

**Handbook of**

**POLITICAL  
COMMUNICATION  
RESEARCH**



**Edited by**

**Lynda Lee Kaid**

**HANDBOOK  
OF  
POLITICAL COMMUNICATION  
RESEARCH**

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# HANDBOOK OF POLITICAL COMMUNICATION RESEARCH

Edited by

Lynda Lee Kaid  
*University of Florida*



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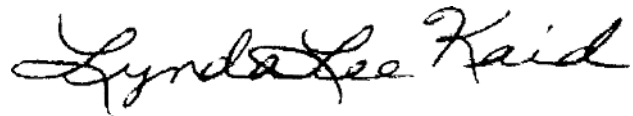
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Dedicated to  
Keith R. Sanders and Dan Nimmo  
and  
to the memory of Steve Chaffee

They forged a new discipline. They fought for the formal recognition of political communication as a field of study, and they helped to train a new generation of scholars who have advanced it. I benefited enormously from working with them, and I'll never forget their influence on the field of political communication. We all owe them.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lynda Lee Kaid". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'L' and 'K'.



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Finally, the continued assistance and support of my husband, Cliff A. Jones, is a prerequisite for any project. He keeps me on track and clears the distractions and obstacles to concentration.



# Foreword

Keith R. Sanders

Executive Director (Ret.)  
Illinois Board of Higher Education

Readers of this volume who were active during the early years of the emergence of political communication as a distinctive field of study will remember such salient events as:

- The creation in 1973 of the Political Communication Division within the International Communication Association (ICA), providing a provocative forum for like-minded scholars from several disciplines;
- The founding, by the Political Communication Division of the ICA, in 1974 of *Political Communication Review*, the precursor to *Political Communication*, a journal that provides researchers with knowledgeable editors who can judge and publish their best work;
- The publication of the first comprehensive, partially annotated bibliography on the subject (Kaid, Sanders, & Hirsch, 1974), giving students, young and old, an opportunity to access the intellectual history of the topic without having to do what was then tedious, computer unassisted library work;
- The teaching of courses, beginning in about 1968, and the development of graduate programs that gave students a firm foundation on which to launch a career in the field, whether as a practitioner, teacher, or scholar; and, of course,
- The publication of the first *Handbook of Political Communication* (Nimmo & Sanders, 1981), one of the earliest efforts to provide some synthesis and give some structure to this “pluralistic” undertaking.

These activities, and others of like kind, were the necessary progenitors of the work appearing in the following pages. Those who were there at conception will be

pleased, and more than a little surprised, at how rapidly their offspring has matured from infancy to adolescence.

However, even in the face of great growth and change, one truth lingers and has changed little since Dan Nimmo and I wrote, in 1981, that “instead of residing in a fixed, static, and sterile body of knowledge, scholars find themselves living in an exciting process of emergence, one of expanding possibilities, enriching diversities, and plural options” (Nimmo & Sanders, 1981, pp. 9–10). May it always be so. My compliments to the editor and contributors to this book for avoiding premature closure, while capturing much of the essence, excitement, and potential of this vital field of inquiry.

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# Introduction and Overview of the Field

Lynda Lee Kaid  
University of Florida

## INTRODUCTION

Although political communication can trace its roots to the earliest classical studies of Aristotle and Plato, modern political communication research is very much an interdisciplinary field of study, drawing on concepts from communication, political science, journalism, sociology, psychology, history, rhetoric, and other fields. In their seminal *Handbook of Political Communication*, Nimmo and Sanders (1981) traced the development of the field as an academic discipline in the latter half of the 20th century, and other scholars have described the breadth and scope of political communication (Kaid, 1996; Swanson & Nimmo, 1990). Many definitions of *political communication* have been advanced, but none has gained universal acceptance. Perhaps the best is the simplest: Chaffee's (1975) suggestion that political communication is the "role of communication in the political process" (p. 15).

The interdisciplinary nature of the field, as well as its growth and importance in the broader communication field, means that the field badly needs scholarly syntheses of its major research and theoretical findings. Not since Nimmo and Sanders' original handbook in 1981 has there been any volume that attempts to provide syntheses and overviews of the major components of the field. In 1990, Swanson and Nimmo provided a look at some new advances, but their volume made no claim to updating the major topics covered in the Nimmo and Sanders handbook. This volume provides the first opportunity in over two decades to bring together the major thrusts of research and theory in political communication.

This volume's approach is one that stresses theoretical overviews and research synthesis. One label for such pieces would be "bibliographic essays," meaning that

the goal of each chapter is to provide the reader with an overview of the major lines of research, theory, and findings for that topic.

This handbook approaches the field of political communication with an organizational structure that relies on six divisions. The first part of the book contains chapters that discuss some of the theoretical background, history, structure, and diversity of the field. Part II concentrates on the messages that are predominant in the study of political communication, ranging from classical rhetorical modes to political advertising and debates. The third part focuses on the news media coverage of politics, political issues, and political institutions and is followed by Part IV, which emphasizes public opinion and the audiences of political communication. Part V offers international perspectives on political communication, with the inclusion of European and Asian approaches. The final Part VI, provides an opportunity to look at the newest channel in political communication study, the Internet, and its role in changing the face of political communication.

## THEORIES AND APPROACHES

In the book's first chapter, **Everett Rogers** traces the development of political communication and places the evolution of the field in a broad and historical perspective. His discussion of the roles of Walter Lippmann, Harold Lasswell, Paul Lazarsfeld, and Wilbur Schramm are important—because we too often skip over them today, and students do not always learn the roots of the field. Even Klapper gathers dust in the brains of many students today. Rogers then outlines the major theoretical perspectives that have guided the field in the past few decades, such as agenda-setting and the diffusion of news events, and brings us to a discussion of new technologies, especially the early example of the Public Electronic Network (PEN) Project in Santa Monica, California.

In Chapter 2, **Bruce Newman** and **Richard Perloff** explain the importance of considering the political marketing perspective in the study of political communication. They define it here, as Newman (1999) defines it in *The Handbook of Political Marketing*, as "... the application of marketing principles and procedures in political campaigns by various individuals and organizations" (p. xiii). They argue that a marketing orientation is necessary both for winning office and for governing in modern times. Their analysis highlights the practical implications of marketing tools for political communication and demonstrates how much the field of political communication is intertwined with the commercial field of marketing.

**Doris Graber** traces the methodological evolution of the political communication discipline from its early roots in observational methods through the dominance of quantitative methodologies such as survey research. In addition to discussing the widespread use of content analysis and the need for more concern for visual analysis, her investigations also indicate a surprising amount of experimental research in current political communication scholarship, with its concurrent strengths in internal validity and challenges in external validity.

**Yang Lin** brings together the theoretical and methodological traditions of political communication by investigating the structure of the discipline through cocitation analysis. By bringing the tools of bibliometric inquiry to the field of political communication, Lin provides a way of illuminating the intellectual structure of the discipline of political communication. Using cocitation analysis and multidimensional scaling techniques, he demonstrates that there is clear fragmentation in the

intellectual structure of the political communication discipline. He further suggests that this fragmentation is, in fact, a healthy indicator of a strong multidisciplinary field, but he cautions against the possibility that fragmentation can also lead to isolation.

One of the most critical factors in the evolution and identification of a discipline is the development of topic and subject headings that can be used to classify the discipline's work. Without consistent and systematic subject headings, the classification of literature and ability to search for it and identify it are very difficult. The most accepted and commonly used subject headings are those developed by the Library of Congress for use in cataloging books and other materials. In the past few decades, the field of political communication has evolved to the point that it now justifies, even requires, that a special vocabulary be developed to systematize the classification of research materials. **Kathleen Haynes** discusses the use and development of vocabulary for the political communication field and the importance of developing a thesaurus that can apply both to the written word and to the visual content of the field. As all fields of research move further into an era of electronic and digital searching, the need for a thesaurus for political communication will become even more imperative.

## POLITICAL MESSAGES

The chapters in Part II focus on political messages. **Bruce Gronbeck** reminds us that the study of political communication has its roots in classical rhetoric and that modern scholars still have much to learn from these early disseminators of political messages. Chapter 7, on political advertising, provides a way of organizing and analyzing the research in an area of political communication that has evolved dramatically since the original Nimmo and Sanders handbook (Kaid, 1981). Particularly important is the new work on negative advertising and on the potentially discouraging impact of negative advertising on voter turnout. The chapter also discusses the growth in the study of international and comparative approaches to the study of political advertising.

Televised debates were still a relatively rare phenomenon at the time of the 1981 handbook (Nimmo & Sanders, 1981). Today this form of political message provides voters at almost all levels of electoral competition the chance to see and hear direct confrontations between candidates. As **Mitchell McKinney and Diana Carlin** point out in Chapter 8, debates have become a true staple of the political information environment, not only in the United States but also abroad. These messages provide voters with a great deal of issue and image information that research has shown to be important for decision making, as well as helpful in stimulating interest among those with lower levels of interest and involvement in other political message types.

## NEWS COVERAGE OF POLITICS

Chapter 9, on news coverage of political campaigns, reviews the vast literature on journalistic interpretations of election campaigns. **Girish Gulati, Marion Just,** and **Ann Crigler** emphasize the television medium but clearly demonstrate the dominance of the horse race and strategy frames of media coverage. In Chapter 10, **David Weaver, Maxwell McCombs,** and **Donald Shaw** detail the history and



major tenets of agenda-setting theory, demonstrating the tremendous reach of the theory, both in the United States and internationally. Agenda-setting has proven to be one of the most robust theories in political communication. Not only has the basic premise of the media's power to communicate the salience of issues to the public been validated repeatedly over the past several decades, but agenda-setting has expanded beyond the communication of issues (first-level agenda-setting) to the ability of the media to communicate attributes about issues and candidates (second-level agenda-setting). The authors here make a case also for the understanding of priming as related to agenda-setting but argue that framing, while it may be viewed as embodying second-level agenda-setting concepts, is different from agenda-setting in its focus on media presentation and its lesser emphasis on the salience communicated to audiences.

The selection of the information that makes up the news to which citizens are exposed is also the focus of **Lance Bennett's** analysis in Chapter 11. Bennett argues that the absence of substance in news content has a great deal to do with the structural and organizational constraints that constantly bear on the news decisions of media, journalists, and even politicians maintaining the gatekeeping function. He offers a four-pronged, multigated model that drives the modern news cycle: application in different historical and political contexts, the reporter's news judgment values, bureaucratic or organizational news gathering routines, economics, and information and communication. In Chapter 12, **Amy McKay** and **David Paletz** review the literature on the president and the media, providing detailed analyses of the books and articles that address this relationship.

## **POLITICAL COMMUNICATION AND PUBLIC OPINION**

The next group of chapters focuses on the role of publics and public opinion in studying political communication. In Chapter 13 **Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann** and **Thomas Petersen** discuss one of the most enduring theories of public opinion, the Spiral of Silence. Before explaining the complexities of this theory and reviewing the research that underpins it, the authors provide a very useful history of the public opinion concept and its relationship to views of the social nature of man. In Chapter 14, **Mira Sotirovic** and **Jack McLeod** discuss political learning and argue that political knowledge is much more than the acquisition of factual information about government and political affairs. They suggest that political learning is also about understanding and making sense of civic affairs. In addition to a review of the relative importance of various types of media (including entertainment media) in the construction of political meaning, they provide new data and interpretations of the role of various media in relation to age and education as indicators of political knowledge in the 2000 elections.

Few issues have captured the attention of political scholars and observers of democratic life like the documented decline in civic engagement during the last few decades of the 20th century. In Chapter 15, **Michael X. Delli Carpini** reviews mixed research on the role of the media on the various forms of civic engagement. Among his conclusions is the clear finding that evidence suggests a positive role for the information carried by public affairs media, while acknowledging that some types of exposure (such as political advertising) may yield more negative outcomes. Further,

entertainment programming may offer more hope of constructive stimulation of civic engagement than does the news. In addition, the Internet has not yet attained the positive effects predicted for it, although there is still hope that its combination of information in varied form may yet produce positive results. Delli Carpini argues that we must “expand our theories and research to a much wider range of genres,” taking more note of entertainment formats.

In the final chapter in the public opinion section, **Dianne Bystrom** analyzes the role of women both as political sources and as audiences for political messages. Noting the increased frequency with which women have taken their place in positions of political leadership at both the national and the state level, she concludes that “though some gender differences still exist, both women and men candidates and elected officials seem to be balancing ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ issues and images in their political speeches, televised political advertising, and Web sites.” Her summary of research also indicates that women are still subjected to some stereotypical coverage by the media, although the degree of this problem is lessening. It also appears that the much-discussed gender gap in voting and knowledge levels no longer places women in inferior roles compared to men. Today women vote in higher percentages and proportions than do men, and their knowledge and interest levels are becoming more similar.

## **POLITICAL COMMUNICATION FROM AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE**

In the last few decades, the study of political communication has expanded greatly, and this growth has been evident around the world, as well as in the United States. Several authors of the first 16 chapters in the handbook discuss relevant international findings in the specific topic areas being addressed. However, the chapters in this section provide a more comprehensive understanding of the evolution of political communication in the two areas of the world where the greatest amount of scholarship can be found, Europe and Asia. In Chapter 17 **Christina Holtz-Bacha** traces the major lines of political communication research in Europe, indicating a rich and developing heritage that continues to evolve but stops short of the consolidated efforts that national associations and more established research groups have achieved in the United States. In the 21st century, European contributions to political communication scholarship are significant, and major streams of theory such as uses and gratifications and the Spiral of Silence can be traced to their roots in work done in Britain and Germany.

Also, a growing part of the landscape in political communication is the contribution of Asian scholars, outlined in Chapter 18 by **Lars Willnat** and **Annette Aw**, who note that political communication became a noticeable aspect of Asian communication study only in the 1980s. Further, the awareness of Asian political communication scholarship has been hampered by the small number of studies published in English and by the limited number of Asian countries that have generated relevant research (China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea, and Japan). Of course, tight political controls in many Asian countries have served as constraints on the allowable research, and real and perceived cultural differences have caused many to question the applicability of mainstream mass communication theories to Asia. However, Willnat and Aw argue that such constraints need not hamper political

communication scholars from advancing comparative research. They argue for more research that applies major communication theories to Asian countries, while acknowledging the very real political, social, cultural, and media system differences.

## NEW TRENDS

The last chapter in this volume addresses one of the most exciting new developments in political communication, the Internet. As a new channel of communication, the Internet has brought wide-spread changes to almost every aspect of the political communication arena. **John Tedesco** discusses the implications of this new medium and points out that the hope that the Internet would generate a new and intensive level of civic engagement for the general populous has not yet been realized. Nonetheless, the new medium presents many opportunities for political communication, and the future may offer exciting changes.

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PART

I

**THEORIES AND APPROACHES TO  
POLITICAL COMMUNICATION**



# Theoretical Diversity in Political Communication

Everett M. Rogers  
University of New Mexico

*Note: The late Steven H. Chaffee originally planned to write this chapter, which is dedicated to his memory.*

In the 2000 election, almost every political candidate running for office at every level (presidential, state, county, city, and local) had an active Web site. This fact indicates the current importance of Internet-related communication technologies in political communication and suggests how this specialty field has evolved since its beginnings earlier in the past century in the hands of Walter Lippman, Harold Lasswell, Paul F. Lazarsfeld, and other forefathers and founders of communication study. Despite the growth of television in the 1950s and the Internet in the 1990s, which altered the channels of communication carrying political messages to the U.S. public, certain human communication processes involved in changing political behavior have remained much the same.

A long-lasting, stable set of theoretical themes has dominated the study of political communication, rather than any single, overarching theory. Nevertheless, the theoretical diversity of political communication displays certain common themes, such as a lasting concern with communication effects. Our purpose here is to synthesize these diverse theoretical perspectives, showing how they have evolved over the years, with an emphasis on their beginnings. Although the field of political communication began by studying the effects of print media and radio on individuals' voting choice, such as in the 1940 Erie County Study (described later), the field has expanded to include additional aspects of communication and political behavior.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The beginnings of communication study, mass communication, and political communication are intertwined. All shared a common intellectual interest in the effects of mass media communication, and the forefathers and founders of these fields included the same set of scholars. From the early period of what was later to be identified as communication study, scholars focused on changes in political behavior (such as voting) as one of their main dependent variables of study.

### Walter Lippmann and Public Opinion

Some observers consider Walter Lippmann's (1922) *Public Opinion* a founding document for communication study. Lippmann was a contemporary scholar with the political scientist Harold Lasswell in studying propaganda and public opinion. During World War I, Lippmann served as a propaganda leaflet writer for the Allied Army in France. During the era when communication study was getting under way in the 1920s and 1930s, until the 1950s or 1960s, propaganda constituted one important stream of communication scholarship. World War I represented a conflict in which both combatants used propaganda extensively, and the public perceived propaganda techniques as being dangerously powerful. This perception was based mainly on anecdotal evidence and on exaggerated claims by governments, rather than on scientific analysis. The public's fear of powerful propaganda served to attract the attention of early scholars like Lippmann and Lasswell. In fact, the field that was later to be called "mass communication" was termed "public opinion and propaganda" (or approximately similar names) in the 1930s. For example, Lasswell taught a course by this name at the University of Chicago (Rogers, 1994).

Lippmann (1922) also did early thinking and writing about what later was called the agenda-setting process, with his insightful chapter on "The World Outside and the Pictures in Our Heads." Lippmann contrasted what agenda-setting scholars were later to call "real-world indicators" (which index the seriousness of some social problem) with peoples' perceptions of the issue (later called the public agenda). Walter Lippmann pioneered in conducting one of the first scholarly content analyses, of *The New York Times* coverage of the 1917 Russian Revolution. Lippmann and Merz (1920) found an anti-Bolshevik bias in this news coverage, which led Lippmann to become skeptical about how the average member of the American public could form an intelligent opinion about important issues of the day. Walter Lippmann was called the most gifted and influential political journalist of the 20th century. At the same time, he was a key analyst of propaganda and public opinion, and of agenda-setting.

Lippmann was important in identifying the role of the mass media in public opinion formation in a democracy. He argued that the media, whose freedom was protected by the First Amendment, were crucial in creating a free marketplace of ideas. "The value of participatory democracy, active and widespread popular participation informed by a free and responsible press, serves as an important impetus to political communication research" (McLeod, Kosicki, & McLeod, 2002, p. 215). Study of political communication was stimulated from its beginnings by a normative concern about the need for a free press and an informed public in society.

## Harold Lasswell and Propaganda Analysis

The study of media effects as part of an ongoing research program began with the scholarly work of Harold Lasswell, a political scientist at the University of Chicago who specialized in the investigation of propaganda. Lasswell's Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Chicago, later published as a book (Lasswell, 1927), content analyzed the effects of propaganda messages by the Germans versus the French, British, and Americans in World War I. Lasswell formalized the methodology of content analysis of media messages. He is known for his five-question model of communication: *Who says what to whom via which channels with what effects?* This conceptualization was to influence early communication study toward the investigation of media effects, a preoccupation that has continued, to at least some degree, to the present day. Although Lasswell earned his doctorate in political science, his scholarly interests ranged widely, and in the latter part of his career, after he left the University of Chicago, he specialized to an increasingly greater degree in communication research. During World War II, Lasswell, with funding from the Rockefeller Foundation, led a research team at the U.S. Library of Congress charged with content analyzing Allied and Axis propaganda messages in the media.

In 1944, the owner of Time-Life Corporation, Henry Luce, provided funding for a 3-year study of the mass media in the United States by the Commission on Freedom of the Press. The 13-member Commission, chaired by Robert Hutchins, President of the University of Chicago, included Lasswell as an influential member. The Commission was concerned about the growing concentration of U.S. media ownership and the decreasing degree of newspaper competition. The Commission report stressed the value of First Amendment freedoms for the media as being essential for an informed public in a functioning democracy.

## Paul F. Lazarsfeld and the Erie County Study

Another key forefather of communication study was Paul F. Lazarsfeld, an émigré scholar from Austria, who spent much of his scholarly career at Columbia University. Trained in mathematics, Lazarsfeld became an important toolmaker for social science research on mass communication effects. He led the Radio Research Project, funded by the Rockefeller Foundation in 1937, which explored the effects of radio on American audiences. Lazarsfeld transformed the Radio Research Project into the Bureau of Applied Social Research at Columbia University, arguably the most noted university-based research institute of its day, and one specializing in communication research. With his sociological colleague Robert K. Merton, Lazarsfeld developed the research method of focus group interviews (Rogers, 1994), a data-gathering technique initially utilized to study U.S. government radio spots urging the American public to plant Victory Gardens, collect scrap iron and used rubber, and buy war bonds. These federal government campaigns, essentially a form of domestic propaganda, were designed and evaluated by a set of communication scholars drawn from various social sciences, including Lasswell, Lazarsfeld, Wilbur Schramm, and others.

Lazarsfeld led the first quantitative studies of voting behavior, with his most well-known inquiry being the 1940 Erie County Study, which in certain respects represented the most important pioneering investigation of political



communication. Lazarsfeld and his colleagues conducted 600 personal interviews each month for 6 months until the November 1940 presidential election. This study was carried out in Erie County, Ohio, selected by the Columbia University researchers as a representative American county. At the time, the prevailing conception was one of powerful media effects, a perception based loosely on historical events like the role of the Hearst newspapers in leading the United States into the Spanish American War, the panic resulting from Orson Welles' "Invasion from Mars" radio broadcast in 1937, and Hitler's use of propaganda as World War II began in Europe.

So Lazarsfeld intended that the Erie County Study investigate the importance of the direct effects of the media in determining how people voted in a presidential election. The main dependent variable of study was voting behavior, a reflection of Lazarsfeld's background in conducting market research (in fact, Lazarsfeld was one of the founders of market research in America). As Chaffee and Hockheimer (1985, p. 274) stated, "The vote was taken to be the ultimate criterion variable, as if it were the most important political act a person can perform. This focus on voting has been followed by many researchers since the 1940s. . . ." No one would deny that voting is a crucial aspect of political behavior, but contributions of time and money to a political campaign, personal statements to others in support of a candidate, display of campaign buttons and posters, and other political actions are also important (Chaffee & Hockheimer, 1985). The main independent variables of study in the Erie County project, in addition to exposure to newspapers and news magazines and radio (the main media of the day in 1940), were individuals' socioeconomic status and political party identification.

To Lazarsfeld's surprise, only 54 of his 600 respondents in the Erie County panel of voters shifted from one presidential candidate to another, and only a few of these switchers were directly influenced to do so by the media (Converse, 1987). Many of the voters had made up their minds before the electoral campaign began. Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet (1944) concluded that the media had minimal effects in the 1940 presidential election campaign. However, other scholars (e.g., Chaffee & Hockheimer, 1985) have questioned this conclusion, and so the matter seems to be dependent in part on interpretation and on the types of data that are considered (Rogers, 1994). In any event, Lazarsfeld and others postulated a two-step flow of communication in which opinion leaders with a relatively high degree of media exposure then passed along political information to their followers via interpersonal communication channels. This two-step flow model highlighted the complementary role that media and interpersonal communication often play in influencing an individual's political decisions, a lead that has been pursued in later investigations up to the present (Rogers, 2002a).

In the several years following the Erie County study, communication scholars may have overemphasized the minimal effects of the mass media. A younger colleague of Lazarsfeld's at the Bureau of Applied Research at Columbia University, sociologist Joseph Klapper (1960), concluded in his book *The Effects of Mass Communication* that the media seldom have direct effects. At the time, given the assumptions and methodologies of mass communication research, this conclusion seemed rather obvious. Later developments, however, led to questioning of this minimal effects conclusion.

Along with a follow-up to the Erie County Study, of the 1948 presidential election in a New York community (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, & McPhee, 1954), Lazarsfeld's investigations were the first large-scale election research to give major attention to

the role of the mass media and virtually the last for many years thereafter (Chaffee & Hockheimer, 1985). The University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research began a series of studies of presidential election voting, carrying on Lazarsfeld's tradition of survey research on voting behavior. These national surveys, however, paid relatively little attention to the role of the mass media in voting decisions, concentrating instead on political party identification and socioeconomic variables in influencing voting (the importance of political parties in determining citizens' voting behavior has faded in recent years, replaced by the media, especially television). Because these Michigan studies were national sample surveys, the role of personal communication networks in voting decisions was difficult or impossible to explore (Sheingold, 1973). The primary focus on the individual as the unit of response and the unit of analysis led to a deemphasis on network and other social influences on voting decisions and to lesser attention to larger systems (such as media institutions) in political communication research.

### **World War II and the Beginnings of Communication Study**

World War II Washington, DC, was the gathering place for leading American social scientists who were to become the forefathers and founders of communication study. One important preceding event, however, was the year-long Rockefeller Foundation Communication Seminar, organized by Foundation official John Marshall and held monthly at the Rockefeller Foundation's offices in New York City. Marshall's letter of invitation to the Seminar's participants was one of the first uses of the term *mass communication* (previously, such terms as public opinion or propaganda were used to refer to such study) (Rogers, 1994). The 12 regular participants in the Rockefeller Foundation Communication Seminar included Paul F. Lazarsfeld and Harold Lasswell, with the latter being the dominant intellectual force in the discussions. Lasswell's five-question model of communication was developed at the Seminar. The primary concern of the Rockefeller Foundation Communication Seminar was to have been defining the newly emerging field of communication but centered increasingly on the approaching World War II, which began in September 1939 (as did the first of the Seminar's monthly meetings). The Seminar was important in bringing together leading scholars with an interest in communication research and in forming a consensus about the priority questions that should be pursued. At the conclusion of the year-long series of Seminar sessions in New York, the participants held meetings with high government officials in Washington to brief them on the Seminar's conclusions, including the role that the newly emerging field of communication could play in the ensuing world conflict.

World War II brought together a talented set of social scientists in Washington, DC, where they worked as consultants or employees of various wartime government agencies. Included were Lazarsfeld, Lasswell, sociologist Sam Stouffer, social psychologists Carl Hovland and Kurt Lewin, and Wilbur Schramm, who had been director of the Iowa Writers' Workshop at the University of Iowa. These scholars shared a common interest in human communication study and in its application to wartime problems facing the United States. Their interaction in Washington led to the formation of a paradigm for mass communication study. These scholars were relatively more free of disciplinary barriers in wartime Washington than when they were on their university campuses, and this freedom encouraged them to

think about an interdisciplinary approach to communication research. Some of the participants in these interdisciplinary discussions began to plan how to continue communication research after the War and how to train a cadre of individuals with doctoral degrees in communication.

In 1943, Wilbur Schramm returned to the University of Iowa as Director of the School of Journalism, where he sought to implement his vision of the new scholarly field of communication. He established a Ph.D. program in communication and started a mass communication research center at the university, thus launching a postwar strategy of founding university-based communication research institutes that awarded Ph.D. degrees in communication. After several unfruitful years at Iowa, Wilbur Schramm moved to the University of Illinois, where his efforts to establish communication research and to award doctorates in the new field were more successful. By the mid-1950s, when Schramm moved to Stanford University, the field of communication was becoming well established. By 1960, more than a dozen U.S. universities, including Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan State, had institutionalized mass communication research institutes or centers and were awarding doctorates in communication.

This new field stressed a social science approach to communication study, building on the communication research and theory that had been conducted in previous decades in social psychology, sociology, and political science (by Lasswell, Lazarsfeld, Lewin, Hovland, and others). Importantly, a prerequisite to doctoral study in these early communication Ph.D. programs was experience as a mass media professional (usually as a newspaper journalist). This requirement meant that the new corps of doctorates in communication looked at the world they studied somewhat differently than had the prior generation of communication researchers, who kept their academic base in a department of sociology, psychology, or political science. The new Ph.D.'s had a central scholarly interest in mass communication effects, like their social science predecessors, but they also had an understanding of the realities of media institutions. This orientation led them to look at the indirect effects of the media (such as through the agenda-setting process), as well as the direct effects, and not to expect such strong effects of media exposure on individuals' behavior (given that the media played mainly an informational, rather than a persuasive, role).

Wilbur Schramm emerged as the dominant leader of the founding of communication as a field of scholarly study in the postwar era. Communication scholars with doctorates from Schramm's program at Stanford University fanned out to universities across the United States, where they often rose to leadership positions. Examples are Paul J. Deutschmann at Michigan State University, Wayne Danielson at the University of North Carolina and later at The University of Texas, and Steven H. Chaffee at the University of Wisconsin (all became deans or directors of schools of journalism). Several of these scholars made important conceptual contributions, such as Danielson and Deutschmann to the study of news event diffusion and Maxwell McCombs, another Stanford product at the University of North Carolina, in collaboration with Donald L. Shaw, a Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin, in investigating the agenda-setting process (Rogers, 1994).

The institutionalization of communication study at U.S. research universities around 1960 was a turning point in political communication research, in that the new cadre of communication doctorates pursued research on the indirect, as well as the direct, effects of mass media communication. After about 1960, communication study had a greater degree of constancy and continuity, which facilitated

the pursuit of important theoretical questions and paradigms through organized research programs.

## RESEARCH ON MEDIA EFFECTS

About the same time that communication study was becoming institutionalized at a growing number of U.S. research universities, television was spreading rapidly in the United States. By 1960, most American households contained a television set, and television soon became the main source of political news. Currently, 56% of the American public responds in surveys that television is their main source of political news, with 24% responding newspapers and 14% saying radio (Graber, 2001). The public wants to obtain its news quickly and easily and generally believes that television does an adequate job of providing news, although many media experts claim that television overpersonalizes the news.

We previously traced how a powerful media effects model was eventually replaced by a limited effects model, with the Lazarsfeld et al. Erie County Study as a turning point (Chaffee & Hockheimer, 1985). Television, of course, was not yet available in the 1940 presidential election. During the decade of the 1950s, when television diffused rapidly among U.S. households, this new medium became the dominant channel used in political communication campaigns and began to occupy an important role in their study by communication scholars. Electoral campaigns soon spent the majority of their budget on television, especially on candidates' television spots, and these campaigns began to escalate in total cost. The previously important role of political parties in influencing electoral outcomes faded in the new age of television politics.

This growing importance of television in politics brought with it new concerns. For example, political communication scholars found that "the amount of learning from television is slight. Large numbers of citizens see news as boring and politics as disconnected from their lives" (McLeod et al., 2002, p. 250). As the costs of television spots rose, forcing up electoral campaign budgets, only wealthy individuals (or those who could attract substantial contributions) could win public office.

Research on mass media effects often dealt with the dependent variable of political behavior change, such as voting choice. "Political communication research has traditionally played a central role on the effects of mass media" (McLeod et al., 2002, p. 218). Mass communication research and political communication research became almost synonymous in their priority concerns with media effects. It is no accident that in the main communication research organization, the International Communication Association, the Political Communication Division split off from the Mass Communication Division in 1973.

Findings from mass communication and political communication studies often supported a minimal effects model, although these results may have been due in part to the research designs and research methods that were utilized. For example, Rogers (2002a) reviewed four recent investigations to find relatively strong media effects when data were gathered (1) about an important news event (such as Magic Johnson's 1991 disclosure of his HIV infection), (2) by tracing its effects on the overt behavior of individuals exposed to media messages about the event, (3) whose contents are analyzed, and (4) whose effects are evaluated by means of data gathered rather immediately after the event occurred. Coincidentally, this research approach is similar to that followed by Paul F. Lazarsfeld and his

colleagues at Columbia University's Bureau of Applied Social Research 60 years ago (although not in the Erie County Study), such as the investigation of the panic effects of "The Invasion from Mars" (Cantril, Gaudet, & Herzog, 1940) and the highly successful Kate Smith War Bond radio marathon (Merton, Fiske, & Curtis, 1946). Importantly, both these earlier and later studies of direct effects considered the intermedia processes of mass media effects occurring through, and in combination with, interpersonal communication stimulated by media messages (Chaffee, 1986).

The rise of communication study after 1960 and the pervasiveness of television led political communication scholars to investigate *indirect* media effects such as in the agenda-setting process.

## Agenda-Setting

A well-known dictum by political scientist Bernard Cohen (1963, p. 13) was that "The press may not be successful much of the time in telling people *what to think*, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers *what to think about*." Cohen's statement was based on Walter Lippmann's (1920) earlier idea of "the world outside" and "the pictures in our heads." Cohen's dictum suggested that the media have indirect effects along with, in certain cases, direct effects.

Maxwell McCombs, one of the new generation of communication scholars earning his doctorate at Stanford University, read Cohen's book in a seminar taught by Wilbur Schramm and, later, while a young faculty member at the University of North Carolina, collaborated with a colleague, Donald Shaw, in the first empirical study of agenda-setting. These new Ph.D.'s in communication knew from their experience as professional newspaper journalists that news seldom had strong direct effects on audience individuals. However, the *amount* of news coverage accorded an issue by the media might indeed lead audience individuals to rate such an issue as more important (Rogers, 1994).

The ensuing Chapel Hill study (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) of how 100 undecided voters in Chapel Hill, NC, made up their minds in the 1968 presidential election was the first empirical investigation of the agenda-setting process and is the most widely cited publication in this field of research (Dearing & Rogers, 1996). McCombs and Shaw content analyzed the media coverage of the election in order to identify the five main issues and the amount of news coverage given each (this has since been called the media agenda), which they compared with a personal interview survey of the 100 undecided voters, who were asked which issues they felt were most important (this is the public agenda). McCombs and Shaw (1972) found a high degree of agreement between the rank order of the four or five issues on the media agenda and the rank order of those on the public agenda. The implication of this finding was that the media indeed tell the public "what to talk about."

The Chapel Hill research set off a tremendous number of studies of the agenda-setting process. This proliferation of agenda-setting studies amounted to 357 publications at the time of a 1996 synthesis (Dearing & Rogers, 1996), and the number continues to grow. Many of the early studies of agenda-setting more or less followed the model and methods pioneered by McCombs and Shaw, but in more recent years single-issue longitudinal research on agenda-setting also has been conducted

(Dearing & Rogers, 1996). Here the essential question is how an issue like AIDS or the environment rises on the national agenda over time. In contrast, the early agenda-setting research concentrated on the set of issues (usually four or five) that were on the national agenda at any one time. In both types of agenda-setting studies, the media agenda is measured by a content analysis, the public agenda by survey data, and the policy agenda by the laws, regulations, and appropriations regarding the issue of study.

The general model of the agenda-setting process that has emerged from research is a usual temporal sequence of

Media agenda → Public agenda → Policy agenda.

Communication scholars study mainly media agenda-setting and public agenda-setting, whereas political scientists and sociologists study mainly policy agenda-setting. The initial multiple-issue research focused on the relationship of the media agenda and the public agenda (a focus similar to that of the Chapel Hill Study), whereas more recent longitudinal, single-issue research illuminated factors important in setting the media agenda. A common finding is that a focusing event or a tragic individual (such as the death of Hollywood actor Rock Hudson and the discrimination against Kokomo, Indiana, schoolboy Ryan White) often initially calls an issue to media attention. If an issue appears on the front page of *The New York Times* or if the U.S. president gives a speech about the issue, it is immediately boosted upon the national media agenda. The seriousness of a social problem, measured by what scholars call real-world indicators (like the number of deaths due to AIDS), has been found to be unrelated to an issue's position on the national media agenda, given that the issue is at least perceived as an important problem (Dearing & Rogers, 1996).

One of the important advances in understanding the agenda-setting process is framing, that is, how an issue is given meaning by media people, politicians, or others. Framing began to be studied as an important influence in the agenda-setting process a decade or so after the Chapel Hill Study, in a series of ingenious experiments by Shanto Iyengar (1991), a political scientist and communication scholar.

Agenda-setting research may overrepresent the power of the mass media to set the national agenda through an over-time process. Certain news events shoot immediately to the top of the agenda, such as the Monica Lewinsky scandal, and represent an exception to the more gradual agenda-setting process investigated by communication scholars (McLeod et al., 2002). Nevertheless, agenda-setting research advanced the understanding of the indirect effects of the mass media, this in an era of minimal effects. Further, agenda-setting study represented a refocusing of political communication research away from a primary emphasis on individual political behavior (as in the voting studies) by relating media news coverage of an issue to individual aggregated perceptions of issue salience and to the response by political institutions (the policy agenda). Further, agenda-setting investigations cast light on how people organize and give meaning to the political world around them, as the public gives meaning to various news issues. Finally, agenda-setting research generally recognized that one mechanism of media influence was through stimulating interpersonal communication, which in turn often triggered behavior change (Dearing & Rogers, 1996).

## Diffusion of News Events

Another type of communication research that was launched in the 1960s by the new cadre of experienced newspaper journalists who earned Ph.D.'s in Communication at Stanford University was the study of news event diffusion. Paul J. Deutschmann and Wayne Danielson (1960) established the paradigm for news diffusion research with a pioneering study. These scholars gathered data from a sample of the public soon after the occurrence of a major news event, asking about the channels through which initial awareness–knowledge of the news event was obtained, channels for obtaining further information, and the time of an individual's first knowing about the news event. A common finding in the news event diffusion studies was that the media, especially the broadcast media, were particularly important in spreading major news events. When plotted over time, the number of individuals knowing about a news event increased slowly at first, then rapidly as interpersonal communication channels were activated, and, finally, tailed off to form an S-shaped diffusion curve as the remaining individuals learned about the event. This S-shaped curve was similar to that found for the diffusion of technological innovations over time, and news event diffusion studies were initially influenced by the earlier diffusion research (Rogers, 2003).

The Deutschmann and Danielson (1960) study of news event diffusion led almost immediately to a spate of similar investigations, most of which focused on news events that were more or less political in nature: assassination of a president or a head of state, resignation of a high-ranking official, or a major disaster. More than 60 news event diffusion studies have been published to date. DeFleur (1987) concluded that the field of news event diffusion research was dying because the interesting questions had been answered. However, in the past decade or so, new types of news event diffusion investigations have been completed that explore new research questions (Rogers, 2000). For example, the Mayer, Gudykunst, Perrill, and Merrill (1990) study of diffusion of news of the *Challenger* disaster, which occurred on January 26, 1986, showed the importance of the time of day and day of the week of a news event's occurrence on which media or interpersonal channels were most frequently used by members of the public. For instance, stay-at-home housewives first learned of the news event, which occurred in midmorning on a weekday, particularly from broadcast media, whereas individuals at work were more likely to learn from interpersonal channels.

Rogers and Siedel (2002) investigated diffusion of the September 11 (2001) terrorist attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Center. They found that the news of this spectacular event led to various actions by many members of the public, such as donating blood, sending financial contributions, and flying American flags on vehicles, at homes, and at workplaces. News of the terrorist attacks affected audience members emotionally to a much greater degree than the news events studied in past research. Prior to the Rogers and Siedel (2002) study, most news event diffusion research emphasized the dependent variables of time of knowing and the relative importance of various communication channels. Recent research demonstrates the value of looking at other dependent variables and at additional independent variables in news event diffusion.

In contrast to the news event diffusion studies, which investigate mainly major news event, most political news spreads relatively slowly and with modest impact on public knowledge. So the news event diffusion studies emphasize highly

unusual news events. Most members of the public remain relatively uninformed about most current news. This lack of knowledge is especially characteristic of the less-educated, lower-socioeconomic segments of the American public (Tichenor, Donohue, & Olien, 1970; Viswanath & Finnegan, 1996).

The pervasive problem of an inactive and inadequately informed public led political communication scholars in recent years to conduct research on “civic journalism,” as a means of increasing citizen participation in American democratic society. An example of such research on civic journalism is a study by McDevitt and Chaffee (2002) that evaluated the impacts of KidsVoting USA, a program intended to stimulate family political communication for civic involvement. Current interest in civic journalism is an expression of the values of political communication scholars on an active, informed citizenry, values that go back to the days of Walter Lippmann.

## **NEW COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES**

One early and well-studied application of the new interactive communication technologies was the Public Electronic Network (PEN) Project in Santa Monica, CA. PEN was designed to encourage communication exchange, especially about political issues, among the residents of Santa Monica, a seaside community in Los Angeles. A 6-year investigation of PEN was conducted by communication scholars at the University of Southern California (Collins-Jarvis, 1993; Guthrie & Dutton, 1992; Rogers, Collins-Jarvis, & Schmitz, 1994; Schmitz, Rogers, Phillips, & Paschal, 1995). PEN was noteworthy because at the time it was established, in 1989, it was the first municipal electronic network available at no cost to residents of a city. Some 5,300 Santa Monica residents (of a total population of 90,000) registered to use PEN, and approximately 60,000 accesses to PEN occurred each year. A core of approximately 1,500 users remained active on PEN, with a turnover among the remaining users each year. Some 200 electronic messages were exchanged monthly between residents and city officials.

PEN was launched in an era of optimism about the potential of the new interactive communication technologies for increasing political participation. The Internet existed in 1989 but had diffused to only a small percentage of the U.S. public. Santa Monica had a tradition of intense political activity. The city government was able to obtain the donation of networking equipment from a U.S. computer company. This equipment included 20 public terminals that were placed in city libraries, senior citizens' centers, and other public buildings. Some 20% of all PEN log-ons occurred from these public terminals, with the remainder from individuals using computers at home or at work. The public terminals, initially expected to be a minor part of the PEN system's design, turned out to be very important as a means for homeless people to gain access to the electronic communication system.

“Ted,” a homeless man in Santa Monica, entered the following message on the PEN system: “I . . . spent many hours in the Library; it is my home more or less. Then I discovered PEN and things have never been the same. PEN is my main companion; although it can't keep me warm at night, it does keep my brain alive.” At the time Santa Monica had a homeless population variously estimated as from 2,000 to 10,000. They were regarded by most homed people in the city as the priority social problem of Santa Monica, and early discussion on the PEN system by the homed concerned complaints about the homeless. Then the homeless, using the public



terminals, began to participate in PEN. They responded to earlier criticism about their perceived laziness by stating that they wanted jobs but could not apply because of their appearance. Soon, about 30 homed and homeless individuals formed the PEN Action Group in order to identify possible solutions. They obtained the use of a centrally located vacant building for SHWASHLOCK (SHowers, WASHers, & LOCKers), in which the homeless could clean themselves, store their belongings, learn computer skills, and access job information. As a result of SHWASHLOCK, a number of homeless people in Santa Monica obtained jobs.

Importantly, PEN offered a space in which unlike individuals could interact in order to work out solutions to a social problem of mutual concern. "Don," one of the leaders in the PEN Action Group, stated, "No one on PEN knew that I was homeless until I told them. PEN is also special because after I told them, I was still treated like a human being. To me, the most remarkable thing about the PEN community is that a City Council member and a pauper can coexist, albeit not always in perfect harmony, but on an equal basis." Thus PEN demonstrated that electronic communication systems had the potential of connecting heterophilous members of society (note, however, that this ability of PEN to bridge social distance would not have been possible without the public terminals).

A further lesson learned from the PEN Project was that at least certain social problems that occurred on this system could eventually be solved by the system itself. For instance, in the first months of PEN's operation, female users of the system were attacked verbally by certain males. Derogatory messages were sent to PEN users with female first names (individuals must use their real names, rather than computer names, on PEN), along with messages containing male sexual aggressiveness (such as pornographic stories in which the female's name was incorporated). Many female PEN participants discontinued use of the system in the face of these personal attacks. However, 30 of the remaining female participants formed PEN-FEMME in order to organize to resist these verbal attacks. Their first decision was not to respond to the male sexual aggression. PENFEMME was closed to male participants and focused on such issues as domestic violence, sexual equality, child care, and the reentry of mothers into the workforce (Collins-Jarvis, 1993). The perpetrators of the antifemale aggression were eventually identified as several young boys. Soon, 30% of PEN participants were female. This example shows how interactive technologies can be used to organize for social change, a process through which the disempowered can gain control of their situation.

Content analyses showed that most of the messages exchanged on PEN concerned local political issues. In a community that was already very politically active, it is not surprising that a new means of interactive communication was used for political discussion. The Internet, currently utilized by about 70% of adult Americans, plays an increasingly important role in electoral politics (as mentioned at the beginning of this paper) and in many other types of political communication behavior.

One problem limiting the Internet's impacts is the *digital divide*, the process through which the Internet advantages certain individuals who have access to computers and the Internet and relatively disadvantages other individuals who lack such access. At present, approximately 544 million people use the Internet worldwide, about 8% of the world's total population. In many countries, and in poorer economic areas of the United States, telecenters and cyber cafes (Rogers, 2002b) provide community access to computers and the Internet, thus bridging the digital divide.

## CONCLUSIONS

A theme of the present essay is that the beginnings of communication study at the hands of Walter Lippmann, Harold Lasswell, Paul F. Lazarsfeld, and others has had a lasting influence on the field of political communication. Scholars of political communication placed a primary focus on mass media communication, although a growing recognition of the interrelatedness of the media with interpersonal communication has occurred. Media messages often stimulate interpersonal communication about a topic, with the interpersonal communication then leading to behavior change in an intermedia process (Rogers, 2002a).

From its initial research (like the Erie County Study), the field of political communication focused on such individual-level dependent variables as voting choices. In contrast, much concern about political communication, such as an inactive and uninformed public, is at the societal level. "Most political action and power relationships operate at the societal or other systemic levels, whereas the bulk of empirical theory and research concentrate on the behavior of the individual citizen" (McLeod et al., 2002, p. 232).

Connecting individual-level research with societal problems remains a concern for political communication scholars, who share a normative belief in the desire for a more properly functioning democracy.

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## Political Marketing: Theory, Research, and Applications<sup>1</sup>

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The projections blasted across the pages of American newspapers in September 2000: Gore to win easily, the stories said. Models carefully tested by political scientists indicated that the election would not be close. Gore would receive 52.8 to 60.3% of the votes cast for the Republican and Democratic tickets (Kaiser, 2001). The political science models factored in approval ratings of the incumbent president and voter satisfaction with the economy, the latter running in the ozone during the summer of 2000.

Reality was, as usual, different. Gore won 50.2% of the two-party vote. He lost narrowly and controversially to Bush in the Electoral College.

Although the political scientists who made the predictions offered a host of compelling reasons why their predictions had gone askew (Kaiser, 2001), they managed to forget one convenient fact: The models paid insufficient attention to the role played by communication and political marketing.

This chapter examines the burgeoning area of political marketing, focusing on both macro and micro levels, synthesizing predominant theoretical perspectives, and examining the psychological processes that underlie marketing effects. We pay considerable attention to the psychology of political marketing, believing that a comprehensive understanding of marketing effects is not possible without appreciating the mechanisms by which persuasive messages exert their impacts.

A full-court press on political marketing seems warranted. Marketing has become a major force in American elections (Newman, 1999a) and also in academic scholarship. A major volume, *Handbook of Political Marketing*, was published in 1999, with articles written by scholars from a host of disciplines and countries

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<sup>1</sup>As both authors contributed equally, the order of authorship is alphabetical.

(Newman, 1999a). In 1981, when the first political communication handbook was published, political marketing did not warrant a chapter; nor was it mentioned in the index. That has changed, and this chapter critically explores the field as it has emerged over the past decade.

## **POLITICAL MARKETING: REVIEW OF THEORY AND RESEARCH**

Let us begin with a definition of political marketing. Political marketing can be defined as

... the application of marketing principles and procedures in political campaigns by various individuals and organizations. The procedures involved include the analysis, development, execution, and management of strategic campaigns by candidates, political parties, governments, lobbyists and interest groups that seek to drive public opinion, advance their own ideologies, win elections, and pass legislation and referenda in response to the needs and wants of selected people and groups in a society. (Newman, 1999a; p. xiii)

Political marketing involves a broad array of concepts and theories that have been used traditionally by for-profit organizations in the selling of goods and services to consumers. This section highlights the application of these same procedures to political marketplaces where candidates, government officials, and political parties use these techniques to drive public opinion in a desired direction.

### **The Role of Marketing in Politics**

The same principles that operate in the commercial marketplace hold true in the political marketplace: Successful companies have a market orientation and are constantly engaged in creating value for their customers. In other words, marketers must anticipate their customers' needs and constantly develop innovative products and services to keep their customers satisfied. Politicians have a similar orientation and are constantly trying to create value for their constituents by improving the quality of life and creating the most benefit at the lowest cost (Kotler & Kotler, 1981, 1999).

It has become impossible not to incorporate a marketing orientation when running for office or, for that matter, when running the country. Politics today is increasingly being influenced by marketing, and the same technological methods used by corporate America to market products are also being used by politicians to market themselves and their ideas. The modern day president must rely on marketing not only to win the election, but to be successful as a leader after entering the White House (Alexander, 1984; Altschuler, 1982; Butler & Collins, 1999; Diamond & Bates, 1984; Graber, 1984; Goldenberg & Traugott, 1984; Greenfield, 1982; Jamieson, 1992; Luntz, 1988; Mauser, 1983; Newman & Sheth, 1985a, 1985b, 1987; Newburg, 1984; Nimmo & Rivers, 1981; Perloff, 1999; Polsby & Wildavsky, 1984; Sabato, 1981; Wring, 1999).

## **Making the Leap from Business to Politics**

There are two glaring differences between the use of marketing in business and in politics (Newman, 1988). First, there are differences of philosophy. In business, the goal is to make a profit, whereas in politics, it is the successful operation of democracy (at least in this country). Winning in politics is sometimes based on a few percentage points, whereas in business, the difference between winning and losing is based on huge variations. Second, in business the implementation of marketing research results is often followed, whereas in politics, the candidate's own political philosophy can influence the extent to which it is followed (Newman, 1999b).

The differences between business and politics have not prevented the practitioners of both areas from working to merge the two together. As a result, there are strong similarities between the two markets. First, both rely upon the use of standard marketing tools and strategies, such as marketing research, market segmentation, targeting, and positioning, and strategy development and implementation (all of which are explained later in this chapter). Second, the voter can be analyzed as a consumer in the political marketplace, using the same models and theories in marketing that are used to study consumers in the commercial marketplace. Third, both are dealing in competitive marketplaces and, as such, need to rely on similar approaches to winning (Newman, 1994).

## **Marketing Is an Exchange Process**

Marketing is often described as an exchange process between a buyer and a seller, with the buyer exchanging money for the seller's product or service. When applying marketing to a political campaign, the exchange process centers on a candidate who offers political leadership (through the policies he advocates) and a vision for the country in exchange for a vote from the citizen. Once in the White House, the exchange centers on the same leadership and vision being offered to the American people in exchange for their vote of confidence (as measured through opinion polls that track the president's approval ratings).

The exchange process becomes slightly more complicated when we apply it to a sitting president, as his leadership can be effective only if he is able to move legislation through Congress. However, as a president's approval ratings increase in the polls, there is an indirect pressure on congressmen and senators to work with the president to avoid alienating his constituency. Eventually, the exchange between a president and the American people moves to the next campaign when the president runs for reelection. A market orientation then requires that research and polling be done to help shape the policies of the politician, which become the product through which the exchange is consummated (Kotler & Kotler, 1999).

## **Voter Behavior**

Significant strides have been made to integrate the literature in the social sciences with marketing thought on the subject of voter behavior (Newman & Sheth 1985b, 1987). A predictive model of voter behavior (Newman, 1999c) proposes a number of cognitive beliefs that may come from a wide range of sources, including the voter, word-of-mouth communication, and the mass media. The model incorporates the influence of individuals' affiliation with groups of people in their social environment

(Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1944) and the influence of party affiliation and past voting behavior (Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960). The fundamental axiom of the model is that voters are consumers of a service offered by a politician and, in that role, choose candidates based on the perceived value they offer them. The model proposes that there are five distinct and separate cognitive domains that drive voters' behavior.

1. **Political issues** represent the policies a candidate advocates and promises to enact if elected to office. This component in the model captures some classic literature in this field (Campbell et al., 1960; Converse, 1964; Downs, 1957; Flanigan & Zingale, 1983; Key, 1966; Nie & Anderson, 1974; Nie, Verba, & Petrocik, 1976; Popkin et al., 1976; RePass, 1971).

2. **Social imagery** represents the use of stereotypes to appeal to voters by making associations between the candidate and selected segments in society (e.g., the support that George W. Bush received during the 2000 election from business leaders and the National Rifle Association or Gore's support from unions and blue collar workers). This component captures the influence of the role of party affiliation and other important social networks that shape voter behavior (Asher, 1980; Berelson, Lazarsfeld, & McPhee, 1954; Campbell & Cooper, 1954; Key, 1966; Natchez, 1970; Nie et al., 1976).

3. **Candidate personality** captures the importance of a candidate's personality in helping to reinforce and manufacture an image in the voter's mind (e.g., Gore's emphasizing his experience as vice president in the 2000 presidential election as a way of making voters feeling more secure about him). Similar to the first two components in the theory, there is a significant body of literature in the social sciences that supports this voter domain (Bowen et al., 1976; Campbell, 1983; Campbell, Gurin, & Miller, 1954; Downing, 1965; Gant & Davis, 1984; Kessel, 1984; Mendelsohn & O'Keefe, 1976; Natchez & Bupp, 1968; Nimmo & Savage, 1976).

4. **Situational contingency** represents that dimension of voters thinking that could be affected by "hypothetical events" that are profiled in the course of a campaign. For example, during the 2000 presidential campaign, Bush went out of his way to lead voters to believe that if Gore were elected he would carry on in the same manner that President Clinton did. A candidate's opponents often use this tactic as a means of creating the illusion that one candidate is better in dealing with certain situations than the other candidate, in an effort to get voters to switch their allegiance. There is literature in the field that supports this type of research (Campbell et al., 1960; Howard & Sheth, 1969; Triandis, 1971; Vincent & Zikmund, 1975).

5. **Epistemic value** represents that dimension that appeals to a voter's sense of curiosity or novelty in choosing a candidate. Examples of this in recent presidential elections are captured by the novelty of Perot and Clinton during the 1992 campaign and Jimmy Carter's campaign in 1976. Very little research has been conducted to document this dimension of voter behavior (Berlyne, 1963; Faison, 1977; Rogers, 1979; McAlister, 1982; McAlister & Pessemier, 1982).

## The Role of Marketing Research

The importance of doing research rests with the notion that not all products can be sold to all consumers. Companies use marketing research to determine what

to stress to different consumer segments. Politicians are no different. Marketing research and polling are of course not new to the field of politics (Alker et al., 1973; Bachman & O'Malley, 1984; Berelson et al., 1954; Campbell et al., 1954; Campbell & Kahn, 1952; Eldersveld, 1951; Herndon & Bernd, 1972; Lazarsfeld et al., 1944; Macrae, 1970; Markus, 1982; Mitchell & Daves, 1999; Mitofsky, 1998; Pool & Abelson, 1961; P. A. Smith, 1982; Tullock, 1967).

There are many types of polls that candidates rely upon, including benchmark surveys (usually conducted after a candidate has decided to seek office to provide a baseline of information), trial heat surveys (used to group candidates together in hypothetical matchups early in the campaign), tracking polls (conducted on a daily basis near election day to monitor any late shifts in support), cross-sectional and panel surveys (conducted by the major polling firms over time to provide a picture of where the electorate stands at different points during a campaign), and exit polls (carried out immediately after voters cast their ballots). In addition to polling, candidates rely on focus groups, small numbers of people brought together in a room to discuss either the candidates or their ideas. As the group discussion goes on, campaign strategists sit behind a two-way mirror and watch in an effort to get new insights into ways of altering their campaign strategy (Asher, 1998).

Opinion polls have become one of the most important tools of the modern president. Going back to Jimmy Carter's administration, candidates have relied extensively on marketing research to direct their campaign strategy. Beginning with the 1992 presidential campaign, candidates have created high-tech nerve centers that have been used to communicate with journalists. During Clinton's first campaign, this was referred to as the war room (Newman, 1994).

The campaign is the time during which ideas are researched and promises are made and then tested in the marketplace, something which is referred to as a *test market*. This is in principle the same procedure a manufacturer uses to determine if a new product should be marketed nationwide. The manufacturer will pick a few test cities, pass out sample packages of the product, and then get people's reactions to ensure the likelihood of success. In effect, the test market is a "simulated" marketplace that serves as a way of forecasting the behavior of the participants.

## **Imagery and Perception in Politics**

In politics, an image is created through the use of visual impressions that are communicated by the candidate's physical presence, media appearances, and experiences and record as a political leader as that information is integrated in the minds of citizens (Campbell, 1983; Fox, 1967; Kjeldahl, 1971; Nimmo, 1973; Schweiger & Adami, 1999; Trenaman & McQuail, 1961; Wyckoff, 1968). A candidate's image is very much affected by endorsements of highly visible people in the country who support him. This is no different from the successful endorsement of products by celebrities, who help ring up sales for products from beverages to long-distance telephone services. We see Michael Jordan promoting Coca-Cola, McDonalds, and Nike products, while Candice Bergen can be seen promoting Sprint telephone services. Why? Because they create an image for the company and the products the company sells. This is not any different from Hollywood stars like Goldie Hawn and Warren Beatty appearing in front of rallies promoting Bill Clinton during the



1992 and 1996 campaigns. These Hollywood stars have a strong following, and their success rubs off on a candidate when they are seen together on television.

## **Market Segmentation and Candidate Positioning**

In business, market segmentation and targeting are used to identify those segments of customers toward whom the marketer directs the product and promotional campaign. It is used by many companies that choose to sell their product or service not to every potential customer, but only to those who are likely to buy it. In politics, market segmentation has been traditionally used by each of the political parties to choose which groups of people they target with their appeals. Historically, the Democrats have been the party of the poor and minorities, and the Republicans the party of the rich and big business. Each party worked very hard at identifying the needs of its constituents and developing programs and policies geared to satisfying those needs. However, as the marketing technology has become available to tailor-meet the needs of all constituents, regardless of group identification, the segmentation of people along party lines has been blurred, with both parties trying to attract citizens from the competing party. During the 1980 and 1984 presidential campaigns, Reagan was successful at segmenting his appeal to attract the group that would become known as the Reagan Democrats (Newman, 1994).

Positioning is a multistage process that begins with candidates assessing both their own and their opponents' strengths and weaknesses. Positioning is the vehicle that allows candidates to convey their image to voters in the best light possible (Baines, 1999; Campbell, 1983; Elster, 1972; Goggin, 1984; Johnson, 1971; Maddox, 1980; Mauser, 1980; Nimmo, 1970, 1973; Nimmo & Rivers, 1981; Patton & Kaericher, 1980; West, 1984; Wildman & Wildman, 1976). Once an image is developed, it is crafted through the media by emphasizing certain personality traits of the candidate, as well as stressing various issues. For example, George W. Bush realized that as a Republican and an outsider to Washington, he was in a good position to criticize the system that Bill Clinton and Al Gore had influenced during their tenure in office and to position himself as a candidate who would restore respect to the nation's capital.

## **Marketing Strategy**

A marketing strategy is a plan of action that is used to implement a series of activities that will ensure success in the marketplace. A successful marketing strategy begins with the recruitment of viable candidates (Aldrich, 1980; Burns, 1984; Clarke & Donovan, 1980; DiRenzo, 1967; Foley, 1980; Jacob, 1972; Jewell & Olson, 1982; League of Women Voters Education Fund, 1984; Marshall, 1981; Nice, 1980; Pomper, 1963; Rosenzweig, 1957; Spadaro, 1976; Wittman, 1983).

Once a candidate has been recruited, a marketing strategy is developed and implemented. The role of a marketing strategy is to reinforce the candidate's "position" in the minds of the constituencies that will affect his or her success in the political marketplace established, a marketing strategy is developed and implemented. At the heart of that strategy will be the use of political advertising (Arterton, 1984; Kaid, 1981, 1999; Perloff, 1999). Recall that the position of the candidate is based on his or her image and the platform that is developed (Kraus, 1999; Morris, 1997; Newman, 1999b; O'Shaughnessy, 1990; Sherman, 1999).

## The Permanent Campaign

After a candidate gets elected to office, the same concepts and principles of political marketing can be applied to the role of governing. After entering the White House, a president must fully understand that there is a whole new host of challenges and changes in the marketplace. The campaign is the time during which the candidate develops his product, tests it out, and arrives at a “contract” with the American people that he promises to keep after he enters the White House. However, once a candidate wins the election, it is delivery time, a time when voters look to the president to carry out his promises (Blumenthal, 1980; Maarek, 1995; Nimmo, 1970, 1996, 1999; O’Shaughnessy, 1990).

Whereas the methods and techniques are the same, the marketing strategy necessary to be successful in the “campaign marketplace” is very different from one that will ensure success in the “governing marketplace.” The first change centers on the needs and profile of the electorate. The level of interest in politics drops off significantly after the campaign is over, leaving a tremendous power in the hands of the media to shape the president’s image. Moving the campaign into the White House brings with it a reliance on a new “team” to run the country. This is a marketing management issue, which centers on the issues of planning and control within the White House. For example, many of the same people who ran Bush’s campaign in 2000 came with him to the White House, a common and unsettling trend in politics. Although campaign tested and loyal to Bush, several of these aides were young, untested consultants, who naively tried to apply the same marketing formula they used successfully during the campaign to govern. This forced the “permanent campaign” mentality onto the strategic operations of the White House and, in so doing, proved to create problems for Mr. Bush as it did for Mr. Clinton before him.

Another central dimension to a successful marketing strategy once in office is refocusing on a different set of competitors. Once a candidate enters the White House, the competition increases significantly, including politicians from the opposition party interest groups working to stop legislation the president is advocating, world leaders who would rather see the president leave office, and sometimes leaders in the president’s own party, who either do not agree with him or are trying to put themselves into an electable position for the next election (Nimmo, 1999).

## The Choice of Consultants

The fact is that today, consultants sometimes take the center stage, and even determine the issues of a campaign (Asher, 1980; Belker, 1982; Blumenthal, 1980; Chambers & Burnham, 1967; Glick, 1967; Goldenberg & Traugott, 1984; Johnson, 1999, 2001; Kessel, 1980; Kotler & Kotler, 1981; McDonald, 1961; Newman, 1983a; Norrandner & Smith, 1985; Payne, 1980; Polsby & Wildavsky, 1984; Sabato, 1981; Sorauf, 1968; Wayne, 1980; West, 1983). Politics has become a big, profitable business. At the level of overall strategic thinking, the candidate is involved, but when it comes to creating a campaign platform, conducting polls, and setting up a promotional strategy, very few candidates are involved. The services offered by consultants include several different activities, such as direct mail, fund-raising, TV and radio spots, issue analysis, and print advertising, all essentially an effort toward raising funds and impacting on voter’s choices. The ability to lead in the high-tech

age hinges on the careful selection of the right consultants to run the candidate's political campaign, both before and after entering the White House.

Consultants now play a role in any election campaign, from local school board member to President of the United States. Candidates and politicians alike rely on these experts to perform many functions, including fund-raising, research, strategy, advertising, media buying, and many other functions that one would find being carried out in a corporation. Politics has turned into big business, and the management skills necessary to run a corporation are the same ones necessary to run a campaign and even the White House.

## **Running a Successful Marketing Campaign**

The formula for successful product development follows some basic rules. First, successful companies spend a lot of time studying the needs of target customers and getting their reactions and suggestions as the product moves through development. Second, they make the customer part of the development team. Third, successful companies get the support of a high company officer and advocate. Fourth, successful companies spend a lot of time announcing the new product, not leaving this step to chance. Finally, successful new product development requires the company to establish an effective organization for managing the new product development process. Success in a presidential campaign is subject to a similar set of rules, but in a much more condensed time period.

Generally speaking, there needs to be continuous improvement and, in some cases, reengineering to boost a leader's standing in the polls. One of the reasons Bush won the presidency is because he had fresh ideas that people liked. This is no different from the product development process within a company, where innovations are tested out every day in the research and development departments of corporations.

In all businesses, structure determines strategy, a process that will result in new ways of solving problems, running organizations, and transmitting knowledge. One of the most important business priorities is to implement exciting new organizational schemes. This is something from which a president can learn a lot. A very popular dictum in business is that the customer is always right. In a very crowded marketplace, too many products and services look alike, so empowerment and customer service are necessary to help a company differentiate itself from competition. In politics, this equates with following the polls as a leader; deciding when to lead the country into knowing what is right, and, in the process, knowing when to go against public opinion.

The success of any candidate, political party, or organization that seeks to drive public opinion will rest on the following set of best practices (Newman, 2001a, 2001b).

1. Understand what voters are looking for: This highlights the importance of carrying out marketing research to identify the needs and wants of the critical voter segments candidates are going to target with their message.
2. Marketing is all about making an emotional connection with people: Consumers make decisions with their hearts and confirm them with their minds. Without first making an emotional connection with the voters, a politician will not have the opportunity to speak to them about issues.

3. We live in an age of manufactured images: Without the benefit of meeting the candidate during the course of a campaign, voters must rely on the image of the person that is created on television.
4. Use one central vision to connect to a candidate's issues and personality: Communicating with voters is done most successfully if there is a clear vision that defines the essence of a candidate's campaign. Perhaps the best recent example of this was Clinton's use of the phrase, "It's the economy, stupid," in his first successful bid for the White House in 1992.
5. Talk about voters' concerns, not your own: Voters do not want to hear about your ideas, they want to hear about how your ideas will help them.
6. Voters constantly want change: This is the one constant in modern-day politics, stemming from the impact of technology on the political process. Information technology and the telecommunication infrastructure make it possible for candidates to understand and appeal to a highly fragmented audience with a myriad of messages.
7. Market yourself to the media: The media have become the new "party bosses" who are the opinion leaders to the voters today.
8. Get support from party elites: Most candidates at all levels still rely on their political party to get them nominated and pay their campaign bills.

## Marketing and Democracy

Marketing has played a key role in the reshaping of ideology in this country. Political ideology is being driven by marketing, not by party affiliation. The implication of this change lies in the increasing importance that marketing technology plays in shaping the ideological beliefs of the president. If we look back to recent presidential administrations, ideology was based on very fundamental differences in the way in which government was run.

Polls are the new ideological tool that politicians use to determine their issue priorities. This is a very dangerous issue, but one that cannot be avoided, as polls continue to be used to monitor every action a candidate makes during the course of a campaign. Along with this change in politics comes the diminishing role of the political party and the transference of that power to the likes of the consultants and media. As the information highway enters politics, we will see significant innovations in the way in which polling is conducted.

Advances in the telecommunications industry, especially with respect to interactive technology, has the potential to change the electoral process as we know it today and bring with it significant changes. For example, it may become possible for citizens to vote from their own homes on their computers. Assuming that the proper verification system could be built into the process, this change brings with it the potential for substantially increasing the level of participation in presidential elections.

The role of money in politics has always been a central issue to the success of a political candidate (Agranoff, 1976; Alexander, 1984; Arrington & Ingalls, 1984; Asher, 1998; Dunn, 1972; Giertz & Sullivan, 1977; Glantz et al., 1976; Gould, 1999; Howell & Oiler, 1981; Malbin, 1984; Palda, 1975; Welch, 1976; Wray, 1999; Young, 1978). These studies have addressed issues such as where to allocate funds, whether campaign expenditures are evaluated as a reflection of demand or supply, and the overall impact of expenditures on the outcome of an election. It is clear from the

review in this area that expenditures on selected campaign activities will have a differential impact depending on the level of the race. Some of the more recent books written in this area point to the increasing importance that candidates have placed on using political consultants to direct the allocation of funds to help candidates to position themselves to the specific target markets (League of Women Voters Education Fund, 1984; Polsby & Wildavsky, 1984; Sabato, 1981; Wayne, 1980).

Alexander (1980a, p. 11) states the problem of election reform very well with the following questions.

How do we improve political dialogue, attract a more attentive and well-informed electorate, encourage citizens to participate in the political process as workers, contributors, and voters, and yet diminish financial inequalities among candidates and political parties and reduce the dominance of big money while simultaneously opening opportunities for well-qualified persons to become candidates? How do we apply democratic principles to elections in our age of media politics, seemingly dominated by an atmosphere of dollar politics, in ways consonant with constitutional guarantees?

He concludes by pointing out that the electoral process has turned into a conflict between a democratic society with public dialogue in free elections and the pressure from the marketplace. There is no doubt that with the ever-increasing use of advertising and modern electioneering, the study of reforms will become more important. Alexander's words continue to echo a caution that has become even more imperative since entering the new millennium.

It is critical for politicians to know to which segment of the electorate to listen and to whom to target their appeals. A serious issue to the health of our democracy is the ever-prevailing battle to do what is right for the country, even at the expense of losing popularity in the polls and possibly hurting a candidate's (especially a president's) chances at getting reelected. Moving public opinion in the desired direction is the marketing challenge to leaders in all democracies. Success in politics is measured by the ability of a leader to move public opinion in the direction in which he or she wants it to move. This is a short-term measure of success, but it is also the one barometer that everyone will look at on election day before the results come in.

## **PERSUASION AND POLITICS: REVIEW OF THEORY AND RESEARCH**

How can we explain the effects of political marketing? How do individuals process persuasive political messages? How can we translate an understanding of voter processing to strategies for marketing effects? Knowledge of political marketing is incomplete without addressing these questions. We now turn to social psychological research on attitudes and political persuasion, which examines process issues. Using as a template the time-honored source–message–channel–receiver model, with cognitive elaborations, we review and synthesize research on the social psychology of political marketing.

## Communicator Characteristics

Persuasion experts—ranging from Aristotle, the Greek philosopher, to Aristotle International, a political consulting firm (Wayne, 2000)—would unquestionably agree that the source of a message can significantly influence political attitudes. Classic research leaves little doubt that communicator characteristics, such as likability, attractiveness, dynamism, and the big two—expertise and trustworthiness—affect candidate evaluations. The important, but hardly controversial, point that context matters (Perloff, 2003) can be glimpsed in efforts of presidential candidates to emphasize qualities that stand them in good stead relative to their predecessors (e.g., Carter and George W. Bush's stressing trustworthiness to contrast them with Nixon and Clinton, Reagan's stressing competence after Carter's mixed record on leadership, and Clinton's showcasing compassion as a contrast with George Bush).

There is an interesting symmetry between the finding from communication surveys that *expertise* and *trustworthiness* are the key components of credibility and the conclusion emerging from political science studies that *competence* and *integrity* are the *sin qua non* of presidential evaluations (Kinder, 1998). Candidates place their particular stamp on these two dimensions in political campaigns, although, from a research perspective, it must be admitted that little is known about how voters integrate the two components psychologically when judging contemporary candidates.

Another communicator quality that influences voters, though probably much less than those discussed above, is physical attractiveness. Two experimental investigations found that physically attractive or visually appealing candidates elicited more positive voter evaluations than did less appealing contenders (Budesheim & DePaola, 1994; Rosenberg & McCafferty, 1987). These findings, coming as they do from laboratory experiments, understate the complexity of attractiveness effects. Physical appearance is partly constructed by voters, with nonverbal signs like smiles interpreted differently by a candidate's opponents and supporters. For example, in the 2000 presidential election, Democrats claimed that they saw a rich boy's sneer in George W. Bush's smile; Republicans saw a boyish grin, perhaps even "instinctive personal modesty" (Noonan, 2000, p. A26). Attractiveness is also amalgamated with other candidate image information, such as experience and likability, as well as with issue positions, suggesting that attractiveness is less often a main effect than a significant interaction term in voters' mental ANOVA (analysis of variance) calculations (Ottati, 1990).

A constellation of factors frequently associated with physical appeal but that is actually more complex comes under the heading of candidates' nonverbal displays of emotion. These are of particular importance today, given the critical role that visual image-making plays in public opinion and policy formation. During the 1980s, a group of Dartmouth College psychologists and political scientists examined perceptions of political leaders' facial displays of emotion (e.g., Lanzetta, Sullivan, Masters, & McHugo, 1985). They located three types of facial displays: happiness/reassurance, anger/threat, and fear/evasion. Facial displays of happiness, anger, and fear were perceived differently and elicited different psychophysiological responses. Prior attitude moderated the impact of facial displays on evaluations, as supporters of a candidate (i.e., Ronald Reagan) found his nonverbal displays of happiness and reassurance more reassuring, and his expressions of anger more indicative of strength, than the candidate's critics. Presumably, politicians who can

clearly and convincingly express core emotions, and do so in politically appropriate ways (Bucy, 2000), are likely to have substantial influences on citizens' attitudes.

To sum up, communicator effects play an important—and complex—role in the political marketing process. For ego-involved members of interest groups, the mere mention that a credible source supports or opposes an issue has a tremendous impact, sometimes causing supporters to e-mail congressional representatives en masse. Pat Robertson exerts this effect on the Christian Right, and Jesse Jackson can serve as a peripheral cue for African Americans who affiliate with the Democratic Left (Kuklinski & Hurley, 1996). Complicating matters, communicator qualities (e.g., Reagan's likability and Clinton's dynamism) can serve as persuasive arguments, as well as peripheral cues (Petty & Wegener, 1999), as when voters base their vote choice on the match between salient personal traits and perceived requirements of the presidential office. Such voting makes eminent sense in an era of candidate-centered marketing and is a continued testament (and a not altogether bad one) to the influence that politicians' personality exerts on political behavior.

## Message Characteristics

**Subliminal Appeals.** Although there was considerable hue and cry during the 2000 election about a Republican advertisement that flashed the letters R-A-T-S for approximately 1/30 of a second during a prescription drug care spot, there is virtually no evidence that subliminal messages influence political attitudes. Words subliminally embedded in ads are not noticed, primarily because they are swamped by the more powerful verbal and visual images that are patently part of the advertisements (Perloff, 2003). Even if a subliminal message in a political spot were noticed—and such messages appear to be rare, to say the least—there is no guarantee that it would be processed as the producers intended. (The word RATS might be mentally construed to read FRATS, the common abbreviation for fraternities.) There is also virtually no evidence that subliminal messages influence behavior, although Democrats' quick response to the GOP ad represented adroit political manipulation of widespread public belief in subliminal advertising effects.

**Mere Exposure.** A more likely noncognitive message effect is repeated exposure to political advertisements, an application of Zajonc's (1968) mere exposure effect. Grush, McKeough, and Ahlering's (1978) well-known demonstration that candidates who spend more money on campaigns are significantly more likely to win election is frequently invoked as offering support for the theory's application to the political world. Their study suggests that repetition should be most likely to work in low involving elections, in which voters have developed little affect toward candidates or are unmotivated to balance out affect with logic. Political repetition is also likely to be effective when candidates' names are euphonious, as in the now-famous Illinois election in which a LaRouche candidate with the smooth-sounding name of Fairchild defeated the less euphonious Sangmeister (O'Sullivan, Chen, Mohapatra, Sigelman, & Lewis, 1988; G. W. Smith, 1998).

Mere exposure is no panacea. It is not likely to succeed when attitudes toward candidates are strong or moderate, which is fairly common in presidential elections. Money not being everything, there have been numerous cases in which candidates spent to the hilt and had wide name recognition but lost big. Pierre DuPont, Steve Forbes, and Ross Perot in 1996 provide compelling case study evidence that

repeated exposure is not a sufficient condition for political success. (Money is most assuredly a necessary condition for electoral victory, however.)

**Valence.** Although it is commonly believed that negative messages have more impact than positive ones, in view of their frequency (Kaid & Tedesco, 1999) and the greater memorability of negative information (Kellermann, 1984), an historical perspective on political communication provides a useful corrective. A generation ago, positive communications were believed to be highly persuasive, in light of Americans' bias toward evaluating political figures favorably (Sears & Whitney, 1973). Corroborating this view, a content analysis of Democratic and Republican nomination acceptance speeches from 1900 to 1984 revealed that candidates who spoke more pessimistically lost 18 of 22 elections (Zullo & Seligman, 1989). Presumably, candidates who ruminated pessimistically elicited perceptions that bad events are uncontrollable; in contrast, optimistic candidates induced feelings of hope. There is no reason to believe that this trend has abated. This suggests that positive information can still have an impact and that the influence of negative information must be qualified to take into account what we know of the role played by optimistic messages in modalities other than political advertising.

**Symbols and Values.** Symbols are the stuff of politics, and appeals based on symbols and values are arguably the most influential of all political campaign messages. A symbolic politics approach stipulates that people acquire affective responses to symbols in childhood and early adulthood, through conditioning, modeling, cognitive consistency, affect transfer, and other socialization mechanisms (Sears & Funk, 1991). These acquired responses, or symbolic predispositions (e.g., racial prejudice, ethnic identities, partisan attachments, and strong values), persist over time. As adults, people respond affectively to symbols that are perceived as similar to the attitude objects to which they acquired conditioned or learned responses years ago.

To capitalize on this psychological tendency, political communicators condense complex issues into "simplified symbolic terms," attempting "to code political symbols in terms that will evoke widespread and supportive predispositions in the citizenry" (Sears & Funk, 1991, p. 14). Such catch phrases as "law and order," "forced busing," "partial birth abortion," "right to choose," "Watergate," and "right-wing conspiracy" are designed to activate associations learned earlier or to tap into schema individuals have formed as adults, schema that are tagged with significant affect. Symbolic appeals are frequently controversial, and some raise ethical concerns (e.g., the Horton ads in 1988 and attempts to link George W. Bush with the racist killing of James Byrd in 2000).

Mendelberg (1997) explored these issues, conducting one of the few studies applying symbolic politics theory to political communication. Mendelberg found that news coverage of the Willie Horton issue increased the impact of prejudice on opinions about racial issues. The Horton story inclined prejudiced Whites to reject government programs to assist African Americans, such as affirmative action, as well as to oppose welfare. Paralleling the finding that the Horton ad had its greatest impact on those who were sympathetic with its message, Garst and Bodenhausen (1996) showed that Republican participants were less likely than Democrats to scrutinize a message with attitude-congruent "family values" kin terms. Democrats tended to react more suspiciously to the use of these attitude-incongruent appeals.



Symbolic politics theory is rich in implication for political marketing, although it is not without shortcomings, including (a) the tendency to understate the impact of nonsymbolic factors, chiefly self-interest (Crano, 1997), and (b) a bias in assuming that partisan political behavior (e.g., opposition to affirmative action) is primarily attributable to base human motives (racism) when more humane value-based alternatives (principled commitment to egalitarian values) are also plausible (Sniderman, 1985; Sniderman & Piazza, 1993; but see Sears, Sidanius, & Bobo, 2000). While disagreements rage on the extent to which Americans remain prejudiced, there is little debate that symbolic predispositions operate on individuals on both political extremes and perhaps also on moderates with strong sentiments on particular issues.

Framing and accessibility theories (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Fazio, 1989) articulate mechanisms by which symbolic messages achieve effects. Framing stipulates that communications persuade by making particular values salient or linking them with certain policy alternatives (Kinder, 1998). Accessibility focuses on the ways in which messages call to mind strong attitudes, symbolic sentiments, and group interests steeped in affect. Experimental research (Sherman, Mackie, & Driscoll, 1990) and field experiments on news (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987) have demonstrated that political messages that prime relevant categories can make these constructs more accessible and influential, a finding with clear, but relatively unexplored, implications for political marketing.

**Inoculation.** Unlike other approaches discussed thus far, inoculation theory focuses on building *resistance* to persuasion. Candidates hope to keep wayward supporters in their camp by acknowledging, then refuting, a widely publicized shortcoming (Gore's admission in 2000 that he was not the most exciting candidate but would work hard for Americans every day). There is substantial evidence that political inoculation works (Pfau & Kenski, 1990), suggesting that anticipation and preemption of attacks can prevent supporters from defecting to the opposition, as well as perhaps attracting undecided voters. Inoculation effects appear to depend on political party identification, education level, and time interval separating inoculation and attack (Pfau & Kenski, 1990).

## Channel and Context

Channel variables are traditionally discussed in summaries of persuasive communication variables, although in view of the ubiquity of television, such mention seems quaintly out of date. Nonetheless, several points are worthy of discussion. First, evidence that simple messages are more compelling on television, while complex ones are more compelling via print (Chaiken & Eagly, 1976), provides a psychological basis for politicians' effort to keep televised speeches simple. Ronald Reagan clearly excelled at this (Hart, 1984; Perloff, 1998). Second, political campaigning via the Internet opens up new persuasion vistas, with the Internet's interactive capabilities clearly congenial with contemporary theories that assign a key role to receiver elaboration and processing of persuasive messages.

Context, frequently discussed at this juncture, includes mood, a variable that has evoked considerable interest in recent years. People are frequently angry at politicians, afraid of downturns in the economy, and proudly patriotic. There are different theories about the role mood plays in persuasion. Some scholars argue

that when in a good mood, people are less apt systematically to process political messages, steadfastly avoiding activities that might disrupt their positive affective state (Schwarz, Bless, & Bohner, 1991). (Clinton critics argued the positive mood engendered by the healthy economy discouraged people from thinking deeply about Clinton's moral lapses during impeachment. An alternative view is that people ruminated about this and decided that his crimes did not fit the punishment meted out by Republicans.) Other theorists, invoking cognitive processing perspectives, argue that negative moods bias systematic processing (Chaiken, Liberman, & Eagly, 1989), leading people to ignore reasonable, temperate appeals in favor of misleading, deceptive rhetoric. This too remains speculative, but interesting.

## Receiver Factors

***Preexisting Political Attitudes.*** The time-honored finding (e.g., Lazarsfeld et al., 1944) that political attitudes, steeped in childhood political and religious socialization, potentially influence vote choice remains true today, with religion gaining more attention in the aftermath of Lieberman's vice presidential nomination and Bush's appeal to White evangelical Protestant voters in 2000 (Morin, 2001). There is abundant evidence that Americans process campaign information selectively, assimilating positions of preferred candidates and contrasting the views of opposed candidates (see Granberg [1993] for a review that acknowledges both balance and social judgment theory mechanisms). Assimilation and contrast effects are accentuated among individuals high in involvement and those whose attitudes are strong or important. Assimilation and contrast occur both before and after the election, the latter powerfully illustrated by a poll taken during the Florida imbroglio in late November 2000. The poll found that 89% of those who believed that the certified Florida results were a fair and accurate count voted for Bush, while 83% of those who believed the opposite voted for Gore (Berke & Elder, 2000).

Selective processing of information is not lost on candidates, who tailor their messages to the attitudes of audiences (Miller & Sigelman, 1978), striving to keep messages within voters' latitudes of acceptance. Walter Mondale's insistence—courageous though it may have been—on telling voters in 1984 that he would raise their taxes is a cautionary tale of how messages are dead on arrival when they drift into the latitude of rejection. Voters prefer politicians who share their attitudes, even if candidates switch positions to gain votes (Hoffman & Carver, 1984; McCaul, Ployhart, Hinsz, & McCaul, 1995). Thus, candidates are discouraged from taking bold campaign positions, at least if they would rather be president than right. Appeals directed at accessing citizens' most acceptable positions, and at convincing them that the political communicator shares their views, occur not only in presidential elections, but in a host of strategic public campaigns, including those on behalf of the Gulf War (Manheim, 1994), health reform, and tax cuts.

Party identity remains one of the most important filters that citizens use to interpret political messages. Partisan identification is still a potent psychological force, even given the increase in the number of Independent voters (many of these voters are closet Republicans or Democrats; see Iyengar & Simon, 2000). Moreover, partisanship effects extend much beyond the fact that people are more responsive to appeals congenial with their party affiliation. As Iyengar and Simon point out, American voters develop beliefs about which party is best able to deal with particular problems (Republicans are traditionally seen as superior on issues of crime,

Democrats on education). Political messages that resonate with voters' stereotypes are more effective, with the same logic explaining why male war hero candidates may benefit more from emphasizing issues such as defense, whereas female candidates with children may fare better on issues relating to child care. Increasingly, though, marketing experts urge candidates to mix matters up by advocating policy positions in the terrain of the opposing political party (e.g., Clinton's 1996 triangulation efforts, in which he emphasized Democratic successes in reducing crime and restoring family values). Research indicates that such strategies may have potential payoff but are unlikely to pay strong electoral dividends (Norpoth & Buchanan, 1992).

**Involvement.** A complex variable, involvement is an important moderator of persuasion effects and theoretically a way to segment the political market. The elaboration likelihood model (ELM) predicts central processing under high involvement and peripheral thinking under low involvement (Petty & Wegener, 1999). Low involvement is common in politics and encourages reliance on peripheral cue, heuristics, and simple messages (Perloff, 1984; Zaller, 1992). High involvement is more complex. When an issue is personally engaging to voters (because it taps either self-interest or symbolic politics), people can become more committed to their viewpoints. When voters are moderately politically aware, they may change attitudes, especially when communications are somewhat intense and partisan attitudes are activated (Zaller, 1992). To the degree that politically involved citizens are also experts, whose political schema contain many concepts and linkages among concepts, they may be more likely to recall attitude-incongruent information than novices (Fiske, Kinder, & Larter, 1983). But when confronted with messages that are highly incompatible with values, experts are no more likely to be objective than anyone else.

## EXPLAINING POLITICAL PERSUASION EFFECTS

Social psychological theories offer a rich panoply of perspectives on attitude change. For this reason, they are of considerable importance in explaining persuasion on a mass level—i.e., in the mass marketing of politics. Having reviewed micro-level research on persuasion and politics, it is now time to bridge the micro and macro levels by examining political implications of the dominant theoretical perspective on attitude change: the dual process approach encompassing the heuristic systematic model (HSM) and ELM (Chen & Chaiken, 1999; Petty & Wegener, 1999). The present discussion emphasizes the ELM because it provides a somewhat more integrated analysis of persuasion variables, particularly those that bear on politics.

The centerpiece of the ELM is process. It emphasizes that messages change attitudes by connecting with individuals' preferred strategies for processing communication in a given situation. Citizens can be either thoughtful or mindless processors of political messages, depending on their motivation and ability to elaborate on political information. When they are motivated and able, individuals process information through a central route—sometimes with thought and objectivity, other times in a biased fashion, guided by values. Under low-involvement or low-ability conditions, citizens take the peripheral route, opting for simple messages and political heuristics; gut-level affect can strongly influence voting in such situations.

The ELM's emphasis on fitting persuasive strategies to cognitive processing melds nicely with marketing theory's focus on matching macro political messages to audiences based on the four Ps of marketing and strategic marketing's emphasis on segmentation and targeting.

Applied to political marketing, the ELM stipulates that different strategies should be employed to reach high-motivation/ability and low-motivation/ability audience segments. Under conditions of high motivation (involvement or personal relevance) or ability (e.g., political expertise), voters will process the campaign centrally, elaborating on candidate messages. Under such conditions, cogent political arguments can be effective as they match these voters' orientation to the campaign. Such arguments include evidence offered in behalf of issue positions in debates (e.g., Perot's now-famous charts), appeals offered in support of one proposal or another that resonate with targeted audiences' core values, and articulation of a political philosophy that contrasts positively with the philosophical orientation taken by the opposing candidate.

Messages have different effects under conditions of low elaboration likelihood, operationalized as low perceived personal relevance of messages, low vested interest (Crano, 1995), inability to decide for whom to vote until late in the campaign (Chaffee & Choe, 1980), or low political expertise (Fiske et al., 1983). In these circumstances, peripheral cues such as branded party labels, celebrity endorsements (Martin Sheen for Gore in 2000), mere exposure to the candidate, and associations (Ronald Reagan's patriotic "morning in America" ads) will be impactful. Nonverbal communication behaviors (e.g., George Bush's glancing at his watch in the 1992 debate) can be processed peripherally, conveying negative information and affect among low-involved voters looking for a quick way to make their voting decision. For voters in a low-involvement mode, political attitudes are frequently constructed from whatever information happens to be accessible (Wang Erber, Hodges, & Wilson, 1995). These voters' attitudes are highly elastic, susceptible to much shift over the course of a campaign (e.g., Krosnick, 1988).

Although this represents a general summary of the ELM's application to political marketing, it does not describe the relevance of new postulates added in recent years to accommodate criticisms and ambiguities in conceptual terminology (Petty & Wegener, 1999). The model stipulates that a given persuasion variable can perform multiple roles. A source or message factor can influence attitudes by (a) acting as a peripheral cue when individuals are unmotivated or unable to process issue-relevant arguments; (b) serving as a persuasive argument when elaboration likelihood is high; or (c) influencing the extent of message elaboration when motivation or ability are moderate. Just as one person's meat is another person's poison, so too a factor that serves as a peripheral cue for one person may not function in this manner for another, or a given variable may perform different functions for the same voter across situations that vary in their elaboration likelihood.

Consider Al Gore's sighs, displayed during the first presidential debate of 2000. The sighs could have served as peripheral cues for low-involved, undecided voters. Hearing the sighs could have engendered negative affect, pushing these voters to evaluate Gore negatively. For voters with high political involvement or ability, the sighs could have been processed more centrally. Voters who leaned against Gore might have connected the sighs to Gore's "no controlling legal authority" statement regarding his appearance at the Buddhist Temple in 1996 and other instances in which Gore displayed behavior that they regarded as arrogant or holier-than-thou. The sighs could also influence the degree of cognitive elaboration by

triggering reflections on Gore's character among those moderately involved in the campaign: "I really like the fact that he's willing to show some emotion. That's refreshing in a debate." For these voters, Gore's sighs functioned as neither cues nor arguments, but as catalysts to renewed cognitive scrutiny of the candidates in a close presidential election.

Another insight generated by the ELM is that under different conditions, with different motives salient, voters engage in reasonably objective, or highly biased, political processing. Objective processing occurs when voters do not harbor strong attitudes toward a candidate or are motivated by uncertainty reduction or a desire to make the best decision possible. Such processing occurs when voters have a vested interest in economic issues (1980 and 1992).

Under many conditions, voters do not process information in an objective fashion. For many voters, biased processing is the rule, not the exception. Further more, self-interest is by no means the only—or most important—predictor of political behavior (Sears & Funk, 1991). The ELM accommodates these facts by noting that when voters have strong attitudes, are motivated by consistency or self-esteem maintenance needs, or have a biased store of knowledge, they process information highly selectively or in a biased fashion. Under such conditions, the model suggests that persuaders devise messages that are consonant with voters' prevailing political sentiments, in line with Iyengar and Simon's (2000) resonance model of political communication.

## Shortcomings

Although the ELM has much to say about persuasion, it has several conceptual shortcomings that make it somewhat less useful in political marketing than one would ideally desire. First, involvement means different things in the laboratory, where it can be tidily manipulated, than in the real world, where it is confounded with numerous other factors, such as attitude extremity and importance. As a result, suggestions about optimal marketing strategies, particularly under high involvement, are frequently of limited utility to political marketing theorists. The ELM suggests that marketers devise cogent appeals to reach voters high in perceived personal relevance. This is hardly a novel prediction. Furthermore, we are never told just what a cogent appeal is or precisely and specifically what type of message should be most effective for voters high in elaboration likelihood.

A second limitation is that the multiple roles concept, though intellectually interesting, is confusing and, at worst, incapable of being falsified (Stiff, 1994). To be sure, the same political factors perform different roles under different conditions, but it remains difficult to translate the concept into clear, novel, or consequential predictions for political campaign marketing.

In view of these limitations, the model should *not* be viewed as a full-blown theory fraught with testable hypotheses but, rather, as an overarching framework for analyzing attitude change processes and effects. Combining the model with research findings from political communication and marketing should enhance its utility in the political persuasion domain. The ELM's emphasis on dual processing mechanisms has important implications for political marketing. Its focus on matching messages to recipients' motivation or ability levels meshes nicely with

recent work in political communication that emphasizes the profoundly interactive nature of contemporary campaigns (Iyengar & Simon, 2000). Campaigns, it is generally believed, do not hypodermically change attitudes so much as link up with voters' predispositions and concerns in subtle ways, bringing certain issues to the surface, distilling others, crystallizing beliefs and affects, and pushing some voters to align their attitudes in different ways than they had earlier in the political season. Theory and research provide insights regarding ways in which this occurs on the micro level, as well as on how marketing communications attempt to mold the political environment and how micro-level changes can feed back to influence the larger marketing campaign game plan.

## **FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS**

In the coming years, as political marketing research continues to flourish, it can be expected to move in several directions, both micro and macro. We offer several directions that we believe research will take, as well as those that we think will be beneficial to the field.

First, research should explore linkages among symbols, politics, and marketing communications. Although there have been numerous applications of symbolic politics to political behavior, few studies have examined the influences of messages that try to arouse symbolic sentiments (e.g., on gun control, abortion, and race). The symbolic politics approach, although not without its shortcomings, offers a rich framework for examining political marketing effects. For example, there is a pressing need to extend the psychologically relevant notion of accessibility, amply tested in the laboratory but insufficiently in the field, to political marketing settings.

With framing a popular topic in political communication research, we will likely see more studies that apply framing theory to political communication. We believe that framing approaches have intriguing possibilities for marketing, given the subtle influences that frames can exert on attitudes. In a similar fashion, we believe that there will be increased attention paid to the role affect plays in micro marketing effects, particularly how it meshes with cognition, and ways in which marketers can evoke affect in politically persuasive ways. Affect is an essential part of politics yet was inexcusably neglected by researchers for years. With models available to explain the role that affect plays in political persuasion (e.g., Petty & Wegener, 1999; Schwarz et al., 1991), there is good reason to expect increased attention to this in future years.

Other psychological processes worthy of attention include political attitude structure and function. Attitudes that are structured around an ideology are likely to be differentially susceptible to media manipulation than those that are inchoate or are structured around a variety of unconnected beliefs or around memorable affects. Persuasive messages are also apt to have different effects, depending on the function that politics plays in people's lives. Functional studies of attitudes are flourishing in social psychology (e.g., Maio & Olson, 2000) and have interesting implications for political marketing. For example, voters for whom political attitudes serve a social adjustment function (impressing others) should be influenced by different types of messages than those for whom attitudes play a deeper, value-expressive role.

Moving to more macro areas, we are certain that there will be considerable attention paid to political marketing via the Internet, already a topic of interest to advertising scholars. We believe that such research should be theory-based, and we encourage scholars to adapt dual process models to the interactive world of political Web sites. Sites permit tailoring of messages to individual receivers' ability and motivational levels, a development with intriguing theoretical practical, and ethical implications. The ELM, recently applied to the study of commercial advertising on the Web (Cho, 1999), provides a useful framework for studying Internet political advertising effects.

We also issue a clarion call for research in contexts other than the presidency. The presidency is the most exciting and prestigious arena to study, but it is not the only one. Much marketing occurs in lower-level elections and in issue campaigns, with potentially greater effect in light of the automatic, low-involvement processing mode that typically accompanies the reception of such messages.

Researchers should strive to apply marketing and social psychological principles to campaigns designed to ameliorate the sorry state of politics in contemporary America. Marketing and persuasion theories are designed with scientific, rather than ethical, purposes in mind. As rhetorical scholars are exquisitely aware, this stands in sharp contrast with early persuasion approaches, notably those of Aristotle, who linked persuasive communication and ethics (Roberts, 1954), albeit with less analytical flourish than theorists of today. Social marketing, although not explicitly guided by a philosophy of ethics, is the best available approach to direct such efforts. Emboldened by the work of Kotler and Kotler (1999) and Goldberg, Fishbein, and Middlestadt (1997), researchers should apply marketing principles to the problem of low voter turnout and nonvoting among young people (Doppelt & Shearer, 1999). With America lagging behind much of the world when it comes to casting ballots (Newman, 1999a), yet arguably rivaling or exceeding other democratic countries when it comes to registering cynicism about the political process, the time has come for a series of theory-driven marketing campaigns designed to change perceptions of the political marketplace and entice a generation of young people to participate more actively in American politics.

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# Methodological Developments in Political Communication Research

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## HOW RESEARCH METHODS EVOLVED: AN OVERVIEW

The multiplicity of research approaches used by political communication scholars has been developing over many centuries because the essence of politics has remained the same. It has always involved the construction, sending, receiving, and processing of politically relevant messages. Study methods began with scholars and practitioners of politics simply observing how people communicated about politics, analyzing what appeared to be the consequences, and speculating why these consequences were occurring and how they could be produced or avoided.

In modern times, study methods have become far more deliberate and systematic, beginning with formulating hypotheses, which are then tested, using a variety of methods. Communication concepts have become more carefully defined, and better indicators and more sophisticated methods have been developed to test them. For example, over time the concept “media use,” which is important in many mass communication impact studies, has been refined considerably. Instead of interpreting it merely as “general exposure to the medium in question,” scholars now distinguish between mere “exposure” to content and “attention” to content and exposure or attention to particular aspects of content, rather than leaving content unspecified. More sensitive measures of media use, tested through more precise methods, then capture political effects more accurately.

Formal investigations have been greatly aided by the development of sophisticated communication technologies. Computers, for example, have become a veritable magic wand opening up, as well as creating, massive sets of political communication data. Similarly, how human brains process political information can be



studied much more accurately because new functional magnetic resonance imaging techniques permit investigators to probe brain activities. When students of mass media effects could move beyond questioning respondents about their emotional arousal to measuring the arousal through changes in brain activity, heart rates, and skin moisture, many new possibilities for definitive, finely calibrated research unfolded.

Nonetheless, a great deal of research is still conceptualized and conducted using the tried-and-true methods of careful observation of communication behaviors and their consequences and careful scrutiny of recorded communications and their outcomes. Such research has many shortcomings, of course, and cannot equal the precision of the best research done with modern methods. But, at its best, it can achieve excellent results. The main reason, it seems to me, is that insightful observers analyze communications in context, taking into account the historical, social, economic, and political situation surrounding particular messages. Unfortunately, much modern research is more narrowly focused and fails to do that (Berger, 2000; Gunter, 2000).

Though research tools have changed, the main foci of research have remained the same. They are embodied in the well-known questions posed by the eminent social scientist Harold Lasswell in an essay published in 1969. Lasswell urged communication scholars to assess the nature and consequences of communication by asking “*Who says what to whom in what channel, with what effect?*” Attention should be focused on *senders* and *receivers* of messages, on the *message* itself and the *channel* through which it traveled from its source to its destination, and the *effect*, if any, that it produced. Accordingly, political communication scholars study matters such as the salient characteristics of the originators of political messages, the backgrounds and attitudes that receivers bring to the interpretation of messages, the form and substance of messages, the impact that various types of communication channels leave on the messages that flow through their networks, and, ultimately, the impact of the messages on political processes at individual and societal levels.

In this chapter, I focus on the current status of four genres of methods that political communication scholars use to explore the major political communication research areas that Lasswell identified. I sketch out—which is all that is possible in a brief chapter—recent developments and their strengths and weaknesses. The spotlight first falls on survey research used to ascertain what and how various publics think about political issues in the wake of the political information that they have received. Then it turns to the study of the content, framing, and presentation of verbal political messages. Content analysis is the most hallowed and most widely used method of political communication research. In light of the increasing prevalence and importance of transmitting messages audiovisually, I highlight solved and unsolved problems in the emerging field of audiovisual content analysis. Next I focus on the important, but underused, technique of network analysis, through which information flowing through various channels within communication systems can be traced. Finally, I report on the exciting new insights that have become possible by studying communication effects through experimental methods.

All of these research methods start with the collection of data and finish with data analysis. It is therefore appropriate to comment on these aspects of research before turning to the more specialized approaches.

## **DATA SOURCES AND DATA COLLECTION METHODS**

Once the focus of a research project has been determined and hypotheses have been formulated in line with the chosen theory or theories, researchers must decide what bodies of data they should examine and the precise ways in which the data are to be gathered. This has become both easier and more difficult. It is easier because the pool of available data has grown exponentially so that data scarcity has become quite rare. It is harder because thorough research requires sampling and analyzing much larger databases than ever before. Many of these data are stored on Web sites on the Internet. Some Internet data sets are excellent in quality and far more up-to-date than most previous data sets. But some of the data sets are badly flawed and it is often difficult to detect their shortcomings. Another problem is the impermanence of much computerized information on the World Wide Web. It may be here today and gone or altered tomorrow because data archiving methods are still rudimentary. That may make it difficult for investigators to double-check the accuracy of their data. It also makes it far more difficult for other scholars to check and replicate the research. If the ability to replicate findings is a hallmark of methods such as content analysis, the fragility of Internet data may make this resource questionable as a solid database.

Literally hundreds of archives worldwide now offer political communication data which vary in substance, nature, scope, and quality. It would be pointless to attempt to list them when good computer search engines can churn out up-to-date lists that cover both on-line and off-line archives. Moreover, the names on the lists change frequently, mostly through the addition of new Web sites. Therefore I limit myself to mentioning a handful of largely American archives that carry extensive, reliable data. Some of these archives have a track record of many years so that the chances are good that they will continue to serve the off-line and on-line research community for a long time with records that span many decades.

First on my list of data gold mines is the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR), which has provided access to a vast archive of social science data since 1962 (ICPSR, 2001). The archive is located at the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan. It operates under the guidance of a council of scholars and data professionals who oversee its extraordinarily diverse collections of mostly survey data and help scholars in using them. Archive professionals have been sensitive to the fact that data storage methods change over time; therefore, they migrate older data to newer storage media when needed.

The ICPSR unit that has been most central to the work of political communication researchers is the National Election Study (NES). The unit conducts nationwide surveys of American voters in all presidential and midterm election years. In presidential election years, polling takes place both before and after the elections; in midterm elections, there is only a postelection poll. Besides a host of election-related questions and questions about the respondents' demographic profile and political values, the polls ascertain people's views about major problems and policies and feelings about politics and politicians.

The NES (2001) has amassed a treasure trove of data suitable for multiyear analyses. In addition, NES investigators conduct and report pilot studies to test new study designs and new instruments for assessing public opinions. They have, for instance, dabbled in network analysis to investigate people's political discourse

partners outside the home. NES staffers also supply summaries of key variables from their surveys but leave analysis to the scholarly community at large. Full texts of individual study questionnaires, codebooks, and most data sets are available. Analysis of these data generally requires knowing a statistical software package such as SPSS or SAS.

The National Opinion Research Center (NORC), housed at the University of Chicago, is another major data resource. It has conducted the General Social Survey (GSS) of U.S. households since 1972. The biennial survey covers an exceptionally broad range of questions relevant to social science research. Many of these questions are repeated in successive surveys to allow monitoring social change and stability (GSS, 2001). The survey has had a cross-national module since 1985, in cooperation with overseas data archives. Survey topics are chosen based on the advice of a large pool of social scientists so that the surveys reflect the vast variety of interests represented within the social science community. A cumulative data file covering the years 1972 to 2000 became available on CD-ROM in 2001. It contains responses by 40,933 individuals and involves 3,500 variables.

Two data archives—the Roper Center and the Pew Center—are representative of the hundreds of organizations that devote themselves to the creation, collection, and archiving of more specialized data collections. The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research at the University of Connecticut is a depository for many thousands of public opinion polls drawn from the United States and other countries. It prides itself on maintaining “the most complete collection of public opinion information in existence” (Roper Center, 2001). Considering the explosive growth of public opinion polling since the mid-1970s, that is an impressive feat that is of immense benefit to the research community.

At the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, scholars concentrate on studying attitudes toward the press and toward public policy issues (Pew Research Center, 2001). That includes surveys of public attitudes about the credibility and salience of the news media, surveys about the public’s use of old and new print and electronic news media, and analyses of the attitudinal consequences of media usage. A series of in-depth surveys and analyses has focused on the views of the public and opinion leaders about international politics. The Center began in 1990 under the sponsorship of the *Los Angeles Times* but has been supported since 1996 by the Pew Charitable Trusts.

Finally, no cameo list of data gold mines would be complete without mentioning *LexisNexis* and the *Vanderbilt Television News Archives*. LexisNexis (2001) is an online database that has archived texts relevant for political communication research since 1979. The collection covers complete texts from more than 350 newspapers worldwide, more than 400 magazines and journals, and over 600 newsletters. It also includes broadcast transcripts from the major television and radio networks and transcripts of government documents, including laws and court decisions. The archived texts can be searched electronically and retrieved in part or in full by subscribers to LexisNexis services.

The Television News Archive at Vanderbilt University began its collections in 1968. It has become the world’s most extensive archive of television news. Broadcasts of the major networks (ABC, CBS, and NBC and since 1995 CNN) are recorded daily. They are indexed so that they can be searched by date or by subject matter and scholars can rent taped copies of the actual broadcasts needed for their research. In addition to the tapes of nightly national news broadcasts, the Archive also maintains records of special news-related programming. These special reports

and periodic news broadcasts cover presidential press conferences and political campaigns as well as national and international events such as the Watergate hearings during the Nixon administration, the hostage crisis in Iran during the Carter Administration, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Persian Gulf War, and the War on Terrorism that started during the George W. Bush administration.

## **DATA ANALYSIS METHODS**

Turning to data analysis methods, political communication researchers use the familiar social science tools, ranging from qualitative approaches, like eyeball comparisons of presidential speeches, to complex quantitative procedures. Again, the methodological tool kits have become much more well stocked, especially in the realm of quantitative methods. (Examples are given by Little, Schnabel, and Baumert, 2000; Lomax, 2001; Roberts, 1997; and Stevens, 2001.) To mention just a few, besides the common descriptive and correlation statistics, they include factor analysis, path analysis, multidimensional scaling, spatial analysis, and various methods of model building. In many research projects, investigators use multiple analysis procedures to make sure that the findings are not artifacts of one particular method of analysis. Comparison among methods also helps in determining which is likely to prove most effective in particular types of research.

When samples are too small to make findings reliable, databases are frequently combined. For example, to test political information held by minority groups within the population, several general population surveys may be combined to increase the small numbers of minorities represented in ordinary samples (Gartner & Segura, 2000). The same goal can be achieved through statistical weighting procedures. Data sets may represent one point in time or they may be drawn from information gathered at numerous points in time and combined to permit time-series analyses.

In some types of communication research, such as network analysis, ordinary statistical techniques may be inappropriate because their assumptions, such as randomness in the selection of survey respondents, are not met. Similarly, in mass media news content analysis, ordinary sampling methods may be inappropriate because newsworthy events are not randomly distributed. For example, analyzing the main foci of annual news coverage by selecting dates randomly could miss the most important news of the year, such as a stock market crash, the assassination of a prominent person, or a major medical breakthrough.

Straying from ordinary statistical techniques does not necessarily mean that such research is “unscientific.” Research is “scientific” as long as it is conducted systematically using procedures that most scholars deem appropriate to the goals. All steps in the conduct of research must, however, follow a set format so that they can be precisely replicated in subsequent research. Naturally, the essential steps vary depending on the nature of the research.

## **SURVEY RESEARCH METHODS**

We now turn to the first of the major methodological genres: large-scale surveys. In preparation for writing this chapter, my research assistants and I surveyed the research methods used in articles dealing with political communication published in American social science journals over a 1-year period stretching from the

summer of 2000 to the summer of 2001. Among others, the journals included *Communication Research*, *Journal of Communication*, *Political Communication*, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *Journal of Politics*, and *American Politics Quarterly*. We counted each article only once, although numerous researchers combined two or more of these methodologies. In the 79 articles that reported relevant research, surveys—involving sampling of the views of systematically selected populations through standardized questionnaires—were by far the most common research methodology. In 48% of the articles, survey research was the primary method for data collection. Content analysis—systematic analysis of selected written, spoken, or audiovisual texts—accounted for 20%. Experimental research—involving the controlled use and testing of message stimuli—constituted 16% of the contributions. In 9% of the articles, interviews—small-scale surveys using open-ended, unstructured questioning—were the primary research methodology. Miscellaneous other methods including focus groups accounted for the remaining 6%. Focus groups allow researchers to test how responses are shaped when small groups of people—usually fewer than a dozen—engage in conversation.

The greatest methodological developments in survey research have come through using computers to aid in interviewing and recording and analyzing data. In computer-assisted self-administered interviews (CASIs), for example, respondents read and respond to questionnaires on the computer. CASIs have several advantages over self-administered paper-and-pencil surveys. CASIs make it easier to customize surveys by “branching” them, which means that respondents can be directed to different questions depending on answers they gave earlier in the survey. Common errors, like making an inappropriate response choice, can be detected instantly so that the respondent can be asked to correct the mistake. Respondents also seem to be more willing to supply sensitive information in this format than in pencil-and-paper surveys (Asher, 2001; Wright, Aquilino, & Supple, 1998).

The advantages of using computers for telephone surveys are even more striking. Interviewers can sit at a video display and read the questions, using the precise language required and in the precise order in which the questions should be asked. This reduces errors resulting when interviewers do not follow their instructions precisely. CATI interviewers can enter the verbal responses they receive into the computer immediately, eliminating the need first to hand-record and then to keypunch the answers. Inappropriate responses are flagged instantly so that they can be corrected. The results of the survey are available almost immediately after completion so that the findings can be used while they are at their freshest. Overall, costs including costs in interviewer training, are less than comparable surveys unaided by computers. At the same time, the technological advances have made surveys more reliable and faster, permitting accurate assessment of reactions to events that are breaking rapidly (Wyatt, Katz, & Kim, 2000).

Another new addition to survey methodology is the use of on-line technology to select representative samples of respondents. Sample selection has been a problem in Internet surveys that rely on self-selected volunteers to answer questions. The improved technique, developed by the research firm Knowledge Networks, involves granting free WebTV subscriptions to a scientifically selected representative sample of U.S. households (Chang & Krosnick, 2001; Dennis, 2001). Members of the household agree to respond to surveys displayed on their television sets. The technique was used successfully during the 2000 presidential election. It allowed researchers to test the impact of the campaign and reactions to speeches and television commercials by candidates George Bush and Al Gore on a state-by-state

basis, rather than only nationally (Jackman & Rivers, 2000). By election day 2000, an astoundingly large sample of over 18,000 members of the Knowledge Network panels had responded to the surveys.

Researchers have used both cross-sectional and panel designs for surveys and interviews designed to assess the impact of various political messages on audiences. Cross-sectional surveys involve collecting data from a sample of respondents at one point in time. In panel surveys, the same sample provides data repeatedly, at time intervals dictated by the needs of the research enterprise. Panel designs as well as aggregate time-series designs have been gaining in favor for political communication research because they are better suited for tracking attitude and opinion changes over time and because they increase the accuracy of causal inferences about the connections between stimuli and responses (Bartels, 1993).

### **Survey Research Problems**

Sample sizes in surveys have ranged from several thousand respondents interviewed in person, by mail, by telephone, or by computer in a single wave or multiple waves to intensive work done with small panels or even single individuals (Gamson, 1992; Neuman, Just, & Crigler, 1992). Over the years, researchers have struggled to develop methods to assure that samples are scientifically selected so that every member of a universe designated for examination has an equal chance to be selected. The most recent threats to that goal come from problems encountered in selecting representative samples for Internet surveys. The approach used by Knowledge Network, noted earlier, is one option. Other researchers have used e-mail to preselect a sample of Internet users for subsequent Web surveys. Still others claim that comparisons of scientifically and unscientifically aggregated Internet samples show that there is little difference in end results because self-selected samples attract much larger numbers of respondents than the usual scientific surveys, which use 1,000 to 1,500 subjects (Bishop, 2001; Park, 2001). None of the Internet samples collected in the opening decades of the 21st century represented the entire U.S. population because at least one-fourth lacked Internet access.

Another very serious sampling problem actually results from technological advances. Thanks to easily installed, inexpensive screening devices, privacy-conscious citizens can block unwanted incoming phone calls. Most survey researchers rely on random-digit telephone dialing. The technique selects phone numbers in line with scientific sampling criteria. The technique is derailed if some population segments block access to sizable numbers of their telephones.

As in other types of social research, data collection through questionnaires presents many unresolved, and possibly unresolvable, problems because of the difficulty of phrasing questions appropriately and then accurately assessing the meanings of the answers. Insufficient information about the respondents' background is a major reason. If the effects of exposure to particular messages are under scrutiny, survey researchers are rarely able to confirm the extent of respondents' exposure to the information stimuli whose impact is being tested. Frequently, they do not even examine these stimuli in detail and do not ask to what specific aspects of the stimulus messages the respondents have been exposed. Survey researchers rarely know what information respondents held prior to exposure to the stimuli under investigation. Hence there is no baseline for measuring message-induced changes on perceptions and behaviors. Political communication researchers

urgently need better, less cumbersome ways to ascertain meanings that respondents construct from questions and answers.

The accuracy and veracity of answers are problems as well. Inaccuracy is a particularly serious problem when people are asked about past events or behavior that they did not record systematically at the time. Research has shown that retrospective memories and evaluations are notoriously unreliable (Loftus, 1979; Loftus & Ketcham, 1994).

Survey researchers ask closed-ended questions as well as open-ended questions. In closed-ended questions, respondents must select their answers from a relatively brief list of responses provided by the investigators. On the positive side, the limited number of possible responses then makes it easy to categorize respondents and place them into groups of like-minded individuals. On the negative side, the list of responses reflects the researchers' expectations about likely responses. These expectations may be partly or totally wrong. The answers may reflect only partly how the respondent would answer absent a forced choice or they may actually misrepresent the respondent's thinking.

Open-ended questions are far more likely to capture respondents' thoughts, especially when subjects are allowed to expand on their ideas. But the greater accuracy comes at the cost of more time needed for conducting the surveys and for coding responses and the difficulty of developing coding categories and analyzing findings when the data are very disparate.

The trend toward CATI and Internet interviewing is likely to discourage the use of open-ended questions further, even though computerized programs for coding open-ended questions have become available. However, at least some of the advantages of open-ended questions can be retained by using them for pretesting survey questions. Researchers can also include a small number of open-ended questions within larger, closed-ended surveys. Researchers blessed with large budgets can even enjoy the luxury of a multimethod approach that allows them, simultaneously, to administer a survey in closed-ended and open-ended formats, as well as testing the same questions in focus groups.

## DEPTH INTERVIEWS

Although survey research remains the dominant mode for investigating message impact, several other approaches have made inroads. They are based on the idea that understanding the impact of political messages requires looking closely at respondents' background, their prior orientations, and the ways in which they process information. Such thinking has led to intensive analyses of small groups of individuals, using depth interviews, focus groups, and various psychological testing devices (Gamson, 1992; Graber, 1993; Iyengar & Kinder 1987; Neuman et al., 1992). The findings from these intensive tests, besides their intrinsic value, have been very useful in making sense of the psychological processes underlying mass survey results.

Among the techniques for in-depth research, Q-methodology, which is one of my favorites, is rarely discussed. It is particularly well suited for political communication research because it forces subjects to think about multiple alternatives when rendering judgments. In the technique, researchers collect cross sections of diverse views that have been expressed about a particular issue or person. Participants in a Q-sort then must arrange these statements—which represent the dilemmas

encountered in real-world choices—in a fixed grid to indicate which statements are closest to or farthest away from their views. Q-methodology measures these clusters of subjective reactions to information stimuli based on individual scores, rather than on a mean drawn from all of the respondents to a particular Q-sort. The technique enables researchers to detect patterns of reactions to specific messages and the types of individuals most likely to exhibit these patterns (Brown, 1980).

## CONTENT ANALYSIS TECHNIQUES

When research focuses on political messages, some form of content analysis is in order. It can be applied to all types of message content, including written or printed documents, recorded messages, films, and audio tapes. Messages may even be analyzed instantaneously if observers are present when they are uttered initially.

Using trained human coders to identify textual elements is still the most common content analysis approach. When voluminous data sets need to be analyzed, “manual” content analysis is a very time-consuming, tedious, and costly technique. Computer content analysis has become a good alternative, although preparation of data for computer analysis may also be costly and time-consuming, especially when the data are not initially in machine-readable form.

Refinements in computer coding constitute the most important methodological developments in content analysis research. They include the development of numerous software packages for various kinds of analyses of computer-readable texts. Some analysis programs provide researchers with dictionaries that have been pretested for their usefulness in detecting specified textual content—the ideological orientation of a message, for example, or the cognitive sophistication of political speakers. Researchers can also construct their own search dictionaries with the aid of these programs.

Tasks handled by computers range from simple word frequency counts to comparisons of entire texts to identify their similarities and differences. Many programs can detect textual themes as well as specific words and strings of words. They can also identify the context in which selected words and phrases are embedded. With such “key word in context” (KWIC) programs, investigators can choose to identify key words in a specified context rather than identifying all key words regardless of context. Key words, as well as all contextual words that appear at a specified distance before and after a key word, can be printed out.

Content analysis can be either quantitative or qualitative. Often, it is a mixture of both designed to take advantage of the strengths of each approach. Qualitative analysis of the content of reports, interviews, focus group transcripts, and other messages is usually based on techniques for interpreting messages that humans learn from interacting with others throughout their lives. This type of qualitative analysis, if done systematically based on well-defined criteria, can be very useful and accurate. It has the advantage of allowing researchers to employ many of the intuitive skills for message interpretation that humans possess. These skills include understanding the connotations that are attached to messages, sensing their emotional impact, and spinning out widely believed implications and their consequences. Although such judgments are inevitably colored by individual attitudes and opinions, they also reflect the collective memories of the cultural communities in which political messages circulate.



*Quantitative* analysis, as distinguished from *qualitative* analysis, involves establishing readily measurable, minimally judgmental, criteria for defining the message elements to be detected and the indicators that signal the presence or absence of these elements. Selection criteria are then used for systematic examination of the chosen content. For example, a study of how often Commerce Department employees refer to congressional rules might be based on scrutiny of all annual reports of the department. Every reference to congressional rule making might be noted and scored on a scale rating the length of the reference.

Systematic, quantitative recording of data guards against errors that may arise from more casual procedures that often fail to stick to a chosen protocol. Quantitative methods, using computers, make it possible to subject large databases to rigorous analyses. That task would be beyond the capacity of painstaking qualitative analysis. Rigorous quantitative procedures also make it feasible to apply complex mathematical tests to the findings. For example, factor analysis may reveal clusters of concepts that would escape the intuitive analyst. Multiple regression analysis may permit predictions about changes in communication variables that can be expected when the communication situation changes. Mathematical models can facilitate sophisticated analyses that may aid in restructuring ineffective communication networks. The price to be paid for increased capacity to handle large data sets rigorously, however, may be an overly mechanical analysis that distorts the meanings that the content is likely to convey to live audiences (Kaufman, Dykers, & Caldwell, 1994; Popping, 2000; Rosenberg, Schnurr, & Oxman, 1990).

Just as qualitative analysis has quantitative aspects because investigators count the presence or absence of specified content characteristics, the reverse is also true. For example, deciding whether certain criteria are present or absent often involves subjective considerations. For instance, an automated search of newspaper editorials during an international crisis may still require a detailed examination by human coders to check that each mention of the word *crisis* does, indeed, signify attention to the international event that is under scrutiny.

If researchers want to evaluate messages, subjective judgments may be unavoidable. If they use a scale assessing urgency, for example, it may require human judgments to determine at what point “great” urgency becomes “somewhat great” or “neutral.” Such distinctions are still difficult to incorporate into computer programs despite great progress in artificial intelligence studies. However, some software packages, like newer versions of the venerable General Inquirer system, do incorporate artificial intelligence systems that make some of the finer distinctions.

All types of content analysis, irrespective of methodological advances, entail a series of important steps, beginning with selection of the body of data to be examined to shed light on the research hypotheses. When researchers use bodies of data from archives, like those mentioned earlier, they must be sensitive to the archive’s data collection methods. For example, the Vanderbilt Television News Archive collects the early evening national television news broadcast by major networks continuously, but it samples other types of political messages, such as presidential addresses. Other archives, like the local broadcasts collected by Chicago’s Museum of Broadcast Communications, rotate through the news broadcasts aired by major local stations throughout each week.

After the text to be scrutinized has been chosen, the unit of analysis must be determined. That means that investigators must decide how large or small a portion of the research material they want to code for the desired information. For example, if the research purpose is to look for the frequency of mention of global warming

in the *Denver Post*, and the unit of analysis is the front page of the paper, then a single observation would be recorded for each front page mention. If, however, the unit of analysis is every paragraph on the front page and global warming is mentioned in seven paragraphs, there would be seven recordable observations. Generally, the smaller the unit of analysis, the larger will be the total number of recorded observations for a particular sample of content. Qualitative analysts tend to use larger units compared to quantitative analysts, who normally prefer smaller ones.

After the unit of analysis has been chosen, codes and indexes must be developed to guide investigators in detecting the chosen content elements. Preparing a codebook that describes in detail how the research must be executed is a crucial aspect of content analysis because the ultimate value of most studies hinges on the insight and skill with which variables that are important for the investigation have been identified and defined. Variables must be mutually exclusive so that coders can distinguish them from each other.

It is often difficult to identify all of the elements of content that should be recorded. For example, a researcher may want to investigate how frequently race identification is included in an agency's personnel files. Should mention of the client's address be considered racial identification when it refers to a section of town that is known to be overwhelmingly populated by a single race? Should identification of the client as a member of a racially oriented organization be deemed racial identification? Such questions illustrate the delicacy of making coding decisions and the significance of choice alternatives.

The effectiveness of codebooks and the success of coders in following the directions accurately can be checked through various reliability tests that assess intercoder reliability—the extent of agreement among coders about code choices. Checks entail calculating the percentage of coder agreement based on the total numbers of coding decision. Some of the widely used formulas, such as Scott's *pi*, adjust the calculations to reflect the amount of coder agreement likely to occur by chance (Holsti, 1969; Neuendorf, 2001).

Although perfect agreement on coding decisions is rare because it is difficult to specify all contingencies and subtleties, one would normally expect coders to agree on about 80% or more of their decisions. Intracoder reliability refers to the ability of coders to replicate their own decisions after a period of time. For well-trained coders, it should be even higher than intercoder agreement. When agreements among skilled coders drop below acceptable levels, categories may have to be redefined or even redesigned.

Most researchers customize their codebooks to best suit their individual research purposes. This has obvious advantages but also makes comparisons of various studies far more difficult. Despite valiant efforts, scholars have been unable to agree on uniform coding categories for comparable studies. For a while, there was hope that wide use of the coding dictionaries in computer coding programs might lead to greater uniformity of coding and hence greater comparability of studies. But programs using diverse approaches have mushroomed so that wide diversity of coding schemes still reigns.

The goals of content analysis are also very diverse and research methods will vary accordingly (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 1998). For example, scholars interested in political symbolism may use dramaturgical analysis and fantasy theme analysis to explore the dramatic and fantasy themes in political life. Some scholars use the principles of hermeneutics to study the verbal construction of social meanings. Others

use ethnomethodology, which is the study of explanations people give about their daily experiences, and symbolic interactionism, which assesses how people use symbols to communicate with one another. Nimmo and Combs (1990), for example, have used a dramatist perspective to examine election communication. They conceptualize elections as dramatic rituals played for audiences of prospective voters to show the candidates locked in a heroic struggle. Nimmo and Combs contend that audiences perceive these rhetorical visions as reality and gear their expectations of future performance to these visions.

Researchers frequently examine messages as clues to underlying political, social, and economic conditions, such as international tensions, confidence in government, and fear about economic declines. In the 1950s and 1960s, for example, a group of prominent social scientists collaborated in the Hoover Institution's RADIR studies. The acronym stands for Revolution And Development of International Relations. The researchers believed that they could infer the knowledge and value structures and priorities prevalent in various nations by studying images disseminated through their mass media. If these political climates were known, one could forecast political developments in these nations (de Sola Pool, 1959; Lasswell & de Sola Pool, 1952).

More recently, researchers have looked at coverage of the 1996 Telecommunications Act to detect whether the interests of the corporate owners of the news medium impacted coverage (Gilens & Hertzman, 2000). They have examined the perspectives from which news stories, such as the advent of the euro as Europe's new currency or public journalism in New Zealand, were written to determine the nature of the "framing" and infer the consequences (McGregor, Fountaine, & Comry, 2000; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). And they have analyzed election campaign speeches to detect the presence of specific themes and rhetorical patterns (Benoit, Blaney, & Pier, 2000; Hershey & Holian, 2000).

Message content can also be used to infer the psychological characteristics, beliefs, motivations, and strategies of political leaders (DeMause, 1986; Winter & Carlson, 1988). Even when the psychological characteristics remain obscure, valuable inferences can be drawn about power configurations by knowing which political personalities are cited and in what connections their messages are reported.

## **Content Analysis Problems**

Like other research methods, content analysis continues to suffer from many serious deficiencies that impair the validity of its results. Some of these have already been mentioned. In addition, the technique has been plagued by unresolved scholarly disputes about the meanings that should be attributed to messages. Should it be the meaning as the message sender sees it or as the receiver sees it? Or should it be considered as a construct that is produced through the interactions between senders and receivers, as scholars subscribing to interpretist theories would contend? When messages carry multiple meanings, as many do, which meaning or meanings should content analysts record? For example, a message inviting only Republican Congress members to a White House gathering, besides its explicit meaning, may signal that the party wants to conduct a confidential party session. But it may also be construed as a deliberate snub to Democrats, possibly to signal displeasure with a particular maneuver in which that party has engaged. Which meaning should researchers report?

Most content analyses deal with denotations of words and phrases—which means their dictionary meanings—rather than with their connotations—the extended meanings evoked by the literal message. Many researchers avoid connotation research, arguing that it is pointless because all messages are polysemic so that they convey different meanings to various audiences. Nonetheless, despite the difficulty of ascertaining them, connotations cannot be ignored if scholars want to know what meanings messages actually convey to particular audiences (Cohen, 1989). The possibility of multiple interpretations of messages does not mean that senders cannot convey consensual connotations. It does mean that senders must know how their audiences are likely to interpret messages and tailor them accordingly.

The high costs of content analysis often force trade-offs between intensive analysis of small bodies of content and more scattered and superficial analysis of larger bodies of content. Economizing can be a risky process that may threaten the validity of findings. For example, investigators who study newspaper content often check only headlines and front pages on the flawed assumption that they reflect all significant news topics. Headlines rarely signal all major topics covered in the text of a particular story and many important stories appear on inside pages of newspapers. Similarly, to economize researchers may code an entire story as a single topic even though coding by paragraphs, for example, would show that most stories contain multiple topics. Such restricted approaches to content analysis can severely distort or mask the actual content (Althaus, Edy, & Phalen, 2001; Woolley, 2000). Content analysis that codes news content fully and pays heed to the entire news offering in which a story is embedded is very rare, primarily because such intensive research is very costly.

### **Audiovisual Content Analysis Challenges**

To keep pace with the ever-growing importance of audiovisual media when it comes to reporting the world of politics to average citizens and political elites, audiovisual content analysis ought to be booming. Unfortunately, it is not. As is typical, it played a very minor part in our sample of content analysis studies reported in 2000 and 2001 (e.g., Dixon & Linz, 2000). Many political communication researchers acknowledge the importance of illustrating their studies of political content, such as election campaigns, with actual audiovisual examples. In fact, the journal *Political Communication* featured a special electronic issue titled “Multi-Media Politics” on a CD in 1998. Most of the issue was devoted to election campaign studies that presented and analyzed television clips (Boynton & Jamieson, 1998). Similarly, textbooks, including many American government texts, now include videos and CDs. An outstanding example of this genre is *Video Rhetorics: Televised Advertising in American Politics*, published in 1997 by John Nelson and G. Robert Boynton. The authors use a video to convey information that is beyond the reporting capacity of the printed text.

So what keeps political communication scholars from using audiovisual content analysis for research rather than treating television messages as if they were akin to radio, ignoring the visual content? The answers lie in the lingering myths that audiovisuals are too difficult to code, if they can be coded at all, because they do not constitute an analyzable *language*—an orderly way of using symbols to communicate specific thoughts and feelings to others (Hall, 1980).

The fact that the combination of words and pictures produces messages that differ from the meanings conveyed by the verbal or visual elements alone further complicates the analysis. Words commonly affect the meaning of pictures and pictures alter the meanings of words. The picture of a soldier sprawled on the grass carries different meaning when the words say that he is sleeping after a hard training exercise or that he is dead in the wake of a sniper's fire. A comment that a politician looked and sounded relaxed may keep the audience from noticing the nervous tapping of his fingers and the slight tremor in his voice. To complicate matters further, verbal syntax consists of discrete units like words and sentences that carry distinct denotations. In contrast, picture syntax is fluid making it more difficult to determine the unit that conveys meaning. One picture can be the equivalent of many words and sentences (Salvaggio, 1980).

None of these obstacles to audiovisual content analysis refutes the fact that audiovisuals are a codable language and sophisticated as well as simple programs for the task abound (Hart, 2000; Van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2001; Wang, Liu, & Huang, 2000). Moreover, coding audiovisuals is not exceptionally costly, as doubters often allege.

Contrary to the claim that audiovisuals do not carry shared meaning, news producers know that audiovisual language has an array of widely understood cues that can be coded. Without such shared understandings, it would be impossible to convey similar meanings to mass audiences. When television broadcasts use a limited vocabulary of familiar audiovisual clichés audiences can grasp the predictable meanings quickly. Speed is essential because television news segments are short and fleeting, leaving no time for reflection, careful search for alternative meanings, or close scrutiny of pictures for hidden clues. When audiences are asked about the audiovisual cues they use to judge political figures and situations, they mention an array of similar cues (Graber, 2001). Likewise, print reports covering televised events, such as presidential inaugurations, show that the writers derived shared meanings from the audiovisuals.

Audiovisual cues used in television stories are based on producers' understanding of average Americans' past visual experiences and viewing tastes. To show the destruction of a bridge in war-torn Afghanistan, for example, a producer might show the actual bridge—an *icon*—or vehicles piling up where the road breaks off—an *index*. Or the producer might depict a road sign that is a symbol for an impassable highway. All of these pictorials are well understood by American audiences; they present no unusual coding problems.

Content analysis of television news shows that audiovisual language is stereotypical not only in terms of the types of images it uses but also in the overall framing. For example, "... the 'game' frame—reporting politics primarily in strategic terms—is predominant in mainstream news reporting of politics" (Lawrence, 2000, p. 93). Audiences have learned to associate this structure with the idea that politics is a constant, more or less exciting battle between sworn enemies. The game frame and other frames can be maintained easily for a variety of political situations because it can be assembled from disparate image and audio bites. The fact that audiovisual language is stereotypical does not mean that the framing and pictures are identical. Drought damage scenes from American farms, or sites in China or Argentina, undoubtedly resemble each other. Still, each set of pictures provides well-understood information about similar happenings in diverse locations.

Coding politically relevant television images can be an overwhelming task when one contemplates recording the large number of constantly changing pictures with

thousands of potentially significant details recorded from different angles and distances and embedded in diverse contexts in an average broadcast. How can analysts master such complexity in ways that make audiovisual coding a practical and affordable research procedure? One answer is using the many available audiovisual coding programs. For example, televised legislative session can be analyzed with a program developed for use on video transcripts from the German parliament (Köhler, Biatov, Larson, Eckes, & Eickler, 2001). The fact that parliamentary proceedings involve a limited universe of verbal and visual discourse makes it possible to develop protocols for recognizing this particular audiovisual syntax and semantics.

Judging from the political communication literature, scholars in the subfield have largely shunned these automated methods in favor of manual content analysis. Their approaches have ranged from merely identifying, counting, and recording every visible object in a scene, such as the number of people and objects, to detailed descriptions of people and objects and their apparent activities (Emmison & Smith, 2000). Researchers have used these descriptions to make and code inferences about the meanings conveyed by the images. A scene showing a police officer surrounded by angry laborers involved in a strike may portend violence, whereas a police officer coaching a sporting event for gang members may portend a more peaceful neighborhood. Similarly, some scholars have concentrated on the psychological implications of production and editing techniques. They have recorded close-ups and middle-range and long-range shots as well as camera angles and zoom shots, fade-outs and fade-ins, and various types of cuts, surmising that such variations have conveyed respect or disrespect for political leaders and have left audiences more or less involved in the scenes that they have witnessed (Kepplinger, 1991; Lang, Geiger, Strickwerda, & Sumner, 1993).

Several scholars have skipped coding of individual verbal and visual images and tried instead to discern the general impression created by images. For example, they have searched for audiovisual content that conveyed rhetorical visions or political fantasies or ritual dramas (Hallin & Gitlin, 1993; Hershey, 1993; Nimmo & Combs, 1989).

My own approach—gestalt coding—is a middle ground between descriptive coding of sentences and pictures and recording of broad general impressions (Graber, 2001). It is based on what neuroscientists and psychologists have discovered about how humans extract meaning from audiovisual texts. Scientists have demonstrated that average people do not absorb the full gamut of information that reaches them. Rather, people selectively extract salient kernels of information from the total flow to which they are exposed. Gestalt coding, therefore, records overall audiovisual impressions and their meanings, rather than analyzing discrete visual and verbal details. In the process, it captures what audiences actually absorb, leaving out what they ignore. It is thus oriented toward the meanings conveyed to average audience members by telecasts, rather than detecting every kernel of information that may be encapsulated in an audiovisual message, as is true for most automated content analysis programs.

Gestalt coding is not unduly impressionistic because it is grounded in tested knowledge about information processing. It is also quite similar to what is routinely done in verbal coding schemes, which rarely call for coding each word. Rather, they call for extracting common meanings from whole sentences and groups of sentences, considering the overall context of particular situations. Similarly, television viewers do not see and hear and interpret each word or picture separately.

Rather, like readers of printed symbols or listeners to the spoken word, they first discern the overall thrust of the message—its general gestalt. Then they select a limited number of suitable details that capture the particular thrust of the message in light of their stored knowledge. As Salvaggio (1980) put it, “. . . the spectator’s attention in any given scene is not necessarily focused on what is visually signified, but is concerned with placing the signified into a gestalt—the entire area suggested by what is seen” (p. 41).

Detecting the gestalt for coding usually depends heavily on a television story’s verbal lead-in or on pictures clearly identifying a specific person, location, or situation. These cues tell coders the overall meaning and significance of the message elements that they are about to witness. For instance, a group of children receiving food packets could be verbally identified as participants in a school lunch program or orphans receiving food in a refugee camp. Coders, just like ordinary viewers, can then structure the audiovisuals into a meaningful story within the gestalt provided for them by the messages in question and the flow of prior messages.

## **STUDYING CHANNELS THROUGH NETWORK ANALYSIS**

In a pathbreaking 1963 study, *The Nerves of Government: Models of Political Communication and Control*, political scientist Karl Deutsch called internal and external political communication channels the “nerves” of government. Political systems cannot function without effective networks of such channels capable of transmitting political messages that range from shouted instructions to messages encrypted in code and transmitted electronically. Yet despite the intrinsic and growing importance of political communication networks in a world where such networks have become global, political communication scholars continue to shun network analysis. The specialized methods used for network analysis have been thriving among sociologists and students of business organizations. Consequently, ample, up-to-date research guides to necessary methodological tools are readily available (e.g., Degenne & Forsé, 1999; Scott, 2000).

Network analysis focuses on the interactive aspects of communication because, by its very definition, communication involves a twosome, at minimum: a message sender and a receiver. Unlike survey research, which treats individuals as if they were unconnected islands in the social universe, network analysis treats them as nodes in a network of interdependent relationships (Williams, Rice, & Rogers, 1988). Network analysts therefore do not pool the information gathered from individual network members to describe political situations. Instead, they preserve the data gathered from individual members and describe how they and their messages function as part of the network.

Patterns of interactions within groups, and indexes derived from such sociometric analyses of formal or informal communication networks, are quite stable, even though communication behaviors of individual network members may vary considerably over time (Knoke, 1990). Nonetheless, data gathered at one particular moment may not capture customary interaction behaviors. They also may miss networking behaviors that are linked to particular issues or individuals. Major and minor crises can alter network patterns temporarily or permanently. Ideally, network studies should therefore be repeated at several points in time. Even then,

they may miss important nonroutine relationships that may constitute exceptionally valuable new information links precisely because they tap unfamiliar sources.

Network studies may focus on the channels of communications within large political units like a state, or on a single public agency, or on a number of groups that have created a network of lobby organizations to promote passage of a specific law. Alternatively, researchers can focus on the personal networks of particular individuals, noting the people with whom they interact most often. Network analysts interested in interactions within small groups often concentrate on cliques of 5 to 25 people. Because many of the most important interactions in organizations, such as planning and decision making, generally take place in small groups, it is not surprising that specialized tools, such as Robert Bales' (1950) *Interaction Process Analysis*, have been developed to analyze the interplay of messages exchanged among group members. The Bales technique classifies verbal interactions into 12 distinct categories and predicts success rates of dealings within small groups based on these data (Bales, 1950).

Deciding at which level of analysis the research should be focused is a major design conundrum that network analysts must face because there are no clear-cut limits to social networks (Baybeck & Huckfeldt, 2000; Knoke, 1990; Knoke & Kuklinski, 1987). Analysts may base this decision on the perceptions of the network members or on the purposes of the particular investigation. For example, in a study of communication breakdowns in the U.S. State Department during a crisis, the analysis could be limited to networks of civil servants at a particular employment grade. If investigators use a snowball-sampling approach to network analysis, in which they trace with whom a particular respondent communicates and then trace the contacts of these contacts, they must decide at what level to stop their inquiry. Depending on available resources, a wider focus is better because an overly narrow focus may capture only truncated network structures. On the other hand, if the focus is too wide, it may be impossible to collect and process all of the data. For example, a network that includes 5,000 people encompasses 25 million linkage possibilities. Despite great strides in computing capacity, handling such massive data sets effectively remains difficult (Scott, 2000).

Data about network structures are usually derived from questionnaires, interviews, diaries, focus groups, and on-site observations of the routes that messages take in linking message senders and receivers. These data are normally gathered from each member of an organization, *not* merely from a random sample. Researchers ascertain how often network members communicate with specific individuals and what type of information is conveyed. It may be useful to distinguish between work-related and social messages and among transmissions of facts, judgments, and opinions. Researchers may also inquire about who ordinarily initiates the information exchange. To make recall easier, investigators may give respondents name lists of each respondent's likely contact partners within the network.

In place of self-reports by network members, which some investigators distrust as potentially unreliable, networking can be discovered through direct observations or through scanning records of past communications. Archival data may have the added advantage of covering long time periods. Researchers may be able to use them for insights into networking in diverse settings and in diverse external circumstances, like periods of economic or political growth or decline.

After the data about links in the chains of communications have been collected, computer programs can identify formal and informal networks. A variety of analyses is possible, including sociometric analysis, spatial analysis, matrix analysis,



factor analysis, block-modeling techniques, multidimensional scaling techniques, and cluster analysis (Scott, 2000). Conventional statistical methods can be used to describe the properties of various aspects of the network structures. However, since network data violate the random-sampling assumptions that underlie statistical inference, conventional statistical analyses may be problematic (Knoke, 1990).

Network analysis can reveal network characteristics that are invaluable for tracing relationships of power and influence within political organizations and systems. For example, it can show how centrally located various individuals, groups, or organizations are within a particular communication network and who the gatekeepers are who control access to various network members. It can also reveal the strength, frequency and speed of interactions. Network analysis can measure network cohesion to determine the proportion of network relations that are reciprocated. It can measure what kinds of information circulate and who is included or excluded from the flow of communication. Tracing these patterns permits analysts to determine how well coordinated a communication network is overall and within its subordinate units and how adequately various communication roles are handled. Of course, the standards used to judge adequacy depend on the perspectives from which organizations are viewed. Since networks involve multiple constituencies, multiple perspectives may have to be considered (Provan & Milward, 1995). Supervisors may consider the channels in an employee complaint system adequate, whereas employees may deem them woefully inefficient.

In recent years, researchers have moved beyond merely tracing the channels through which messages travel and their general thrust and have begun to focus more closely on their content as indicators of linkages. James Danowski (1991) has pioneered a technique called *Word Network Analysis* that uses computerized content analysis to detect shared words and concepts among message senders. This approach can provide fresh insights into the ideas circulating within an organization and the manner in which organizations develop common concepts and reach consensus.

## EXPERIMENTS AND SIMULATIONS

One of the surprises in our scrutiny of recently published political communication studies was the high incidence of experimental research. It constituted 16% in our sample. Considering that the use of experiments in political communication studies started in earnest only in the 1980s, that is an unexpectedly high share.

The principal advantage of experimental studies is the researcher's ability to control the stimuli to which research subjects are exposed. Conducting research under rigorously monitored laboratory or field conditions avoids the stimulus adulteration that occurs in natural settings where multiple stimuli are present and interact with the messages whose impact the researcher wants to test. Accordingly, compared to nonexperimental methods, experiments permit researchers to draw much more reliable causal inferences—linking stimuli to particular effects—even when experimental settings are quite unnatural. In laboratory studies of the effects of election campaign commercials, for example, researchers can expose subjects to a particular advertisement and know that the subjects have actually seen it as well as knowing the precise content of the stimulus commercial. As part of the experiment, researchers can vary details in the ad to isolate which of its features produced

the detected impact. Such precision and such manipulations are unattainable when survey research is the method of choice.

The chief problem posed by experimental research is the fact that the settings in which most experiments are conducted are artificial. Message impact may be quite different in laboratory settings where subjects are exposed to a single stimulus at a time than in natural situations that abound in multiple interacting stimuli. For instance, a finding that a report about a president's marital infidelity reduced his appeal to voters by 30% may have little validity in the real world. Competing news about the president—purposely omitted from the laboratory tests—may wipe out the impact of the infidelity story. The fact that college undergraduates are often used as experimental subjects also impairs the validity of experimental studies. College students are unique populations, quite unlike average adult Americans. Therefore, the findings yielded by college student samples cannot be generalized to larger populations without further testing. However, fairness requires mentioning that the methods that are widely accepted as representative, such as well-conducted survey research, also have chinks in their methodology armor. Problems with sampling, question wording, and flawed memories that were discussed earlier are examples.

Experimental studies serve many important functions in political communication research. Scholars are using them increasingly as a more finely honed tool to probe media impact. Mostly such studies have involved exposing small groups of people to carefully selected information stimuli, often in multiple versions. Investigators have then measured their subjects' retention of the information or assessed attitudes and opinions, or changes in them, generated by the messages (Iyengar, 2001; Leshner, 2001; McDevitt & Chaffee, 2000; Neuman et al., 1992). Some of these tests have involved measuring physiologic reactions like heart rates and skin conductance and even blood flow to brain cells (Grabe, Lang, Zhou, & Bolls, 2000). Such research has helped substantially in discovering message and context factors that aid or deter learning, including assessing impact of priming and framing phenomena whereby prior messages or associations suggested by messages become potent interpretation contexts (Scheufele, Shanahan, & Lee, 2001).

Experiments have also been used to compare the qualities of various research tools (Wright et al., 1998). For instance, researchers have experimented with diverse rating schemes in surveys to ascertain which produces the highest response rates or the finest discriminations by respondents. Question wording, which is always a very big challenge, has benefited from numerous experiments that determined which of several versions worked best.

Internet experiments are the newest additions to the experimental research toolkit. Shanto Iyengar (2001), who has engaged in such experiments, contends that

traditional experimental methods can be rigorously and far more efficiently replicated using on-line strategies. . . . researchers have the ability to reach diverse populations without geographic limitations. The rapid development of multimedia-friendly Web browsers makes it possible to bring text or audiovisual presentations to the computer screen. Indeed, the technology is so accessible that subjects can easily 'self-administer' experimental manipulations. (p. 227).

Iyengar's research shows that demographically sound samples can be easily and cheaply recruited on the Web, provided that adjustments are made for the lingering

digital divide (Iyengar, Hahn, & Prior, 2001). Administering the experiment on the Web saves costs related to site rentals and travel expenses. It vastly expands the pool from which subjects can be recruited.

Simulations are another method used to test interactive communication behaviors under controlled contingencies. For example, one may want to simulate a negotiation session between warring factions to test which approach might produce the most satisfactory settlement of the dispute. Many simulations are now performed as computerized exercises. Government agencies and think tanks are heavy users of these technologies.

If successful, experimental studies and small-group intensive research often serve as pilots that pretest hypotheses for studies done on a larger scale. Findings from experimental research and depth interviews may also fill gaps and broaden the insights gained from larger surveys. For example, extensive probing of the thinking behind a respondent's answers to survey questions, which is possible in small-scale research, can help in interpreting survey responses. A combination of these complementary research approaches, though expensive, is therefore ideal.

## **WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?**

Is there anything new on the methodological horizon? The answer seems to be that the basic research approaches used in recent decades will remain intact but that they will continue to undergo constant refinement. As has happened in the past, new statistical analysis procedures will bloom and fade, as will survey and interview techniques in message effects studies. Electronic monitoring devices and computer simulations are likely to grow in importance in research into brain functions. Human coders of political messages will be increasingly replaced by computers, which can now be programmed to detect words and their synonyms as well as contextual and network patterns that determine the meanings that the words convey. There will be more research that employs a multiplicity of methods in data gathering and analysis, part of it borrowed from other disciplines and subdisciplines. Currently loosely defined concepts, such as "attention" to messages, will undergo clarification. However, giant methodological leaps will probably remain in the realm of wishful thinking.

As future research progresses, new paths of inquiry that have not been pursued in the past should be explored along with retesting old findings to ascertain their validity under changing technological and political conditions. For example, the opportunities for narrowcasting created through cable television and satellite technology may fracture previously confirmed consensus on many political issues and may herald changes in media message effects that need to be investigated (Graber, 2001). Future research should also encompass a better melding of quantitative and qualitative research methods, more interdisciplinary cooperation, and more attention to both micro-level and macro-level effects of political messages.

Overall, a new generation of political communication researchers will find their methodology tool kits far better stocked than did their predecessors. But they will also find exponential growth in the riddles to be solved in what has come to be known as The Information Age.

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# Fragmentation of the Structure of Political Communication Research: Diversification or Isolation?

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The study of political communication is a branch of contemporary communication studies that began at the turn of this century (Delia, 1987). Many of the earliest contemporary communication studies were generated by analyses of propaganda/persuasive messages, mass media effects on voting, and public opinion of political and social issues. Many of the most influential scholars in the development of modern communication studies left their footprints in the domain of political communication study, such as political scientist Harold Lasswell, sociologist Paul Lazarsfeld, and psychologists Carl Hovland and Kurt Lewin (Delia, 1987; Nimmo, 1977; Rogers, 1994). Today, political communication has developed into an academic field of inquiry. The importance of studying the structure of political communication research is obvious, but the structure itself is not. Studies utilizing traditional subjective and qualitative methods have produced many pictures of this structure. However, the quality of these pictures can be enhanced by information obtained from research using objective and quantitative methods. This study is such an attempt.

## THE FIELD OF POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

### Political Communication—A Field of Inquiry

Although the origins of political communication can be traced back many centuries (e.g., Plato's works in ancient Greece), as a cross-disciplinary field of study it began to emerge in the 1950s (Nimmo & Sanders, 1981). During this period, the label *political communication* first appeared to describe an intervening process by which



political institutions and citizens interact with each other and “political influences are mobilized and transmitted” (Nimmo & Sanders, 1981, p. 12).

It was the synthesis of interdisciplinary efforts that gave birth to this new area of communication study. A variety of research traditions in multiple disciplines made their unique contributions to the emergence (Nimmo, 1977). It is almost impossible to discuss all these traditions in a precise way. However, there are several that can be identified as ones that “constitute the lineage of the field” (Nimmo & Sanders, 1981, p. 17). The first is the tradition of rhetorical analysis of public political discourse. This tradition has probably the longest history in political communication study. Some of the classic writers in this tradition are Aristotle, Blair, Campbell, and Whately. This approach is generally qualitative in nature and historically and critically examines the source of a political message (such as the speaker’s motives and styles) and the message itself.

The second is the tradition of political propaganda study during the period of post-WWI to post-WWII. Scholars like Lasswell and Doob focused on how different governments used propaganda/persuasive messages to influence public opinion. Lasswell’s (1927) quantitative analyses (content analysis) of messages generated by the government demonstrated the power of mass political communication in forming public opinion. His question, “Who says what in which channel to whom with what effects?” clearly describes the communication process and defines a framework for later communication studies (e.g., in political communication; Jackson-Beeck & Kraus, 1980; Mansfield & Weaver, 1982; Nimmo, 1977; Sanders & Kaid, 1978).

The third is the tradition of voting studies in the United States. Within this line of research, scholars combined a variety of quantitative and qualitative research methods (e.g., survey research with both in-depth interviewing and observation with participation, content analysis with biographies, and panel studies with focused interviews) (Rogers, 1994). Lazarsfeld and his colleagues at the Bureau of Applied Social Research at Columbia University published *The People’s Choice* (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1944/1965), which is a classic work in the area of voting study. Survey research methods were advanced by Lazarsfeld in terms of triangulation of measurement, data gathering, and analysis. Later, scholars at the Survey Research Center/Center for Political Studies at the University of Michigan added contributions to this tradition (Campbell, Gurin, & Miller, 1954).

The fourth tradition is the study of mass media effects. This tradition was initiated by Lazarsfeld. He challenged the powerful model of mass communication and developed several concepts such as opinion leadership and the two-step flow of communication (Rogers, 1994). Some scholars (i.e., Klapper, 1960) later proposed a minimal effects model of mass communication. They argued that mass communication has a limited effect on people’s political behavior and “selectivity in exposure, perception, and recall of mass communication made for reinforcement or certainly no more than minor change of political predispositions” (Nimmo, 1977, p. 442). Attitude change as the focus of this line of research was mainly examined by conducting experiments, such as the series of Yale Studies in Attitude and Communication conducted by Hovland and his colleagues (Nimmo & Sanders, 1981).

The fifth is the tradition of institution study of the press and government in their relation to public opinion. Lippmann’s (1922) study, *Public Opinion*, was the first to examine the agenda-setting function of mass media. The political effects of mass media, according to this tradition, are the result of the media agenda-setting process in which media “may not be successful much of the time in telling people

what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling . . . [people] what to think about" (Cohen, 1963, p. 13).

As a subfield of communication study, during the early stage of its development, political communication shared a characteristic of the field in general, being "an academic crossroad where many have passed, but few have tarried" (Schramm, 1963, p. 2). Although the four "forerunners" of communication studies (political scientist Harold Lasswell, sociologist Paul Lazarsfeld, and psychologists Carl Hovland and Kurt Lewin) (Rogers, 1994) primarily were interested in and studied topics in political communication, they never permanently immigrated into this new field.

Why did political communication finally become an academic "Eden" for many scholars? The reason, as Nimmo (1977) observes, is simply that when "the urge for mutual collaboration is stronger than disciplinary chauvinism, scholars forge a multidisciplinary effort" (p. 441). This effort is a driving force in developing an individual field of study.

### The Growth of the Field

As a result of more than two decades' endeavor, in 1973 the Political Communication Division of the International Communication Association (ICA) was officially founded. This action indicated that political communication had become a "distinct and self-conscious" field of study (Nimmo & Swanson, 1990). The interdisciplinary nature of political communication is an important attribute:

[Political communication] is not a discipline [or a field] distinguished by manner of explanation but a study guided by the phenomena it explains. It is a field exceedingly diverse in theoretic formulations, research questions, and methods of inquiry that transcend the boundaries of the separate disciplines from which it draws. (Nimmo, 1977, p. 441)

Today, professional recognition of political communication has been almost 30 years, and Political Communication Divisions have been established not only in the ICA, but also in the National Communication Association (NCA) (then the Speech Communication Association; SCA) and the American Political Science Association (APSA). There are more than 1,500 registered members in these three divisions now. In addition, political communication divisions/interest groups have also been formed in some regional communication associations such as the Eastern Communication Association and the Central States Communication Association. In Europe, by the 1990s political communication research had been "firmly rooted" at the academic centers of most Western European countries (Blumler, Dayan, & Wolton, 1990; for example, in Britain [Franklin, 1995] and in France [Cayrol & Mercier, 1998]).

It is interesting to note that the recognition of political communication as a unique area of study in political science came much later. In the 19 chapters in the first edition of *Political Science: The State of the Discipline* (Finifter, 1983), political communication had not been viewed as a subfield of political science. When the second edition (with the same title and number of chapters and by the same editor) was published 10 years later, in 1993, political communication was considered a distinct subfield of study in political science. Since then, political scientists have cheered the emergence of this "energetic subfield" (Simon & Iyengar, 1996).

Increases in the amount of literature and the publication outlets demonstrate the rapid growth of the field. For example, in 1974, one of the first bibliographies in the field consisted of 1,500 entries published between 1950 and 1972 (Kaid, Sanders, & Hirsch, 1974). Only a decade later (in 1985), 2,461 entries were included in the second volume of the bibliography. These entries were published in a 10-year period (1973 through 1982) (Kaid & Wadsworth, 1985).

In addition to the large volume of books, dissertations, and convention papers that study topics in political communication, many articles have been published in scholarly journals in different disciplines (Kaid, 1981a). *Public Opinion Quarterly* (published by the American Association for Public Opinion Research), *Journalism Quarterly* (now *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, published by the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication), *Journal of Broadcasting* (now *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, published by the Broadcast Education Association), *American Political Science Review* (published by the American Political Science Association), *Journal of Communication* (published by the International Communication Association), *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* and *Communication Monographs* (published by the National Communication Association), and *Communication Research* (published by Sage Publications) are just a few of these journals. Some journals published by the regional communication associations (then speech communication associations) have included articles on political communication. These journals include, for instance, *Central States Speech Journal* (now *Communication Studies*), *Southern Speech Communication Journal* (now *Southern Communication Journal*), and *Communication Quarterly*.

For many years, the Political Communication Division of the ICA published *Political Communication Review*. This journal was the predecessor of *Political Communication*, an academic journal devoted exclusively to studies in this subfield that has been copublished by the APSA and the ICA divisions since 1990. A new journal, *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, also became available to scholars interested in media and politics in 1996. The field today is characterized by its substantial growth (Kaid, 1996), and it has entered its mature stage.

## Assessment of the Growth

An indication of the maturity of a field of study, as Cheon, Grover, and Sabherwal (1993) point out, is the “balanced utilization of several different research methods, rather than excessive reliance on one or two” (p. 109). A diversity of research topics and methods is a basic feature of a mature field. Orlikowski and Baroudi (1991) also argue that for those disciplines studying individual and collective human phenomena (e.g., anthropology, political science, psychology, and sociology), “one of the most pronounced features . . . is the great range of research perspectives that operate concurrently” (cited by Cheon et al., 1993, p. 108). Political communication is a field with such features. Nimmo and Swanson (1990) describe the growing process of political communication as a field of inquiry, showing that groups of scholars in the field have been pursuing “dissimilar agendas and approaches” (p. 10). They maintain that “[s]uch differences and disagreements invigorate scholarship, stimulate innovation, and nurture the vitality of a domain of inquiry” (p. 10). The maturation of the field is marked by the formation of “specialized research communities” (Swanson, 1993). Therefore, reviewing what scholars have studied in terms of research topics, theoretical perspectives, and research approaches is one way to assess the state of the field.

However, communication as a field of study, in general, and political communication and other subareas of communication studies, in particular, have not produced large quantities of publications that overview and synthesize studies in the field or subareas of the field. Well-established disciplines like anthropology, psychology, and sociology have at least one publication devoted exclusively to reviews of the major literature in the disciplines (Burlison, 1996), for example, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, *Annual Review of Psychology*, *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, and *Annual Review of Sociology*. Communication as a field has no similar publications. (*Communication Yearbook* tried to function in this fashion in the late 70s and the early 80s; it stopped making such an effort eventually. Ironically, beginning in 1996, *Communication Yearbook* refocused its attention on publishing literature reviews in the discipline.) This type of review or synthesis is certainly essential to the development of the field or subareas of the field; it helps “develop a historical perspective . . . on the discipline as a whole” (Burlison, 1997, p. x).

For political communication study, this type of review appeared in the first five volumes of *Communication Yearbook*, published by the ICA (Jackson-Beeck & Kraus, 1980; Larson & Wiegele, 1979; Mansfield & Weaver, 1982; Nimmo, 1977; Sanders & Kaid, 1978). These reviews examined articles published in the previous year—presenting the findings of these articles, discussing the methods used for conducting them, and describing the intellectual history of the themes of research. Four of these five essays applied the framework developed in Lasswell’s famous question, “Who says what in which channel to whom with what effects?” to organize the studies reviewed. Basically, the studies reviewed were categorized into the following themes: political communicators, political messages, political media, audience, and the effects of political communication. However, scholars realized that “as researchers continue to examine the complex transactional communication process, it will be more difficult for succeeding overviews to utilize the Lasswellian framework . . .” (Mansfield & Weaver, 1982, p. 620). A few essays applied different approaches to reviewing the state of the field. For example, Meadow (1985) examined eight books that represented the type of research being conducted in the field of political communication and identified what he thought to be the major problems in the research.

In the following years, however, many comprehensive overviews of the state of the field have also been written (e.g., Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999; Graber, 1993; Johnston, 1990a; Kaid, 1996; Kaid & Sanders, 1985; Nimmo & Sanders, 1981; Nimmo & Swanson, 1990). Compared with the previous review essays, these overviews possess three unique features. First, they reviewed more research over a longer time period (several years). Second, because they dealt with a larger body of literature, the level of synthesis in each of these overviews is greater than in the previous review essays. Third, the syntheses are also more comprehensive, reflecting the state of the field in a systematic way.

For instance, Johnston’s (1990a) essay investigated the literature of the study of political communication in the 1980s. She classified political communication literature into four major categories: election communication; political communication and news; political rhetoric; and political attitudes, behavior, and information. Election communication includes such areas as “political advertising” and “political debates.” Political communication and news include “the president and the news media,” “congress and the news media,” “polling and political news,” “government and media,” “coverage of foreign affairs and international news flow,” and so on. Political rhetoric consists of “political language” and “the rhetoric of media.” Political attitudes, behavior, and information are composed of “media use, exposure,

dependency,” “political socialization and participation,” “political information processing and seeking,” and “issues, images, and candidate evaluations.” She suggests that because of the interdisciplinary nature of political communication study, it is difficult for political communication researchers to “stay abreast of relevant literature” (p. 350). Thus, the comprehensive review of literature is very important and helpful to the development of the field.

During the last four decades (from the 1950s to the 1990s), scholars in political communication have approached topics from various theoretical bases, which include, for example, Burke’s “dramatistic” analysis, Bormann’s “fantasy-theme” analysis, Fisher’s “narrative” analysis, Shaw and McCombs’ agenda-setting theory, Blumler and McQuail’s uses and gratifications perspective, critical theory, and constructivist views (Denton & Woodward, 1990; Graber, 1993; Kaid, 1996; Nimmo & Sanders, 1981; Nimmo & Swanson, 1990). The mainstream of the field focuses on the “strategic uses of communication” and its effects on the public’s political attitude and behavior, such as rhetorical analyses of political speeches, studies of media coverage of political events, and studies of political advertising (Nimmo & Swanson, 1990). The major research methods are traditional ones such as rhetorical analysis, historical analysis, survey research, experimental study, and content analysis (Kaid, 1996; Nimmo & Sanders, 1981).

Noticeably, almost all reviews follow a traditional approach, providing subjective and qualitative descriptions of the state of the field. Using this traditional method, reviewers first read the literature; then, based on this reading, they develop a synthesis of several aspects of the field such as research topics, research approaches, and theoretical perspectives. This reviewing method has limitations due to its subjective and qualitative nature. To overcome this weakness, an objective and quantitative review is needed. Some measurable characteristics of the field have been identified; based on these objective and quantitative measurements, different approaches have been developed to assess the state of a field. The results obtained using these approaches can be complementary to review essays, which produce only subjective and qualitative descriptions.

Jackson-Beeck and Kraus (1980) provide the first attempt to do a quantitative review of political communication theory and research. In their study, they report the percentage distribution of articles with respect to research topics and research methodologies. Because the reviewed articles were selected from a period of a year and a half (a total of 90 studies), their assessment of the field provides only a small portion of the entire picture. Different from Jackson-Beeck and Kraus’s approach, the current study applies a bibliometric research method, author cocitation analysis (ACA), to study quantitatively the intellectual structure of political communication research.

## **STUDY OF THE INTELLECTUAL STRUCTURE OF A FIELD**

### **Bibliometrics**

The centrality of the intellectual structure of a field of inquiry has long been stressed in science studies. The intellectual structure is generally identified by certain characteristics: subject areas common to groups of scholars, scholarly journals and other publications, membership in associations, attendance at particular conferences, and formal and informal communication networks (e.g., citation network)

(Kuhn, 1962). The most frequently used research method to study this structure quantitatively is bibliometrics.

First, bibliometrics can be used to describe the characteristics of an existing field or scholarly community (Borgman, 1989). Utilizing the concept of scientific communities, invisible colleges, and research specialties, the range of subjects, countries, languages, document forms, and groups of scholars and their theoretical approaches have been studied (e.g., Crane, 1972; Lievrouw, 1988; Rice, Borgman, & Reeves, 1988; So, 1988). Key literatures and core scholars of the field can be determined. In addition, the types and the aging of the literatures in the field can be explored.

Second, bibliometrics can be utilized to investigate the historical development of a field—the evolution of scholarly communities (Borgman, 1989). The structural change of a field is reflected in its existing literatures. Studying the citation patterns among journals in different time periods can determine such changes and further describe the field's maturity, stability, and future direction (e.g., Hinze, 1994; McCain & Whitney, 1994; Small, 1973, 1993).

Third, bibliometrics provides an effective way to evaluate the contributions of scholars in a field (Borgman, 1989). Citations connect present studies with past research endeavors and indicate the relevance, importance, and influence of cited documents (Sarabia, 1993). Therefore, for a publication, the number of citations received reflects, to some degree, the significance of the ideas in this publication. Some studies focusing on this aspect are, for example, those by Garfield (1985), Hertz and Muller-Hill (1995), and Royle and Over (1994).

Fourth, bibliometrics is very useful in discovering the communication patterns of scholars in a field (e.g., McCain, 1984, 1989). Citation linkages that reflect the intellectual connections among the scholars, rather than social contacts, are the focus of bibliometrics. The patterns are described through the study of the formal channels of scholarly communication; that is, the written record of scholarship (Borgman, 1989).

Studies approached by bibliometric methods have become common not only in the disciplines of natural science, but also in the disciplines of social science and humanities. Several journals have created new policies devoting themselves to bibliometric research, such as *Scientometrics*, *Journal of Documentation*, *Science*, *Social Studies of Science*, *Science Studies*, and *Journal of the American Society for Information Science*. Other journals have accepted bibliometric studies: for example, *American Sociologist* in sociology, *American Psychologist* in psychology, *Communication Research* and *Human Communication Research* in communication, and *Sociology of Education* in education.

### **Citations as the Indicator**

From the perspective of sociology of science, scholarly publications are the media through which scholars make their claims to new knowledge (Gilbert, 1976). Citations to these publications acknowledge the existence of such claims (Small & Greenlee, 1989). In other words, a citation is the acknowledgment that one work receives from another (Egghe & Rousseau, 1990). Although the reason for a citation varies from author to author and from source to source (Brooks, 1988; Chubin & Moitra, 1975; Peritz, 1983), citations in articles or books demonstrate an intellectual relationship between the citing sources and the cited sources. In general, citations of a work reflect the quality, significance, and impact of that work.

At a micro level, for individual authors, citations play an indispensable role in their intellectual development. By citing others' works, scholars communicate about and define the elements in their evolving knowledge base (Small & Greenlee, 1989) and indicate both their understanding of the classics in the area and their contributions of knowledge in forming an integrated intellectual property. Meanwhile, they can also absorb others' thoughts into their own works. Citations "bind present to past research endeavors indicating relevance, importance, and influence of cited documents" (Sarabia, 1993, p. 12). Thus, citing others' works is an important part of the practice of academic communities and "it is a way of paying intellectual debts, of giving credit to others, and of obeying the etiquette of scholarly publication" (Karki, 1996, p. 324).

At a macro level, for various disciplines or fields, the citation patterns among and within disciplines is an indicator of a discipline or a field's history, maturity, stability, and even future direction. The sociological significance of citation lies in its function of scientific continuity (Roche & Smith, 1978). Aggregating citations of earlier works provides a means for examining consensus in an academic field (Cozzens, 1988).

## Citation Analysis

One of the most important branches of bibliometrics is citation analysis. As discussed previously, citations indicate that there is a relationship between a citing work and a cited work. Citation analysis is an approach to examining this relationship. Since the 1960s, because of the creation of various citation indexes, more citation analyses have been done (Peritz, 1992). Along with a great number of citation studies in both the natural sciences and humanities, there have also been many in the social sciences, including communication (Reeves & Borgman, 1983; Rice et al., 1988), psychology (Bagby, Parker, & Bury, 1990; Cox, Wessel, Norton, & Swinson, 1994), sociology (Blackburn, 1981; Culnan, O'Reilly, & Chatman, 1990), anthropology (Choi, 1988), political science (Reid, 1983), and economics (Ferber, 1986). In fact, Snyder, Cronin, and Davenport (1995) report that during a 10-year period (1982 to 1992), there were 8, 4, 41, and 40 articles published in major communication, economics, psychology, and sociology journals, respectively. The growth of the citation analysis literature is significant.

Generally, in citation analysis, data are obtained through unobtrusive measures that "do not require the cooperation of a respondent and do not themselves contaminate the response" (Webb, Campbell, Schwartz, & Sechrest, 1966, p. 2; cited by Paisley, 1990, p. 293). In other words, the data are collected unobtrusively from the published record. The process of data collection is different from that of either interview or questionnaire, and it is more reliable and easier replicated by other researchers. It is also valid to the extent that one accepts the aggregation of citations as representing the "importance" of links between citing and cited documents (White, 1990).

## Citation Analysis in Communication Studies

During the past three decades, many citation studies have been conducted in the field of communication (e.g., Beniger, 1990; Funkhouser, 1996; Lau, 1995; Parker,

Paisley, & Garrett, 1967; Paisley, 1984; Reeves & Borgman, 1983; Rice et al., 1988; Rush & Kent, 1977; So, 1988; Tankard, Chang, & Tsang, 1984; Wispe & Osborn, 1982). As the very first citation study in communication, Parker et al. (1967) investigated the citation patterns of 6 core communication journals (*Journal of Broadcasting*, *Journal of Communication*, *Journalism Quarterly*, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *Journal of Advertising Research*, and *Audio-Visual Communication Review*) and 11 journals from relevant disciplines in a journal-to-journal citation count study. The data from both their citation analysis (including 9900 citations in 17 journals from 1950 to 1965) and their survey questionnaires indicate that communication journals cite each other and other disciplines' journals frequently, but other major social science journals do not cite communication journals (Reeves & Borgman, 1983). The interdisciplinary exchange seemed to be unidirectional.

In a later study, Paisley (1984) combined data from Parker et al. (1967) with the data collected from the divisional overview chapters in *Communication Yearbook 1* through *Communication Yearbook 5* (1977–1982). Based on his analysis of citation patterns, Paisley argued that the development of communication studies suffers from the consequences of “ethnocentrism of disciplines,” a process first described by Campbell (1969; cited in Paisley, 1984). He elaborated his points in two aspects. First, according to the interdisciplinary citation data during a 30-year period, “communication journals cite major journals in the other social science, but the citations are not reciprocated” (p. 28). There is no clear trend showing that communication studies “are becoming better integrated with other social sciences over time” (p. 28). Second, the amount of cross-citation shows that the subfields of communication studies, such as interpersonal, mass, political, and instructional communication, do not cite each other often; and they “react to each other more ethnocentrically than they react to the other social sciences” (p. 30). For example, between any one of five mass communication journals (*Communication Research*, *Journal of Broadcasting*, *Journal of Communication*, *Journalism Quarterly*, and *Public Opinion Quarterly*) and any one of three interpersonal communication journals (*Central States Speech Journal*, *Communication Monographs*, and *Quarterly Journal of Speech*), only 24 cross-citations occurred in a total of 5,941 citations made in the 1981 issues of these eight communication journals. The overwhelming amount of citations were within the mass communication subfield or within the interpersonal communication subfield.

Based on his citation analysis of 10 major communication journals, So (1988) also found that communication literature is heavily dependent on the literature from other disciplines (e.g., psychology); communication literature is less likely to be cited by other disciplines. In other words, communication as a field of study is less attractive and less influential and may occupy “only a peripheral position in the social sciences” (p. 247). Furthermore, of 1,672 citations from the 10 major communication journals, only 115 cross-citations happened between the 5 mass communication journals and the 5 interpersonal communication journals (Reardon & Rogers, 1988). These findings echo what is in Paisley (1984). In addition, his findings show that there is no dominant journal in communication research; and he argues that the lack of such a dominant journal or journals implies that communication as a discipline is still at an emerging stage, and “a widely accepted cognitive structure has yet to evolve” (p. 251).

Both Reeves and Borgman (1983) and Rice et al. (1988) investigate the citation patterns of 10 major communication journals. The results from their citation analyses and network analyses indicate that communication literature is dichotomous



or clustered in two groups: speech/interpersonal and mass communication. The number of reciprocal citing between these two cliques is unbalanced: The former has cited the latter more frequently than vice versa. Although there are many discussions of the feature of the field—whether or not it is dichotomous (e.g., Reardon & Rogers, 1988)—the findings of these two studies provide unique insights of the field.

Most recently, Rice and his colleagues (1996) demonstrated again how citation analysis can contribute to communication studies. Their primary interest was to use citation data collected from the *Social Science Citation Index* to study the evolution of the *Journal of Broadcasting (& Electronic Media)* during the past 40 years. Based on citation data, they assessed the *Journal of Broadcasting (& Electronic Media)*'s influence within the field of communication studies and ranked the most frequently cited authors and publications in the field. They used several two-dimensional maps to illustrate the relationships among the core communication journals, providing an intuitive view of the field.

The findings of these citation analyses provide important insights concerning many aspects of communication studies. For example, in his discussion of the historical development of communication research, Delia (1987, p. 28) uses citations as an indicator to demonstrate that after WWII the central focus of communication study was no longer propaganda analysis because of “the complete absence of citations to Lasswell in Klapper’s (1949, 1960) and Hovland’s summaries of mass communication effects research.” Regarding the current status of communication studies, Berger (1991) says that “bibliometric studies of journal citations have revealed extensive Balkanization within the field [of communication studies]...” (p. 102) and “. . . have produced compelling evidence that the field of communication has been suffering and continues to suffer from an intellectual trade deficit with respect to related disciplines; the field imports much more than it exports” (p. 102). Based on these citation studies, Rogers and Chaffee (1993) echo Berger, “it is rare to find a mass communication study in HCR [*Human Communication Research*]. . . or a theory-testing study in CT [*Communication Theory*], despite the generic labels on the covers of the journals” (p. 128). More recently, Sypher (2000) considers citation patterns (between communication journals and journals in other disciplines) as an indicator showing the “real progress” of communication research.

Most of the above studies, however, examine only journal-to-journal citations, which explores only the characteristics of a discipline or a field at the macro level. In order to capture the picture at a micro level, it is obvious that the focus of study must be on the level of author—that is, the pattern of author-to-author citations needs to be investigated. Lin (1996) provided the first attempt to explore such a pattern in the research area of political advertising.

## **Author Cocitation Analysis (ACA)**

ACA is an approach within the larger context of citation analysis and bibliometrics (White & McCain, 1989). In ACA, “*oeuvres*—sets of documents by authors” are the unit of analysis (White & Griffith, 1981); the cocitation of pairs of *oeuvres* is the variable that indicates the intellectual relationship among authors. One assumption of this method is that if two authors are “often jointly cited,” then there exists an intellectual relationship between them; “the more frequently they are co-cited, the more closely they are related” (White, 1990, p. 84). In other words, if two authors’

writings are related in some way, they are more likely to be cited together by other authors. In this circumstance, these two authors are cocited authors. As one form of citation analysis, ACA studies the pattern among a group of cocited authors; this pattern is based on hundreds of authors' or citers' perceptions of cocited authors' works. The pattern is developed from a collective view of authors in a discipline or a field.

One immediate product of ACA is a map of authors' intellectual relationships in a field of study. Using a multidimensional map, an author is represented by a point, and the relationships among authors as perceived by many citers are reflected in the proximity of the points (White, 1989). For example, if two authors are perceived to be similar with respect to their research areas or methodological approaches, then they will be positioned close to each other. Based on the same rule, if a group of authors has common or similar research subjects, or they share the same research approaches, then, in general, they will form a cluster. If a field under study is characterized with a variety of research topics that are studied by different approaches, there will be several clusters on the map to represent the features of the field's intellectual structure.

## **ACA Studies**

One pioneering study was White and Griffith's (1981) article in which they explored the cocited pattern of 39 authors of information science. In their study, a two-dimensional map constructed from the results of the multidimensional scaling analysis showed several features of research activities among these authors; for example, the "centrality and peripherality of authors within groups and with respect to the overall field" (p. 165) and the "proximities of authors within groups and across group boundaries" (p. 165). A factor analysis based on these data confirmed the groupings produced by the mapping.

During the 1980s and 1990s, many articles within the tradition of ACA were published (e.g., Bayer, Smart, & McLaughlin, 1990; Culnan et al., 1990; Eom, 1996; Karki, 1996; McCain, 1984, 1986, 1989). For example, McCain (1989) examined the cocitation patterns of 58 authors from the field of population genetics and its relevant areas. In the two dimensions resulting from the multidimensional scaling analysis, the authors' research specializations spread along the horizontal axis. Their theoretical approaches to their studies were reflected by the distribution of author groups on the vertical axis. The findings of this study suggest that both authors' institutional affiliations and general research efforts may be reflected in the pattern of author placement and cluster assignment.

Bayer et al. (1990) selected 36 authors from the field of marriage and family study. The multidimensional scaling analysis of the cocitation data shows that the intellectual structure of this particular field of study can be represented in a three-dimensional map: dynamism (authors' perspectives, which range from relatively static, structural, to comparative), temporal span (features of authors' works that have an historical and intergenerational focus or concentrate on contemporary and nuclear family systems), and micro to macro (the units of analysis, varying from psychological or interactional to societal or social-structural). Based on these three dimensions, researchers in this field are divided into six groups. The experts interviewed by the researchers agree that the groupings are relatively accurate and reflect the reality.

Regarding the uniqueness of ACA, White (1990b) concludes, “ACA helps to define the principal subject and methodological areas of literatures in terms of their major contributors, and to do so through the empirical consensus of hundreds of citers rather than the impressions of individuals” (p. 430). He further stresses that the use of ACA does not deny the traditional subjective qualitative approach, but the findings of ACA provide complementary information that enhances researchers’ understanding of the intellectual structure of a field. The information is embedded in the context of authors’ bibliographic records. What ACA does is to reveal such information hidden in the context. In so doing, ACA assigns “empirical meaning to such abstract words as ‘influence,’ ‘impact,’ ‘centrality,’ [and] ‘speciality’” (p. 430). It is also noted that the multidimensional map that results from ACA is not a precise picture of “a full intellectual and social history of a field” (p. 430).

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS OF THE CURRENT STUDY

Although most previous studies have been conducted by researchers outside the field they studied, it is political communication scholars’ obligation to answer such questions with respect to the intellectual structure of their research. Previous studies provide models for applying the method of author cocitation analysis to an examination of such a structure in the field of political communication.

First, as Swanson (1993) points out, because of the growth of interdisciplinary subfields, the intellectual structure of communication studies as a field is fragmented, which echoes a charge that the “growth [of communication] has been accompanied by differentiation” (Paisley, 1985, p. 5). Communication is a field “literally made up of dissimilarities and differences—all of those shards and fragments from other, more respected disciplines” (Frentz, 1995, p. 17). Intellectual fragmentation is not a phenomenon existing exclusively in the field of communication studies; it can be found in disciplines in the natural sciences (e.g., physics and chemistry) and in the social sciences (e.g., psychology and sociology). It has long been a topic in studies of the sociology of science (Chubin, 1983; Crane, 1972). The fragments have also been described as, for example, “specialities,” “scientific communities,” “invisible colleges,” and “subfields.”

The fragmentation of communication studies produces both advantages and disadvantages for the development of the field. On one hand, the fragments reflect intellectual territories (indicating a sign of intellectual diversification) within which researchers from various disciplines can “legitimate themselves by distinctive theories, methods, or syntheses of multiple disciplinary perspectives that will differentiate them from parent disciplines and from other subfields” (Swanson, 1993, p. 166). On the other hand, as a result of the fragmentation, there is less intellectual exchange than scholars anticipate (Berger, 1991). “The field’s intellectual capital [is transferred] from the center to the periphery” (Swanson, 1993, p. 166), and the field may consequently lose its focus of research (Sypher, 2000).

Political communication as a subfield of communication studies has made its unique contributions to such fragmentation (Swanson, 1993). However, for political communication scholars, a more interesting question is whether political communication possesses as much intellectual fragmentation as the field of communication studies as a whole. Scholars argue that after substantial growth during the recent decades, political communication has evolved into a mature field of study (e.g., Kaid, 1996; Swanson, 1993). A mark of this maturation is the existence of

“specialized research communities [constituted by authors in the field] devoted to pursuing subjects in great depth” (Swanson, 1993, p. 165). Groups of scholars in the field have pursued “dissimilar agendas and approaches” (Nimmo & Swanson, 1990, p. 10). In the current research scene, the field is “accelerating toward ‘fragmentation’” (p. 10). The process and the consequences of this fragmentation certainly have a strong impact on the future development of political communication research.

However, fragmentation as a feature of political communication study has been discussed only in a qualitative manner (e.g., Graber, 1993; Kaid, 1996; Nimmo & Swanson, 1990). The current study attempts to use empirical data to assess this feature of the field quantitatively:

*RQ1.* Is there intellectual fragmentation in the field of political communication study?

Second, political communication, as Nimmo (1977) notes, is rooted in five different research traditions. It is “a field exceedingly diverse in theoretic formulations, research questions, and methods of inquiry. . .” (p. 441). Sanders, Kaid, and Nimmo (1985) echo this point when saying that “what is labeled as political communication research, teaching, and practice by those involved in the field is . . . varied and pluralist in outlook and approach . . .” (p. xiv). Some scholars also argue that political communication is “an area of scholarship defined by a distinctive subject matter” and “is characterized by a distinctive approach or methods of investigation” (Franklin, 1995, p. 225). In fact, “it is a terrain contested and enlivened by competing theories, approaches, agendas . . .” (Nimmo & Swanson, 1990, p. 7) and “. . . is characterized by a remarkable diversity of theories and approaches ranging from the purely quantitative to the strictly qualitative . . .” (Stuckey, 1996, p. vii). Thus, intellectual fragmentation, if it exists, should reflect the above features:

*RQ2.* What is the pattern of fragmentation in the field of political communication with respect to scholars’ research approaches (qualitative or quantitative) and the major research subject areas (e.g., political rhetoric, political advertising, political debates, media coverage of political campaigns and events, and political attitude and behavior)?

Third, political communication is an interdisciplinary field of study (Denton & Woodward, 1990; Graber, 1993; Kaid, 1996; Nimmo & Sanders, 1981; Nimmo & Swanson, 1990). Scholars involved in this field are from a variety of academic backgrounds including speech communication, mass communication, journalism, political science, and social psychology. The field of political communication is thus, on one hand, a place where interests of scholars with different backgrounds converge; on the other hand, it is a place where the inherent differences of scholars’ original academic areas appear:

*RQ3.* Based on answers to research question (RQ) 2, what are the characteristics of each fragment with respect to scholars’ academic homes (field of study and institution)?

## METHOD

As discussed in earlier sections, author cocitation analysis (ACA) is located within the larger context of bibliometrics in general and citation analysis in particular. What a scholar or a researcher can do with ACA has been demonstrated to possess validity and reliability. Many studies using this approach have been conducted during the past several decades. A relatively standard procedure for these studies has been summarized. According to McCain (1990), the general procedure for using ACA includes five steps: author selection, determination of cocitation frequencies, composition of a raw cocitation matrix and conversion of this to a correlation matrix, statistical analysis of the correlation matrix, and interpretation of the statistical results (Appendix A).

### Selecting Authors

In general, using bibliometric research methods to assess the state of an academic field begins with the determination of the unit of analysis, which is accomplished through the selection of some core set of journals, articles, authors, or key terms (Borgman & Rice, 1992). The results of any bibliometric study are influenced by the choice of the initial set and the unit of analysis. Depending on the research questions, researchers can select different emphases—for example, authors, if they are interested in the influence of individuals; articles, if they focus on the influence of a particular idea; key terms, if they explore the diffusion of an idea; and journals, if they examine the institutional embodiment of a field. In the current study, in which the intellectual structure of a scholarly community (political communication) is the focus, a set of authors is the choice, and the cocitation of a pair of authors is the unit of analysis. In other words, when using ACA to approach the research questions raised in the current study, the scope of the field is defined by authors involved in the field. It is more like a sociological definition of the field (Nimmo & Swanson, 1990).

If the selected authors do not capture the full range of variability on the aspects of the field of interest (such as research foci and research approaches), the intellectual structure of the field cannot be demonstrated (McCain, 1990a). Therefore, it is essential to compile a diversified list of authors. Potential sources for such a list include membership directories, personal knowledge, review articles, and consultation with researchers in the area of studies. The criteria can be objective, subjective, or a combination of both. In the current study, a list of authors (a total of 51) used in a previous ACA study (Lin, 1997) was chosen (see Appendix B for the authors' names). In the previous study, authors were selected through a three-step process (see Appendix C).

### Determining Cocitation Frequencies

In author cocitation analysis, raw data are obtained from counting how many times any two selected authors (a pair) are cited together in a publication. For instance, if someone cites anything by author A and author B in the same publication, the number for the pair of authors A and B will be increased by 1 (White & McCain, 1989). The total number of any given pair of selected authors is defined as the cocitation frequency of the pair. In the current study, the cocitation frequencies

among authors are determined by a two-step process;<sup>1,2</sup> the data for determining the cocitation frequencies were retrieved in December 2000 from an on-line database, *Social Scisearch*.

### **Composing a Raw Citation Matrix and Converting It to a Correlation Matrix**

In a matrix where each row represents an author and each column represents an author (authors' names are identically ordered on the rows and columns), the number for each off-diagonal cell is the cocitation frequency of a given pair of selected authors. According to McCain (1990a), the diagonal cell values are defined as missing data for the later calculation of the correlations. A complete matrix is formed after exhausting every possible pair of two authors from the selected author pool.

After the computation (in which the missing data are pairwise-deleted) of the Pearson product-moment correlations of every possible pair from the selected authors, this raw data matrix can then be converted to a matrix of proximity values—each correlation of a pair of authors “represents the similarity in co-citation pattern of the two across all the other authors in the set, with the exception of the two being compared” (McCain, 1990b, p. 200). As McCain (1990b) points out, there are at least two advantages to using the correlation coefficient. First, the overall similarity of use of the works of two authors is measured. In other words, it takes all selected authors' collective perceptions of these two authors into consideration rather than just how often this pair is cited (a simple pair cocitation frequency). Second, the effects of differences in “scale” of citation and cocitation are also reduced. The potential difference is due to the fact that every author joins the field at a different time so that some authors have fewer publications than others. These “new” comers may be cited less frequently but share some common characteristics of the field.

### **Statistically Analyzing the Correlation Matrix**

The correlation matrix of 51 selected authors serves as a matrix of proximity in which the correlations are the measures of similarity among the authors. To say this in a simple way, the higher the positive correlation, the more similar two authors are in the perceptions of the selected authors. Multidimensional scaling (MDS) is the approach used in this study to analyze the similarity matrixes. In ACA, the use of multidimensional scaling serves two major purposes: “to provide an

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<sup>1</sup>First, use the command “S CR = [Last Name] [First Name Initial?]” to retrieve all the probable citations (in all major journals in communication and political science) that have been made to a particular author's work(s) (including journal articles, book chapters, and books) through an on-line database, *Social Scisearch* (its print version is *Social Science Citations Index*), on DIALOG. For example, for the author Steve Chaffee, the search command would be S CR = CHAFFEE S? The use of the truncation symbol (?) in the search is to generalize the request to retrieve documents that cite any works by CHAFFEE. The accession numbers of the citations for each author were downloaded. Due to the design of the database, an accession number indicates in what article a citation is made. Therefore, when citations made to different authors appear in the same article, these citations will have the same accession number. Second, use a special computer program to count the number of the same accession numbers between any two authors. The number of the same accession numbers is the cocitation frequency between these two authors, which indicates how many times these two authors have been cited in the same publications.

<sup>2</sup>In the current study, the search through the on-line database, *Social Scisearch*, on DIALOG was conducted in December 2000.

information-rich display of the cocitation linkages and to identify the salient dimensions underlying their placement” (McCain, 1990a, p. 437).

In a multidimensional map, authors who are frequently cocited group together in space. Those who have many links to others tend to appear in central positions which can reflect the centrality of the field. If some authors have relatively weak connections to others, they tend to be in the periphery. In addition, to help determine relatively accurate groups in the map, the coordinates of the selected 51 authors on each of the dimensions are submitted to the computer for a cluster analysis (Bayer et al., 1990).

## Interpreting the Statistical Results

**Fragmentation.** If two scholars are frequently cited together, there exists an intellectual relationship between them. In other words, if two scholars’ works are generally related in some way, these two scholars are more likely to be cited together by other scholars. Thus, the distribution of authors obtained from the map(s) reflects some aspects of the intellectual structure of the field. On the map(s), it is clear that those authors who are close have something in common, whereas those authors that have fewer things in common are distant from others. If the field is fragmented, there will be multiple authors’ groups on the map(s).

**Research Approaches.** Generally, qualitative research approaches include rhetorical analysis, historical analysis, critical analysis, focus group, and case study. Quantitative research approaches include survey research, experimental research, longitudinal research, and content analysis. In a previous ACA study (Lin, 1997), a four-step process was utilized to interpret maps with respect to authors’ frequently used research approaches (qualitative or quantitative).<sup>3</sup> In the current study, the interpretation is based on the same classification of authors’ frequently used research approaches.

**Research Subject Areas.** Some of the most comprehensive reviews of the field are, in chronological order, Nimmo and Sanders’ (1981) “Introduction: The Emergence of Political Communication as a Field” Kaid and Sanders’ (1985) “Survey of Political Communication Theory and Research,” Denton and Woodward’s (1990) *Political Communication in America*, Johnston’s (1990a) “Trends in Political Communication: A Selective Review of Research in the 1980s,” Nimmo and Swanson’s (1990) “The Field of Political Communication: Beyond the Voter

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<sup>3</sup>The first step included the researcher’s reading previous review articles and other relevant literature to classify the selected authors into two categories: either qualitative or quantitative. In the second step, each author’s dissertation title and abstract were examined using *Dissertation Abstracts International* (index and abstracts to dissertations and theses in all subject areas completed at accredited North American colleges and universities and more than 200 institutions elsewhere since 1861). Dissertations represent an author’s first major academic work, and, methodologically, authors tend to apply the same research approach to their major research in the future. For the third step, the titles of the authors’ articles indexed in the database *ComIndex* were examined to determine the research approach frequently used in their studies. For step 4, if the first three steps combined did not provide a clear indication of an author’s frequently used research approach, other bibliographic sources (e.g., ERIC, PSYCLIT, SOCIOFILE, and PAIS) or the original articles were examined to determine the author’s approach. The final classification of the selected authors’ major research approaches was validated by two political communication scholars on the faculty.

Persuasion Paradigm,” and Kaid’s (1996) “Political Communication.” Nimmo and Sanders (1981) list 13 substantive research areas including “political rhetoric,” “political advertising and propaganda,” “political debates,” “political socialization,” and “election campaigns.” Kaid and Sanders (1985) identify 12 research areas including “news and public affairs,” “rhetoric/fantasy/symbols,” “president and media,” “debates,” “political advertising,” and “political socialization.” Johnston (1990a) classifies these studies into four major areas: “election communication,” which includes political advertising and political debates; “political communication and news”; “political rhetoric”; and “political attitudes, behavior, and information,” which includes media use and exposure and political socialization. Kaid (1996) describes four lines of research: “media coverage of political campaigns and events,” “political debates,” “political advertising,” and “political rhetoric.”

Every author provides a variety of names and classifications for the substantive areas of the field, depending on his or her perception of the field and the scope of the review. It is clear that there is no standard organizational pattern, no comprehensive list, and no mutually exclusive categories for reviewing the studies in terms of topic area.

Based on these qualitative reviews of the field, several major research subject areas are identified for the current study to help interpret the map(s): political rhetoric, political advertising, political debates, media coverage of political campaigns and events, political attitude and behavior, and others.<sup>4</sup> These six categories reflect the feature of the most recent reviews in the field (e.g., Johnston, 1990a; Kaid, 1996). Again, the current study uses the classification of the selected authors’ major research areas that was developed in Lin’s (1997) study.<sup>5</sup> The purpose for developing the six major research subject areas for this study is to enhance the interpretation of the map(s).

**Academic Origins.** The information on these authors’ original field of study and the institutions at which they got their highest degree (doctorate) can be obtained from the database, *Dissertation Abstracts*. This information helps describe the characteristics of each fragment in the field. When an author’s name cannot be found in *Dissertation Abstracts*, this author is not included in the interpretation of the characteristics of the fragments.

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<sup>4</sup>“Political rhetoric” concerns the content of particular speakers or speeches and the politicians’ use of rhetorical strategies and political language. “Political advertising” studies the use and the effects of political ads in political campaigns. “Political debates” focus on the presentation of the debates with respect to both visual elements in the coverage and verbal components of the debates. “Media coverage of political campaigns and events” emphasizes the content and the pattern of media’s coverage. “Political attitude and behavior” explores public’s use of media and the effects of such a use on public’s political behaviors. “Others” includes the subject areas not in the above categories.

<sup>5</sup>A two-step method was used to determine the selected authors’ major research areas. For the first step, the researcher’s reading of previous review articles and other relevant literature and consultation with two scholars in the field provided a general understanding of the areas in which a particular author makes his or her major contributions. In the second step, three major bibliographies available in the field were searched to see in what areas an author’s works appear most often. If an author appears in two or several categories at the same or similar frequencies, this author is considered to have two or several subject areas of study. The bibliographies used are Kaid and Wadsworth’s (1985) *Political Campaign Communication: A Bibliography and Guide to the Literature, 1973–1982*, Johnston’s (1990b) “Selective Bibliography of Political Communication Research, 1982–1988,” and “Political Communication Literature, 1980–1993” (an unpublished bibliography prepared by Mary Hanly at the University of Alabama). One common feature of these three bibliographies is that they use very similar categories to classify the literature. The five major research areas identified for the current study are among the categories in these bibliographies.



Overall, interpretation of the statistical results depends on understanding the field as a whole, particularly based on the existing literature (e.g., reviews, research articles, books) and the information obtained from other bibliographic sources. As discussed in the earlier paragraphs, the final interpretation should be complementary to the traditional qualitative reviews, and the research questions of the current study should be answered by the integration of all of the above.

## RESULTS

The correlation matrix created from 51 selected authors' cocitation frequencies was submitted to the computer for a multidimensional scaling analysis (ALSCAL in SPSS). The values of  $S$  (stress) and the squared correlation (RSQ) associated with various solutions are, respectively, 0.16 and .90 for two dimensions, 0.10 and .95 for three dimensions, 0.07 and .97 for four dimensions. RSQ values are the proportion of variance of the scaled data in the partition that is accounted for by their corresponding distance.

McCain (1990a) suggests that, when using the method of multidimensional scaling to analyze the cocited author data, an  $S$  value less than 0.2 "is considered acceptable" for a two-dimensional solution if the RSQ square is high enough to capture a substantial proportion of the variance (above 85%). She indicates that, if these two conditions are met (i.e.,  $S < 0.20$  and  $RSQ > .85$ ), a two-dimensional solution is a parsimonious one that provides sufficient explanatory power; a three-dimensional one is "more complex" and "adds little explanatory power" (p. 439). Thus, in the current situation, a two-dimension solution ( $S = 0.16$  and  $RSQ = .90$ ) can sufficiently reflect the information embedded in the data. Figure 4.1 presents

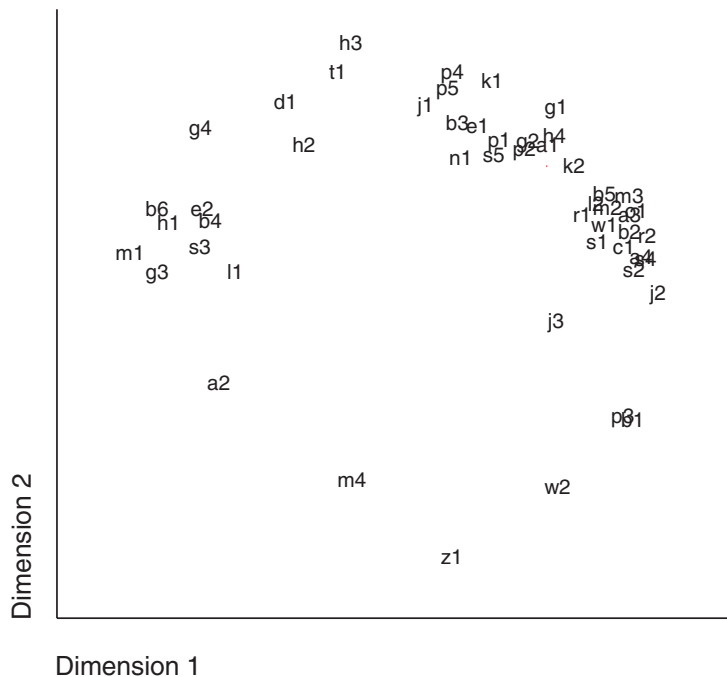


FIG. 4.1. Two-dimensional plot of 51 selected authors.

this result. As shown in Fig. 4.1, 51 authors are scattered in the two-dimensional space, some being close to each other and some being distant. Although the actual formation of authors' groupings is not clear, it is obvious that these 51 authors form several clusters.

To determine the formation of the groupings, the coordinates of the 51 authors on each of the two dimensions were submitted for a cluster analysis. The results of the cluster analysis are shown in Table 4.1 and Fig. 4.2. In Table 4.1, there is a relatively large increase in the value of the distance measure from a three-cluster to a two-cluster solution (Stages 48 and 49). Thus, a three-group solution appears to be appropriate in the current situation.

These 51 authors form three major clusters on the map (Fig. 4.3), with each of Clusters 1 and 3 consisting of two smaller clusters (Figs. 4.2 and 4.3). Based on the previous discussion, the answer to RQ1 is that intellectual fragmentation exists in the field of political communication studies. Although the current groupings of authors can be debated (since cluster analysis provides no single solution regarding the number of clusters derived), the three-cluster solution helps reveal the intellectual fragments of the field and makes a reasonable interpretation without increasing the complexity. These three author clusters indicate the existence of intellectual fragmentation in the field of political communication studies. Thus, an analysis of the characteristics of these groups (clusters) can help further understanding of the intellectual structure of the field.

## Characteristics of the Groups

**Research Approach.** The first group (Cluster 1; for its detailed composition, see Fig. 4.4), the largest author group in this study, includes 32 authors. This group consists of two subgroups (Clusters 1-a and Cluster 1-b in Fig. 4.2), and each of them has 17 and 12 authors, respectively. Scholars in the first subgroup (Cluster 1-a) approach research questions mainly in a quantitative manner; for instance, McCombs and Shaw's (1972) "The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media." In order to investigate the relationship between media and audience in the 1968 presidential campaign, McCombs and Shaw randomly selected registered voters from a community and asked them to specify the key issues in the campaign. During the same time period, the mass media in the community were collected and content analyzed. The high correlation between the important issues covered by the mass media and the key issues identified by the voters indicates a high possibility of the existence of media's agenda-setting function.

In the second subgroup (Cluster 1-b) in the first cluster, some of the scholars use qualitative methods (e.g., Nimmo & Combs, 1983), and some of them use quantitative methods (e.g., Hofstetter, 1979; Pfau, 1992). Nimmo and Combs (1983) applied the principles of fantasy theme analysis to demonstrate how "rhetorical visions of politics may come into being through all types of media fare..." (Johnston, 1990a, p. 345). Hofstetter (1979) studied the nature of bias in news reporting of the 1972 presidential campaign. In his study, a national sample of the voters was interviewed, and the data collected from these voters were used for several statistical analyses to examine the voters' perceptions of bias in media in relation to the type of media, type of issue, and voters' party affiliation. Pfau (1992) designed an experimental study to examine the effectiveness of using inoculation messages to resist the persuasiveness of comparatives in political ads. In terms of research approach, the

TABLE 4.1  
Results from the Cluster Analysis

<i>Stage</i>	<i>Cluster Combined</i>		<i>Coefficient</i>	<i>Stage Cluster First Appears</i>		<i>Next Stage</i>
	<i>Cluster 1</i>	<i>Cluster 2</i>		<i>Cluster 1</i>	<i>Cluster 2</i>	
1	4	46	1.488E-03	0	0	10
2	3	35	2.932E-03	0	0	13
3	16	37	3.637E-03	0	0	20
4	29	31	5.256E-03	0	0	7
5	1	22	5.606E-03	0	0	20
6	5	38	5.649E-03	0	0	40
7	9	29	6.141E-03	0	4	18
8	8	14	8.469E-03	0	0	23
9	6	11	1.047E-02	0	0	17
10	4	44	1.166E-02	1	0	19
11	36	47	1.200E-02	0	0	28
12	39	40	1.333E-02	0	0	26
13	3	32	1.389E-02	2	0	27
14	10	19	1.439E-02	0	0	33
15	43	49	1.640E-02	0	0	22
16	7	13	2.460E-02	0	0	25
17	6	42	2.594E-02	9	0	19
18	9	41	2.838E-02	7	0	22
19	4	6	3.591E-02	10	17	32
20	1	16	3.673E-02	5	3	29
21	21	48	4.400E-02	0	0	39
22	9	43	4.556E-02	18	15	27
23	8	45	4.761E-02	8	0	33
24	17	30	5.550E-02	0	0	37
25	7	34	5.579E-02	16	0	28
26	23	39	6.180E-02	0	12	34
27	3	9	7.636E-02	13	22	35
28	7	36	7.745E-02	25	11	36
29	1	15	7.878E-02	20	0	31
30	12	20	9.346E-02	0	0	39
31	1	27	0.111	29	0	41
32	4	24	0.113	19	0	35
33	8	10	0.115	23	14	37
34	23	26	0.153	26	0	36
35	3	4	0.178	27	32	43
36	7	23	0.221	28	34	41
37	8	17	0.228	33	24	38
38	8	28	0.325	37	0	42
39	12	21	0.357	30	21	47
40	5	50	0.456	6	0	48
41	1	7	0.467	31	36	46
42	8	18	0.618	38	0	45
43	3	25	0.638	35	0	46
44	33	51	0.837	0	0	48
45	2	8	1.252	0	42	47
46	1	3	1.523	41	43	49
47	2	12	2.244	45	39	50
48	5	33	2.790	40	44	49
49	1	5	4.809	46	48	50
50	1	2	7.445	49	47	0

unique composition (i.e., mixture of both qualitative and quantitative approaches) of this subgroup (Cluster 1-b) indicates a special phenomenon in the development of intellectual structure of political communication study (see details under Discussion).

The second group (Cluster 2) includes five scholars. These five scholars apply qualitative methods to their studies, such as Murray's (1975) "Wallace and the Media: The 1972 Florida Primary." George C. Wallace's overwhelming victory in the 1972 Florida primary caught much attention and aroused much controversy. Murray focused on this unique event and conducted a case study of Wallace's successful use of media in his campaign.

There are 14 scholars in the third group (Cluster 3), which is divided into two subgroups (Clusters 3-a and 3-b in Fig. 4.2), with 4 and 10 in each, respectively. Their research approaches are primarily qualitative in nature—for example, Gronbeck's (1992) "Negative Narrative in 1988 Presidential Campaign Ads." In his article, Gronbeck applies "narrative performance theory" to examine "narrative or storytelling ads" sponsored by Bush and Dukakis. He categorizes these ads into two types: adversarial narratives and sequel narratives. His analysis shows that in the first type of negative political ads, sponsors use "double narrative structure" to attack opponents' "personal qualities" and their "epideictic praise"; in the second type of ads, "the negative narrative in their sequels abandoned the pretense of assessing candidates' records and situated topics in a political rather than social-institutional context" (p. 339).

**Research Subject Areas.** The second interesting aspect to look at is the research subject areas that the scholars in different groups explore. In the first subgroup (Cluster 1-a) in Group 1 (Cluster 1), scholars concentrate on two major subject areas: political attitude and behavior and media coverage of political campaigns and events. Focusing on the public's use of media and the effects of such a use on the public's political behaviors, scholars in this group have made their contributions to political communication study in developing several theoretical models, such as media agenda-setting (e.g., McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Weaver, 1984), uses and gratifications (e.g., Blumler & McQuail, 1969; McLeod & Becker, 1981), and uses and dependency (Rubin & Windhal, 1986). In addition to building theory, scholars in this group also explore other aspects of the above two categories—for example, mediation of effects by mass media uses (e.g., Chaffee & Tims, 1982; Jensen, 1987a, 1987b), political socialization (e.g., Atkin & Gantz, 1978), and media coverage of political events (e.g., O'Keefe, 1982; Shoemaker, 1984).

Several subject areas have been explored by scholars in the second subgroup (Cluster 1-b) in Group 1 (Cluster 1): political rhetoric (e.g., Bennett, 1977; Bennett & Edelman, 1985), media coverage (e.g., Graber, 1989; Hofstetter, 1976; Kepplinger, 1982; Nimmo & Combs, 1983; Patterson & McClure, 1976), and political advertising (e.g., Garramone, 1984, 1985; Jamieson, 1984, 1986; Kaid, 1981b, 1991, 1994; Pfau, 1992).

Scholars in Group 2 (Cluster 2) study a variety of subject matters; for example, Zarefsky's (1983) study on presidential speeches, Perry's study of international news (e.g., Perry, 1987, 1990), and Beasley's research on women and politics (e.g., Beasley, 1984; Beasley & Belgrade, 1986). According to the subject categories developed for this current study, Zarefsky's is in the area of "political rhetoric," and both Perry's and Beasley's are in the area of "others."

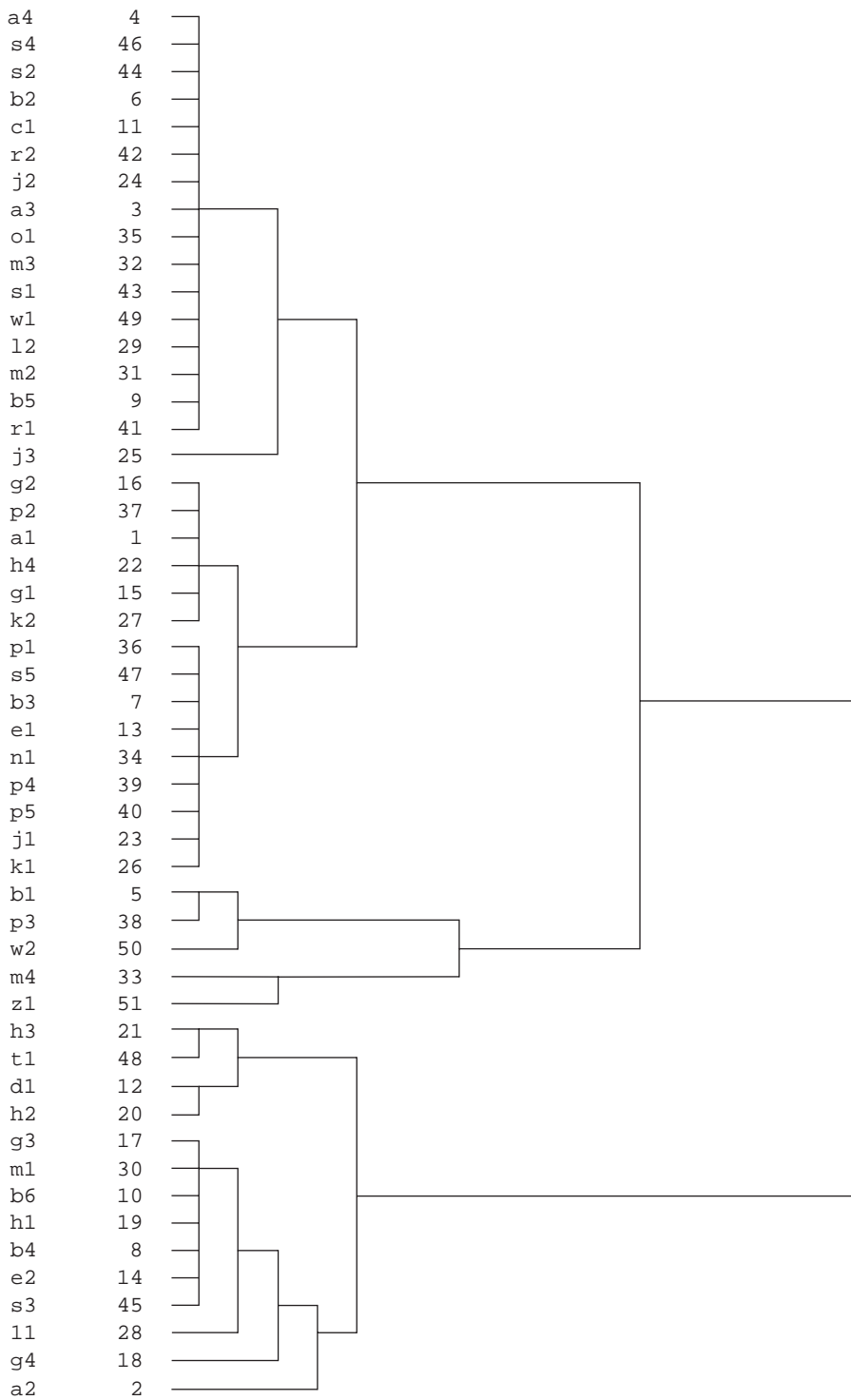


FIG. 4.2. Clusters Groups of 51 selected authors.

Cluster 1		Cluster 2
Cluster 1-a	Cluster 1-b	
a4/Atwood	g2/Graber	b1/Beasley
b2/Becker	h4/Hofstetter	m4/Murray
j2/Jeffres	p1/Paletz	p3/Perry
m3/McLeod	e1/Entman	z1/Zarefsky
l2/Lemert	p5/Powell	w2/Whitney
r1/Reese	p2/Patterson	
s4/Stevenson	g1/Garramone	
c1/Chaffee	s5/Swanson	
a3/Atkin	n1/Nimmo	
s1/Shaw	j1/Jamieson	
m2/McCombs	a1/Adams	
j3/Jensen	k2/Kepplinger	
s2/Shoemaker	b3/Bennett	
r2/Rubin	p4/Pfau	
o1/O'Keefe	k1/Kaid	
w1/Weaver b5/Blumler		
Cluster 3		
Cluster 3-a	Cluster 3-b	
h3/Hellweg	g3/Gregg	
h2/Hart	h1/Hahn	
t1/Trent	s3/Simons	
d1/Denton	a2/Andrews	
	m1/Medhurst	
	b4/Blankenship	
	l1/Larson	
	b6/Bormann	
	e2/Erickson	
	g4/Gronbeck	

FIG. 4.2 (Continued)

Scholars in the first subgroup (Cluster 3-a) in Group 3 (Cluster 3) focus their study on “political rhetoric” (e.g., Hart, 1984a) and “political debates” (e.g., Hellweg & Phillips, 1981). Scholars in the second subgroup (Cluster 3-b) in Group 3 (Cluster 3) concentrate on “political rhetoric.” In other words, they apply a variety of rhetoric analysis methods (e.g., Burke’s “dramatistic” analysis, Bormann’s “fantasy-theme” analysis, and Fisher’s “narrative” analysis) to study the content of particular speakers or speeches and the politician’s use of rhetorical strategies and political languages. For instance, Hahn (1983) and Medhurst (1987) (as cited in Johnston, 1990a) focused on presidential speeches and analyzed how the themes, metaphors, and messages in the speeches “served to define for the speaker [the Presidents] . . . [and] the ‘reality’ of the situation” (Johnston, 1990a, p. 343). Some scholars in this group studied how “the theme or metaphor was used to construct a vision and united an audience in their belief in that vision” (p. 344). For example, Erickson and his colleagues (1982) (as cited in Johnston, 1990a) showed how incumbent presidents use the “Rose Garden” strategy in the campaigns (Johnston, 1990a). In addition, other subjects of political rhetoric have also been explored by the scholars in this group, such as the rhetoric of media (Blankenship, Fine, & Davis, 1983; Bormann, 1982; Gronbeck, 1984, as cited in Johnston, 1990a).

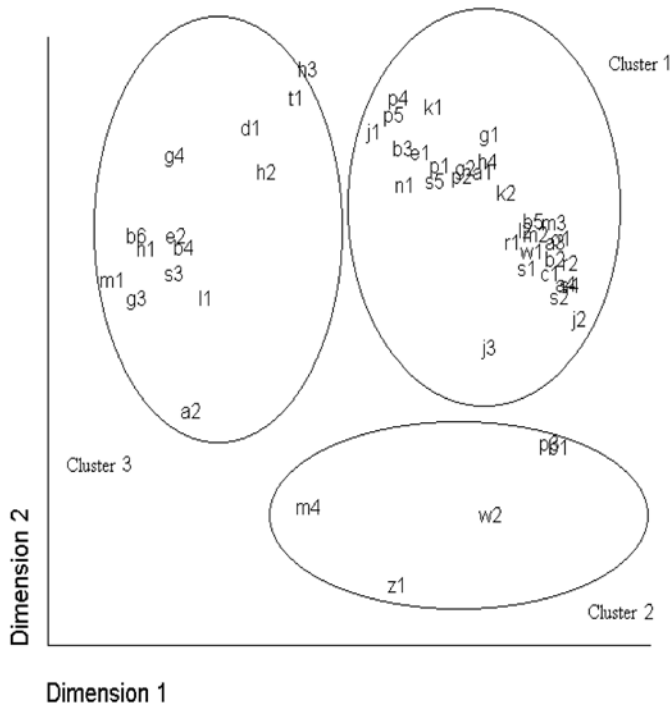


FIG. 4.3. Three author clusters. The detailed composition of Cluster 1 is shown in Fig. 4.4.

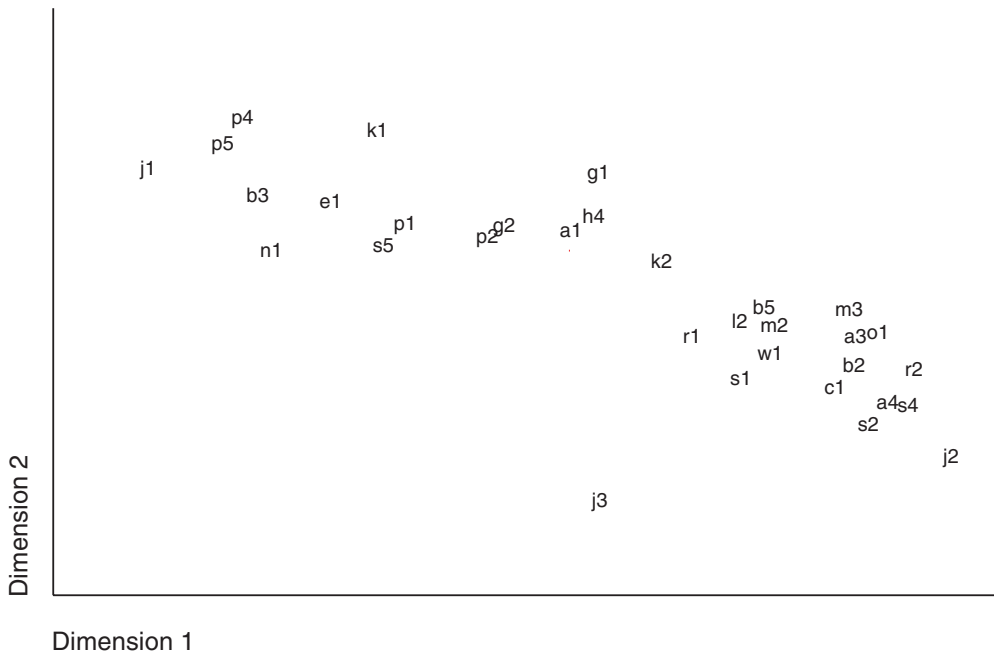


FIG. 4.4. Detailed composition of Cluster 1.

**Scholars' Academic Origins.** Of the 17 scholars in the first subgroup (Cluster 1-a) in Group 1 (Cluster 1), the majority were from the same academic areas—journalism and mass communication—except 2 from psychology and 2 unknown (Table 4.2). Scholars in the second subgroup (Cluster 1-b) in Group 1 (Cluster 1) are mainly from two areas: political science and speech communication. In Group 2 (Cluster 2), scholars are from the fields of speech communication, journalism, and mass communication. For those in Group 3 (Cluster 3), all but one (Hahn) received their academic training in the field of speech communication/theater; Hahn received his in political science. Most of these 51 authors graduated from schools located in the middle, Midwestern, and eastern regions of the country: 9 from Wisconsin, 4 each from Michigan, Minnesota, and Pennsylvania, and 3 each from Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, and New York.

An analysis of the statistical results indicates the existence of three main author groups in the field of political communication research. Each of these three groups has its unique attributes with respect to the authors' primary research approach, their major research subject areas, and their academic origins. These attributes are reflections of the basic characteristics of the intellectual structure of political communication research. Our knowledge of these attributes can establish a basis for us to understand the structure itself.

## DISCUSSION

The results of the multidimensional scaling analysis and cluster analysis of author cocitation data show that there are three main author groups in the field of political communication (Fig. 4.3). Each of these groups has its unique composition in terms of the scholars' research approach, research subject matter, and academic origin. In this sense, the field is intellectually fragmented by three groups of scholars. This study thus provides empirical evidence to support other scholars' claims that the research scene in political communication is characterized by fragmentation.

Scholars in Group 3 (e.g., Bormann, Gronbeck, Hart, and Medhurst), with their academic training in speech communication, are interested in qualitatively studying political rhetoric. In contrast, most of the scholars in the first subgroup in Group 1 (e.g., Atkin, Becker, Chaffee, McCombs, Rubin, and Weaver) have been trained in the schools of journalism and mass communication, and they apply quantitative research methods to study people's political attitudes and political behaviors and media coverage of political activities. It is equally significant that, in the second subgroup in Group 1, scholars received their academic training in speech communication or political science; some of them (e.g., Bennett and Nimmo) use qualitative methods to study political rhetoric and media coverage, whereas some utilize quantitative methods to approach their research questions in areas like media coverage and political advertising (e.g., Hofstetter, Kaid, Patterson, and Pfau). Finally, scholars (e.g., Murray and Perry) in Group 2, with their academic backgrounds in speech communication, journalism, or mass communication, approach many subject areas (e.g., media coverage, political attitude and behavior) in a qualitative manner.

Historically, as a field of inquiry, political communication is intellectually rooted in five research traditions. These five traditions later evolved into two dominant approaches in political communication research: rhetorical criticism and social-scientific analysis (Nimmo & Swanson, 1990). These two approaches have



TABLE 4.2  
The Academic Origins of the 51 Selected Authors

<i>Name</i>	<i>Area of Dissertation</i>	<i>Institution</i>
Cluster 1		
Cluster 1-a		
a4/Atwood (1965) <sup>a</sup>	Journalism	Univ. of Iowa
s4/Stevenson (1975)	Journalism	Univ. of Washington
s2/Shoemaker (1982)	Mass communication	Univ. of Wisconsin—Madison
b2/Becker (1974)	Mass communication	Univ. of Wisconsin—Madison
c1/Chaffee (1965)	Journalism	Stanford Univ.
r2/Rubin (1976)	Mass communication	Univ. of Illinois
j2/Jeffres (1976)	Mass communication	Univ. of Minnesota
a3/Atkin (1972)	Mass communication	Univ. of Wisconsin—Madison
o1/O'Keefe (1971)	Psychology	Univ. of Wisconsin—Madison
m3/McLeod (1963)	Psychology	Univ. of Michigan
s1/Shaw (1966)	Journalism	Univ. of Wisconsin—Madison
w1/Weaver (1974)	Mass communication	Univ. of North Carolina, Chapel Hill
l2/Lemert (1964)	Journalism	Michigan State Univ.
m2/McCombs (1966)	Journalism	Stanford Univ.
b5/Blumler	N/A	Oxford Univ.
r1/Reese (1982)	Mass communication	Univ. of Wisconsin—Madison
j3/Jensen	N/A	Univ. of Aarhus, Denmark
Cluster 1-b		
g2/Graber (1949)	Law	Columbia Univ.
p2/Patterson (1971)	Political science	Univ. of Minnesota
a1/Adams (1977)	Political science	George Washington Univ.
h4/Hofstetter (1967)	Political science	Indiana Univ.
g1/Garramone (1981)	Mass communication	Univ. of Wisconsin—Madison
k2/Kepplinger	N/A	Univ. of Mainz, Germany
p1/Paletz (1970)	Political science	UCLA
s5/Swanson (1971)	Speech communication	Univ. of Kansas
b3/Bennett (1974)	Political science	Yale Univ.
e1/Entman (1977)	Political science	Yale Univ.
n1/Nimmo (1962)	Political science	Vanderbilt Univ.
p4/Pfau (1987)	Speech communication	Univ. of Arizona
p5/Powell (1987)	Political science	MIT
j1/Jamieson (1972)	Speech communication	Univ. of Wisconsin—Madison
k1/Kaid (1974)	Speech communication	Southern Illinois Univ.
Cluster 2		
b1/Beasley (1974)	Journalism	Univ. of Washington
p3/Perry (1984)	Mass communication	Univ. of Wisconsin—Madison
w2/Whitney (1978)	Mass communication	Univ. of Minnesota
m4/Murray (1974)	Speech communication	Univ. of Missouri—Columbia
z1/Zarefsky (1974)	Speech communication	Northwestern Univ.

TABLE 4.2  
(Continued)

<i>Name</i>	<i>Area of Dissertation</i>	<i>Institution</i>
Cluster 3		
Cluster 3-a		
h3/Hellweg (1977)	Speech communication	Univ. of Southern California
t1/Trent (1970)	Speech communication	Univ. of Michigan
d1/Denton (1980)	Speech communication	Purdue University
h2/Hart (1970)	Speech communication	Penn. State Univ.
Cluster 3-b		
g3/Gregg (1963)	Speech-theater	Univ. of Pittsburgh
m1/Medhurst (1980)	Speech communication	Penn. State Univ.
b6/Bormann (1953)	Speech-theater	Univ. of Iowa
h1/Hahn (1968)	Political science	Univ. of Arizona
b4/Blankenship (1961)	Speech-theater	Univ. of Illinois
e2/Erickson (1972)	Speech communication	Univ. of Michigan
s3/Simons (1961)	Speech-theater	Purdue Univ.
l1/Larson (1968)	Speech communication	Univ. of Minnesota
g4/Gronbeck (1970)	Speech communication	Univ. of Iowa
a2/Andrews (1966)	Speech communication	Penn. State Univ.

<sup>a</sup>The year in which the author's doctoral degree was granted is given in parentheses.

generated most of the studies in the field; these studies are usually considered "mainstream" political communication research. The impact of these two approaches on the intellectual structure of the field can be clearly seen on the map (Fig. 4.3). Based on the present groupings, the majority of the scholars on the map can be classified into two big camps. The first one is the camp of rhetorical criticism/qualitative approach, which includes those scholars in Group 3 and several scholars in the second subgroup in Group 1. The second one is the camp of social-scientific analysis/quantitative approach, which consists of the scholars in the first subgroup in Group 1 and several scholars in the second subgroup in Group 1. The existence of this simple dichotomy suggests that the long discussion of the intellectual separation of interpersonal communication (broadly speaking, speech communication) and mass communication in the field of communication studies can help us understand the intellectual structure of political communication research. Most important, because such a discussion reflects communication scholars' recognition and understanding of the intellectual fragmentation of communication research as a whole (Barnett & Danowski, 1992; Delia, 1987; Reardon & Rogers, 1988; Rice et al., 1988), the fragmentation of political communication research warrants political communication scholars' investigation.

In a close examination of the map (Fig. 4.3), it is evident that, among these author groups, some are close to each other and some are distant. According to the basic assumptions of citation analysis, groups that are distant from each other have less intellectual connection (i.e., exchanging information through citing others' work)

than those near each other. In other words, the unbalanced information exchange (due to the differences in the scholarly commitments) among these groups creates the scatter of authors—fragmentation. Fragmentation as a basic feature of the research scene in political communication has caught scholars' attention (Nimmo & Swanson, 1990). They realize that, in order to understand the intellectual structure of political communication research, fragmentation is a “fundamental fact that must be taken into account . . .” (Delia, 1987, p. 22). Thus, understanding fragmentation of the field is the key to investigating and comprehending the intellectual connection between scholars—the intellectual structure of political communication research.

## Understanding of the Fragmentation

**Fragmentation and Diversification.** Fragmentation, as a basic feature of political communication research, “is in no way unusual . . .” (Nimmo & Swanson, 1990, p. 12). In the development of an interdisciplinary field (regardless of its scope), fragmentation of the intellectual structure indicates the field's growth and is a common phenomenon. Fragmentation is a result of intellectual diversification. For example, as the discipline of psychology grows, the number of divisions (as a well-accepted indicator of a growing area of study) in the American Psychological Association increased from 17 in 1951 to 41 in 1985 (Rodgers, 1988). Each of these divisions represents a particular research interest that distinguishes a group of scholars who are affiliated with the division from the others, such as the division of adult development and aging versus the division of psychologists interested in religious issues. The field of communication studies, as a second example, has shown a similar pattern. In its comparatively short history, the field of communication studies has experienced substantial growth. As a result, it has been “fractured into myriad conceptual fragments and research practices . . .” (Delia, 1987, p. 22).

Thus, the map and the groupings should not be a surprise. When researchers with different backgrounds come into this new academic territory—political communication—they prioritize different research foci, follow dissimilar research agendas, and use different research methods. Some of them may define the “definition's reference to ‘content’ as a ‘message’” (Franklin, 1995, p. 226), whereas other researchers may define it as a “text.” The audience may be labeled as “recipients” (which sounds passive) by some and as “readers” (which sounds active) by others (Franklin, 1995). Some may consider political communication as a subfield of political science (Graber, 1993), and others may view it as a subfield of communication studies.

These kinds of differences exist in many aspects of scholarship—epistemological, methodological, and social commitments (Nimmo & Swanson, 1990). Obviously, these differences are profound, and scholars' perspectives are sometimes contrary to each other. With respect to the intellectual development of political communication research, these differences (or sometimes disagreements) generate intellectual diversification. This diversification “. . . invigorate[s] scholarship, stimulate[s] innovation, and nurture[s] the vitality of a domain of inquiry” (p. 10) and “. . . contributes to the richness of the scholarly endeavor” (Stuckey, 1996, p. viii).

On the other hand, these differences and disagreements may produce an unwelcome result—intellectual isolation (e.g., blocking the healthy dialogue among researchers). Take the differences between the first subgroup in Group 1 and the

second subgroup in Group 3 as an example. Their differences (e.g., qualitative vs. quantitative research approach; humanistic vs. social-scientific perspective) make them, to some degree, intellectually separate from each other (see Fig. 4.3), forming two distant fragments. Although the extensive study of this consequence on the development of research in political communication has seldom appeared in scholars' research agenda, it is a potential outcome that now troubles political communication scholars most (Jamieson & Cappella, 1996; Nimmo & Swanson, 1990).

**Fragmentation and Isolation.** Based on the characteristics of these groups' composition, many sets of names can be used to describe these fragments in the research scene of political communication, such as humanistic (or rhetorical criticism) clique, empirical (or social-scientific analysis) clique, speech communication clique, journalism and mass communication clique, and mass communication and political science clique. However, no matter what these fragments are called, the most important concern is the deeper implications of the fragmentation for the intellectual development of political communication studies.

The pattern of fragmentation shown on the map indicates that two intellectual traditions of political communication research, rhetorical criticism and social-scientific analysis, drive the majority of scholars in opposite directions (Group 3 on one side and Group 1 on the other). Scholars in different fragments may be interested in related subjects or, in fact, the same subjects labeled in different ways (e.g., text and message; recipient and reader), but as a result of differences in epistemological and theoretical commitments, scholars in different groups have not received benefit (as they should have) from each other (Nimmo & Swanson, 1990).

To some degree, scholars are confined to the relatively small territory of their speciality. The relatively large distance between groups (e.g., the first subgroup in Group 1 and the second subgroup in Group 3) on the map suggests the existence of isolation and a lack of intellectual exchange between the groups. These can result in ethnocentrism of scholarship (a concept borrowed from Campbell's "ethnocentrism of Disciplines," cited by Paisley, 1984). In the worst situation, some scholars in opposite groups may even develop a biased attitude, viewing others as inferior. Scholars working in the field eventually lose the feeling of intellectual cohesion.

In addition, intellectual isolation created by fragmentation makes a full understanding of political communication processes impossible. For example, in the effects study of political discourse, rhetorical critics tend to make their own interpretation of the meaning imbedded in the speech (or text). And, the effect of the speech on an audience (e.g., being informed or misinformed) is presumed subjectively. Obviously, the chance to obtain a complete understanding of the effect will be missed if other objective observations are not incorporated into the study to judge the accuracy of interpretations of the message's meaning and the effect of the message. If researchers are confined to their own small intellectual territory without looking beyond the "boundaries," the potentials of what their research can produce in terms of the completeness of knowledge will suffer. This may lead to an "internal crisis" of political communication research (Bucy & D'Angelo, 1999).

Certainly, political communication scholars cannot afford the unpleasant consequences of fragmentation. However, there is no straightforward road suggesting the best way for political communication scholars to overcome the undesired consequences. Intellectual fragmentation is an inevitable product of the development of an interdisciplinary field. The field benefits from a diversity of scholarly commitments, research agendas, research subjects, and research approaches. As long as

the field of political communication grows, there will be differences and disagreements, such as the ones between rhetorical criticism and social-scientific analysis, and, in turn, intellectual fragmentation.

## Intellectual Cohesion

In order to overcome the undesired consequences of fragmentation, political communication as a field of inquiry needs a high degree of intellectual cohesion. Intellectual cohesion is a state in which differences between fragments are respected and are encouraged, and the effort of exchanging information and searching for the mutual relevance between fragments, and exploring subjects across fragment boundaries is cheered.

For political communication scholars, differences between them are sometimes fundamental—for example, the epistemological difference between rhetorical critics and social scientists. However, in the state of intellectual cohesion, scholars' conflicting viewpoints should be respected. In the meantime, scholars' efforts to find out what the conflicting viewpoints hold in common and how to incorporate the works produced by those who have different perspectives are encouraged as well.

Intellectual integration is the best way to reach intellectual cohesion, which helps avoid the unfortunate consequences of fragmentation. Intellectual integration is a process by which different perspectives are compared, information is exchanged, and the fundamentals of the field are searched. Furthermore, this process is not a selecting process that may suggest that one perspective or viewpoint is superior to the other.

Through an integration process, intellectual cohesion is possible regardless of the scope and the subject matter of the fields or disciplines. The cases of two mature disciplines (psychology and physics) can illustrate this point. As previously discussed, one indicator of intellectual fragmentation is the academic divisions in these two disciplines, such as experimental and clinical psychology in psychology and theoretical and applied physics in physics (Reardon & Rogers, 1988). Because of the size and the complexity of these two disciplines, the level of fragmentation is much higher than in the field of political communication. However, it is evident that these two disciplines are still able to enjoy a high level of intellectual cohesion—their status as disciplines is firm and unquestionable.

The development of the field of communication studies provides another successful example. In the history of communication studies, "no process has been more important to the development of the field than its integration into journalism schools and speech departments" (Delia, 1987, p. 73). With respect to what happens to different research approaches in the integration process, Schramm (1963) concludes,

Expectation is not that quantitative research will crowd out qualitative or that the two will necessarily live in worlds of their own, but rather they will go forward together on the road to an adequate theory of communication. (Cited by Delia, 1987, p. 77)

It is noted that the field of communication studies today has reached a high level of intellectual convergence or cohesion (Rogers & Chaffee, 1993). But it has not yet

established its status as an academic discipline. Ironically, the establishment of its disciplinary status depends on the level of intellectual cohesion of its subfields, such as political, interpersonal, mass, instructional, and intercultural communication (Swanson, 1993). Thus, establishing intellectual cohesion in the field of political communication study is necessary not only for the needs of its own field, but also for those of communication studies as a whole.

In the field of political communication research, both rhetorical criticism and social-scientific analysis make important contributions, but neither of them establishes hegemony. These two dominant perspectives should work together and benefit from each other and, at the same time, incorporate other possible alternative perspectives. It is predictable that the richness of the rhetorical criticism tradition (such as the studies of persuasion and political process) can provide helpful insights for study based on the social-scientific approach. Some attempts have been successfully made. For example, Hart (1984) used a computer program (DICTION) to study how media coverage of presidents may influence the presidents' use of language, and Kaid and her associates applied both rhetorical analysis and empirical analysis methods to study the 1996 presidential debates—the former focusing on the content of the debates and the latter examining the viewers' responses.

On the map (Fig. 4.3), the second subgroup in Group 1 is a bridge connecting two opposite fragments (the first subgroup in Group 1 and Group 3). The relatively short distance between the first and the second subgroup in Group 1, and between the second subgroup in Group 1 and Group 3, indicates that the intellectual exchange between these groups reaches a relatively higher level. One apparent explanation of this fact is that in the second subgroup in Group 1, communication scholars are sharing their works with scholars from political science. Thus, as a result of "cross-fertilization," the distance between two different perspectives becomes shorter. In other words, the cross-fertilization of disciplines or fields can also help the integrating process. The intellectual exchange is thus increased, which has positive impact on the field's intellectual integrating process.

The intellectual integration in the field is not a theory-building process; thus, the intellectual cohesion of the field does not suggest the existence of some "grand theory" that embraces all kinds of approaches utilized in political communication research (Nimmo & Swanson, 1990). In fact, that kind of theory probably cannot be developed. Intellectual cohesion makes the field at large "more easily confront the kinds of broad generalizations about political communication that seem to be implied in the field's research taken as a whole . . ." (p. 22).

In sum, using the method of author cocitation analysis, this study presents a quantitative examination of the intellectual relationship among scholars in the field of political communication. The findings of this study are considered complementary to other traditional qualitative reviews of the field. In other words, a complete understanding of the intellectual structure of the field cannot be established without the integration of both.

There are at least two immediate contributions of this study to the field. First, it provides convincing evidence to support previous qualitative studies. Fragmentation exists in political communication research; scholars with different academic backgrounds have their own particular research approaches to studying certain subjects in the field; and scholars do not exchange information as much as they should, and in this sense, scholars are intellectually separate and limited within the borders of each fragment.

Second, beyond the general scope of the traditional review essays on the field, this study, through the mapping, statistically documents scholars' differences in their scholarly commitment and the interdisciplinary cross-fertilization and its effect on political communication research. The mapping helps scholars trace and understand various traditions that originated the field. The establishment of this understanding is the basis for scholars to develop political communication further into a cohesive field that can encompass scholars with different epistemologies, research subjects, research agendas, and other commitments.

Cocited author mapping, as one of the multiple indicators being employed to describe the intellectual structure of political communication research, complements and cross-validates other studies and itself has become a research approach in the field of political communication. The study of political communication is no longer a group of irrelevant research programs in various disciplines. Political communication has evolved into a field characterized by its various methodologies based on pluralistic theoretic perspectives. The intellectual cohesion is vital, for the field is in a fragmented territory with fluid boundaries.

As the field becomes larger and more complex, political communication scholars need to review the field's past, assess its current status, and discuss its future direction. Review and synthesis of studies in the field through either qualitative/subjective or quantitative/objective methods should be regularly featured in our journals (such as *Political Communication*) and other publications. In the past, the field has benefited from this type of intellectual practice. Today, this kind of self-reflection should be considered a sign of the field's stability and maturity.

## APPENDIX A

### Steps in Author Cocitation Analysis

1. Author Selection\*
  - a. Directories/political communication divisions in the ICA, NCA, and APSA
  - b. Author search in ComIndex/publications more than 10
  - c. Consultation with leading researchers, other review articles, author's personal knowledge
2. Cocitation Frequency Retrieval
  - a. Database search: S CR = CHAFFEE, S?
  - b. Database search: S CR = MCCOMBS, M?
  - c. Use a special computer program to determine the cocitation frequencies: [CR = CHAFFEE, S? and CR = MCCOMBS, M?].
3. Composition of Raw Citation Matrix and Conversion to Correlation Matrix
  - a. The cell values = the cocitation frequencies.
  - b. Compute the Pearson product-moment correlations.
4. Statistical Analysis of Correlation Matrix
  - a. Cluster analysis of the correlation matrix
  - b. Multidimensional scaling analysis
5. Interpretation of Statistical Results

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\* a, b, and c here were first used in a 1996 study; the same group of authors was chosen for the current study.

## APPENDIX B

### Selected Authors for This Study and the Symbols Representing Them

a1/ Adams, William C.	k2/ Kepplinger, Hans Mathias
a2/ Andrews, James R.	l1/ Larson, Charles U.
a3/ Atkin, Charles	l2/ Lemert, James B
a4/ Atwood, L. Erwin	m1/ Medhurst, Martin J.
b1/ Beasley, Maurine	m2/ McCombs, Maxwell E.
b2/ Becker, Lee B.	m3/ Mcleod, Jack M.
b3/ Bennett, W. Lance	m4/ Murray, Michael D.
b4/ Blankenship, Jane	n1/ Nimmo, Dan
b5/ Blumler, Jay G.	o1/ O'Keefe, Garrett J.
b6/ Bormann, Ernest G.	p1/ Paletz, David L.
c1/ Chaffee, Steven H.	p2/ Patterson, Thomas
d1/ Denton, Robert	p3/ Perry, David K.
e1/ Entman, Robert M.	p4/ Pfau, Michael
e2/ Erickson, Keith V.	p5/ Powell, Larry
g1/ Garramone, Gina	r1/ Reese, Stephen D.
g2/ Graber, Doris A.	r2/ Rubin, Alan M.
g3/ Gregg, Richard B.	s1/ Shaw, Donald L.
g4/ Gronbeck, Bruce E.	s2/ Shoemaker, Pamela J.
h1/ Hahn, Dan F.	s3/ Simons, Herbert W.
h2/ Hart, Roderick P.	s4/ Stevenson, Robert L.
h3/ Hellweg, Susan A.	s5/ Swanson, David L.
h4/ Hofstetter, C. Richard	t1/ Trent, Judith
j1/ Jamieson, Kathleen H.	w1/ Weaver, David H.
j2/ Jeffres, Leo W.	w2/ Whitney, D. Charles
j3/ Jensen, Klaus Bruhn	z1/ Zarefsky, David
k1/ Kaid, Lynda L.	

## APPENDIX C

### Three-Step Process for Author Selection Used by Lin (1997)

First, primary scholars' names were obtained from the rosters of the Political Communication Divisions in the ICA Membership Directory (1996), the NCA Membership Directory (1996), and the APSA (American Political Science Association) directory (1994–1996). These three divisions consisted of a total of 1,494 members, with 386, 823, and 285 members, respectively. There was a small number of overlapped members who joined at least two organizations. Although other membership directories (such as that of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication) could also be examined, most political communication scholars were probably affiliated with one of the above three because there was no political communication division existing in other associations. The selection in this stage



was based on “face validity”—the chosen authors, by joining the divisions, claimed that they were related to the study of political communication.

Second, the names identified in the first step were used as authors’ names to be searched for in the ComIndex Database (Version 3.1.0). Comindex provides indexes to articles published in 71 current and previous communication journals. ComIndex offers a relatively complete set of data. The author’s name search determined how many articles each member has published in communication-related journals since the 1970s. The titles of articles displayed after each search provide a general indication of the relevance of the articles to the study of political communication. To obtain usable numbers of citations of each author for later cocitation analysis, the criterion was that a member had to have published at least 10 articles related to the study of political communication to be included in the final author pool. In other words, the threshold number of articles published in the field for an author was 10. This criterion selected relatively well-established authors in the field; some younger scholars who were new in the field and without significant amount of publications would not be included.

Third, because some influential members might publish primarily books or book chapters rather than journal articles, or publish in journals not indexed in ComIndex (e.g., some journals in political science and sociology), these members might be left out if the selection was based only on the number of articles published (ComIndex provides only article indexes of communication journals). Thus, a complementary criterion was added at this step—a combination of consultation with leading researchers in the field, other review articles, and author’s personal knowledge to finalize the author pool. After going through this three-step selection, a total of 51 authors was chosen for the study. (See Appendix B for the list.)

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# Design and Creation of a Controlled Vocabulary for Political Communication

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## DEVELOPMENT OF CONTROLLED VOCABULARIES

Lists of subject headings, bibliographic classification schemes, and thesauri are the major types of controlled vocabularies, and all such vocabularies are subsets of the lexicon of a natural language. Vocabulary control is the process of organizing a list of terms (a) to indicate which of two or more synonymous terms is authorized for use, (b) to distinguish between homographs, and (c) to indicate hierarchical and associative relationships among terms in the context of a thesaurus or subject heading list (National Information Standards Organization [NISO], 1994). Subject headings in alphabetical order were the earliest attempts to control vocabulary or provide an authority list for use in subject catalogs and printed indexes. The terms in the lists were often precoordinated for multiple and related concepts, and this is a characteristic of subject headings that distinguishes them from thesaurus descriptors (Coates, 1960; Foskett, 1982; Pettee, 1946; Roberts, 1984; Spärk Jones, 1972). An authority list gives the subject headings established for a particular catalog and the cross-references necessary to lead a user to the preferred heading.

In 1895, the American Library Association published the first authoritative list of subject headings and the principles and rules used to prepare the list. The Library of Congress began publishing its *List of Subject Headings* in 1911, and this helped establish the pattern for vocabulary control with the main topic subdivided (Lancaster, 1972, p. 15). The list, published annually, is currently in its 26th edition and is used throughout the world in all types of information retrieval systems (Library of Congress, 2003). It is considered the standard for library cataloging and reference services.



As the early lists evolved, subheadings, compound headings, phrase headings, and other devices were precoordinated and assigned to documents during indexing to provide more specificity. The types of documents being indexed also expanded from written and printed materials in paper or microform to nonprint media and three-dimensional objects or realia.

Before 1940, information retrieval systems were precoordinate and usually in the form of card catalogs and printed indexes. The arrangement of the topics were alphabetical or, when used with a classification scheme, a classified sequence. Lancaster (1972, pp. 5–7) noted the important distinctions between precoordinate and postcoordinate systems and between enumerative and synthetic vocabularies. Precoordinate systems may use vocabularies that are only enumerative or both enumerative and synthetic. An enumerative vocabulary lists the terms an indexer is required to use to represent the subject of documents. Postcoordinate systems are synthetic because the vocabulary includes rules to permit the indexer or end user to combine terms for more specificity.

Information retrieval has complex procedures, and central to all of them is the idea of classes. Documents are assigned in a consistent manner to classes that have a label that is used as the index term. A set of the index terms is the index language. Large classes provide high recall; small classes provide high precision. Requests for documents in systems that use a controlled vocabulary improves precision. Natural language searching in full-text databases allows users to search on word fragments, but problems with synonyms, homographs, generic searches, and ambiguous and spurious relations between words reduce effectiveness. Using a controlled vocabulary with natural language searching provides the best results. The research literature that developed on all aspects of subject analysis detailed methods for designing and using controlled vocabularies (see, e.g., Dym, 1985; Foskett, 1982; Lancaster, 1972, 1986, 1998; Milstead, 1984; Soergel, 1974; Vickery, 1960). For a comprehensive review and analysis of the development of information retrieval see Spärk Jones and Willett (1997).

Hans Peter Luhn was acknowledged as the first person to discuss the thesaurus concept, and the first thesaurus used to improve information retrieval in postcoordinate systems was developed by the Du Pont organization in 1959 (Krooks & Lancaster, 1993; Lancaster, 1972). A decade later, several thesauri were available in engineering, education, and medicine. One of the most successful was *Medical Subject Headings* (MeSH) (National Library of Medicine, 2002), designed for the National Library of Medicine's MEDLARS machine-based system. It has a hierarchical structure and a complex system of relationships; it is in continuous revision and accepted as the standard for medical literature. Continuing research in information science has established the thesaurus as an effective tool that leads to improvement of retrieval (Aitchison, Gilchrist, & Bawden, 2000; Gilchrist, 1971; Green, 1996; Joyce & Needham, 1997; Nielson, 1998).

## **Purpose and Use**

Thesauri are used by indexers and by searchers of a database. When the database is developed in-house, indexing and searching are often performed by the same specialists. When the database is compiled for use as a commercial on-line retrieval service, the thesaurus is used by indexers. Users who understand the importance of the thesaurus in retrieval use it when it is made available in print or electronic

form, but a better tool for this is the search thesaurus. A search thesaurus provides more assistance in searching a free-text database by suggesting additional terms for expanding the query and by providing a large entry vocabulary (Aitchison et al., 2000).

It is widely agreed that the major purposes and uses of a thesaurus are (a) to provide a way to translate the natural language of authors, indexers, and users into a controlled vocabulary, (b) to promote consistency in the assignment of index terms, (c) to indicate semantic relationships among terms, (d) to serve as a searching aid in retrieval, (e) to provide for synonym control, (f) to provide a map of the concepts that structure a specific field of knowledge, (g) to provide a standard vocabulary for a specific field of knowledge, and (h) to provide classified hierarchies to broaden or narrow search queries (Aitchison et al., 2000; Lancaster, 1972, 1986; Milstead, 1998a, 1998b; NISO, 1994).

We are moving away from subject access created in-house and without the use of standards to methods that use a systematic and well designed approach based on standards. This cooperative effort is justified by the increased use of collections and commercial databases, ability to share resources through networks, and availability of consistent and reliable vocabularies in specific fields. This approach helps the researcher who needs materials from several collections and eases the burden of finding and learning in-house subject lists.

## Vocabulary Problems

There is a basic assumption that indexers analyze the concepts in documents and translate these into a set of terms from a controlled vocabulary. These terms represent a summary of what the document is about. Several authors examined the meaning of aboutness and agreed that aboutness to an indexer may be different from aboutness to a searcher (Hutchins, 1997; Lancaster, 1998; Maron, 1977). Users want documents relevant to particular information needs, and they express these needs in natural language. The problem is which documents are to be retrieved relative to any given query. Even with a controlled vocabulary, the information retrieval system may not be able to match a user request with results that are pertinent to an information need. Maron pointed out that aboutness is not related to indexer understanding but to the linguistic behavior of asking for information and the nonlinguistic behavior of searching for information. Aboutness is a key factor, but comprehensibility, credibility, importance, timeliness, and style are also important (Maron, 1977).

Studies on naming behavior indicated the difficulty of the vocabulary problem. Whether indexers are naming categories for classing documents, domain experts are naming ideas within a field, or users are providing keywords for potential retrieval, there was little agreement (Collantes, 1995; Furnas, Landauer, Gomez, & Dumais, 1987).

The vocabulary and its structure, the rules for its application, the user assistance provided through scope notes explaining coverage or specialized usage, definitions of terms, and history notes providing the date a descriptor were approved for use and a history of changes is often referred to as an indexing language. Indexing language devices within a thesaurus improve both recall and precision in searching. As stated by NISO (1994), "For example, they improve precision by defining the scope of terms; they increase recall by retrieving documents that employ different

terms for the same concept” (p. 1). Designers may not be providing enough support through these indexing language devices. Hudon (1996) developed a model for using terminological definitions in scope notes to improve user understanding and Green (1996) proposed expanding the relational structures within thesauri.

It is clear that the interdisciplinary structure of the social sciences requires a large, complex vocabulary and the cost of constructing such a retrieval tool is one reason that development of a comprehensive tool is not progressing. Rees-Potter (1992) noted the following characteristics of the social sciences: (a) high use of popular language, (b) lack of precise definitions, (c) subjective and theory-based concepts, (d) high use of technical terms, (e) importance of contextual information, and (f) high use of compound phrases. Aitchison et al. (2000) described a “proposed descriptor bank consisting of merged thesauri in the social sciences” (p. 177). It is practical to consider the needs of particular disciplines or fields within the social sciences by designing vocabularies according to standards that can stand alone or be merged into a larger vocabulary. It is also necessary to convince social science scholars that improved access to information in social science fields is for their benefit and not just for the use of information specialists.

## Political Communication

As noted above, one purpose of a thesaurus is to provide a map of the concepts that structure a specific field of knowledge. The vocabulary described in this chapter began with political advertising materials and is expanding to include other areas within political communication. *Guidelines for the Construction, Format, and Management of Monolingual Thesauri* (NISO, 1994) is the standard applied in the United States and the one guiding scope, form, and choice of descriptors, guidelines for compound terms, relationships among terms, and formats. Their are equivalent standards published by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO; 1986) and the British Standards Institution (BSI; 1987).

The launching of *Political Communication* under new sponsorship by the American Political Science Association and the International Communication Association added new dimensions to the field and provided support for further collaboration (Graber, 1993, pp. vii–viii). Franklin (1995) emphasized the broadness and range of political communication “from political cartoons to censorship, from central government advertising to public service broadcasting” (p. 226).

Political advertising was defined by Kaid (1981) as “the communication process by which a source (usually a political candidate or party) purchases the opportunity to expose receivers through mass channels to political messages with the intended effect of influencing their political attitudes, beliefs, and/or behaviors” (p. 250).

Television is recognized as the dominant form of communication in the political system. News coverage, debates, and talk shows are important, but it is television commercials that make up a substantial amount of the content used by other media and media formats in discussing political campaigns. A natural consequence of the growing importance of television advertising is an increase in scholarly research (Kaid & Bystrom, 1999).

A major difference with political advertising materials is that access for scholars must consider textual, audio, and visual content because of the large collections of television news, debates, and advertising. The concern about consistency in indexing is well documented in the literature for text, and Lancaster (1998, pp. 62–76)

discussed the major research studies. Scholars are only beginning to investigate consistency problems for visual materials. Both Markey (1984) and Enser (1995) suggested that it is very low. However, Turner (1995) found a high degree of correspondence between the terms participants gave when asked to supply words and phrases that could be used for later retrieval of the shots seen on research tapes and the terms assigned to those same shots by professional indexers.

The critical need for improved subject access to image collections began with research in indexing art images (Besser, 1990; Enser, 1995; Jorgensen, 1996; Shatford, 1986). It is generally agreed that image collections need to be analyzed to include ways for users to determine what the image exemplifies (the genre or form) and what the image is *of or about* (Krause, 1988; Layne, 1994; Shatford, 1986). All images (stock shots, still frames, and moving picture elements) have *ofness*, and finished products or long sequences of shots have a context so *aboutness* can be addressed. Turner (1994) discussed the need for vocabularies to provide terms for both, but *ofness* and *aboutness* are not distinguished in most vocabularies. *Ofness* is the naming of objects or events in the item, and *aboutness* is determined by interpreting themes, activities, and events in completed products. There is also the intrinsic meaning or content and knowledge of the subject domain is essential to make these interpretations.

Indexing for visual materials differs from text because many characteristics of the image are included to provide access: shape, color, texture, camera angles, geographical descriptors, indications of time, and, of course, subject description, to name a few. It is understandable why many organizations create only summary descriptions of compilations and whole productions (Turner, 1994).

Turner (1994, pp. 6–7) also addressed subject access for ordinary images, moving picture elements, simple images, and complex images. His definitions apply to finished products of political advertising materials as follows.

1. Simple images with the candidate, anchor, or another person talking directly to the camera on one or two issues
2. Complex images with two candidates or other persons debating or interacting on several issues

## METHODS OF VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT

Several approaches to developing vocabularies are detailed in the literature (Aitchison et al., 2000; Lancaster, 1972; Milstead, 1998b; NISO, 1994; Paice, 1991; Spiteri, 1999). The committee approach gathers experts in the subject domain to agree on a list of the key terms in the field. Experts in thesaurus design work with the subject domain experts to build the relationships among the terms. The empirical approach involves either a deductive or an inductive method. In the deductive method, terms are extracted from documents by humans or computers prior to indexing. When a sufficient number of terms has been collected, the terms are then reviewed by a group of experts in the subject domain and experts in thesaurus design. Together they identify terms that represent the broadest classes and then allocate remaining terms to these classes on the basis of their logical relationships, so that the hierarchies tend to be established on a broader-to-narrower basis. In the inductive method, new terms are selected for potential inclusion in the thesaurus as they are encountered in documents. Vocabulary control is applied from the

outset as each term is assigned to one or more broader classes that are constructed on an ad hoc basis at an early stage. The thesaurus is therefore established on a narrower-to-broader term basis. Thesaurus construction is regarded from the outset as a continuous operation with assistance from subject experts formed into an editorial board.

It is more common to use a combination of approaches at one stage or another during the construction of a thesaurus. For example, hierarchies of terms that were first established inductively may later be examined from a deductive viewpoint. Both techniques are essentially empirical, and it is accepted from the beginning that terms and hierarchies need to be checked frequently to ensure consistent application of principles (NISO, 1994, p. 27).

### **Existing Collections of Materials and Thesauri**

In order to avoid duplication of work, the indexing techniques used in several collections were examined.

1. Baylor Collections of Political Materials (Baylor University Libraries 2002)
2. Carl Albert Center Congressional Archives (University of Oklahoma, 2002)
3. Motion Picture/Broadcasting/Recorded Sound Division (Library of Congress, 2002)
4. Public Affairs Laboratory, Video Archives (Purdue University, 2002)
5. Media Archives (National Archives and Records Administration, 2002)
6. Television News Archive (Vanderbilt University, 2002)

It is also important to identify existing thesauri covering related domains of knowledge. The Thesaurus Clearinghouse at the University of Toronto covers many subject areas, but no thesaurus of political advertising or political communication was found.

The primary collection used was the Political Commercial Archive at the University of Oklahoma. This is the largest collection of political radio and television commercials in the world and the only collection that covers all levels of political campaigning. Containing over 66,000 film, audio, and videotape recordings of commercials aired between 1936 and the present, the Archive is a unique historical resource. The earliest radio material dates from 1936, and the earliest television is from 1950, the first year television was used in political campaigns. The archive contains materials from every presidential election, over 1,200 gubernatorial and lieutenant gubernatorial races, nearly 2600 senate and congressional races, and thousands of statewide, local, and district elections (Kaid & Haynes, 1998). Kaid and Haynes collaborated on organizing and describing these materials through two databases (Haynes, 2000a, 2000b; Haynes, Kaid, & Rand, 1996; Haynes, Saye, & Kaid, 1994). The item-level database has 45,000 records, and there are just over 2,400 collection-level records in the national database, the Online Computer Library Center.

The coding scheme created for the item-level records includes production techniques and spot characteristics developed by Kaid and Davidson (1986) that contribute to the *ofness* and the *aboutness* in the commercial. Catalogers assign at least five topical subjects from the natural language used in the commercial. An alphabetical local subject heading authority list was created and maintained

using the topics extracted from the materials. This was a necessary preliminary step before work on designing and creating the *Political Advertising Thesaurus* (Haynes, 2003) could begin using the inductive method of development described above.

*Library of Congress Subject Headings* (Library of Congress, 2003) was used for subject access in the collection-level records. These headings are form headings applied using the guidelines for topical films that are commercials. Headings taken from *Moving Image Materials: Genre Terms* (Yee, 1987) provided standardized terms for genre and form access to all types of moving image materials and as recommended by the National Moving Image Database Standards Committee.

Other resources used were film and video glossaries and dictionaries, Public Affairs Information Service (2002) subject headings, *Political Science Thesaurus II* (Beck, 1979), and *Art and Architecture Thesaurus* (1994). Where possible, and with permission, terms from existing thesauri can be incorporated into the new vocabulary. In particular, the Visual Communication Facet of the *Art and Architecture Thesaurus* contains many terms useful to moving image collections (Getty Research Institute, 2002).

Other fields recorded the authorized form of personal, corporate, and/or geographic names established using *Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules* (2002), United States Board on Geographic Names (2002), the MARC 21 authority (Library of Congress, 1999b), and MARC 21 bibliographic formats (Library of Congress, 1999a). Such headings may be included in thesauri, and the relationships among them indicated through the devices presented in standard (NISO, 1994, p. 2).

## Vocabulary Building

In defining the range and depth of the thesaurus, the boundaries of the subject area are determined and the number of terms and their specificity are considered. The boundaries are often divided into (a) the core area of topics immediately pertinent to the main subject, (b) the fringe area of topics supportive of the main area, and (c) the outside area of topics that support some aspects of the main area. A high level of specificity increases the number of descriptors available and how concepts are defined. It is best to restrict specificity to the core area, because proliferation of such descriptors in the fringe and outside areas may lead to a thesaurus that is difficult and costly to maintain. Literary warrant, frequent occurrence of the concept in the literature, and user warrant, frequent requests for information on the concept, informed the selection of terms (Aitchison et al., 2000; Lancaster, 1972; NISO, 1994).

Candidate terms for the core area were from the political commercials. Each 30- or 60-sec spot were viewed when technical data were recorded and again during cataloging for the item-level database. The local subject heading authority list contained 982 terms that were combined with the production techniques and the spot characteristics. Some of the terms for these techniques and characteristics were expanded to provide more flexibility for searching the special effects that are increasingly found in political commercials. For example, there was one code for animation, computer graphics, or other special effects. Glossaries and dictionaries provide definitions that clearly distinguish: computer-generated graphics, animation with digital effects, patterns or filters, multiple imagery, page flipping, three-dimensional effects, dissolving, and fast or slow motion.

Candidate terms for the fringe area were from selected articles published during the last 10 years in journals considered by subject matter experts to support the broader field of political communication. These journals were as follows.

*Communication Monographs*  
*Communication Research*  
*Communication Research Reports*  
*Communication Studies*  
*Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*  
*Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*  
*Journal of Communication*  
*Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*  
*Political Communication*  
*Public Opinion Quarterly*  
*Social Science Quarterly*  
*Southern Communication Journal*  
*Western Journal of Communication*

Candidate terms for the outside area were from selected articles published during the last 10 years in journals considered by subject matter experts to support related topic areas. These journals were as follows.

*American Historical Review*  
*American Journal of Political Science*  
*American Journal of Sociology*  
*American Political Science Review*  
*Journal of American History*  
*Journal of Film Preservation*  
*Journal of Politics*  
*Midwest Journal of Political Science*  
*Political Science Quarterly*  
*Reviews in American History*  
*Women's Studies in Communication*  
*World Politics*

Other sources for candidate terms included books, conference proceedings, televised debates, radio and television news broadcasts, and user requests for commercials at the Political Commercial Archive.

As terms are selected, their final form is not the focus. The concern is with concepts as they are expressed in the nonstandardized, natural language of the sources. It is from this raw language that candidate terms are identified. Terms not chosen as candidate or preferred terms may be retained as entry language. A large entry language serves users best.

The intellectual decisions are assisted by the use of a word processor and thesaurus management software that follows the standard to assist with building the relationships, tracking changes, and creating print and on-line displays. The raw vocabulary may be gathered into text files and imported into the software; candidate terms may also be entered directly. In either case, individual term records are made for every descriptor and entry term. Records for entry terms may include source notes and date of admission into the thesaurus. For descriptors, the record may contain any or all of the following elements (NISO, 1994, p. 28):

(a) descriptor, (b) source(s) consulted, (c) scope note, (d) synonyms, (e) nondisplayable variations, (f) broader terms, (g) narrower terms, (h) related terms, (i) locally established relationships, (j) category or classification number, and (k) history note.

The building process includes (a) validating conflicting relationships, (b) generating reciprocal relationships, (c) considering multilingual needs, and (d) considering clusters and facets. The steps are not performed in a sequence until completion; each source is studied, terms are maintained and updated, antonyms, synonyms, and compound phrases are carefully considered, and links to terms appearing in a different facet or cluster are determined. The evolution from raw vocabulary to candidate term to preferred term is a validation process.

The standard details the scope, form, and choice of descriptors, and this process requires careful consideration with attention to user needs. In the discussion that follows, selected examples from the standard and the political advertising vocabulary illustrate the building process (NISO, 1994, pp. 3–8). Descriptors are in boldface; an example may apply to more than one illustration.

**Types of Concept.** The concepts represented by the terms need to be grouped by type.

- (a) Things and their physical parts
  - bridges**
  - computers**
  - courts**
- (b) Materials
  - coal**
  - oil**
  - crops**
  - pesticides**
- (c) Activities or processes
  - hunting**
  - indexing**
  - voting**
- (d) Events or occurrences
  - holidays**
  - wars**
  - hurricanes**
  - disasters**
- (e) Properties or states of persons, things, materials, or actions
  - background**
  - competence**
  - prejudice**
  - dignity**
- (f) Disciplines or subject fields
  - political communication**
  - information science**
- (g) Units of measurement
  - hertz**
  - feet**
  - seconds**
  - minutes**



**Unique Entities.** These are expressed as proper nouns in singular form:

**United States Constitution**  
**Magna Carta**  
**Fourth of July**  
**Tiananmen Square**

**Grammatical Form.** Guidance is provided for the preferred grammatical form of descriptors. A noun or noun phrase is preferred to represent a single concept. Noun phrases may be either adjectival or prepositional. Adjectival noun phrases are preferred and are usually precoordinated:

**public broadcasting**  
**living wills**  
**opinion polls**  
**zero tolerance**  
**cold war**

Prepositional noun phrases are usually postcoordinated and restricted to concepts that cannot be formed another way or that are considered idiomatic:

**balance of power**  
**cost of living**  
**freedom of speech**  
**right of petition**  
**right to die**

An alternative to the creation of multiple compound descriptors is to use adjectives as separate descriptors to be precoordinated by the indexer or postcoordinated by the searcher. Adjectives are not used alone because they could be combined with the wrong noun and create false coordination in searching.

**Singular and Plural Forms.** These are based on two categories.

- (a) Plural count nouns—objects or concepts that ask “How many?”

**voters**  
**airports**  
**journalists**  
**mayors**

User warrant may require some of these to be in the singular form:

**campaign**  
**candidate**  
**political party**

- (b) Singular noncount (mass) nouns—materials or substances that ask “How much?”

**coal**  
**debt**  
**water**  
**steel**

**Abstract Concepts.** Abstract Concepts are singular:

- (a) Systems of belief  
**radicalism**  
**communism**  
**socialism**
- (b) Activities or processes  
**offshore drilling**  
**global warming**
- (c) Emotions  
**concern**  
**belligerence**  
**compassion**
- (d) Properties or states  
**worth**  
**empathy**  
**value**
- (e) Disciplines  
**business**  
**journalism**  
**education**

**Qualifiers and Scope Notes.** Descriptors chosen for a particular controlled vocabulary are restricted to selected meanings within that domain. It is best to avoid terms whose meanings overlap in general usage and homographs. However, as discussed above, disciplines in the social sciences frequently use popular terms, slang, jargon, technical terms, and many compound phrases. Parenthetical qualifiers are added to homographs for clarification and are part of the descriptor.

**damage (injury)**  
**damages (law)**

Scope notes are created to restrict or expand descriptors that have overlapping meanings or to provide guidance on term usage. Scope notes may also contain definitions and the source for the definition.

**framing**

**SN: Selecting and highlighting particular aspects of reality by the media**

**Neologisms, Slang, and Jargon.** New or established concepts peculiar to a field are used as descriptors if no widely accepted alternative exists:

**yuppies**  
**spin doctors**

**Compound Terms.** As noted above, the vocabulary is created by breaking it down into single-concept terms. However, there are many compound or multiword terms in natural language that are considered lexemes, that is, words bound together as lexical units not limited to a single word. Deciding how to represent such

terms is one of the most difficult areas in thesaurus construction. The standard provides details on the handling of compound terms (NISO, 1994, pp. 10–13). Compound or multiword terms are established in these circumstances.

- (a) Splitting leads to ambiguity or loss of meaning  
**grass roots**  
**mud slinging**  
**flag burning**
- (b) One component of the term is not relevant to the scope or is vague  
**tax cuts**  
**early release**  
**bandwagon effects**
- (c) The modifier in the term has lost its original meaning  
**boot camps**  
**dark horse candidate**
- (d) The modifier suggests a resemblance to an unrelated thing  
**nuclear freeze**  
**spending freeze**  
**enterprise zones**
- (e) The term contains an adjective that does not define a subclass of the focus  
**acid rain**  
**talking head**  
**radio talk**
- (f) The term is a proper name or includes proper nouns  
**Brady Bill**  
**Endangered Species Act**
- (g) The term is in common use or used in the field as if it were a single concept  
**work ethic**  
**trickle-down economics**  
**deadbeat parents**

Semantic and syntactic factoring techniques are used to break down complex topics. Semantic factoring results in loss of precision during searching, and it is used with care for topics in the core area. Syntactic factoring is used for compound terms that have separate components that can be used alone without loss of meaning. Examples of compound or multiword phrases that are factored are given below. In each example, the nonpreferred phrase is retained as entry vocabulary.

1. Identification with Kennedy mystique—needs to be a combination of the authorized form of the personal name with descriptors expressing certain characteristics  
**PN: Kennedy, John F. (John Fitzgerald), 1917–1963**  
**UF: identification with Kennedy mystique**  
**RT: charisma**  
**RT: halo effect**  
**RT: power**  
**RT: presidency**  
**RT: presidential popularity**

Examples 2 and 3 are topics expressed as several related terms used in the same context:

2. Out-of-state garbage  
**garbage dumps**  
 UF: out-of-state garbage  
 RT: **landfills**  
 RT: **Mobro (garbage barge)**
3. Third-world national interests  
**developing nations**  
 UF: third-world national interests  
 RT: **economic independence**

Example 4 is a topic expressed as related terms and narrow terms:

4. War against organized crime  
**crime**  
 NT: **juvenile delinquency**  
 NT: **organized crime**  
 NT: **victims of crime**  
 RT: **drug traffic**

## Relationships

A thesaurus is a special type of controlled vocabulary with a structure that permits the display of the basic semantic relationships among the terms (NISO, 1994, pp. 13–20). Standard codes and relationship indicators are used to express these. The property of reciprocity requires that every relationship established between term A and term B has a corresponding one from term B to term A. Three relationship types are established: equivalence, hierarchical, and associative.

**Equivalence Relationship.** The equivalence relationship is between preferred and nonpreferred terms that represent the same concept. The descriptor (preferred term) is chosen and cross-references are made from any synonym or near synonym that the user may consider appropriate in the domain of the vocabulary. The preferred term is used for (UF) the nonpreferred term. When the nonpreferred term is selected during the search process, a USE reference is made to the preferred term.

<b>boss politics</b>	UF	bossism
<b>hazardous waste</b>	UF	toxic waste
<b>nuclear energy</b>	UF	atomic energy
	UF	atomic power
<b>conservative economics</b>	UF	Reaganomics
<b>Palestinian–Israeli conflict</b>	UF	Arab–Israeli conflict
		Israeli–Arab conflict
		Islam and politics, West Bank
		Islam and politics, Gaza Strip
		Israeli–Palestinian conflict
		Palestinian uprising

**Hierarchical Relationship.** In this relationship there are levels of superordination and subordination. The superordinate descriptor represents a class or a whole, and the subordinate descriptors refer to its members or parts. Reciprocity is indicated by using the BT (broader term) and NT (narrower term) labels. The

hierarchical relationship covers three logically different and mutually exclusive situations.

1. The generic relationship
2. The whole-part relationship
3. The instance relationship

The generic relationship identifies the link between a class and its members.

BT **voters**  
 NT **protest voters**

In this example, some members of the class “voters” are “protest voters” and all “protest voters” are “voters.” Other members of the class include **issue voters**, **independent voters**, and **undecided voters**. All members of the class must meet the test.

The whole–part relationship is used when one concept is included in another and the descriptors can be organized into logical hierarchies, with the whole treated as a broader term. The standard gives examples of four types of whole–part relationships, but others should be created as needed.

1. Systems and organs of the body
2. Geographic locations
3. Disciplines or fields of discourse
4. Hierarchical organizational, corporate, social, or political structures

The instance relationship identifies the link between a general category of things or events (common noun) and an individual instance of that category (proper name).

BT **state capitals**  
 NT **Oklahoma City**  
 NT **Santa Fe**

When descriptors are arranged in hierarchies in a thesaurus, node labels may be used to indicate the division among a set of descriptors that share a broader term. Node labels may also be used to group categories of related terms in the alphabetic section of a thesaurus. The function of a node label is similar to that of broader term (BT), but node labels are not used as indexing terms. The nodes used in the *Art and Architecture Thesaurus* (1994) to organize people and organizations merit study, revision, and application to other thesauri. For example,

people  
 ⟨groups of people⟩...  
 ⟨people by age group⟩...  
 ⟨people by family relationship⟩...  
 ⟨people by gender⟩...  
 ⟨people by occupation⟩...  
 ⟨people by ideology⟩...  
 ⟨political activity⟩...

**Associative Relationship.** The associative relationship is between descriptors that are neither equivalent nor hierarchical, but they are semantically or conceptually associated. By making an explicit link between the terms, both indexers and users are provided with suggestions for additional descriptors. Whenever one term is used, the other should always be implied within the common frames of reference shared by the users of the thesaurus. One of the terms is often an essential component in explaining or defining the other.

<b>export</b>	RT	<b>import</b>
<b>jails</b>	RT	<b>prisons</b>
<b>radio talk</b>	RT	<b>call-in programs</b>
<b>persuasion</b>	RT	<b>propaganda</b>

### Subject Categories

In the *Political Advertising Thesaurus* (Haynes, 2002c), there are currently 2,236 terms grouped into six categories of subjects (facets): topical, personal name, corporate name, geographic name, production techniques, and spot characteristics. Proper names of persons, institutions, organizations, places, and certain titles are formed as described above. As the vocabulary expands to include other fields within political communication, additional categories and a notation scheme need to be considered. Elements from the production techniques and spot characteristics are being reviewed and refined with elements from Fédération International des Archives du Film/International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF; 1992) specialized dictionaries, glossaries, and lists of technical terms and genre.

Examples of production techniques currently used are as follows.

**audio track**  
**format**  
**original condition**  
**physical description**  
**tape speed**

Examples of spot characteristics currently used are as follows.

**district number**  
**endorsement**  
**incumbent**  
**negative advertising**  
**talking head**  
**use of family**

**Personal Names.** *Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules* (2002) call for the use of the name by which the person is commonly known. This could be the name used by the candidate during a campaign(s) or an author, photographer, cameraperson, director, producer, or sponsor. For individuals known by multiple names that are not pseudonyms, the predominant name is used. Different forms of the name used during a campaign or in a commercial are a problem. The way a name appears on campaign material is influenced by the advertising agency and the choice of

slogans for both national and local use. Additionally, the way the name is spoken in a commercial may conflict with the visual use of the name in the same commercial.

At the presidential and congressional level, the identification of an authorized or accepted form of name is easily established if the name is in one of the national name authority files. If no authority record exists, the name by which the person is commonly known is used. Commercials for campaigns for lower levels of government, however, present several problems. At the state and local level, there are many instances where reference material is insufficient to help establish an authorized form of the name when the choice involves different forms of the same name. Examples are as follows.

**Kennedy, John F. (John Fitzgerald), 1917–1963**  
**Eisenhower, Dwight D. (Dwight David), 1890–1969**  
**Gray, Bill**  
**Hutchison, Kay Bailey, 1943–**  
**Smith, H. L.**  
**Smith, Helen Knipe**  
**Smith, Jim**  
**Smith, Jim, 1940–**

**Corporate Names.** These can be names of institutions, organizations, political parties, political action committees, other groups, and titles of laws, treaties, and similar works. Examples are as follows.

**United Nations**  
**American Cancer Society**  
**National Political Party**  
**Foreign Relations Committee**  
**Students for a Democratic Society**  
**North American Free Trade Agreement**  
**Nuclear Test Ban Treaty**

**Geographic Names.** The names of countries, geographic regions, and geographic features are included in this group. The form most familiar to the users of the thesaurus is chosen as the descriptor, and cross-references provided from variant forms. Preference is given to the short form of the official name rather than the popular name. *Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules* (2002) and the United States Board on Geographic Names (2002) are used as the authorities. Examples are as follows.

**Guatemala**  
**Western Europe**  
**Hudson River**  
**Israel**  
**Middle East**

## Displays

The standard suggests that a printed thesaurus include a title page, a table of contents, a comprehensive introduction, and one or more of the following types of display: (a) alphabetical, showing all the immediate relationships of each term; (b) hierarchical, showing a display of all levels of hierarchies; and (c) permuted or rotated, giving access to every word in each descriptor and entry term (NISO, 1994, p. 23). Aitchison et al. (2000) discuss thesaurus displays in more detail and provide useful examples (pp. 95–138). The typical alphabetical display shows all terms, preferred and nonpreferred, scope notes, and one level of relationships. The word-by-word filing system in which a space is significant is preferred by most standards, but letter-by-letter is also used. Figure 1 is an extract from the alphabetical display of the *Political Advertising Thesaurus* (Haynes, 2003).

political ads USE: political advertising	<b>political communication</b> BT: <b>mass communication</b> NT: <b>drama rhetoric</b> <b>political advertising</b> <b>political discourse</b> RT: <b>debate formation</b> <b>political debate</b> <b>political party advertising</b> <b>presidential debates</b> <b>presidential speeches</b>
<b>political advertising</b> SN: Def: "the communication process by which a source (usually a political candidate or party) purchases the opportunity to expose receivers through mass channels to political messages with the intended effect of influencing their political attitudes, beliefs, and/or behaviors" (Kaid, 1981, p. 250) UF: political ads BT: <b>political communication</b> NT: <b>political commercial</b> RT: <b>advertising industry</b> <b>campaign advertising</b> <b>political propaganda</b>	<b>political conspirator</b> BT: <b>political activists</b>
<b>political agitator</b> BT: <b>political activists</b>	<b>political control</b>
<b>political argument</b> RT: <b>political debate</b>	<b>political culture</b>
<b>political boss</b> RT: <b>boss politics</b>	<b>political debate</b> RT: <b>political argument</b> <b>political commercial</b> <b>political communication</b>
political celebrity USE: <b>political elites</b>	<b>political discourse</b> BT: <b>political communication</b>
<b>political commercial</b> UF: political spot BT: <b>political advertising</b> RT: <b>political debate</b>	<b>political elites</b> UF: political celebrity
<b>political commercial type</b> SC: sc SN: Relates to the dominant type of commercial. NT: <b>combination political commercial</b> <b>image political commercial</b> <b>issue political commercial</b> <b>negative political commercial</b>	<b>political generations</b> UF: young generation of politicians
	political journalists USE: <b>journalists</b>
	<b>political liberty</b> BT: <b>freedom</b> NT: <b>right of opposition</b> RT: <b>freedom of inquiry</b>
	<b>political participation</b> RT: <b>voting</b>

FIG. 5.1. Extract from the *Political Advertising Thesaurus* (Haynes, 2003): alphabetical display.



<b>voters</b>	war against drugs
NT1: <b>at-risk voters</b>	USE: <b>drug war</b>
NT1: <b>independent voter</b>	
NT1: <b>issue voters</b>	war on drugs
NT1: <b>marginal voter</b>	USE: <b>drug war</b>
NT1: <b>protest voters</b>	
NT1: <b>third party voters</b>	<b>warning labels</b>
NT1: <b>undecided voter</b>	
<b>voting</b>	<b>Washington Post poll</b>
BT1: <b>electoral participation</b>	wasted vote
NT1: <b>absentee voting</b>	USE: <b>third party voters</b>
NT1: <b>compulsory voting</b>	
NT1: <b>confidence voting</b>	<b>water</b>
NT1: <b>geographic voting</b>	NT1: <b>dams</b>
NT1: <b>group voting</b>	NT1: <b>water rights</b>
NT1: <b>online voting</b>	
NT1: <b>plural voting</b>	<b>water conservation</b>
NT1: <b>political party ticket voting</b>	RT: <b>water supply</b>
NT1: <b>proxy voting</b>	
NT1: <b>split ticket voting</b>	<b>water pollution</b>
NT1: <b>straight ticket voting</b>	BT1: <b>pollution</b>
NT1: <b>urban voting</b>	BT2: <b>environmental health</b>
NT1: <b>write in voting</b>	BT2: <b>public health</b>
RT: <b>bipartisan voting</b>	NT1: <b>acid rain</b>
RT: <b>candidate preference voter</b>	RT: <b>industrial waste</b>
RT: <b>ideological voter</b>	
RT: <b>nonvoting</b>	<b>water power</b>
RT: <b>political participation</b>	BT1: <b>energy</b>
	BT1: <b>hydraulics</b>
<b>voting behavior</b>	NT1: <b>hydroelectric power</b>
NT1: <b>class voter</b>	
RT: <b>election interest</b>	<b>water purification</b>
	UF: <b>water quality</b>
<b>voting districts</b>	BT1: <b>sanitation</b>
	BT1: <b>water supply</b>
<b>voting record</b>	BT2: <b>natural resources</b>
NT1: <b>congressional voting record</b>	BT2: <b>public utilities</b>
<b>voting rights</b>	water quality
RT: <b>freedom of speech</b>	USE: <b>water purification</b>
<b>vouchers</b>	<b>Watergate Affair, 1972-1974</b>
RT: <b>school choice</b>	SC: <b>CN Corporate Name</b>

FIG. 5.2. Extract from the *Political Advertising Thesaurus* (Haynes, 2003): hierarchical display.

The hierarchical display is generated from the alphabetical display and shows preferred terms in the context of the full hierarchy. Figure 2 is an extract from the hierarchical display of the *Political Advertising Thesaurus*. (Haynes, 2003).

Systematic displays and hierarchies are also called classified or subject displays, and these show the general structure or macroclassification. The logical relationships between hierarchies and among groups of terms are clarified. This type of display must have a systematic section and an alphabetical section linked through the notation assigned to the subject groups or facets. It is particularly useful for large vocabularies with many facets covering several disciplines or subject fields. It should be possible to display a hierarchy at various levels.

pensions	female political images
congressional pensions	image political commercial
people	Independent Political Party
groups of people	issue political commercial
informing young people	negative political commercial
man of the people	people by political activity
people by age group	political accountability
people by family relationship	political commercial
people by gender	political discourse
people by ideology	political elites
people by occupation	political generations
people by political activity	political insiders
person	political journalists
third-person effect	Republican Political Party
petition	ruling political party
right of petition	strong political party identifier
physicians	third political party
women physicians	traditional political party
physics	politicians
nuclear physics	appointed politicians
pilots	career politicians
women air pilots	young generation of politicians
plan	politics
defense plan	boss politics
Marshall Plan	cultural politics
tax plan	gender politics
plants	global politics
atomic power plants	international politics
electric power plants	media influences on politics
nuclear power plants	media politics
power plants	partisan politics
pledge	press politics
campaign pledge	protest politics
pledge of allegiance	unification politics
pluralism	wedge issue politics
Information pluralism	world politics
plurality	polling
virtual plurality	polling methodology
Political	polling reliability
Alliance Political Party	polls
American Independent Political Party	deliberative opinion polls
Authoritarian Political Party	media polls
broadcast political talk	opinion polls
Conservative Political Party	public opinion polls
Democratic Political Party	tracking polls

FIG. 5.3. Extract from the *Political Advertising Thesaurus* (Haynes, 2003): rotated display.

The permuted or rotated display is considered a separate index that makes multiword terms available to the user regardless of where they occur. These are either a Key-Word-In-Context (KWIC) or Key-Word-Out-of-Context (KWOC) type. Figure 3 is an extract from the rotated display of the *Political Advertising Thesaurus* (Haynes, 2003).

Graphic displays in the form of two-dimensional figures bring related terms into physical proximity and permit a quick view of associations. Tree structures, arrowgraphs, and terminographs or box charts are included in thesauri, but they have not found wide acceptance. The standards suggest improvement is needed for graphic displays taking into account the subject domain and search habits of users.

## **Review, Testing, and Maintenance**

It is critical to evaluate a draft of the thesaurus using subject specialists and information studies experts to verify core terms, suggest additional core terms, and identify terms in related areas. Suggestions for changes to terms and their relationships are solicited. After review and revision, a pilot version of the new thesaurus is tested using a series of trial runs with scholars and students from appropriate disciplines. A published copy is deposited with the appropriate clearinghouse. Procedures for adding, modifying, and deleting terms are detailed in the standards and how the vocabulary will be updated needs to be considered early in the design phase.

## **Cooperative Work**

Building the vocabulary is a detailed process even for small vocabularies with subject domain limitations. The problem of access to the political communication discipline requires continued research and development through collaborative projects. The leading associations would contribute in different ways according to their strengths. It is well known that cooperative work reduces costs and labor, permits sharing of databases and other resources, provides standard terminology for networked resources, and shares the indexing task (Lancaster, 1998). Soergel (1974) suggested that organizations could develop a source thesaurus designed specifically to the interests of the user group to be served. A source thesaurus is not an indexing tool but a data bank from which indexing tools can be extracted for each participating organization. An organization or subdiscipline could develop the terms that pertain to its core vocabulary and use the source thesaurus for other areas.

## **NEW DIRECTIONS**

Users should have access to any vocabulary aids if they want them, so interfaces need to be designed to be available to users on demand during full-text retrieval to help with query expansion and other tasks. There is a recognized need in the artificial intelligence community to include a rich semantic tool in software design. A thesaurus provides information on how terms are used within the system, and linguistic ontologies and lexical ontologies would address the semantics of natural language processing in dynamic ways (Aitchison et al., 2000; Anderson & Rowley, 1992; Kristensen, 1993; Milstead, 1998a; WordNet, 2002). Researchers in natural language processing are considering how users interact with free text and how to improve precision by representing deeper meaning within text. These approaches require collaboration among many specialists, including linguistic scholars. Developments in concept mapping and semantic networks provide new areas for research on how users interact with these displays and if they improve information retrieval (Harter, 1996; Shiri, A. A., Revie, C., & Chowdhury, G., 2002). Usability studies concerning search behavior and cognitive learning styles in the context of interactive searching of controlled vocabularies would improve design.

Improvements in multimedia information retrieval hold promise of providing access to users in ways barely glimpsed now. High-level metadata standards for

multimedia have not been studied, but recent work is helping to establish a theoretical basis on which standards can be built (Maybury, 1997; Nicholson, D., 2003; Turner, G. M., Hudon, M., & Devin, Y., 2002). A significant contribution in this area is the Moving Image Collections project sponsored by the Association of Moving Image Archivists (AMIA) and the Library of Congress. Of particular interest is the progress in designing a flexible but standardized metadata architecture for multiple information streams and the development of lists of controlled terms (MIC, 2003). Investigations that explore key problems for access to multimedia using speech and shape recognition, computer vision, closed-caption text, and other sophisticated approaches contribute to our understanding of political advertising and news materials (Crestani, F., 2003; Hayes, Knecht, & Cellio, 1997; McKeown & Radev, 1995; Rau, 1997; Zhang, Low, Smoliar, & Wu, 1997).

The international expansion of political communication is the result of the efforts of those scholars actively acquiring and using materials from other countries in research and study. Such expansions require developing multilingual thesauri in which terms of the subject domain are listed in parallel sequences showing conceptual equivalences in more than one language. Both the ISO (1986) and the BSI (1987) have guidelines for multilingual thesauri available. Soergel (1996) proposed an integrated knowledge access system with multilingual terminology to serve a global information society. Such expansions require developing multilingual equivalents for subjects, production techniques, and genre terms along the lines of the highly used terms from FIAF (1992). Crouch (1990) offered an early approach to machine-assisted development of vocabulary from across different disciplines. The improvements in information retrieval technology make this a realistic choice, and his ideas merit further consideration.

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PART

# II

## **POLITICAL MESSAGES**





## Rhetoric and Politics

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The primary difficulty in conceptualizing “rhetoric and politics” is the tendency of rhetoricians, especially, to collapse those two concepts into each other. Although the idea of politics, in 20th-century American political science, came to be associated with the rational-choice mechanisms whereby nation-states regulate and control the redistribution of resources via powerful institutions, its earliest meanings assumed operative principles of rhetorical practice.<sup>1</sup> To act politically in ancient Greece was to do the decision-making work needed in the *polis*. As the monarchical and tribal culture of eighth- and ninth-century BCE Greece gave way to the narrower and more formally organized city-state, and as the newer forms of government—oligarchy, aristocracy, and democracy—took root, the notion of the citizen rose to replace the concept of the subject.

It is, of course, too easy to romanticize ancient civilization and, especially, Athenian democracy. The great lawgiver Solon (ca. 639–559 BCE), for example, was a *tyrannos*, yet certainly central in the development of institutional protections and social order in Athens. Not only in times of democratic governance but even in eras of other nonmonarchical systems, the *polis* developed political infrastructures. By the time of the rule of Pericles (461–429 BCE), the public forums were in place: The Assembly met about 35 times a year in the Areopagus; the large popular juries (201–1,001 people each), the *dikasteria*, were drawn from a pool of 6,000 citizens as needed; the semiadministrative body, the Council of 500, was comprised of 50 citizens from each of 10 blocks (*demes*, root of the English word “democracy”); and

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<sup>1</sup>It is difficult to write anything like a systematic essay about rhetoric and politics outside their practice in the Western world. The work has been spotty and is still largely embryonic. Also, as Oliver (1971/1995) argues, “rhetoric” itself is a Western concept that can be applied to non-Western public discourse only in imperfect ways. We keep our inquiry focused in European traditions.

even the military and civic-ceremonial administrative unit, the Board of Ten Generals (the *strategoí*), was elected by the Assembly (for more background, see Polis, 2002; Smith, 1998; Swartz, 1998). The public forums were comprised less of professional politicians than of citizens with the duty to govern juridically, legislatively, and administratively. In such a situation, rhetorical skill—both to construct and to consume political messages—was essential to the survival of the *polis*. Governance (politics) and governing (rhetoric) were overlaid collectivist processes.

Thus, Aristotle (384–322 BCE) defined rhetoric as a practical art lying at the boundary of ethics and politics (Cope, 1867; Kennedy, 1991, 1356a) because he understood it to be the symbolic means of translating collective mores or personal virtues in public action. In the rhetorical, that is, was to be found the amalgamation of the social–personal and the political, suggesting why the history of rhetoric and the history of politics often have run down the same highway. And thus, too, the multiplicity of conceptual and practical connections between rhetoric and politics makes the job of understanding their relationships difficult. Rhetorical studies and political science are academic disciplines easily separated, but rhetoric and politics are human practices that can be fused both conceptually and practically.

To deal with such difficulties, we approach this essay in three movements: Each term is used as a lens examining the other, as those inspections have occurred across the history of Western thought. So, both (1) rhetorical theories of politics and (2) political theories of rhetoric provide initial foci. (3) This leads to an overview of intellectual developments occurring over the last three-quarters century, during the period of the rise of the idea of “political communication.” Here we see theoretical–definitional movement away from *politics* as titular term to *politicization* as central to political activity and from political outcomes understood as policy (legislative–judicial politics) expanded to include those we now conceptualize as polity matters (identity politics). The brief conclusion points toward definitional issues facing the student of rhetoric and politics in the digital age. The essay, thus, is built around an explicitly historical-realist set of assumptions: that definitions of rhetoric, politics, and coordinations of those terms vary and have been made useful to particular historical situations (Oravec & Salvador, 1993).

## THE RHETORIC OF POLITICS

To talk about the rhetoric of politics is to explore views of politics in the Western world that conceive of it as public, political decision making. Although the formal—that is, written—history of politics until the last 200 years was documented in handbooks or treatises, rhetoricians down through the ages theorized their own subject matter largely as a political study. That is, Aristotle’s *Politics* as well as Cicero’s *De officiis* were centered on lists of governing virtues and advice on how to act as a magistrate working within various governmental structures. But within the framework of Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* and many treatises in the Ciceronian corpus, rhetorical theories on discoursing in the political arena probably circulated more widely than the treatises and handbooks on politics per se.

After we examine the rhetoric of politics, we deal with those terms in reverse—the politics of rhetoric—because the term *rhetoric* itself has been bathed in political controversy for 24 centuries.

To begin, the goddess of oratory and persuasion in Athens was Peitho. She was a persona with magical powers, akin to the Muses in charge of the other arts,

one who had the power to charm, to seduce, to enthrall, to put human beings into a trance or dream state. That the arts of political discoursing would be associated with seduction and the unreality of dreaming from their earliest Western conceptions was a judgment that has followed them across time. Theories of probability (*eikos*), articulated definitively (at least in legend) by Corax (fl. 467 BCE), a Sicilian rhetorician, helped bring a fledging kind of rationality to persuasion, yet also a sense of gaminess, as political discourse became associated with the tricks and wordplay that probability-based thought would bring.<sup>2</sup>

The tension existing between theories of emotion-based enchantment and reason-based proof has haunted rhetoric and politics forever. Indeed, the word “rhetoric” itself—*rhetorikē*—was a political battleground, likely invented by Plato (427–347 BCE) to contrast rational dialectical discourses that produced knowledge (*episteme*) with political–social discourses that produced only popular belief (*doxa*). Plato’s political reforms, aimed at returning Athens to the aristocratic rule of philosopher-kings, depended on reducing the political influence and authority of popular discourses (rhetoric and poetic), which in an oral culture maintained the values and wisdom (*doxa*) of Athenians. Philosophically examined truths (*episteme*) could form the bases of social and political institutions only if dialectically disciplined, that is, logically rational, rulers controlled society (see Plato’s *Republic*, especially, as read alongside one of his treatises on rhetoric, *Gorgias*). The very word “rhetoric,” therefore, has been branded as the vehicle of hyperemotional politics since its invention (Schiappa, 1990).

Plato’s antirhetorical, truth-oriented politics, however, was countered in the fourth century BCE by two other conceptions of rhetoric and politics. The most complete understanding of their interrelationships was offered by Isocrates (436–338 BCE). Known as a Sophist (from *sophos*, wise or skilled), he had studied with some of the best of that group of intellectuals: Protagoras, Prodicus of Cheo, Tisias, and Gorgias. Also, like Plato (10 years his junior), he had studied philosophy with Socrates (469–399 BCE), but the civic causes of his sophistic teachers won out over the epistemological bent of the Socratic school. He set up a rival school to the Academy and became the most influential teacher of his time. His job was to prepare orator-statesmen—civic leaders with the natural talent, technical training, and practical experience needed to run Athens. That trio of resources—nature, art, and practice—were absolute requirements for preparation to lead. *Against the Sophists*, a work of his youth, chided his forebears for too often teaching only technique (*techne*), charging too much money, and ignoring the importance of virtue (*arete*), among other things. His *Antidosis* (ca. 353 BCE) was a speech he wrote to defend his career and approach to civic education.

Isocrates believed, then, in what would develop into the liberal arts approach to education for public life: training offered within the confines of a broad education and supplemented with rigorous practice. Practical wisdom (*phronesis*) would result from such schooling and in turn guide the decision makers of the state. *Phronesis* would be made effective and powerful through rhetorical talent honed in rehearsal. Plato’s ideal state, governed by truth-testing dialecticians, and

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<sup>2</sup>In the classic story of probability, a fight broke out between a large and a small man. In court, the small man argued that he would not have started it because it is improbable that he could have won. On the other side, the large man argued that it was improbable that he had started it, knowing that, as a large man, he would be charged with a crime. Arguments from and over probability reflected Athenian interest in typical and presumably rational collective and individual behavior.

Isocrates', run by wise rhetoricians, essentially were the polar political theories of the fourth century BCE.

Mediating them, in a sense, was Aristotle's understanding. Rhetoric for him was "the faculty [*dunamis*, capacity or power] of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion" (Roberts & Bywater, 1954, 1355b). The most important situation to Aristotle was the deliberative occasion—the politics of legislative decision making. And central to public deliberation was the principle of *eudaimonia*, or human well-being, fulfillment, happiness (Herrick, 2001, p. 79). Rhetoric was the tool for making political decisions that could produce *eudaimonia* for Athenian citizens. Through careful analysis of the situation and the people (the *kritēs* or judges) who would make decisions based on public discourse, speakers (rhetors) could engineer public happiness via political action.

What set Aristotle's conception of rhetoric and politics apart from Plato's was his insistence that rhetorical reasoning is parallel to—a counterpart (*antistrophos*) to—dialectic; dialectical reasoning can explore general questions (Should a country maintain a standing army?), whereas rhetorical reasoning is designed to answer situationally specific questions (Should Athens go to war with Sparta now?). What set his conception of rhetoric and politics apart from Isocrates' was his technical-definitional care in teaching rhetoric and his famous metaphor in *Politics* for conceptualizing relationships between governors and the governed: Governors are flute-players, but the governed are flute-makers (Lord, 1984, 1277b). In that metaphor lay a conception of politics as always grounded in the beliefs, values, and generally accepted ("true") opinions of the public (*doxa aletheia*), so that *phronesis* comes to be understood in strongly audience-oriented ways. And the hearts of rhetorical reasoning for Aristotle were the enthymeme (*enthymema*), which is a kind of reasoning drawing its premises from audience views, and the example (*paradeigma*), which is a specific instance or parallel case familiar enough to listeners to have probative power. Furthermore, among the three kinds of proof that Aristotle discussed, *logos* is an argument adjudged probable by an audience, *ethos* is comprised of the listeners' understanding of the speaker's good sense, goodwill toward them, and general character, and *pathos* includes lines of thought that "put the audience in the right frame of mind" (Kennedy, 1991, 1358a).

The key to understanding the Aristotelian conception of rhetoric and politics, then, is to conceive of politics as grounded in citizens' needs and mores and of rhetoric as a tool for symbolically turning citizens' needs and mores into the bases of public policy.

As one turns from Greek to Roman rhetorical theories of politics, one encounters a kind of Isocratean spirit combined with logological refinements of Aristotle's thought. The central figure in emphasizing rhetorical understandings of politics was Marcus Tullius Cicero (106–43 BCE). Whereas his early writing (*De inventione*, ca. 85 BCE; Cicero, 1976a) dealt with the technicalities of rhetorical (especially legal) argumentation, it also codified the so-called canons or *officia* of rhetoric: invention (*inventio*), the discovery or construction of seemingly valid, forceful arguments; arrangement (*dispositio*), the patterning of the discourse; expression or style (*elocutio*), the fitting of effective language to the invented material; memory (*memoria*), the memorizing of speeches; and delivery (*pronunciatio* or *actio*), the use of voice and body to present the ideas to others.

It was in his more mature works—especially the three-volume *De oratore* (probably 55 BCE)—however, that his grand conception of rhetoric and politics was most fully developed. Although the book was entitled "On Oratory," in fact its primary

focus was the definition of *perfectus orator*, the finished or complete orator (Herrick, 2001, p. 101). In that persona “we must demand the subtlety of a logician, the thoughts of the philosopher, a diction almost poetic, a lawyer’s memory, a tragedian’s voice, and the bearing of the most consummate actor” (Cicero, 1976b, xxviii; quoted by Mooney, 1985, p. 36). In focus here was what Mooney (pp. 8–9) defines as “a public servant whose ability with words is informed by a command of the entire cycle of learning.” Eloquence (*eloquentia*) depends on those qualities listed above plus aspects of character that the orator develops through a public career: mature dignity (*dignitas*), achievements (*res gestae*), and reputation (*existimatio*) (May, 1988, p. 9; quoted by Herrick, 2001, p. 102).

The ideal politician to Cicero, therefore, was *vir bonus decendi peritus*: the good man, speaking well.<sup>3</sup> Only in that way would the Roman republic and its citizens be well served and effectively run. To Cicero (1976b), to speak of politics without consideration of the politician’s character in combination with his technical skill was impossible, for “in every free nation, and most of all in communities which have attained the enjoyment of peace and tranquility, this one art [rhetorical discoursing] has always flourished above the rest and remained ever supreme” (I.viii.30). In Cicero’s writing, and echoed in Quintilian’s (35–100 AD), was a theory of rhetoric and politics geared to public virtue, technical skill (especially as the canons of invention and style were fully developed in Roman schools), and a learnedness that provided knowledge and wisdom. Only thus could a populace be served by its governmental institutions and their managers.

The next flowering of European writing about rhetoric and politics came with the Renaissance, specifically new thought about modern city-states or nation-states and how to run them. The *studia humanitatis*, which we call humanism, was a complex series of intellectual developments, many burbling up in the Italian city-states, where scholars such as Petrarch (1304–1374) in Venice, Milan, and Padua, Lorenzo Valla (1407–1457), Savonarola (1452–1498), and Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527) in Florence, and George of Trebizond (1395–1472) in Rome and Vicenza translated Greek rhetorical works into Latin, revitalized the civic-rhetorical study of Cicero and resurrected thinking even from the lesser-known ancients such as Hermogenes (his Latin treatise on rhetorical style) and Hermagoras (his Greek treatise on points of argumentative clash or *stasis*). These Italian humanists intensified Cicero’s and Quintilian’s overall search for a clear and forceful articulation of relationships between and among rhetorical *technè*, powerful modes of public expression (*eloquentia*), moral education (some drawing on the new rhetorics of preaching, *artis ditaminis*, that had developed in the late medieval period), classical learning, and civic responsibilities and actions. A new sense of the importance of and requirements for public life—the *vita activa*, the active life of civic involvement—enlivened discussions of rhetoric and politics (see Bizzell & Herzberg, 2001, pt. 3; Herrick, 2001, chap. 7; Smith, 1998, chap. 7; cf. “eloquence” in Enos, 1996, and discussions of civic involvement in Vickers, 1988).

Among those listed in the previous paragraph, regarding rhetoric and politics Machiavelli stands out. Neither a humanist nor a scholar as such, but rather a diplomat who wrote books and plays when his active political career had ended, Machiavelli produced the early Renaissance masterwork in the rhetoric of politics. *The Prince* (1515) attacked the pious recitation of traditional political virtues that

<sup>3</sup>The phrase actually is Quintilian’s (1980, XII.i.1), although the theory was first articulated by Cicero, his predecessor by some hundred years.

had dominated the political handbook tradition from Aristotle and Cicero to the 16th century, opting instead for rule by force. Yet force alone could not subordinate a whole territory (*The Prince*, 2002, chap. 5): “Because such a government, being created by the prince, knows that it cannot stand without his friendship and interest, and does its utmost to support him; and therefore he who would keep a city accustomed to freedom will hold it more easily by the means of its own citizens than in any other way.” From this assumption, Machiavelli developed a theory of government based on rulers’ control of public perceptions: public opinions, collective beliefs, shared feelings, and emotional views of rulers themselves. Rulers were to take special care to forge perceptions of their *ethos*, for in popular perceptions of personality and of penchants for executive action lay the engines for controlling whole populations. To many readers, Machiavelli’s theory of rhetorical governance was based on deception (e.g., pretending rather than believing in generosity), cruelty (e.g., periodically executing dissidents to show one’s power), and manipulation (e.g., professing care for citizens even while assassinating rivals). Through much of *The Prince*—and explicitly in Chapter 17—it is clear that Machiavelli believed that a ruler should work more on being feared than being loved.

Yet in *The Prince* we have a full-blown theory of *realpolitik*—politics as driven by empirical circumstances, practical problems, and ranges of actions possible within the constraints of time and place. Political and ethical theory, to Machiavelli, must yield to the demands of the rhetorical situation, that is, the requirements and the limitations of the here-and-now. Responses to the political here-and-now, to Machiavelli, were preeminently rhetorical acts designed to create perceptions of power in both ally and enemy, a citizenry, and one’s rivals. In Machiavelli, Peitho had a new champion.

Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) was, in some ways, the conservative English successor to Machiavelli and, in others, the progenitor of John Locke (1632–1704). Like Machiavelli, he believed that only a powerful, aristocratic ascendancy could secure the well-being of a commonwealth, and like Locke, he distrusted any theory of innate ideas and assumed that rulers and the ruled lived together by an explicit compact that held the political system together. Writing immediately after the English Civil War and publishing his *The Leviathan* in the year of the Restoration of royal rule (1660), Hobbes sought to frame the successful operation of a commonwealth rhetorically. Key to his political epistemology were his thoughts on the acts of discoursing by the sovereign (*The Leviathan*, 2002, chap. 7):

From whence we may infer that when we believe any saying, whatsoever it be, to be true, from arguments taken, not from the thing itself, or from the principles of natural reason, but from the authority and good opinion we have of him that hath said it; then is the speaker, or person we believe in, or trust in, and whose word we take, the object of our faith.

An important consequent of this understanding of discourse and knowledge, then, is his belief in concrete actions by political leaders as that which runs the machinery of the state—the leviathan—with the approval of the governed. The governed approve of centralized power because it is rational to seek protection from a paternal fountainhead of action; the sovereign is to be granted political power as long as protection is offered (but no longer than that). The governed obey, in turn, as long as the machinery works and their faith in the governor remains unshaken.

Implicit in Hobbes was a theory of political discourse as that which binds together the political system, but it is undeveloped. The theory became fully articulated by Locke, partially in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689ff.) and partially in his *Two Treatises on Government*, written a decade earlier but published later (1690). His theories of property, labor, and human freedom far outstrip the ideology of citizenship articulated by Hobbes and make his contract theory of government more viable, that is, dependent on explicitly rhetorical relationships between leaders and the led.

As did Hobbes, Locke opened *Two Treatises* imagining the origin of civil society but, *contra* both Hobbes and, explicitly, Robert Filmer's *Patriarchia* (1680), argued that government arose as a social contract between powerful men and citizens, yes, but that those contracts did not produce political free-for-alls because of the faculty of reason and natural laws that would punish those who irrationally violated the social contract. Obligations for government in the contract included the protection of private property, opportunities for one's labor (as the source of all economic value) to produce improvements in the natural world, and what he identified as "life, health, liberty, and possessions" (Kemerling, 2001, citing 2nd Treatise sect. 37, p. 2). To make the contract work, legislative power was essential: the ability of a representative body to maintain social order and to engineer the common good by constructing laws controlling the acquisition, sanctity, and transfer of property within a consensual system.

Finally, then, in what is generally ceded to be an enlightenment (rationalistic) or modernist (empirical) model of politics, the theory of politics included explicit structures for deliberative–rhetorical functions; not since the glory that was Athens and Republican Rome had the operations of politics been conceived deliberatively. In Locke's great work on social epistemology, the *Essay*, however, rhetoric *per se* was found wanting because of its ability to obfuscate and misdirect human reasoning. In its place in the *Essay*, he built a great theory of human communication whose center was argumentation: the advancement and defense of propositions, i.e., statements that combine two or more ideas in assertive fashion. His conception of proposition-based argumentation, together with his famous discussion of popular fallacies (the *ad-* fallacies grounded in human, not logical, error), provided the grounds for modernist conceptions of public reasoning and decision making. Here was the beginning of a modern(ist) theory of collective deliberation constructed on legislative processes that negotiate relationships between powerful governors and interested citizenries.

Once the ideas of representative government and the natural rights of citizens became commonplace in the West, it was but a short step to the emergence of what Habermas (1989) called the bourgeois public sphere, places where citizens could assemble, debate their self-interests, and then pressure their societies' political institutions for redress or legislative–executive action. Throughout the 19th century, on both sides of the Atlantic, citizens began to organize themselves into civic–professional–religious organizations, preparing petitions and assembling publicly in sometimes confrontational modes, in the name of political advocacy and action. Political parties also hardened their discipline (Piven & Cloward, 2000), organizing social–political units out of their ethnicity (tribalism), acquaintance with powerful bosses (clientism), or commitments to particular political actions such as peace or the gold standard for American currency (issue-based loyalties). Direct political actions were taken by million-citizen groups such as the Chartists in Great Britain, the Catholic Association in Ireland, and Abolitionists in the United States by the



mid-19th century, lobbying legislative assemblies, sometimes coming perilously close to forming their own provisional governments. And, throughout the 20th century in the United States (and elsewhere), citizens grew more confident as they organized themselves into ideological parties, as with the Roosevelt Democrats and the Reagan Democrats, and into the sprawling issue-oriented movements and political actions committees of the 1960s and 1970s: the civil rights movement, the environmental movement, the women's movement, the gay and lesbian liberation movement, and thousands more with specific foci.

"Direct action" became a hallmark cry. In that cry was a marker for a radically resculpted political system, one based on (1) political institutions that presumably sought citizen quiescence, even acquiescence, so as to do their work as they saw fit (Edelman, 1964; Piven & Cloward, 2000); (2) special-interest associations or committees that had access to the denizens of political power and hence influenced legislative and bureaucratic regulatory and distributive activity; and (3) a citizenry with political-economic and even social needs or interests that could be met only if they engaged in some form of direct action. Such a mixed oligarchic-democratic political system, especially in the electronically enlivened 20th century, provided three central channels for citizen activity aimed at meeting its needs or interests.

a. *Electoral activity.* Thanks to not simply the November vote but also the caucus and primary system (which was in place in every U.S. state by last quarter of the twentieth century), technological means of directly communicating with political representatives, and an electoral system that put a premium on individuals' contributions to campaigns, the need for concrete associations between politicians and their constituents was heightened.

b. *The science of public opinion polling.* Public opinion polls, especially once the personal computer gained ease-of-use and greater analytic power, meant that the citizenry now could speak politically in "numbered voices" (Herbst, 1993). This or that percentage of the population could express its yes/no/maybe opinions loudly and frequently—214 times in just the last 2 weeks of campaign 2000, and that in just two newspapers, *Washington Post* and *New York Times* (Alsina, Davies, & Gronbeck, 2001). All major newspapers and the networks ran them, and PollingReports.com kept track of subtle shifts of public attitude on a daily basis. Numbered voices entered political dialogues in serious ways.

c. *Political action committees (PACs).* Should citizens prefer to do their own talking, PACs provided the outlet. PACs became organized by economic stratum (the AFL-CIO's Committee on Political Education, National Association of Manufacturers), ideology (National Conservative Political Action Committee), occupation (Farm Bureau), demographic group (Emily's List for feminists, American Association for Retired Persons for post-50-year-olds), industry (American Petroleum Institute, National Pork Producers Association), issue group (Sierra Club, National Rifle Association), good government group (Common Cause, MoveOn.com), and many more. Contributing dollars, signing petitions, hosting candidates, joining in on news conferences, and capital building visits—the body politic learned to manipulate symbols, economic incentives, physical presence, and balloting processes to address very particularized aspects of self-interest.

In sum, "the rhetoric of politics" in fact has been comprised of many rhetorics operating within myriad political systems across two and a half millennia of the

Western world's life in the *polis*. Conceptions of “the rhetorical” have risen or fallen, often, on a single test: Will they aid or hinder the public communicative processes that comprise the machinery of politics in any given time and place?

We return to that question when we consider what it means to conceive of politics in terms of “communication” rather than “rhetoric.” For now, however, we should reverse our thinking about the titular terms for this essay.

## POLITICAL THEORIES OF RHETORIC

As suggested earlier, the idea of rhetoric itself has endured across time within a web of political significations. If the classicists are correct, it was a word coined for political purposes: to give Platonic epistemological idealism and political fascism a leg up in their fights with competing theories of knowledge and public processes. In that neologism, as well, lay a moral attack on political rhetoric—that it was used to deceive the populace (see the argument of McGee, 1985, intertwining the epistemological, moral, and political dimensions of the Platonic attack). If rhetoric theoretically and practically threatens public morals, distorts human understanding and knowledge, and generates a politics of unchecked self-interest, then it is implicated in the downfall of necessary ethical (especially religious), educational, and governmental institutions.

Because the center of political activity in the West has been regularly envisioned as rhetorical, and because politicians build public interactions between each other and, when in a democratic mood or system, between themselves and citizenries through discourses we identify as “mere” political rhetorics, rhetoric perforce has always been conceptualized as politically interested. But the question must be, Whose interests? For Plato, it was the interests of those who profited from a tradition-bound morality and politics that suffered from no clear understanding of justice, truth, beauty, and those who pandered to a public interested only in bodily needs and pleasures (*Statesman* 349–359, in Jowett, n.d.). For Tertullian (ca. 155–225) in *Apologeticum* (1999), the moral issue took on a particularly sinister hue, for rhetoric produced a framework of immorality that would lose a person his or her soul and an anti-Christian discourse that made truth inoperative in the social and political realms. Tertullian's apologia was one of the bases of St. Augustine's defense of rhetoric against such charges (Murphy, 1974, pp. 284–285).

The debate over whether rhetoric was the harlot of the arts (Wells, n.d.) was fully engaged as the second century CE was drawing to a close. The arguments periodically surfaced across the history of rhetoric through the sophistic and medieval periods, even in such satiric forms as Lucien's *A Professor of Public Speaking* (ca. 125–180) and John Jewell's *Oratio Contra Rhetoricam* (1522–1571; delivered in 1548). (See Hudson, 1928, and MacLeod, 1967.) The antirhetoricians, of course, did not always win that debate. Machiavelli, as we noted, elegantly defended the politics of rhetorically constructed appearances—of rhetorically constructed, positively valued public personae—as the tools needed to rule populations that could never be subjugated by force alone. Rhetorical discourses were fear- and worship-inspiring, and therein lay their political values.

The sort of epistemological attacks that flowed from Plato were reframed with the rise of the New Science of the 18th-century Great Britain. To the 18th-century empirical philosophers and rhetoricians from John Locke (1632–1704) to Richard Whately (1787–1863), the rhetorical reliance on systems of *topoi* or belief-structures

as the bases of argument opened the discipline to human error and, hence, could affect outcomes in the arenas-of-talk, including politics. Further, even a *logos* based on such formal devices as the deductive syllogism only organized the already-known; the conclusion to a formally valid syllogism, to George Campbell (1719–1796) in his *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1776/1963), produced no new knowledge. Only systematic investigation did: “The art of *inventing* and *arranging Arguments* is, as has been said,” Whately noted in his *The Elements of Rhetoric* (1846/1963, p. 40), “the only province that Rhetoric can claim entirely and exclusively.” Rhetoric was to be faced with a scientistically inspired set of tests for those arguments, that is, tests based largely on factual investigations and other forms of empirical research.

And so, Whately’s advice (1846/1963, pp. 211, 214) to the politician was to avoid the niceties of rhetorical eloquence and to promote disengaged policy discussion when addressing Parliament:

Eloquence . . . is, in some degree, dreaded by all; and the reputation for it, consequently, will always be, in some degree, a disadvantage . . . [Herein follows a discussion of vanity in statesmen. Then:] [B]ut the Orator attains his End the better the less he is regarded as an Orator. If he can make the hearers believe that he is not only a stranger to all unfair artifice, but even destitute of all persuasive skill whatever, he will persuade them the more effectually, . . . [I would] counsel him who wishes to produce a *permanent* effect, (for I am not now adverting to the case of the barrister,) to keep on the side of what he believes to be truth; and, avoiding all sophistry, to aim only at setting forth that truth as strongly as possible, (combating, of course, any unjust personal prejudice against himself,) without any endeavour to gain applause for his own abilities.

Whately was urging such a conception of rhetoric in the era when the Ireland wherein he was an Anglican archbishop was in the throes of controversies over religious and political ascendancy and when conservative Benjamin Disraeli and liberal William Gladstone were beginning their face-offs in Parliament that would shape nearly half a century of British politics. His position is testament to the strength of the belief that rhetoric could be scientized, that persuasion—even political persuasion—could be effected through rational argument. He was not alone in that belief.

Many in the 20th century picked up his line of thought, especially after the Great War was characterized by many to have been the product of bad rhetoric, what came to be disparaged as propaganda (Sproule, 1997). One impulse was to recognize that rhetoric is political to its core, that human beings are both symbol-using and symbol-misusing animals who are “rotten with perfection” (Burke, 1968), and that it is incumbent upon the humanist-critic to understand how it is that we all survive in such a predicament (Gronbeck, 1999). The rhetoricity of life, including political life, perpetuates a contest between social cooperation and individualistic divisiveness, between the cultural forces of permanence and change—the title of Kenneth Burke’s (1897–1993) major work of 1935.

The desire to rid the world of “the Scramble, the Wrangle of the Market Place, the flurries and flare-ups of the Human Barnyard, the Give and Take, the wavering line of pressure and counter-pressure, the Logomachy, the onus of leadership, the Wars of Nerves, the War” (Burke, 1962, p. 547), however, was unavoidable. Shining knights on crusades to purify language and social-political processes were everywhere at

the same time that Burke was wallowing in the muck of public discoursing. Alfred Korzybski (1879–1950) published *Science and Sanity* in 1933, following principles of factual verification, semantic narrowing and individuation (the law of non-identity), and time-binding (always specifying the time and place of an encounter), among others. He and others established the Institute of General Semantics to institutionalize his work on the neutralization of language and, by extension, the bringing of sanity to politics.

I. A. Richards (1893–1979) went farther in some ways. He defined rhetoric as “the study of misunderstanding and its remedies” (Richards, 1936/1965, p. 7). He then sought to teach students the functions of language (expressions of sense, feeling, tone, and intention) as well as the seven human activities accomplished in language use (indicating, characterizing, realizing, valuing, influencing, controlling, and purposing), to make them sensitive to the ways in which human comprehension can go awry. In addition, he was an avid advocate for Basic English—an 850-word vocabulary that, he believed, permitted the expression of anything anyone wanted to say; its use would permit the careful control of meaning and feeling (Foss, Foss, & Trapp, 1991).

Even more sharply focused on the political dimensions of rhetorical activity was Richard Weaver (1910–1963). In a series of studies published under the title *The Ethics of Rhetoric* (Weaver, 1953), he contrasted, in a neo-Platonic mood, dialectic’s truth-seeking mission with rhetoric’s self-interested advocacy; the bases of conservatism in rhetorical appeals to principle vis-à-vis the bases of liberalism in rhetorical appeals to circumstances; the epistemological and political worldviews to be found in the grammatical forms of simple, compound, and complex sentences; and the place of high-flown “spread-eagle” oratory in the maintenance of American political unity, especially through the first three quarters of the 19th century. Also, he wrote of the necessity of every society maintaining central authority through the use of the “tyrannizing image” (Weaver, 1964) and being driven politically by the sermonic functions of language (Weaver, 1970, pp. 140, 221–225) as a “carrier of intention,” as “never innocent of intention,” as grounded in a rhetor’s “own sense of motive.” To Weaver (1964), public life was lived rhetorically, and it was up to the critic or theorist of public discourse to drive out the bad rhetoric and produce social cures as “a kind of doctor of culture” (p. 7; overall, on Weaver see Foss et al., 1991, pp. 55–85).

And so, through much of the 20th century, at least up to the great gathering of the academic elites at the National Conference on Rhetoric in 1970, there raged a battle between the scientific, apolitical sanitizers of both rhetorical and political practice and those who found rhetoric’s political commitments inevitable and even necessary for a complex world, with many a critic-theorist positioned between those poles. The report on the National Conference, *The Prospect of Rhetoric* (Bitzer & Black, 1971), provided a revealing inventory of those positions.

Even as the agenda of the National Conference was being put into practice—new work on rhetorical invention, genres of rhetorical discourse, continued development of social-political movements theory and criticism, expansion of the artifacts that would be conceptualized as “rhetoric”—new political conceptions of rhetoric were crossing the Atlantic. Slowed but not stopped by Americans’ lack of foreign language facility, politically based understandings of rhetorical processes blossomed in the 1980s, informed by British Culture Studies’ invasion of media studies and by translations, especially of the work of Jürgen Habermas out of the German critical tradition, Antonio Gramsci out of Italian socialism, and Michel Foucault out

of French poststructuralism. Marxist thought was evolving from its grounding in economic determinism to a so-called “critical” phase that focused on the discursive bases of power: reexaminations of ideology by Stuart Hall, Louis Althusser, and a host of others (many catalogued by Thompson, 1990), the evolution of what had been arguments about the hegemonies of European class relations into similar understandings of race and gender as well, and the growing clarity and force of a Francophile sort of cultural studies that substituted studies of discursive formations for studies of institutional formations (During, 1999, pp. 9–11).

Within the American rhetorical community, led by Michael Calvin McGee (1943–2002 [1975, 1980, 1990]), Philip Wander (1941–[1981, 1983, 1984]), and Raymie McKerrow (1943–[1989]) a rash of politicized rhetorics—under the names of “critical rhetoric,” “cultural rhetorics,” and “postmodern rhetorics”—romped through the field of rhetorical studies. So-called critical rhetoric generally was Foucauldian (though McGee recognized that a *marxissant* base was equally viable), built around knowledge/power as constructed and maintained discursively. For McKerrow, especially, the critique of domination and of freedom, with an eye toward the social–political empowerment of those dominated and defined discursively, centered the political work of rhetoricians. Hence, as McGee noted (1990), the reversal of terms—from “rhetorical criticism” to “critical rhetoric”—likewise redefined the mission from analysis/interpretation to critique.

Cultural criticism as Wander envisioned it (1981, p. 497) was to be understood as related to critical rhetoric—as “the practice of interpreting cultural products in the context of ideological struggles”—yet it generally had more breadth and, often, a focus particularly on the everyday, on lived experience (see Enos, 1996, s.v. “Cultural Studies”). In the hands of Condit and Lucaites (1993), for example, it could become the regular redefinition, in ever-changing historical circumstances, of a key ideograph such as “equality.” When Hartley (1992, p. 6) pursued it within a focus on visual culture, our everyday experience with journalistic, news, advertising, fashion, and other publicly accessible photographs was politically charged: “So engrained is the idea that public affairs are visible that metaphors of light and sight suffuse political rhetoric, acting as guarantors for the credibility of the representation. Politics and truth become inextricably bound up with notions of visualization, representation, pictorial power.”

Race–class–gender studies soon followed from the emphases on civil rights, antipoverty legislation, and the women’s liberation movement of the 1960s and early 1970s. Molefi Asante (then Arthur Smith) published *Rhetoric of Black Revolution* in 1969, interesting because he argued that African American politics worked in a different voice than white politics. But it was Campbell’s (1973) essay on “the rhetoric of women’s liberation” that provided the signal statement about the need to redefine politics and political practice to accommodate the discourse of those without direct access to traditional political power. She succeeded in tying questions of power, alternative forms of discourse, and a processual understanding of both rhetoric and politics to matters of social identity and cultural efficacy. And, once her successors were steeped in the theoretical orientations of critical rhetoric and (especially French) cultural theory, race–class–gender studies, wherein both the personal and the social were defined as political, came to center much of rhetorical criticism by the late 20th century. The challenge of forging links between critical and cultural rhetorical thought in the study of popular discourses that have significant political fallout was illustrated in Ono and Sloop’s (2002) study of the widespread

controversies generated by California's ballot initiative over undocumented workers, Proposition 187.

The postmodern move to politicize rhetoric was still another way to grapple with cultural conditions. As Lyotard's (1979/1984) *The Postmodern Condition*, with its arguments about the delegitimation of institutions, the failures of Grand Narratives, and the destabilization of knowledge regimes, made its way through social-political thought, it wrote into such thought a demand to analyze the world in situationally specific ways—in particular, heres and nows. Whereas some, such as Schlesinger (1992) and later Putnam (2000), believed that the political arena itself was in danger of being destroyed through fragmentation, and whereas others, such as Baudrillard (1983), were convinced that it was nothing but a simulacrum where reality itself was absent, most students of rhetoric and politics argued that postmodern politics was efficacious—only very, very different from the premodern and modern operations.

So, Parvikko (1993) sought to update Hannah Arendt's analysis of the pariah figure in politics, arguing that in postmodernity, the outcast was in fact a viable and important political figure whose discourses helped create the symbolic spaces within which political action could occur. Case and Reinelt (1991) found in postmodernity precisely the political atmosphere within which to consider theatre and drama as discourses of power. And Biesecker (1997) urged, in Kenneth Burke's rhetorical constructions of the human lifeworld—especially his understanding of the Negative as an assertion of “No,” not “Nothing”—grounds for arguing that undecidability, discontinuity, and rupture in fact are resources for social change and, hence, for rhetorical-political agency. A related, though alternative, view of “posts”—Daniel Bell's (1960, 1973) studies of a postideological, postindustrial world—posited wholesale shifts in political rhetorics resulting from the collapse of overarching ideologies and Fordist systems of economic-political institutions. The world of the “posts,” to Bell, was a world of culture-based, rather than system-based, political rhetoric. In all of these sorts of studies, a shifting societal condition was being argued to be responsible for a new kind of—or at least a significantly altered understanding of—political rhetoric.

And so, by the time students of rhetoric and politics worked their way through the Posts—especially poststructuralism, post-Fordism, postcolonialism, and postmodernity—they fundamentally remade both disciplines. The signal term *politics* now included a broad interest in politicalization—in how a citizenry acquires and puts to use political consciousness—and hence began to move toward a society-wide or systemic orientation that, we will see, marks *political communication* as a conceptual descriptor. And, too, as the so-called New Politics of the late 1960s evolved into the Post-worlds of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, questions of political identity became as important as those of political action. Put that another way, rhetorical actions or interventions came to be understood as both *praxis* and performance—a public activity and a marking of identity. (See Palonen, 1993.)

The politics of rhetoric, in summary, has been a staple topic of academic conversation for two and a half millennia. An ordering of the terms *politics* and *rhetoric* provides a container and a thing contained. Whereas “the rhetoric of politics” takes us into the institutionalized and noninstitutionalized arenas of power relations wherein collectivities negotiate the distribution and redistribution of material and symbolic resources, “the politics of rhetoric” drives us into the power dynamics of

the negotiation processes themselves. The first ordering focuses on the systemic, and the second, on the epistemic.

## THE COMING OF “POLITICAL COMMUNICATION”

The 19th-century discussions of communication and community in American society, especially in combination with the crisis atmosphere produced by the Great War in the early 20th century, led to heightened interest in communication, politics, and society following that war. The presence of both mechanically reproduced mass media (propaganda posters, photojournalism) and electrically driven political media (silent then sound film, including both documentaries and newsreels, and radio) added urgency to arguments over the state of American democracy. The ease with which posters could be distributed and mounted, the reach of film into communities and radio into homes, and the psychological, raw emotional lure of *The Image* demanded systematic and systemic examination. The politics that had been viewed at a distance in Washington, DC, now came into home towns and living rooms. Worse, it came into a country changing at a frightening speed thanks to the increase in immigration of diversifying populations through the late 19th and early 20th centuries. “Your tired,” “your poor,” “your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,” “the wretched refuse,” and “the hopeless, tempest-tossed” (Lazarus, 1985) were looking for places at an American table that had been serving a largely Northern European cuisine for some 250 years.

Into such a situation stepped social theorists with avowedly political interests. Lippmann (1922) worried that the “pictures in our heads” created by newspapers could drive a gullible public left or right, depending on who was reading what. Lasswell (1927) had seen the effects of World War I propaganda and, by the 1930s (see Lasswell, 1960), was advising the country on the psychopathologies of politics. Dewey (1927) worried that the public and its demands for accountability in politics were eclipsed by powerful, media-owning and influencing interests, though Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet (1944) demonstrated that the political power of even unregulated mass media and their economic interests could be tempered by localist influences. Overall, the consensus, articulated most clearly by Klapper (1960) and his review of especially quantitative social-scientific studies, seemed to be that Americans were shielded from the powerful effects of mass media by their refusal to read or view political material too different from their own viewpoints (selective exposure), family background, opinion leaders (who, through a two-step flow of communication, helped the rest form reactions to political messages), and even the ideological middle-of-the-roadism that characterized the United States’ economically sensitive media system.

The so-called limited effects model of political—especially campaign—discourse in the country called for significant reconceptualizations of rhetoric and politics. More subtle effects that altered voting behavior needed to be explored, and critical-cultural, that is, interpretive studies in the humane tradition of rhetoric-and-politics writing could complement the quantitative social-scientific research that was popularized through the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s.

Enter Murray Edelman (1919–). In a series of books (especially Edelman, 1964, 1971, 1988) he articulated what has been called the symbolist or interpretive school of political science, arguing that it was essential to study closely the place of

language use, the symbolic dimensions of political behavior and the places in which it occurs, and even the genres or forms in which political language is constructed. He examined not individual messages, as the rhetorical tradition had emphasized, but general operations of the systems of politics in the United States: the ways in which political quiescence is achieved through legislative debate and legal actions (Edelman, 1964); the ritualization of conflict as political movements confront an intransigent establishment (Edelman, 1971); and the moves to encase political communication generally in discursive forms featuring “problems” and their “solutions,” even when such discourses had little to do with actual human conditions (Edelman, 1988).

Fellow political scientist Doris Graber (1923–[esp. Graber, 1976, 1984, 1998]) worked much the same territory, at first inspired by Kenneth Burke, among others, and then driven more relentlessly than even Edelman into political news analysis. Another member of this political triumvirate, W. Lance Bennett (1947–[Bennett, 1975, 1988, 1992]), took Edelman’s ideas into explicitly rhetorical territory (1976), followed Graber into the world of political news (1988), and then focused on the interaction of money, the media exposure that could be purchased for it, and the world of media consultants that made advertising and public relations the essence of American politics especially during campaigns (1992). Bennett’s vision was—and still is (Bennett, 2001)—that of a postmodern world where everything seems disconnected except the centers of economic power. In that way, he has affinities to Parenti (e.g., 1994) and Chomsky (e.g., 1992), both of whom brought students of political communication back to the warnings of Lippmann and Lasswell.

A bridging figure in political communication was Dan Nimmo, who in midcareer moved from the Department of Political Science at the University of Tennessee to the Department of Communication at the University of Oklahoma. He devoted much of his professional life to studying dramatic–ritualistic aspects of institutional politics: campaigning (Nimmo, 1970; Nimmo & Savage, 1976), governmental politics and news (Nimmo & Mansfield, 1982), political advertising (Kaid, Nimmo, & Sanders, 1986), political conventions (Smith & Nimmo, 1991), and the propagandistic dimensions of political communication (Combs & Nimmo, 1993). In addition, he sought to explore the symbolic construction of politics generally in narrative and dramatic forms (Nimmo & Combs, 1983) and to work with others in the handbook tradition to outline political communication as a field or discipline (Nimmo & Sanders, 1981). By drawing coauthors and coeditors from both political science and communication studies, he welded knowledge bases together to the benefit of both fields.

Helping to construct the field of political communication from the rhetorical side were many scholars, but two stand out: Roderick Hart (1945–) and Kathleen Hall Jamieson (1946–). Hart (1977) began with a view of politics as galvanizing the *status civitatis* and the *status ecclesiae*; the realm temporal was envisioned by Hart as operating with moral force, even drawing on general outlines of the realm spiritual for its power and force in life. As he warmed to his subject, however, he became more sharply oriented to the systematicity of politics, using a computer text-analysis program to analyze presidential speechmaking (Hart, 1984) and the places where presidents spoke (Hart, 1987). The more he studied the American political system, the more he worried about its health, especially the impact of television and its emotionality (Hart, 1994) and the fragmentation of politics in our time (Hart & Sparrow, 2001).



The moral tone of Hart's work was complemented, in many ways, by the rationalist–democratic orientation of Kathleen Hall Jamieson. She began her book publishing with an anthology on rhetorical genres, understood within a systems metaphor of constellations, with Karlyn Kohrs Campbell (Campbell & Jamieson, 1978). They continued working together in broad strokes, first with an interactive examination of social–cultural–political advertising (Campbell & Jamieson, 1982) and then with a study of presidents' rhetorical relationships with citizens, again, understood generically (Campbell & Jamieson, 1990). Jamieson made her marks, however, in the political arena largely through her own work, examinations of the history of presidential campaigning (1984), and the impact on political speechmaking of television in particular (1988), an intensive study of campaign discourse, deceptiveness, and the condition of democracy dominated by political advertising (1992), and then a broad, popularly oriented exposé of practical politics today (2000). In addition, she coauthored a study of argumentation, rationality, and democratic decision making in presidential debates (Jamieson & Birdsell, 1988) and another on the development and effects of political cynicism within the press and the citizenry (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997). National Public Radio, especially, regularly aired her views on political advertising and public relations activities during the 1990s. Throughout her work ran twin themes: Political communicators have obligations to truth-telling, reasonableness, and civility, and citizens have obligations to exercise their influence directly and indirectly to make sure that all three of those standards of political practice are operative when political institutions govern, judge, and campaign for public support.

In Hart and Jamieson, therefore, we see rhetoricians who accommodated their scholarship to systemic understandings of political communication, focusing on the political media of the times (the press and television, especially). Their work was marked with an understanding of rhetoric that was deeply classical yet simultaneously attuned to the dynamics of the contemporary public sphere. They complemented such political scientists as Edelman, Graber, and Bennett, and both these sets of scholars' work was influential in the forming of Political Communication Division of the American Political Science Association as well as of the National Communication Association in the 1990s.

Hart and Jamieson, of course, were not alone in pursuing rhetorically motivated agenda within political communication studies. The aforementioned *Handbook of Political Communication* (1981) by Nimmo and Sanders broke its task into four parts—theoretical approaches, modes and means of persuasive communication in politics, political communication settings, and methods of study—and concluded with two appendixes, European research and a guide to the literature. Its melding of social-scientific and critical–cultural studies of political communication providing a thoroughly Americanist approach to politics and politicalization—an approach that was reinforced 4 years later in *Political Communication Yearbook: 1984* (Sanders, Kaid, & Nimmo, 1985).

The scholarship of Hart and Jamieson, in combination with the orientation toward political communication coming out in the early 1980s, led to book series fostering humane approaches to politics within systemic orientations. The biggest one has been the Praeger Series in Political Communication, edited by Robert E. Denton, Jr (1953–). His own study of symbolic dimensions of the presidency (Denton, 1982) cast American politics within a broadly symbolic-interactionist viewpoint, an orientation that, he argued, had to be supplemented with a concern for a communication model of power and for especially rhetorical understandings of role

relationships and negotiations. Such an orientation to all political operations became visible in Denton's overview of American political communication (Denton & Woodward, 1985/1990) and in the Praeger Series, which issued its first book in 1988. Other series followed, including Cambridge University Press' Communication, Society, and Politics series, the University of Chicago's Studies in Communication, Media, and Public Opinion, Westview Press' Polemical Rhetorics series, Sage's multiple series in politics and communication, and Peter Lang's Frontiers in Political Communication.

The idea of "political communication," in sum, is an extension of a centuries-long effort to understand relationships between "rhetoric" and "politics." As those two terms have tumbled through Western writings about how to establish, maintain, improve, and control the State, with or without the active participation of the citizen-subject, humane perspectives on government have narrowed, broadened, darkened, and brightened in varied times and places. The coming of "political communication" as an architectonic term has fostered a dual recognition: that "politics" and "politicalization" encompass both institutional and public-symbolic processes productive of collective policy, visions of polity, and even self-identities; and that humane studies of such processes always must include definitional, analytical, interpretive, and evaluative moments if the social world is to be productive of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

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# Political Advertising

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As a form of political communication, political advertising is both celebrated and reviled. Over the past five decades, since its first appearance in campaigns in the 1950s, political advertising has evolved into the dominant form of communication between candidates and voters in the United States. In a variety of forms and styles, political advertising has also become a staple of communication in democracies around the world. It is not surprising, therefore, that the research on political advertising has become one of the most significant components of the political communication discipline (Kaid, 1996a, 1997c, 1999). This chapter discusses the role of political advertising in modern politics, provides information on the legal and regulatory context in which political advertising occurs, and summarizes the research about the content and effects of political advertising in the United States and other democratic systems. It also consider the special effects associated with negative advertising, advertising for female candidates, issue advocacy advertising, political advertising and the Internet, and press/news coverage of political advertising.

## **DEFINITION AND ROLE OF POLITICAL ADVERTISING IN POLITICAL SYSTEMS**

### **Definition of Political Advertising**

The use of political advertising in the United States is often associated with the commercial meaning of advertising as a promotional device whose use is dependent upon the market economy and the right and ability to purchase the means to

promote products or services or, in the case of politics, candidates or ideas. Thus, most scholars who study political advertising think of the concept with those associations. In the first review of research on political advertising in the *Handbook of Political Communication* in 1981, the author defined political advertising as “the communication process by which a source (usually a political candidate or party) purchases the opportunity to expose receivers through mass channels to political messages with the intended effect of influencing their political attitudes, beliefs, and/or behaviors” (Kaid, 1981, p. 250). This definition, of course, also placed the review in the context of the traditional study of communication as a study of “who says what to whom in what channel with what effect”—the famous Lasswell (1948) description of communication, later restated as the process model of communication (source–message–channel–receiver and effect) by Berlo (1960).

However, the limitations of that early definition of political advertising are clear when it is applied to the broader use of political promotion and political marketing in a worldwide context. Many countries, for instance, do not require—or even allow—their candidates or parties to purchase space or time for political advertising. In contrast, some countries provide free time on public broadcast outlets for candidates and parties to promote themselves and their ideas. This expansion of the political advertising concept led Kaid and Holtz-Bacha (1995) to use a much broader definition of political broadcast advertising in their study of political advertising in Western democracies, suggesting that it included “all moving image programming that is designed to promote the interests of a given party or candidate” and incorporated “any programming format under the control of the party or candidate and for which time is given or purchased on a broadcast (or narrowcast) outlet” (p. 2). This definition itself, however, did not encompass all forms of political advertising, as it did not address promotion by printed means and did not foresee the arrival of a new medium of transmission now available, the Internet.

Many considerations of political advertising also fail to consider the importance of political advertising in contexts other than electoral contests. Political advertising, sometimes called issue advertising or advocacy advertising, now plays a large role in proposition and/or ballot elections and in the advocacy of public policy issues by interest groups.

All of these concerns lead to a much broader definition of political advertising. In a later review of political advertising research, the author suggested that “the defining characteristics of modern political advertising are (1) control of the message and (2) use of mass communication channels for message distribution” (Kaid, 1999a, p. 423). This ability to control completely the message presented to an audience is one of the greatest advantages of all forms of political advertising. Other forms of political communication, from speeches to debates, are subject to interpretation or filtering by news media or other participants in the political process. This interpretation suggests that political advertising should be considered quite broadly as any message primarily under the control of a source used to promote political candidates, parties, policy issues, and/or ideas through mass channels. This definition requires that the message be controlled by the source it promotes (thus distinguishing such messages from news content). It allows for inclusion of messages that advocate the election of candidates, parties, and propositions, as well as for advertising about policy issues or the advocacy of interested viewpoints on political ideas. While it requires the dissemination of the message through some type of mass channel, distinguishing political advertising from interpersonal

communication and from general public communication such as political speeches or rallies, it allows for a broad interpretation that encompasses all types of political advertising channels including posters and display advertising, pamphlets and brochures, direct mail, newspaper and magazine advertising, broadcast and cable advertising, and Internet or other electronic distribution systems. The definition also does not require that the source must purchase the access necessary for dissemination of the message, thereby including the free broadcast time given to candidates and parties in some countries and the, at least so far, free distribution allowed by Internet distribution.

### **Role of Political Advertising in the Political System**

Although politicians and statesmen have sought to promote themselves and their ideas throughout the history and evolution of democratic systems of government, political advertising is often considered a relatively modern form of political promotion. Jamieson (1984, 1992b, 1996) discusses the use of early forms of political promotion in the United States through handbills, placards, and posters. Such historical accounts set the stage for an understanding of the importance that political advertising has played in its many forms. This chapter, however, concentrates on more modern forms of political advertising, emphasizing the results of research on the content and effects of newspaper and print advertising, electronic advertising via radio and television, and new forms of advertising dissemination such as the Internet.

In the United States the study of political advertising is largely about the role of political television advertising. Televised political advertising is now the dominant form of communication between candidates and voters in presidential elections and in most major statewide contests (Kaid, 1999; Kaid & Johnston, 2001). One measure of this dominance, of course, is the large amount of campaign funds spent on political television advertising. In the last four presidential elections (1988, 1992, 1996, and 2000) spending for political advertising has been at record levels. George H. W. Bush and Dukakis together spent over \$80 million on electronic advertising in 1988 (Devlin, 1989). In 1992, the three-candidate race resulted in combined spending of over \$120 million for Perot, Bush, and Clinton (Devlin, 1993). Clinton, Dole, Perot, and their respective parties spent nearly \$200 million on advertising time in 1996 (Devlin, 1997) but were topped by Al Gore, George W. Bush, and their parties, with \$240 million in reported advertising expenditures (Devlin, 2001). Of course, candidates, parties, and special interest groups spend millions more on state and local-level races in presidential and off-year election cycles and on advocacy related to ballot issues, propositions, and public policy issues.

Television's dominance in the electoral process of the United States is well known and well documented. Although television spots have been a dominant part of U.S. elections for several decades, "American-style" television advertising gained significance more slowly in the political processes of other democracies around the world. Differences in political systems, media systems, and cultural constraints have accounted for many differences in the speed and extent to which other democracies have adopted television advertising as a central component of electoral politics. Although research on the role of political advertising outside the United States is still in its infancy, there are several important similarities and many interesting differences that warrant discussion in this chapter.



## LEGAL AND REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT FOR POLITICAL ADVERTISING

Political advertising is subject to a limited degree of regulation depending on its form or channel. The First Amendment guarantee of a free press under the U.S. Constitution ensures that in general the print media are not subject to any controls on structure or content. The principal exceptions would be (1) Federal or state rules on anticompetitive practices (antitrust law) or Federal laws that restrict ownership of media, (2) state laws on libel that provide for media responsibility by discouraging the printing of false and libelous information, and (3) state laws that protect the privacy of individuals to a limited extent (Kaid & Jones, 2004).

Broadcast media, on the other hand, are subject to a more complex regulatory system under the supervision of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), which administers the Federal Communications Act (FCA) of 1934 (and its amendments). The access provision of this legislation (Sec. 312) requires that a licensed broadcast station must provide reasonable access to or permit purchase of a reasonable amount of time for the use of the station by all legally qualified candidates for *federal* elective office (National Association of Broadcasters, 1988, 2000). It is not necessary for the candidate to appear or play any substantial role in the advertisement.

In addition, the FCA requires that in allocating time (or allowing its purchase) for candidates, stations must adhere to the Equal Time Provision (Sec. 312b), providing essentially equal time access to all candidates. Stations must also sell this time at what is called “the lowest unit charge,” the lowest rate it has charged other commercial advertisers during the preceding 45 days, even if that rate is part of a discounted package rate (National Association of Broadcasters, 2000).

The FCC also requires that political ads carry a “disclaimer” indicating the sponsoring entity. These specific requirements have not been tested in the Supreme Court, but their constitutionality is in doubt (Jones & Kaid, 1976; *McIntyre v. Ohio Elections Comm’n.*, 1995; *Talley v. California*, 1960). However, in administering the Federal Communications Act, the FCC allows no station censorship of the content of political advertising. Although many stations have tried to gain exceptions to this principle, the FCC and the courts have generally held firm on this point, maintaining that the First Amendment to the United States Constitution prohibits any restraint on the content or format of political speech. For this reason, stations themselves are held to be exempt from any claim of libel or slander arising from an advertisement broadcast on their station (WMUR-TV, Inc., 1996).

Because of the First Amendment protections for free speech, press, and assembly in the U.S. Constitution, the attempts to affect the conduct of campaigning through paid broadcasting has most often taken the form of regulation of the process by which candidates and parties raise money and make expenditures in support of election campaigns. This is because direct restrictions on political broadcasting would be patently unconstitutional. Donations of money to political candidates and their expenditures represent forms of political “speech” and free association that may only be restricted for compelling reasons, a conclusion that initially may not appear obvious but is amply justified (Jones & Kaid, 1976).

Under the Federal Election Campaign Act (FECA, 1971) and its amendments (principally, 1974 and 2002, the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act [BCRA]), the Federal Election Commission administers a complex system of disclosure of and limitations

on political contributions and reporting of campaign expenditures by candidates, political party committees, and independent persons and organizations (Jones & Kaid, 1998). Attempts by Congress to impose limits on the quantity of political advertising or campaign expenditures by candidates and others were struck down as unconstitutional in *Buckley v. Valeo* (1976).

With only a few exceptions, Federal campaign rules do not apply to political advertising over the Internet in the form of Web sites or e-mails. This is because the Federal law applies only (except for political party Web sites and bulk e-mails, which must contain disclaimers) to broadcast “public communications” from which the Internet is excluded by definition (FEC, 2003, pp. 18, 23). Thus, for example, whereas the new BCRA Amendments of 2002 prohibit “electioneering communications” (political advertising specially defined) by corporations or labor unions that might be broadcast by television, the same message transmitted via the Internet is not prohibited.

On May 2, 2003, a three-judge Federal District Court (*McConnell v. FEC*, 2003) declared several provisions of the BCRA to be unconstitutional while upholding others. The case was appealed to the Supreme Court and was scheduled to be argued in September, 2003. A decision before the 2004 elections is probable.

### Political Advertising in Foreign Countries

The use of candidate-centered advertising (and candidate-centered campaigns) has been a distinctive feature of the American political campaign process. Recently, some European political campaigns, especially in the United Kingdom, have adopted more American-style approaches to political advertising including candidate-centered broadcasts aired by political parties. However, studies have shown that European countries, including EU members, impose much more stringent restrictions on televised political advertisements than is the case in the United States.

In *Political Advertising in Western Democracies*, Kaid and Holtz-Bacha (1995) presented findings from a broad investigation of the content and effects of political advertising in established democratic countries including the United States, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, The Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. This was followed by a similar study of former Communist countries, *Television and Politics in Evolving European Democracies* (Kaid, 1999), that investigated the media and political structures in the former East Germany, Poland, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Russia, Turkey, and the Czech Republic. Restrictions on the use of political advertisements in election campaigns were identified (Kaid, 1999; Kaid and Holtz-Bacha, 1995), and are summarized in the following results for the purposes here.

1. *Number of broadcasts*: The number of permissible spots (election broadcasts of any length) is limited, for example, to five Party Election Broadcasts (PEBs) in the United Kingdom. In addition, the number allowed is often limited in proportion to party strength (e.g., France and Germany) or by equal time among parties (e.g., Denmark).
2. *Broadcasts on public stations*: Limited free air time is usually allocated to parties (but not individuals) on public stations. Although a few countries (e.g., Poland, Finland) allow the purchase of an unlimited amount of paid time,

most European countries either do not allow the purchase of any additional time or limit it according to party strength or other criteria.

3. *Broadcasts on private stations.* Neither candidates nor parties may freely purchase additional broadcast time on private stations in most European countries. A few, such as Bulgaria, Romania, and Hungary, allow unlimited purchase, but most countries that allow purchase of time on private stations limit it according to similar criteria applied for purchase of broadcast time on public stations.

The consequence of these restrictions is that governments suppress the quantity of political broadcasting that is allowed to occur in Europe. It appears that individuals are never allotted free broadcasting time on public stations. Parties are generally allotted free time on public stations either on a basis of equality with other parties or on a basis of proportional strength. For the most part, either parties are not allowed to purchase additional broadcasting time on public or private stations or, if they are, it is limited by reference to their free time or their proportionate strength. This is in sharp contrast to the situation in the United States. The campaign laws found in EU member and candidate countries appear to restrain some European democracies from embracing in full what Gurevitch and Blumler (1990, p. 311) have termed “American-style ‘video-politics.’”

## **RESEARCH ON THE CONTENT OF POLITICAL ADVERTISING**

The large body of academic research on political advertising falls into two basic categories, research about the content of political advertising and research that focuses on the effects of political advertising. This review considers both, focusing first on content and style of political advertising and then on the many types of effects measured by researchers.

Some researchers have described the content of political advertising through approaches that are primarily historical, critical, and interpretive, relying on subjective analysis (Devlin, 1989, 1993, 1997, 2001; Diamond & Bates, 1984, 1988, 1992; Jamieson, 1984, 1992b, 1996). Joslyn (1980) was the first to apply a more systematic method, followed by many other content studies that have been dominated by key concerns about issue/image content; negative/positive content; and other content characteristics such as presence of partisan appeals, emotional tone, and use of fear appeals.

### **Issues vs. Images**

Across more than five decades of research on political advertising, no topic has been more dominant than the discussion of whether or not campaign commercials are dominated by image information or issue information. Rooted in the classic democratic voting model that insists rational voting decisions should be made on the basis of policy issues (Berelson, 1966), one of the perennial criticisms of advertising in politics is that it trivializes political discourse by concentrating more on candidate personalities and images than on issues. However, this has proven to

be an unfounded concern since research has shown that most political advertising, whatever the medium, concentrates more often on issues than on candidate image.

***Newspaper and Print Political Advertising Content.*** Early political advertising in newspapers, however, was not dominated by issues. Humke, Schmitt, and Grupp (1975) analyzed 849 political ads appearing in the Bloomington, Illinois, newspaper from 1932 to 1960 and found that the central focus of 78% of the ads was the candidate; issues played a much less significant role. This picture changed in later campaigns, however. In 1970 races below presidential level in 23 states, Bowers (1972) found that newspaper political ads emphasized issues much more than candidate personalities. Other researchers have drawn similar conclusions about newspaper advertising in lower level races (Elebash & Rosene, 1982; Latimer, 1984). Nonetheless, some researchers have found that candidates for lower level races rely on a substantial amount of personal appeals in their spots. Typical of these findings are those by Latimer (1989a, 1989b), who found that Alabama state legislative candidates focused on image traits in their newspaper ads.

The emphasis on issues extends to other types of printed campaign materials. For instance, in a study of 137 races for U.S. Congress in 1978, Raymond (1987) found that campaign brochures were issue-oriented, especially for challengers who gave more attention to issues than did incumbents.

Other researchers have concentrated their interest in issue content in newspaper advertising on the specific types of issues covered. Mullen (1963b) analyzed newspaper ads from Kennedy-Nixon 1960 race and found that Democrats used pictures more effectively and promoted their strengths in the domestic policy area. In a similar analysis of newspaper ads in 1960 U.S. Senate campaigns, Mullen (1963a) found differences in issues stressed according to party—Democrats stressed more appeals to the elderly, on education, and on health, whereas Republicans concentrated more on their record in fiscal policy. Newspaper ads in the 1964 Johnson–Goldwater campaign displayed few differences on issues, although Democrats focused more on agriculture, labor, business, conservation, and health while Republicans focused more on graft and corruption (Mullen, 1968).

***Issues in Televised Political Advertising.*** The dominance of issues in televised political advertising has rarely been challenged by empirical data. Television political advertising concentrates more often on issues (usually between 60 and 80%) than on candidate images (Joslyn, 1980). Patterson and McClure's (1976) classic study of the 1972 presidential campaign found not only that issue information overshadowed image content, but that the issue content of political spots outweighed the issue content of television network news during the campaign. Other work confirmed this finding with regard to the 1972 presidential race (Hofstetter & Zukin, 1979), and Kern (1989) reinforced these findings in her studies of spots in the 1980s. In analyses of the 1996 primaries, researchers have also discovered that candidate messages (advertising and speeches) were giving substantial attention to issues and were definitely more issue substantive, by a margin of 3:1, than television news (Center for Media and Public Affairs, 1996; Lichter & Noyes, 1996). Kaid and Johnston (2001) analyzed a comprehensive sample of presidential ads from 1952 through 1996 and concluded that 60% of all spots used in presidential general elections have focused primarily on issues. Geer (1998) analyzed a large sample of presidential ads from general and primary elections over time and found that there are identifiable differences in the issue agendas offered by candidates

of different parties; the study also found that image traits, particularly experience, are more often found in the ads of incumbents. Findings on the last four presidential campaigns have also substantiated that issues are more frequently stressed in spots than are images (Kaid, 1991a, 1994, 1998, 2002b). In fact, the percentage of issue ads (78%) in the 2000 presidential campaign was one of the highest in history (Kaid, 2002b).

Such findings are also common below the presidential level (Elebash & Rosene, 1982; Joslyn, 1980). More recently, Vavreck (2001) analyzed the ads of 290 candidates in the 1998 elections and found that only 30% were predominately trait-based, whereas 52% were dominated by issues, and over 80% contained some mention of issues.

Although this research debunks the notion that political television spots are dominated by image information, it is important to note that the concentration on issues does not always mean that candidates are providing substantial arguments or explaining complex policy issues. Even Joslyn's (1980) early analysis of spots indicated that the percentage of spots with specific policy issue information was much lower than the overall number of issue spots. In a later analysis of 500 spots from 1960 to 1984, Joslyn (1986) found that ads focusing on prospective policy choices were the least frequently occurring type. Payne, Marlier, and Baukus (1989) reinforced this notion in their analysis of 1988 presidential primary spots when they concluded that issues are treated more in the form of vague policy preferences and that spots are replete with emotional and cultural images and symbols. Kaid and Johnston (2001; Johnston & Kaid, 2002) found a similar lack of policy issue statements in their comprehensive analysis of presidential ads. Darrell West (1993) analyzed sets of typical and prominent spots across a number of years and was equally critical of the lack of substantive, specific policy positioning by candidates, although he notes that spots have become more, not less, policy-oriented in recent presidential elections.

One of the most well-developed studies of issue and image content in political spots was conducted on the 1980 presidential primary spots by Leonard Shyles (1983, 1984a, 1984b, 1988). Shyles found a strong emphasis on defense and foreign policy in the 1984 primary ads. He also found that candidates in the presidential primary used the spots to convey their image characteristics and that the choice of issue or image content also related to the presentational style of the spots (Shyles, 1984b). For instance, spots that focused on the candidate's image tended to be head-on candidate presentations, with candidates in formal attire.

Researchers have also noted the increasing difficulty in distinguishing between issues and images in campaign messages. Traditionally, issues have been viewed as statements of candidate positions on policy issues or preferences on issues or problems of public concern, whereas images have been viewed as a concentration on candidate qualities or characteristics (Kaid & Johnston, 1991; Kaid & Sanders, 1978). Many researchers acknowledge that this dichotomy is, in fact, a false one. As Rudd (1986) points out in his observation of spots from the 1982 Idaho gubernatorial campaign, issue spots are often used to bolster aspects of a candidate's image. Johnston and Kaid (2002) also suggest that modern televised political spots show a blending of image and issue information, making it difficult to separate them into distinct genres.

Political scientists have posed theoretical models about the information provided about issues in political advertising. Chappell (1994) developed a model to explain the strategic decisions candidates use in determining whether to provide

or withhold information about policy positions via informative advertising and suggested that decisions about policy content of ads is dependent on candidate policy preferences, campaign fund endowments, partisan reputations, and incumbency status.

Researchers have also suggested a relationship between the issue content of ads and electoral success. Candidates seem to be more successful when their issue advertising focuses on issues over which they can claim ownership (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1994). For instance, Republicans are often thought to “own” foreign policy issues, whereas Democrats fare better on claims about domestic policy. Benoit and Hansen (2002) have shown that, in fact, perceptions of issue ownership associated with the two parties is, indeed, evident in political advertisements. Democrats, for instance, are likely to stress education, health care, jobs/labor, poverty, and environment more frequently in primary election appeals to their own voters and somewhat less in general elections when they must appeal to voters from both parties. The same is true for Republicans, who are more likely to stress their issues (national defense, foreign policy, government spending/deficit, taxes, and illegal drugs) in Republican primaries than in general election campaigns.

### **Negative vs. Positive Ads**

Since the early 1980s the controversy over negative and positive spots has raged even more strongly than the issue/image debate. What exactly are “negative ads”? In earlier work, the author offered a simple interpretation: “There is no universally accepted definition of negative advertisements, but most would agree that they basically are opponent-focused, rather than candidate-focused. That is, negative ads concentrate on what is wrong with the opponent, either personally or in terms of issue or policy stances” (Kaid, 2000, p. 157). Although this may seem to be a relatively new concern to some, analyses of spots over time indicates that negative spots have been a factor in all presidential campaigns since 1952 (Kaid & Johnston, 1991, 2001). Johnson-Cartee and Copeland (1991, 1997) have also done a great deal to enhance our understanding of negative spots in their books, which categorize and analyze the strategies used in a wide variety of negative ads.

However, it is unquestionably true that there was a real increase in the number of negative spots used in presidential campaigns in the past few election cycles. Whereas the percentage of negative ads in presidential campaigns from 1952 through 1996 is only about 38%, in the 1992 and 1996 campaigns negative ads made up more than half of the advertising content of both major party candidates. Although George H. W. Bush used more positive appeals than Michael Dukakis in 1988 (Hacker & Swan, 1992), there are differences of opinion among researchers about the degree of negativity in these two campaigns. However, in both 1992 and 1996 Clinton reached all-time highs in the number of negative ads in a presidential campaign, with 69% of his ads being negative in 1992 and 68% being negative in 1996 (Kaid, 1994, 1998; Kaid & Johnston, 2001; Kaid, DeRosa, & Tedesco, 2002). Al Gore’s presidential campaign used only slightly fewer negative ads; 62% of his ads were negative, compared to 37% of Bush’s ads (Kaid, 2002b).

Goldstein and Freedman (2002) argue that ads aired are more reflective of the tone of the campaign than those made by candidate. In an analysis of ads aired in the top 75 markets in 2000, they found that ads aired by Bush reflected a more negative tone than those aired by Gore. Overall, across all elections in 2000, they

categorized 46% of television spots as positive, 29% as pure negative, and 25% as comparative/contrast. The tone of ads by parties and groups was more negative than that of candidate ads overall. However, the overall effect of considering aired ads in selected markets is confounded by the fact that presidential candidates now engage in more strategic placement of ads for maximum effect. For instance, West, Kern, Alger, and Goggin (1995) document differences in ad buying strategies for the 1992 campaign, showing that Clinton used fewer national ad buys and did more local targeting of television advertising. Bush, on the other hand, kept his positive ads on the national buys and the negative ads in selected local markets.

Races below the presidential level began to see dramatic increases in negative advertising in the 1980s. Negative advertising by independent or third-party groups took on particular significance in this negativity, as groups like the National Conservative Political Action Committee (NCPAC) began to target congressional and senatorial candidates (Kitchens & Powell, 1986). Kahn and Kenney (2000) provide further evidence of negative spot content in races below the presidential level. In a study of 594 ads from Senate campaigns in 1988, 1990, and 1992, they found that 41% of all ads contained negative attacks. Vavreck (2001) studied 290 candidates in the 1998 elections and found 64% were positive ads.

One of the clear findings about negative ads is that they tend to be more issue-oriented than do positive ads. Kaid and Johnston (1991) reached this conclusion from a study of over 800 presidential ads aired between 1960 and 1988 and confirmed it in later analyses that included presidential ads in 1992, 1996, and 2000 (Johnston & Kaid, 2002; Kaid & Johnston, 2001). West (1993) reached similar conclusions in his content analysis of typical and prominent ads: “. . . It is somewhat surprising to discover that the most substantive appeals actually came in negative ads” (p. 51).

Benoit (1999) has developed another way of looking at positive and negative content in political ads. The functional analysis approach (Benoit, 1999) suggests that spots can be categorized according to those that acclaim (make positive claims about the sponsoring candidate or idea), attack (make attacks on opposing candidate or idea), or defend (offer defense against an attack made by the other side). When Benoit's category system is applied to presidential advertising across time, he suggests that attacks have become more common over time but that winners are more likely to use positive acclaims, whereas losers more often attack in their spots (Benoit, Pier, & Blaney, 1997).

Other interesting findings about the use of negative appeals in the content of political spots come from analyses of the relationship of partisanship and electoral positioning to negative content. Kaid and Johnston's (2001) comprehensive study of presidential ads found that, contrary to popular wisdom, challengers do not use significantly more negative ads than do incumbents. The opposite seems to be true in elections below the presidential level where incumbents are more entrenched. In a study of 1992 U.S. congressional candidates, Tinkham and Weaver-Lariscy (1990) found that challengers used more negative spots than did incumbents. A later study in 1990 found that candidates for congressional seats view the strategy of attacking opponents as more important than do incumbents (Tinkham & Weaver-Lariscy, 1995). Hale, Fox, and Farmer (1996) analyzed U.S. Senate ads between 1984 and 1994 and concluded that negative ads were more likely to be used by challengers, by candidates in large states, and by those engaged in more competitive races. Further support for these tendencies is provided in a study of 1998 Senate and congressional campaigns that found that attack ads were more common in races

that were more competitive and were also more likely to be sponsored by parties than by candidates (Goldstein, Krasno, Bradford, & Seltz, 2000).

Analysis of the content of presidential ads also suggests some differences based on the party of the candidate. For instance, Democrats used significantly more negative ads in presidential races from 1952 to 2000 (Benoit, 1999; Kaid, 2002b; Kaid & Johnston, 2001).

### Other Content Considerations

The conceptualization of *videostyle*, first laid out by Kaid and Davidson (1986), also focuses on the content of political spots and suggests that it is possible to understand a candidate's mode of self-presentation in spots by analyzing the verbal, nonverbal, and production characteristics of the candidate's political advertising. Videostyle has been used to describe characteristics of presidential spots (Kaid, 2002b; Kaid & Johnston, 2001; Kaid & Tedesco, 1999b; 2001), to analyze spot styles of incumbents and challengers (Kaid & Davidson, 1986), and to determine differences in male and female candidate styles (Bystrom, 1995). Some researchers examined the types of claims and arguments used in political spots. In an analysis of logical claims in 1972 Nixon and McGovern ads, Buss and Hofstetter (1976) found that the use of logical fallacies was not a dominant strategy; instead, ads used cognitive maneuvers to identify issue stands or information about the candidate. On the other hand, Baukus, Payne, and Reisler (1985) have suggested that the arguments contained in spots are often so abbreviated that they are misleading and difficult to prove.

Language and verbal style have also been explored in political spots. Researchers have suggested that positive ads have more informal language and cognitive vocabulary than do negative ads, and positive ads are more likely to focus on the future and present, whereas negative ads concentrate on the past and convey anger (Gunsch, Brownlow, Haynes, & Mabe, 2000).

Emotional content of political ads is also an important question, and several researchers have focused on the emotional content of political spots. Particularly relevant is the application of the "wheel of emotions" categories to 1984 campaign spots at various levels by Kern (1989). Kern determined that spots contain an enormous amount of emotional content. Emotions such as pride, reassurance, trust, and hope made up 56% of the content of political spots from the 1984 campaigns at various levels. Such findings are in line with the discovery by Kaid and Johnston (2001) that presidential ads contained more emotional proof than logical or ethical proof. In a comparison of different types of campaign discourse, Hart (2000) suggests that political ads are "effusive" and full of emotional logic. He cautions that, in fact, "... one must never underestimate the importance of that which advertising most reliably delivers—political emotion" (p. 138).

The verbal style of political television spots has also been analyzed. Using Hart's (1984) indicators of verbal style—optimism, activity, realism, and certainty—Ballotti and Kaid (2000) used computerized content analysis to categorize presidential ads used from 1952 to 1996: "An overall summary of these trends indicates that verbal style in presidential spots has seen a clear decline in realism over the past few election cycles, particularly since 1968. After several early peaks, certainty has shown a decline in recent elections" (p. 268). They concluded that overall the language choices of Democrats indicates that they are less willing to take stands and



demonstrate less certainty than Republicans. They also saw differences between winners and losers in their language style: “Winners use more words indicating activity and optimism than losers. Losers, alternatively, demonstrated less certainty but higher realism in their spots” (p. 269). Hart and Jarvis (1997) found that ads in 1996 presidential campaign were more optimistic and more realistic than were debates. In 1996 Dole displayed more optimism than Clinton, but both candidates conveyed lower levels of certainty and realism than most prior presidential candidates in their spot ads (Ballotti, 1999).

The generation of emotional responses in political advertising is particularly important because researchers have found strong relationships between the generation of emotions and candidate evaluations (Kaid, 1994; Kaid, Leland, & Whitney, 1992; Kaid & Tedesco, 1999; Tedesco, 2002; Tedesco & Kaid, 2003). Christ, Thorson, and Caywood (1994) also found that motivations for viewing political ads (information seeking and entertainment) are related to emotions (pleasure and arousal) evoked by the different types of ads. For instance, high information seeking resulted in high levels of emotional response (arousal and pleasure) for issue ads but only pleasure for the image ads.

The misleading or unethical content of political spots has received some attention by researchers but is a difficult area for assessment (Kaid, 1991b). The only systematic analysis of ethical content has focused on the technology in the ads (Kaid, 1996b) and has found a growing use of technologically based ethical concerns in ads from 1980 through the present (Kaid, 1998, 2002b; Kaid, Lin, & Noggle, 1999; Kaid & Noggle, 1998; Noggle & Kaid, 2000). Vavreck uncovered similar concerns in the 1998 midterm elections by discovering that almost one third of all ads morphed the opponent into someone unpopular. As O’Shaughnessy (1990) laments, “Political marketing and its technological articulation can conceal real intentions, fine-tuning the lie” (p. 156).

## RESEARCH ON THE EFFECTS OF POLITICAL ADVERTISING

Interest in analyzing the content of political spots or discerning patterns of videostyle would hold little interest for scholars or political practitioners if there were no evidence that political spots have identifiable effects on voters. Such evidence is not difficult to find, confirming that candidates who spend millions on advertising campaigns are not completely off the mark.

As social scientists in the 1970s began to break away from the pessimistic media effects prescriptions of the “limited effects” model (Klapper, 1960), many discovered that the principles accepted by minimal effects researchers did not apply as readily to political television advertising as to other mass media phenomenon. Even by 1981 when the first comprehensive review of the literature on political advertising was published in the *Handbook of Political Communication* (Kaid, 1981), it was possible to say that researchers had discovered that political advertising had identifiable cognitive, affective, and behavioral effects. In a summary of research on advertising effects, Perloff (1998) also concluded that “clearly, political spots can affect voters’ evaluations of candidates and their interpretations of political events” (p. 374). Most of the effects studies rely on survey research or experimental designs to measure the effects of spots. The most well-researched of these effects fall

into three categories: (1) cognitive effects or effects on voter knowledge levels, (2) affective effects or effects on voter perceptions of candidates, and (3) behavioral effects, including effects on voting preferences.

### **Effects of Political Advertising on Voter Knowledge Levels**

Voters in the United States are generally not considered to be particularly well informed (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996). Studies abound verifying that many cannot name their current congressperson, let alone the candidates for upcoming offices or the issues at stake in various electoral contests. Certainly the minimal effects tradition, with its emphasis on the significance of selective processes in thwarting media effects, had lowered expectations about the possibility that political advertising would be successful in communicating information to voters. Early studies of the political effects of exposure to campaigning with radio, newspaper advertising, and other printed literature had not held out much hope for success (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1948). Television changed these pessimistic predictions.

One of the earliest surprises in political advertising research was the finding that political television commercials do a good job of communicating information, especially issue information, to voters regardless of partisan selectivity. The first empirical studies of televised political advertising highlighted its ability to overcome selective exposure (Atkin, Bowen, Nayman, & Sheinkopf, 1973; Surlin & Gordon, 1976). This was a very important finding because it confirmed that spot advertising was successful in getting the candidate's message to all voters, not just those who already supported the candidate or party.

Name identification is one of the most important knowledge effects for a political candidate, the equivalent of brand name recognition in product marketing. Research has provided evidence that exposure to political spots enhances candidate name recognition (Kaid, 1982). In fact, in a study of the 1992 California U.S. Senate races, West (1994) found paid advertising exposure to be a better predictor of candidate recognition than either television news or newspapers.

A great deal of evidence now supports the claim that exposure to political ads can also influence voter recall about specific campaign issues and candidate issue positions (Atkin & Heald, 1976). Measuring the effects of political advertising exposure for newly naturalized U.S. citizens in 1988, Martinelli and Chaffee (1995) concluded, "The respondent's ability to recall and describe a particular campaign advertisement is the most significant media use predictor . . ." (p. 25). They found that even though voters may be reluctant to acknowledge their reliance on political spots, they still recall a great deal of information from them. Hofstetter and Strand (1983) used a national survey in 1972 and later added National Election Study (NES) data for 1972–1978 and found that television ad exposure, along with other forms of media, was significantly related to holding positions on issues and on knowledge of candidate issue positions.

Although Faber and Storey (1984) report that voters recall of political spots in the 1982 Texas gubernatorial race was only 34%, the split between information they did recall was evenly distributed between issues and image information. There appear to be differences in the types and levels of information recalled from spots, and the type of information recalled can be structured somewhat by what viewers are cognitively attuned to or "seeking" from the ads (Garramone, 1983, 1984a,

1984b, 1986). Those who view ads for information seeking are more positive about both issue and image ads, and their vote intentions are more likely to be affected by viewing the ads (Christ et al., 1994).

Other types of spot content can interact with receiver characteristics to prime attitudes toward particular candidates. For instance, researchers have found that subtle racial cues in political ads can prime racial attitudes toward particular candidates, making racial attitudes cognitively more accessible (Valentino, Hutchings, & White, 2002). These racial cues appear to operate similarly in both laboratory experiments and in a random survey conducted in the Detroit area (Valentino, Traugott, & Hutchings, 2002). Equally disturbing are the findings of Medelberg (1999), whose test of the famous 1988 Willie Horton ad found that, controlling for gender, class, and racial and crime attitudes, exposure to the ad activated racial prejudice in Whites.

The type of ad can also affect voter recall levels, with some research showing that image ads can produce greater recall of information (Kaid & Sanders, 1978), particularly when a candidate is less well known (Schleuder, 1990). However, negative ads generally produce higher levels of recall than positive ones (Basil, Schooler, & Reeves, 1991; Johnson-Cartee & Copeland, 1989; Kahn & Kenney, 2000; Lang, 1991; Newhagen & Reeves, 1991).

Since the findings of Patterson and McClure that voters learned more about issues from television ads than from television news in the 1972 presidential election (McClure & Patterson, 1974; Patterson & McClure, 1976), debate has flourished over whether television advertising is superior to other forms and channels in conveying political information to voters. Kern and Just (1995) drew similar conclusions about the 1992 election. Just, Crigler, and Wallach (1990) found ads superior even to televised debates in issue learning. Attention to television ads was a better predictor than attention to television news of information gain in a 1990 Senate race (Zhao & Bleske, 1995). Using 1992 NES data, Brians and Wattenberg (1996) concluded that those who use television advertising are more likely than those who watch television news to recall candidate issue positions accurately and are more likely to use issues to evaluate candidates. Holbert, Benoit, Hansen, and Wen (2002) replicated these results with 1996 NES data and found political advertising to be a strong predictor of levels of issue knowledge and salience, although they suggest the importance of considering the interactions between advertising and other kinds of campaign information, such as debate exposure, television and newspaper use, and political discussion among citizens.

However, more recent multivariate analyses suggest that television news is sometimes a better predictor of overall information acquisition in political campaigns (Zhao & Chaffee, 1995), a finding reiterated by Chaffee, Zhao, and Leshner (1994), who found that for voters in California and North Carolina in the 1992 presidential campaign, "attention to" television ads did not predict knowledge about issues or the candidates as well as frequency of viewing and attention to television news and newspapers. Weaver and Drew (2001) also concluded that attention to television news, not television ads, had a significant impact on issue learning in the 2000 presidential campaign. Like all survey research studies of media effects, these studies may produce contradictory findings partly because of differences in measurement, particularly related to distinctions between exposure, attention, and frequency of viewing.

Receiver characteristics can also affect ad recall. Early research posited the notion that voters with low levels of campaign involvement were most likely to be

affected by political spots (Rothschild & Ray, 1974), as are undecided voters and late deciders (Bowen, 1994) and those with low-information seeking habits (Surlin & Gordon, 1977). This greater effect of promotional materials in low involvement situations was also true for exposure to direct mail advertising in campaigns (Swinyard & Coney, 1978). Age may be related to knowledge effects of political spots, as Atkin (1977) has found that viewing political commercials in the 1976 presidential primary resulted in increased political knowledge levels for children.

Agenda-setting theory has also played a role in understanding the cognitive effects of political advertising. The issue content of ads has been shown to correlate with judgments of issue salience for voters (Bowers, 1973, 1977; Ghorpade, 1986; Herrnson & Patterson, 2000; Kaid, 1976; Roberts, 1992; West, 1993; Williams, Shapiro, & Cutbirth, 1983) and candidate attributes (Sulfaro, 2001) and to affect the news agendas of media outlets (Roberts & McCombs, 1994; Schleuder, McCombs, & Wanta, 1991).

The structure and design of a political spot may also explain the effectiveness of some ads over others. For instance, researchers have demonstrated that the structure and design of ads can affect recall (Lang, 1991; Lang & Lanfear, 1990). Emotional aspects of a political ad can affect viewer recall (Lang, 1991). The presence of music in an ad can enhance visual recall (Thorson, Christ, & Caywood, 1991a), and an ad's visual structure can affect content recall and candidate evaluation (Geiger & Reeves, 1991).

## **Effects of Political Advertising on Candidate Evaluations**

The finding that exposure to political spots can affect candidate image evaluation has been confirmed in both experimental and survey research settings (Atkin & Heald, 1976; Becker & Doolittle, 1975; Cundy, 1986, 1990; Hofstetter, Zukin, & Buss, 1978; Kaid, 1991a, 1994, 1997a, 1998, 2001; Kaid & Chanslor, 1995; Kaid, Leland, & Whitney, 1992; Kaid & Tedesco, 1999c; McLeod et al., 1996; Pfau et al., 1997; Tedesco & Kaid, 2003; West, 1993). Some of the most convincing evidence for the effects of spot viewing on candidate perceptions comes from multivariate analysis. West (1993) analyzed survey and voting data from 1972 to 1992, and (controlling for demographic variables such as political party, education, gender) found that seeing a candidate's ads had a significant impact on judgments of candidate likeability and information on candidate issues and traits.

As with the recall of spots, the type of spot may be related to the effect on candidate image evaluation. For instance, issue ads seem to be particularly effective in raising a candidate's image ratings (Kaid, Chanslor, & Hovind, 1992; Kaid & Sanders, 1978; Thorson et al., 1991a, 1991b). Viewer predispositions also can affect evaluations of candidates as a result of spot exposure (Donohue, 1973; Meyer & Donohue, 1973). The evaluations of candidates are also more likely to be affected for political advertising viewers who have low levels of involvement (Cundy, 1990). Production techniques and stage factors such as shot length and social context of a television appearance may affect viewer impressions of the ad, as candidate image is contextualized when the camera pulls back, an effect Bucy and Newagen (1999) call "macro-drama."

Usually, the effects of spots on candidate images have been in a positive direction, but sometimes the results have shown that the effects can also be negative, particularly as a result of spots attacking the opponent (Kaid & Boydston, 1987;

West, 1994). Although a few studies have not found strong effects of spots on candidate evaluations (Meadow & Sigleman, 1982), others have found that the effects are often mixed. For instance, in a study of the 1992 California Senate races, West (1994) found that exposure to spots did not have a uniform effect on the candidates; some candidates' favorability ratings were not affected at all, and sometimes the effect was positive from exposure to the candidate's own ads and sometimes negative as a result of exposure to the opponent's attack ads.

In fact, there is now a substantial body of research that specifically addresses the effects on candidate images and voting behavior from exposure to negative or attack ads or comparing negative ad exposure to positive ad exposure. This research is addressed in more detail in a separate section.

Like the controversy over the superiority of television ads to television news for information gain, there is a small body of research that addresses the important question of whether there are channel differences in effects of political advertising on candidate evaluations. The evaluation of candidates appears to be dependent on the channel through which the advertising is transmitted. Early research verified that some candidates appear to do better one medium; some, on another (Andreoli & Worchel 1978; Cohen 1976). Particularly intriguing is the recent study that found a difference in candidate attitude depending on the channel used (TV or Internet) for advertising in the 2000 presidential campaign. Voters who watched ads on the Web were likely to vote for Gore, whereas those watching the same ads on TV were leaning toward Bush (Kaid, 2002a). Channel of ad exposure also seemed to affect a range of related information-seeking and voting behaviors (Kaid, 2003).

## Effects of Political Advertising on Behavior

Determining the effects of political spots directly on receiver behavior has been somewhat more difficult to substantiate. Yet there is strong evidence that political television spots have behavioral effects. The most obvious of these are effects on voting for particular candidates, but effects have also been found on other political system variables, such as information seeking and electoral turnout.

**Effects on Voting for Candidates.** Effects directly on candidate voting decisions have been demonstrated in two ways. First, some researchers have attempted to prove a relationship between voting outcomes and amount of expenditures, either in the campaign in general (as most of the budget in high-level campaigns goes for advertising) or in political advertising specifically (Jacobsen, 1976; Reid & Soley, 1983; Soley, Craig, & Cherif, 1988). Although research has found that in noncandidate elections, such as ballot propositions, there is little support for the notion that media spending affects votes (Bowler & Donovan, 1994), higher levels of campaign spending seem to have some relationship to turnout and success for the candidate (Weaver-Lariscy & Tinkman 1976, 1987). Wattenberg (1982) found a relationship between spending for advertising in Congressional campaigns and the salience of candidates for the electorate. McCleneghan (1987) found that amount of radio political advertising and campaign spending was the best predictor of success in 1986 New Mexico mayoral races. This positive effect seems to be present even when applied to spending on direct mail, especially for challengers (Weaver-Lariscy & Tinkham, 1996).

A second type of study on voting for candidates uses experimental or survey research to show that a voter exposed to political advertising will vote as the message intends (Cundy, 1986; Kaid & Sanders, 1978; Mulder, 1979); these effects seem to be especially strong for late deciders (Bowen, 1994). Hofstetter and Buss (1980) found that exposure to last-minute paid advertising was associated with late changes in vote decisions and ticketsplitting. In his study of the 1992 California Senate races, West (1994) identified some effects of exposure to ads on vote preference for Barbara Boxer, but all other candidates were not similarly affected. Kaid (1976) used regression analysis in a local Illinois election to demonstrate that exposure to political advertising of many types accounted for a significant portion of the variance in the vote.

Political scientists have tended to use aggregate survey data, NES data, or combinations of NES data and other datasets, to demonstrate a relationship between advertising exposure and voting decisions (Goldstein & Freedman, 2000; Joslyn, 1981). Alternatively, Shaw (1999) used advertising time buy data for the 1988, 1992, and 1996 presidential elections to show that an increase in advertising buys can have a direct effect in increasing the candidate's percentage of the statewide vote. Campaign personal appearances also have an effect, and the two can interact to produce an additive improvement, especially with undecided voters.

As with recall and candidate evaluation, receiver variables seem to play a role in advertising effects on voting behavior. Early studies suggested that the voting decisions of low-involvement voters were more easily affected by political ads (Rothschild & Ray, 1974). However, in the 1988 Minnesota Senate race Faber, Tims and Schmitt (1993) found that higher levels of enduring and situational involvement, as well as attention to television news, resulted in greater effects for negative ads on vote preference.

## **NEGATIVE ADVERTISING EFFECTS**

In discussing the research on content of political advertising above, the author noted the growing number of negative political ads in elections in the United States. The number and influence attributed to such ads have encouraged a substantial increase in research concentrated on this type of political advertising. A point worth noting is the controversy over what to call "negative" advertising. Some have suggested that the use of the term itself is ill chosen and encourages a negative response from voters. Richardson (2001, 2003) argues that the distinction between negative and positive advertising is too simplistic and should be viewed in a larger cultural context. Some researchers have preferred the term "attack" advertising, whereas others distinguish negative advertising from comparative advertising.

This controversy is interesting in part because of the emotional charge the word negative seems to carry for voters. Although voters seem to be able to distinguish in practice between "mudslinging" and legitimate criticism of an opponent's record and policy positions (Stewart, 1975), the media and other political observers have so demonized "negative advertising" that it is difficult to remember sometimes that discussion of the pros and cons of policy concerns and candidate positions on issues, whether it occurs in political advertising or some other forum, is the very heart of the free choice system embodied by democratic principles. As Richardson (2003) points out, the advantages of engaged debate and hearing the pros and cons

through political advertising serve important functions for democracy and help to build an informed electorate. The public, however, are on both sides of this issue at the same time. In a national survey conducted after the 1996 presidential campaign, Kaid, McKinney, and Tedesco (2000) found that, whereas 70% of those surveyed said that “candidates have a right to point out weaknesses of their opponents,” 43% thought that “negative ads are unethical.”

### **Information Effects of Negative Political Advertising**

One important characteristic of negative political advertising bears repetition here and helps to explain their effects on voters: negative political ads are more issue-oriented than positive ads). It is not surprising, then, that, as noted above, exposure to negative ads results in higher levels of audience recall than exposure to positive ads (Basil et al., 1991; Johnson-Cartee & Copeland, 1989; Kahn & Kenney, 2000; Lang, 1991; Newhagen & Reeves, 1991). Voters who recall negative ads are more likely to have enhanced issue knowledge and use issues for evaluating candidates, particularly late in the campaign (Brians & Wattenberg, 1996). Exposure to negative ads also increases the accuracy and speed of visual recognition (Newhagen & Reeves, 1991).

### **Candidate Evaluation Effects of Negative Advertising**

In addition to knowing that negative ads encourage recall of issues and related candidate information, researchers have also learned from experimental studies that positive ads are more effective than negative or comparative ads at enhancing attitudes toward candidates (Hill, 1989; Kahn & Geer, 1994; Shen & Wu, 2002). It should be noted that this does not mean that negative ads have proven ineffective, only that some experimental studies show them to be less effective than positive spots. O’Cass (2002) found that the negative campaign of the opposition is just as believable to voters as the positive campaign of an incumbent party. Experimental studies have documented the effectiveness of negative advertising, particularly in giving negative attitudes toward the opponent/target (Tinkham & Weaver-Lariscy, 1993). In fact, Jasperson and Fan (2002) found that the effect of negative information was four times greater than the effect of positive information when both were considered in favorability toward the candidates.

**Potential Backlash Effects.** Negative ads have very complicated effects on attitudes toward the candidates who sponsor them and the opponents who are the target of them. Research has shown that candidates who sponsor negative ads may be subject to negative responses themselves—i.e., the negative ads may backfire on them, leading to more negative views of the sponsoring candidate (Garramone, 1984c; Jasperson & Fan, 2002; Lemert, Wanta, & Lee, 1999; Merritt, 1984; Sonner, 1998).

Research has suggested several ways to avoid the potential that a negative ad may backfire on the sponsor. For instance, Pfau, Parrott, and Lindquist (1992) suggest that expectancy theory might account for the success of Wellstone’s 1990 Senate campaign spots. By using humor and less harsh negative attacks, the campaign violated expectations and avoided the backlash sometimes associated with negative advertising.

**Sponsorship, Content, and Rebuttals.** Despite the potential for backlash, research has shown that negative ads can be more effective when sponsored by a third party or independent source (Garramone, 1984c, 1985; Garramone & Smith, 1984; Shen & Wu, 2002).

Most research has concluded that the content and style of negative advertising is also an important determinant of its success. Attacks that focus on the opposing candidate's issue positions are more effective than those attacking the character or image of the opponent (Johnson-Cartee & Copeland, 1989; Kahn & Geer, 1994; Kaid & Tedesco, 1999c; Pfau & Burgoon, 1989; Roddy & Garramone, 1988; Schenck-Hamlin, Procter, & Rumsey, 2000; Sonner, 1998). However, if a sponsoring candidate feels that a personal attack on an opponent is necessary, Homer and Batra (1994) suggest that success is more likely if character-based attacks on the opponent are focused on competence or experience. Another strategy for effective negative attacks based on character of the opponent can be derived from research by Budesheim, Houston, and DePaola (1996), who found support for the importance of and intertwining of character and issue attacks in negative campaigning. Although these experiments used messages that were attributed to candidate speeches, and not ads, they found that voters were more influenced by character attacks when they had a strong justification based on issues. A comparative ad may also work better than a purely negative ad, as it may lower evaluations of the targeted candidate without having so great a negative effect on the sponsor (Pinkleton, 1997, 1998). One reason for this comparative success of comparative ads is that comparative ads prompt more counterarguments and positive affect among viewers compared with negative ads (Meirick, 2002).

For a candidate who is the target of negative attack spots, rebuttals have proven helpful in blunting the effects of an attack (Garramone, 1985; Roddy & Garramone, 1988; Sonner, 1998). However, the effectiveness of the defense may wear off over time and the original attack exhibits a "sleeper effect," becoming more powerful later in the campaign (Weaver-Lariscy & Tinkham, 1999).

Inoculation can also provide some advance protection against the effectiveness of opponent attacks (Pfau & Burgoon, 1988; Pfau & Kenski, 1990). This inoculation advantage seems to apply to political advertising even when the distribution channel is direct mail (Pfau, Kenski, Nitz, & Sorenson, 1990).

Reactions to negative political advertising may also depend on the voters' overall attitude to such ads (Christ et al., 1994; Copeland & Johnston-Cartee, 1990). For instance, level of involvement and attention as well as attention to television news seems to increase the likelihood of being affected by television political ads, whereas higher newspaper reading tended to decrease the effect of the negative ads (Faber, Tims, & Schmitt, 1993). An experimental study showed that judgment about the ethicality of an ad affected the attitude or liking of the ad but that emotional responses generated by an ad may overcome this judgment (Tinkham & Weaver-Lariscy, 1994). That is, a voter may be affected by an ad that taps emotional responses, even if the voter believes the ad to be unethical. Recent research has suggested that voters may exhibit a "third-person effect" with regard to such advertising, thinking that others were more likely to be affected by the ads than they were themselves (Cohen, & Davis, 1991).

To make it all even more complicated, research has also suggested that exposure to negative political advertising may affect voters in a synergistic way (Houston, Doan, & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 1999). If both candidates run a negative campaign, then both candidates are rated lower, but the candidate who is most compatible may get off easier and be more positively regarded than if he or she runs a negative



campaign and the opponent runs a positive one. The opposite may also be true—i.e., even a nonfavored candidate can get better evaluations for running a positive ad if the preferred favored or compatible candidate is running a negative campaign.

### **Effects of Negative Advertising on Voting Behavior**

Many of the studies that have measured negative ad effects on recall and candidate image have also identified effects on voting behavior, leading to a clear conclusion that negative ads do affect voting preferences (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995; Basil et al., 1991; Kaid & Boydston, 1987; Roddy & Garramone, 1988). Experimental studies such as these are often discounted by political scientists, who place more confidence in NES and national survey data. Lau and Pomper (2002) used such data to determine that negative campaigning is effective for challengers. Instead of using genuine negative advertising, they coded newspaper articles to represent the tone (negative or positive) of campaigns. Combined with the NES data, their measures showed that negative campaigning seems to work for challengers, whereas positive campaigning seems to be more effective for incumbent political candidates.

The context in which negative ads are shown can also affect vote likelihood. For instance, negative ads are particularly likely to affect vote decisions when shown in a news environment (Kaid, Chanslor, & Hovind, 1992).

### **Effects of Negative Advertising on the Political System**

One of the most compelling concerns about political advertising is the possibility that exposure to negative advertising may have effects that are unhealthy for democracy. Some have suggested that the very existence of negative advertising has negative consequences in the form of lower voting turnout and an increase in voter alienation and cynicism. The basic argument, exemplified by the position of Curtis Gans, head of the Committee for the Study of the American Electorate, is that as people get turned off by negative campaigning, they tune out of the electoral process, choosing not to vote at all (Much Ado, 1985).

The most publicized findings in this regard are those of Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1995), whose experimental studies showed that exposure to negative ads reduces voter turnout by 5% (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995; Ansolabehere, Iyengar, Simon, & Valentino, 1994). Analyses of aggregate NES and survey data reinforced their findings that negative advertising leads to “demobilization of voters” (Ansolabehere, Iyengar, & Simon, 1999). Lemert et al. (1999) analyzed the Oregon mail ballot election for Senate in 1996 and found some support for the decreased turnout from negative ads for independents. Rahn and Hirshorn (1999) found that viewing negative political ads affected children’s attitudes toward the political system—those with high efficacy were stimulated by negative advertising but those with low efficacy were less likely to vote as a result of seeing negative ads; no similar effect occurred for positive ads. Few other studies, however, have found any support for the conclusion that a direct reduction in voter turnout is attributable to negative advertising exposure.

The evidence on the other side, however, has grown substantially in the last 10 years. Wattenberg and Briens (1999) contest directly the Ansolabehere et al. findings and use NES data to show that there is no identifiable demobilization effect from exposure to negative advertising. Using a combination of content analysis

of ads from 1960 to 1992 with NES voting data, Finkel and Geer (1998) found no demobilizing effect for negative advertising among any voters, even independents or those most likely exposed to high amounts of mass media. Similarly, Vavreck (2000), using NES data from 1976 to 1996, found that negative campaigning does not appear to lower levels of interest in the campaign, attention paid to the campaign, or participation in voting.

Freedman and Goldstein (1999) likewise found no support for the notion that negative ads depress voter turnout. They used telephone survey data in Virginia, along with content analysis of exposure data (weighted to construct individual exposure measures), to show that, on the contrary, exposure to negative ads seemed to increase the likelihood of voting. Kahn and Kenney (1999) reached a similar conclusion when they showed that increased negativity in ads causes turnout to go up, not down, as long as the criticisms are viewed as legitimate and not as mudslinging. Although they found a slight possibility that independents and those less interested in politics might be turned away from voting by exposure to negative messages, their study showed that negativity in news tone may be more harmful to turnout for this group than negativity in ads.

A few studies have also suggested another negative impact for negative ads: the possibility that exposure to negative ads may increase levels of political cynicism and alienation. Ansolabehere et al. (1994) also found that exposure to negative ads leads to increased feelings of political inefficacy and increased feeling that political leaders are not responsive. Kaid et al. (2000) found that voters exposed to 1996 presidential ads, both positive and negative, experienced more political cynicism after exposure than before.

Again, however, the evidence is more convincing on the other side. Many studies have found that exposure to negative ads has no discernible effect on levels of political trust, cynicism, alienation, or efficacy (Garramone, Atkin, Pinkleton, & Cole, 1990; Kaid, 2002; Martinez & Delegal, 1990; Pinkleton, 1998; Pinkleton, Um, & Austin, 2002; Schenck-Hamlin et al., 2000).

## **Metanalysis of Negative Ads**

With the body of research on negative advertising growing ever larger, researchers have become interested in applying the techniques of metanalysis to the research in hopes of establishing some general findings that transcend differences in methodology and measurement. Lau and Sigelman (2000) analyzed 55 studies on negative advertising and concluded that negative ads are not more effective than positive ads. In a related, formal metanalysis of negative ad research, Lau, Sigelman, Heldman, and Babbitt (1999) analyzed 52 studies and determined that research does not show that negative ads are more effective than positive ones and also does not show that they have a detrimental effect on the political system. However, their work is not persuasive because of its narrow focus. The authors seem interested only in the question of whether negative ads are more effective than positive ads. However, direct comparisons are not the only concern, as negative ads may be effective on their own even if there are no countering positive ads for comparison. Negative ads may be the only way to counter an incumbent. Thus, this metanalysis excludes many important negative advertising studies and ignores the importance of campaign context, as well as third party or independent advertising effects, which research has shown to be particularly effective.

## POLITICAL ADVERTISING AND FEMALE CANDIDATES

Although women have been voters for nearly a century and serve as elected and appointed government officeholders in ever-increasing numbers, the surge in interest about the campaign communication styles of female candidates occurred in the 1990s. The “Year of the Woman” in 1992 followed outrage over the treatment of Professor Anita Hill in the hearings for confirmation of Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas in 1991 and resulted in more women running for political office at varying levels throughout the United States. With this increase in female candidates came a stronger interest in identifying the styles and strategies that female candidate use in their political advertising.

### Advertising Content for Female Political Candidates

**Issue vs. Image Content.** The earliest studies of women as political candidates tended to be anecdotal and interpretive (Kern & Edley, 1994; Procter, Aden, & Japp, 1988; White, 1994). As research began to accumulate on the advertising styles of female candidates who ran for office in the 1980s, it became clear that female candidates, like their male opponents, discussed issues in the majority of their ads (Benze & DeClercq, 1985; Johnston & White, 1993; Kahn, 1993, 1996).

In fact, in an analysis of spots from 38 candidates for U.S. Senate in 1984 and 1986, Kahn (1993) found that, compared to male candidates, women are even more likely to focus on issues. The issue content differences between men and women occurred in expected areas: “Men are more likely to discuss economic issues such as taxes and the federal budget, in their spot ads, while women spend more time talking about social issues and social policy, such as education and health policy” (p. 489).

In the 1990s, however, Bystrom and Kaid (2002) found that women and men were quite similar in the topics they chose to highlight in their political television commercials. Both men and women were more likely to concentrate their advertising on “masculine” issues, such as the economy in general, the budget/deficit, crime, or defense/military. There were also no significant differences between men and women candidates in their use of “feminine” issues, such as health and social welfare policies. This lack of difference in issue concentration for men and women remained true in U.S. Senate races from 1990 to 1996. However, in 1998 races researchers found that “feminine” issues, particularly health care and education, received much greater emphasis by female candidates (Bystrom & Kaid, 2002; Robertson, 2000). Williams (1998) reached similar conclusions about the content of male and female ads, although he found that men tended to discuss “social issues” even more than women, partly because he grouped crime into the social issues category and included gubernatorial elections. This higher emphasis on crime when gubernatorial candidates are included was confirmed by Bystrom and Miller (1999) when analyzing 1996 gubernatorial and senatorial ads.

Studies of the image content of male and female political advertising have also revealed limited differences. This lack of difference is due, in part, to the tendency of male candidates to take on “feminine” traits, representing themselves as trustworthy and caring. Bystrom and Kaid (2002) summarize this development in

image portrayal in advertising in the 1990s by saying that both men and women “emphasize mostly ‘masculine’ traits such as strength, aggressiveness, performance, and experience balanced with such “feminine” attributes as honesty, sensitivity, and understanding. That is, both men and women seem to be presenting themselves as tough but caring—at least when running against each other” (p. 164).

### **Negative Advertising and Female Candidates**

Female candidates have always found it difficult to walk the line between demonstrating the toughness and strength necessary for political service and appearing too aggressive or offensively masculine. Nowhere is this path more difficult to negotiate than in the area of negative advertising. Benze and Declercq (1985), in their early study of male and female ad strategies, maintained that male candidates used more negative advertising than female candidates. Similarly, Johnston and White (1993) studied four Senate campaigns in 1986 and concluded that female candidates steered away from negative ads.

However, more inclusive studies of candidate advertising in the 1980s found differences in male and female negative ad usage that depended on the level of the election. Kahn (1996) found that in gubernatorial elections men used more negative advertising than women, but in Senate level campaigns it was female candidates who used more negative ads. Trent and Sabourin (1993) confirmed the equality between men and women in use of negative ads but noted that men used a much more hard-hitting, assaultive style in their negative ads.

By the 1990s, however, with women suddenly challenging for more and more electoral offices, female candidates began to use negative advertisements as frequently as, and sometimes more often than, their male counterparts (Bystrom, 1995; Bystrom & Kaid, 2002; Bystrom & Miller, 1999; Kahn, 1993, 1996; Procter & Schenck-Hamlin, 1996; Procter, Schenck-Hamlin, & Haase, 1994; Robertson, 2000; Robertson, Froemling, Wells, & McCraw, 1999; Williams, 1998). However, it appeared that women were more likely to use negative attacks against their opponents on issues, whereas male candidates more often focused their attacks on female opponents on personality and image factors.

### **Videostyle of Female Candidates**

In the 1990s, with more female candidates challenging and winning public office, researchers also began more systematic analyses of the style and content of their ads, focusing on more than just issue/image content or positive/negative focus. Bystrom (1995) applied the videostyle concept to the ads of male and female senatorial candidates in the early 1990s and found that it was possible to identify a unique videostyle for women candidates facing male opponents. Although few differences in the verbal component of videostyle (such as issue emphasis, negative tone, use of logical appeals) were apparent in the ads, Bystrom and Kaid (2002) found that throughout the 1990s, female candidate styles could be distinguished from male candidates in several other ways. In the nonverbal content of the ads, for instance, they found that women appeared and spoke more often in their ads, dressed more formally, and smiled more frequently than did male candidates.

Differences in production components of television spots were also apparent, with women using more testimonial formats than men and also more special effects and technological distortions in their ads (Bystrom & Kaid, 2002). The latter findings on production techniques may relate to the increased use of negative ads by women candidates, as special effects techniques and technological distortions are more frequent in negative ads.

Unlike other political advertising research, little attempt has been made to extend the study of female candidate ads in other countries. A marked exception is the application of videostyle analysis to female candidate advertising in Finland. Carlson (2001) found that there are some similarities between male and female political ads within and between the United States and Finland. Verbal components were quite similar since women in both countries emphasized male issues and traits. Most Finnish ads were positive because of national broadcast regulations. Female candidates in both countries share nonverbal characteristics in their ads, such as being more likely to smile than are male candidates. Some minor differences across countries were present, but in general, female candidates used a dual strategy by emphasizing hard issues while trying to portray a softer image.

## **Effects of Female Candidate Advertising**

Although there is a growing number of studies that address the content differences and styles of male and female candidates, there is very little research on the effects or effectiveness of such advertising. Some research addresses the political advertising strategies used by male candidates to appeal to female voters. For instance, Banwart and Kaid (2003) used content analysis to identify the feminine strategies used by Bill Clinton in his 1992 and 1996 campaign ads as appeals to women voters, playing on women's issues and emphasizing in ads with women his sensitivity and compassion.

Experimental research has also tested the differences in effectiveness of male and female commercials. Researchers have shown that female candidates seem to do better when they appear in typical masculine settings. Kaid, Myers, Pippis, and Hunter (1984) found that women candidates received higher evaluations and higher vote likelihood scores in experiments that involved exposure to political spots that placed the female candidate in masculine settings, such as a construction or "hard-hat" setting. Wadsworth et al. (1987) also conducted experiments that placed a female candidate in a variety of settings and found that a female candidate was rated higher (candidate evaluation and vote likelihood) when she appeared in a career setting, instead of a family setting.

Experiments conducted by Hitchon and Chang (1995) show that commercials for male and female candidates are processed differently by receivers. Ads for women candidates elicited greater recall of family and personal appearance, whereas recall was higher for men's ads when content was political campaigning situations (Hitchon & Chang, 1995). Men's negative ads against women elicited more emotional and negative responses than women's negative ads against men (Hitchon & Chang, 1995). For women, neutral ads, as opposed to positive or negative ones, elicit more favorable responses from voters and are viewed as more socially desirable (Hitchon, Chang, & Harris, 1997).

## ISSUE ADVOCACY ADVERTISING

One of the newest areas of political advertising research focuses on the use of print and television advertising to convey positions on policy issues in both electoral and nonelectoral settings. In electoral settings such advertising generally takes the form of interest group or political action committee efforts designed to support the election or defeat of candidates whose views are similar or dissimilar from those of the group. Through such advertising, corporate interests can attempt to influence political campaign outcomes (Konda & Siegelman, 1990; Sethi, 1977). West (2000) suggests that issue advocacy ads are a growing part of the political dialogue in both campaigns and public policy debates with interest groups spending millions on ads. In candidate elections, expenditures by such groups are often called “independent expenditures” because, from a legal standpoint, they are supposed to be independent of, and not coordinated with, the candidate’s campaign. As such ads are more often negative (directed toward defeat of an opponent or policy), most research on this type of advertising has been encompassed by the negative advertising research. The most relevant finding to date has been the well-documented conclusion that negative advertising from independent or third-party sources is more effective than negative ads sponsored by an opposing candidate (Garramone, 1984c, 1985; Garramone & Smith, 1984; Shen & Wu, 2002).

The use of advertising as a public policy tool in nonelectoral settings has received only limited analysis and empirical research. In the last half of the twentieth century, corporations increased their use of advertising to attain political and image enhancement goals. Such advertising, sponsored by public or private entities and designed to influence public opinion on policy questions, has occupied a unique place in the political system because it often blurs the line between commercial and political speech. On the one hand, the purpose of the advertising can be seen as offering information and viewpoints on a political issue. On the other hand, it is also often the case that such advertising has the ultimate purpose of influencing policy that may have economic implications for the advertiser. Early in this century the courts clearly held that purely commercial speech (or advertising) was not protected by the First Amendment but that editorial advertising could be interpreted as political or “protected” speech (Meeske, 1973).

Issue advertising first drew the serious attention of scholars in the mid-1970s as a result of the attempts of Mobil Oil to gain public exposure for its viewpoint on energy concerns (Crabbe & Vibbert, 1983). Corporations were attracted to advocacy advertising for many of the same reasons that political candidates rely on it, including the advantage of exerting control over the message conveyed to the public, thus escaping the gatekeeping function of the news media (Salmon, Reid, Pokrywczynski, & Willett, 1985).

Meadow (1981) discusses the use of corporate advertising, or nonproduct advertising, as a way of providing a conduit for discussion of issues directly with voters. He provided categories (typologies) of such advertising from newspapers, including such types as image, informative, public interest, participation, patriotic, free enterprise, controversy, equal time, advertorial, and recruitment. Heath (1988) outlined strategies corporations use in their issue advertising to establish their social responsibility.

One of the most common types of research on this type of advocacy advertising has been the case study method. For example, Dionisopoulos (1986) analyzed the

use of corporate advocacy advertising by the nuclear power industry in managing the aftermath of the Three Mile Island nuclear plant crisis in 1979. More recently, researchers have addressed the ways in which businesses modified their advertising to convey patriotic and political messages in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist tragedy in 2001 (Connolly-Ahern & Kaid, 2002).

Although some corporate advocacy advertising is designed to address the corporation's public image and to pursue social and political goals, some advocacy advertising is used by corporations and interest groups to express views on and to persuade voters and elites to adopt their views on public policy concerns. Among the better-known examples of this type of advocacy advertising were the spots sponsored by the health care industry in opposition to Clinton's health care proposals in 1993–1994. Kaid, Tedesco, and Spiker (1996) analyzed the ads used to advocate on both sides of this controversy and on the adoption of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in the early 1990s. West, Heith, and Goodwin (1996) likewise have documented the large amount of money spent by various groups on health-care advertising when Clinton's health-care plan was being considered. Their analysis of the ads and survey results showed that exposure to the ads increased the public's perceptions of their knowledge about health care but did not specifically affect views of Clinton's proposals.

Experimental studies have been more successful at evidencing the outcomes of such advocacy efforts on public opinions about policy issues. Atkin (1981), in an early review of the effectiveness of mass media information campaigns, Atkin (1981) pointed to findings that suggest public information campaigns, like political candidate advertising, often have their greatest success in affecting public knowledge levels. Tests of the effectiveness of specific issue advertising have focused on source and message strategies. Salmon, Reid, Pokrywczynski, and Willett (1985) compared the message effects of an issue advocacy print ad with the presentation of the same message via print news. They concluded that advocacy advertising can be effective and may be as persuasive as news in the presentation of some information. In other research, that parallels the findings of the superiority of independent sources in negative political advertising (Garramone, 1985), Hammond (1987) found that nonprofit sources had greater credibility in issue advertising than did those perceived as having a profit motive.

## **POLITICAL ADVERTISING ON THE INTERNET**

One of the most talked-about political phenomena of the past decade has been the growth in the use of the Internet or World Wide Web (WWW) for politics. For candidates, parties, interest groups, and even individuals, the Web has many of the same advantages attributed to political advertising (control of the message and widespread distribution) but with the added advantage of low cost and almost-universal access. In Chapter 19 of this volume, John Tedesco outlines the research on the many uses and possibilities of the Web as a channel for political communication. It is worth noting here, however, that in many ways Web sites can be viewed as a form of political advertising. Candidate, parties, interest groups, nonpartisan groups, corporation organizations, and individuals have the ability to create and distribute at very little cost large amounts of information directly to voters.

Presidential candidates and political parties began to make limited use the Web for political information and persuasion in the 1992 campaign and found more uses

for it in 1996 (Whillock, 1997). After the 1996 campaign, for example, a professional campaign consultant reported that exit polls provided evidence that “more than a quarter of all voters are on-line and about 10 percent made their voting decisions based upon information collected primarily from the Internet” (Connell, 1997, p. 64). By the 2000 campaign, Rumbough and Tomlinson (2000) indicated that 144 million Americans could view candidate Web sites from their homes.

As a vehicle for political advertising, the Internet functions in two ways. On the one hand, the Internet serves as a discreet and unique medium for conveying information to voters via Web sites. Such Web sites provide the opportunity for detailed and almost limitless textual information about issues, endorsements, political statements or manifestos and the presentation of all kinds of sound, graphic, and visual representations. Thus, the Web site and its content are itself political advertising. On the other hand, the Web site provides a channel, or secondary medium, for the distribution or replay of other types of campaign information, including advertisements designed for television, print media, radio, direct mail, or any other format. Increasingly, candidates, parties, and other groups use their Web sites as a place to load multimedia advertising or information materials originally disseminated through other channels (Kaid, 2002a; Klinenberg & Perrin, 2000).

As a direct form of political advertising, Web sites were used by almost all primary and general election candidates for president in 1996, and descriptions of such advertising efforts have generally noted that this form of candidate advertising contains a great deal of detailed and substantive issue information (Kaid et al., 2000; Margolis, Resnick, & Tu, 1997). McKeown and Plowman (1999) validate this notion with their study showing that 1996 presidential candidate Web sites contained substantial amounts of in-depth issue information. Tedesco, Miller, and Spiker (1999) suggested that in the 1996 campaign the Web sites of Dole and Clinton provided an opportunity for the candidates to relay their messages throughout the campaign without the filter of media or interest group interpretation, providing constantly updated information to voters about a variety of topics in a variety of forms (text, video, sound, etc.). However, some scholars (Klinenberg & Perrin, 2000) have criticized 1996 Republican presidential primary candidates for failure to use the full potential of their Web sites or to exploit the interactive capabilities. They argued that most politicians tended to use the Web just like traditional media (such as print, video, or graphics).

More optimistic views of the Web's role in political communication point to the fact that Web sites more often contain positive information, compared to the negativity of television political advertising. For instance, Klotz (1997) analyzed Web sites for U.S. Senate candidates in 1996 and found them to be composed of primarily positive information promoting the candidate, rather than tearing down the opponent. However, this is not true of all aspects of a Web site. Analyses of the content of the 2000 Gore and Bush Web sites found that attacks on the opponent were one of the most common content features of the news releases posted by the candidates on their Web sites (Wicks & Souley, 2003; Wicks, Souley, & Verser, 2003). Puopolo (2001) found that these trends extended to U.S. Senate campaigns' use of the Web in 2000. This study concluded that whereas both Republican and Democratic candidates discussed substantial amounts of issue information, Republicans were more likely to include negative information.

Comparisons of Web site content for male and female candidates have also revealed some interesting findings. For instance, female candidates are more likely



to take advantage of the interactive aspects of Web sites (Puopolo, 2001). Banwart (2002) studied a large number of male and female candidate Web sites in 2000 and compared their "Web style" to the videostyle demonstrated in traditional television spots. She concluded that male and female "Web styles" are very similar, allowing women a better opportunity to overcome the advantages of male incumbency and better financing.

One possibly important aspect of the Internet as a form of political advertising is its ability to provide exposure for independent or lesser-known candidates who cannot afford the expense of major television advertising campaigns (Kern, 1997). The potential for Web sites to be effective as part of a campaign arsenal depends to some extent on more than just exposure to the information, however. To date, there is only limited research on the extent to which this type of advertising has verifiable effects on voters.

Most research on the effects of voter use of and exposure to Web sites has been descriptive, but a few studies have discovered that viewing Web sites has a positive effect on liking for candidates (Hansen, 2000; Hansen & Benoit, 2002). Whereas Johnson, Braima, and Sothirajah (1999) found that exposure to political Web sites in the 1996 campaign had very limited effect on levels of candidate image or issue knowledge, Tedesco and Kaid (2000) concluded that respondents who interacted with a 2000 presidential candidate Web site were less cynical after the activity than before, regardless of whether they were attuned to informational or entertainment content. One reason for this positive effect of Web site exposure may be that those who use on-line sources of information ascribe higher credibility to on-line information than to traditional media information (Flanigan & Metzger, 2000; Johnson & Kaye, 1998).

Research has also shown that the level of interactivity on a candidate's Web site may affect the perception of the candidate. Candidates with high levels of interaction on their sites were perceived as more sensitive, responsiveness, and trustworthiness (Sundar, Hesser, Kalyanaraman, & Brown, 1998). Kaid (2002) found that political advertising on the Internet was more effective for Gore, but on traditional television, it helped Bush.

In direct comparisons of traditional television advertising and advertising shown as part of a Web site, Kaid (2002) found that not only did viewing ads on the Internet affect voting decisions, but voters who saw a political spot on the Internet exhibited higher levels of information seeking and likelihoods of voting than those who saw the same spot on a traditional television medium (Kaid, 2002a, 2003).

## **INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL ADVERTISING**

Although many nations around the world have adopted democratic systems of government, there are many differences in the institutional and political systems and in the media structures. For instance, most European systems are characterized by multiparty systems, shorter campaign periods, greater emphasis on the political parties themselves, parliamentary electoral systems, and public-controlled media systems. These characteristics are important determinants of the type of political advertising allowed and produced by candidates for public office. Cultural factors, particularly the cultural prohibition against confrontation and public attacks on opponents, play a greater role in the approach to political advertising in many Asian countries. However, despite all the differences that exist, it is remarkable

that so much of the “American style” of political advertising has found its way into the electoral processes of democracies around the world.

Perhaps it is not so surprising that democracies outside the United States have turned to political advertising as a way for political leaders and parties to market issues and personal qualifications to voters. Political candidates and parties in most democratic systems face the fundamental problem of how to communicate with and persuade voters to accept their leadership. For candidates and parties in any democratic system, political advertising offers the same basic advantages, message control and ability to achieve mass dissemination. Despite this fundamental advantage to political advertising, the roles of such messages, their content and styles, and their effects vary across democratic systems. In *Political Advertising in Western Democracies*, Kaid and Holtz-Bacha (1995) discuss the various media, cultural, and political system differences that affect the role that such messages play in a number of democratic systems. Plasser (2002) has also done an extensive review of the use and characteristics of advertising across international and cultural boundaries.

The U.S. environment for political advertising is distinguishable from many other democracies in two important ways. First, because in the U.S. candidates purchase time for political ads in a commercial broadcasting system, candidates at every level of elective office are allowed to buy almost unlimited amounts of advertising time on television. Second, the message content is almost unregulated, as noted earlier. Because of the value placed on free speech rights in the United States, candidates and parties can say or do almost anything in political spots (Kaid, 1991b). Most other countries allow no or limited purchase of time, providing instead free time on public channels to candidates and parties (Kaid & Holtz-Bacha, 1995; Kaid, 1999b; Plasser, 2002). This free-time system may allot commonly 3 or 5 or 10 spots per candidate or party in an election campaign, whereas the major U.S. presidential candidates in 1996 and 2000 purchased time in the general election campaign for over 100 spots costing \$200-300 million (Devlin, 1997, 2001).

## Comparisons of Advertising Content

As Holtz-Bacha points out in Chapter 17 of this volume, a growing tradition of political communication research in Europe has led to analysis of political advertising strategies and techniques. The largest quantity of research on political advertising outside the United States has probably been done in Britain, where the evolution and content of political broadcasts have been described (Philo, 1993; Scammell, 1990, 1995; Scammell & Semetko, 1995), and in Germany, where comprehensive analysis has been provided from content and cultural perspectives (Holtz-Bacha, 2000; Holtz-Bacha & Kaid, 1993). A few comparisons of content of political spots across countries, using the videostyle concept (Kaid & Johnston, 2001) and including Germany, Britain, France, Italy, Poland, Romania, Greece, and Israel, have revealed that political ads in most democracies concentrate more on issues than on candidate images (Holtz-Bacha, Kaid, & Johnston, 1994; Kaid, 1997b, 1999b; Kaid, Gerstlé, & Sanders, 1991; Kaid & Holtz-Bacha, 1995; Kaid & Tedesco, 1993). Although most countries are not immune to the attack mode of political communication, the United States is the only country in which negative ads have become the dominant format for political spots in national elections (Kaid, 1997b, 1999b). The use of emotion is also a common feature in spots across cultures, although Great Britain and France are more successful at emphasizing logical proof in their broadcasts.

Researchers have also given attention to the advertising in Israel, both on television and in newspapers. Earlier research by Caspi and Eyal (1983) pointed to an increase in issues over image in candidate political newspaper advertising in Israel, but Eyal (1985) studied the 1984 national parliament elections in Israel and found that, although real and ideological issues made up the majority of coverage in newspapers and in newspaper ads for candidates, there was an increasing trend toward image content, particularly in ads. Griffin and Kagan (1996) compared 1992 U.S. and Israel spots and noted differences between parties and how they communicate cultural identities through visual and mythic techniques.

Studies of the content of ads in a few other countries have emerged. For instance, Carlson (2000) compared the strategies of female candidates in Finland and the United States. Róka (1999) emphasized the role that advertising has played in communicating candidate and party values to voters in Hungary. Studies of political advertising in the United States and South Korea found that there are differences in the content of newspaper (Tak, Kaid, & Lee, 1997) and television (Lee, Tak, & Kaid, 1998) political spots as a result of cultural differences in the two countries. For instance, Korean ads and U.S. ads are both issue oriented, but Korean ads are more positive and rely more on ethical proof. Nonverbal indicators also are different in that Korean candidates are shown in more formal settings and dress and exhibit less movement of hands and body.

Worth noting also is the importance of other types of political advertising in many international political settings. For instance, many countries still find print display advertising, particularly posters, to be an important part of party advertising strategies. This is certainly the case in Germany (Bergmann & Wickert, 1999), and Van den Bulck (1993) points out that, because television broadcasts by parties are limited in Belgium, posters play a big role for the parties there, helping to position parties and providing association with issue positions. Queré's (1991) analysis of the messages used in posters in the 1988 French election suggests that parties use this form of political advertising as an interactive aspect of political discourse, designed to achieve identity for the candidate but also activating a response in the voter.

## **Effects of International Political Advertising**

Although many countries now use some form of political advertising in their electoral processes, there has been much less research on effects of political advertising in democracies outside the United States. However, research on early PEBs in Britain suggested that they did affect voter knowledge levels (Blumler & McQuail, 1968; Scammell & Semetko, 1995) and may have had some effects on undecided or low-interest voters. Research on the first unified national election in Germany in 1990 showed that spots had effects on chancellor candidate images and on voter recall and emotional responses (Kaid & Holtz-Bacha, 1993a, 1993b). Research on the German elections in 1994 and 1998 showed similar results (Holtz-Bacha, 1999; Kaid, 1996c) and suggested that some differences in reactions to political advertising between voters in the West German states and those socialized under the East German regimes were disappearing (Holtz-Bacha, 1999; Kaid & Tedesco, 1999a).

Subsequent research findings on the effects of political broadcasts in other countries have shown remarkably similar trends. Experiments conducted with the same basic procedures (pretest/posttest designs, with intervening exposure to sets of

political ads) and measuring instruments (semantic differential scales to measure candidate image) have shown that exposure to political television messages can have definite effects on a candidate's image, regardless of the country or political culture (Kaid, 1997b, 1999b). Sometimes the effects are positive, as they have been for Bush in 1988 and 1992 and for Clinton in 1996 and Romania's Emil Constantinescu in 1996, Poland's Lech Walesa in 1995, and Britain's Tony Blair in 1997. Sometimes, however, exposure can mean a negative reaction, as it did for Dole in 1996 and for Jacques Chirac in France in 1988 and for Mino Martinazzoli in Italy in 1992.

Important progress has been made in developing models that suggest direct and indirect effects of exposure to political ads across countries and cultures. Falkowski, and Cwalina (1999) have determined how political advertising exposure generates evaluations of candidate constructs for voters. Their research suggests how incorporation of identifiable adjectives in advertising messages can result in successful campaigns. Cwalina, Falkowski and Kaid (2000) used similar techniques to compose a sequential model of voting with cognitive and affective elements, general emotional attitudes, vote intentions, and vote decision with regard to television spot exposure in recent elections in France, Germany, and Poland. Cohen and Wolfsfeld (1995) report the results of surveys that establish that political advertising plays a role in decision making for voters in Israel, particularly for independent and undecided voters.

Research on effects of spots across countries also shows some interesting gender differences. Women reacted much differently than men when viewing spots, somewhat in line with voting behavior findings on the "gender gap" in voting (Kaid & Holtz-Bacha, 2000). For instance, women voters rated Clinton (U.S., 1996) and Blair (Britain, 1997) much higher than they rated their opponents, Dole and Major. Overall, the gender comparisons across several countries suggest that "... female voters are more likely to be affected by exposure to political spots; and, when they are, the spots are more likely to result in higher positive evaluations for the candidates than is true for male voters" (Kaid, 1997b, pp. 20–21).

## **MEDIA COVERAGE OF POLITICAL ADVERTISING**

One of the most interesting developments in the study of political advertising has been the increasing attention given to political advertising by the news media. Television advertising, in particular, seemed to reach the public without much media commentary or intervention for many years. The first quantitative study of network television coverage of political advertising in the United States showed that the number of stories about political advertising on the three major networks in 1988 was more than the total of such stories in 1972–1984 combined (Kaid, Gobetz, Garner, Leland, & Scott, 1993). In many ways, 1988 was a watershed year for news media coverage of political ads, as the news began to discover the importance of political advertising as a campaign tool and acknowledged its significance as a major force in the campaign discourse. *Washington Post* columnist David Broder is often credited with providing the impetus for a new approach to media oversight of political advertising. In the aftermath of the 1988 campaign, when many journalists felt impotent to control the impact of George H. W. Bush's advertising attacks on Michael Dukakis, David Broder (1989) called for journalists to take a more active "watchdog" role in assessing the validity of claims made in political advertising.

Journalists subsequently adopted a new strategy for covering campaigns, the “ad-watch.”

An “adwatch” is defined by Kaid, Tedesco, and McKinnon (1996) as “media critiques of candidate ads designed to inform the public about truthful or misleading advertising claims” (p. 297). West (1993) suggests a similar definition when he says that adwatches “review the content of prominent commercials and discuss their accuracy and effectiveness” (p. 68).

It is only fair to note that, whereas the impact of broadcast adwatches reached a peak in the 1988 and subsequent years, newspapers have been covering political advertising for a much longer period of time (Bowers, 1975). McKinnon, Kaid, Acree, and Mays (1996), however, have found that many of the trends in broadcast adwatch analysis could be observed in print advertising in the prestige press in 1992.

### **Characteristics of Adwatch Coverage**

One of the most well-documented trends identified in adwatch coverage of the broadcast media is the tendency to focus adwatches on negative ads (Kaid et al., 1993; Kaid, Tedesco, & McKinnon, 1996; McKinnon et al., 1996; Min, 2002; Tedesco, McKinnon, & Kaid, 1996; Tedesco, Kaid, & McKinnon, 2000). The trend is true of local television and newspaper coverage of political advertising, as well as of network and national broadcast and print outlets (Kaid, McKinney, Tedesco, & Gaddie, 1999). The media have also seemed more likely to focus their critiques on the advertisements of Republican candidates than those of Democratic ones (Kaid et al., 1993).

Network critiques of candidate and party political advertising, although often neutral, tend to have a negative or critical slant. For instance, Tedesco et al. (2000) note that in the 1996 general election and primary campaigns for president, there were no adwatches on any of the three national networks that advanced a positive tone toward the candidates or their advertising. When the networks did take a nonneutral position, it was always overwhelmingly negative in tone. Min (2002) drew similar conclusions from a study of newspaper adwatches in 1992, 1996, and 2000, finding that newspapers were actually more often negative than neutral in their assessments of political advertising. Such findings may not be surprising in light of the fact that a 1989 study of journalists found that they have a very negative view of ads in general (Perloff, 1991; Perloff & Kinsey, 1992).

Despite the seeming intent of the news media to engage in thoughtful and meaningful analysis of political advertising, most studies of political adwatches on both print and broadcast media have concluded that the media do not do a very good job of providing substantive and effective analysis (Kaid et al., 1993; Kaid, Tedesco, & McKinnon, 1996; Kaid et al., 1999; McKinnon et al., 1996; Tedesco et al., 1996, 2000). According to Jamieson (1992a), for instance, merely 1.7% of adwatch content dealt with the accuracy of the ad claims. Furthermore, Bennett (1997) demonstrated that the amount of in-depth analysis was 68% lower in 1996 than in 1992.

One concern noted by scholars has been an actual decline in the number of adwatches in recent election cycles (Kaid, Tedesco, & McKinnon, 1996; Tedesco et al., 2000). Although Wicks and Kern (1993) found that local journalists in 1992 expressed an intention to increase their scrutiny of political broadcast ads, no corresponding increase appeared. Even more disturbing has been the finding that local newspaper and television adwatch coverage in 1996 focused more often on

presidential candidates, leaving candidate advertising at other levels without substantial scrutiny (Kaid et al., 1999). The advertising of female candidates seemed particularly invisible to media outlets as a source of campaign coverage. When Senate, congressional, and other state and local candidate advertising was covered, the same trends were observed—i.e., emphasis on coverage of negative ads and very little in-depth scrutiny. Gobetz and Chanslor (1999) studied CNN's coverage of advertising by nonpresidential candidates during the 1996 cycle. They found the same trends on CNN as on network news—coverage primarily of negative ads, focus on Republican candidates, and lack of substantial analysis.

### **Effects of News Coverage of Political Advertising on Voters**

Although many scholars call for adwatches as a way to help the public understand and evaluate political advertising because the media enjoy higher credibility and can keep ads “honest” (West, 1992), research on the effectiveness of adwatches has not been particularly reassuring on this point. Capella and Jamieson (1994; Jamieson & Capella, 1997) argue that well-constructed adwatches generally accomplish their goal and inform voters about the deceptive appeals made in candidate spots. However, their own experimental studies do not unequivocally support this assertion. The majority of academic research shows that adwatches produce a boomerang effect, further enhancing the ad and benefiting the candidate's campaign strategy (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995, 1996; Just et al., 1996; McKinnon, 1995; McKinnon & Kaid, 1999; Pfau & Loudon, 1994). Further support for the lack of intended effects of news media criticism of candidate advertising is provided by a study of the Reagan promotional film shown at the 1984 Republican National Convention. Simons and Stewart (1991) found that those who saw critical news media commentary about the film prior to viewing it actually rated the film higher than those who saw only the film, suggesting the possibility that news coverage may interact with ads to create a positive effect and visual and verbal reinforcement that favors the candidate.

Not all empirical studies of adwatches are so discouraging. O'Sullivan and Geiger (1995) found that exposure to newspaper adwatches was effective in changing viewers' attitudes toward the sponsor of attack ads. If the ad watch confirmed the attack ad, then the sponsor benefited, but if the ad watch challenged the accuracy of the attack, then the sponsor was evaluated more negatively. Leshner (2001) found that adwatches that focused on image ads were more successful than those that focused on issue ads in convincing viewers to react more critically toward the sponsoring candidate. Min (2002) also found that those who were exposed to adwatch commentaries could be influenced in their vote tendencies in the direction suggested by the advertising critique. However, this research offered no comparison between exposure to the ad itself and exposure to the adwatch.

Overall, the research on adwatches calls into serious question the ability of journalistic coverage of advertising to serve as a watchdog for the public. Much of the research seems to suggest that by analyzing and airing the ads to be scrutinized, the media may actually be enhancing the intended effectiveness of the ads. Some have suggested that the media might offset some of the advantage to the ad sponsor of airing the ads in an adwatch by framing the ads visually and verbally with “truth boxes,” showing the ads at less than full-screen, or labeling the ads with printed

warnings (Jamieson, 1992a; Richardson, 1998). Many scholars still evince hope that thorough analysis of ads through adwatches can be helpful to voters. However, so far the media have done little to prove themselves worthy of the journalistic responsibility to scrutinize what may be the most important aspect of campaign discourse.

## CONCLUSION

Political advertising is unquestionably a major force in political communication, both in terms of electoral campaigns and in terms of policy decision making. This appears to be the case in the United States and around the world. However, it is also apparent that not all political advertising has the same style/content or the same effects. Some spots are more effective at eliciting recall of information and providing voters with some idea of the salience of candidate issue positions. Other types of spots can build and sustain candidate images and communicate to voters about a candidate's strengths and weaknesses of character. Both of these outcomes, effects on issue learning and on formation of candidate images, have some effect on voting decisions. Some spots seem to also have direct effects on vote likelihood.

For decades, scholars and politicians alike attributed most of the variance in voting behavior to partisan affiliations. The definitive work in the field of voting behavior attributed voting to a fourfold model (political party, issues, candidates, and groups) and declared political party to be the dominant component (Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960). Even when issues or candidates were thought to rise to importance, the model believed that attitudes toward them were filtered through a partisan lens. Perhaps it is ironic that it was a real lens, television's actual lens, that changed all that. Media consultant Tony Schwartz, who produced the famous "Daisy Girl" spot for Lyndon Johnson in 1964, observed long before others seemed to understand what it meant that in the past "political parties were the means of communication from the candidate to public. The political parties today are ABC, NBC, and CBS" (Schwartz, 1984, p. 82).

Although this comment may seem dated in a media world that now offers not just ABC, NBC, and CBS but also CNN, FOX, MSNBC, and scores of other independent and cable choices; the spirit of the comment is still important. Candidates in the United States, and around the world, need not rely on parties. They rely on mass media to carry their messages. Because television spots are the most direct way of doing that, providing proven effectiveness, it is easy to understand why candidates would choose television as their primary means of communicating with voters. The Internet may offer new ways of engaging voters in this communication process and a new channel and new formats through which political advertising can be transmitted, in both electoral and policy-making contexts, but candidates and parties are not likely to relinquish what political advertising still promises: message control and mass distribution.

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## Political Campaign Debates

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At the conclusion of the fourth and final Kennedy–Nixon debate in the fall of 1960, moderator Quincy Howe of ABC News praised the two presidential candidates and offered this prediction for future campaigns: “The character and courage with which these two men have spoken sets a high standard for generations to come. Surely, they have set a new precedent. Perhaps they have established a new tradition” (Commission on Presidential Debates, 1960). Setting aside, for the moment, the question of whether or not the Kennedy–Nixon exchanges established a “high standard” for presidential debating, their face-to-face encounters did initiate what has now become an institution in presidential campaigns. Although televised general-election debates would not occur again until the Ford–Carter encounters 16 years later, a tradition of presidential debates is now firmly established, with an unbroken chain of debates since 1976. Even though various types of campaign debates had occurred in the United States since the 18th century (Jamieson & Birdsell, 1988, p. 34), when the televised face-to-face meeting of our general election presidential candidates was introduced in 1960, it was viewed as an innovation in campaign communication. The novelty, now, would be a presidential candidate *refusing* to debate his or her opponent.

After the 1960 and 1976 debates, Chaffee (1979) proclaimed, “Of all the changes in political campaigning that television has wrought, the face-to-face televised debate between candidates may prove to be the most significant” (p. 19). Now that we have experienced presidential debates over four decades, from 1960 to 2000, what assessments can be made regarding their promise? Have they fulfilled their potential for creating a more informed electorate? After analyzing decades of research, we are convinced that debates do matter—that our democracy has been well served, that our citizenry has benefited from their leaders’ willingness to meet,

face to face, seeking public support. Thus, the primary goal of this chapter is not to argue the usefulness of candidate debates. The goal, instead, is to provide a thorough review of the research that has been conducted surrounding televised campaign debates.

Perhaps the most often cited justification for the study of debates is the fact they reach large audiences—more than any other single campaign event.<sup>1</sup> Pfau (2003) points out that debates may be the only televised political event capable of attracting the attention of the “marginally attentive” citizen—an increasingly larger segment of our citizenry! We also know that debates attract the greatest media coverage of any single campaign event (Kaid, McKinney, & Tedesco, 2000, p. 135). Patterson (2002, p. 123) has documented that debates generate the greatest amount of public interest and more citizen-to-citizen discussion than any other single campaign event. In general, as Carlin (1992) concludes, debates serve as the “focal points” for our general election campaigns. They provide voters their most convenient and direct access to the candidates and offer a capsule summary of campaign issues at the very time when the largest numbers of citizens begin following the campaign in earnest.

A cursory appraisal of the extant debate literature reveals that televised presidential debates have stimulated an impressive amount of research. In a previous handbook review of debate literature, Kraus and Davis (1981, p. 280) refer to “several hundred” debate studies (which covered primarily those studies conducted of the 1960 and 1976 presidential debates). Our compilation and review of research included more than 800 journal articles, edited book chapters, and book-length works. Although it is impossible to reference each of these studies in this review, we do attempt to categorize the dominant lines of debate research, summarizing the generally agreed-on conclusions. We recognize that many others have summarized, at various points, the then-current state of knowledge regarding campaign debate research, and we have drawn heavily on these excellent summaries.<sup>2</sup>

This chapter first discusses the various theoretical approaches that have guided debate scholarship. Next is a summary of the major findings that characterize what we claim to know about debates, including the effects of debate viewing, media coverage of debates, our understanding of debate dialogue or content—both verbal and visual—and research regarding debate formats. Finally, we suggest future directions for scholarship with consideration of neglected areas of debate research, including vice-presidential debates, primary debates, nonpresidential debates, and international debates.

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<sup>1</sup>Katz and Feldman (1962, p. 190) report that approximately 80% of the U.S. adult population viewed or listened to at least one of the 1960 Kennedy–Nixon debates, characterizing this as “one of the great political assemblages of all time.” The Commission on Presidential Debates provides official viewership figures for all presidential debates, data supplied by Nielsen Media Research (see [www.debates.org](http://www.debates.org)). The viewing audience averaged 63.1 million for debates in 1960, 65.4 million in 1976, 80.6 million in 1980, 66.2 million in 1984, 66.2 million in 1988, 66.4 million in 1992, 41.2 million in 1996, and 40.6 million in 2000. As these data indicate, debate viewing has steadily declined, and particularly for the 1996 and 2000 debates. Yet debates still generate the largest viewing audience of any single televised campaign event.

<sup>2</sup>Throughout the past four decades many excellent summaries of debate research have appeared. As we reviewed this work we found it quite beneficial to track chronologically advancements in our debate scholarship. Here, we list in order of publication the most comprehensive overviews: Katz and Feldman (1962), Chaffee (1978), Sears and Chaffee (1979), Miller and MacKuen (1979), Kraus and Davis (1981), Geer (1988), Lanoue and Schrott (1991), Hellweg, Pfau, and Brydon (1992), Zhu, Milavsky, and Biswas (1994), Kraus (2000), and The Racine Group (2002).

## THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF TELEVISED CAMPAIGN DEBATES

In their review of the earliest debate studies, Becker and Kraus (1978) found “little agreement on basic theoretical assumptions” (p. 265). Although our appraisal of subsequent research finds that no guiding theory has since emerged, we can point to at least four major theoretical perspectives around which campaign debate research has coalesced, including normative democratic theory, media effects theory—with agenda-setting and uses and gratifications being the dominant effects theories—and argumentation and debate theory. Finally, we also take note of several miscellaneous theories that have been applied to the study of campaign debates.

### Democratic Theory

A number of scholars position their analysis of campaign debates in normative democratic theory, evaluating the extent to which debates contribute to a more enlightened and rational electorate better equipped to make an informed voting decision. Whereas much of this research points to democratic theory as a *justification* for analysis, rather than testing explicit hypotheses or posing research questions emanating from specific political or democratic theories, it is generally agreed that campaign debates enhance democracy and the electoral process. For example, Miller and MacKuen (1979) concluded, “Debates produced a better-informed electorate than would have existed if the debates had not been held . . . democracy was well served, for without the debates a significant proportion of the electorate would have remained relatively uninformed about the candidates” (p. 291).

Kraus and Davis (1981) provide an excellent account of democratic theory’s application to the study of televised debates, noting that in a democracy “elections require leaders to seek the consent of the governed” (p. 275), and it is through candidates’ face-to-face televised debates that this consent is most directly sought. Joslyn (1990) also casts his analysis of campaign communication in theories of democracy, focusing particularly on the requisite educative needs of citizens if a democracy in theory is to work in practice. Commenting on campaign debates’ value as a source of citizen information, Joslyn is quite sanguine, concluding that “candidate debates are the one bright spot in an otherwise sobering portrait of campaign communication. The presidential debates held during the general elections . . . were much more policy-oriented than either news coverage or spot advertisements” (pp. 108–109).

### Agenda-Setting

Debate scholars have frequently adopted agenda-setting theory (e.g., McCombs & Shaw, 1972) to test whether or not those issues discussed during a debate influence viewers’ issue salience. Although the application of this theoretical perspective to debates has been somewhat consistent across time—with issue agenda studies found from the very beginning and continuing to the present—findings from these studies have not always been consistent. In their review of 31 investigations of the



1960 Kennedy–Nixon debates, Katz and Feldman (1962) summarized the results of six issue agenda studies and concluded, “There seems to be little doubt that the debates made some issues more salient” (p. 202). Additionally, this analysis also revealed that the increase in particular issues’ salience was seen to advantage one candidate over the other.

Agenda-setting effects also were pursued with the 1976 debates, with results both contradicting and confirming the 1960 findings. This time, the preponderance of empirical evidence argued against an agenda-setting effect. For example, Sears and Chaffee (1979) found “surprising little evidence” (p. 233) that the 1976 debates were successful in influencing viewers’ issue agenda. However, Swanson and Swanson (1978) did find an agenda-setting effect from the first 1976 debate.

Several scholars have approached their study of debates with variations on the traditional agenda-setting thesis, including Jackson-Beeck and Meadow’s (1979) finding of multiple—actually triple—agendas at play in debates. Their content analysis of the 1960 and 1976 debates compared the candidates’ and panelists’ issue agendas with the existing public agenda as evidenced from public opinion polls. This analysis found little relationship among the three agendas. Another approach to agenda-setting in debates is that of Bechtolt, Hilyard, and Bybee (1977), who sought to determine which candidate in the 1976 debates was able to control the debate agenda through introduction of issues that received the greatest attention. Finally, Kaid et al. (2000, p. 174) applied agenda-setting theory to their analysis of differing debate formats in the 1996 debate series, finding the issues raised by citizens in a town hall forum corresponded much more to the issues of greatest public concern than did the questions asked by journalist Jim Lehrer in his single-moderator debate.

## Uses and Gratifications

A number of debate effect studies have examined how and why citizens use campaign debates and how these campaign messages are evaluated in terms of their usefulness to voters. Sears and Chaffee (1979) point out that uses and gratifications research became a popular theoretical application guiding analysis of the 1976 Ford–Carter debates following the appearance of Katz, Gurevitch, and Hass’ (1973) seminal work. Although this theory has not been applied to debates very much following the several uses and gratification studies in 1976, these earlier investigations provide valuable insight into citizens’ uses and evaluation of debates.

First, Chaffee (1978) reported that the top three motivations that viewers’ cite for watching debates—in descending order—include a desire to learn about candidates’ issue positions, to compare candidate personalities, and to gain information that will allow them to make their voting decision. Sears and Chaffee (1979) provide an excellent summary of the major uses and gratification debate studies (Dennis, Chaffee, & Choe, 1979; McLeod, Durall, Ziemke, & Bybee, 1979; O’Keefe & Mendelsohn, 1979) and report that citizens, overall, hold rather high expectations for debates and, in general, are mostly approving of what these campaign messages deliver. In evaluating viewers’ most important anticipated use—the acquisition of issue knowledge—viewers often claim following debate exposure that they still desire additional issue-based information. The most disappointed viewers are those who claim their debate viewing is motivated by a need to achieve

issue simplification or clarification in making their voting decision. These viewers often claim their exposure to debates raise additional questions and point to issue areas that need further explanation. Finally, those studies that followed respondents across the entire 1976 debate series found the reported usefulness of debates dropped sharply following exposure to the first encounter.

## Argumentation and Debate Theory

Because debates are composed of series of arguments, it is natural that argumentation and debate theory would guide research questions. The reality, however, is that studies clearly rooted in such theory are actually quite limited. Early critical analyses of debates, such as those by Auer (1962, 1981) and Bitzer and Reuter (1980), used debate theory to claim that presidential debates are not “true” debates, yet Carlin (1989) applied their criteria to her examination of the 1988 exchanges and concluded otherwise. Although pundits and journalists alike still frequently make the claim that presidential debates fall short of an ideal debate model, the academic community, in general, has abandoned this dispute. In fact, leading argumentation and debate scholar David Zarefsky (1999) declared that the issue is moot as debates may appear in many forms.

Various approaches to argumentation and debate theory, including candidate clash (Carlin, Howard, Stanfield, & Reynolds, 1991; Carlin, Morris, & Smith, 2002) and also candidates’ attack and defense strategies (Benoit & Wells, 1996), have been applied to debate dialogue through content analytic investigations. Several debate format studies (see next section) also have incorporated fundamental aspects of debate theory. Perhaps the most sustained line of inquiry applying argumentation theory has examined evidentiary standards in debates.

The 1960 Kennedy–Nixon debates were the focus of two studies examining the candidates’ argumentation and use of evidence. First, Ellsworth’s (1965) content analytic study compared evidence used in debates to other forms of campaign communication—nomination acceptance addresses and selected stump speeches—concluding the comparative nature of debate dialogue prompted candidates “to devote more time to giving statements of position, offering evidence for their positions, and giving reasoned arguments to support them” (p. 802). Samovar’s (1965) analysis of the 1960 debates also found that greater use of evidence led to clarity in candidate responses and facilitated comprehension of meaning.

The Ford–Carter 1976 debates were the focus of at least two specific studies dealing with argumentation and evidentiary standards. Bitzer and Rueter’s (1980) rhetorical analysis, assessing both amount and quality of arguments, judged Carter the better debater. Interestingly, they pointed to the “defective” debate format as the principal factor limiting debate argumentation. A study by Bryski (1978) also examined the evidence used by Ford and Carter in their 1976 exchanges and sought to link evidence use with viewer reactions to the candidates. Bryski concluded that although “Ford used fewer pieces of evidence and made more errors (inaccurate statements), [he] was considered the ‘winner’ of the first debate by major opinion polls and surveys”(p. 28).

Riley and Hollihan’s (1981) content analysis of the single 1980 Carter–Reagan debate concluded that Ronald Reagan offered three times more claims supported by specific evidence than did Carter. Rowland’s (1986) rhetorical analysis of this

same debate also found that Reagan's claims were more fully supported with evidence and Reagan's assertions were judged more accurate than Carter's. Unlike the Bryski (1978) study, in which the candidate with the weakest argumentation (Ford) was judged by the public to be the "winner" of the debate, Rowland (1986) suggests that Reagan's more fully developed arguments may have contributed to his being selected the debate "winner" by almost all postdebate opinion polls.

Finally, perhaps the most comprehensive study of debate argumentation is Levasseur and Dean's (1996) analysis of both types and amounts of evidence employed by all presidential debaters from 1960 to 1988. This study also addresses the question of whether or not greater use of evidence to support one's claims is linked to perceptions of a superior debate performance. By calculating the rates of evidence used by the candidates in each debate, and then comparing this data with postdebate "who won" polling results, we learn that those candidates who used the highest rates of evidence were generally viewed by the public as *losing* the debate.

For scholars of argumentation and debate, the Levasseur and Dean (1996) conclusion, a finding similar to the earlier Bryski (1978) study, presents a most interesting, if not disquieting, thesis: that the least developed arguments, particularly in terms of providing less evidence to support one's claims, is apparently judged more favorably by debate viewers. On this possibility, we hasten to add that the use of such secondary data as postdebate opinion polls is highly suspect when attempting to link viewer evaluations of candidates' debate performance with specific approaches to argumentation. We know, for example, that these "popularity" polls are more reflective of one's predebate candidate support than actual debate performance. We are aware of only one study, reported by Hollihan (2001, p. 169), in which a direct test of viewer evaluation of debate argumentation was conducted. The results of this analysis revealed that, although viewers were able to identify responses in which candidates employed greater evidence or analysis to support claims, they were just as likely to find unsupported claims as convincing, particularly when such claims corresponded to the respondents' previously held views. Certainly, additional research is needed in this area. We hope that future investigation will attempt to link both content and rhetorical analyses of candidates' development of argument with viewer reactions to debate dialogue. Finally, for the most part, the study of argumentation and evidence use in presidential debates covers the period before debate structures were altered significantly beginning in 1992. This lack of continued research, particularly analysis comparing different debate formats and their impact on argumentation structure and evidence use, needs addressing.

## Miscellaneous Theoretical Approaches

Whereas it would be utterly impossible to provide a complete listing of every theory guiding the study of campaign debates, we feel that there are several promising theoretical applications worthy of note. First, Pfau (1987) posits that assessment of candidates' debate performance might be fruitfully explored by understanding how candidates violate expectations—both positive and negative violations. Applying Burgoon and Miller's (1985) expectancy theory to a 1984 Democratic primary debate, Pfau (1987) found "as predicted by expectancy theory, positive changes in

attitudes toward [Jesse] Jackson were based on viewer perception of a positive violation of expectations, and negative changes toward [Gary] Hart were the result of viewer perception of a negative violation of expectations” (p. 694). Similarly, Yawn, Ellsworth, Beatty, and Kahn (1998) examined a 1996 Arizona Republican primary debate, and whereas this study was not couched in formal expectancy theory, Yawn et al. (1998) found “that changes in [candidate] viability, changes in electability, as well as differences between expected and actual debate performance influenced the vote preferences of audience members” (p. 155).

We also find intriguing the application of interpersonal communication theories to help explain debate effects and dialogue. Within this category of theories, Pfau and Kang (1991) examined debate viewers’ reactions to candidates’ relational messages, particularly how candidates were able to enhance their persuasive appeal based on such relational message cues as similarity, involvement, and composure. Hinck and Hinck (1992) applied Brown and Levinson’s (1987) politeness theory to debate dialogue, examining the politeness and face-saving strategies candidates use when attacking their opponent.

Zhu, Milavsky, and Biswas (1994) suggest that the process of candidate image formation and evaluation should be explored through the application of stereotyping theory, claiming that “audiences use cognitive shortcuts, such as categorization, to evaluate candidates . . . once formed, the cognitive categories (i.e., stereotypes) about candidates readily resist change” (p. 304). Although early debate studies by Bowes and Strentz (1979) and Carter (1962) examined candidate image evaluation drawing on stereotyping theory, we are unaware of subsequent studies pursuing this potentially useful line of inquiry. Finally, Lanoue and Schrott (1991, p. 88) point out that campaign debates are, above all, attempts to persuade—with candidates appealing to citizens for that ultimate prize, their vote. Thus, these scholars claim debate effects might best be explored through examining the process of attitude change and suggest various theories appropriate for such analysis, including social learning theory, consistency theories, social judgment theory, and the functional theory of attitude formation and change.

As we noted at the beginning of this section, there exists little agreement on basic theoretical assumptions guiding debate research. The absence of a dominant theoretical paradigm controlling debate scholarship, however, may actually be a blessing rather than a curse. The application of multiple theories from multiple theoretical perspectives—including social scientific media effects theories, to theories of persuasion, critical and rhetorical theories of argumentation and debate, and normative democratic theory—will help assure that research in this area remains vital as scholars continue to examine campaign debates’ effects and contents, asking and answering multiple questions in multiple ways.

## **WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT DEBATES?**

Summarizing the many findings from literally hundreds of campaign debate studies presents a rather daunting task. To bring some coherence to this body of knowledge we have categorized what we believe to be the principal themes of the existing research, summarizing the major conclusions within each category. Our review of findings examines the dominant debate viewing effects, media coverage of debates, analysis of debate content—including both verbal and visual message elements—and, finally, debate formats.

## Understanding Debate Effects

As we have noted, a rather large quantity of debate scholarship was generated during the past four decades, and the central question guiding much of this research is “Do debates matter?” Indeed, the vast majority of the empirical debate research emanates from a media effects perspective that seeks to understand the various influences of debate exposure on viewers. A short answer to the question of whether or not, or actually how, debates matter is the typical scholarly conclusion, “It depends.” In brief, we have learned that debate effects are dependent largely on the contextual dynamics of a given campaign, including the particular candidates engaged in debate and also highly dependent upon the different types of debate viewers.

First, the overall campaign context in which a debate takes place influences the debate’s usefulness or impact. Chaffee (1978, p. 342) has described four conditions under which voters are most likely to find debates useful: (1) when at least one of the candidates is relatively unknown, (2) when many voters are undecided, (3) when the race appears close, and (4) when party allegiances are weak. Findings from the 1992 and 1996 debate series illustrate well the application of these conditions. Analysis of citizen reactions to the 1992 debates (Carlin & McKinney, 1994), which included incumbent President George H. W. Bush, Democrat challenger Bill Clinton, and independent candidate Ross Perot, revealed that many debate viewers were in fact undecided at the time of the debates; and the debates were judged by many citizens as the single most important campaign event in their decision for whom to vote. Yet just 4 years later a popular incumbent President debated a life-long and well-known national political leader (Bob Dole) in a race where the incumbent’s lead in preelection polls never dipped below 10%. In this campaign context, McKinney and Lamoureux (1999) found debate viewers learned very little new information, and the debates changed very few minds as most citizens had made their vote choice well before the October debate series.

In addition to campaign context, the disposition of viewers also influences debate effects. Chaffee (1978, p. 342) suggested that some of the early, sometimes contradictory, findings regarding televised debate effects were best interpreted by accounting for the different types of voters. Debates will have their greatest influence on highly interested, yet undecided, voters who might be classified as regular debate viewers (those who view an entire debate or series of debates). Debates will have much less influence on those marginally interested voters, or the “occasional” debate watchers, as well as those committed partisans who view debates for reassurance that theirs is indeed the superior candidate. Finally, debates have very little to no effect on the uninterested voter who may not attune at all to the actual debate program or who might be exposed only to media coverage of the event. Hellweg, Pfau, and Brydon (1992, p. 124) also qualify debate effects according to viewer type, noting that debates do affect voting intention among viewers with weak or no candidate preference, whereas committed partisans are more likely to have their vote choices and preexisting candidate attitudes strengthened.

Even with these caveats, numerous studies have found substantial and specific debate viewing effects. First, we know that debates work more to reinforce rather than change voters’ minds, debates facilitate the acquisition of issue information, and debate viewing influences perceptions of candidates’ character or image traits.

Following our brief review of the behavioral, cognitive, and image evaluation effects, we also discuss various latent influences of debates on citizens and the democratic process.

**Behavioral Effects.** For some, the measure of a debate's usefulness may hinge on the question of whether or not debate viewing influences a citizen's vote choice. On this matter, the empirical evidence is quite clear—very little change in voting intentions are recorded following exposure to debates (Benoit, McKinney, & Holbert, 2001; Bishop, Oldendick, & Tuchfarber, 1980; Katz & Feldman, 1962; Kennamer, 1987; Lemert, Elliot, Bernstein, Rosenberg, & Nestvold, 1991; McLeod, Durall, Ziemke, & Bybee, 1979). As Holbrook (1996) concludes, "The perception of most viewers are colored by their political predispositions going into the debate . . . [and] the single best predictor of which candidate a viewer thought won a given debate is that viewer's predebate vote choice" (p. 114).

Yet whereas debates may not alter the voting preferences of the vast majority of previously committed viewers, several studies have found that among the undecided, conflicted, or weakly committed (e.g., Chaffee & Choe, 1980; Geer, 1988; McKinney, 1994), debates do help these viewers form their voting preference or even change candidate selection. Although the undecided and uncommitted citizen may constitute a smaller segment of the debate viewing audience, it is exactly this slice of the electorate to which most general-election campaign messages are targeted and, in very close contests, the voters that ultimately decide the outcome of an election. Indeed, of the eight presidential campaigns that included general-election debates, we believe that the televised debates played a critical part in the outcome of at least half of these elections. First, pollster George Gallup (1987) found that "in 1960, 1976, and 1980—debates appear to have played a decisive role in the November elections" (p. 34). To these three elections we also add the 2000 debate series and election.<sup>3</sup>

**Cognitive Effects.** That debates are an "information-rich" source of campaign communication facilitating viewers' acquisition of issue knowledge is a well-established finding (Benoit et al., 2001; Benoit, McKinney, & Stephenson, 2002; Bishop et al., 1978; Drew & Weaver, 1991; Holbrook, 1999; Katz & Feldman, 1962; Lemert, 1993; Lemert, Elliott, Nestvold, & Rarick, 1983; McKinney, Kaid, & Robertson, 2001; McKinney, Dudash, & Hodgkinson, 2003; Miller & MacKuen, 1979; O'Keefe & Mendelsohn, 1979; Sears & Chaffee, 1979; Weaver & Drew, 1995; Zhu et al., 1994). In addition to the many studies identifying general knowledge acquisition from debate viewing, several investigations provide a more nuanced understanding of debates' issue learning potential. First, analysis of a number of early debate studies (Chaffee, 1978, p. 334; Katz & Feldman, 1962, p. 201) found clear evidence refuting

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<sup>3</sup>Support for such an assertion is provided by McKinney, Dudash, and Hodgkinson (2003) in their analysis of the national daily tracking polls during the 2-week period in which the 2000 debates occurred. Both CNN's and Gallup's daily polls showed Gore registering a slight to moderate lead on October 3, the day of the first debate (Gallup shows Gore leading Bush by 8 points, whereas CNN has Gore leading Bush by 2 points.) Two weeks later, following the final debate on October 17, both of the tracking polls show a complete reversal in public support (both CNN and Gallup registered Bush with a 10-point lead over Gore). Thus, during the period in which the dominant campaign story was the candidates' performance in their three debates, Bush was able to take a lead in public support that he would hold until Election Day.

the “selective exposure” thesis that suggested partisans may attune only to those messages from candidates they support. Instead, the comparative nature of debate dialogue encourages citizens to overcome any tendency for selective exposure as viewers report roughly equal levels of learning from both the candidate whom they support as well as from the opposition candidate. Sears and Chaffee’s (1979) review of panel-study data collected throughout the 1976 debate series suggests that learning may not be even across multiple debates. Viewers reported learning more from the first debate, with less issue knowledge acquired from subsequent debate viewing. Finally, an intriguing study by Miller and MacKuen (1979) analyzed National Election Study data comparing survey responses from those presidential elections with debates versus years without. Their analysis shows that respondents were much more knowledgeable about campaign issues during those years with debates; also, those respondents who reported watching more debates were able to recall more specific issue information and identify more policy differences between the candidates.

**Candidate Image Evaluation.** A number of studies have found that debate exposure influences viewer perceptions of candidate character or image traits (Benoit, Webber, & Berman, 1998; Benoit et al., 2001; Benoit, McKinney, & Stephenson, 2002; Katz & Feldman, 1962; McKinney et al., 2001, 2003; Pfau & Eveland, 1994; Pfau & Kang, 1991; Tannenbaum, Greenberg, & Silverman, 1962; Zhu et al., 1994). In fact, in their summary of the very first debate studies, Katz and Feldman (1962) concluded, “There is little doubt . . . that the audience was busy analyzing the character of the contestants—their ‘presentations of self.’” Yet, these authors go on to note, “Several of the academic studies focused exclusively on ‘images’ rather than ‘issues’ as the proper subject for investigation” (p. 195).

Within subsequent debate research, the relative or proportional nature of issue knowledge and image perception effects has remained a somewhat persistent and unresolved question. In short, the matter remains as to which influence is greatest—Does debate exposure have a larger impact on viewers’ perceptions of candidate image or on the acquisition of issue knowledge? Certainly, one answer to this question might be that issue and image learning are two message variables that work in tandem. Hellweg (1993), for example, has argued that candidates’ debate messages incorporate a dual strategy of highlighting issue differences while also emphasizing a positive self-image and a negative opponent image. Carlin (2000) also concluded from her analysis that issue and image evaluation work together, noting that “debate viewers make judgments about those [image] traits based on the strategies the debaters employ, their issue choices, their demeanor . . . their willingness to address the questions directly, and the manner in which they attack their opponents” (p. 170).

However, other scholars have claimed that televised debates actually privilege one of the message components—issue or image—over the other. Lanoue and Schrott (1991), for example, argue, “Viewers are far more likely to use debates to gain insight into each candidate’s personality and character. . . . A superior ‘personal’ presentation appears to be more important to voters than accumulation of issue-oriented debating ‘points’” (p. 96). On the other hand, Zhu et al. (1994) reviewed 32 empirical studies that test issue learning and image formation from debate exposure; and of these studies they identified 5 that offer a direct comparison of issue and image effects concluding “issue knowledge learning is greater than image perception formation” (p. 311). Zhu et al. (1994) also conducted their

own direct comparison of issue learning/image formation effects of the first 1992 presidential debate and found a “sizable effect on audiences’ issue knowledge but no impact at all on the perception of candidates’ personalities” (p. 325). Yet a direct comparison of viewers’ issue and image learning from the 2000 debate series by McKinney et al. (2003) found much greater image evaluation from debate viewing than reported issue knowledge acquisition. With such contradictory findings, the issue/image question is an area of debate effects research that demands further analysis.

**Latent Effects.** Several studies have examined campaign debates’ possible latent effects whereby exposure to candidates in debate may activate citizens’ various civic and democratic tendencies. In general, although this line of research remains underdeveloped, most findings do suggest that debate viewing promotes civic engagement and thus strengthens the electoral process. Specifically, debates have been found to heighten viewers’ interest in the ongoing campaign (Chaffee, 1978; Wald & Lupfer, 1978), encourage citizens to seek out additional campaign information following their debate viewing (Lemert, 1993), and encourage greater participation in the campaign through such activities as talking to others about one’s preferred candidate and increases in reported likelihood of voting (McLeod, Bybee, & Durall, 1979; Patterson, 2002, p. 123). Also, a few studies have found debate viewing enhances citizens’ sense of political efficacy and support for political institutions (Chaffee, 1978; Katz & Feldman, 1962; McLeod, Durall et al., 1979; Sears & Chaffee, 1979), although one study (Wald & Lupfer, 1978) found that viewers became significantly less trusting of government following debate viewing. However, Kaid et al. (2000, p. 206) found that debate exposure resulted in a significant lowering of political cynicism levels, and their analysis also revealed a clear link between cynicism and voting—specifically, nonvoters’ political cynicism was significantly higher than voters.

With so much thought to be so wrong with our electoral system (such as the ever-present candidate attack ads, the horse-race and personality-focused campaign reporting, declining voter participation, and the influence of “big money” in campaigns), the televised candidate debate may well represent the one true campaign communication success story. We concur with Pfau’s (2003) appraisal of debates “normative” or latent effects when he concluded, “There are no other more important effects that scholars could document” (p. 32) and join the call for scholars to focus greater attention on this important area of debate research.

Although the preceding review recommends a rather thorough comprehension of particular debate effects, our understanding of debates’ influence could be enhanced in two specific ways. First, we have very little detailed knowledge of any lasting effects of debate exposure—lasting at least until election day—and what little evidence is available along these lines suggests that debate effects are short-lived. Specifically, the few debate studies that have employed a repeated-measure or panel design, following respondents’ postdebate viewing and sometimes to post-election, reveal that specific debate effects evaporate rather quickly. From their examination of both issue knowledge gains as well as formation of candidate image perceptions Miller and MacKuen (1979) reported, “Minimal long-term debate impact on candidate evaluations . . . [and] most important, it is apparent that the effect of any debate lasted only a few days” (pp. 288–289). Similarly, Sears and Chaffee’s (1979, p. 237) analysis of the 1976 debates found “little lasting impact . . . on



evaluations of the candidates, preferences between them or perceptions of the candidates' attributes. Each debate yielded some temporary benefit to the candidate who was the consensus 'winner,' but this advantage seemed to dissipate fairly quickly" (p. 244). Finally, Wald and Lupfer's (1978) examination of debate viewing's latent effect of strengthening intent to vote also concluded "that such an effect was only temporary . . . one week later, this effect had largely disappeared" (p. 348).

Research that answers questions regarding the longevity of debate effects will require scholars to abandon their typical one-shot studies, opting instead for research designs that track responses throughout an entire debate series and even post election day. Although Miller and MacKuen (1979) suggest that debate effects may be short-lived because "the public's memory is just not very long" (p. 290), we are much more inclined to agree with Geer's (1988) assessment that "actually, the effect of debates may be short lived because the campaign continues, not because the electorate simply forgot about the debates" (p. 489). The issue of how debate effects may interact with a multitude of other campaign events and sources of communication represents the second needed change in the current approach to debate effects research.

As debates are but one component in a very complex campaign message environment, a full understanding of their influence will not be found by continuing our usual direct-effect investigations of the isolated debate exchange; rather, analysis should examine how debates interact with the many other campaign events and messages. Pfau (2003) is perhaps the leading advocate of this "macro" approach to the study of debate effects, suggesting that our debate scholarship should be "looking for debate effects in the context of the broader campaign: examining debate effects relative to other communication forms; tracking debate effects longitudinally; and attempting to untangle commingled political effects, which have grown more increasingly prevalent in contemporary campaigns" (p. 4). In fact, Pfau, Cho, and Chong (2001) provided one such investigation of the 2000 presidential campaign with their examination of the relative influence of 13 communication forms, finding that whereas debates exerted significant direct effects on voters there also were discernible indirect effects through entertainment talk shows' debate commentary and parody.

## **Debates as Media Events**

Just as debates have attracted a great deal of scholarly interest, so, too, do they attract a high level of media attention. In fact, analysis of the major network news broadcasts during the fall campaign, from Labor Day to Election Day, reveals that debate-related news segments are among the most frequent of all campaign stories (Kaid et al., 2000, p. 135). McKinney and Lamoureux (1999) suggest that a presidential debate or debate series should be examined within the context of the overall campaign news narrative and is best viewed as an ongoing media drama performed in three acts.

First, the typical presidential debate story begins with the requisite debate over the debates (see Lamoureux, Entrekin, & McKinney, 1994, for analysis of this phase of the 1992 presidential debates). Here, the drama consists of such uncertainties as Will debates actually take place? If so, when, where, and how? and Who will

participate—particularly when “legitimate” third-party or independent candidates are involved? Once the stage has been set for debates, the next phase of the ongoing debate narrative turns to the setting of expectations for each of the candidates. Here, we learn who is considered the stronger or more experienced debater, who is expected to attack whom and how, possible debate strategies that each of the candidates will likely pursue, and of any “October surprises” that could be announced during the debates. Finally, the actual debate takes place, and we enter the third and final stage of the debate news narrative as we are told who won or lost and who performed better than or not as well as expected, with debate highlights drawn from any candidate stumbles or gaffes or from the spontaneously scripted zingers that are destined to become part of debate history. If subsequent debates are to occur, this news narrative returns immediately to the second phase with the setting of expectations for the next encounter.

The available research of the news media’s debate coverage has examined both content and effects of media reporting. In characterizing the content of debate coverage, although issue discussion constitutes the major element of the debates themselves, issues are not the main focus of debate reporting (e.g., Kaid et al., 2000, p. 135; Kendall, 1997; Kraus, 2000, p. 147; Lemert et al., 1991, p. 39). Instead, media coverage focuses largely on candidate performance, highlights the “horse-race” aspects of the campaign, with heavy reporting of the “snap” postdebate polls showing who won the debate, and also reporting that is heavy on speculative analysis regarding the debate’s likely impact on the outcome of the election. Whereas most analysis of the media’s debate reporting has examined network evening news broadcasts, a comparative study by Miller and MacKuen (1979) concluded that “newspapers did a better job of reflecting debate content than TV news did” (p. 294).

Perhaps the most extensive examination of media coverage of debates is Lemert and colleagues’ analyses of the “news verdicts” delivered of candidates’ debate performance (Lemert et al., 1991; Lemert, Elliott, Rosenberg, & Bernstein, 1996; Lemert, Wanta, & Lee, 1999). This research defines a news verdict as any judgment or evaluation of a debaters’ performance, examining the direction of the verdict (negative or positive), the source of the verdict (including a journalist, an “elite” source such as a campaign operative or political pundit, or a “nonelite” source such as a citizen), and also the focus of the verdict (including assessment of the candidates’ issue performance, evaluation of campaign tactics, or a candidate image evaluation). In general, the “news verdict” findings show that journalists and elite sources are the most frequent evaluators of candidate performance, with the news media largely ignoring public evaluation of debates, verdicts focus overwhelming on candidate image assessment, and those candidates who trail in predebate opinion polls usually receive more negative assessments regarding their debate performance.

In analyzing the influence of postdebate media commentary, several studies have found rather significant viewer effects. Indeed, Chaffee and Dennis (1979) concluded, “It may well be that the press’s interpretation of the debate . . . is more important in determining the impact on the electorate than is the debate itself” (p. 85). The classic debate study most often used to argue substantial media commentary effects is Steeper’s (1978) investigation of the second Ford–Carter debate, in which viewers immediately following the debate registered no negative reactions to Ford’s Eastern Europe “gaffe.” Yet in the hours and days following the debate, a

period marked by strong media criticism of Ford's blunder, Steeper (1978) reports what may be the most dramatic free fall in presidential campaign history:

Among 101 voters interviewed Wednesday night immediately following the debate, Ford had a 54-to-36 percent lead in their stated voting intentions. During the next evening the 121 voters interviewed were "voting" for Carter by a 54-to-37 percent count. Thus, in only 25 hours, our raw data was showing an +18 percent majority lead for Ford turning completely around and giving a +17 percent lead for Carter. (p. 84)

A number of experimental studies also have tested the effects of exposure to media commentary. In their analysis of the first 1988 Bush–Dukakis debate, Lowry, Bridges, and Barefield (1990) found that viewers exposed to postdebate analysis featuring an instant poll showing that Michael Dukakais had won the debate were significantly more likely to select Dukakais as the debate winner than were viewers not exposed to this postdebate commentary. Experimental studies by McKinnon, Tedesco, and Kaid (1993) of the 1992 presidential debates and McKinnon and Tedesco (1999) of the 1996 presidential debates also find media commentary effects, as exposure to postdebate "spin" significantly increased respondents' evaluations of the candidates.

## Analyzing Debate Content

Although the largest segment of televised debate analysis emanates from a media effects paradigm, several scholars have focused their studies on various features of debate content, including investigation of both verbal and visual message elements. This review of the content analytic debate scholarship highlights those studies and programs of research incorporating analysis of multiple debates, thus allowing wider generalizations regarding debate content.

**Verbal Content.** Scholars analyzing debates' verbal content have examined the specific campaign issues featured in debate discussion, candidates' development of arguments, candidates' patterns of interaction, including clash and attack strategies, the form and function of candidate responses, and also candidates' language style.

Responding to the charge that televised presidential debates were little more than simultaneous press conferences, devoid of any actual candidate debate Carlin and colleagues (1991, 2001) have pursued a systematic analysis of candidates' clash strategies, with clash operationalized as those instances in which candidates offer analysis of their own versus an opponent's issue positions; clash also occurs through direct attack of an opponent's positions. Carlin et al. (1991) found, in their comparative content analysis of presidential debates from 1960, 1976, 1980, 1984, and 1988, that substantial amounts of direct candidate clash does, in fact, occur in presidential debates; and as discussed in more detail in the following section on debate formats, more recent analysis of clash strategies (Carlin et al., 2001) suggests that clash is affected by format design.

Benoit's functional theory of political campaign discourse has been applied to various forms of campaign communication, including all primary and general-election debates from 1960 to 2000 (for an overview of this work see Benoit &

Harthcock, 1999, and Benoit, Pier et al., 2002). In brief, Benoit's theory of campaign discourse posits three primary functions for candidates' utterances—candidates acclaim themselves, attack their opponent, or defend themselves when attacked. Furthermore, each utterance will focus on matters of policy or character. Specific topics for policy discussion take the form of past deeds, future plans, or general goals. Character discussion focuses on one's personal qualities, leadership ability, or ideals.

From Benoit's exhaustive analysis of debate dialogue, we have learned that debates focus overwhelmingly on campaign issues rather than candidate character, candidates in debates acclaim far more often than they attack their opponent, and attacks outnumber defenses. Also, candidates attack less frequently in primary than in general-election debates, yet primary candidates acclaim more frequently than do general-election candidates, there is less policy discussion in primary versus general-election debates, and, interestingly, in primary debates candidates attack their own party more often than they do the opposition party.

Another comprehensive investigation of debate content is Hart and Jarvis' (1997) examination of all presidential exchanges from 1960 to 1996. The unit of analysis in this research is the candidates' use of language, with Hart's computerized content analysis program, DICTION, actually scoring candidates' verbal responses according to various linguistic dimensions. In short, from Hart and Jarvis' analysis we learn that debates inject a tone of "sobriety" to campaign dialogue, they are relatively free of the usual campaign "bombast," they force candidates to focus their message and respond to an opponent's charges, and, finally, debates encourage candidates to be more introspective.

Certainly, we have learned much from the available content analysis of debates' verbal elements, particularly from those longitudinal studies that allow greater generalizations of candidates' verbal strategies. We also find most useful those content analytic investigations that take a comparative approach to campaign dialogue, analyzing features of debate content in relation to other campaign message forms. For example, cited previously is Ellsworth's (1965) comparison of debate argumentation to that found in nomination acceptance addresses and stump speeches. Also, Hart and Jarvis (1997) show that candidates are less prone to exaggeration and embellishment in debates than they are in either their ads or stump speeches (see also Hart, 2000, for additional comparative campaign communication analysis). Finally, Benoit's functional theory (see Benoit, Pier et al., 2002) has been applied across multiple campaign message forms, finding, for example, that debates feature more policy and less character discussion than TV spots; and general-election debates feature less candidate attack than found in general-election ads (although, interestingly, attacks are more frequent in primary debates than in primary ads). In general, the prevailing theme of much of the comparative message analysis points to debate dialogue as a superior form of campaign communication.

**Visual Analysis/Nonverbal Content.** Without question, from local to presidential campaign debates, citizens encounter these political communication events as a *televised* experience. Scholars analyzing the content of campaign debates, however, have largely ignored the fundamental premise that debates consist of both verbal and visual message elements. In fact, Hellweg et al. (1992) claim that "the visual component of television communication dwarfs the verbal dimension" (p. 73). Yet, any supposed dominance of debates' visual content is certainly not reflected in the existing analysis of campaign debates. From their inception, televised

presidential debates' visual impact has been in question, with the now legendary contention—some believe myth—that television viewers found John Kennedy to be the “winner” of the 1960 debates, whereas radio listeners judged Richard Nixon to be the superior debater or found the two candidates equal in their performance.<sup>4</sup> Whatever the facts of the Kennedy–Nixon viewer–listener difference, there seems to be no disagreement that a campaign debates' visual content and presentation is an important element of the debate message and worthy of investigation. The available empirical analysis of debates' visual content includes several programs of content analytic research examining camera presentation, candidates' nonverbal behaviors in debate, as well as comparison of verbal and visual content.

In his analysis of camera shots from the 1976 debates, Tiemens (1978) found an uneven visual presentation of the two candidates, with Jimmy Carter favored over Ford due to Carter's greater screen composition, more advantageous camera angles, greater smiling shots, and greater eye contact with the camera or viewing audience. Davis (1978), however, found that Ford and Carter had similar amounts of eye contact with the camera throughout their three debate series. Messaris, Eckman, and Gumpert (1979) also examined camera shots in the 1976 debates and noted particular dissimilarities in the second of the three exchanges. Their analysis revealed that the second debate featured shorter shots (more frequent shot switching) and presented more two-shot and reaction shots as a way to visually depict greater candidate clash. Timens, Hellweg, Kipper, and Phillips (1985) analyzed both visual and verbal components of the single 1980 Carter–Ragan debate, concluding that camera presentation actually minimized the candidates' verbal clashes. Finally, Hellweg and Phillips (1981) examined the verbal and visual components of a 1980 Republican presidential primary debate, finding comparatively even camera treatment for both Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush.

Perhaps one of the most sustained programs of research incorporating the visual components of presidential debates is Morello's (1988a, 1988b, 1992) integrative analysis of verbal and visual clash. Here, verbal clash is said to happen when a candidate attacks an opponent or responds to an attack, and visual clash is depicted as a shot that switches from one speaker to the other, including an opponent close-up, or as a two-shot that includes speaker and opponent. In general, Morello's findings point to a discrepancy between verbal and visual content, whereby the visual presentation frequently suggests clash when verbal clash is not present, or the visual overemphasizes when verbal clash does occur (with close-up shots, quick shot cutting, etc.). As Morello's investigations include multiple debate series, with studies examining presidential debates in 1976, 1984, and 1988, his analysis

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<sup>4</sup>The debate over this widely cited debate “fact” can be traced through a review of the following scholarship. First, Katz and Feldman (1962) mention the single study on which the supposed viewer–listener difference is based; next, Vancil and Pendell (1987) point out the weaknesses in the evidence used to support this finding; and, finally, Kraus (1996) reviews the dispute, ultimately supporting the notion of a viewer–listener difference in the first 1960 debate. In terms of continued empirical investigation of a possible medium or channel difference in debate exposure (comparing TV to radio), McKinnon, Tedesco, and Kaid (1993) and McKinnon and Tedesco (1999) conducted experimental studies with debate viewers and listeners, finding significant differences in terms of candidate evaluation. Finally, Patterson, Churchill, Burger, and Powell (1992) also found significant differences in candidate evaluations in their two experiments that examined “modality” effects (subjects were exposed to a debate in one of four conditions: audiovisual, visual only, audio only, and text).

notes important changes in debates' visual presentation across time. First, from 1976 to 1988, the rapidity of shot switching in debates became twice as fast; also, the panelists, over time, became much more prominent in their visual presentation.

In surveying the limited analysis of debates' visual content, it is particularly notable that the available research concentrates on debates that occurred from 1960 to 1988. Yet we are aware of no such analysis that includes debates from 1992 forward—the very period in which presidential debates have changed dramatically in format and production techniques. Clearly, the visual presentation and nonverbal dynamics of a town hall debate would differ greatly from those of a traditional candidates-behind-podium debate. In addition to a renewed emphasis on content analytic research, experimentation and viewer effects research of debates' visual influence is also needed. Whereas earlier presidential debates were broadcast through a single pool feed used by all networks, competing networks now actually present multiple visual versions of our presidential debates, with each utilizing different camera angles, split screens, different screen graphics, etc. Although not a debate study, Rothkopf, Dixon, and Billington (1986) have shown that spatial context, including different camera switching and placement of visual cues on screen, significantly affected viewers' recall of a news program. Although networks may wish to provide a debate program that maximizes entertainment value, the actual visual presentation may very well affect how and what viewers learn from debate viewing.

## Debate Formats

Perhaps the most often-heard refrain regarding presidential debates is the charge that these staged-for-TV encounters between our major aspirants for the presidency are anything but “true” debates. From J. Jeffery Auer's (1962, 1981) frequently repeated assertion of “counterfeit” debates to the popular characterization of presidential debates as merely a “joint press conference” (Lanoue & Schrott, 1991), a chorus of scholars, political pundits, and candidates has complained that these quadrennial exchanges do not reach their full potential as exercises in political argumentation. At the heart of such criticism is usually some quarrel with the actual debate structure or format. In fact, as Carlin (1994, p. 6) noted, format critique represents one of the major areas of presidential debate analysis.

Common criticisms have included the inability of candidates to develop sustained and in-depth argument due to abbreviated response times, as well as multiple and often unrelated topics raised in a single debate. Other debate format flaws identified include insufficient opportunity for follow-up questioning, thus allowing candidates to avoid responding to particular queries, or tight controls on candidate responses that prohibit direct candidate exchange or clash, thus limiting comparison of campaign issues. Finally, one of the most frequent complaints of the traditional televised debate structure has focused on the role and performance of the panel of journalist questioners. Often, instead of debating one's opponent, presidential candidates have found themselves arguing with a journalist engaged in a game of “gotcha” with questions deemed convoluted or irrelevant by the public (Lamoureux et al., 1994).

An examination of the now 40-year history of general election presidential debates reveals the actual structure for these exchanges remained virtually

unchanged until the 1990s.<sup>5</sup> Within the past decade, however, the design and practice of presidential debates have evolved significantly from their earlier press-conference flavor to include such innovations as a single moderator questioning the candidates, the town hall debate featuring citizen questioners, and the more informal candidate round-table conversation or “chat” debate utilized for the first time in 2000. The various alterations in debate structure introduced during the 1992, 1996, and 2000 debate series were adopted by the national debate sponsor, the Commission on Presidential Debates (CPD), largely in response to proposals made by debate scholars (see Carlin, 2000; Carlin & McKinney, 1994). Based on citizens’ evaluations and recommendations for debates that would better serve the public’s voter education needs, the CPD adopted such changes as the exclusion of the traditional panel of journalists, implemented extended and less-rigid candidate response sequences—designed to encourage more direct candidate interactions as well as discussion of fewer issues in greater depth during a single debate—and also championed greater inclusion of public voice and citizen participation in the debate process.<sup>6</sup>

Now that the central issue every 4 years surrounding our presidential debates seems to be what *type* of debates we will have—rather than *if* debates will take place at all—a useful question for scholars to consider is whether or not the debate format actually matters. Do certain formats, for example, contribute to greater voter learning? Also, does debate structure affect the actual content of a debate, or more precisely, How does a debate format affect the communicative performance of the candidates?

First, we know that debate format seems to matter a great deal to the public. For the past decade a team of communication scholars, directed by Diana Carlin at the University of Kansas, has collected and analyzed data from a national sample of voters engaged in focus group discussions following their viewing of presidential debates in 1992, 1996, and 2000.<sup>7</sup> In terms of the types of debates that the public finds most useful, there was wide agreement that the panel of journalists is inferior to a single moderator. Citizens feel strongly that debate discussion should reflect a public policy agenda, focusing on campaign issues most relevant to the public instead of campaign strategy or matters relating to candidate character. The town hall debate is viewed as better addressing issues of greatest concern to voters; however, citizens also believe that there is a need for a journalist or policy expert to be involved in at least some of the debates. Also, citizens want debates that cover four or five different topics in each debate, with each issue discussed 15 to 20 min apiece. Citizens, overall, prefer a debate series featuring a variety of debate formats.

Whereas it is true, as noted earlier, that format critique represents one of the major areas of presidential debate research, much of this analysis appears in the

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<sup>5</sup>See Kraus (2000, pp. 35–30) for a description of formats used in presidential and vice-presidential debates from 1960 to 1996; see McKinney (in press) for a description of formats used in the 2000 presidential and vice presidential debates.

<sup>6</sup>As Schroeder (2000, p. 30) reports, it was candidate Bill Clinton in 1992 who successfully negotiated the adoption of the first town hall debate. With overwhelming positive citizen reaction to this type of debate, the Commission on Presidential Debates continued utilizing the town hall format in both 1996 and 2000.

<sup>7</sup>This research has been reported in several sources, including Carlin (1999, 2000), Carlin and McKinney (1994), Kaid, McKinney, and Tedesco (2000), McKinney and Lamoureux (1999), and McKinney, Spiker, and Kaid (1998).

form of critical commentary in which the analyst identifies perceived deficiencies in existing debate designs, argues that these structural flaws somehow prevent candidates from engaging in “true” debate, and, finally, provides recommendations for developing a “better” debate model. Actual empirical evidence regarding presidential debate format effects on communication outcomes is quite limited. Yet, from the few empirical studies that are available, the answer is increasingly clear that debate format does in fact matter in several important ways.<sup>8</sup>

Pfau (1984) conducted what may be the earliest empirical analysis of debate formats when he compared four debates that took place during the 1984 Democratic primary, each utilizing a different structure. His findings, in general, confirmed that different debate formats produced differences in communication outcomes, concluding, “Format and procedures is an important variable. Some approaches to political debates facilitate clash; some do not. Some approaches elicit substantive responses; some do not (p. 13).” Some studies (Carlin et al. 1991, 2001) have revealed several relationships between candidate clash and debate structure. First, direct candidate clash is limited when format design limits rebuttal times, clash is also limited when the same or similar questions are not posed to both candidates, and the actual type of question asked of candidates influences candidate clash. Specifically, moderator questions asking candidates to compare issue positions resulted in more clash than did the less comparative questions put to the candidates by the citizen questioners in the town hall debate. Finally, when comparing the overall amounts of clash that occurred in the three distinct debate formats utilized in the 2000 debate series, the more formal podium debate contained the greatest overall level of candidate clash, and the more conversational chat debate featured the least amount of clash.

Several other studies also found differences in debate dialogue or content when comparing the town hall debate to more traditional debate models. First, in the 1992 debate series, Eveland et al. (1994) compared the questions posed by both journalists and citizens, finding clear differences, including more argumentative, accusatory, and leading questions posed by journalists, and differences in question topics, with journalists asking more questions relating to foreign policy and candidate character whereas citizen questions focused more on domestic issues and specific government policies. Benoit and Wells (1996) found that the town hall debate contained the least amount of candidate attack of the three 1992 presidential debates, concluding that “the format of the debates—and in particular when audience members are able to clearly express their desires to the candidates—can affect the nature of persuasive attack produced by the rhetors” (p. 59). Finally, Hart and Jarvis (1997) examined candidates’ discursive debate styles and found noticeable differences in candidates’ language choices based on debate format.

In their analysis of the 1996 debate series, which featured a more traditional debate, with questions put to the candidates by moderator Jim Lehrer, and also

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<sup>8</sup>The debate format research reviewed in this section focuses on televised *presidential* debates. In 1992, a rather interesting format experiment was tried with the *vice-presidential* debate that included candidates Al Gore, Dan Quayle, and James Stockdale. In this debate, candidates were allowed to directly question and respond to each other. This experiment was described by Kay and Borchers (1994, p. 99) as “immature children in a sandbox” and has never been used on the presidential level. At least three studies (Beck, 1996; Bilmes, 1999, 2001) have explored how the “freewheeling” nature of the debate affected the candidates’ communication and interaction patterns.



a town hall debate, with questioning by undecided citizens, Kaid et al. (2000, p. 76) found three specific content differences: First, the town hall debate contained significantly less candidate attack; second, the two candidates developed significantly more issue versus image appeals in their town hall debate than they did in their traditional debate; and third, the town hall debate featured significantly more candidate-positive (versus opponent-negative) discourse than did the traditional debate. Furthermore, Kaid et al. (2000, p. 76) also compared the issue agendas developed by the candidates in both of the 1996 debates, comparing the discussion of issues within the two debates to those issues that voters thought were the most important campaign issues. In the single-moderator debate there was little relationship and an insignificant correlation with the issues discussed in the debate and the public's agenda, yet in the town hall debate the public's issue agenda was significantly correlated with the rank order of issues stressed in the debate itself.

Finally, McKinney et al. (2003) tested viewer learning from exposure to the three 2000 presidential debates, examining both issue and image learning, and included type of debate format as an independent variable in their analysis. When comparing respondents' overall issue and image learning from all three debates combined, approximately two-thirds of all claims of learning were evaluations of candidate image, compared to one-third of issue learning. However, when looking at the type of learning that occurred following each of the three debates, the evidence provided by McKinney et al. suggests that format does have an affect on debate learning. Specifically, the chat debate appears to create the type of communicative dynamic that allows viewers to focus less on candidate performance and image considerations and more on issue appeals. Whereas the chat debate resulted in an almost-equal level of reported issue and image learning, the podium and town hall debates resulted in almost three times as many candidate image observations than claims of issue learning.

As the actual structure of our presidential debates has undergone significant changes in the past decade, we feel it necessary in this section to devote additional attention to the topic of debate formats. The preceding review of studies incorporating format as an analytic variable details clear content and candidate communication differences based on differing debate structures. It also seems likely, as McKinney (in press) has suggested, that these different communicative outcomes may have differing affects on viewers' learning from debates as well as viewer assessments of candidate image. Thus, we offer here an additional caveat to our previous list of qualifications for understanding debate effects. Along with the actual campaign context in which the debate occurs, including the specific candidates involved, as well as understanding the types of citizens who may view debates, we believe that debate effects will also be influenced by the type or structure of the actual debate exchange.

Future research designs should approach debate study with format as a key independent variable, testing the extent to which such dependent measures as issue learning, candidate image evaluations, and other debate content and viewer reaction variables may be influenced by format. Frequently, debate studies will analyze a single—usually the first—debate televised in a particular series (e.g., Benoit et al., 2001; Zhu et al., 1994). The common rationale for this study design is supported by the usual trend that the first debate in a multidebate series most often garners the highest viewership. When succeeding debates in a multidebate series were structured largely the same as the first debate, such data collection

efforts may not have been problematic. Now that our debate series feature distinct types of debates, reliance on claims drawn from viewer responses to one particular type of debate is limited.

## THE MISSING PUZZLE PIECES OF CAMPAIGN DEBATE RESEARCH

As we enter our fifth decade of televised presidential debates and, consequently, of campaign debate research, we feel that the prospects are excellent for scholarship in this area of political communication to flourish. Although the foregoing review might suggest to some that debate scholars have exhausted the most fruitful lines of inquiry, and that we now know all there is to know about televised campaign debates, we find this far from the case. At the conclusion of their entry in the 1981 Handbook, Kraus and Davis (1981) pointed to several issues that had not yet received sufficient scholarly attention, including sponsorship and financing of debates, participation of minor and independent candidates, debate spacing, and methods of determining debate questions. Admittedly, these topics have received limited attention by debate scholars; however, such matters are influenced primarily by the debate sponsor and by the candidates' control of the debate planning process and are thus less suited to empirical scholarly investigation. Certainly, issues such as the form and timing of debates, as well as the number of candidates allowed to debate, might very well influence debate outcomes such as voter learning as well as other debate effects. Since debate scholarship is unlikely to influence candidates' political considerations in determining the nature of their debate participation, we suggest that other areas are in greater need of scholars' attention. Our call for expanding campaign debate research recommends focus on such debate-related topics as vice-presidential debates, primary debates, nonpresidential debates, and international debates.

***Vice-Presidential Debates.*** With the exception of 1960 and 1980, vice-presidential debates have been a regular part of the presidential debate season. Although a small number of studies have examined vice-presidential exchanges (e.g., Beck, 1996; Hardy-Short, 1986; Kay & Borchers, 1994; Rosenberg & Elliott, 1987), the "undercard" debates have clearly received much less attention than their presidential counterparts. Carlin and Bicak (1993) provide a concise summary of much of the existing vice-presidential debate research and conclude that vice-presidential debates have unique rhetorical exigencies that require a set of candidate message strategies different from those of presidential debates.

The little empirical analysis that does exist seems to suggest that the vice-presidential encounter may have little impact on voters' ultimate choice for president. Holbrook's (1994, 1996) analysis of the 1984, 1988, and 1992 vice-presidential debates found that whereas exposure to these debates did significantly affect viewers' evaluation of the vice presidential candidates' images, there was no significant effect on presidential vote choice. Holbrook (1996) concluded, "There is very little evidence that vice presidential debates do much at all to alter the political landscape" (p. 109). We are also aware of two studies (Drew & Weaver, 1991; Lemert, 1993) that provide a direct comparison of viewers' knowledge acquisition from presidential and vice-presidential debates, and both found that issue learning from

vice-presidential debates is significantly lower than that reported from viewing presidential debates. Yet Tonn's (1994) summary of focus group reactions to the 1992 Gore–Quayle–Stockdale vice-presidential clash seems to refute the notion that vice-presidential debates have little influence on citizens' evaluation of presidential candidates. Specifically, in describing viewers' assessment of the debate performance by Admiral James Stockdale, Ross Perot's running mate, Tonn (1994, pp. 122–123) concluded, "Nearly all voters had been shaken by Stockdale's humiliating performance during the vice presidential debate. The Stockdale debacle . . . called into question Perot's personal judgment and his seriousness about the campaign."

With so little research available—and in some cases contradictory findings—regarding vice-presidential debates, this is an area of debates research clearly in need of additional investigation. Interestingly, in our review of the existing research we found no studies examining either the 1996 or the 2000 vice-presidential debates, both of which were touted by the media as important moments in the campaign. Future research in this area may start with Carlin and Bicak's (1993) proposed theory of vice-presidential debate dialogue, testing the similarities and differences between vice-presidential and presidential debate messages.

**Primary Debates.** Overall, knowledge of general-election campaign communication is far more extensive than that of primary campaign messages. For example, of the 36 debate effects studies reviewed by Zhu et al. (1994), only 4 analyzed primary debates. That debate scholars have largely ignored primary debates seems at odds with the fact that there are many more of these debates and they feature a wide array of formats. In the 2000 presidential campaign, for example, the Republican and Democratic candidates engaged in a total of 22 televised primary debates—or seven times the number of general election debates.

As most astute followers of presidential campaigns can recite, the very first televised general-election presidential debates were the historic 1960 Kennedy–Nixon exchanges. Presidential candidates, however, had met in debate—although not always in front of TV cameras—many years before Kennedy and Nixon. Kendall (2000, p. 4) details the very first broadcast presidential debate, a radio debate, held in the 1948 Oregon primary election between Republican candidates Harold Stassen and Thomas Dewey. Since 1948, primary debates have been held each presidential election season, with 1952 and 1964 the only apparent exceptions.<sup>9</sup>

The limited findings from primary debate research suggest that these encounters may actually have greater effects on viewers than do general-election debates. Although not a debate study, Kennamer and Chaffee's (1982) analysis of media use during presidential primaries points to why debates during the primary period may be more useful to voters: "What appears clear . . . is that the very early [campaign] phase is characterized by widespread lack of information among those who are not following the campaign closely, and uncertainty even among those who are" (p. 647). Thus, voters in a primary context are more likely to be seeking information to help clarify often subtle differences among intraparty rivals.

The existing primary debate research, for the most part, closely mirrors our general election debate analyses in the specific topics studied. In particular, a focus on candidate preference, perceptions of candidate image, analysis of voter learning

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<sup>9</sup>See Benoit et al. (2002, pp. 133–137) for a listing of all primary debates from 1952 to 2000.

from debates, and assessment of campaign interest constitute the major variables analyzed. Pfau's work on intraparty debates is among the earliest studies devoted to primary debates. His findings indicate that primary debate exposure produced significant changes in viewers' perceptions of candidate images (Pfau, 1987) and that primary debates produced significant viewer learning about candidates' issue positions (Pfau, 1988). Several subsequent studies have found similar patterns of viewer effects (Benoit, McKinney, & Stephenson, 2002; Lanoue & Schrott, 1989; McKinney et al., 2001). Studies by Wall, Golden, and James (1988) and by Yawn et al. (1988) found significant changes in viewers' candidate preferences following exposure to a single primary debate. Studies have also shown that primary debate viewing can significantly enhance voters' interest in the campaign and desire to seek out additional knowledge about the candidates (Lemert et al., 1983; Best & Hubbard, 1999).

At least two studies have suggested that primary debates may help shape the ensuing campaign's issue agenda. First, Best and Hubbard (2000) found that primary debate exposure was successful in modifying viewers' assessment of the salience of certain campaign issues. McKinney et al. (2001) examined an early 2000 primary debate that included six Republican candidates. Their method of analysis allowed viewers to evaluate, using automatic response dials, the various issue appeals made by the six candidates. This study found that the issues rated most highly by viewers were appeals from either the primary campaign front-runner (George W. Bush) or his principal contender (John McCain). Furthermore, the very appeals rated most highly more than a year before the 2000 election became the major campaign issues developed by the Republican nominee throughout the 2000 campaign. The study also found that specific issue appeals made by the field's "also-ran" candidates (Orin Hatch, Steve Forbes, Alan Keyes, and Gary Bauer) were rated consistently as the lowest issues discussed in the debate.

Finally, there is limited empirical evidence to suggest that primary debate participation may have negative consequences for a campaign front-runner. McKinney et al. (2001) examined the patterns of opponent attack in a 2000 Republican primary debate, finding that among the six candidates who participated in this debate, the front-runner (George W. Bush) was the target of nearly 75% of all attacks, with the vast majority of the attacks against Bush made by the several also-ran candidates. Interestingly, the principal contender to the front-runner (John McCain) did not make a single attack against his chief opponent during the 75-min debate, instead allowing all of the attack work against the front-runner to be done by the four also-ran candidates. Content analysis of all the 2000 primary debates by Benoit, Pier, et al. (2002, p. 126) also found that the front-runner is attacked more often than any other candidate in primary debates.

In her examination of presidential primary campaigns from 1912 to 2000, Kendall (2000, p. 2) argued the importance of the primary phase by citing Eaton's (1912) observation, "The power to nominate is more important than the power to elect" (pp. 109–111). We agree that primary campaigns in general, and primary debates in particular, are in need of greater inspection. We are also aware of the usual charge as to why some might find primary debates not as worthy of analysis as their general-election counterparts, namely, their limited reach. As Hollihan (2001, p. 165) points out, the average audience for each of the 2000 primary debates was approximately 1.5 million viewers (compared to the average audience of 40.6 million viewers for the three 2000 general-election debates). Yet two points must be made regarding this disparity in audience size. First, primary debates are most often staged in the

early-primary states (e.g., Iowa, New Hampshire, and South Carolina), where a small number of voters who have great influence on “winnowing” the candidate field for the rest of the nation serve as the main audience for these debates. Furthermore, although large numbers of viewers may not be exposed directly to the candidates engaged in primary debates, these early exchanges do receive extensive media attention that can have a great influence on the candidates vying for the nomination (Berke, 2000).

While continuing the lines of primary debate research cited above, additional questions also seem worthy of pursuit. First, the feature that most distinguishes primary from general-election debates is the presence of multiple candidates. Here, greater analysis is needed regarding the communicative dynamics and patterns of interaction featured in a multicandidate debate (see, e.g., McKinney et al., 2001). Second, another question worthy of study relates to the learning and image effects when viewers must process issue information from a large number of candidates and must form impressions of those candidates. Debate scholars might also approach their analysis of primary debates as key campaign moments designed to forge the party’s agenda and nominees’ subsequent general-election issue agenda. Finally, a study that tracks a nominee’s message and debate strategies across primary and general-election debates has yet to be done. Similarly, comparative analysis of viewer reactions to candidates engaged in both primary and general-election debates poses interesting research possibilities.

**Nonpresidential Debates.** Whereas the paucity of research on primary debates is difficult to explain given their frequency, it is even more difficult to explain an even greater lack of research on nonpresidential debates given that they occur even more frequently. The need for more research in this area is illustrated by Trent and Fridenberg’s (2000) observation that “while findings concerning the effects of presidential debates are not necessarily valid for other debates, there is reason to suspect a broad similarity in the pattern of effects . . . but, we cannot be absolutely certain” (p. 274). On this point we find that existing debate research—or, actually, the lack of such research—prevents us from extrapolating findings from the study of presidential debates to the possible effects or content outcomes of nonpresidential campaign debates. In fact, the little evidence that is available actually suggests that state and local televised debates may differ in both content and viewer effects from their presidential counterparts. But, again, we are unable to make any conclusive claims due to the scarcity of research in this area.

Although our review of the extant debate literature may very well have missed an occasional article or chapter, even we were surprised to find only four published studies analyzing nonpresidential debates. Two nonpresidential debate studies adopted a comparative approach, examining viewer responses to both local- and presidential-level debates broadcast in the same election cycle. Lichtenstein (1982) compared viewer reactions to a series of state-level televised debates in New Mexico and the 1980 Reagan–Anderson and/or the Carter–Reagan debates; similarly, Pfau (1983) compared evaluations of state and local debates in South Dakota to the Carter–Reagan debate. Lichtenstein (1982) found that citizens who watched one or more of the local debates reported learning more from their local candidates than they did from the presidential candidates. Also, the local-level debates had a greater effect on vote choice, as many viewers knew less about the local candidates and had not made a candidate selection before watching the local debates. Pfau’s (1983) study found that the nonpresidential debates were judged to be far superior

to the Carter–Reagan exchange when comparing features of the debate dialogue, format, and questions.

Bystrom, Roper, Gobetz, Massey, and Beall (1991) examined reactions to an Oklahoma gubernatorial debate and found that debate exposure significantly affected viewers' assessment of candidate image characteristics. Edelsky and Adams (1990) studied six mixed-gender state and local debates and found clear differences between male and female candidates' communication patterns as "men got better treatment (safer turn spaces, extra turns, more follow-ups on their topics) and they took control of more resources (more time for their positions, and more of the 'aggressive' speaking)" (p. 186). Finally, although not studying a single debate or a series of debates, Faucheux (2002) reports useful findings from a national survey and focus-group investigation of nonpresidential debates. This study, produced as part of the Debate Advisory Standards Project, presents a set of "best practices" for conducting substantive debates with fair formats on the state and local level.

Further analysis of nonpresidential debates would allow scholars to pursue research questions not easily examined in the context of presidential debates. For example, as female political candidates are seeking—and achieving—public office in greater numbers, many of these candidates engage in campaign debates. Beyond the few studies of the 1984 Bush–Ferraro vice-presidential debate, there is little debate research addressing candidate gender. It is also more common for independent and minor-party candidates to be included in state and local debates. With the exception of Ross Perot's inclusion in the 1992 debates, we know very little about the impact of minor-party or independent candidates in debates. Although not in a debate study per se, Beiler (2000) claims that Jesse Ventura's successful bid for Minnesota Governor in 1998 may have actually turned on his inclusion in the series of three gubernatorial debates broadcast statewide. Finally, nonpresidential debates often utilize formats not used in presidential debates. Here, scholars might examine these formats to identify innovations worthy of emulating on the presidential level. In general, we find the analysis of nonpresidential debates to be an area rich with research possibilities.

***International Debates.*** Mancini and Swanson (1996) describe the "Americanization" hypothesis in political campaign practices as a trend in which "democracies around the world [are] becoming more and more Americanized as candidates, political parties, and news media take cues from their counterparts in the United States" (p. 4). Indeed, a number of nations, representing both established and new democracies, have followed the United States in developing televised debate traditions of their own. Although others have analyzed the U.S. exportation of political advertising (e.g., Kaid & Holtz-Bacha, 1995), very little research has acknowledged the proliferation of televised campaign debates now occurring regularly in the democracies of the world.

Published studies of televised debates occurring throughout the world—at least those appearing in English-language journals—include analyses of debates in Canada (Blais & Boyer, 1996), in the former West Germany (Baker & Norpoth, 1981; Schrott, 1990), and in South Korea (Kang & Hoon, 1999). Coleman's (2000) edited volume is a welcomed addition to this area of debate research, as it brings together studies from several additional countries, including Australia, Israel, New Zealand, and France. We are aware of only two studies that adopt a comparative approach, including Schrott's (1984) unpublished comparative

analysis of the 1980 U.S. and West German debates and Matsaganis and Weingarten's (2001) comparison of the 2000 U.S. presidential and Greek prime minister debates. Finally, deBok (1978) analyzed Dutch TV viewers' reactions to the 1976 Ford–Carter debates.

With the proliferation of televised debates occurring throughout the world, greater analysis of these key campaign events is certainly warranted. We are aware that many nations often turn to the United States when implementing campaign debates in their own countries. Both authors, in fact, have consulted with governments and debate planners representing emerging democracies in both eastern and western nations. Frequently, we have encountered cultural differences, as well as differences in a nation's media system, that prevent the wholesale importation of a U.S. debate model into another country. Analysis of international debates would benefit from a cross-cultural comparative approach (e.g., Cushman & Kincaid, 1987) that would allow researchers to better understand the similarities and differences in both content and viewer reactions to debates.

## CONCLUSIONS

In their 1981 handbook review of political campaign debates, Kraus and Davis (1981, p. 273) noted the various "firsts" of presidential debates. Since that time, we have added several additional firsts to our presidential debate history, including, in 1984, Geraldine Ferraro's being the first woman to debate; in 1992, the first three-way debates and, also, the first debate to include citizen questioners, the first debate conducted by a single journalist, and the first time that candidates were allowed to question each other (the 1992 vice-presidential debate); and, finally, in 2000, the first debate structured as a conversation.

Although we believe that there will be many other campaign debate firsts, we find it a risky endeavor to proffer specific predictions. Indeed, we are reminded of such debate forecasts as Sears and Chaffee's (1979) assertion following the 1976 Ford–Carter debates that "we do not expect all future U.S. presidential elections to feature debates" (p. 258). Thus far, presidential debates have continued uninterrupted. Once incumbents Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter, and Ronald Reagan agreed to debate, it became increasingly difficult for presidential candidates to avoid debating. We anticipate that debates, in some form, will remain a permanent part of presidential elections and of elections at all levels. We feel that campaign debates are likely to continue because, as the voluminous research has shown, debates do matter—they have many useful effects for citizens, for democracy, and for the electoral process.

Having concluded that candidate debates are a useful and necessary component of campaigns does not mean, however, that scholars have exhausted all productive lines of research. As we have suggested throughout this review, it is time to expand our debate research and move to new sets of questions: How do debates achieve their effects? How lasting are these effects? and How do debates work in conjunction with the "noisy" communication environment of political campaigns?

We also believe that many previously asked and answered questions need to be revisited in light of changing debate formats and broadcast techniques. For example, we advocate additional analysis of candidates' verbal debate strategies that will help us better understand the relationship between format and arguments. In fact, more analysis of debate arguments is appropriate beyond looking simply at the use of evidence. With a new presidential sponsor in 1988 and changes in formats and

broadcast practices, the visual debate research needs more development. There are countless other questions asked of early debates related to debate content and effects that need to be applied longitudinally.

Local and state as well as primary debates are open territory for researchers. Additionally, the many questions that have been asked about presidential debates also apply to other contexts. International debates offer numerous research opportunities for scholars. Before new democracies adopt U.S. formats and systems, we should examine the debates that have occurred internationally to determine if there were cultural barriers to the transfer of U.S. models that inhibited their usefulness.

Although it is possible to find flaws in past research, to question conclusions, or to argue that more theory needs to be applied and tested, we are convinced based on our review of the extant research that debate scholarship has helped to improve the practice of campaign debates. Without scholarship on the early debates and the criticisms offered by many of the political communication scholars cited in this chapter, those involved with sponsoring debates might not have experimented with alternative formats. Also, without the convincing evidence of debates' useful effects, it might have been possible for candidates to avoid debates.

Since 1960, televised debates have moved in many directions; and most of these changes, we feel, were for the better. In the next 10, 15, or 20 years campaign debates will surely continue to evolve, and, we predict, so will debate research. We are confident that political communication researchers will meet the challenge to describe and analyze the past and to help shape the future.

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PART

# III

## **NEWS MEDIA COVERAGE OF POLITICS, POLITICAL ISSUES, AND POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS**



## News Coverage of Political Campaigns

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To review research on news coverage of political campaigns, we start with a basic premise: All news is a construction of reality. News about political campaigns represents an on-going negotiation among key actors in the campaign process: on the media side—journalists, editors, and owners; on the campaign side—candidates, campaign staffers, and party activists. To a lesser extent the public, government institutions and their incumbents, interest groups, pundits, and experts also play a role in the news-making process.

Each actor endeavors to control how the news story is told (Bennett, 2001; Cook, 1996; Crigler, 1996; Edelman, 1988; Gans, 1979; Graber, 2002; Hollihan, 2001; Just et al., 1996; Neuman, Just, & Crigler, 1992; Tuchman, 1978). The outcome of negotiations over the news depends on the power of the source as well as on the relative social, political, or economic consequences of the news itself. In the past 20 years, presidential candidates have become savvy about how to stay “on message” and how to get journalists to cover what they want the public to hear (Miller & Gronbeck, 1994). Journalists, for their part, are dogged in the search for inconsistency, hypocrisy, or scandal and can require candidates to speak to issues that the press deems newsworthy. In presidential election campaigns, both journalists and the candidates bring a great deal of leverage to the negotiation of news. As a result, there is often a hotly contested struggle between reporters and officials or candidates for control of the news message.

Given the political stakes in campaigns, the idea that the news media might use their influence to promote the advantage of one side or the other has preoccupied scholars and worried citizens. To the great relief of most observers, partisan bias is not widespread in modern campaign news. Many researchers have shown, however, that although partisan bias is modest, structural bias, rooted in journalistic norms,



infuses political coverage. (See Ansolabehere, Behr & Iyengar, 1993, for “episodic” bias; Bennett, 2001, for “normalization”; Gans, 1979, for “celebrity” bias; Hallin, 1992, for “sound bite” news; Hofstetter, 1976, for “horse-race” bias; Lippmann, 1922, for an “events” bias; Mann & Orren, 1992, for “horse-race/strategy” bias; and Patterson, 1980, for “the game” bias).

In addition to structural biases in the way news is reported, social scientists have found that the construction of news has many other subtle influences. These include, for example, agenda setting—that is, signaling the important issues of the campaign (Cohen, 1963; Iyengar, 1991; McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Mutz, 1989; Weaver, 1981); priming—leading news audiences to particular interpretations of events that then shape their evaluations of political officials and candidates (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Krosnick & Kinder, 1990); and candidate image building—both positive and negative (Bennett, 2001; Hacker, 1995; Hollihan, 2001; Nimmo, 1976; Sniderman, Glaser, & Griffin, 1990).

News media impact has also been observed in what people learn from the news and in their attitudes toward the democratic process (Graber, 1984, 1998, 2001; Neuman et al., 1992; Patterson, 1980; Popkin, 1991). On the whole, researchers have been disappointed in the amount of political learning that takes place during a campaign. Election studies in the 1940s (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, & McPhee, 1954) hoped to find that the new electronic medium of radio would make it easier for voters to become informed on the issues. Later on, television also raised hopes for a better-informed electorate (Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960). Yet citizens’ level of knowledge about candidates and issues appears to have remained constant in the face of new media of communication. Researchers have questioned whether the nature of news is the problem. In particular, they wonder whether or not journalists are providing the kind of campaign news that will help the electorate make voting decisions in line with their policy preferences and their assessments of candidates (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Graber, 1998).

The past 60 years of research into how journalists cover presidential election campaigns has given us a clear picture of what gets reported in newspapers and on television and how that coverage has evolved over time. Numerous studies have shown that campaign news is overly focused on strategies, tactics, poll results, and candidates’ prospects for winning rather than on the substantive issues of the campaign. The news places campaigns within a competitive framework, or “game-frame” (Patterson, 1980), that characterizes elections in terms that would be more appropriate for a horse race or some other sports event.

This chapter begins with the study of journalism and American presidential election campaigns. The topics we consider include political bias, structural bias, group construction of news, and the rise of interpretive journalism. We examine how campaign coverage has changed in the face of television and the growth of local, cable, and Internet news sources. We evaluate news coverage of non-presidential campaigns in the United States, recognizing that the analysis of election news and its effects must necessarily take into account different levels of office (for congressional elections, see Clarke & Evans, 1983; Cook, 1989; Goldenberg & Traugott, 1984; Hess, 1986; Vermeer, 1987; for state and local elections, see Jeffries, 2000; Kanniss, 1995; Zisk, 1987). The chapter then explores how campaign news treats minority political candidates. We conclude by suggesting promising avenues for future research including comparative election studies.

## PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN COVERAGE

### The Search for a Political Bias

Constructing campaign news takes place in an evolving media environment. In the early 19th century, news media in the United States were openly partisan. As wire services became prominent in the delivery of news, a more “objective” standard of reporting became the professional norm (Schudson, 1978). When scholars began evaluating the content and quality of the news media’s coverage of elections, one of their primary questions was whether news reflected a partisan or ideological bias (West, 2001). Their concern was based on the assumption that the slant of the news would influence voters to make decisions not necessarily in their own or the public interest (Campbell et al., 1954; Campbell, Gurin, & Miller, 1960).

Experience with government propaganda during the world wars heightened concern about press bias. Two of the earliest empirical studies of campaign media were extensive content analyses of the 1940 and 1948 presidential election news coverage. Researchers examined local newspapers, popular national magazines, and radio broadcasts. The studies initially found substantial partisan bias in both the print and the broadcast media, which intensified as election day neared. A closer look revealed, however, that partisanship was found among the columnists and editorial writers, with almost no bias in the stories filed by individual reporters (Berelson et al., 1954; Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1948). These studies reassured observers that the wall between factual reporting and opinion, vaunted by the American press, was indeed in place and that citizens could depend on the objectivity of the news.

Repeated analyses of news coverage of recent presidential elections continue to find no evidence of partisan bias in news reporting (D’Alessio & Allen, 2000; Hofstetter, 1976; Just et al., 1996; Patterson, 1980; Patterson & McClure, 1976). This does not mean, however, that the coverage has been neutral. Some candidates receive more favorable coverage than others. For example, Lichter (2001), Lowry and Shidler (1995), and Zaller (1996) have found that Democrats have received slightly more favorable coverage than Republicans in the past 50 years, yet it has not been unusual in particular elections for Republican candidates to receive more favorable coverage than Democrats. A recent study found that in newspapers, the wall between editorial opinion and the news is not as impervious as previous research suggests, and some news slant in favor of editorially endorsed candidates may influence voters in Senate elections (Kahn & Kenney, 2002).

The diverse findings about which candidates are advantaged in news are widely acknowledged to reflect some kind of “structural bias” in reporting, i.e., that norms of journalism or reporter behavior favor news about some topics over others and that this news emphasis advantages some candidates and disadvantages others. For example, if reporters regard a candidate’s loss of support in opinion polls as highly newsworthy, losing candidates will receive negative coverage regardless of party. The news is “biased” against losing candidates, not because of their policy positions, but because of reporters’ decisions about what is “news” (Hofstetter, 1976). Some researchers find that candidates of both parties receive negative coverage when they are not doing well in the polls (Bennett, 1996; Stevenson, Eisinger, Feinberg, & Kotok, 1973) or that bad news about candidates is more likely to be covered than is positive news (Niven, 1991). Others maintain that it is the front-runner,

or the candidate who is perceived as having some unfair advantage, who receives more negative coverage, whereas dark horse candidates benefit from a more positive tone (Robinson & Sheehan, 1983). One area of consensus among scholars is that third-party candidates and lesser-known candidates in the primaries get the least amount of coverage and, also, get very few opportunities to have their own words appear in print or heard over the air (Lichter & Smith, 1996).

## **Structural Bias and the Horse Race**

As Walter Lippmann (1922) noted more than 80 years ago, reporters are drawn to covering factual stories that lend themselves to simple description and to concrete analysis. From the studies of news reporting of campaigns during the 1940s to the most recent election of 2000, researchers have shown that the most common themes of campaign stories are those that are simply about what is happening in the campaign itself (Hess, 2000). Many stories discuss the progress and dynamics of the campaign, the candidates' strategies, and even their itineraries. Campaign coverage focuses on which candidate seems to be winning and how campaign events might influence the remainder of the race. The incumbent administration's record and the candidates' policy positions, personal qualities, and leadership skills form a lesser but not insignificant part of typical campaign coverage (Arterton, 1984; Berelson et al., 1954; Brewer & Sigelman, 2002; Buchanan, 1996; Graber, 2001, 2002; Just et al., 1996; Lazarsfeld et al., 1948; Patterson 1980; Patterson & McClure, 1976).

The framing of the election in terms of a sports event derives in part from political reporting norms. Journalists give high news values to events that have significant impact but whose outcomes are in doubt. Elections fall into this category, along with war, weather and sporting events. Because elections are contests, it is not surprising that reporters employ a game script in telling the story. Candidates contribute to the same script. Although candidates are eager to discuss the issues (Just, Crigler, & Buhr, 1999), they contribute to the media's emphasis on the horse race by using their speeches and events to construct an aura of victory around their candidacies (Berelson et al., 1954; Lazarsfeld et al., 1948).

The "game" focus also derives from a desire by newspaper columnists and broadcast commentators to demonstrate their skills as political analysts and to be recognized for their success in predicting the election outcomes (Berelson et al., 1954; Lazarsfeld et al., 1948; Patterson, 1993). Being the first to predict the election winner is tantamount to scooping the competition, an archetypal news norm (Mason, Frankovic, & Jamieson, 2001). Reporters believe that success in predicting the outcome will provide opportunities for advancement (Arterton, 1984). Furthermore, reporters find it safer and easier to write a story about process and strategy than to report on issues. Issue coverage involves more time for research and technical explanations (Kanniss, 1995). Even more onerous to reporters, however, is that a comparison of candidates' policy positions is likely to draw criticism of partisan bias, whereas examination of poll standings will not. As Lippmann (1922) observed, the "facts" are easier to report than the causes and consequences.

The ubiquity of polls has further increased the focus on strategy and tactics. Recently journalists have relied on daily tracking polls, often generated by their own news organizations. Tracking polls provide journalists with an objective measure of each campaign's recent progress and the ability to link recent campaign decisions to

changes in the candidates' poll standings. Moreover, because tracking polls consist of 3-day, rolling samples, there is substantial volatility in the numbers, providing journalists with an ongoing story that includes mixes of objectivity, balance, and drama (Mann & Orren, 1992; Rhee, 1996).

The emphasis on the progress of the campaign rather than differences in candidate policy positions is even more pronounced in U.S. presidential primaries than in general elections. Because the nomination contests take place within parties, the area of policy agreement is naturally very wide and the voters are asked to decide among slight variations on a policy theme or on the personal qualifications of the candidates. The greater number and openness of primaries since 1972 have attracted correspondingly greater media attention to nominating contests than in the preprimary era, but the coverage is thin on substance. With the compression of the primary period and the emergence of "Super Tuesday," in which multiple primaries are held on the same day, national news reporters have little time for writing in-depth issue stories. Time pressures are compounded as the issues emphasized in the campaigns differ across states and among the major parties (Lichter & Smith, 1996). National news reporters find that they can construct a simpler narrative about the candidates' prospects and tactics than about issues in the primary campaigns.

## Television and Print

In the 20th century, radio and television broadcasting brought citizens into intimate, if synthetic, contact with the candidates and the campaign. Radio and television provided live coverage of political party conventions and allowed citizens to see and hear the candidates' speeches in real time. Not long after television became established in American homes the televised presidential debate presented a new campaign phenomenon. Citizens could watch the candidates talk about the issues and compare them side-by-side for an extended period of time.

Although television brought profound changes in the ways that candidates waged their campaigns, it also seemed to enhance the discrepancy between "hoopla" and substance observed in print and on radio coverage 20 years earlier. In their study of the 1972 presidential campaign, Patterson and McClure (1976) found that television journalists devoted less time to the candidates' qualifications and positions on the issues than had been printed in the newspapers a generation before.

One explanation for the increasing gap between process- and substance-oriented coverage was that television was gaining dominance at the same time that parties were losing control over campaigns. Strategy seemed to become more central to the new candidate-centered presidential campaigns as political parties were losing their influence in selecting the nominees and mobilizing voters (Wattenberg, 1991). Television had a greater tendency than print to dramatize politics and to cover events that provided interesting and exciting pictures (Bennett, 2001; Graber, 2001). Television reporters were more willing than newspaper journalists to offer analysis and interpretation in their stories. Often when television news engaged in discussion of the issues, reporters drifted into behind-the-scenes political maneuvering and assessing how a candidate's policy position would affect the contest (Arterton, 1984; Patterson, 1993; Patterson & McClure, 1976; Robinson & Sheehan, 1983). Several observers found that television coverage was more negative in tone and

featured journalists more prominently than print news (Hofstetter, 1976; Patterson & McClure, 1976).

As TV journalists have increasingly taken center stage, the opportunity for candidates to present their messages in their own words has decreased on television (Hallin, 1992). For example, from 1968 to 1988, candidate “sound bites” on television decreased from an average of 45 to 9 sec (Adatto, 1990). Subsequent studies (Lichter, 2001) saw the sound bite shrink to 7 sec (Hess, 2000). Some recent evidence suggests, however, that newspapers today present a more cynical tone to their stories and provide even less opportunity to hear the candidate’s own words than television now does (Just et al., 1999; Plissner, 1989).

At the same time that television was transforming campaigns and campaign coverage, the print world was changing as well. Beginning in the mid-1960s, many family-owned newspapers were sold to larger newspapers or corporations, many of which had their own reporters working in Washington or assigned to the campaign trail. Smaller subsidiaries found it more cost-effective to publish information that was provided to them by the parent organization than to collect it themselves. Like their television counterparts, national newspaper journalists traveled with the candidates and focused heavily on campaign mechanics, organizational efforts and strategies, polling data, and prognostication (Arterton, 1984). Print reporters have told the “fly on the wall” story of the campaign trail, beginning with Theodore White’s *Making of the President* series in 1960 and followed by observers such as Timothy Crouse (1990), Hunter Thompson (1985), and David Broder (1990).

## Group Construction of the News

The groups of print and television reporters that follow candidates on the campaign trail—“the boys on the bus”—tend to rely on each other for the validation of their stories, discouraging innovation and increasing the ubiquitousness of their characterizations of the candidates and the campaign (Crouse, 1990; Swerdlow, 1988). Not only does professional socialization dominate the campaign trail, but it characterizes the main form of training in journalism. Over time new journalists learn common scripts for campaign events, such as a candidate’s “misstatement,” a whistle-stop tour, or an October Surprise. The 2000 election demonstrated what happens when a new phenomenon enters this scripted professional culture.

Until 2000, election night reporting was all about predicting the winner. Networks vied with each other to be first to declare a winner even though all of the networks relied on the same exit polling data for making projections of the outcomes. Networks rehearsed their staging for either a Democratic or a Republican victory. What none of the networks seemed to be prepared for was a tie. It was not until the early hours of the next morning that television reporters conceded that the 2000 election was still too close to call. The 2000 election provided a new phase of the election to be covered—the recounts in Florida and several other states, as well as the judicial proceedings in the U.S. Supreme Court and the Florida state courts. Although reporting about the unfolding postcampaign phase rebounded vigorously from election night, journalists tended to adhere to a common story line of “The System Works,” consistent with the idea that journalists function to “normalize” the news (Bennett, 2001).

## **New Journalism Norms and Forms in the Construction of Campaign News**

In the negotiation of campaign news, candidates have been constrained by the rise of interpretive reporting. With various electronic media superseding both print and scheduled news broadcasts for disseminating breaking news, older media have had to develop a new *raison d'être*. The result has been the emergence of “news analysis” in newspapers and on TV. By the 1980s, it became acceptable for both the television and the print media to include an interpretive, and therefore inherently subjective, component to their campaign coverage.

Today's political reporters not only predict the outcome of the race but also attempt to put campaign events into a broader context. Many journalists now consider it irresponsible simply to describe the campaign without delving into the candidate's motivation or without exploring why particular campaign decisions were made. Professional journalists perceive it as part of their duty to educate the public about the broader currents of politics, the underlying issues relevant for understanding a story, and the larger significance of particular campaign activities. By traveling with the candidates and observing what goes on behind the scenes, reporters assigned to the campaign trail feel that they are uniquely qualified to offer insights into the realities of presidential elections (West, 2001).

Interpretive reporting is supported by news media-sponsored polls, ad watches, and political punditry. The new style of interpretive reporting raises new questions about fairness in campaign news. The most common form of interpretive reporting has been found in news analysis pieces. These interpretive stories usually are paired with campaign reports and are placed immediately following evening news broadcasts or adjacent to more traditional coverage on the front pages of the newspapers—although the label “news analysis” has pretty much disappeared in print. For the television audience, an alternative way to put the news into a broader context is to bring in “political pundits” to offer analysis and commentary on recent campaign events. A long-term study by Page and Shapiro (1982) shows that pundits, along with popular presidents, are the most important forces influencing changes in public opinion. (See Beck, Dalton, Greene, and Huckfeldt, 2002, for additional perspectives on the relationship of media to public opinion and voter choice.)

Today, all the 24-hr cable news networks have entire programs devoted to pundits talking to other pundits. To construct an impression of objectivity on these programs, journalists and academics are frequently invited to appear or prominent liberals and conservatives are paired, to demonstrate a concern for ideological balance. Political punditry increasingly found its way onto news interview programs during the 1990s. Long a component of the networks' election coverage, these programs not only provided journalists with opportunities to act as commentators, but also provided the political operatives with opportunities to act as journalists.

As some former journalists have become full-time commentators and some former political operatives have become journalists, the line between reporter and “expert” has become considerably blurred. Often interviews today are simply opportunities for candidates and their surrogates to repeat the central messages of their campaigns or to provide their own “spin” on recent events (Baker, 2000). Although these programs may be less than useful sources for substantive information about campaigns, they have become an additional venue for the press to

offer analysis and commentary, gain exposure, interact with the candidates, and become television celebrities in their own right. For the candidates, news interview programs also have become much more useful, giving them a forum to communicate more directly with the voters as the length of their sound bites on the nightly news has continued to decrease (Just et al., 1996).

Political commentary also has become a prominent feature of television networks' coverage of the national political conventions. At the same time that their total convention coverage has decreased dramatically during the past 25 years (from 50 hr in 1976 to only 12 hr in 2000), the networks have placed a greater reliance on "spin doctors" to interpret the events of the conventions (Waltzer, 1999). The contraction of television coverage has left the candidates' acceptance speeches as the primary substantive area for analysis. Newspaper reporters have tended to be much more active analysts than television reporters, writing stories about the candidates' political careers and background, analyzing public opinion data, and investigating campaign finance (Frankel, 2000).

A new form of interpretive journalism that uses some of the techniques of investigative reporting is the "ad watch" (Broder, 1990). During the 1988 presidential campaign, campaign ads were frequently broadcast on the news, followed by journalists' commentary on the ad's effectiveness or the impact it might have on the electorate. In response to a postelection plea by David Broder, a *Washington Post* columnist, for more rigorous testing of advertising claims, "watch dog" ad reports became prominent in the 1992 election campaigns. The main theme of the ad watch was to indicate points of misinformation in the ad. The ad watches in 1992 tended to follow a "grammar" proposed by Kathleen Hall Jamieson, airing only selected portions of the ads and placing the reporter's commentary in a more prominent role (see also Cappella & Jamieson, 1994). Ad watches focused on uncovering the symbolic meaning of the ad, underlying insinuations, and subtle distortions.

By the 1996 campaign, some observers found that ad watches put too much emphasis on evaluating the merit and factual accuracy of isolated claims within the ads, while ignoring the broad patterns of behavior and overall record of the candidates (Richardson, 1998). At least one study argued that no matter how the ad watches were presented, they tended to amplify the resonant candidates' messages, providing them with additional free exposure (West, 2001). More generally, Just et al. (1996) have criticized the negative tone of ad watches, which seem to imply that all candidates are deceptive in their presentations. Ad watches have also contributed to the negative tone of campaigns by providing material to opposing candidates that they can use to counter their opponents' claims or even to produce their own attack ad. Moreover, it is not uncommon for candidates to encourage journalists to analyze opponents' ads, with the sole purpose of generating an apparently objective and credible source to support their claims. The use of ad watches has expanded to include congressional and state races. In addition, local media began using these reports as part of their election coverage. (For more detailed analysis of ad watch coverage and effects, see Chapter 7 in this volume.)

## **Construction of the Campaign in the News Media**

As network evening news viewership has declined, the audience for cable news and local TV news has increased. The 24-hr news cycle on cable stations means

that stories can be updated continuously. Some cable stations present regular hour-long news broadcasts, twice the length of network evening news (Kerbel, 1994). The greater size of the news hole on cable television means that its reporters can tell a complicated story live, in real time, from many places at once, as they did during the controversy following the 2000 presidential election. On that occasion, cable news took the audience inside the courtroom and into the deliberations of a local canvassing board, not only live, but also for an extended period of time. Unfortunately, that round-the-clock reporting prevented the reporters from doing more in-depth stories, as they had to be near the official sources in case there was any breaking news. It was left to the print journalists to undertake analysis and interpretation (Hall, 2001). Some journalists and scholars are concerned that the overall impact of 24-hr cable news is to shorten deadlines and make it difficult for journalists to fact-check their stories before airing (Kalb, 2001; Kovach & Rosenstiel, 1999).

At the other end of the cable spectrum from the hectic pace of 24-hr headline news is C-SPAN. This nonprofit cable providers' network offers news junkies gavel-to-gavel coverage of congressional proceedings. During political campaigns, C-SPAN also offers unedited cablecasts of candidate speeches, party conventions, candidate debates, and political advertisements. Government-supported public television has also partnered with commercial stations to take up the coverage of lengthy campaign events such as political party conventions. Similar partnerships have also emerged between commercial networks and their cable affiliates.

In addition to cable news, audiences have also begun to turn to local media for information about national politics. Local newspapers and television stations, particularly in the larger media markets, have increased their coverage of national and international news, including news about presidential campaigns. Moreover, the increasingly tight budgets faced by local stations (Just, Levine, & Belt, 2001) have forced them to depend on national wire services for content. This has allowed penetration of national news sources and values into local news outlets (Carroll, 1992) and has made the gap between horse race coverage and substantive discussion more pronounced on the local level. When local media do cover the issues and candidate qualities, their stories tend to be more positive and less cynical than the ones written and broadcast by their national counterparts (Just et al., 1996).

In general, local television stations have focused on news that can entertain viewers with dramatic video. In light of budget constraints, local TV favors topics that can be covered with low effort or cost, such as crime, consumer issues, and health. Thus, any local political campaign that is not competitive or does not have a scandal associated with it gets almost no attention (Kannis 1991, 1995; McManus 1994). The situation is not much better in print. Although metropolitan newspapers have traditionally covered national and international news, competition with suburban newspapers and cable television has resulted in an overall decrease in these topics in print. Larger newspapers have shifted resources to the suburbs, expanded their regional business sections, and added other specialty areas such as health and science, leaving less room for local politics. Front pages feature more "reader-friendly" stories. If a local campaign story is to gain a spot on the front page, or at least the front page of the local section, it must relate to something dramatic, such as a major shift in the horse race, analysis of a backroom deal, a shakeup in the candidate's organization, or an inside scoop. Issues, on the other hand, are pushed farther down on the news agenda. In the interest of their own careers,



even the most conscientious and experienced print journalists have incentives to concentrate on stories that not only take less effort, but also will find a larger audience (Kannis, 1991, 1995).

Some other sources of campaign coverage that have become popular during the past 10 years include talk radio (Brokaw, Fallows, Jamiesons, Metalin, & Russert, 1997), tabloid newspapers, and news magazine programs. To date, however, there have not been many studies analyzing campaign coverage in any of these new venues. Talk radio is highly cynical and is predominantly conservative, although both tendencies have declined with the Republican ascendancy in the Congress and the White House. Candidates are also appearing on a number of entertainment talk shows such as late-night comedy programs and soft interview programs, including morning news. These venues have become more useful to campaigns, as they provide candidates with direct outlets for communicating with citizens.

A new media competitor that emerged full force in the 2000 election was the Internet. Most of the coverage on the Internet, however, was virtually identical to that provided on television newscasts and in print. Both local and national print and television outlets used their Internet connections to supplement their regular political coverage. About 55 Internet outlets reported the presidential race, but hardly any of the information was original. Candidate Web sites, however, did provide new material such as live feeds from the campaign and links to candidate profiles and policy stands. The attraction of the Internet in the 2000 election was generally lost, however, on users who did not have broadband connections and who had to wait interminably for candidate Web pages to load (Hershey, 2000). In general, Internet use went down when television covered the same events live, as it did during the political party conventions (Cornfield, 2000).

Although the Internet has the potential to provide an endless supply of detailed and individually tailored information to citizens, it is a medium that requires motivation and some sophistication to utilize. There are a number of nonpartisan Internet sites that can provide citizens with specific information, such as where to register to vote, which interest groups are supporting the ballot questions in their state, and how much money their neighbors gave to presidential candidates. Most nonprofit civic information Web sites, such as the Center for Responsive Politics, Cal Voter, Project Vote Smart, the League of Women Voters, and Web, White, & Blue are supported by charitable foundations. But attempts to make Web sites such as D-Net and Voter.org commercially viable have so far failed.

The Internet, however, offers an exciting opportunity for third-party and non-mainstream candidates to recruit supporters and broaden their electoral appeal. The entry cost for candidate participation on the Internet is far less than for any other campaign medium. A talented friend or relative can help a candidate establish a Web site. The problem faced by both civic and minority candidate Web sites is how to publicize their existence. Possibly the emergence of broadband access and the increasing familiarity of younger generations of voters with Internet navigation will make the World Wide Web a more significant player in future campaigns.

At present, the Internet's most important campaign role has been in helping candidates mobilize the supporters they already have. Candidates and political parties have used e-mail lists to customize their appeals for funds and organize participation in live campaign events. Jesse Ventura, the third-party candidate for

governor of Minnesota, based his successful campaign on a lively use of e-mail and Web contact with potential supporters, especially young people.

## COVERAGE OF CAMPAIGNS FOR OTHER OFFICES

Although there have been numerous studies of the news media's coverage of presidential campaigns, relatively few studies have focused on campaigns for other offices. This imbalance is unfortunate in that presidential campaigns provide researchers with only a single case for analysis in any given year, making it difficult to construct a general theory of election coverage or to explore how coverage varies under certain conditions. Congressional elections and other lower-profile races offer researchers a potentially larger sample of cases to analyze, permitting them to study how coverage varies for incumbents, challengers, and candidates vying for open seats. Studying congressional races provides an opportunity to evaluate whether coverage is different for male and female candidates, Whites and minorities, competitive and noncompetitive races, geographic regions, and different-size media markets (Abramowitz & Segal, 1992; Kahn, 1991, 1996; Kahn & Kenney, 2002; Manheim, 1974; Smith, 1997).

The research that exists indicates that the news media have committed fewer resources to congressional races than to presidential races. Moreover, most of this coverage has been of Senate elections, whereas elections to the House of Representatives have generally been neglected. Only when one of the candidates is a national celebrity or when there is a scandal associated with the incumbent do the television networks report on a House race (Cook, 1989; Robinson & Sheehan, 1983). The metropolitan newspapers have not been much better than broadcast media, limiting their coverage to House districts engaged in competitive races or whose boundaries overlap with their circulation area (Tidmarch & Karp, 1983).

Most information about congressional races is found in smaller papers. Reporters working the congressional beat tend to be young and new to the profession. Most have limited experience in analyzing politics and campaigns and do not regard their assignments desirable. Congressional coverage is considered the "dog beat" of the newsrooms, because reporters are required to spend long grueling hours working during the election cycle and are left with few stories to write once the campaign is over (Clarke & Evans, 1983; Cook, 1989; Glaser, 1996; Goldenberg & Traugott, 1984; Herrnson, 2001).

As is the case with the coverage of presidential races, the most covered aspects of congressional campaigns are candidate qualities and the process of the campaign. Given the emphasis on horse race, elections that are not competitive are not considered newsworthy and receive little coverage. Since the vast majority of House contests falls into this category,<sup>1</sup> it is no surprise that the news media devote so little attention to elections for this powerful branch of government.

Journalists covering congressional campaigns rely even more on routines than their counterparts covering presidential campaigns. In general, coverage is more habitual than innovative, as reporters seek out the most accessible news

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<sup>1</sup> Charlie Cook (2002) reports that the number of House races in 2002 that were rated as competitive in the spring was only 39. In 1992, the last election cycle affected by redistricting, the number of races considered to be competitive was 121, representing only 27% of the seats.

gathering techniques while avoiding complex information that might slow them down. Consequently, local reporters rely on the streams of campaign press releases that are issued by the campaigns to construct their stories. In addition, congressional reporters tend to cover the big events, while ignoring the day-to-day activities of the candidates (Clarke & Evans, 1983; Glaser, 1996; Herrnson, 2001).

Another significant difference between the coverage of congressional and that of presidential campaigns is that congressional coverage is marked by even more attention to the candidates' personal characteristics than presidential coverage (Clarke & Evans, 1983). When reporters do cover issues in congressional campaigns, their stories tend to be simple summaries of the candidates' standard message, with almost no analysis or any attempt to put the substance of their stories into a larger context (Hale, 1987). One bright spot is that issues are covered more often when challengers run issue-oriented campaigns (Simmons, 1987). Almost all the issue coverage in congressional campaigns is devoted to domestic policies. When international affairs make news in congressional campaigns, the emphasis is on the contentious aspects of foreign policy, such as partisan differences over defense spending and the foreign aid budget (Wells & King, 1994).

The primary beneficiaries of typical congressional campaign coverage are incumbents seeking reelection whose name recognition is already high and who have substantial financial resources. Challengers who are well funded and have campaigned for office before also benefit, as they have campaigned under media scrutiny in the past and can afford large professional campaign staffs. Incumbents also have a structural advantage over their challengers because their work (e.g., speaking in favor of or in opposition to a bill, voting on a bill, holding a town meeting) is considered news. The promises and proposals of their challengers tend not to be considered newsworthy (Clarke & Evans, 1983). For challengers, the main factor in generating news coverage seems to be the number of personal appearances they can make in the district (Vermeer, 1987).

A seasoned congressional campaign manager, who understands the news norms that guide reporters, knows how to make the candidate accessible to the press and to generate favorable coverage (Herrnson, 2001). Good managers also know when to shy away from news coverage. White Democratic candidates in the South, for example, have been known to withhold their schedules from the press on days that include events meant to mobilize Black voters, in hopes of leaving White voters uninformed of these activities (Glaser, 1996).

Although Congressional campaigns are short-changed in the press, by far the least covered campaigns are those for judicial office. Even in the best of worlds, reporting judicial campaigns would be challenging for a variety of structural reasons. In 20 states, judges simply stand for retention in unopposed elections, removing any doubt about the outcome. Also, judicial ethics constraints in several states restrict what candidates for judgeships can say during the campaign. Judicial candidates are often not allowed to describe what they will do if elected. Despite these limitations, reporters could cover judicial races by relying on public records. For example, campaign contributions are easy to track, as all states require reports of contributions and expenditures. Judicial candidates' personal financial disclosures are on the public record, as are caseload statistics, legal decisions, disciplinary complaints, and court dockets. Furthermore, the press can interview judicial candidates in order to give citizens a better sense of their qualifications (Foley, 1996). The lack of coverage of judicial races casts a spotlight on the norms of journalism

and the patterns of professional behavior that govern coverage of other kinds of election campaigns.

## RACE, MEDIA, AND ELECTIONS

To the extent that research has expanded beyond the presidency, opportunities have increased to examine media coverage of female and minority candidates. Much of this research is motivated by questions of fairness regarding the quantity and quality of coverage of women and African Americans. Although these studies do not indicate that coverage has a direct impact on the outcome of elections, there is considerable evidence that journalists have used a different set of norms to guide their reporting in elections that include either a female or a minority candidate than they have used when only White men are running. Because Chapter 19 provides a full discussion of the news media's coverage of female candidates and its effect on campaigns, this section focuses on the media's coverage of African Americans.

Although a number of studies have explored the issue of race in election campaigns (Bullock & Johnson, 1992; Glaser, 1996; Key, 1984; Kinder & Sanders, 1996; Mendelberg, 2001; Pleasants & Burns, 1990; Snider, 1985) and the news media's portrayal of African Americans in general (Entman, 1992; Gilens, 1997; Gilliam and Iyengar, 2000; Van Dijk, 1991), only a few studies have addressed the media's coverage of elections that included Black candidates (Jeffries, 2000; Reeves, 1997). Jesse Jackson's campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1984 helped open the door to questions about how the media covered a black candidate and whether Jackson's coverage differed significantly from that of his White counterparts.

Jesse Jackson was not the first African American to run for president, but prior candidacies (e.g., Shirley Chisholm in 1972) were largely symbolic, with no real potential for affecting either the outcome or the process. The historic nature of Jackson's candidacy helped to generate considerable media attention to his campaign. Jackson's bid for the Democratic nomination also presented journalists with a story that did not fit neatly into their conventional framework and might require them to adjust their routines without any precedent to guide them. In shaping their coverage, journalists were concerned that the public and the candidates would think that they were holding Jackson to a different standard than his White counterparts. They worried particularly about being perceived as too critical of Jackson by some, while being perceived as too soft on him by others (Cavanagh & Foster, 1984; Dates & Gandym 1985).

Interestingly, much of the coverage of Jackson relied on objective sources, such as campaign speeches and printed materials (Cavanagh & Foster, 1984). Journalists generally refrained from offering the interpretation and analysis that had come to characterize their coverage of presidential elections in recent years (Broh, 1987). This same pattern has been observed in other elections involving Black candidates and in elections that have an underlying racial dimension. Rarely do reporters explore the interplay between race and politics or press candidates on race-related issues (Gissler, 1996). In the Jackson campaign, the only form of analysis that journalists were willing to provide for their audience was the improbability that he would win the nomination (Broh, 1987).

Because Jackson was unlikely to win the presidential nomination, the media devoted little attention to the tactics and strategies or behind-the-scene accounts of his campaign. Rather, the emphasis in the coverage was on Jackson's leadership

qualities and personal characteristics (Broh, 1987; Merrett, 1986). He was shown as a forceful critic of the administration, an articulate spokesman for the left, and a leader who was capable of mobilizing a large bloc of voters. Still, much of the coverage portrayed him in an unfavorable light in terms of the horse race.

Like the 1984 Jackson campaign, L. Douglas Wilder's historic campaign for the Virginia statehouse in 1989 generated considerable attention from the media and, subsequently, from scholars (Rozell, 1991; Wilson, 1991). The Wilder campaign was also seen as a potential history-making event. If victorious, Wilder would be the first African American to be elected governor. Adding to the drama was that this breakthrough could occur in the capital state of the Old Confederacy. Unlike Jackson's presidential candidacies in 1984 and 1988, however, Wilder had a real chance of winning. In fact, he led his opponent in the polls throughout the fall campaign.

In contrast to the usual election coverage, but similar to their approach to Jackson, journalists emphasized issues in the Wilder race and gave less attention to the contest (in which Wilder had a considerable lead). On the surface, neither racial issues nor Wilder's race received much media coverage. There was also very little discussion of the "Black vote" or Wilder's representation of Black interests, a significant difference from the coverage of Jackson's 1984 campaign. Both Wilder and his opponent, perhaps for different reasons, tried their best to downplay the issue of race, including its historical significance (Rozell, 1991; Wilson, 1991). Wilder attempted to portray himself as a nonracial candidate, and his opponent did not wish to be labeled a racist.

Although few news stories in the Wilder campaign were explicitly about race, reporters made numerous indirect references to the issue, and race frequently served as an underlying theme for news reports. Many stories about Wilder referred to the campaign as "making history" and signaling a "new era" of racial progress (Jeffries, 2000). In a similar way, the media have helped bring race to the forefront in contests that have included a Black and a White candidate in congressional elections (Terkildsen & Damore, 1999). It is possible that the media's subtle references to Black candidates' race or about voting blocs in racial terms help to mobilize racially conservative Whites (Reeves, 1997). For example, the media's coverage of the 1988 Republican ads about the Massachusetts prison furlough program and an escaped Black convict, Willie Horton, provides some insight into how this might unfold. When these ads were first aired, the media described the spots in nonracial terms, even though the image of Horton was included in the stories. By emphasizing the criminal justice issues in the ad, news coverage helped George Bush's campaign appeal to racial conservatives while, at the same time, providing an ostensibly nonracial justification for supporting Bush, or for opposing Dukakis (Mendelberg, 2001). The analyses of the Jackson, Wilder, and other campaigns featuring contests between Black and White candidates show that the news media can adapt to new campaign situations and that they are capable of covering sensitive topics.

## **CONCLUSION AND AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

This chapter has focused on news coverage of political campaigns in the United States. Research on this topic has been conducted steadily from the 1940s and has examined the struggles among candidates, journalists, other political actors,

and the public to construct meaningful campaign messages. These efforts are often thwarted by the competing needs of the participants. Candidates seek to persuade citizens to vote for them and, consequently, seek to gain favorable news coverage for themselves and less favorable coverage for their opponents. Journalists strive to break the big story and reveal the latest missteps of the candidates. An ongoing struggle to control the content of the news ensues.

As reviewed in this chapter, researchers who have analyzed news about election campaigns have focused on questions of bias, the relative attention to the contest versus the issues, and the opportunity for candidates to break through the interpretive journalistic haze to present their views to the public. The evolving news environment and different kinds of elections have broadened the scope of research on campaign news. Case studies have focused on how particular candidates have tried to put their messages across (White, 1989) and how journalists have constructed the realities of particular campaigns (Correspondents of *The New York Times*, 2001; Crouse, 1990; Greenfield, 2001; Robinson & Sheehan, 1983; Rosenstiel, 1993; Thompson, 1985, Witcover & Germond, 1989).

Although many topics have been examined, much work remains to be done. For example, although there are many studies of news coverage of political campaigns within particular countries, there are relatively few comparative studies of media coverage of elections across nations. The expense, noncomparability of media and electoral systems, language differences, and mismatched timing of elections in different countries have contrived to limit research in this area. A few major comparative studies have been conducted. Some scholars focus on comparing American and European election coverage (Kaid & Holtz-Bacha, 2000; Schulz & Schoenbach, 1983; Semetko, 1995; Semetko, Blumler, Gurevitch, & Weaver, 1991). Other comparative analyses of news coverage have been conducted across European elections (Esser, Reinemann, & Fan, 2000; Kevin, 2001; Kleinnijenhuis, 2001; Schoenbach, Ridder, & Lauf, 2001) and more globally (Gross et al., 2001; Swanson & Mancini, 1996).

Not only are more truly comparative studies needed, but also these studies should take into account the relative impact of gender, race, and partisanship or ideology on the coverage of candidates in different political systems. Another line of potential study is to compare campaign coverage in the increasingly diverse media outlets both in the United States and abroad. In the United States, for example, studies of language and ethnic media could provide a counterpart to the study of the mainstream press; in Europe, the increasing availability of international channels may also challenge traditional approaches to news coverage. Scholars should consider the impact of globalization and supranational identities on campaign journalism. The media systems in newly democratized nations that are still developing journalistic norms for election coverage also offer new avenues for research.

On a more theoretical level, efforts should be made to explain divergent constructions of campaign realities. What factors govern the negotiations between candidates and journalists in the process of constructing election news? In the past, journalists and scholars have played catch-up in dealing with and analyzing communication strategies and tactics developed by candidates. More observational research is needed on the role of media consultants in the heat of the campaign. What kinds of assumptions do consultants make about journalists and citizens in designing campaign messages, attacks, and counterattacks? Future research should also consider how news norms develop and journalists adapt to changing conditions of ownership, professional recruitment and training, competition and convergence of media, political institutions, and the size and composition

of the audience. Scholars will also have to take into account the specific historical, economic, and social contexts of elections on the construction of campaign news. Integrating the perspectives of journalists and candidates across time and space will help us to understand better the impact of campaign news on citizens.

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## Agenda-Setting Research: Issues, Attributes, and Influences

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For the past three decades and now into a fourth, the agenda-setting function of mass media, first explored empirically in the United States in 1968 by McCombs and Shaw (1972), has been a major focus of mass communication research in the United States. It has also crossed the Atlantic and Pacific oceans to become more international in scope. At the same time, it has expanded from a concern with the salience or prominence of issues to the attributes of issues and candidate images—a development that moves it closer to studies of “framing” that focus on *how* issues and other objects of interest are reported by news media as well as *what* is emphasized in such reporting.

There has also been increased interest in the consequences of agenda-setting, especially for public opinion, in some studies of “priming.” More recently still, agenda-setting research has begun to take into account a kind of reverse effect labeled “agenda melding.” This chapter reviews many of these studies, including some conducted outside the United States, and discusses their relationship to studies of framing, priming, and public opinion more generally. It concludes with some recommendations for future research in the agenda-setting tradition.

Most agenda-setting research since McCombs and Shaw’s (1972) study of the 1968 U.S. presidential election has focused on the relationship between the news media’s ranking of issues (in amount and prominence of coverage) and the public ranking of the perceived importance of these same issues in various surveys, a type of research that Dearing and Rogers (1996) have called *public* agenda setting to distinguish it from studies that are concerned mainly with the causes or consequences of changes in the media agenda, which they label *media* agenda setting (for studies of the influences on media agendas) and *policy* agenda-setting (for studies of the impact of media agendas on public policy agendas).

The evidence from scores of such public agenda-setting studies is mixed, but on the whole it tends to support a positive correlation—and often a causal relationship—between media agendas and public agendas at the aggregate level, especially for relatively unobtrusive issues that do not directly impact the lives of the majority of the public, such as foreign policy and government scandal. (For the details of this evidence, beginning with the original study during the 1968 presidential election, see Dearing & Rogers, 1996; McCombs, in press; McCombs, Einsiedel, & Weaver, 1991; McCombs & Ghanem, 2001; McCombs & Reynolds, 2002; McCombs & Shaw, 1972; McCombs, Shaw, & Weaver, 1997; Protesch & McCombs, 1991; Rogers & Dearing, 1988; Shaw & McCombs, 1977; Wanta, 1997; Weaver, 1984; Weaver, Graber, McCombs, & Eyal, 1981).

Most of these studies have been conducted in the United States, with a few notable exceptions, especially in Germany as noted by Winfried Schulz (1997), who cites, among others, Brettschneider (1994), Brosius and Kepplinger (1990, 1992a, 1992b, 1995), Eichhorn (1996), Huegel, Degenhardt, and Weiss (1992), Schoenbach and Semetko (1992), and Wilke (1995). Many of these German studies involve extensive content analysis and survey data sets over months of time, providing some of the strongest evidence yet for the influence of the media agenda on the public agenda. Because this basic evidence on the agenda-setting role of the mass media has been thoroughly documented elsewhere, this chapter concentrates on the more recent developments in agenda-setting theory.

Some scholars of agenda setting have also examined the antecedents of media agendas to try to answer the question of who or what sets the media agenda (Semetko, Blumler, Gurevitch, & Weaver, 1991). This type of research has been called “agenda building” by some U.S. scholars (e.g., Gilberg, Eyal, McCombs, & Nicholas, 1980; Lang & Lang, 1981; Turk, 1986; Weaver & Elliott, 1985), and intermedia agenda setting by others, although Dearing and Rogers (1996) prefer to label it *media* agenda setting because of its focus on the media agenda as the dependent variable. This kind of agenda-setting research has been far less common than the more traditional public agenda-setting studies, but it has not been confined to U.S. researchers. In Germany, for example, Mathes and Pfetsch (1991) have studied the role of the alternative press in the agenda-building process.

More recently, scholars from a number of different countries have tried to link agenda-setting research with studies of “priming” and “framing” that examine not only *what* issues are emphasized by news media, but *how* these issues are reported and, in some cases, the effects of this reporting on public opinion as well as public concerns (McCombs, Shaw, & Weaver, 1997). The focus on the consequences of agenda setting for public opinion (often labeled “priming”) can be traced back at least to Weaver, McCombs, and Spellman (1975), who speculated in their 1972–1973 panel study of the effects of Watergate news coverage that the media may do more than teach which issues are most important—they may also provide “the issues and topics to use in evaluating certain candidates and parties, not just during political campaigns, but also in the longer periods between campaigns” (p. 471).

## A SECOND LEVEL OF AGENDA-SETTING

Especially in the past decade, there have been more studies conducted outside the United States—in Britain, Germany, Israel, Italy, Japan, The Netherlands,

Spain, and Taiwan and in other countries as well. Many of these studies are described by their authors in a book published during the summer of 1997, *Communication and Democracy*, edited by McCombs, Shaw, and Weaver. Not only do these studies expand the geographical boundaries of agenda-setting research, but they also extend the focus of attention beyond issues to attributes of issues and images.

In the majority of studies to date, the unit of analysis on each agenda is an *object*, a public issue. But objects have *attributes*, or characteristics. When the news media report on public issues or political candidates, they describe these objects. But due to the limited capacity of the news agenda, journalists can present only a few aspects of any object in the news. A few attributes are prominent and frequently mentioned, some are given passing notice, and many others are omitted. In short, news reports also present an agenda of attributes that vary considerably in salience. Similarly, when people talk about and think about these objects—public issues, political candidates, etc.—the attributes ascribed to these objects also vary considerably in their salience. These agendas of attributes have been called “the second level” of agenda setting to distinguish them from the first level that has traditionally focused on issues (objects), although the term *level* implies that attributes are more specific than objects, which is not necessarily true. The perspectives and frames that journalists employ draw attention to certain attributes of the objects of news coverage, as well as to the objects themselves.

## Japan

This distinction between the first and second levels of agenda setting is evident in a number of recent studies, both in the United States and in other countries. For example, Takeshita and Mikami (1995) examined both levels of agenda setting in the 1993 general election in Japan. Their content analysis showed that the main issue of the election was political reform, but the system-related attributes of this issue were emphasized over the ethics-related attributes, and the same was true in their survey of the public, suggesting a second-level agenda-setting effect.

In another study of environmental issues in Japan, Mikami, Takeshita, Nakada, and Kawabata (1995) also found support for agenda setting at both the first and second levels. From these studies, Takeshita (1997) concluded, “By designating what aspects of a certain issue to attend to, agenda setting at the subissue level can influence the perspective with which people see the issue as a whole” (p. 23).

Takeshita (1997) also links second-level agenda setting with the concept of framing (as conceptualized by both sociologists and psychologists), noting that as a result of a focus on attribute-agenda setting, “agenda-setting research and framing research are exploring almost the same problem—that of the reality-definition function of the media” (p. 24). And Ogawa (2001), in an experimental study, concluded that quantitative agenda setting can be influenced by the quality of the information about an issue as well as the quantity of such information. In other words, how an issue is presented can influence how salient the issue is considered to be. In theoretical terms, this is a relationship between the second level of the media agenda, attribute salience, and the first level of the public agenda, object salience. McCombs (1997) named this relationship “compelling arguments.”

## Israel

Another scholar who sees links between the construction of social reality and agenda setting is Anat First of Israel. She suggests that the second level of agenda setting “can be understood best as a process of reality construction by individuals who combine elements of news with what they personally observe of life and events to make a sort of blended reality” (First, 1997, p. 41).

First studied the agenda-setting role of Israeli television news in the social construction of views about the Israeli–Arab conflict during the 1987 uprising by Arabs in Israel for greater autonomy. She focused on one main issue, the Israeli–Arab conflict (the Intifada), and three main attributes—intensity, complexity, and solvability. She found that audiences seemed to learn about these aspects of the issue approximately the way television presented them. Her conclusion is that “one may not need media exposure to learn of the biggest issues, but one does need media exposure if one is to understand the ways in which the mass media frame, and the public learns, about issues” (First, 1997, p. 50).

## Italy

Andreina Mandelli has studied the agenda-setting influence of media coverage on short-term changes in political values by drawing on survey data and content analyses conducted during a major scandal (Tangentopoli) in Italian politics (Mandelli, 1996; Semetko & Mandelli, 1997). Her main hypothesis predicted that the news media had an important role in setting not only the public agenda of political issues, but also the agenda of public values. Her analysis found that media emphasis and framing had an important role not only in changing the Italian public’s electoral opinions, through first- and second-level agenda setting, but also in bringing about electoral dealignment in the country following the 1992 government corruption scandal. Her study raises the question of whether political values can be considered “attributes” of a political issue. If not, then perhaps values can be conceptualized as objects in the same way that issues can.

## Taiwan

A second-level agenda-setting study in Taiwan, by King (1997), examined the influence of coverage by three major newspapers on voters’ images of the three candidates for mayor of Taipei in 1994. His agenda of attributes included 12 categories representing a variety of personal and political attributes. King found that candidate attributes emphasized by the press became salient features of the images of the candidates held by voters, at least for the substantive dimension of images (political ability, experience, leadership, and political style), if not the affective dimension (favorable or unfavorable ratings of each attribute). For the affective dimension of images, voters’ characteristics (such as age, partisan identification, education, and ethnicity) were stronger predictors of evaluations than media exposure. In other words, media influence was greater on the salience of perceived attributes of candidates than on how these attributes were evaluated, in line with many other studies that have found greater cognitive than affective influence from news media exposure and attention (Weaver, 1996).

## Spain

Both levels of agenda setting also were examined in Spain during the 1995 elections for provincial parliaments and mayors of larger cities (Lopez-Escobar, Llamas, McCombs, & Lennon, 1998; McCombs, Llamas, Lopez-Escobar, & Rey, 1997). The traditional, first-level hypothesis asserted that the pattern of news coverage of issues affecting the city of Pamplona would be reflected in the public agenda of issues, and examination of the correlations between agendas of six local issues revealed significant relationships. The correlation of the public agenda with *Diario de Navarra* was +0.73; with *Diario de Noticias*, +0.63; and with local television news, +0.56.

At the second level, as in the Taiwan study by King, data on the candidates' images in the voter survey and in the content analysis were organized along two dimensions—(1) *substantive*, which included candidates' ideology and issue positions, qualifications and experience, and personal characteristics and personality; and (2) *affective*, where candidates were described in positive, negative, or neutral terms. Taking Lippmann's idea of the pictures in our heads almost literally for the substantive dimension, the analyses compared the salience of 15 elements (5 parties  $\times$  3 attributes) in the media coverage with the public's collective picture of the candidates. This complex matching of media salience with public salience across 15 elements was a tough test of second-level agenda setting, and the evidence was mixed.

For the parliamentary candidates, the match between the agenda of the newspapers and the agenda of attributes held by the public was +0.57 for one paper and +0.27 for the other. For the mayoral candidates, there was little correspondence between the two agendas. But for television news, which paid more attention to the mayoral election, there was a correlation of +0.41 for the mayoral candidate image agendas, but little association with the public's images of the parliamentary candidates. A similar pattern was found for the affective dimension of candidate images, with the match between the newspaper and public agendas stronger for parliamentary candidates than for mayoral candidates (+0.66 and +0.86, compared to +0.34 and +0.44) and the match between the TV agenda and the public agenda stronger for the mayoral candidates (+0.59) than for the parliamentary candidates (+0.18).

Another study in Spain in 1996 examined the influence of the major news and advertising media on the images of the three candidates for prime minister (McCombs, Lopez-Escobar, & Llamas, 2000). In this election, the conservative Popular Party successfully challenged Spain's 12-year incumbent Socialist prime minister, and a third major candidate represented a coalition of far-left parties. In line with the earlier 1995 study in Pamplona, the image attributes of the candidates were analyzed along both substantive and affective dimensions. But unlike 1995, where the local candidates for each office were aggregated, the 1996 study examined the second-level agenda-setting process separately for each of the three major candidates. In a particularly demanding test of agenda-setting effects, this study also combined the substantive and affective dimensions into a single 15-cell descriptive matrix (5 substantive categories  $\times$  3 affective categories).

The correlations between the voters' attribute agendas and a local newspaper were +0.87, +0.82, and +0.60. For *El Pais*, a national newspaper, the correlations were +0.84, +0.83, and +0.86 for the three candidates. The median correlation for all six comparisons between the voters and two local newspapers (3 candidates  $\times$  2



newspapers) was +0.70. For the six comparisons with two national newspapers the median correlation was +0.81. For the two national TV news services it was +0.52. For three comparisons with the political ads on television, the median was +0.44. Taken together, these correlations, especially those for the newspapers, offer significant support for second-level agenda setting of attributes of candidates.

## Germany

In an extensive content analysis and survey study of the 1990 German national election, Schoenbach and Semetko (1992) found evidence that the framing of an issue, in addition to frequency of coverage, can influence the overall salience of the issue—in other words, that second-level agenda setting can influence first-level. Looking at the salience of two major issues in this election (problems in the former East Germany and the environment), the authors found that interest in and exposure to television news were associated with increased salience of these issues, but for the *Bild*, the national tabloid newspaper, exposure was correlated negatively with later salience of former East German problems, even though coverage of this issue increased in the weeks leading up to the survey.

Schoenbach and Semetko (1992) explain this by the actual tone of the coverage—the affective dimension of second-level agenda setting. During the early period of the campaign almost all *Bild* stories on developments in the former GDR (East Germany) were laced with very optimistic claims and predictions, thus diminishing the importance of the problems in the former GDR in the eyes of the readers. The authors conclude that whereas most agenda-setting studies focus only on the amount and prominence of issue coverage, their study suggests that the tone of the coverage is also an important factor. If one conceives of “tone” as the increased salience of certain attributes or aspects (positive in this case) of an issue, then this is a case of second-level agenda setting influencing first-level.

## United States

Another case of this relationship, but in the opposite direction, was discovered in Texas from 1992 to 1994 by Ghanem (1996, 1997). During that time, the percentage of respondents to the Texas Poll who named crime as the most important problem facing the country went from 2% to more than one third, an unusually high level for any poll asking about the most important problem (MIP). Ironically, during that same time period when public concern over crime rose to such high levels, crime statistics indicated that the rate of crime was actually declining. Crime coverage in the news was a likely source of rising public concern, and comparisons found that the pattern of crime coverage in Texas newspapers was reflected in subsequent public concern. Across 2.5 years the match between the pattern of crime coverage and the trend in public concern was +0.70 (Ghanem, 1996; Ghanem & Evatt, 1995).

More interesting than this, however, was the match between the frequency of crime stories in the newspaper that framed crime as a threat to the average person and the overall salience of the crime issue (+0.78), and likewise for those stories where the crime occurred locally or in the state of Texas (+0.73). Whereas stories of distant gang fights and murder in New York City were not especially worrisome to Texans, stories about local crime, robberies of ordinary persons in broad daylight, and random shootings were of high concern to them—a clear example of framing

(second-level agenda setting) increasing the overall salience of crime (first-level agenda setting).

## FRAMING

Tankard, Hendrickson, Silberman, Bliss, and Ghanem (1991, p. 3) have described a media frame as “the central organizing idea for news content that supplies a context and suggests what the issue is through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion and elaboration.” Entman (1993) argues that “to frame is to *select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation* for the item described” (p. 52, original italics). McCombs (1997) has suggested that in the language of the second level of agenda setting, “framing is the selection of a restricted number of thematically related attributes for inclusion on the media agenda when a particular object is discussed” (p. 6). He argues that there are many other agendas of attributes besides aspects of issues and traits of political candidates, and a good theoretical map is needed to bring some order to the vastly different kinds of frames discussed in various studies. This he sees as a major challenge and opportunity for agenda-setting theory in its exploration of the second level.

Not all scholars agree that second-level agenda setting is equivalent to framing, at least not to more abstract, or macro-level, framing. Gamson (1992) has conceived of framing in terms of a “signature matrix” that includes various condensing symbols (catch phrases, taglines, exemplars, metaphors, depictions, visual images) and reasoning devices (causes and consequences, appeals to principles or moral claims). Some would argue that second-level agenda setting is more similar to the first part of this matrix than to the second, because it is easier to think of condensing symbols as attributes of a given object but more difficult to think of reasoning devices as attributes.

Of course, it depends on how framing is defined. A study, by de Vreese, Peter, and Semetko (2001), concerns the framing in news about the introduction of the Euro monetary unit. This study defines frames in terms of amount of conflict over the introduction of the Euro and the economic consequences of adopting it in various countries. Amount of conflict seems to fit the dictionary definition of an attribute (an inherent characteristic or quality), whereas economic consequences seem to go beyond what would usually be considered an attribute, although they could be considered a related aspect of the issue.

Another study, by Callaghan and Schnell (2001), deals with how the news media framed elite policy discourse concerning the issue of gun control. These scholars defined frames as stated or implied arguments. Examples included “Guns deter crime,” “Guns don’t kill, people do,” and “There is a constitutional right to bear arms.” These arguments, or frames, seem to go beyond the commonly held definition of attribute because they are more than just characteristics or qualities of the issue. They could be considered aspects of *presentation* of the issue, however, if not attributes of the issue itself.

In addition to debates over what constitutes an attribute, Scheufele (2000) argues that the theoretical premises of agenda setting and framing are different—that agenda setting (and priming) relies on the theory of attitude accessibility by increasing the salience of issues and thus the ease with which they can be

retrieved from memory when making political judgments, whereas framing is based on prospect theory that assumes that subtle changes in the description of a situation invoke interpretive schemas that influence the interpretation of incoming information rather than making certain aspects of the issue more salient. As Scheufele (2000) notes, however, “What remains unanswered is the question of whether the framing of an issue—regardless of its perceived salience—might have a significant effect on evaluations of political actors that goes above and beyond priming” (p. 313). He recommends future empirical research on this subject, and we concur that such research is needed.

Nevertheless, there are similarities between second-level agenda setting and framing, even if they are not identical processes. Both are more concerned with how issues or other objects (people, groups, organizations, countries, etc.) are depicted in the media than with *which* issues or objects are most (or least) frequently covered. Both focus on the most salient or prominent aspects or themes or descriptions of the objects of interest. Both are concerned with ways of thinking rather than objects of thinking and with the details of the pictures in our heads rather than the broader subjects.

One primary difference between the two approaches, in addition to those mentioned above, is that second-level agenda-setting research has been more concerned with the relationship between media and audience ways of thinking than has framing research, which has concentrated on how the media cover and present various subjects.

## PRIMING

As mentioned earlier, a number of scholars have become interested in the effects of media agenda setting on public opinion and government policy. The focus on the consequences of agenda setting for public opinion (often labeled “priming”) can be traced back at least to Weaver et al. (1975, p. 471), who speculated, in their study of the effects of Watergate news coverage, that the media may suggest which issues to use in evaluating political actors but who did not use the term “priming” to describe this process.

Their speculation was supported a decade later when Iyengar and Kinder (1987), in controlled field experiments, linked television agenda-setting effects to evaluations of the U.S. president in a demonstration of what some cognitive psychologists have called “priming”—making certain issues or attributes more salient and more likely to be accessed in forming opinions. Weaver (1991) also found that increased concern over the federal budget deficit was linked to increased knowledge of the possible causes and solutions of this problem, stronger and more polarized opinions about it, and more likelihood of engaging in some form of political behavior regarding the issue, even after controlling for various demographic and media use measures. As Willnat (1997, p. 53) points out, the theoretical explanations for these correlations, especially between agenda setting and behavior, have not been well developed, but the alliance of priming and agenda setting has strengthened the theoretical base of agenda-setting effects by providing “a better understanding of how the mass media not only tell us ‘what to think about’ but also ‘what to think’ (Cohen 1963).”

There have been at least two information-processing models developed to explain priming. One, by Higgins and King (1981), suggests that the energy or action

potential of a mental category is increased whenever the category is activated by exposure to related concepts or ideas. Another, by Wyer and Srull (1986, 1989), assumes information is stored so that the more recently acquired and used information is placed back at the top of the “storage bin,” making it more accessible in memory. Regardless of the actual process, the central idea of priming is that people routinely draw on information that is most salient, or accessible, when making a judgment or expressing an opinion. Because agenda-setting is concerned mainly with the salience of issues and attributes, there is an obvious link with priming. Iyengar and Simon (1993) argue that priming is really an extension of agenda-setting in affecting the criteria by which political leaders are judged.

As Willnat (1997) notes, the strongest empirical support for media priming comes from experimental studies, but there have been some demonstrations of this effect under more natural conditions. Krosnick and Kinder (1990), for example, examined the priming effect of media coverage of the Iran–Contra scandal on perceptions of President Reagan in October 1986 using survey data from the 1986 National Election Study (NES), which was being conducted at the time. They compared two groups of respondents—one interviewed before the Attorney General announced that funds obtained by the U.S. government from the secret sale of weapons to Iran had been improperly diverted to the Contras (a group attempting to overthrow the Sandinista government in Nicaragua) and the other interviewed after this revelation. The findings from the NES survey indicated that respondents in the postdisclosure group gave foreign policy more weight in their evaluations of President Reagan’s overall performance than the predisclosure group did.

A later study, by Iyengar and Simon (1993), used NES surveys from 1988, 1990, and 1991 to assess the effect of public beliefs about foreign policy on evaluations of Presidents George Bush and Ronald Reagan. In 1990 and 1991, the effect of foreign policy performance was more important than economic performance in respondents’ assessments of President Bush, but the reverse was true in 1988 for President Reagan. This change in evaluation standards was attributed to news coverage of U.S. foreign policy.

In a very different political setting, Willnat and Zhu (1996) found that public opinion about Hong Kong’s last British governor was strongly influenced by news coverage of his proposals to broaden public participation in the election of the Legislative Council. Using 52 consecutive weekly polls from the fall of 1992 when the governor made his initial policy speech, Willnat and Zhu found that public opinion about his overall performance was significantly primed by the pattern of news coverage in Hong Kong’s three leading newspapers.

Wanta and Chang (1999), in a survey of Oregon residents during the early months of the Monica Lewinsky sex scandal, found that frequent newspaper readers were more likely to describe President Clinton in terms of public issues than in terms of the scandal, and these readers were more likely to have positive opinions about Clinton’s overall job performance. Among those for whom involvement in the scandal was the most salient attribute, opinions about President Clinton were more negative, suggesting a second-level agenda-setting priming effect.

Holian (2000), in an analysis of the 1981–1996 time period, from the first term of President Reagan through the first term of President Clinton, found support for his hypothesis that when the president successfully sets the national issue agenda, his public approval level increases, independent of economic factors. He analyzed the relationship over time among the agendas of *The New York Times*, *The Public Papers of the President*, and presidential approval ratings, controlling for economic

measures. He found that the president can focus public attention on issues on which his party is credible but tends to follow media reporting on issues on which the opposition party holds the advantage.

Not all scholars agree that priming is a consequence of agenda setting, however. Price and Tewksbury (1995) have argued that both agenda setting and priming rely on the same cognitive process (the increased accessibility of mental constructs in long-term memory due to media exposure) and that “agenda setting—commonly thought to be a kind of basic media effect upon which priming depends—is actually but one particular variant of priming, which is itself a far more general effect” (pp. 7–8). Scheufele (2000) also argues that both agenda setting and priming are based on the assumption of attitude accessibility and a memory-based model of information processing, but he draws a distinction between salience (or accessibility) and perceived importance of issues, even though most agenda-setting studies have treated these concepts as identical. Unlike Price and Tewksbury, Scheufele has not argued that agenda setting is a variant of priming.

It seems to us that increased salience of issues (and attributes of issues) is likely to precede opinion formation and judgment (or at least changes in opinions and judgments) and, therefore, that agenda setting is not “one particular variant of priming” but, rather, a separate process that should be distinguished from opinion formation. There seems to be much practical and theoretical value to making a distinction between increased salience of an issue (usually measured as perceived importance) and the opinions that one has regarding the issue.

Whether there is also practical and theoretical value in distinguishing between salience and perceived importance is not as clear to us at this time. This may turn out to be a distinction without a real difference, at least as far as agenda-setting and priming are concerned. Even Scheufele (2000) seems to use these terms synonymously when he writes that mass media “have the power to increase levels of importance assigned to issues by audience members. They increase the salience of issues or the ease with which these considerations can be retrieved from memory if individuals have to make political judgments about political actors” (p. 309). The evidence that Scheufele (1999) cites for a distinction between perceived importance and salience (accessibility), from Nelson, Clawson, and Oxley (1997), pertains only to framing effects, not to agenda-setting or priming. Clearly more research is needed to test whether this distinction is important for these other media effects.

## BEHAVIOR

There is also evidence that media agenda-setting can affect behavior. Extensive news coverage of crime and violence, including a murder and rapes, on the University of Pennsylvania campus contributed to a significant drop in applications by potential first-year students, predominantly women, according to the university’s dean of admissions (*Philadelphia Inquirer*, 1996). This decline occurred when other comparable universities experienced an increase in applications during the same period.

News about airplane crashes and skyjackings offers another example of a link between media agendas and risk avoidance behavior (McCombs & Shaw, 1974). This study predicted that news about crashes in which 10 or more persons died or news about skyjackers’ control of an airborne plane would increase the salience of the dangers of flying. A comparison of high-salience weeks (those where there

were fatal crashes or skyjackings) with low-salience weeks for 5 years revealed that ticket sales dipped in high-salience weeks and that flight insurance sales increased.

Roberts (1992) found further evidence of a link between agenda setting and behavior in a study of the 1990 election for governor of Texas. Issue salience was a significant predictor of actual votes in this election, with 70% of the respondents' actual reported votes for governor correctly predicted by the level of issue concern over time, controlling for demographics and media reliance and attention.

In one of the most dramatic revelations of the behavioral influence of media news emphasis, Blood and Phillips (1997) carried out a time-series analysis of *New York Times* headlines from June 1980 to December 1993 and found that rising numbers of unfavorable economic headlines had an adverse effect on subsequent leading economic indicators (average weekly hours for manufacturing, average weekly initial claims for unemployment, new orders of consumer goods and materials, vendor performance, contracts and orders for plant and equipment, building permits, etc.) rather than vice versa. Blood and Phillips (1997) wrote that their findings "suggest that the amount and tone of economic news exerted a powerful influence on the economic environment and further, that the economic news agenda was generally not being set by prevailing economic conditions" (p. 107).

In a study exploring cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral consequences of agenda setting, Weaver (1991) found that public concern about a major issue of the late 1980s (the U.S. federal budget deficit) was linked with actual behavior, such as writing a letter, attending a meeting, voting, or signing a petition, even after controlling for various demographic and media use measures.

## POLICY

Another possible consequence of agenda setting is its impact on public policy, which has generally been studied more often by political scientists than by communication scholars. As Dearing and Rogers (1986) note, policy agenda setting has been of somewhat less interest to communication scholars than has media or public agenda setting because policy agenda setting involves collective political behavior as well as communication behavior and is more complex. Nevertheless, some communication scholars have explored the impact of media agenda setting on policy agendas.

David Pritchard (1986), for example, found that prosecutors in Milwaukee were more likely to plea bargain homicide cases that did not receive much newspaper coverage compared with those that got prominent coverage and thus were higher on the newspaper agenda. Paul Janensch (1982), while executive editor of *The Louisville (Kentucky) Courier-Journal and Times*, reviewed legislation passed by the Kentucky General Assembly in its 1982 session and concluded that even though major newspaper coverage does not guarantee legislative action, "I also think nursing-home reform would have been plowed under had it not been for *The Courier-Journal's* exposure of deplorable conditions in some of the homes." Janensch noted that even though the newspaper's investigative series seemed to affect legislation regarding nursing homes, auto titles, and county jails, major coverage of Louisville's dirty air and lack of vehicle emission standards did not have any impact on state government policies.

David Protes and his colleagues at Northwestern University (1991) studied the impact of several investigative journalism reports on policy makers' perceptions

of the importance of various problems and found that each of the media investigations they studied influenced public policy making in various ways. The reports on rape made legislative changes an immediate priority and stimulated community hearings. The police brutality TV broadcasts produced fundamental revisions of regulations regarding police misconduct. The dialysis series led to a state and federal debate over the regulation of clinics and the reuse of dialyzers. On the other hand, the series on problems of toxic waste disposal at the University of Chicago did not have much impact on the agenda of policy makers but did result in swift actions being taken by the University to remedy the problem. The home health care investigation prompted the U.S. Senate to hold immediate hearings that raised significant questions, but no bills were introduced to address the problem.

In short, these studies suggest that media agendas can have substantial impact on the priorities and behavior of government policy makers, especially if an issue is nonrecurring and unambiguous, but they also suggest that the influence is sometimes from policy maker to media, rather than vice versa, and that journalists and policy makers often cooperate with each other to raise the salience of various issues and problems without first involving public opinion. As Protess et al. (1991) put it, "We find that policy-making agendas are catalyzed by the formal transactions between journalists and officials more than by the direct influence of the public or interest groups" (p. 246).

A more recent time-series analysis of the effects of news coverage on policy attention and actions by Itzhak Yanovitsky (2001) found that the increased volume of drunk driving-related policy actions (annual amount of federal spending for curbing drunk driving and adoption of anti-drunk driving laws by all states and the District of Columbia) was largely driven by increased attention to the problem by *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and the Associated Press (AP) between 1981 and 1984. From 1985 onward, media attention waned, but policy actions continued to increase but at a decreasing rate. Yanovitsky (2001, p. 25) concluded that "intensive periods of media attention to issues are instrumental in attracting policy attention to problems that are low on policy-makers' agenda (cf. Baumgartner & Jones, 1993) and creating a sense of urgency among policy-makers to generate immediate, short-term solutions to public problems."

But he also found that as media attention declined, policy preferences gradually shifted from ad hoc solutions to long-term solutions such as investments in education and prevention programs. And he suggested that enthusiastic, one-sided treatment of the issue resulted in rapid policy change, especially when policy makers themselves were already favorably disposed to the media framing of the problem and the solutions advocated in the media.

## **INFLUENCES ON THE MEDIA AGENDA**

Another area of agenda-setting research that seems to be gaining in popularity is the study of influences on news media agendas, a type of research Dearing and Rogers (1996) have termed *media* agenda setting and others have called "agenda building" (Gilberg et al., 1980; Lang & Lang, 1981; Weaver & Elliott, 1985). This type of research includes studies of various kinds of influences on media agendas, such as news sources, public relations efforts, and other media. It also calls into question the active agenda-setting role of the media assumed by many public agenda-setting

studies. If the media are merely passing on agendas set by other influential actors and institutions in society, is it accurate to think of the media as the agenda setters?

One model for thinking about the relationship between other agendas and the mass media agenda is an onion. The concentric layers of the onion can represent the numerous influences on the media agenda (McCombs, in press). This metaphor also illustrates the sequential nature of this process, with the influence of an outer layer being, in turn, affected by layers closer to the core of the onion. Pamela Shoemaker and Stephen Reese (1996), in their book, *Mediating the Message*, have proposed five layers of the onion that range from the prevailing societal ideology to the psychology of the individual journalist. Some of the intermediate layers representing the influence of news organizations and professional norms (media routines) of journalism constitute the sociology of news research literature studied by Warren Breed (1955b), Gaye Tuchman (1976), and Herbert Gans (1980), among others.

For this chapter, we consider only three major influences on the media agenda: (1) influential news sources such as the U.S. president, routine public relations activities, and political campaigns; (2) other media (intermedia agenda setting); and (3) the social norms and traditions of journalism.

## News Sources—Presidents and PR

The single most influential news source in the United States is the president. Virtually everything that a president does is considered newsworthy. One measure of the president's agenda is his annual State of the Union address. Required by the U.S. Constitution, for more than a century this yearly report was a written document submitted to Congress. But in the late 20th century the annual address became a major media event broadcast live nationally by the television networks as it was delivered to a joint evening session of the House of Representatives and the Senate.

The format of this address in recent times—a listing of issues that the president wants the Congress to address—makes it a convenient measure of the president's priorities, or agenda. This ranking of issues can be compared with the media agenda before and after the address to get a sense of whether the president is setting the media agenda, or responding to it, or both. A comparison of President Jimmy Carter's 1978 State of the Union address with the agendas of the *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and the three national TV networks by Gilberg et al. (1980) found no significant impact of this address on the subsequent month's coverage of his eight priority issues. But there was evidence that the media coverage of these issues during the month prior to the address had influenced President Carter's agenda.

Another study of a very different president, Richard Nixon, by McCombs, Gilbert, and Eyal (1982), found that the agenda of 15 issues in Nixon's 1970 State of the Union address did predict the subsequent month's news coverage in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and two of the three national TV networks. There was no evidence that the prior media agenda influenced Nixon's agenda. Additional replications based on President Reagan's 1982 and 1985 State of the Union addresses by Wayne Wanta and colleagues (Wanta, Stephenson, Turk, & McCombs, 1989) yielded mixed evidence about the relationship between the news media agenda and the president's agenda, suggesting that the U.S. president is sometimes able to



influence the subsequent media agenda and sometimes follows earlier media and public agendas.

In a time-series analysis of *The New York Times* and *The Public Papers of the President* from 1981 to 1996, spanning the first and second Reagan terms, the single term of George Bush, and the first term of Bill Clinton, Holian (2000) found that in most instances, Republican presidents set the media agenda on Republican issues such as taxing and spending, government regulation, and crime punishment. But Republican presidents Reagan and Bush tended to follow the media emphasis on the Democratic issues of Social Security/Medicare, education, and gender equality. In other words, Reagan and Bush tended to discuss these traditionally Democratic issues publicly when others, either the media or their political opponents, placed them on the media agenda. Democrat president Clinton, on the other hand, influenced newspaper coverage of issues related to Social Security and Medicare. Thus, there is evidence from Holian's study that the U.S. president is more likely to influence the media agenda for issues traditionally "owned" by his political party.

Another important news source influence on the media agenda is the corps of public information officers and other public relations practitioners. They subsidize the efforts of news organizations to cover the news by providing substantial amounts of information, frequently in the form of press or video releases. In one of the earlier studies of this process, Leon Sigal (1973) found that nearly half of the front-page news stories in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* from 1949 to 1969 were based on press releases, press conferences, and other information subsidies. Considering that both newspapers are major organizations with large staffs and impressive resources, their substantial reliance on public relations sources underscores the key role that information subsidies play in the formation of all media agendas.

The reporting of public health issues, such as AIDS, also reflects information subsidies provided by scientists and other expert news sources. Everett Rogers and his colleagues (Rogers, Dearing, & Chang, 1991) studied the news coverage of AIDS in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the three TV network evening newscasts from June 1981 through December 1988. They found different stages of coverage, with the second stage from 1983 to 1985 depending mainly on scientific sources. Of the 606 news stories about AIDS in this period, 40% were based on scientific sources. In later periods, prominent personalities and government sources, as well as polls, were more influential news sources.

At the state level, Judy Turk (1986) found that news coverage of six state government agencies in Louisiana's major daily newspapers also was based substantially on information provided by those agencies' public information officers. Slightly more than half of the information subsidies provided by these officers, mostly written news releases but sometimes personal conversations, appeared in subsequent news stories. During an 8-week period the correlation between the agenda of the of the information officers and the agenda of the news stories using their information was +0.84; for all news stories on those government agencies it was +0.57. Interviews probing the reasons for this influence of information subsidies revealed the central role of journalistic norms and traditions, especially perceptions of newsworthiness.

At the local (city) level, David Weaver and Swanzy Elliott (1985) analyzed a year's worth of city council minutes and coverage of the council in the local newspaper. They found a strong overall correlation (+0.84) between the agenda of the council

and that of the local newspaper, suggesting that the local paper closely reflected the priorities of the city council, although for some issues the newspaper ranking of issues deviated considerably from the council ranking, especially those concerning arts and entertainment, utilities, animal protection, and awards. When asked about these discrepancies, the reporter covering the council for that year said that he consciously “boiled down” the subjects of education, animal protection, honors and awards, and historical events because they were not controversial and did not lend themselves to a good story. As with Judy Turk’s study in Louisiana, this local study reinforces the importance of journalistic norms and traditions, especially ideas about newsworthiness, in shaping the media agenda.

### **News Sources—Campaigns**

Political campaigns are also an important influence on media agendas, at least in countries that hold regular elections. Even though the ultimate goal is to win elections, increasingly campaigns also try to control the media agenda in hopes of influencing the public agenda (Jamieson & Campbell 1992). Part of the media agenda is under the direct control of political campaigns. Huge amounts of money are spent on political advertising, especially on television ads, to convey candidates’ agendas and images, but campaigns also exert major efforts to influence news media agendas because these agendas are less obviously self-serving and thought to be more credible to the public than are political ads.

A comparative analysis of the 1983 British general election and the 1984 U.S. presidential election found that politicians in Britain had considerably more influence on the news agenda than their counterparts in the United States (Semetko et al., 1991). U.S. journalists had considerably more discretion to shape the campaign news agenda than did British journalists. Extensive comparisons of the Conservative, Labor, and Alliance parties’ agendas of 16 subjects with coverage of those subjects by the BBC, ITV, and five newspapers (both broadsheets and tabloids) found a median correlation of +0.62 (with a range of +0.37 to +0.84), compared to a median correlation of +0.22 (with a range of +0.03 to +0.37) in the U.S. comparisons of Democrat and Republican agendas of 11 subjects with two newspapers’ and the three national TV networks’ agendas.

This striking difference between the influence of the U.S. and that of the British campaigns on the media agendas was due, in large part, to significant cultural differences in American and British journalists’ orientations toward politicians and election campaigns. American election news coverage weighed election news against the newsworthiness of all other stories of the day, whereas the British journalists considered election campaigns as inherently important and deserving of coverage. British journalists were also more ready to use party-initiated material, whereas U.S. journalists were concerned that the political campaigns not be allowed to dictate the media agenda and that candidates not be given any “free publicity ride.”

A study of agenda setting in the 1992 U.S. presidential election by Russell Dalton and his colleagues (Dalton, Beck, Huckfeldt, & Koetzle, 1998) found high correlations among candidate platform, media-initiated, and public agendas, but a subsequent analysis using partial correlations by McCombs (in press) showed that when the media agenda is viewed as intervening between the candidate and the public agendas, the original correlation of +0.78 drops to +0.33, suggesting that there is

still considerable discretion on the part of the media to set the public agenda in a presidential election.

A comparison of television news coverage of the New Hampshire presidential primary in 1996 with the topics of the candidates' speeches during this first primary election found only a moderate degree of correlation (+0.40) between the two, supporting the earlier finding from 1984 that U.S. journalists are reluctant to let political candidates set the media agenda (Lichter & Smith, 1996). While the overwhelming majority of the candidates' speeches included comments on public issues, less than a third of the TV news reports even mentioned issues.

A more recent comparison of the agendas of the summer 2000 national convention acceptance speeches of U.S. presidential candidates Al Gore and George W. Bush with the agendas of the coverage of these speeches in five newspapers found an average correlation of +0.48 for Bush and +0.31 for Gore, suggesting that even in the reporting of major candidate speeches, the U.S. newspaper journalists were not willing to let the candidates dictate the news agenda (Mentzer, 2001). On the other hand, the consistency of the agendas of the speech coverage of the five newspapers (*USA Today*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Boston Globe*, and *Los Angeles Times*) was considerably higher, with an average correlation of 0.56 for Gore's speech and 0.68 for Bush's, suggesting that journalistic views of newsworthiness were an important influence on the newspaper story agendas.

At the state level in the United States, Marilyn Roberts and Maxwell McCombs (1994) found that in the 1990 Texas gubernatorial election, the candidates' advertising agenda exerted significant influence on the campaign agendas of the local newspaper and the local television stations even after other factors were taken into account. This analysis also found that the newspaper agenda influenced the television news agenda, rather than vice versa.

## Intermedia Agenda Setting

Another part of the answer to the question, "Who sets the media's agenda?" can be found by looking over time at how the changes in one medium's agenda precede or follow changes in another's. In the U.S. setting, for example, there is considerable anecdotal and some empirical evidence about the agenda-setting influence of *The New York Times* on other news media (Danielian & Reese, 1989; McCombs et al., 1991; Reese & Danielian, 1989), as well as the influence of wire service news on the gatekeeping decisions of Ohio newspaper and television wire editors (Whitney & Becker, 1982). One of the first scholars to analyze this process was sociologist Warren Breed (1955a), who wrote about newspaper opinion leaders and the process of standardization of newspaper content.

In a book about the reporting of the 1972 U.S. presidential election, Timothy Crouse (1973) made the phrase "pack journalism" famous when he wrote about how Johnny Apple of *The New York Times* set the agenda for the other journalists covering the Iowa caucuses: "He would sit down and write a lead, and they would go write leads. Then he'd change his lead when more results came in, and they'd all change theirs accordingly" (p. 85). Although Crouse referred to this as "pack journalism," it could also be thought of as a case of intermedia agenda setting.

A more recent example of large-scale intermedia agenda setting comes from a study of the reporting of the issue of global warming from 1985 to 1992 by Craig Trumbo (1995). He found that as the news coverage of this issue steadily

accelerated toward its peak in 1989, five major newspapers—including *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *the Wall Street Journal*—significantly influenced the agenda of the three national television networks. A significant intermedia agenda-setting role also was played by science publications regularly scanned by media science writers and editors.

The major wire services, such as the Associated Press, also have an important intermedia agenda-setting influence. A study of how 24 Iowa daily newspapers used the AP wire found that even though each newspaper used only a small number of the available wire stories, the patterns of coverage reflected essentially the same proportion for each category of news as the total AP file (Gold & Simmons, 1965). Likewise, a reanalysis of one of the early studies of gatekeeping (White, 1950) by a wire service editor called “Mr. Gates” found a substantial correlation (+0.64) between the combined agenda of the wire services he used and Mr. Gates’s selections for his newspaper (McCombs & Shaw, 1976). A reanalysis of a follow-up study of Mr. Gates 17 years later, when he used only a single wire service (Snider, 1967), found a correlation of +0.80 between the wire agenda and his news agenda.

An experimental study by Charles Whitney and Lee Becker (1982) also found a substantial agenda-setting influence of wire service news on experienced newspaper and television wire editors, with a correlation of +0.62 between the proportions of news stories in a large wire service file and the smaller sample selected by the editors. But in a control condition, where there were an equal number of stories in each news category, there was no common pattern of selection, either in comparison with the wire service or among the editors themselves.

Intermedia agenda setting is not limited to the United States. Using data from the 1995 election study in Navarra discussed earlier, Esteban Lopez-Escobar and his colleagues (Lopez-Escobar, Llamas, McCombs, & Lennon, 1998) also examined patterns of intermedia influence among the two local Pamplona newspapers and Telenavarra, the regional newscast produced by the national public television service. They found correlations of +0.66 and +0.70 between the newspapers and the subsequent television news agenda. Political ads were examined in the newspapers and on television. The researchers found strong evidence (+0.99) for the influence of newspaper advertising on television news descriptions of the candidates, in keeping with Roberts and McCombs’s (1994) U.S. finding that campaign advertising agendas can influence news coverage. But the Spanish study also found evidence that the descriptions of the candidates in TV advertising shifted in response to TV news descriptions (+0.78).

And, finally, in Germany, Mathes and Pfetsch (1991) studied the role of the alternative press in the agenda-building process and found that some issues spilled over from the alternative press into the established newspapers in “a multistep flow of communication within the media system” (p. 51). The liberal newspaper, *Die Zeit*, was the first established newspaper to cover a counterissue (boycotting the 1983 German census, resisting German government plans for a new ID card), followed by other liberal daily newspapers. Shortly after the liberal papers covered the issue, the pressure to discuss it became so strong that even the conservative media were forced to cover it, Mathes and Pfetsch concluded. As they put it, “Thus, the media agenda was built up in a process similar to a chain reaction. At the end of the agenda-building process, a counter-culture issue became a general, public issue” (Mathes & Pfetsch, 1991, p. 53).

The authors also found what could be called a “second-level” agenda-building effect—that the spillover effect from the alternative to the established media was

not limited to the topic or issue of coverage because “the established media on the left of the political spectrum adopted the frame of reference for presenting the issues from the alternative media” (Mathes & Pfetsch, 1991, p. 53), although this was not true for the conservative media. And they found this agenda-building process also influencing the *policy* agenda because the political elites and institutions could no longer ignore the issues that had received so much coverage in the established media.

The outcome of this intermedia agenda setting is a highly redundant news agenda, at least within a single country or culture. Across countries there may be considerable variation, as Jochen Peter and Claes de Vreese (2003) found in comparing television news programs and public surveys across five countries (Denmark, France, Germany, The Netherlands, and the United Kingdom). Some of these differences are due to different cultures and norms of politics and journalism, as Barbara Pfetsch (2001) pointed out in a recent comparative analysis of political communication cultures in Germany and the United States. Her study of political communicators and journalists in the United States and Germany as key actors in media agenda setting found more emphasis in the United States on the norms of objectivity, balanced content, diversity, and conflicts of interest and less emphasis on ethically impeccable behavior, openness, and honesty.

She also found the perceived relationship between political spokespersons and journalists to be more conflictual and less harmonious in the United States than in Germany, leading to a conclusion that in the U.S. professional journalistic norms govern interaction between political actors and journalists, whereas in Germany political norms are more important. These different norms and interactions can result in quite different political agendas, as the comparative study of British and U.S. election agendas by Holli Semetko and her colleagues (1991) has shown.

## AGENDA MELDING

One of the newest approaches to agenda-setting research has been called “agenda melding” by Donald Shaw and his colleagues (Shaw, McCombs, Weaver, & Hamm, 1999). This approach centers on the receivers of media messages—various publics—and their motivations for adopting agendas and affiliating with other persons. It reverses the traditional arrow from media to public in much the same way that uses and gratifications research asks “what people do with media” rather than “what media do to people” (Blumler & Katz, 1974; Rosengren, Wenner, & Palmgreen, 1985).

Agenda melding argues that there is a strong impulse to affiliate with others in groups as one leaves the original family setting and that one often joins these groups via other people and various media. This motivation to meld with various groups is explained by a theory of social dissonance that draws on psychologist Leon Festinger’s (1957) theory of cognitive dissonance. Thus agenda melding is a theoretical elaboration of the concept of “need for orientation” (Weaver, 1977) that seeks to explain why some individuals are more interested in certain issues (and agendas) than others through a combination of perceived relevance and uncertainty. Agenda melding offers an explanation for why some persons might find some agendas more relevant than others—a felt need to affiliate with certain groups—and predicts that those who desire to join a group or community, but who have little information

about it, will be the most likely to seek information about its agenda from other persons or from various media such as newspapers and magazines. An increase in this information-seeking behavior is predicted to lead, over time, to both level 1 and level 2 agenda setting.

The theoretical foundation of agenda melding (social dissonance) draws upon several previous approaches. In addition to cognitive dissonance, it builds upon “disequilibrium” (the seeking or avoiding of information that significantly alters views; Chaffee & McDevitt, 1996), Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann’s (1984) spiral of silence, and Abraham Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy of needs. Shaw et al. (1999) argue that individuals seek affiliation with groups for many reasons, and those who join a group match their own priorities to those of the group even if they do not always agree with the dominant position of the group regarding the various issues. Whereas agenda-setting research has concentrated, for the most part, on what people learn from the media, agenda melding incorporates media agenda setting as part of a larger ongoing social learning process from various media, including other persons.

The implications of this learning process for community building are not entirely clear, but it seems likely that new media, especially the Internet, allow people to join many smaller groups that more exactly fit their interests, which can in turn lead to the fragmentation of larger groups. *The Virtual Community*, by Rheingold (1993), has found that some people are linked in communities that exist only in space. One pertinent example of such a community could be mass communication scholars who comprise an “invisible college,” residing all over the globe and only occasionally meeting in the same geographic place. In the past, media agenda setting has been found to be an integrating force, with those frequently exposed to newspapers and television news more likely to agree on a common set of issues as important than those not frequently exposed, regardless of most demographics (Lopez-Escobar, Llamas, & McCombs, 1998; Shaw & Martin, 1992). As individuals are increasingly free to choose their own agendas via the Internet, and as fewer people pay regular attention to newspapers and TV news, this traditional function of media agenda setting seems likely to decline.

## CONCLUSIONS

This review of agenda-setting studies conducted in Britain, Germany, Israel, Italy, Japan, Spain, Taiwan, and the United States illustrates not only an expansion of this research geographically, but also an expansion of scope from first-level agenda setting (*what* issues the media emphasize and the public cares about) to second-level (*how* issues and political actors are reported and perceived). A count of the number of research articles indexed in *Communication Abstracts* using the concept of agenda setting shows an increase from 36 in the first half of the 1980s to 75 in the first half of the 1990s, with a drop to 54 in the second half of the 1990s. At the same time, the number of articles mentioning framing increased dramatically, from only 3 in the first half of the 1990s to 30 in the second half, suggesting a surge of interest in this concept.

There is also considerable concern now with priming and other consequences of agenda setting, as well as how the media agenda at both levels is determined and why some individuals are more or less interested in adopting various agendas.

This chapter has argued for a distinction between second-level agenda setting and framing, even though there are a number of similarities between the two. It has also argued that there may be little value in making a distinction between the salience and the perceived importance of issues in studies of agenda setting and priming. It has tried to shed some new light on the consequences of agenda setting for public opinion and behavior, as well as for public policy, and on the factors that shape media agendas. And it has briefly reviewed the new concept of agenda melding and the theory of social dissonance as proposed by Donald Shaw and his colleagues to try to explain why some people are more or less likely to adopt different agendas.

Some would argue that this expansion of the concept of agenda setting obscures its original meaning and unnecessarily intrudes into other realms of mass communication research, such as framing, priming, the construction of meaning, policy making, gatekeeping, and other approaches. We regard this expansion as a natural outcome of the elaboration of a theoretical approach over time, which should be a goal of theory building in any field. This does not mean that the agenda-setting approach should replace other theoretical approaches, but there does seem to be value in pointing out the areas of overlap between various theoretical perspectives and moving on to a greater synthesis.

As McCombs (1997) has written,

One of the strengths of agenda-setting theory that has prompted its continuing growth over the years is its compatibility and complementarity with a variety of other social science concepts and theories. . . . Incorporated concepts include gatekeeping and status conferral. Conceptual complements include the spiral of silence and cultivation analysis. Explication of a second level of agenda setting, an agenda of ideas about the topics in the news, links agenda setting with a major contemporary concept, *framing*. (p. 5).

In addition, the theoretical foundations of agenda melding draw upon cognitive dissonance, disequilibrium, and Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

Thinking about communication in terms of the salience of objects and attributes is, of course, only one way of understanding its complexities, but over the past three decades it has proven to be a useful approach that seems to hold out more promise for integrating the field than most others. Clearly more research is needed to clarify the similarities and differences between second-level agenda setting and framing, between the salience and the perceived importance of issues and attributes, and the conditions under which media agendas are likely to influence not only public, but also policy makers' agendas.

Whether this research should be conducted solely at the psychological, or even biological, level (in the case of information processing) is questionable. Agenda-setting can be conceptualized as a societal-level process as well as an individual-level one. Harold Lasswell (1948) argued more than 50 years ago that mass communication has three broad social roles—surveillance of the larger environment, facilitation of consensus among the segments of society, and transmission of the social culture. Clearly, media agendas are an important source of surveillance of the larger environment that is often outside the direct personal experience of most people. But there is also evidence that media agenda setting has significant implications for societal consensus and transmission of social culture.

As mentioned earlier, Donald Shaw and Shannon Martin (1992) found evidence of a media role in building consensus among different groups in society in the North Carolina Poll. Their comparison of the issue agendas of men and women who read a daily newspaper infrequently yielded a correlation of +0.55. For those who read a newspaper occasionally, it increased to +0.80, and for those who read frequently, the agendas were identical (+1.0 correlation). Similar patterns of increased agreement about the most important issues facing the nation as a result of more frequent exposure to news media were found in comparisons of young and old and Blacks and Whites, for both newspapers and television news. This consensus-building function of newspapers and television news has also been found in Spain (Lopez-Escobar, Llamas, & McCombs, 1998) and in Taiwan (Chiang, 1995).

Further evidence of this function was found by Jian-Hua Zhu and William Borson (1997) in their study of 35 Gallup surveys containing a question about the most important problem facing the nation between 1977 and 1986. They divided the answers to this question by differing educational and income levels to check on possible differences in issue priorities among these groups. They found that the differences between the groups were much smaller than the differences over time. And in comparing the agendas of the different groups with the number of TV news stories about these issues, they concluded (p. 82) that "the media agenda-setting effects are not manifested in creating different levels of salience among individuals, but are evident at driving the salience of *all* individuals up and down over time."

Although these comparisons of demographic groups are useful in documenting a consensus-building role of media agenda setting, further research on this media role should compare groups defined by other lifestyle and psychographic measures to test the limits of this process. Demographics are very broad-brush measures of today's segments of society.

Finally, the transmission of culture is also related to the agenda-setting process. One can conceive of an agenda of beliefs or values concerning democratic governance that is more important than agendas of specific issues and attributes. For example, in the United States, where government is not high on the personal agenda of most citizens, one of the most significant agenda-setting roles of mass media may be to stimulate interest in elections and voting. During the 1976 presidential election, in a nine-wave panel study of voters, David Weaver and his colleagues (1981) found that exposure to television news in the late spring stimulated political interest in the summer and fall months leading up to the November election.

Other examples of the transmission of culture include media portrayals of the past, with differing levels of emphasis on certain selected events and specific aspects of these events (Wilke, 1995). These media include popular books and school textbooks as well as films and the news media. Schools are also an important agenda setter for collective memories, emphasizing certain aspects of a society's past.

In short, there are many different agendas in society and many different agenda setters, including family and friends, schools, and the media. Not all agenda-setting processes should be analyzed at the psychological level. Some must be studied at the societal or cultural level to gain a richer understanding of how these processes occur and the forces that shape them. Regardless of level of analysis, however, it seems clear from the studies reviewed here that the various communication media are among the most important agenda setters of 21st-century societies, whether or not they seek this role.



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# Gatekeeping and Press–Government Relations: A Multigated Model of News Construction

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The news is in a state of continual change, defined and redefined by economics, journalism, technology, politics, and publics. Today's news system in the United States is in the ironic situation of having evolved as an essential tool of government at a time when audiences increasingly mistrust politicians and journalists. As today's news system evolves under pressures of commercial profit and political spin, the most glaring result may be the dwindling space for serious political news itself. Over the past two decades the content of news in daily papers, television newscasts, and magazines has shifted from substantial levels of reporting on government activities and policy problems to an increasing proportion of soft news features that resemble entertainment formulas more than they represent the kind of hard information that citizens might use in grasping the political events that affect their lives. The details of this reformulation of news content are documented here.

The empirical trends reported here are worthy of serious attention, but it is not clear that they signal the sweeping abandonment of press gatekeeping conventions claimed by many observers. The central focus of this chapter is constructing a comprehensive, empirically oriented framework for assessing the nature and direction of changes in news construction. Applications of this model suggest that the shrinking space for serious political news is just one of several conflicting changes in the ways in which information is selected in and out of the public sphere constructed by the press and political actors. There are reasons to expect considerable variation in the extent and distribution of gatekeeping changes across different kinds of news organizations, across topical domains in the U.S. press system as a whole, and even within particular news organizations.

The analysis proceeds in several steps, beginning with a brief presentation of evidence that news content has changed substantially in the recent period, as documented in the next section, *Changing Content Patterns in the News*. This overview

is followed by various interpretations of these changes, including the increasingly popular view among journalists and academics that the news has lost (or is losing) its gatekeeping function. The emerging consensus seems to be that news judgments vested in journalists and the routine practices of journalism organizations are being replaced by crass commercial considerations that distort news content to a state beyond recognition as serious public information. In place of reporting, so the criticism goes, the intrusion of profit pressures and infotainment trends have interacted badly with the advent of the 24-hr news cycle, expanding Internet information flows and other technology-driven developments to create a media “beast” that demands continual feeding. When sources do not advance stories, they are simply driven ahead by incessant reporter chat, negative innuendo, and rumor mongering. These arguments are reviewed in the section *Sounding the Alarm: The End of Gatekeeping?*

It is easy to understand how a period of rapid change that blurs familiar news patterns can make for alarmist pronouncements. Yet such pronouncements do little for our capacity to see the shape or the direction of complex change processes. In an effort to link old gatekeeping and political content patterns with newly emerging trends, I offer as the main contribution of this chapter a multigated model of four factors that interact to shape news content. This model promises some analytical continuity across different historical periods, whether those periods are defined by relative stability or rapid change in relations among the four factors. The section *A Multigated Model of News Construction* develops this model and illustrates its application in different historical and political contexts.

In this model, the four main news gates are (1) *the reporter's personal and professional news judgment values*, (2) *bureaucratic or organizational news gathering routines that establish the working relations between reporters and sources*, (3) *economic constraints on news production such as considerations of cost, efficiency, advertiser potential, and audience demographics*, and (4) *information and communication technologies that define the limits of time and space and enable the design of news formats that appeal to audiences*.

The interactions among all of these factors affect news content. What is clear from an historical perspective is that each of these four general factors has long operated to shape the news. However, the dominance of one or another factor may change with historical circumstance. Such periods are characterized by interactions that may destabilize content patterns and disrupt press–source relations. Following such changes, a new interaction pattern among the four factors may settle into a new equilibrium, resulting in another period of patterned content and stable relations among press and political sources. For example, the rise of a national, mass audience news system in the mid-20th century (1940s–1970s) can be characterized as a period of relatively stable professional norms, organizational routines, and technological development (following the saturation of society with television). It was also a time of fairly stable industrial economic norms protecting news divisions from the same profit imperatives applied to entertainment and other media content. In the more recent period, by contrast, several of these gatekeeping factors have been thrown into change all at once, creating complex interactions and correspondingly puzzling changes in news content and press–government relations.

Perhaps the greatest changes in the recent period have been in the economic realm, where profit pressures have invaded the newsroom, setting the economic gatekeeping apparatus into new and often antagonistic relations with the others. But economics are not the only element of the gatekeeping model in play in recent

times. In the past decade important new technologies such as the video phone have burst upon the scene, enabling journalists to enter conflict zones freely and to report directly from sites of international disasters. The proliferation of video recorders, digital cameras, and the Internet enable ordinary citizens to supply eyewitness accounts of events. These technological changes may interact differently with the other gatekeeping factors than the economic changes do, often with opposite effects on content patterns.

These complex interactions among the different gatekeeping factors discourage easy generalizations about political news content trends or the press-government relations that produce them. In some respects the news looks much as ever, with a heavy reliance on official sources, a tendency to “index” content to the range of views expressed by those sources, and a core news agenda set by government officials, not journalists or marketers. Yet in other respects, the news has changed a good deal. As noted above, the media content space in which this political agenda is constructed has shrunk (with the notable exceptions of cable and Internet channels), making some issues harder to get into the news at all. Moreover, even though reporters may continue to rely on officials to identify what matters, they are decidedly less deferential in representing official views, often introducing more negativity and journalist-driven commentary into the news mix, while playing up scandal and celebrity angles over political analysis of power and policy.

The challenge for analysis is to sort out aspects of news construction that have changed from those that remain much the same. This can be difficult, as news produced even within a single news organization can reflect contradictory gatekeeping patterns. The section *Some Applications of the Model* begins with an historical look at periods of equilibrium and instability in news gatekeeping regimes. One application of the four-gated model in this section is a brief case study: *Conflicting News Values: CNN and the “Valley of Death.”* This analysis explores the pressures faced by journalists within an organization as some areas of news production—in this case, a newly launched news magazine—become walled off and driven by different gatekeeping norms than used by journalists covering similar stories in other parts of the organization.

The final section, *Changing Press-Government Relations?* explores the implications of these multiple gatekeeping practices for the negotiation of news among reporters, government officials, and other political sources. The main empirical prediction here is that hard news content (though it may be shrinking) is likely to remain dominated by the organizational gatekeeping model with its symbiotic press-government relations at the core. If some increased levels of scandal, manipulation, and infotainment are found in political news across most organizations over time, the main reasons are likely to stem from officials themselves, along with other reliable sources who have corrupted symbiotic press relations by using them to attack opponents. When the tone of political discourse itself sinks, should journalists avoid covering it—particularly when they currently have evolved no other gatekeeping norm for deciding what the alternative might look like?

If there is some amount of scandal and infotainment not accounted for by the above explanation, I expect that residual is unevenly distributed across news organizations, with the disproportionate share to be found in quasi-news formats on talk radio and cable channels that brand themselves in explicitly infotainment terms. The critical theoretical question is, How much of this manufactured content is likely to “leak” into more serious news organizations? The analysis suggests that the answer is “not much.” Moreover, when such cross-channel infotainment



“leakage” does occur, we can expect serious journalists to rush to repair serious breaches with vigorous discourse about the decline of gatekeeping and the need to uphold journalism standards (by which they mean the organizational and journalistic ideals in the four-gated model). These subtle and sometimes not so subtle gatekeeping relations explain a good deal about the patterns of news content that have changed and the ones that have not.

## CHANGING CONTENT PATTERNS IN THE NEWS

There is a risk of nostalgia in contrasting contemporary news trends with the news of bygone days—when journalists may have erred in routinely adopting a too cozy relationship with the officials they covered (Bennett, 2003). Yet without waxing nostalgic, there seems an inescapable conclusion that, whatever the flaws of its earlier versions, the *new news* is not a salutary development. Research indicates that long term trends in news content involve framing politics more in terms of negative images of games and partisan struggles and less in terms of policy substance (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Patterson, 1993). At the hint of political vulnerability, mistake, or scandal, the press pack may lose perspective on the issue at stake and become swept up in a feeding frenzy that further personalizes the political process and opens the news gates to more negativity, drama, and sleaze (Sabato, 1991; Sabato, Stencel, & Lichter, 2000).

As Marvin Kalb (1998) has described it, the new news subverts the talents of even the best-trained and -compensated elite journalists, consigning them to report stories that violate their better news judgment even as they continue to report them:

They are among the best educated and best paid in the land, and more powerful as an institution than at any other time in American history. And yet, in their daily and hourly product, they produce, for the most part, not an elitist formula for better government, not a detailed analysis of social-security or Kremlin intrigue, but rather an increasingly fluffy, sexy, and sensationalist vision of society, in which vice among our leaders can be (and has been) converted into profitable enterprises. The cream of the crop has produced a harvest of shame.

A number of content trends lend support to such a dim view of contemporary news. Perhaps most notable is the drive to produce drama and emotionally charged material even where the resulting content may not bear much connection to social reality or to public policy problems. The content of news dramas may change following industry trends and audience fatigue, but the underlying formula seems to have become “scare them and they will watch.” For example, the big news formula of the 1990s was crime. A national study of local news by the Center for Media and Public Affairs found that crime dominated most programs and that, after removing the combination of crime, weather, accidents, disasters, other “soft” news, and sports, only 5 min and 40 sec remained of the 24 min and 20 sec of noncommercial news time for coverage of government, health, foreign affairs, education, science and the environment (Grossman, 1998). This means that “hard” news got less time than commercials.

The 1990s trends in increased violent crime news cannot be explained as reflections of actual rates of crime in society, nor were those profitable news formulas

limited to local programs. On the contrary, the trends in crime news went up as actual crime declined. In the period from 1990 through 1998, for example, the number of crime stories broadcast annually on the NBC, CBS, and ABC evening news programs rose from 542 to 1,392, during a time in which the actual levels of most violent crimes dropped significantly in society (Brill's Content, 1999). If we look just at news about murder on the national networks, the number of murder stories increased by 700% between 1993 and 1996, a period in which the murder rate in society actually declined by 20%. The focus on television in these studies is appropriate in light of findings that roughly two thirds of people get most of their information about crime from television, compared to just 20% from newspapers, 7% from radio, and less than 10% from friends, neighbors, co-workers, or personal experience (Morin, 1997).

More generally, network TV newscasts between 1990 and 1998 more than doubled the time devoted to entertainment, disasters, accidents, and crime, while reducing the coverage of environment, government activities, and international affairs to make room (Center for Media and Public Affairs, n.d.). Until the international events of September 11, 2001, and the following war in Afghanistan, the largest casualty of the rise of infotainment formula news was the fall of international news. Foreign affairs coverage on network TV declined from 45% of stories in the 1970s to 13.5% of stories in 1995 (Hoge, 1997). Newspapers reduced international news coverage from over 10% of nonadvertising space in the early 1970s to 6% in the early 1980s to less than 3% in the 1990s (Hoge, 1997). Among the national news weeklies, between 1985 and 1995, international news declined from 24% to 14% in *Time*, from 22% to 12% in *Newsweek*, and from 20% to 14% in *U.S. News and World Report* (Hickey, 1998).

Entertainment, celebrity stories, recreation, lifestyle, and sports filled up the displaced editorial space. In 1987, *Time* ran 11 covers that put the focus on international news. Only one cover in 1997 was about an international story (Hickey, 1998). Overall, the network news, the cover stories of news magazines, and the front pages of major newspapers witnessed an increase from 15% to 43% between 1977 and 1997 in celebrity, scandal, gossip, crime, and other human interest stories (Hickey, 1998). The Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism showed that the three nightly network newscasts devoted fully one third of their broadcasts by 2001 to stories in just the categories of lifestyle features and crime (Kurtz, 2002).

Perhaps the best generalization about these content trends is Patterson's (2000) study showing that the balance of hard news to soft news shifted decidedly in favor of soft news in the last two decades of the twentieth century. Patterson's content analysis of a national sample of over 5,000 news stories (from 2 TV networks, 2 weekly magazines, 3 leading newspapers, and 26 local daily papers) between 1980 and 1999 revealed that stories with no public policy content (soft news) comprised 35% of all stories in 1980 and nearly 50% in 1999. In this study, sensationalism increased from 25% to 40% of the news. Human interest stories increased from 11% to 26% of the news content.

The finding that may offer the most significant indicator of how these trends have affected the quality of press-government relations is that the journalistic tone of the news during this time became more negative and cynical, with journalists introducing their own voices more into stories, often at the expense of direct quotes from the political sources they cover. In broadcast coverage of the 2000 U.S. election, for example, journalists spoke 6 min for each 1 min allocated to the candidates (Patterson, 2000).

Not only may journalistic tone matter to politicians in their construction of press relations and public communication strategies, but also it may affect the ways in which news audiences process the news. Despite, or perhaps because of, the often stated rationale of news executives to attract cost-effective audiences with sensationalism and soft news, the news audience in the United States declined dramatically in the period from 1990 to 2000 (Patterson, 2000). Of those who said they now pay less attention to news than they did before, 93% characterized the news as negative, compared to 77% of the general population (Patterson, 2000).

Critical and often soul-searching journalistic reactions to these trends indicate that the struggle over news values has not been conceded easily to the forces of markets, corporate profits, new technologies, and spin patrols. It is clear that individual journalists have experienced the transformation of news most painfully. Lively debates echo through journalism reviews and classrooms about how to restore more independent news judgment to journalists. Yet part of the challenge in finding a solution is that few of these accounts have adequately described the nature or extent of the problem itself. The next section critically examines the common claim that journalism is losing its traditional gatekeeping function.

## **SOUNDING THE ALARM: THE END OF GATEKEEPING?**

According to knowledgeable critics such as Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel (1999), many of the defining elements of traditional journalistic gatekeeping have indeed been lost in the recent rush to technological and profit-driven news judgments. They argue that in place of producing a reliable account of the important social events of the day, journalism is more prone to publicize a “corrosive” combination of infotainment and political spin. News organizations have lowered their standards for admitting material into the news, in part by paying less attention to sources, evidence, and import, which have been replaced by narrative intrigue, gossip, and innuendo.

The reasons they cite for this erosion of standards include the following.

- The 24-hr news cycle requires a never-ending supply of news and updates on running stories. Because few stories have such serious and timely developments, journalists are pressured to supply speculation, leading questions, and their own analysis and commentary in place of documented information.
- The proliferation of news outlets on cable and the Internet means that the competition to break stories with little information increases, along with the temptation to raise the level of speculative intrigue in order to draw audiences.
- The professional political management of relations between reporters and their political sources makes it difficult for reporters to get beyond the spin and encourages more cynical commentary on the games and strategies of politics rather than focusing on policies and public impacts.
- The ratings and audience-driven reorganization of the news industry creates a “blockbuster mentality” that favors big, sexy, dramatic, scandal stories over more difficult to research and report stories about government and political routine.

Kovach and Rosenstiel are part of a chorus of academics and journalists who are beginning to warn of a near-total collapse of the journalistic gatekeeping function.

Although evidence of some sort of tectonic shift in the nature of mass media news continues to mount, the explanations for that shift do not go much beyond gesturing toward the obvious economic and structural changes in the news business. The rise of economic gatekeeping is surely important, but other factors and their interactions must be considered in more detail.

Developing better models of gatekeeping may also help focus thinking about solutions for the problem. Many concerned journalists continue to believe that the answer to the gatekeeping problem is simply to redouble individual efforts to assert traditional gatekeeping standards of truth, relevance, and ethical propriety. Sydney Schanberg a prominent reporter, editor, and columnist put it succinctly:

I have yet to hear a compelling argument as to why the old code of journalistic ethics is no longer valid. Under the old code, you didn't write about the sex lives of public figures unless you could demonstrate that the private life had an effect on the public person. I've heard all the discussions and seen all the country's major newspaper editors telling us that they had no choice because we have a 24-hour news cycle and they have to keep up. And if they don't, their readers won't be served. But if they have no choice, then what qualifies them to be editors? (Shepard, 1999, p. 22)

Individual journalists like Schanberg may cling to their faith in the old standards, but notable failures to rally editors and news executives around them suggest that important aspects of the gatekeeping process are well beyond the control of individuals (Stepp, 1999). Indeed, those who try to uphold traditional standards often end up quitting when their efforts are frustrated or undermined, as happened to Bill Kovach at the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution* and, more recently, to Jay Harris at the *San José Mercury News* (see Bennett, 2003, chap. 3, for details of the latter case). In short, more plausible solutions require better theories about the problem.

## CONVENTIONAL WISDOM IN SEARCH OF THEORY

One result of the undertheorized state of the field is alarmism: simply overestimating the magnitude and the "distribution" of the problem over different areas of news content. Another consequence of poor theoretical specification is that it is hard to decide between competing explanations for the same result or to imagine possible positive outcomes that may produce better citizen information in some areas of the information system. Finally, the current state of theorizing results in many proposed solutions that tend to be unworkable because they are anchored mainly in common sense that does not reflect the complex factors that go into the gatekeeping process. These tendencies are examined in the remainder of this section.

### The Problem of Overgeneralization

Consider one example of overgeneralization from assumptions about the influences of technology and economics on news content. It is common to hear that the rise of e-journalism and Internet information sites increase the circulation of poorly checked stories that are simply too tempting for the scandal-hungry mainstream

media to resist. The classic case, of course, was the Clinton–Lewinsky presidential sex scandal—a story broken by Matt Drudge in his e–gossip sheet, *The Drudge Report*. The unsourced report of a blue dress with a presidential semen stain quickly made the mainstream media, and Drudge himself became the prime source of the story when he was interviewed on a morning network breakfast program. Although this is rapidly becoming an iconic case of the end of gatekeeping, it is not entirely clear how extensive this sort of problem is, whether it applies only to some kinds of stories and not others, or why it even occurs.

The interaction between media economics and the proliferation of information gates no doubt results in some proportion of stories that are of dubious civic value, from the steamy details of the Clinton–Lewinsky scandal to light news bits of the sort that may have long slipped through newsrooms with the wink that they were “too good to check.” For example, Cannon (2001) recounts how *The New York Times* in 1998 pulled a series of Chinese translations of American films off the Web. In its story, *The Crying Game* became *Oh No! My Girlfriend Has a Penis*, and *Batman and Robin* became *Come to My Cave and Wear This Rubber Codpiece, Cute Boy*. Although *The Times* soon issued a correction noting that the origin of the information was a humor Web site that became lost in the rapid spread of the Internet story, Peter Jennings later ran ABC’s version of the story. He announced that *Babe* had become in China *The Happy Dumpling to Be Who Talks and Solves Agricultural Problems*. Although Jennings, like *The Times* before him, soon recanted the story, versions continued to appear in mass media news for months afterward.

Examples such as these lead some observers to conclude that spiraling electronic information flows create so many random points of entry and transmission of information that there are simply too many gates to keep. In this view, the media gates were far easier to operate with a common result when the mass media consisted of relatively few outlets, fed by one or a few wire services, and where the importance of stories was more likely to be determined by a hierarchical pecking order of prestige press. Although it may be true that there is more complexity in the media today than in earlier times, it seems unreasonable to conclude that all structure is lost. Yet some who promote this view take it to the extreme conclusion that we are looking at the end of journalism. New media pioneer Bob Wyman puts it bluntly:

The image of a “gatekeeper” implies that there is a gate. That may have been true in the old days of journalism when there were very few ways for folks to get news of their community or world. Today that just isn’t the case. Information is raining on us rather than being funneled along any particular path. Simply put: The gate is gone, thus the gatekeepers need new jobs. (Lasica, 1996, p. 20)

The author of the above journalism review article regarded this perspective with enough alarm to frame her entire article around it: “What will be the role of journalists when anyone with a computer and modem can lay claim to being a reporter, editor and publisher? Will professional journalists be needed in an era when people can get their news ‘unfiltered’?” (Lasica, 1996: 20). What this alarmist framing omits is that most Internet news is filtered in other ways. Moreover, as long as people experience common identifications as members of society, the need for some broad social news filter of the sort provided by journalism will likely persist.

Interesting experiments with open publishing and collective electronic editing are under way on the Web. Among many variants, Indymedia ([www.indymedia.org](http://www.indymedia.org)) and Slashdot ([www.slashdot.org](http://www.slashdot.org)) are examples worth following. However, it is by no means clear that these “middle media” sites are usurping mass media functions in ways that should send professional journalists for new job training. Indeed, there is more reason to suspect that Internet and mass media information flows are beginning to become integrated in fairly systematic ways that do not suggest mutual exclusivity or abandonment of standards at all. For some preliminary steps toward analyzing information flows among micromedia (e.g., e-mail and list serves), middle media (webzines, weblogs, and portals), and mass media, see Bennett (in press-a, in press-b).

### In Search of Theory

Without models that better establish actual information flows, the rise of scandal and sensationalism threatens to become the poster case for all news. As one commentary on the Clinton scandals put it: “Today’s media landscape offers so many back doors for salacious stories to find their way into the public consciousness that we have entered a world without gates to keep. The late night monologues of Jay Leno and David Letterman can put a story into play long before it has been checked out” (Shepard, 1999 p. 22).

Delli Carpini and Williams (2001) take an important step in the direction of theory by offering a model of the flow of information across the news-entertainment divide, citing a number of technological, structural, and economic factors to suggest a general dissolution of the news-entertainment distinction. Their analysis raises the important point that once news gives way to entertainment, journalists no longer exercise much control over the content cues that most affect public opinion and perceptions of politics. Late-night comedians may well provide more perspective. In this process, some portion of the news space is shifted from important political content to entertainment, as documented in the last section. Yet Delli Carpini and Williams also point to scandal and infotainment as the main evidence for claiming that gatekeeping is disappearing because the distinction between news and entertainment is dissolving. What remains unclear in infotainment-based perspectives on the fall of gatekeeping is what they have to say about the content of the rest of the news, from routine public policy issues, to serious scientific discoveries.

Even the best approaches to infotainment do not make it clear why some potential scandals fail to make the news, whereas others are subject to feeding frenzies. A step toward a sharper analytical statement might look like this: *When poorly sourced material circulates through “middle media” sites that are monitored by mass media organizations (e.g., The Drudge Report in the time of Lewinsky), the chance of passing through mass media gates increases to the extent that the story, if true, would be a big story.* (In the case of the misbegotten movie titles, the standard is lower because the story has little consequence.) We should also add that *the chances of rumor making the news increase further when a story is already being driven by prominent opponents or political investigations, as was also the case with Clinton-Lewinsky.* With this formulation, the newsworthiness of scandal becomes circumscribed and subject to more careful empirical examination.

Propositions such as those above suggest that gatekeeping—even in the areas of its reputed decline—is a complex, multilayered process. Formalizing this process

alerts us to dynamics that may help explain why certain instances of suspect news occur and others do not. In the case above, we have a collective action formulation for the gatekeeping problem: If the story is potentially big enough, or simply good enough, journalists who resist pressures to cover it are caught in a collective action dilemma in which other players in a more competitive and less hierarchical system will surely open the gates anyway. This makes it difficult for news organizations to just say no to particular types of stories, even if individual journalists would like to.

Because of this collective action problem, organizations that attempt to stay out of the race to the bottom after the outbreak of a feeding frenzy simply look like they are getting beat on the big story of the day. Worse, they stand little chance of being heralded as noble protectors of the public order. For example, when CBS news anchor Dan Rather refused to run daily stories on the disappearance of a young intern who was rumored to be having an affair with a member of Congress, his decision to avoid the story became a news story reported by other news organizations. One rival news organization even speculated that Rather's decision was aimed at creating a unique market niche for his news program as the alternative to all the others.

### **A General Theory Should Account for Both Stability and Change**

Overgeneralizations about breakdowns in the press system reflect an undertheorized condition. For all the talk about the end of gatekeeping, there is little empirical evidence that—beyond the shrinkage of hard news space in general—content patterns have changed much in more conventional areas of political news such as coverage of policy processes in education, welfare reform, health care, tax law, transportation, and military deployment. One suspects that in these expert-dependent and institution-based areas of public policy, the news spreads much as before: from the prestige news organizations to which official information is offered as a measure of their prestige and which, in turn, frame government policies as important and official. This simple model has long been advanced as a core conception of gatekeeping and as the bond that cements press–government relations (Tuchman, 1978). Until demonstrated otherwise, it seems reasonable to suppose that the indexing hypothesis—selecting content patterns that are cued by the positions of decisive actors in a political conflict—still explains most routine political reporting (Bennett, 1990).

And even if we can isolate the gatekeeping problem to the growth in scandal and soft features reported in the preceding section, it is still not clear how much of this problem is due to changes inside the media, alone. For example, if political sources produce more deception, negativity, and scandal these days as part of their political strategies, and if they deliver this information to journalists with more sophisticated press management techniques, then the corruption of content is not just a result of changes in journalism practices. Many of the scandals that have distressed journalists, publics, and politicians in recent years may be partly the result of “supply-side” factors such as strategic negative campaigns waged by political opponents. At least since the rise of the new Republican majority era in Congress (i.e., post-Newt Gingrich), many of the big scandals resemble organized campaigns with links to credible partisan players who spin them through traditional press–source channels to keep the news going. Thus, the Whitewater scandal may

have haunted the Clintons because opponents used credible and newsworthy governmental processes (such as official investigations and court cases against other players in the story) to advance charges against the Clintons that kept the story going. In contrast, potentially juicy Bush administration connections to Enron, and numerous shenanigans in the 2000 Florida election scandal died in the absence of sustained opposition campaigning or effective uses of political processes to keep those stories going.

In addition to the rise of coordinated press campaigns run by politicians against opponents, such campaigns are also commonly run by businesses and interest organizations. These campaigns feature staged publicity events, consumer scares, Astroturf organizations, uses of litigation to make news, and the delivery of sources and information to fit dramatized scripts (Bennett and Manheim, 2001; Manheim, 2001). If these supply-side strategies play into traditional press-government and, more generally, press-source, relations, then the problem may not lie entirely at the doorstep of abandoned journalistic standards and practices. On the contrary, in some percentage of the cases, old journalistic practices may simply yield new results.

If old practices yield bad results, then why don't journalists simply fix the problem? In part, because gatekeeping was seldom a simple matter of journalists making personal news decisions. At the most basic level, the news is a collection of materials produced by authoritative news sources. When the world of authoritative sources becomes corrupted or destabilized, journalists may confront a problem that they cannot fix or reconstruct on their own. Beyond the press-source relationship, even more remote changes in media economics and technology further complicate the interactions and decision rules that constitute the gatekeeping process. A first step toward sorting out all this complexity is to construct a more sophisticated model.

## **A MULTIGATED MODEL OF NEWS CONSTRUCTION**

Part of the confusion about gatekeeping is the tendency to simplify the process to just one or two key factors that constrain the decisions made by individual journalists. A few scholars have noted that news making is the result of complex interactions among different organizational, personal, and economic factors (Cook, 1998; Hallin, 1985). However, none to my knowledge has specified a model that is detailed enough to identify the pressure points, changing dynamics, conflicting outcomes, and historical shifts in these interactions.

Our discussion so far has touched on no fewer than four broad areas that may be in play at the same time in the selection and construction of news narratives: (1) the individual reporter's news sense, (2) the routines and standards of the organization for which the reporter works, (3) the economic pressures that enter the newsroom, and (4) the technologies that facilitate gathering and transmitting information. Any given news event may engage one or more of these factors, sometimes in conflicting ways that require difficult choices on the part of journalists.

Setting all four factors in play enables the model to serve as a systematic analytical framework for case studies of different news situations. Perhaps even more important, the model can be used to distinguish and explain broad content trends across different historic periods. A period of relatively stable gatekeeping patterns



can be defined in terms of stable interactions among the four factors. During any period, one or more of the factors may be dominant in the quartet, but the relations among dominant and submissive factors settles into an equilibrium that journalists come to recognize in terms of commonly accepted working conditions (e.g., established levels of personal autonomy, known organizational routines, recognized economic limits, and stable applications of technology). Such periods end when the dominance of one or more factors increases or decreases markedly, resulting in punctuating, or disrupting, the equilibrium of interactions among all the factors. For example, the rise of economic considerations in news production in the mid 1800s so destabilized existing reporting norms and organizational patterns that the news was fundamentally redefined (Baldasty, 1992). Another great economic upheaval punctuated the gatekeeping equilibrium in the late 1900s as the economic structure of the news business changed so dramatically that formerly dominant organizational routines and reporter news standards were thrown into new relationships (Underwood, 1993).

The economic transformation of the newsroom in this recent period has fueled much of the talk about the deterioration of gatekeeping. Yet putting the focus on economics, alone, would miss a good deal of what is and, perhaps more importantly, what is not changing. For example, during this same time, rapid technological developments have introduced other considerations in news organizations. Some of these technological developments (e.g., digital video editing and storage) magnify economic changes by introducing efficiencies of production, whereas others (e.g., videophones) directly enable journalists to gather and transmit live information from previously inaccessible locations. In addition, the rise of Internet information channels offers the potential for greater depth and diversity of citizen information. A comprehensive understanding of what may emerge in the next era of news gatekeeping requires consideration of the rich interactions among these newly dominant technological and economic changes with the still-important organizational and individual level news practices.

Viewed in such historical terms, it makes more sense to think about how gatekeeping is changing, and why it is changing, than to pronounce its end. It is true that we have passed through a long period of relatively stable interactions among the factors that affect news construction—roughly, the period from 1950 to 1980, which was distinguished by the rise of network television, the introduction of nightly network newscasts, the creation of a mass audience, and comparatively modest economic constraints on news organizations. The passing of this period may seem cataclysmic because long periods of stability tend to feel grounded and authentic. Yet it is important not just to focus on what is lost from the past era, but to be alert to emerging developments that may have potential for new citizen engagement and new flows of information to publics.

In order to turn our four gatekeeping factors into a dynamic, useful model, we need to specify each factor in greater detail so that it may be compared to, and distinguished from, the others. Each factor is presented in this analysis as an ideal type so that it can be distinguished and seen clearly. To help with this, I have identified six basic aspects of news construction that add up to an operational definition of each factor and that distinguish the factors categorically from one another. Each defining element of a factor can become a diagnostic point useful for identifying areas of conflict and change as the gatekeeping system moves from one equilibrium to another.

The defining elements of each major gatekeeping factor begin with the *decision basis*, or the principles on which a “pure” economic, organizational, personal or

technological news decision would rest. For example, profit and business formulas drive content in the economic ideal, in contrast to professional journalism values and editorial standards in organizational gatekeeping. Each of the four ideal type gatekeeping factors also displays a characteristic *information gathering and organizing style*—for example, the investigation model of the independent reporter, versus the marketing-driven news formulas of the economic ideal of news. Each factor is also associated with a dominant *journalist's role*—the iconic “watchdog” associated with the independent reporter, versus the passive information transmitter role of the journalist presiding over a live satellite feed from the scene of a natural disaster. Similarly, each ideal dimension of journalistic gatekeeping also adopts a characteristic *concept of the public* for which its product is aimed—the engaged citizen ideal of the watchdog journalist, in contrast to the entertainment and drama audience served by the economic newsroom. Each ideal-type news construction factor thrives on a different kind of relationship between journalists and their sources, or in our case, a different type of *press–government relationship*—the symbiotic, mutually dependent relations nurtured by the economically protected organizational model of journalism, versus the commodified, negative, and manipulative relationships that develop under an economically dominant model of news construction. Finally, these practical qualities that define the differences among the four ideal gatekeeping constructs can be summarized in terms of an overriding *gatekeeping norm* that captures the ethos of each factor: *independence* for the reporter-driven ideal, *objectivity or fairness* for the organizational ideal, *infotainment* for the economic ideal, and *eye-witness immediacy* for the technological ideal. These six defining characteristics are described for each of the four factors in the sections that follow and are summarized in Table 11.1.

### The Reporter-Driven Ideal Type

The ideal that reporters are the real gatekeepers of the news remains dominant in the minds of most citizens and many academics and journalists. This is the mythic narrative that ties Peter Zenger, Ida Tarbell, Upton Sinclair, I. F. Stone, and Woodward and Bernstein together in the minds of students and idealistic young professionals. This crusading, independent image persists in the earlier words of Sydney Schanberg encouraging journalists and editors simply to hold the line on the erosion of reporting standards. The individual reporter uses personal judgment to guide choice of subjects and approaches to them. The enterprising reporter cultivates sources, recognizes a story in the making, and resists pressures to conceal information or to reveal sources. Ideal reporters generally regard themselves as taking a stance independent of partisan sources and, sometimes, even their own editors.

The *decision basis* of the reporter-driven ideal is personal knowledge. Good reporters can “smell” a story. They recognize good sources. They know what the narrative is, even if they must learn it the hard way through the coaching of more seasoned veterans (Cannon, 1977; Darnton, 1975; Lapham, 1981). The basis on which *information is gathered and organized* by the independent journalist is the *investigation*. Although it occurs rarely in these times of managed press relations, enterprise reporting or investigative journalism remains the highly romanticized ideal on which good information is based. This combination of a personal news standpoint and investigative methods makes the *watchdog* the idealized *journalistic role* associated with reporter-driven gatekeeping. The implicit rationale for watchdog journalism is the *conception of the public* as an *engaged citizenry* in need

TABLE 11.1  
A Multigated Model of News Gatekeeping

<i>Core Gatekeeping Principles</i>				
<i>Defining Dimensions</i>	<i>Reporter-Driven</i>	<i>Organizational</i>	<i>Economic</i>	<i>Technology-Driven</i>
Decision basis	Personal (implicit news values)	Bureaucratic (professional journalism values & editorial standards)	Business (profits demographics)	Immediacy (information fidelity)
Information organizing & gathering	Investigation (personal sources & leads)	Beats & assignments (official pronouncements, pack journalism)	Marketing formulas (infotainment)	Informatics (location, access, coding, & flow)
Journalistic Role	Watchdog	Record keeper	Content provider	Transmitter
Conception of public	Engaged citizens (public interest)	Social monitors (Is my world safe?)	Entertainment audience (consumer content)	Voyeur (information processor)
Press-government relationship	Personalized (cultivated source relationships)	Symbiotic (routinized information & status exchange)	Commodified (manipulative transactions)	Mediated (real time, event-driven, instant reaction)
Gatekeeping norm	Independence (what the journalist decides is news)	Objectivity-fairness (officials & established interests define news)	Plausibility (if plausible, would it make a good story?)	Eyewitness (let the audience decide what's news)

of an independent check on the claims made by government officials and other news sources. In this process, the *press-government relationship* is a very *personalized* one, crafted from a combination of adversarialism and trust between reporters and their sources and cultivated with an admixture of favors, scoops, leads, and fair warning about tough stories. These defining elements of the reporter-driven ideal add up to a *gatekeeping norm of independence* through which each journalist weighs the available information in a story and arrives at a judgment about its probity and significance.

Although it is clear that many factors can enter a reporter's world to complicate or even displace this independence of news judgment, the reporter-driven ideal remains a strong conception of how news decisions are made—a conception that is held not just among idealistic journalists, but also among some journalism and mass communication scholars. Consider, for example, this classic account of gatekeeping by Wilbur Schramm that was reprinted in a mass communication text in 2001:

Suppose we follow a news item, let us say, from India to Indiana. The first gatekeeper is the person who sees the event happen. This person sees the

event selectively, noticing some things, not others. The second gatekeeper is the reporter who talks to this “news source. . . .” [T]he reporter has to decide what facts to pass along the chain, what to write, what shape and color and importance to give the event. The reporter gives his message to an editor, who must decide how to edit the story, whether to cut or add or change. Then the message goes to a news service where someone must decide which of the many hundreds of items will be picked up and telegraphed to other towns, and how important the story is, and therefore how much space it deserves.

At a further link in the chain, the story will come to a United States news service and here again an editor must decide what is worth passing on to the American newspapers and broadcasting stations. The chain leads us on to a regional and perhaps a state news service bureau, where the same decisions must be made. . . . And finally when an item comes to a local newspaper, an editor must go through the same process, deciding which items to print in the paper.

Out of the news stories gathered by tens of thousands of reporters around the world, only a few hundred will pass the gatekeeper along the chains and reach a local newspaper editor, who will be able to pass only a few dozen of those to the newspaper reader. (Quoted in Vivian, 2001, p. 251)

This conception of gatekeeping involves many individual journalists making essentially the same kinds of decisions all the way along a highly individualized information chain from the source to the reader. If this seemingly complex process produces a remarkable degree of convergent end results, both within and across stories, that is only because the personal news values of the individual journalists along the line reflect strong and widely shared professional norms. Although it is true that at the end of each link in the news chain there is an individual journalist taking responsibility for something that resembles a personal news decision, there are also reasons to believe that many other factors supplement or even supplant the personal independence that is the normative bottom line of the reporter-driven ideal. The first well-developed gatekeeping model that challenged this notion of journalistic independence, yet still acknowledged room for reporters to interact creatively with their editors and sources, is the organizational ideal type outlined in the next section.

### **The Organizational Ideal Type**

As news became an increasingly important subject for understanding the construction of social reality, more elaborate sociological analyses of the gatekeeping process began to emerge. Early studies identified important socialization processes and cue systems in news organizations that competed with and, in important respects, supplanted journalists’ personal judgments about what’s news (Breed, 1955; Geiber, 1956). Later sociological accounts linked these organizational routines with the construction of representations of mass social reality. A series of classic sociological studies offered accounts of how news decisions produced results that both journalists and their audiences could routinely understand as realistic and authoritative (Gans 1979; Gitlin, 1980; Hall, Chrichter, Jefferson, Clark, & Roberts, 1978; Schudson, 1978; Tuchman, 1978).

The news *decision basis* in the organizational model of gatekeeping is the *bureaucratic routine* in which an editorial hierarchy establishes everyday news priorities, production processes, assignments, and status distinctions among journalists and their activities. The daily quota of *information* required to fill a given organization's "news hole" is predictably *gathered and organized* by developing a system of regular *beats and assignments* where reporters are sent to gather reliable quotas of news handed out by officials (and established interest organizations concerned about official activities) who become the authoritative sources for most of the day's stories. The beat system can become so constraining that even nonroutine breaking news such as the outbreak of war or another crisis may find reporters in an organization canvassing their routine beats or consulting officials to secure authoritative definitions of the situations (Cook, 1994). In the classical version of bureaucratic journalism, when editors see their reporters deviating from the story frames used by other members of the press pack, the deviation is often challenged and corrected. The result of this process played out across diverse news organizations is a remarkable uniformity of news content: independent journalists working in different, but similarly organized bureaucracies tend to produce similar gatekeeping decisions. The fig leaf for this uniformity is the belief that reality, itself, is a uniformly discoverable, coherent, and authoritatively established set of facts.

In the organizational gatekeeping model, the *journalistic role* is primarily that of an authoritative *record keeper*. Officials provide those records and are generally not challenged unless strong evidence of corruption or error is presented to the journalist by other sources. Instead of an engaged citizenry, the conception of the public in the bureaucratic gatekeeping model is that of *information monitors* who follow developments in society and government. A classic rendition of how to construct news for this information monitor audience was reported by Paletz and Entman (1981) in this excerpt of a memo from an ABC news producer to his staff:

The Evening news, as you know, works on elimination. We can't include everything. As criteria for what to include, I suggest the following for a satisfied viewer: (1) "Is my world, nation, and city safe?" (2) Is my home and family safe?" (3) "If they are safe, then what has happened in the last 24 hours to help make that world better?" (4) "What has happened in the last 24 hours to help us cope better?" (p. 17)

Rather than journalists representing the interests of publics, the new consumers are presumed capable of using the information provided to represent themselves in various forms from voting to expressing their own opinions. This presumption of democratic representation simplifies the *press-government relationship* in this gatekeeping system—it is *symbiotic*, with journalists and sources engaging in mutual cooperation (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1981; Cohen, 1963; Sigal, 1973). Sources produce a steady supply of reliable and timely information for the journalists who cover them, and news organizations complete the cooperative arrangement by publicizing what the officials wish to communicate to their publics.

The *gatekeeping norm* that best captures this idealized factor is *objectivity or fairness*, which, in practice, means that journalists faithfully report what authoritative sources tell them and, in the process, help construct the legitimacy of those sources. The established sources, in turn, create the impression that the news is an objective or at least authentic record of social and political events (Tuchman, 1978). The word objectivity has been dropped by most journalists in the recent

era of public criticism of the press because it is simply too hard to defend against criticism that most news events contain multiple possible realities. However, as Mindich (1998) points out, the overwhelming majority of journalists continue to idealize the same practices that formerly defined objectivity but generally prefer the term “fairness” as more rhetorically defensible.

### The Economic Ideal Type

Although the organizational model of news gatekeeping provides an important complement to the journalist-driven ideal type, many observers have argued that, just as journalists’ decisions cannot be understood apart from the organizations in which they work, the workings of the news organization must be considered in the context of its ownership (or other chartering principles). Most news organizations in the United States are owned by business interests. The economic model of gatekeeping focuses on ways in which both political and economic agendas of parent corporations are inscribed in the charters and decision calculus of the news organizations they own and manage. The more political versions of this economic model of gatekeeping argue that the concentration of media ownership reduces the diversity of content—for example, by eliminating information that would offend sponsors or that would appeal to economically insignificant minorities (Bagdikian, 1997; Herman & Chomsky, 1988; McChesney, 1999).

Less explicitly political versions of the economic gatekeeping model point out that pressures to maximize profits and to create information for the most advertiser-friendly demographic audiences have simply distorted news values away from the ideals of independent journalists and autonomous organizations producing socially or politically useful information. These views were expressed by various authors in the “end of gatekeeping” argument reviewed earlier (Hickey, 1998; Underwood, 1993).

Whether viewed more in terms of the political interests of the media or as crass commercialism, this economic ideal type puts the *decision basis* of news choices squarely in *business* terms: profits, delivering audiences to advertisers, and keeping the program content environment friendly to advertising and other commercial values. These business decisions result in *information gathering and organizing* in terms of marketing formulas: developing information formats that deliver the most profitable audiences to advertisers. The growing importance of the economic gatekeeping factor accounts for the notable growth of soft news and the much derided genre of *infotainment*: the adoption of dramatized and personalized news narratives that make news easy to report, yet largely devoid of political value for citizen action.

In the economic ideal type, the *journalist’s role* is that of a *content provider* who may be assigned to harvesting and reformatting material from the wires and other news services or developing popular features on health, consumer fraud, or government waste. The journalist’s job is to find content to fit the formula, whether or not that content is a fair reflection of general trends in the area or has much real importance. The *conception of the public* in this gatekeeping type is that of an *entertainment audience* with little attention span or interest in serious reporting. Indeed, the ultimate management justification for the resort to dramatization and content formulas is the alleged impossibility of interesting audiences in high-brow material. Even if audiences say they want more serious news, most media executives say their marketing studies show otherwise.

In the economic model, the *relationship between press and government officials* (and news sources more generally) is *commodified and manipulative*, based on the coproduction of news that fits the commercial formulas. If officials manipulate journalists effectively through well-staged events and dramatic announcements, those officials earn a grudging respect and receive coverage largely on their own terms. If officials fail to generate news that yields sufficient drama or personal profile, reporters may supply the drama and personal emotion through speculation, challenging the official's claims, or raising opponent's rumors and attacks to the status of news stories. If the officials under attack do not effectively produce newsworthy responses through spin or distraction, the press may end up in a feeding frenzy in which spiraling drama, conjecture, and tawdry allegations compete for audience attention on every channel (Sabato, 1991; Sabato et al., 2000).

The organization-based idea of objectivity or fairness (generally, as defined by officials or competing positions in officialdom) is displaced in infotainment driven news by a weaker *gatekeeping norm* of plausibility. This can be operationalized as: *If a story might be true, and if it would be a good story, then it should be reported.* Not surprisingly, more of these stories start on cable channels than on the networks, and more rise from the Internet in the technological speedup that many consider to be the equal of economic factors in driving the "new news."

## The Technological Ideal of Gatekeeping

Technology has long been recognized as important for shaping news content patterns. From the advent of the Pony Express and the creation of a national postal service to the spread of telegraph wires across the land, technologies of information transmission have long shaped the size, the style, and the standardization of communication formats (Kielbowicz, 1989). Above all, technologies affect the sense of immediacy and connection between people and events. The procession of technologies from the fast express rider, to the tapping of Morse code, to the satellite link has made *immediacy*—or the reduction of time and space boundaries—the distinguishing *decision basis* of what passes through the technology gates in the news process.

Technologies constrain the *organizing and gathering* of news information through *informatics*, or the interaction of codes and transmission devices. The size, the coded algorithms, and the trade-offs between reception quality and the driving value of immediacy all enter the journalistic gates through available technologies and—at least as important—the failings of previous ones (Marvin, 1988). For example, we have established that the simple multiplication of channels and the increased speed and availability of information can boost the frequency of poorly checked news reports. At the same time, technology can give audiences a sense of immediate access to events that they have not experienced before. Either way in this process, the *journalist's role* is as a *transmitter*.

Technology and informatics affect not only what kinds of information pass through the news gates, but what sensation the audience receives from that information as well. The sense of being involved in an event increases if a journalist is transmitting through a "four-wire" phone line in a Baghdad hotel, standing in front of a videophone near the Tora Bora Caves in Afghanistan, or doing a live standup on the White House lawn. Whether they come from a studio or a live location, the words may be the same, but the way in which they are transmitted

affects their qualities of immediacy and authenticity. The *public* in this relationship between transmission and reception is treated as *voyeur*, watching events in private and reacting with private sensation. The transmission engages the sensation. The live shot from the White House at night imparts a sense of sharing the same intimate space. The attractive anchor on camera invites a particular identification, an intimacy unavailable with the reporter merely shown in a photograph doing a telephone feed.

Perhaps the most interesting dimension of technological gatekeeping is the press-government relationship, which can be thrown into real-time event management as reporters and officials all watch the same spontaneous transmissions of events and construct real-time interpretations of problems and solutions. For example, a bystander's video recording of white cops beating a black motorist created a technologically mediated policy problem that not only disrupted symbiotic press-government constructions of events, but ultimately spilled outside of institutional boundaries into the streets of Los Angeles (Lawrence, 1996). The images of a dead American soldier dragged through the streets of Mogadishu occasioned real-time policy decisions to withdraw the forces. The press chorus whispering genocide at the sites of mass graves in Kosovo raised politically persuasive calls for humanitarian intervention of the sort that were less technologically insistent in an earlier era of even more horrifying German death camps.

The degree to which this so-called "CNN effect" has changed the overall reporting of new or transformed press-government relations should not be exaggerated (Livingston, 1997). Yet the potential for policy decisions to be shaped by technological mediation surely exists, particularly as technologies become more portable, less costly, and, in a sense, more democratically available (Livingston, 2002).

The *gatekeeping norm* that best defines the technological ideal is that of *eyewitness*. In some cases, such as Kosovo, this capacity to create a public witness to history liberates journalists from normal press-government relations and offers the potential for more accurate citizen judgments than officials would normally provide. In other cases, technology becomes subordinated to other gatekeeping factors such as economics. Thus, local TV news quickly saw new technologies as ways to extend commercial formulas, with the familiar results: live coverage from grisly freeway accidents, live reports from reporters in a newsroom off the main anchor set, or the infamous helicopter shots of low-speed chases that became part of the Los Angeles news formula in the 1990s.

In these and other cases, the eyewitness technology norm easily becomes conflated with the infotainment plausibility norm to become a means of passing journalistic responsibility for the veracity and significance of reports on to the audience for their ultimate judgment. Perhaps Fox news best captured this dubious marriage of economic and technological gatekeeping with their branding slogan "We report. You decide." (In addition, Fox has added an overlay of conservative rhetoric that may signal a return of political journalism.)

For many of the observers cited earlier, these developments are signs of a system change in which the old gatekeeping order (e.g., the reporter-driven-organizational hybrid of the past era) is formally challenged by a new order (an entertainment-technology hybrid). Moreover, as the former success of Drudge and the continuing success of the Fox brand of news suggest, not all journalists, audiences, or observers regard these new norms as negative. For example, American Enterprise Institute Fellow James Glassman (1998) applauded this trend with the sentiment "Let a thousand Drudges bloom, and let readers make up their mind."



The important question remains whether this emerging hybrid model is mainly filling marketing niches on cable and local TV or whether it is threatening to become an industry standard. Put another way, are we at the beginning of a gatekeeping sea change, or simply witnessing a multimodal system of the sort that exists in most eras in which a dominant gatekeeping pattern (in the most recent system, the reporter–organizational hybrid) is supplemented—as opposed to supplanted—by lesser alternatives?

### **Some Applications of the Model**

One application of this multigated model is as an organizing scheme for the disparate elements that go into everyday news reporting. For example, most reporters are, in various ways, a mix of the roles of watchdog, record keeper, content provider, and transmitter. Depending on the news organization and the disposition of the journalist, particular role attributes may be more dominant than others. Similarly, press–government relationships, taken as a whole, surely run the gamut from highly personalized and cultivated, to routinized transactions, to manipulation and frenzy, to event-driven constructions in real-time.

Another way of using this model is to step back and examine the systemic balances and conflicts among different gatekeeping factors at any point in time. For example, if we wanted to find a time when the reporter-driven ideal was the dominant factor—or at least a more dominant factor—in press gatekeeping, we might have to return to the time of the muckrakers to find large numbers of prominent journalists operating in fiercely independent ways (including publishing and promoting their own work) and attracting substantial public followings. The last of this breed may have been I. F. Stone.

With the rise of a mass media news system following World War II, most journalists settled into stable, if sometimes uneasy, organizational routines resulting in highly uniform patterns of news content. This long gatekeeping equilibrium dominated by the organizational ideal type is now being challenged by pronounced changes in the economic structure of the media and the rapid rise of new information technologies. For example, the onset of merger mania and the decline of government regulation of the media from the 1980s onward have introduced new constraints at the levels of both individual journalists and news organizations. Organizational routines have been disrupted (but not altogether replaced) by mergers, economy measures, marketing models, and other economic factors intruding directly into the daily routines of the news organization. Yet these disruptions are unlikely to be distributed evenly across and, sometimes, even within organizations.

The different gatekeeping factors can be thought of as weights in the daily news equation. This equation varies with gross industrial trends over time. At any point in time, the equation is surely weighted differently in different news organizations as well. Depending on the organization and its adoption of new economic and technological standards of the present era, journalists experience greater or lesser pressures at the individual level. In some cases, they must adjust their sense of independence not just to the requirements of their immediate journalistic bureaucracy, but to even more noisome and distantly uncaring economic masters as well.

As is often the case when a social value scheme is disrupted, threatened values become raised in public discourse. Hence, the recent period is characterized by high levels of journalistic concern about the increased sense of loss of personal

integrity and independence and the compromise of organizational standards that, whatever their other failings may have been, at least offered journalists a somewhat stable and protected environment in which to work.

So far, this account may seem consistent with earlier alarmist claims about the end of gatekeeping. The difference is that the model permits a more nuanced account of the contradictory patterns operating in the present period. For example, we can consider the simultaneous existence of elements of stability and change, without conceding the rise of a new gatekeeping equilibrium that clearly dominates the gatekeeping process. In other words, economic and technological factors, although destabilizing the system, have not yet driven it convincingly into a new equilibrium. Indeed, as suggested above, it may be difficult to generalize about trends even within a single news organization. The following case suggests that even in organizations rocked by profit pressures and merger mania, the old gatekeeping regime is still in play.

### **Conflicting News Values: CNN and the “Valley of Death”**

Following the merger with Time Warner, CNN was forced to create economic “synergy” with its new corporate partners. One project was *NewsStand*, intended as a splashy newsmagazine aimed at cross-branding CNN with *Time* magazine and boosting CNN’s previously poor newsmagazine ratings into the same league as the network newsmags. One week before the premier edition was set to air, CNN/U.S. president Rick Kaplan (the person responsible for hiring and supervising the key staff of the new newsmagazine unit) was given the script for the lead story of the inaugural program. The typically breathless newsmag headline was “Valley of Death”. But the content was not the usual newsmag fare of consumer rip-off or celebrity scandal. The story was an insider account of “Operation Tailwind” a Vietnam War air mission into Laos. The piece featured charges that the United States dropped poison gas on American defectors. Kaplan’s reported response to the script was “Hell-o Jesus” (Paterno, 1998, p. 22)

It turned out that Kaplan had cause for concern. The story aired with his approval a week later, on June 7, 1998, without the changes called for by prominent members of CNN’s regular news staff, who remained isolated from the reporting process until the last minute. “Valley of Death” was the showcase project of the new elite investigative unit brought in by Kaplan after he took the reigns of the news division. A print version of the story also appeared in *Time*, adding to both the splash and the catastrophe that followed. Immediate denials of the program’s nerve gas allegation were issued by Pentagon brass and by former chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral (ret.) Thomas Moorer, who appeared on camera, but whose recorded statements did not confirm the gas charge. CNN CEO Tom Johnson received irate calls from Henry Kissinger and Colin Powell, among others.

Faced with such a high volume of official negative reaction, CNN launched an investigation led by distinguished outside counsel Floyd Abrams. The investigation ultimately repudiated the story, and CNN broadcast formal apologies for reporting unsupportable charges. Kaplan, Johnson, and other executives who presided over the fiasco blamed the error on gatekeeping failures inside CNN attributable to misplaced trust and loyalty to the producers of the story. The producers (April Oliver, Jack Smith, and Pamela Hill) maintained that they were betrayed. They claimed

to have shared clear understandings about standards with CNN brass when they were brought into CNN by Kaplan, with whom they had worked when he held top executive positions at ABC (including at *PrimeTime* magazine). They continue to defend the piece as upholding established newsmagazine gatekeeping standards.

What none of the players suggested directly in public was that CNN had inadvertently created two separate internal organizations with implicitly different standards. Yet it is clear that the evidence from the aftermath of the story is more consistent with the existence of two gatekeeping models inside CNN at the time than with a breakdown of a single model due to bad professional judgments. The old CNN gatekeeping system remained essentially an organization-reporter hybrid. The revamped newsmagazine unit brought in an economic gatekeeping standard that had long been present in news magazines at other networks. Kaplan personally hired the new “A-team” of producers to implement that model—at least that was the view of many senior journalists at CNN who survived the reorganization (Paterno, 1998).

Part of the problem with the Tailwind fiasco may have been the choice of a big political news story to launch the magazine. It was the sort of story that newsmags seldom run. Newsmagazine stories characteristically involve the manipulation of source inputs to fit scripts that must rise (or sink) to the economic infotainment model of dramatic plausibility. Such manipulation presents potential conflicts with organizational gatekeeping standards based on symbiotic political source relationships that generally result in “official,” source-driven news narratives. Thus, it is safer to dramatize bad sanitation standards at a fast food chain with a hidden camera expose than to run an investigation that burns the same political sources that fill the daily quota of stories for the regular news in the same organization.

One of the most interesting players in this short circuit between the two gatekeeping systems at CNN was Peter Arnett, one of CNN’s most distinguished correspondents. He played conflicting roles in both gatekeeping systems. On the regular news side, Arnett had won journalism awards for his live reports from war zones. Yet he was inserted into the *NewsStand* production merely as a narrator to add luster to the “Valley of Death” story. Those uninitiated in the ways of newsmags may have received the false impression that he also participated in the investigation. When the scandal broke, Arnett was clearly compromised in his role as journalistic gatekeeper. He admitted openly that he did not report or check the piece and that he was simply being a good team player, saying “I ‘m a company guy. You want me to read a script, I’ll read it” (Paterno, 1998, p. 34).

Arnett disclosed one of the little trade secrets of newsmags: Network stars are routinely parachuted into stories they did not investigate. He added to his revelations by noting that the CNN newsmagazine unit was “secretive” and not run with the usual “checks and balances” that applied to the rest of the organization (Paterno, 1998, p. 25). Yet CNN’s company line maintained that a gatekeeping breakdown occurred due to bad reporting practices. This cover story required a public reprimand for Arnett. Surely the management at CNN was not so naïve in the ways of the industry. The more plausible interpretation is that Arnett’s public humiliation was a bit of hypocrisy to paper over a deeper organizational problem.

In contrast, the public criticism of Arnett by his journalistic colleagues Christiane Amanpour and Ralph Begleiter was a more straightforward matter of trying to repair the ideal that a serious “journalist” is defined by commitment to the conventional organizational and journalistic standards of direct reporter documentation and symbiotic press-official relations. Indeed, this effort to restore the dominance of

the organizational-journalist gatekeeping hybrid was joined by a number of senior staff in the regular news division, including Perry Smith (Air Force Major General, retired), who was CNN's in-house military expert at the time. He resigned from the network after "Valley of Death" compromised both his organizational role and his relationship to sources in the Pentagon. Those official contacts raised objections when he vetted the story with them, yet CNN ran the story over their (and his) objections.

After quitting, Smith alluded to this gatekeeping rift inside the journalistic ranks at CNN, noting that the older staff felt that Kaplan was "destroying the network" by using tabloid techniques "to get the ratings up" (Paterno, 1988, p. 25). Indeed, corporate policy at the time of Kaplan's arrival at CNN included large-scale job cuts (230 firings), the scheduled elimination of the old, low-rated newsmagazine *Impact*, and authorization for Kaplan to bring in the team of highly paid producers from ABC, his old employer. A memo that circulated in the newly purposed magazine investigative unit outlined ways of enhancing the splash factor of stories and noted that "We are all tired of toiling in obscurity" (Paterno, 1998, p. 28).

There were many signs that two gatekeeping systems had been established, yet poorly integrated inside the same organization. For example, the characteristic press-government relations and the gatekeeping norm in Smith's traditional organizational approach stood in stark contrast to the manipulative source relations and gatekeeping norms of plausibility that sustained the dramatic *NewsStand* script. Weakening the dramatic impact of an infotainment newsmagazine script due to quibbling facts or objections ranks near the top of an infotainment producer's worst nightmares. The manipulative press-source relationships of the economic gatekeeping model helped "Valley of Death's" drama and entertainment values trump tedious qualifications and factual details. For example, *NewsStand's* dramatic launch story was kept close to its original production script by stretching the script to suggest that vague statements by on-camera sources such as Admiral Moorer somehow corroborated the lethal gas charge. Such manipulation reflects the economic gatekeeping norm of plausibility, in contrast to the organizational norm of officially corroborated objectivity.

The dramatic purity of "Valley of Death" was further protected by isolating the story as a whole from inputs by the normal beat reporters and military experts at both *Time* and CNN. The "Valley of Death" producers went so far as to ask Kaplan to keep the military expert, Smith, out of the loop. Kaplan recalls producer Pamela Hill's objection to Smith like this: "You can't let us deal with Perry; it will destroy the story. We've had problems with Perry in the past" (Paterno, 1998, p. 39). Although CEO Johnson wanted Smith involved, Kaplan intervened and won his reluctant approval to keep him out (Paterno, 1998).

Thus, Smith learned about the story only through watching CNN's on air promotional material for the upcoming program. When he then initiated his organizational gatekeeping routine that failed to produce official corroboration, he registered his objections to the story. According to Paterno's (1998) account, those objections were dismissed by Kaplan, and only surfaced later when the internal investigation attempted to repair the alleged breach of the gatekeeping process. (For a general discussion of gatekeeping repair operations, see Bennett, Gressett, and Haltom, 1985.) CNN's Washington bureau chief Frank Sesno and Pentagon correspondent Jamie McIntyre were treated with a bit more deference than Smith, but they received only short-notice courtesy copies of the script. After McIntyre checked with his usual sources, he also wrote a memo registering his objections to the story

based on the classical organizational gatekeeping norm: his inability to develop corroborating official evidence. That memo was also ignored.

Maintaining the wall between the two gatekeeping systems came at a price. Internal dissent and anger grew between the newsmagazine “investigative” unit and the regular reporting staff. Shortly before “Valley of Death” was scheduled to air, the internal conflict at CNN had grown to such proportions that Smith’s call to kill the story drew what he characterized as a “very nasty” e-mail from Kaplan, which, Smith says, dismissed his concerns as “the bleating of a biased amateur” (Paterno, 1998, p. 35). In an effort to ease the situation, *NewsStand* producers called an internal meeting to convince the CNN staff that their “deep throat” on the story was impeccable (p. 30). But neither side convinced the other of its standards. As noted above, Smith soon resigned over the “journalism ethics” involved with compromising his gatekeeping efforts.

What to conclude here? One possible conclusion is similar to the views among the alarmists noted earlier: that gatekeeping is disappearing, even in quality news organizations. The fact that the “Valley of Death” story aired over objections from the top old-school (i.e., organizational ideal) journalists might seem to support the economic/infotainment thesis. Thus, Ted Gup, a former *Time* reporter and current journalism professor, described the incident as a “disturbing trend” of journalists working more in the realm of plausibility than truth: “You don’t print possibilities when they can destroy individual and national reputations” (Paterno, 1998, p. 25).

One problem with Gup’s judgment is that it too easily champions one gatekeeping standard over another without considering the failings and gray areas of the chosen ideal—such as the near-zero probability that any official would corroborate this story if it *were* true. More to our point, however, is that the familiar claim of a “trend” suggests that the process we are talking about can be described as an easy slide down a single news judgment dimension to a lower level. This is very different from the active corporate construction of a second stand-alone and highly valued gatekeeping standard that, among other things, promised to rescue journalists from “toiling in obscurity.” The above analysis suggests that a more active gatekeeping conflict—a conflict between two standards systems—was at work inside CNN. Such a dual-standard system had gone beyond anything that could be plausibly characterized by the official company line of bad judgment within a single-standard system.

CNN merely established a walled-off infotainment news unit, as many news organizations had long since done. The difference was that such units function smoothly mainly by selecting stories that do not intrude into the routine source relations or other practices of the daily news organization. In turn, the daily news organization, with some economic concessions to scandals and more soft features, continues to function along a dominant organizational gatekeeping model. What created the problem in the Tailwind story was picking a topic that so clearly brought the two gatekeeping systems into direct contradiction.

Perhaps most importantly, this analysis suggests that an economic gatekeeping model had by no means become dominant. Indeed, nothing resembling an economic gatekeeping equilibrium had been established at CNN. To the contrary, the company response signaled the continuing primacy of the organizational model: CNN repudiated the story, fired the producers, and made a cash payment to Admiral Moorer for his trouble. The main result of this repair operation in the dominant

gatekeeping paradigm was to maintain the symbiotic press-government relations on which all leading news organizations continue to depend.

## CHANGING PRESS GOVERNMENT RELATIONS?

It is common to hear that press-government relations are more conflicted and negative than ever before. Evan Thomas of *Newsweek* has argued that with the layers of professional communications and press management operating between reporters and officials, reporters these days seldom get close to the officials they cover (Bennett, 2003). This distance and constant spinning may introduce a measure of mistrust and wariness in the press-source relationship. However, it is not clear that such wariness is necessarily a bad thing when contrasted with the cooperation and coziness that most observers concede characterized the press-government relationship prior to the Vietnam War and Watergate. Nor is it clear that spin and more highly managed press-government relations are pushing the gatekeeping system out of its still-dominant organizational ideal type.

A breach of the organizational model would entail far higher levels of explicit manipulation on both sides. Recall here the contrasting press-source relations involved in the two systems that clashed in the “Valley of Death” story. The news-magazine producers characteristically manipulated their sources to fit a dramatic script that merited all the economic promotion it received only if its main charge (that the United States had used lethal gas) remained in place. Thus, Admiral Moorer appeared on camera in the context of a script that implied his support of the charge, but no words to that effect came out of his mouth. Moorer later engaged in his own manipulative relationship with CNN that resulted in their issuing him an apology, along with an undisclosed cash settlement, presumably aimed at heading off a lawsuit. In the other gatekeeping system, the military expert Smith and beat reporter McIntyre, among others, contacted their usual sources, found no official support for the lethal gas charge, and—characteristic of the symbiotic press-government relationship at the center of the organizational model of gatekeeping—concluded that the story was without merit.

In short, different press-source and, more specifically, press-government relations come into play depending on which gatekeeping model is dominant in a news situation. When it comes to reporting hard news, most news organizations continue to maintain the symbiotic standard of the old organizational model, and so do most politicians. The turbulent press relations of the Clinton years may be the exception that proves this rule. Consider the following simple dynamic of Clinton’s first 4 years in office.

### **Bill Clinton and the Press: The Exception That Proves the Rule**

Haunted by the campaign scandals (that were fed in large part by standard source patterns), Clinton entered office angry at the media. The communication staff of the new White House began a full-scale manipulative assault on the press corps that effectively removed any initial possibility of symbiotic relations. In Maltese’s (2000) analysis, the overall strategy was “to avoid the critical filter of the old media” (p. 78).

This policy was epitomized by shutting the door between the press room and the White House press staff offices so that reporters could not interact informally with their handlers (p. 79). Along with a host of lesser offenses, this snub clearly signaled the attitude from the top:

Clinton neglected the White House press corps. During his first two months in office, he did not even hold a full scale press conference. He did, however, hold some twenty-five sessions with representatives of local media as part of an effort to target messages to specific media markets . . . Ann Compton of ABC News said that of the five presidents that she covered, Clinton was the only one who 'did everything in his power to go around, under, and away from the White House press corps. (p. 78)

The press corps responded in kind with its own news manipulation by magnifying a series of scandals. Most of those scandals came through standard sources, but the decisions to boost them on the news agenda reflected a standard press reaction to virtually any politician who breaches the symbiotic pattern on which news organizations depend. From the organizational standpoint, Clinton was not only circumventing the press corps but, in the process, abandoning his capacity to set the news agenda himself. The results were striking. Clinton's proportion of favorable stories in the first 6 months barely reached one third, in contrast to his predecessor, George Bush, who received predominantly positive coverage in his first year in office (Maltese, 2000; Rosenstiel, 1994). The "iron law" of organizational gatekeeping is that negativity of coverage is inversely related to news sources' programmatic care and feeding of reporters along the daily beat. For an analysis of how a generally critical press corps ended up coproducing Ronald Reagan as the great communicator, see Bennett (2003).

With his popularity in a tailspin, Clinton brought in former Reagan and Bush press strategist David Gergen to revamp press relations. Gergen quickly restored the organizational model of symbiotic press-government relations, and the gatekeeping pattern changed dramatically. After just a month on the job, network news coverage jumped from 27% positive to 40% positive (Maltese, 2000; Rosenstiel, 1994). However, internal disarray and political conflicts inside the Clinton inner circle allowed this moment of symbiosis to pass: Personal and political conflicts introduced noise into the staff relations, lack of staff leadership made communication policy difficult to enforce, and Gergen was soon forced out. White House press relations also returned to stormy levels of mutual manipulation for much of the rest of the Clinton presidency, interrupted only by a brief concerted return to a forced symbiosis around the 1996 election (Maltese, 2000).

Where is the trend here? Even within the Clinton years, the scandal patterns reflect the gatekeeping patterns before and after Gergen. Resulting variations in the volume of negative news coverage seem attributable at least as much to Clinton's failures to implement the symbiotic gatekeeping ideal as to any clear press predisposition to "go negative." In contrast, the easy press handling of George W. Bush after his questionable accession to office suggests similarly little evidence that negativity, infotainment, or scandal can be attributed solely to changes inside the news business itself. One suspects that had the Democrats made a scandal of the Florida election process or the Supreme Court ruling, journalists would have responded in routine fashion by reporting it. As it was, a team of reliable sources

largely from the first Bush administration was parachuted into the fray, and the news agenda was steadily wrestled under control.

## CONCLUSION: THE FUTURE OF GATEKEEPING

Critics who sound the alarm about the end of gatekeeping are generally talking about instabilities within in a particular type of news construction process: organizational gatekeeping, or more accurately, the journalist-organization hybrid that has dominated news construction for most of the period from roughly 1950 to 1980. Yet even when viewed in these more restricted terms, it is not clear that the alarms are based on much more than disruptions or “punctuations” in this old equilibrium. It is by no means clear that a new gatekeeping standard has or even will arise to displace the still dominant one.

Although some of the “new news” trends are disturbing, the danger is that jumping to conclusions about the end of gatekeeping may keep us from seeing other factors that figure prominently in the incidence of scandal and journalistic negativity. If there are disruptive forces in the gatekeeping equilibrium, they include factors outside the news business as well. In particular, it should be clear from this analysis that as long as news organizations continue to favor the organizational model, politicians operate at their own peril if they choose to ignore it. In other words, some proportion of the disruption of news content may reflect the strategic decisions of politicians to ignore the information “gold standard” of symbiotic press relations. Some other proportion of the disruption of news content may reflect decisions of political sources to break with past standards of civility and ethics and introduce negativity and scandal into their symbiotic press-source relationships. In the case of the Clinton White House, the first calculation was adopted by Clinton, and the second by his opponents. The result was an amplification of scandal and negativity that cannot be attributed merely to the usual explanation of a shift to an economic-infotainment news model within media corporations.

The multigated model of news helps to illuminate the full collection of factors that contribute to changes in news content patterns. At the same time, its assumption of some independence among the factors helps to assess newly emerging styles of public information construction that may be on the horizon. For example, even if the organizational model of news construction could be stabilized, and more positive (i.e., “authoritative”) political coverage patterns restored, it is not clear that this model any longer serves the needs of many of today’s citizens. For example, social changes broadly associated with globalization have resulted in fundamental shifts in social structure, along with changes in political identity and attitudes about authority (Bennett, 1998; Rahn & Rudolph, 2001). Younger generations have disconnected from conventional news and politics in ways that neither the stabilization of the old news construction system nor the emergence of a new infotainment equilibrium would likely change.

What may make more sense than restoring the old equilibrium is to find and nurture new, technologically driven information models with the aim of recapturing citizen attention (Graber, 2001a, 2001b). Yet current critics are likely to miss many potentially interesting developments in information formats by associating them with a “gatekeeping crisis” that really entails instability within a particular and, perhaps, outmoded model of news construction. For example, many decry the



migration of younger demographics in the news audience to sources like *MTV* or *Comedy Central* for their information. Perhaps it makes more sense to recognize that these audiences will not return to conventional journalism, no matter how it is fashioned within the current parameters of the organizational–journalist ideal. Journalists might begin thinking about more creative uses of information technologies to reconnect audiences to society and politics. As Steven Rosenbaum, creator of *MTV News Unfiltered* describes the current disconnection of young people from conventional journalism:

Part of what's changing in society is this top-down model of where the media decide what's important and spoon feed it to a docile, accepting public. That's becoming obsolete, and a lot of people in journalism find that threatening. But all that's really happening is we're allowing the audience to participate in the news. That doesn't make us any less important, it just changes our role. (Lasica, 1996, p. 20)

The MTV news format is to screen story ideas from viewers and then send them camcorders and ideas about how to focus the selected stories, which the viewers then report.

For practitioners like Rosenbaum, the technological combination of more information sources and more consumer-driven content means that conventional organizational gatekeeping is not something to be restored; it is simply becoming obsolete. In this view, the most serious threat to gatekeeping is not the economic greed of media corporations, but the diverse social and political realities of publics:

... “Gatekeeper” suggests that journalists should be guardians of what comes into the public sphere—an antiquated notion in an age of information overload and reader directed news. Today, users often bypass the news media entirely and go to Internet search engines like Alta Vista and Yahoo! to get the information they want. The era of newspapers “breaking the news” is over—especially in an online universe. (Lasica, 1996, p. 20)

Although the last claim may seem hyperbolic, the development of high-quality electronic information networks is not something to be dismissed. The “desktop revolution” entails at least one area of great civic import: the expansion of often high-quality information sites run by responsible interest groups and issue advocacy organizations. Indeed, many organizations, particularly those dealing with complex global policy problems that seldom receive regular coverage in mass media news, have taken to conducting their own research and to publicizing their investigations on Web sites that often receive high volumes of traffic (Keck & Sikkink, 1998). Some sites (for example, [www.OneWorld.net](http://www.OneWorld.net)) have adopted broad “news” coverage of multiple issue areas governed by high editorial standards. Some of these middle-media citizen information sites have even entered syndication agreements with other Web-based information networks (for example, *One World* has forged such an agreement to post its stories on *Yahoo!*). Software currently in development will enable audiences to rate the relevance of postings and even to assess the credibility of the information they contain. The advantage of these developments is that they go beyond standard mass media in terms of the extent, the depth, and (potentially) the quality of information about a vast range of political subjects. Moreover, they provide citizens with information on demand, rather

than when it is supplied in sufficiently dramatic fashion by officials and prominent sources along organizational beats.

The growth of quality civic information sites on the Internet does not necessarily imply the isolation of audiences from commonly mediated imagined communities. Some of this independently generated information ends up flowing through the mainstream news, as when organizations stage press events to release dramatic reports or when government policy initiatives trigger a need for alternative views in mass media news about environmental, human rights, corporate conduct, or other advocacy concerns. Such middle-to-mass media crossover is a bonus for organizations that are daunted by the struggle to keep their issues in the shrinking mass media news space (Bennett, in press-a). More importantly, for many organizations and citizen activists who have grown cynical about both the press and the governmental response to their concerns, the proliferation of alternative electronic information channels comes as a welcome development offering a more direct link between information and citizen action than the news generally provides (Bennett, in press-a, in press-b).

Although critics of the current system implicitly call for a restoration of traditional top-down gatekeeping standards, they may fail to see how new technological developments offer the potential for improved information flows to citizens that create paths for civic engagement as part of the information flow itself. These electronic channels need not be divorced from mass media news, unless they are dismissed by limiting conceptions of what the news must be. If journalism can imagine truly interactive information environments so that citizens actually become part of the news frame, the next generation of news may be even more conducive to civic engagement than the last (Gamson, 2001). Instead of a one-way information flow shaped by varying patterns of press-government relations, new technologies offer the potential for multidirectional press-government-citizen gatekeeping relations. It is possible to imagine a gatekeeping system in which each set of players contributes meaningfully to the selection and construction of news. Perhaps the greatest challenge for journalists and politicians today is to learn how to use this technology to include citizens more fully in the public sphere.

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## The Presidency and the Media

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In this chapter we synthesize and summarize recent research on the media and the presidency: its animating ideas and questions, methods, data, and findings. We also identify major gaps in the literature.

In comparison to the abundance of books and articles separately on the presidency and its occupants or on the media, there is only a limited literature on the presidency and the media together. Much of it, moreover, is not research. We exclude three prominent types from our ambit: memoirs by presidents, their press secretaries, and other members of their staff; presidency texts; and journalism. We also exclude from analysis the many scholarly books about various aspects of the presidency, which, to our surprise and chagrin, make no or only passing mention of the media or just state the obvious. (We mention a few of them to illustrate this neglect of the media.)

Nevertheless, the academic books and articles we do include, most of them published since 1995, are more than sufficient to fill a chapter on the media and the presidency. They fall, not always comfortably, into five categories: elections, theories, presidents and the public, governing, and directions for research. (For a study of the media in American politics, with a chapter on the media and the presidency, see Paletz, 2002.)

### ELECTIONS

Political scientists often view campaigns and elections as the central area of interest in the study of politics, and that applies to media–presidency research. Obvious subjects amenable to study are the candidates' campaign strategies and tactics, political advertising, interactions with journalists, news coverage and media

depictions of nominating conventions and debates, and their effects on candidate preferences, voting, and other responses, by the public. We focus on overviews, media contents, effects, and the quality of coverage.

## Overviews

We start with research that covers several elections or entire campaigns. Kathleen E. Kendall's *Communication in the Presidential Primaries* (2000) catalogs the history of presidential primaries, including their media coverage. She examines how different rules and norms for primaries have affected communication between voters and candidates, as facilitated increasingly by the media. In particular, Kendall compares coverage of primaries before television and in the television era, finding more similarities than differences. The guiding principles of candidate reporting have changed little over time. The tendency to focus on conflict, adding evaluative dimensions, and the criteria for what to cover are consistent. Another constant is candidates' ability successfully to manipulate the press. In sum, the introduction of television and sophisticated media have "dramatically heightened and underlined previously existing media tendencies" (p. 200).

Marion Just and five coauthors engage in a "constructionist" account of the 1992 presidential election, to ascertain how voters make meaning from the "crosstalk" of citizens, candidates, and the media (Just et al., 1996). Their book focuses on four communities: Los Angeles, Boston, Winston-Salem, NC, and Moorhead, MN. For the citizens' viewpoint, the authors gather data from extensive interviews, public opinion surveys, and focus groups. To measure media effects, they content-analyze news from network and local news broadcasts, interview programs (such as those on Sunday mornings), and newspaper stories. Candidates' messages were recorded from their political ads aired in the four cities, and from criticism of political ads by ad watches.

Their analysis shows that, at least in 1992, people's political assessments of the candidates' characters were very influential in their voting decisions. Also, campaign issues were chosen by citizens, as revealed by their attention to the economy before and throughout the campaign. President Bush's opponents responded to this interest among the public, by using the issue against him. The media present a mostly consistent story about the campaign, focusing primarily, but not exclusively, on the horse race instead of the issues. In sum, however, the interaction of the dialogues among media, candidates, and citizens results in a combined rhetorical meaning for the campaign. The authors' synthesis of the variety of actors and factors in a presidential campaign is very useful for its comprehensiveness and combination of research methodologies, as well as its theoretical conclusions.

In the same vein as Just et al., but using an even wider range of methods (including experiments) and sources (including Web sites), Lynda Lee Kaid and her coauthors (Kaid, McKinney, & Tedesco, 2000) analyze the 1996 presidential election campaign as a civic dialogue with interplay among candidates, media, and public messages. Among their more important conclusions, presidential campaigns do matter, but at least in 1996, there was increasing apathy and indifference among the electorate.

## Media Contents

John Zaller (1998a) offers a model of the three-way interaction among candidates, journalists, and the people. He focuses on journalists' motivations. His hypothesis

is that the more a presidential candidate and campaign staff try to control his coverage in the press, the more journalists will resist covering him the way he wants and, instead, report something different. Zaller calls this the rule of product substitution, wherein journalists want to create and sell a good product, and when a candidate tries to control it for them, they substitute that product with their own. Meanwhile, news consumers want direct exposure to the candidates, not just journalists' reworking of the candidates into punditry, soundbites, and musical montages.

To test this hypothesis, Zaller codes two collections of data. One measures media negativity, defined as the number of negative comments in news stories generated by journalists. The other catalogs instances of news management by candidates, where candidates demonstrate either high or low levels of concern for how a story is reported. This second method is innovative and could be useful in other studies. Regression analysis shows media-initiated negativity to be correlated with high levels of news management by candidates. By controlling for spurious variables and specifying caveats, Zaller makes plausible claims about a causal, not just correlative, relationship between candidate attempts to control news content and treatment in news stories.

Dalton and his colleagues (Dalton, Beck, Huckfeldt, & Koetzle, 1998) studied the 1992 presidential election. Rather than asking people about their exposure to the news, they code news articles according to whether they are stimulated by the campaign (e.g., reporting a speech) or by the media (news analysis). They design and conduct their own survey for an independent measure of what voters thought were the important issues during the election. Strong correlations between media reports and what interested the public suggest to the authors that the media respond to, rather than direct, the public's interests, especially since the media raised few issues on their own. Correlations are higher between the issues people think are important and the ones candidates discuss than between the ones reported by the media and of concern to the public.

They conclude that the media respond to both the public's interests and the candidates' platforms. Generally high correlations among party platforms, candidates' speeches, journalists' coverage, and voters' interests lead them to conclude that these four jointly determine the campaign agenda.

## Effects

Several studies focus on the impact of the media's contents on the election results. In another article using the same data, Dalton and two of the coauthors of his previous article (Dalton, Beck, & Huckfeldt, 1998) examine more directly the degree to which media content affects people's learning and voting decisions. They complain that previous studies of such a phenomenon oversimplify the coding of newspaper articles, treat editorial endorsements as reflections of partisan news content, and assume without proving that media have become more critical of political candidates over time. Research has often neglected the cognitive reactions of individuals in reading the news to ascertain best whether the media have a direct effect on voting. They find that during a presidential campaign, the media do not speak with one voice; newspaper readers are exposed to multiple messages about the candidates and campaigns. People's responses are shaped by their political views as much as by the media contents. The authors report a "hostile media effect," in which partisans see balanced campaign coverage as biased toward the opposite



side. As a result, although higher partisan newspaper content is correlated with more partisan leaning by those readers, the effect is only modest. Nonetheless, newspapers' editorial content is significantly related to candidates' preferences, at least in 1992.

On the subject of cognitive reactions to presidential campaigns, Briens and Wattemberg (1996) compare the consumption of different types of media in their effects on people's recall and evaluation of presidential candidates. They too claim that the media are too often treated as a unitary force and wonder, instead, if voters in a presidential campaign respond differently to the different media of political ads, television news, and newspapers. Using data from the National Election Studies (NES), they show that people are able to remember political ads better than political news, in either televised or newspaper form. This is especially true when the ads are negative. Those who recall political ads are more likely to know the candidates' issue positions than those who watch television news and read the paper. A problem with this conclusion is that the survey's questions are asymmetric. They ask whether respondents recall political ads and then open-endedly ask which; but with newspaper and television news accounts, the authors produce an index that accounts for both frequency and attention of news consumption. Thus there is no measure of how many times a respondent saw a political ad in order to remember it. It is assumed that the more times a person watches the news, multiplied by the amount of attention he or she pays to it, the more political awareness he or she ought to have. But in measuring political ad recall, all negative responses are treated equally, whether a person saw an ad and forgot it or just did not see an ad. It is spurious to draw the conclusion that political ads are more effective in educating viewers than the slow but continuous process of consuming the news.

Shaw (1999a) uses state-level data from the 1988, 1992, and 1996 presidential elections to assess the relative impacts of campaign efforts on electoral outcomes by state. He measures these efforts in two ways: candidate appearances and, more relevant for this essay, campaign television advertisements. The latter's impact is measured according to the number of ratings points an ad receives, multiplied by the percentage of eligible voters in each media market. Shaw performs pooled time-series and cross-sectional analysis on his data, showing that campaign appearances and advertising efforts are positively correlated with a candidate's vote share, particularly for undecided voters. Shaw also uses computer simulation to show that changes in the candidates' relative levels of campaigning could affect electoral percentages. However, he claims, "There is little reason to suggest that presidential campaigning was decisive" in these three elections (p. 358).

Shaw (1999b) also compares the favorability of media coverage of a presidential candidate to the candidate's public support. Assuming that campaign events affect people's evaluations of candidates only as reported by the media, he creates separate measures for media effects and campaign effects. Using first-person accounts of the presidential campaigns of 1992 and 1996, Shaw codes all significant campaign happenings as either positive or negative. He uses existing data sets to measure the favorability of daily television and newspaper reports in some major markets, measuring them against tracking polls taken throughout the campaign. He finds that both media and campaign events cause fluctuations in support for candidates but that television has less effect than newspapers. More interestingly, campaign events show significant effects on voters independently of media effects. But given Shaw's assumption that campaign events are overwhelmingly experienced as filtered by

the media, it is questionable whether the distinction he makes between the two effects is very robust.

Marc Hetherington (1996) argues that negative media assessments of the economy contributed to Clinton's victory in the 1992 election. The economy seemed favorable for a Bush reelection early in the race, but over the course of the campaign the media persuaded news consumers that (1) the economy was in dire shape and (2) a change of presidents offered the best hope for fixing it. He claims that if citizens had voted on the actual state of the economy instead of the way the media portrayed it, George Bush would have been reelected. He uses regression analysis of NES data to show that "heavy media consumers" of news had more negative evaluations of the economy than light consumers and that light consumers tended to vote for Bush. His correlative links are clear, but his causal inference—that high consumption of news made people more likely to vote for Clinton—is not convincingly supported by his study.

### Quality of Campaign Coverage

Another major line of research into the electoral aspects of the presidential–media relation studies the quality of the media's coverage of presidential campaigns. Researchers are interested in questions that are both normative and popular, such as, Is coverage mainly about the horse race (including polls)? Do the media have a liberal bias? Are the media fulfilling their supposed responsibility of being the primary educators of the public about the candidates?

In his influential book, Thomas Patterson (1993), argues that in their selection and interpretation of presidential election campaigns, journalists view candidates as game players principally interested in winning. Thus news coverage focuses on the horse race: who is ahead, who is behind, and how the game is being played (or the race is being run). Candidates' statements and actions, including their policy positions, are viewed from this perspective.

Kenneth Dautrich and Thomas H. Hartley (1999) assume, with considerable validity, that declining partisanship and the availability of increasingly pervasive multimedia enhance the importance of news organizations as voters' primary source of information in presidential elections. Through a four-wave national panel survey they conducted during and immediately after the 1996 presidential election, the authors discovered that although voters become more satisfied with the news over the course of the campaign, they have a lengthy list of specific criticisms. The electorate is deeply dissatisfied with election coverage in the media they use the most and with its ability to aid them in deciding how to vote. Voters think that political news coverage is left-biased and focuses too much on the horse-race and campaign strategies and not enough on issues. Nonetheless, for reasons of personal taste, convenience, and political experience, they seem unlikely to change their source of information. Like Patterson, the authors conclude that the news media's campaign and election coverage is failing the American people.

Wayne Steger (1999) investigated the belief that over time news organizations have become increasingly critical and opinionated instead of reporting the news objectively. Believing that elections are particularly affected by media during the primaries when voters have the least information, he uses the 1996 nominating campaigns for his study. He counts the number of paragraphs mentioning each candidate in news and editorial pieces in the national editions of *The New York Times*

and the *Chicago Tribune*. His findings are predictable, if not tautological: Front-runners receive more and increasing coverage than also-rans, commentary reveals more ideological bias than news coverage, news stories pay much more attention to the horse race and the machinations of the campaigns than does commentary. Steger does not test his hypothesis that coverage is becoming more negative, since he studies only one part of one election.

June Woong Rhee (1996) responds to the common complaint that media coverage of campaigns focuses too much on the way the campaigns are going instead of providing useful information to voters trying to decide what candidate to support. She is further concerned that the polls being reported are not accurate; since proper sampling techniques are often short-cut. For example, news polls have different results if conducted on the weekend versus weekdays (more Democrats home on weekends than weekdays), and changes in poll numbers within the margin of error are treated as substantive changes reflecting on the candidates. Rhee counts how and how often *USA Today* used its own tracking poll data in articles on the campaign to test two hypotheses: (1) the larger the changes in the poll numbers for Clinton and Bush, the more reporting attention they will get; and (2) the more often the poll data are used, the more times campaign strategy will be the focus of articles. Using time-series data generated by LEXIS/NEXIS and a modeling technique called ARIMA, Rhee finds support for both hypotheses. She concludes with a normative argument that if media organizations want to use poll data as a chief generator of news stories, they should at a minimum improve their polling methods and, ideally, use polling to supplement issue-oriented stories, not as stories in themselves. Rhee's research is well executed and normatively interesting.

Challenging Rhee's findings on the extent to which polls dominate campaign coverage is Stephanie Greco Larson (1999). Larson does not share Rhee's concern that too much poll-driven coverage spells a big problem for democracy. Drawing on political theorists' ideas that there is much more to public opinion and democratic deliberation than polls, she suggests that "people-on-the-street" news stories (formerly known as man-on-the-street) match Jurgen Habermas's conception of the public sphere, in which citizens freely express themselves on political matters and other citizens listen intently. Her method is to perform content analysis on the nightly news broadcasts of the three major networks covering the 1996 presidential election. She compares news reporting of polls to common citizens' opinions. She finds that people-on-the-street reporting is rich in substance and conforms with the ideal of the public sphere. She credits the networks for devoting resources to this method of campaign coverage, especially NBC, whose series *Fixing America* aims explicitly to capture, unfiltered, people's opinions on national issues. Larson's rejoinder to media critics does not fully consider that this type of reporting is unrepresentative of the larger public.

A common question regarding the media and its coverage of politics is whether it has a liberal bias. Scholars have found that liberal bias was mostly a function of people's partisan beliefs, not their assessments of unfair media coverage of either side. Domke, Watts, Shah, and Fan (1999) try to identify the factors prompting conservative elites to allege liberal media bias and what influences the news media to report such criticisms during presidential campaigns. They suspect that complaints of a liberal media by conservatives is in part strategic. They therefore study the 1988, 1992, and 1996 presidential elections using content analysis and time-series polling data. They code each paragraph of a random selection of election articles from major American newspapers as positive or negative for each candidate. On

a separate sample, they identify news stories discussing the “liberal media” complaint, and compare both samples to poll data showing the highs and lows of each party’s standing in the public leading up to the election. They find that claims of liberal bias are not more likely when media coverage has actually been more favorable to Democrats or less favorable to Republicans but, rather, that such claims follow positive coverage of Republicans. They try to explain this counterintuitive phenomenon by suggesting that although conservatives may constantly complain about the liberal media, only when they are receiving particularly favorable coverage do these claims get reported. In turn, the authors find, poll numbers reflect the favorable coverage by showing increases in popularity for the Republican candidate. They conclude that conservative elites purposely make liberal bias claims during these period of Republican popularity so that news consumers will respond to the next shift in coverage by blaming the media, not the Republican party or candidate. These findings and conclusions do not draw any causal connections. The authors do not directly test their hypothesis that conservatives’ claims of liberal bias are a product of periods of favorable coverage for Republicans, only speculate. They provide no evidence that such claims are strategic decisions by conservatives; in fact, their data imply that the liberal media complaint is constant and is reported only when Republicans are receiving extra media attention.

Roderick P. Hart (2000) takes a much more positive, even halcyon, view of the media in presidential elections than the critical research and views described above. Campaigns and the media educate the public; the media are the forum for the political and social discourse that fuels democracy. To examine this discourse, Hart has developed a computer program he calls DIRECTION, which studies the words used in its large database of campaign speeches, print and broadcast news, political advertising, public debates, and letters to the editor, in the last 13 presidential elections. The program searches all input texts for five semantic features—activity, optimism, certainty, realism, and commonality. Because journalists must always select among the infinite things they can report on, and must interpret what they see, bias is inevitable. But he does not find any systematic bias in either print media or television. He concludes that where the media are not objective, they are at least skeptical; where they are not certain, they are interpretive; and where they are not comprehensive, they are energetic. The media, Hart contends, are both integral and positive in presidential elections. In sum, presidential campaigns inform people about issues, make them aware about the concerns of others, and, even if they do not encourage them to vote, increase people’s awareness of the political world.

## Omissions

Barely visible in all this research on presidential elections is the situation of the president as candidate: indeed, in 1988 and 2000, the incumbent of the office was not a candidate. Even when presidents are running for reelection there is very little discussion in the research of the benefits and burdens of incumbency other than mentions of invulnerability or vulnerability, the president’s record, and “Rose Garden” strategy. Nor are the election studies related systematically to such subjects as pre- or postelection president–media relations, the president’s agenda, or the president’s ability to go public. For example, research on presidential debates (discussed elsewhere in this volume) rarely considers the incumbent president’s debate dilemmas: whether to seek or avoid debates; once involved (embroiled) in

a debate, whether to claim credit and how much; how to show knowledge without appearing overbearing; and how to avoid appearing defensive.

## THEORIES

Presidents are loaded with expectations: to be the chief executive, ensuring faithful execution of the laws; the chief policy maker, proposing and pushing for congressional enactment of legislation; the commander in chief, in charge of national security; and a world leader. Presidents are deemed more or less responsible for the state of the nation's economy, for solving societal problems, for dealing with issues of foreign relations, and for leading the fight against terrorism. (See also Waterman, Wright, and St. Clair, 1999.)

However, the president's authority to meet expectations is limited by the U.S. Constitution's checks and balances, overlapping powers, and federalism; by the institutional conflicts inherent in the American political system. It can be and often is contested by other leaders at home and abroad, the opposing political party, members of the president's own party, authority holders in other institutions such as Congress and the Supreme Court, and interest groups. Critics and antagonists abound.

The circumstances in which a president takes office more or less limit him. Whom does he replace? What previous programs is he extending or rejecting? How strong is opposition to items on his policy agenda? What opportunities does he have for leadership? Inevitably, a president experiences problems. There are debilitating, even intractable, economic and social conditions. There are events that he neither wittingly inspires nor initiates but to which he must react or respond; plus the foolish or disastrous activities he undertakes.

The president, moreover, is surrounded by executive agencies, such as the Office of Management and Budget and the National Security Council. Lyn Ragsdale (1993) calls this "the plural presidency," pointing out how it "makes numerous decisions for presidents without necessarily full-fledged presidential involvement and how [its] ambiguous goals, methods, and participants beset presidential decisions" (pp. ix-x).

The president can command, but obedience does not necessarily follow. Indeed, command is often ignored. The president can invoke party loyalty, but members of his own party may be among his most vigorous opponents. He can look to interest groups, but their support is self-interested, therefore often sporadic and uncertain. He can bargain, make promises, offer blandishments and inducements. But his supply of rewards is limited, and potential recipients are many. He can threaten, even punish, but these weapons lose their potency if frequently applied, and make enemies to boot.

To try to accomplish their objectives presidents need the media. They like media coverage conducive to their personal, policy, and political interests. Such content favorably communicates their beliefs, aspirations, decisions, actions; it shows them in command, thereby improving their standing with the public and policy makers.

Conversely, presidents deplore unauthorized leaks, reporting they deem inaccurate or distorted, criticism they believe unwarranted (or even warranted), and negative depictions. If unpleasant news must be issued—and they realize that its appearance is inevitable—the president and his aides want to structure and interpret it for the media and thus the audience.

## Neustadt and Presidential Power

The leading theories of the presidency contain explicit or implicit assumptions about the president's use of and need for the media. Facilitating understanding of presidential behavior and successes and failures, taught to political science majors across the country, these theories have not, as we will show, been well and widely tested empirically.

Richard Neustadt (1990) wrote that the power of the president is the power to persuade. He describes the president as constantly bargaining for his objectives. By persuading other political actors that these are in their interests, he increases bargaining power, and to the extent that he can bargain successfully, he will be successful as president. A president's persuasiveness is positively related, in turn, to his professional reputation: the belief by those with whom he deals that he has skill and will. If Neustadt's thesis is correct, in modern times the media can be a significant resource at the president's disposal for his attempts to exert power through the art of persuasion and to display his skill and will.

Clearly presidents use the media to reach the public through set pieces such as addresses to Congress and through news-making activities. But there is little recent research systematically testing Neustadt's ideas. A conspicuous exception is the work of Gleiber, Shull, and Waligora (1998). They measured presidents' professional reputations on the basis of the length and valence of roughly 3,600 editorials and op-eds in *The New York Times* from 1961 to 1992. They conclude that professional reputation is not static and that "it is at least indirectly affected by media coverage of the president" (p. 379).

One could argue that most research on the president and the media implicitly tests Neustadt's theses. Moreover, many of the important normative questions surrounding the media's success in informing the voting public and, reciprocally, reflecting public opinion (for the president's use) are ultimately concerned with how the president is using the media to persuade people and how they are responding to the media's portrayal of the president's stands. Another possibility for the paucity of research testing Neustadt's propositions is that they are difficult to operationalize. How does one measure persuasion? What counts as a president's attempts to persuade? and How do we know when they occur?

## Kernell and "Going Public"

The other dominant media-related theory of presidential power is Samuel Kernell's (1997) "going public." In essence, his argument is that a president needs to rally public opinion to his side, then to use this public support to bring pressure on legislators and, sometimes, bureaucrats to conform to his view. Amplifying Kernell, Jeffrey E. Cohen and Ken Collier (1995) point out that presidents can go public for several additional reasons: to place items on the policy agenda of other institutions (usually successfully), to persuade people to put direct pressure on other policy makers, and to promote particular solutions to issues. Presidents may also seek to build their public prestige overall or to appeal to the populace, or a special segment of it, for support on a particular issue, usually a legislative battle. To go public, presidents need the media.

Kernell's theory is more easily tested than Neustadt's, and has been. David Lewis (1997) studies several independent variables affecting a president's choice to go

public on an issue. These include length of time since the election, whether his party has a majority in Congress, and issue content. He codes these variables in all major discretionary televised speeches made by presidents from 1947 to 1991. His dependent variable, going public, is coded according to whether, within a speech, the president calls for legislative action, makes direct appeals to the public to contact their members of Congress, or appeals directly for support on an issue. Lewis shows that the biggest predictor of going public is whether the issue is foreign or domestic: presidents go public on domestic, particularly economic, issues.

Matthew Corrigan (2000) uses President and Mrs. Clinton's health-care reform efforts as a test case for the going-public theory. His data are Gallup polls for the 11-month period after the proposal was introduced and speeches and interviews given by the President and First Lady during that time. He finds that the President did make "a considerable but inconsistent effort to win support for his plan" (p. 154), but the First Lady's attempts were merely inconsistent. Formidable challenges to the Clinton presidency during its first 18 months, including issue advertising from opponents of the health plan, interfered with the couple's attempts to win popularity for it. Corrigan shows that presidents do go public to try to achieve policy goals. They have an array of media options available, yet none of them turned out to be an effective way for a president to communicate the complexities of a vast governmental proposal, as occurred with health-care reform in 1993–1994. Neustadt and Kernell are only two of the many scholars who study the president and his style of communication, use of language, personality-driven behavior in office, and interactions with the public. Although all of these subjects can involve the media, the media are seldom central to the studies conducted.

## Presidents and the Public

Lori Cox Han (2001) has studied the White House communication strategies of eight presidents, from John F. Kennedy through Bill Clinton, during the television age. She shows how they consist of the president's leadership style, rhetoric and speechwriting, public activities, policy agenda, and presidential/press relationships.

## Institutions and Staff

The president is surrounded by institutions and staff whose main mission is to interact effectively with journalists, ensure that his coverage in the media is as favorable as possible, and, thus, make him look good to the American public. See Grossman and Kumar (1981) for a still-relevant study of the relationship between the president and the press. The most visible among the staff is usually the press secretary. W. Dale Nelson's *Who Speaks for the President?* (1998) is a historical look at the people, activities, and influence of press secretaries from Cleveland to Clinton. Nelson weaves together anecdotes and historical trends to show the diversity of roles press secretaries have played in various administrations.

Michael J. Towle (1997) takes an analytical look at the same question of the function of presidential press secretaries. Noting "the brief span of time in which the press secretary has risen from obscurity to prominence" (p. 297), he provides brief case studies of press secretaries from Eisenhower's James Hagerty to Carter's Jody Powell. He finds four elements contributing to a press secretary's success, where success is evaluated by the president and the press. These are (1) the

degree to which the press secretary is treated as an inner part of the administration, (2) how much the president controls the information the press secretary reveals, and how much (3) the president and (4) the press respect the secretary. Through his narrative descriptions, Towle demonstrates that secretaries who had these attributes were successful and those who lacked them did not perform well.

Whereas the press office deals almost exclusively with the Washington press corps, who monitor the president's activities closely through their "daily feeding" at press conferences and other means, the Office of Communications proactively supplies news to a plethora of local media agencies across the country. In his book *Spin Control*, John Anthony Maltese (1994) uses papers about the Office held by presidential libraries, supplemented with some 50 interviews, to describe the Office's evolution through various expansions, diminutions, and personnel and administration changes. His thesis is that the Office's attempts to manipulate news are detrimental to American democracy.

Mark Rozell (1995) also examines the spin control phenomenon but reaches conclusions divergent from those of Maltese. Assuming that the best people to ask about the success of the White House's attempts to manipulate the media are the ones doing the spinning, he interviews the media strategists of the Ford, Carter, and Reagan administrations. He finds that manipulation efforts are a function of contextual, personal, and strategic factors that vary, especially by administration. Media strategists are frequently thwarted in their efforts to portray a president or an event the way they like. Many factors outside the control of the White House affect the coverage of presidential news, suggesting that Maltese's concerns about the monopoly of message possessed by presidential media manipulators may be overblown.

Todd M. Schaefer (1997) examines one avenue the president uses to get his messages across, formal speeches. He is interested in the amount of control the president (and his speechwriters) has in setting the national agenda. He specifies four sets of possible influences determining editorial coverage: objective reality such as the state of the economy and any current crises; liberal bias; the "credibility gap"; and the political state of the president, meaning his popularity and perceived power. He compiles a data set of presidential State of the Union addresses from 1970 to 1995, as their requirement and regularity allow for proper control of the experiment. He then examines *New York Times* editorials written in response to the speeches. Regression analysis shows that the "political state of the president" determines the tone of coverage more than any of the other factors. This finding lends support to Neustadt's view that a president's power and political approval are connected.

## Coverage

Mark J. Rozell (1989, 1992, 1996) has written a series of books on how journalists reported and evaluated Presidents Carter, Ford, and Bush, respectively. Based on a comprehensive, chronological review of news stories, news analyses, commentaries, and editorials in *the New York Times*, *the Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, and the three national news weeklies, he identifies the themes of coverage under five categories of activities: timing, symbolism and rhetoric, policy agenda, policy development, and staff. He adds to this research selected administration



officials' (speechwriters, members of the press secretary's office, etc.) perceptions of the media's depictions of the president.

Rozell identifies journalists' expectations of presidential leadership that influence their perceptions of presidential success and failure. Then he uses these expectations to help explain why President Ford had so much difficulty achieving a positive presidential image; why President Carter went from an initially favorable to a persistently negative depiction; and why President Bush, failing to integrate his agenda with a press relations strategy, was characterized in the media as not having a philosophy of governance, as not being a visionary domestic leader.

Rozell's research is original, thorough, and much needed. However, his analysis of the media's contents is more impressionistic than systematic and ignores television. More important, it tests no theories.

## Public Opinion

A paramount objective of the White House press operation is to influence public opinion. Thus public opinion about the president should be one of the most important areas of research into the presidency and the media. It certainly is for presidents: Diane J. Heith (2000) recounts how President Clinton, with the aid of Dick Morris, used public opinion polls to design his strategy against the attempt to impeach and convict him. Presidents' attempts to woo the public are not invariably successful. Diana Owen (1997) shows that many listeners to talk radio negatively evaluated Clinton's personal qualities and job performance; they also perceived him as a liberal. But because these people were negatively predisposed toward the president, talk radio's main effect was to reinforce anti-Clinton proclivities.

Most recent research on the president and public opinion is limited to three general areas: cognitive psychological responses, presidential approval ratings, and scandals.

Under cognitive psychology, Goidel and Shields (1997) apply the Receive, Accept, and Sample (RAS) model developed by John Zaller (1992) to the 1992 presidential election. In this model, people's receptivity to information is a function of the exposure environment and their predispositions for receiving new information.

This model has typically been considered separately from priming theory (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). Priming theory holds that media content (specifically television news) shapes the public's political priorities. More precisely, it sets the agenda of what people believe to be the important issues. It does so by paying attention to some problems and ignoring or paying minimal attention to others. The effect is particularly pronounced in lead stories. The audience's characteristics are important: The agenda-setting effects are most immediately apparent on people directly affected by the problem, but political partisans, interested and active in politics, are less susceptible than the politically indifferent.

Goidel and Shields focus on the period between George Bush's handling of the Gulf War and his election defeat the next year. According to the RAS model, individuals who had greater exposure to the media when challenger Bill Clinton and the media were both focused on the economy as the central campaign issue would have greater disapproval of Bush's handling of the economy during the election. Strong Democrats should react with even more disapproval, whereas Independents would be more resistant, and Republicans would not be affected at all. Priming theory, meanwhile, suggests that individuals have preexisting attitudes about George

Bush and how they should evaluate him and that their reactions to subsequent information, such as Bill Clinton's blaming Bush for the state of the economy, affect people according to how politically sophisticated they are and what information schema they have already developed in their heads (Krosnick & Brannon, 1993).

Goidel and Shields use NES data from the period between the Gulf War and the 1992 election to test these hypotheses. They also survey *New York Times* front-page articles, gather standard data about the economy, and track President Bush's approval ratings. Their analysis shows a clear relationship between respondents' political awareness and their reaction to media coverage of the economy, with the highly politically aware (more set in their beliefs) and the politically unaware (overly optimistic about the economy due to less news exposure) showing less resistance to media messages. Those in the middle, meanwhile, were the most susceptible to changing their opinions. Further, there is a relationship between the partisanship of respondents and their openness to change in response to media messages, in the predictable directions. These two findings are consistent with the Zaller model.

With regard to the priming model, the data show that the media's increased attention to the economy as the Gulf War became temporally distant did increase individuals' focus on economic matters. But these effects are not a function of an individual's political awareness or media exposure. Goidel and Shields speculate that the Gulf War was too dramatic and brief to have had lasting priming effects on future political stories. They do show that priming and the RAS model's attitude change happen independently, but simultaneously, so that the overall impact of media content in affecting people's evaluation of the president is greater than would appear in studies that look at only one of the two.

## Presidential Approval

Edwards, Mitchell, and Welch (1995) are interested in the relationship between the salience of issues in a presidential administration and approval of the president. Previous work on presidential approval, they find, attends to mass-level, not individual, behavior. This focus provides very little information about why the public may approve more or less strongly of the president: Do people blame him for some problem in the country? If so, what? Are they responding to the media? What accounts for changes in presidential approval?

The authors suspect that issue salience is the answer. Issue salience, they believe, based on others' research, is largely a function of media priming. The media tell people what issues are important, and then people develop their own opinions about those issues. Using the *Television News Index and Abstracts and Newspaper Index*, the authors count television minutes and column inches to determine the salience of the economy and foreign affairs over time. They find that issues salient to the public evaluations of the president's performance have more impact on his approval. Thus greater attention to a poorly performing economy resulted in lower approval for President Bush. The phenomenon holds even though independent measures of the economy indicated that it was actually on an upswing at the time.

Edwards and Swenson (1997) investigate a phenomenon closely related to presidential approval, "the rally effect." Originally proposed by John Mueller (1973), it is that international crises, irrespective of the policies that produce them, can increase the president's public support. The rally is produced by a patriotic public

reaction to threats to a nation's safety. Richard A. Brody (1991) has adduced data suggesting that rallies appear only if opposition elites refrain from publicly and actively criticizing the policies giving rise to the crisis. A rally requires "(1) A presidential monopoly of the interpretation of the meaning of the events and the actions required to end the crisis; (2) A silent or supportive political elite; (3) News media that abjure independent policy criticism . . ." (Brody, 2000, p. 55).

Edwards and Swenson want to separate the obvious fact that in the aggregate the public rallies around a president engaged in a foreign military dispute from the reasons that individuals change their minds from having a negative or neutral opinion about the president to approving of him. They use data gathered in a *New York Times* panel study conducted both before and after President Clinton authorized an air attack on Iraq in June 1993. Nearly half of the initial interviewees were reinterviewed. Their analysis demonstrates that the people who rallied are those predisposed to support the president in the first place. They show that the media heighten this inclination, but they are not able to separate out media effects from partisan and cognitive tendencies.

## Presidential Scandals

Most presidencies and even occasional presidents experience (may be embroiled in) scandals that are usually reported and discussed extensively in the media. This coverage, in turn, attracts analysis from researchers.

Brown and Vincent (1995) consider events during the Reagan administration's policies known as "Irangate." They wish to test which prevailed: media as watchdog or the president as media manipulator. The authors study three major newspapers and the administration's Tower Commission Report investigating the details of Iran policy in the 1980s. They take the Tower report to be written evidence of the "spin" the Reagan administration attempted to put on the arms-for-hostages scandal. Brown and Vincent evaluate each sentence in a sample of news stories, editorial pieces, and the Tower report for inferential as opposed to factual content, as well as their favorability for the president's policies. They find that, indeed, newspaper articles are more critical of the administration than is the Tower report; only 9% of the Tower report was critical of Reagan's Iran policy. Further, news accounts used more inference and judgment than the report. Thus, the authors conclude that the media successfully resisted government attempts to write the news and support the media watchdog model. However, against the authors' hypothesis, the Tower report portrayed the events as "trading arms for hostages" much more often than as diplomatic efforts. This leads us to wonder whether using the Tower report in this case was a reasonable way to portray the administration's spin.

In his 1991 book *Feeding Frenzy*, Larry Sabato described political scandals as blood in the water that turns journalists into crazed, hungry sharks. Paul J. Maurer (1999) tests this contention against two Clinton scandals that followed Sabato's book. According to Sabato, feeding frenzies are the product of, among other things, a post-Watergate investigative media, competitive pressures brought by the proliferation of news gatherers, and agreement that politicians' character is fair game. Maurer evaluates these elements in the Gennifer Flowers and Paula Jones scandals, using *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, which he claims are representative of the media at large. He concludes that the two newspapers in these two cases demonstrated a pack journalism mentality but that every other factor of a feeding frenzy was largely or totally absent from the Flowers and Jones cases.

Lind and Rarick (1999) are interested in the public's reaction to the news media's recent coverage of political scandals. They interview 111 individuals shown the same local news story on the Clinton–Flowers scandal, trying to measure people's sensitivity to the airing of ethical issues on television. Their measures show a broad diversity of reactions to the story but an overall weak ability in the public to evaluate ethical stories. That is, people lacked the “media literacy” to understand the consequences of an ethical scandal to all of those affected.

John Zaller (1998b) ventured into the Bill Clinton–Monica Lewinsky scandal. He tries to separate the media's shaping of public opinion about the events from the public's independent opinions. Combining content analysis of news stories about Monica Lewinsky in the days surrounding this story's appearance with polling data about presidential approval, Zaller points out that the Wednesday the news broke and Thursday immediately after, coverage was very negative toward the president, and poll approval went down 7 points. After those first 2 days coverage was much more balanced, and presidential approval reclaimed those 7 points and added 8 to 10. For Zaller, the media have some responsibility for the public's reaction, but not all. More important, Clinton's record at the time was “any president's dream” (p. 3), as the president highlighted in his State of the Union address 6 days after “Lewinsky” became a household name. At the time, this speech was the fourth-most watched broadcast ever. Zaller concludes that the public are not sheep following media reports without resorting to their own opinions; they focus instead on the bottom lines of peace, prosperity, and ideological moderation.

## GOVERNING

### Congress

Congress is one of the most studied institutions in political science, and its relations with the president are often considered. Yet, despite their involvement in framing, facilitating, and explaining this relationship, the media are often left out of the analysis. An example is Steven A. Shull's (1997) *Presidential–Congressional Relations*. At least the first two of the four aspects he covers—presidential position taking, controversy over congressional votes, legislative support of the president, and executive order issuance—are ripe for consideration of media influence, yet Shull does not consider it. How are position taking and controversy captured and measured, if not by the media? If Congress is guided by its constituents, how do people gather information on issues about which to contact their representatives, if not through the media? Members of Congress and the president obtain information about the activities of government from the media. Yet the media are not prominent in Shull's work.

A notable exception to the dearth of research in this area is the work of Edwards and Wood (1999), which considers policy making as a function of the reciprocal influence of the president, Congress, and the media. They observe that despite agreement that the president has great importance in the national policy-making process, academic studies do not systematically and effectively measure presidential influence. So they seek to measure the president's ability to set the congressional agenda by focusing mass media attention on the issues of interest to him and thereby influencing legislators to act on that agenda.

Edwards and Wood measure media attention as the number of minutes devoted to five issues—crime, education, health care, U.S.–Soviet relations, and the

Arab–Israeli conflict—on the nightly news broadcasts of the three major networks between 1984 and 1994. They measure presidential attention by counting the number of paragraphs mentioning the key words associated with the five issues in *The Public Papers of the President*, an annual compilation of presidential activities. They measure congressional attention by counting the number of mentions in the Congressional Information Service Index, a compilation of congressional hearings. They show that the avenues of influence among the president, Congress, and the media are many and varied. The president often reacts, responding to fluctuations in media attention and world events, although, especially in domestic policy, presidents have the opportunity to be more entrepreneurial, presenting initiatives that influence the agendas of both Congress and the media. Reciprocally, the media exert the greatest effect on the president, whereas Congress does not influence the president or the media, and is only influenced by them on the outlier issue of education.

### **The Supreme Court**

There is little research on the relations of the president to the Supreme Court as filtered by the media. John Anthony Maltese (1995) considers media portrayals of president's public rhetoric in his Supreme Court nominations. He shows that Samuel Kernell's "going public" can be applied to the president's relations with the high court, not just the Congress. Maltese observes that only in recent years have presidents turned to the public to engender support for their Court appointments, and sees this as a reflection of the institutionalization of the "public presidency." He documents the changes in presidents' strategy in garnering public support for Supreme Court nominees by counting presidents' news conferences, speeches, and written statements about them. He supplements these data with historical variations caused by the president's personality, technological and attitude changes in the media, and the success or failure of previous appointment strategies. For example, until 1929, Supreme Court appointments were almost always discussed by the Senate in closed session; President Nixon was the first to announce his choice on television, but Reagan broke all records, with 34 public statements about nominee Robert Bork. The essay is a useful look at the changes wrought by the media.

### **Public Policy**

There is of course abundant research on public policy, some of it involving the president as policy maker. Occasional studies focus on the involvement of the media in public policy (Bennett and Paletz, 1994). But most policy research does not include both the president and the media. As a typical example, Launius and McCurdy's (1997) edited volume *Spaceflight and the Myth of Presidential Leadership* does not consider the media in the relations between presidents and the space program. Yet presidents and NASA have used the media to promote the program, which, for many years after its inception, received favorable news coverage and depictions in movies (*The Right Stuff*, *Apollo 13*). Surely, the media have been relevant to such significant events as President John F. Kennedy's "go to the moon" pledge, the first lunar landing itself, the *Challenger* disaster, and robotic missions to Mars. The conclusion of the book is that "a careful examination of the record of presidential leadership in space exploration reveals that actual events differed considerably

from perceptions” about the president’s role in inspiring and directing space exploration (p. 222). A thesis about public perceptions that overlooks the centrality of the media in interactions between the public and their president is incomplete.

One of the few studies attempting to analyze the relationship among the president, the media, and public policy, and the difficult task of measuring the effects of the media in affecting the president’s public policy-making efforts, is that by Jeffrey E. Cohen (1995). Comparing presidents’ State of the Union Addresses against the Gallup Poll’s most important problem series, he found that increases in presidential attention to economic, foreign, and civil rights policy areas led to increases in public concern with these policies. Even mere mentions seemed to elicit a public response. Popular presidents were no more influential than unpopular ones. And, except for foreign policy, the effects decayed within a year.

William J. Gonzenbach (1996) attempts to trace the causal relationships among the public’s concerns, the media’s agenda, and the president’s public agenda regarding the drug problem in the late 1980s. His data are a compilation of public opinion polls across time, content analysis of presidential public relations issues from *The Public Papers of the Presidents*, federal expenditures on the drug problem, and real-world cues surrounding the drug issue. He uses the ARIMA modeling technique and Granger causality tests, which allow the user to see how changes in one variable affect changes in another over time. His analysis indicates that the agendas of the public, the president, and the media are determined primarily by events. First, an underlying drug problem was seen by individuals to be affecting their friends, families, and communities. Months later, government would respond with funding, then the media would report on the subject, and next the president would adopt the issue for his agenda. The finding that the president responds to the public agenda rather than setting it is a surprising but recurring theme in recent research. Next, the high salience of the drug issue reinforced all of the causal patterns; as the issue went from new to severe in the public’s consciousness, media, government, and the president all increased their attention. By 1991, however, even though the severity of the drug problem had not declined, it shared the public spotlight with newer issues.

Peer and Chestnut (1995) test for the degree of autonomy exercised by the media. They compare newspaper and television coverage of the same issue, in this case the Gulf War. Their hypothesis is that television was more supportive of the Bush Administration than newspapers because television, they argue, provides a single, dramatic picture of a story, whereas newspapers can easily include divergent viewpoints and aspects on the same page. Coding news stories and articles from both media during a 2-week period, they conclude that newspapers are more autonomous than television news, which is dangerous if citizens are increasingly getting their news from television, to the exclusion of newspapers.

## RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The president is the focus of American government and politics and receives the most media attention. Much presidential behavior is influenced by his need to use the media to reach the public (including the electorate), and sometimes communicate with other policy makers his understanding of the relevance of media depictions of his activities, and his occasional reliance on the media for information.

The research on the presidency and the media we have described and discussed is impressive in many ways. It covers several areas and ranges from general to specific subjects. A notable strength is its increased methodological sophistication. Difficulties of abstracting news content into coding data, numerically analyzing presidential speeches and actions, and measuring public opinion have been overcome. Researchers are also beginning to use accounts by politicians and journalists for systematic analysis, as done by one researcher in this essay (Shaw, 1999b).

At the same time, the research is also inadequate in many ways. Most obviously, it is undertheorized. Moreover, although we have tried to show connections in our survey, studies tend to be unrelated to one another. There is a dearth of thoughtful and systematic research on several subjects, such as the involvement of the media in relations between the presidency and interest groups, the presidency and political parties, and the presidency and the bureaucracy. Other topics, e.g., public policy, are underresearched. And as we have pointed out, even on subjects covered, extensively, such as elections, important questions are barely considered.

Two additional subjects deserving research are popular culture and technology. Presidents are perennial figures in popular culture. Movies about American presidents, real and imagined, keep appearing. Averaging one a year during the 1990s, they ranged in box office receipts from the modest \$2.5 million for *Jefferson in Paris* to the astronomical \$173 million for *Air Force One*. Their genres include fictional biographies (*Nixon*), romances (*The American President*), adventure (*Air Force One*), and one we dub "cynical" (*Wag the Dog*). The latest popular culture incarnation of the president appears on television in *The West Wing*. With exceptions (*Nixon*), these presidents are idealistic and virtuous, display unabashed patriotism, and triumph over assorted immoralities, although the ways in which they do so are sometimes unrealistic fantasies. Yet aside from working papers by Michael Genovese (2000) and Michael Krukones (2000), issued by the Political Film Society, we have uncovered no published research on or analyses of popular culture depictions of presidents.

New research on the impact of technology is also desirable. One could argue that changes in media technology are almost totally responsible for the changes in the relationship between the president and the public that have occurred in the 20th century. For example, in a study of Nielsen audience ratings for presidential appearances between 1969 and 1998, Matthew A. Baum and Sam Kernell (1999) show that cable television ended the ability of presidents to enlist prime-time television to promote their policies.

Stephen Ponder (1998) has cataloged the changes in the treatment of the president even before television began, demonstrating how the recognition of the importance of the news media resulted in the institutionalization of the presidential press secretary and White House press corps, which made the president, instead of Congress, the center of news making in Washington. The dynamic growth in non-partisan periodicals and radio gave presidents a new way to communicate directly with the nation. Subsequently, presidents had to learn how to use the media most effectively: how to get along with the newly developing White House press corps, how to compete successfully with the many other kinds of news being reported, how to court favorable instead of critical coverage. Successful presidents learned that media coverage was very important to their presidency, and by according it the status it now deserved, they could increase their popularity in the public. (For the example and a discussion of Franklin Roosevelt's fireside chats, see Ryfe, 1999.)

Patricia S. Misciagno (1996) offers a critical take. Her thesis is that changes in media technology and proliferation have dismantled the “mythic president,” whose private life was private, and who, she claims, did not try to manipulate the “message” of his administration. Today, increased competition among a wide variety of media outlets, 24-hour news channels and the Internet, and the institutionalization of the White House’s press relations have changed the culture of presidential politics. Few subjects are off-limits from scrutiny and criticism; the president is not treated as beyond reproach and his credibility is not necessarily taken for granted. The author allows that some of this new disdain for the presidency may be attributable to more universal skepticism about government and authority. But she makes a compelling case that the news media have participated in dismantling the naive view of a perfect president that prevailed in times past. Of course, this view ignores the existence of a partisan press during much of American history. Further, cynicism, even skepticism, may be suspended at least for a while, when a president leads the country in a conflict against a foreign enemy.

The new medium with the greatest potential to change the way politics are transacted is the Internet. The White House has a home page big on promotion and publicity, extolling the president and his family, advocating his policies, and lauding his accomplishments (real and claimed). It tells people how to obtain copies of presidential speeches and announcements, transcripts of daily press briefings and releases, and texts of major documents. It is also interactive, allowing people to express agreement or disagreement with the president’s policy positions. As yet, however, there is no compelling research on the Internet and the presidency.

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PART

# IV

## **POLITICAL COMMUNICATION AND PUBLIC OPINION**



## The Spiral of Silence and the Social Nature of Man

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Ever since it was first presented at a psychology conference in 1972 (Noelle-Neumann, 1972) and shortly thereafter in the *Journal of Communication*, the spiral of silence theory has attracted considerable attention in the social sciences. Nevertheless, the theory has often been misunderstood. Many of these misconceptions derive from the first article describing the theory, which was published in the *Journal of Communication* in 1974 and seems to have left its mark on how the theory is perceived to this day (Noelle-Neumann, 1974).

George Gerbner, the editor of the *Journal of Communication* at the time, decided to publish a substantially abridged version of the paper, arguing that it was not possible to present “the whole waterfront” of such a complex theory in a journal article. Although his reasoning was undoubtedly correct and hence understandable, it is precisely the article’s lack of complexity that has led many to assume until today that the spiral of silence theory can be reduced to one core hypothesis, i.e., that people who believe that they hold a minority opinion tend to fall silent and conceal their views in public.

Although this assumption is, indeed, a key element of the spiral of silence theory and, as such, is not incorrect, it is also not entirely correct when put in such simplified terms. In fact, the tendency to speak out or remain silent is only part of a very extensive theoretical approach that attempts to explain how public opinion affects peoples’ lives and behavior, how it ensures social cohesion and contributes to the decision-making process.

### WHAT IS PUBLIC OPINION?

Discussing the concept of public opinion in theoretical terms is particularly encumbered by the thicket of confusion, misunderstandings, and communication

problems surrounding the concept. “There is no generally accepted definition of public opinion.” It was with this statement that W. Phillips Davison began his article on public opinion in the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* in 1968. “Nevertheless,” Davison continued, “this term has been employed with increasing frequency.” Today, more than 30 years later, the very same sentence could still be used to start an article of this kind.

According to reference book entries around the world, the term “public opinion” allegedly came into being in the 18th century. It is often associated with prerevolutionary France and the French Minister of Finance, Jaques Necker. Yet the term is actually far older than that. The earliest indications of its use date back as far as antiquity, where it appears in a letter by Cicero to his friend Atticus (ad Atticum VI. 1, 18, 2). At the start of the modern age, the term is found in various languages, such as Spanish, English, German, and French, for example, in the essays of Michel de Montaigne ([1588] 1962, pp. 115, 143) and, finally, in the writings of Jean-Jaques Rousseau in the mid-18th century. Rousseau employed the term so frequently and matter-of-factly that it must have already been widely used at the time.

Since antiquity, a great number of synonyms for public opinion have also been used, including such simple expressions as *opinione* and *opinion*. Early instances of such usage are found, for example, in the writings of Niccolò Machiavelli, William Shakespeare, William Temple, John Locke, and David Hume. The first known use of the phrase “climate of opinion” in English was discovered by Robert K. Merton in the works of Joseph Glanvill (1661). In 1965, the prominent American political scientist Harwood Childs published his book, *Public Opinion: Nature, Formation and Role*, including almost 50 definitions of public opinion in the second chapter, “The Nature and History of Public Opinion.”

Why has the term public opinion taken on such a confusing wealth of different meanings? From antiquity onward, public opinion and the various synonyms for the concept were employed in the sense of social control. Public opinion was understood as a form of broad social consensus to which both the government and each individual member of a particular society must adhere. As Aristotle declared, “He who loses the support of the people is a king no longer.” This was expressed in a similar way by Erasmus of Rotterdam and Machiavelli, as well as by William Temple in a collection of his writings compiled by Jonathan Swift (Erasmus, [1516] 1968; Machiavelli, [1532] 1971; Temple, 1731). Or, as David Hume ([1741/1742] 1963) succinctly commented in 1739, “It is . . . on opinion only that government is founded; and this maxim extends to the most despotic and most military governments, as well as to the most free and most popular” (p. 29).

According to an account by Thucydides, Pericles refers to “unwritten laws” in a speech commemorating those who died in the Peloponnesian War (Niedermann, 1991). This term, which was widely used in antiquity, was taken up again in the 18th century by Rousseau, ([1762] 1953), who described unwritten laws as being “graven not in marble or bronze, but in the hearts of the citizens . . .” (p. 58). As strange as it sounds to us now, unwritten laws were synonymous with public opinion.

In a passage addressing the issue of public opinion in the 1588 (1962) edition of his *Essais*, Montaigne describes Plato’s contemplations on how to influence public opinion. According to Montaigne, Plato viewed pederasty as a dangerous passion that should be condemned by public opinion. The way to achieve this, Plato believed, would be to convince poets to portray the practice as a vice. The entire

citizenry, including women, children, and slaves, would then follow the poets' lead and adhere to this new public opinion. As this example illustrates, public opinion was by no means viewed as an intellectual construct pertaining only to the elite, but as a far-reaching, all-encompassing pressure to conform, a form of social control that guides society and ensures social cohesion.

In the 18th century, however, the term public opinion experienced a highly peculiar semantic shift. Reason, which had come to be so highly prized, was now also viewed as the essence of public opinion, which was equated with the opinion of discriminating, well-informed, responsible citizens who were willing to engage the government in reasoned debate. This definition increasingly gained ground. It continued to prevail even in the latter half of the 20th century, as reflected, for example, by Wilhelm Hennis's (1957) definition of public opinion in the 1950s. Similar interpretations of the concept of public opinion are found in the works of Pierre Bourdieu (1979; Beniger, 1992; Herbst, 1992), Michel Foucault (Peer, 1992), and Jürgen Habermas (Goodnight, 1992). At the same time, however, the age-old meaning of public opinion was not lost and continued to thrive. Thus, these two completely different definitions of the concept became entwined, leading to considerable confusion in writings on the subject.

There would be no need to spend so much time discussing how the meaning of a term like public opinion has changed were it not for the fact that conceptualizing public opinion as the domain of an intellectual elite represents a gross misunderstanding of both human nature and the sociopsychological mechanisms at work in a democracy. The most important characteristic of public opinion, which has prompted social scientists to investigate it again and again, is the overwhelming power it wields over both the government and individual members of society. The concept of public opinion as a form of rational judgment is completely incapable of explaining how public opinion is able to strike fear in the hearts of mighty rulers and trigger popular revolts. The power that public opinion exerts can be explained only by returning to the traditional view of public opinion as it has been understood for centuries, i.e., public opinion in the sense of social control. In other words, we must assume that public opinion derives its power from man's social nature, which has developed over the course of evolution, from the modes of behavior that promote social life—and these are not based on rational or logical thought but on emotional, reflexive, subconscious reactions.

## **THE DISCOVERY OF THE SOCIAL NATURE OF MAN**

In Western cultures, which bear the stamp of the Enlightenment, a remarkably great number of people find it difficult to accept the idea of a social nature of man. Viewing public opinion not as the outcome of rational decision-making processes but as the result of subconscious collective behavior is incompatible with the democratic ideal and the notion of the independent individual who makes decisions after thoroughly weighing the advantages and disadvantages.

It is striking that many philosophers and researchers who have dealt with the social nature of man have encountered massive resistance among their contemporaries, as if the results of their investigations represented an attack on man's free will. An early example of such resistance is found in the case of John Locke. In



the following passage, Locke (1894) exquisitely describes how the court of public opinion forces people to conform due to their fear of isolation:

But no man escapes the punishment of their censure and dislike, who offends against the fashion and opinion of the company he keeps, and would recommend himself to. Nor is there one of ten thousand, who is stiff and insensible enough, to bear up under the constant dislike and condemnation of his own club. He must be of a strange and unusual constitution, who can content himself to live in constant disgrace and disrepute with his own particular society. Solitude many men have sought, and been reconciled to: but nobody that has the least thought or sense of a man about him can live in society under the constant dislike and ill opinion of his familiars, and those he converses with. This is a burden too heavy for human sufferance. (Vol. I, p. 479)

One might have thought that these lines—which are so poignant in terms of the emotion conveyed and their empathy with the human condition—would have immediately opened people’s eyes to what can be called the “social nature of man.” After all, Locke did not write them merely in passing, but formulated a law based on his observations that he considered to be on a par with divine law and civil law. He called it the “law of opinion, reputation and fashion.” When Locke uses the expression “law,” he does not do so frivolously or casually. Rather, he explains quite clearly, when an action involves a law, a reward or punishment that is not intrinsic to the act itself must ensue from it (p. 476). The disapproval of their environment: this is the punishment that awaits those who infringe against the law of opinion, reputation, and fashion, and, Locke maintains, this disapproval is feared more than divine punishment or punishment by civil law enforcement authorities.

But these ideas brought Locke no happiness. He was accused of relativizing good and evil in a terrible way, of transforming that which stemmed from divine law into a matter of consensus among private individuals, of degrading moral issues to nothing more than a matter of fashion. Locke thus became the target of precisely the type of public disapproval he had described. Ultimately, in the third edition of his book, he altered the passage describing man’s sensitivity toward the disapproval of his environment, replacing it with stilted formulations.

The next great pioneer in the discovery of the social nature of man was Jean-Jacques Rousseau in the mid-18th century. Rousseau (1964) summed up his observations in a few very concise lines: “Man, as a social being, is always oriented outward; he first achieves the basic feeling of life through the perception of what others think of him” (p. 193). Rousseau recognized the battle between people’s individual nature and their social nature, between the need to satisfy their own needs and pursue their own interests, on the one hand, and the need to be recognized and respected, on the other. But how, he queried, were people “to find a form of association which defends and protects the person and property of each member with the whole force of the community, and where each, while joining with all the rest, still obeys no one but himself, and remains as free as before. This is the fundamental problem” (Rousseau, [1762] 1953, pp. 14–15).

The work by ethnic psychologist Wilhelm Wundt (1832–1920) on the significance of gestures among primitive peoples provided a major stimulus for George Herbert Mead of the University of Chicago, who is the next great “giant” along the way toward discovering the social nature of man—whereby “giant” is used in the sense

of Robert Merton, who once remarked, “Our work rests upon the shoulders of giants,” meaning that science, if it is to be successful, must develop a continuity over the course of generations, enabling each new generation of scientists to build upon the knowledge gained by the previous generation.

Mead (1863–1931), the discoverer of “symbolic interaction,” studied in Germany, albeit in Berlin and not in Leipzig where Wundt was teaching. Yet it was while he was studying in Germany that Mead recognized the significance of Wundt’s theory that people communicate via gestures even before any words are uttered, based on their assumption that these gestures have a common symbolic meaning.

Mead crossed over a decisive threshold in the investigation of the social nature of man via his discovery of the inner realm in which individuals imagine what others are saying about them, what others think of them, how others will judge them, prior to the display of any actual external reaction. People thus symbolically anticipate the punishments of isolation and condemnation that will ensue from infringing against the law of opinion, reputation, and fashion.

To understand Mead’s work, we must be careful not to confuse the process of symbolic interaction with what is known as empathy, i.e., our ability to put ourselves into other people’s shoes, so to speak, and thus understand them better. Symbolic interaction does not entail understanding other people better but, instead, refers to our ability to foresee how others will react to us. Mead distinguishes between “I” and “Me,” whereby I signifies people’s consciousness of their own identity, whereas Me refers to their self-image, to how they believe they are seen or judged by others. The individual constantly alternates between these two perspectives.

Mead fared no better than his predecessors: He was reviled and ridiculed. The perspective he had outlined was too unconventional. And so it happened that Mead did not actually write his great classic work, *Mind, Self, and Society* ([1934] 1974): After experiencing the scorn of his colleagues, he had resolved not to write any more books. Instead, the book was compiled by several of his students based on his lectures and was published 3 years after his death.

On reading the minutes of a lecture Mead gave at the Sixth International Philosophy Congress at Harvard in 1926, it is obvious that he was trying to please the high priest of philosophy during his day, Alfred North Whitehead. His writing, too, was just as stilted as that of John Locke.

The work of Erving Goffman (1922–1982), who was born 9 years before Mead’s death, represents the next milestone along the way to discovering the social nature of man. Goffman was not a sociologist, but a psychologist, and the most important inspirations for his work derived from his 2.5-year stint at a psychiatric clinic. He subsequently taught as a university professor in California and Pennsylvania. The titles of his books and essays strike a new tone: *Behavior in Public Places* (1963a) and *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (1963b).

“*Stigma*,” “public places”: These were totally foreign concepts in the jargon of social scientists at the time. In Germany, the respected sociologist Friedrich Heinrich Tenbruck dismissed Goffman as a mere feature writer, an opinion he once voiced at a dinner hosted by the dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Chicago. Sitting at Tenbruck’s table was Edward Shils, the renowned social philosopher and recipient of the Balzan award. Shils shook his head and replied, “You are wrong.”

What does Goffman mean by stigma? Psychiatric patients are stigmatized; they are not normal. They constantly engage in “facework”; in other words, they “work” on their facial expressions, on their external appearance, trying to overcome their

stigmatization and isolation by adjusting their appearance and behavior, trying to appear normal and be recognized as normal. But then their self-control somehow slips and all of their facework, their efforts to maintain an external appearance that corresponds to how they want to be seen by others, is again in vain.

Why does Goffman speak of the public, of public places? Psychiatric patients feel exposed to the judgment of others in public, they perceive the public as a tribunal. The more open and anonymous the public is, the more unprotected patients feel and the more they suffer.

On reading Goffman's works, it gradually becomes clear that these reactions and emotions do not apply solely to psychiatric patients. Goffman shifts his scientific interest to the question, "What is normalcy and how does it come into being?" Anyone can be afflicted by "stigma," by "spoiled identity" in public. Thus, we approach the broad spectrum of sanctions designed to impugn an offender's honor—from the pillory in the Middle Ages to the media pillory today—sanctions that are intended to stigmatize and isolate the offender from "normal" people.

In the late 18th century, the term *social psychology* came into use and researchers made the first attempts to measure social-psychological phenomena empirically. For Paul F. Lazarsfeld, the renowned Austrian-American social psychologist, what we now know as empirical social research essentially signified "reactions and views on social phenomena, differentiated according to respondents' social constellations." This, at any rate, is how Lazarsfeld's view was described by Paul Neurath, the head of the Lazarsfeld Archives in Vienna. Ultimately, however, this standpoint did not gain widespread recognition. Theodor W. Adorno is said to have once remarked to his students at the Institut für Sozialforschung (Institute for Social Research) in Frankfurt in the 1950s, "Social psychology? There's no such thing."

Looking through the standard work, *Personality and Social Psychology*, which was published in 1992 by Barbara Krahe, we find that the focus is on the psychology of personality and on analyzing the behavior of different personalities in various social situations. There is no mention of Locke's fearful individual, who is afraid of infringing against the "law of opinion, reputation and fashion." Nor do we find any reference to Rousseau's extroverted man, whose consciousness is rooted in how others react to him. Mead's symbolic interaction is nonexistent. Also absent are people's attempts to achieve the appearance of normalcy, to avoid stigma and spoiled identity via "facework." The great arsenal of sanctions that can be imposed upon the individual by the public tribunal—a controlling public already referred to as the "public eye" by Edmund Burke in the late 18th century (Burke, [1791] 1975, p. 66)—none of these aspects are mentioned in a major textbook on social psychology published in the early 1990s.

The pressure to conform, which ensures social cohesion, is most likely to be found, if at all, under the rubric of "group dynamics," a field of research that experienced its heyday in the mid-20th century under the influence of researchers in the United States. Yet group dynamics focuses on the direct interaction of primary groups, not on the anonymous public. Although individuals can also be stigmatized and threatened with exclusion in primary groups, the processes involved are much more benign than the stigmatization that ensues from losing one's good reputation on the pillory. The theory of group dynamics holds that groups invest a great deal of time and energy in winning back deviant members and resort to exclusion only when there is no more hope of bringing them back into the fold.

The anonymous, intangible court of public opinion, however, functions quite differently, passing quick judgment and hearing no arguments. People must work hard

to hold their ground in the constantly changing atmosphere created by the climate of opinion, threats to their reputation, the danger of unsuspectingly breaking the rules, value change, and “in” and “out” reactions.

Along with their individual nature, their identity—which Mead referred to as “I”—people also have another nature, their social nature or “self”—which corresponds to Mead’s “Me.” This social nature fears isolation; it is extremely vulnerable. In the Middle Ages, wrongdoers were known to swoon after only a few minutes on the pillory, even though not one hair on their heads had actually been harmed.

Numerous phenomena that we encounter every day are rooted in the social nature of man. Social control, which ensures social cohesion, is effective only because of the social nature of man. One incident that comes to mind here is the controversy surrounding Shell Oil’s Brent Spar offshore oil platform in 1995, specifically, the pressure of public opinion that arose in connection with the question of how best to dispose of the defunct platform, i.e., by sinking it into the sea or towing it ashore and dismantling it on land. Given the great value that the public places on environmental protection, this issue had a clear moral dimension. Also not to be forgotten are phenomena such as political correctness and taboos. Fashion, too, could not function were it not for the social nature of man.

In Western cultures, we have had a strong awareness of man’s individual nature ever since antiquity. In contrast, we have not developed, or have perhaps even repressed, the consciousness of our social nature, which runs contrary to the notions of reason, independence, and individual responsibility.

## **EMBARRASSMENT AS AN INDICATOR OF THE FEAR OF ISOLATION**

Does man really have a social nature that anxiously avoids isolation at all times? This was the question asked by Florence Van Zuuren, a Dutch psychologist who had studied the works of Mead and Goffman intensively. Van Zuuren pursued this question in her research at the University of Amsterdam’s Psychology Department, ultimately presenting her findings at a psychology conference in Perugia in 1983 in a paper entitled, “The Experience of Breaking the Rules.”

On the long path toward discovering the social nature of man, Van Zuuren had devised a new method, the method of self-experimentation, which was intended to help researchers recognize and subjectively experience their own social natures. To this end, she and a group of her young colleagues conducted self-experiments on embarrassment, observing and recording their own feelings in embarrassing situations. For instance, they abruptly stopped walking right in the midst of a very busy pedestrian zone, thus experiencing how it felt to be the target of angry looks from other passers-by. They went into a half-empty café and seated themselves at a table where another couple was already sitting, or they went into a store and purchased the same item twice within a short period of time, in each case observing their own feelings on transgressing against these unspoken rules.

Another task involved taking the elevator up to the top floor of an unfamiliar high-rise and just looking around. One participant in the experiment said that even before she had set foot in the building, she was worried that she would not know what to say if anyone asked her what she was doing up there. “I suddenly realized how grotesque I must look in my pink slacks and my pink blouse.” She saw herself

from the outside, through the eyes of others. Many of the participants in the Dutch self-experiments reported that they were unable to go through with the actions and break the rules as planned.

Students at the Institute for Communication Research in Mainz had similar experiences when they tested the self-experimentation method in situations such as singing in the pedestrian zone of Mainz, either alone or in a group (it was easier in a group), handing out pieces of cake to passers-by, and doing a wild solo on the dance floor before the start of a party.

These self-experiments demonstrated that human behavior is already subject to a type of internal personal control even before social control comes into play. The individual imagines the threat of isolation prior to the fact. The mere thought of how unpleasant a situation *might* be—even if it has yet to come to pass—prompts people to correct behavior that goes against the rules, that diverges from the public consensus, long before any external social control is exercised by the collective, indeed, long before the collective even learns of the intended infraction.

This is precisely what George Herbert Mead had described: “symbolic interaction,” imagining what others will think and how they will react, which influences the individual as if it were already reality.

The same phenomenon was observed by Michael Hallemann, who organized a self-experiment with a group of his fellow students in Mainz. In the experiment, the students set up a booth on a busy street, behind which a banner proclaimed, “Stop Squandering Money on Carnival Celebrations in Mainz!” Other banners urged passers-by to join a newly founded organization advocating “that this and all future carnival parades be cancelled for humanitarian reasons. The money saved should be used to help the Third World.” Leaflets stating this demand were piled high on the booth’s counter. The students tried to distribute the leaflets to passers-by and gather signatures in support of their campaign.

The gravity of this transgression can be appreciated only in view of carnival’s great significance for the self-image and identity of the city of Mainz. Mainz without carnival is hardly imaginable. Suggesting that Mainz stop celebrating carnival is like demanding the elimination of carnival festivities in Rio de Janeiro.

From the window of a neighboring house, one of the students filmed what transpired, as even storekeepers from adjacent streets joined in the effort to isolate the students, trying to fan away unsuspecting passers-by and exhorting them not to get any closer with the warning, “Stay away from them, they’re crazy!”

Hallemann (1989) later reported that the experience of having people give him the cold shoulder when he approached them—or watching others make a wide detour to avoid running into him or even having to look at him—was so disturbing that he decided at the time to devote his master’s thesis and later his doctoral dissertation to the subject.

Thanks to this dissertation, we now have fundamental insights into the experience of embarrassment, which derives from the social nature of man. Hallemann traced the phenomenon back to Charles Darwin, who recognized blushing as a reflection of man’s social nature, as a sign that people are imagining what others think of them.

Thus, a tradition of scholarly work on the phenomenon of embarrassment began, which was another important step toward the discovery of the social nature of man, even if this was initially not the stated aim. Erving Goffman had already focused on the phenomenon of embarrassment in his scientific investigations. Shyness, he maintained, is nothing more than an extremely heightened sense of embarrassment.

Shy people are constantly plagued by the thought of what others are thinking of them.

With help from the Allensbach Institute, Hallemann began systematically investigating the phenomenon of embarrassment. He devised a sentence completion test that was included in a survey of the population. In the test, respondents were shown an illustration of two people talking. One of the two says, "Can you imagine what happened to me yesterday—it was so embarrassing: I . . ." The accompanying question reads, "Here are two people talking. Unfortunately, the man/woman was interrupted in mid-sentence. But what do you think he/she wanted to say, what could have happened to him/her?"

Hallemann gleaned a total of 30 potentially embarrassing situations from the verbatim responses recorded during the interviews. These situations were then printed on cards and presented to respondents in normal surveys of the population, with respondents being asked to decide which situations they would find embarrassing and which would not be embarrassing.

The results obtained in this and other surveys revealed a striking similarity in how respondents in a number of different countries reacted, including Spain, the United States, Japan, and South Korea. Only the findings ascertained in Great Britain represented a curious exception: Apparently, the English have a much less pronounced sense of embarrassment than the populations of the other countries tested. On the whole, however, the findings indisputably point to the pancultural character of the social nature of man and the conflict between man's individual nature and his social nature.

## THE THEORY OF THE SPIRAL OF SILENCE

The spiral-of-silence theory can be understood only in light of this constellation of ideas and the history of the investigation of the social nature of man. Pressure to conform, fear of isolation—these are the concepts we must keep in mind if we wish to comprehend the theory, which describes the dynamics of public opinion in situations where the climate of opinion is shifting—and, again, this in view of the conceptual constellation described above, the idea that people have a social nature that causes them, among other things, to experience fear of isolation, which has a considerable influence on their behavior in public.

The spiral of silence theory is not static. Nor does it describe any theoretical ideal; it constructs no "social circuitry," so to speak. Accordingly, the theory does not originate from abstract theoretical thinking, but from a puzzle, from a remarkable research finding for which an explanation had to be found. It was in search of this explanation that the theory ultimately arose.

The puzzle was encountered in connection with election research conducted during the 1965 federal election campaign in Germany. Months before Election Day in September 1965, the Allensbach Institute launched a series of surveys tracking the entire campaign. Over the course of 10 months, from December 1964 to shortly before Election Day, the survey findings on voting intentions remained practically unchanged. Month after month, the two major parties, the governing Christian Democratic Party and the opposition party, the Social Democrats, were in a dead heat, with about 45% of the population intending to vote for each party. In these circumstances, it seemed impossible to predict which party was most likely to win

the election. Throughout the entire campaign, the two parties remained locked in a neck-and-neck race.

In the final few weeks and days prior to the election, however, the situation suddenly changed, with survey findings showing a so-called “last-minute swing.” After a standstill that had persisted for months on end, the percentage of respondents who said that they intended to vote for the Christian Democrats in the upcoming election suddenly climbed to almost 50%, whereas the share who intended to vote for the Social Democrats dropped to less than 40%. In the end, the election outcome confirmed these final survey findings: The Christian Democratic Party clearly won the election, with 49% of the vote, and the Social Democrats obtained 40%.

On attempting to determine what had caused this last-minute change in voting intentions, the puzzle was encountered that ultimately led to the development of the spiral of silence theory. Namely, although voting intentions—as measured via the question, “If the next federal election were held this Sunday, which party would you vote for?”—remained unchanged over the course of many months, responses to the following trend question shifted dramatically over the same period of time: “Of course, nobody can know for sure, but what do you think: Who is going to win the election?” In December 1964, the percentage of respondents who expected the Social Democrats would win the election was about the same as the share who anticipated a Christian Democratic victory—in fact, the Social Democrats even had a slight edge. But then the results began to change direction. The percentage of respondents who expected a Christian Democratic victory rose relentlessly, whereas the Social Democrats continually lost ground. By as early as July, 1965, the Christian Democrats were clearly in the lead; by August, almost 50% anticipated a Christian Democratic victory. It was as if the two measurements—i.e., how voters intended to vote and which party they expected to win—had been made on different planets. It was not until late in the campaign that the bandwagon effect came into play, with 3%–4% of voters being caught up by the general current and swept along in the direction of the expected winner.

How could party strength possibly have remained constant for so long while, at the same time, expectations as to who would win the election changed so dramatically? We suspected that the situation might have been at least partly related to a visit by the Queen of England to Germany in the summer of 1965. Under sunny skies, she traveled up and down the country, accompanied at all times by cheering crowds and with Chancellor Ludwig Erhard, a Christian Democrat who was extremely popular anyway, repeatedly at her side. Had the images of this state visit, the cheerful atmosphere, perhaps given rise to an optimistic mood among the supporters of the governing Christian Democratic party, prompting them to gladly proclaim their convictions? And might the supporters of the Social Democrats thus suddenly have felt surrounded by political opponents on all sides? Had they allowed themselves to be intimidated by their opponents’ ebullient mood and ultimately fallen silent, to the point where their own political camp was hardly visible in public, even though it was actually no smaller than that of their opponents? Had the social nature of man, man’s fear of isolation, caused the Social Democrats’ supporters to fall silent?

Subsequently, especially during the emotionally charged federal election campaign of 1972, the Allensbach Institute gradually gathered survey data pointing to man’s fear of isolation, to the tendency to speak out or fall silent in controversial, morally loaded debates. The pattern that had been observed during the 1965 campaign was detected again on other occasions—and thus the spiral of silence theory

slowly began to take shape. The following is a brief summary of the theory's most salient points.

1. People experience fear of isolation. They have a fear—probably developed over the course of evolution—of being rejected by those around them.
2. For this reason, people constantly monitor the behavior of others in their surroundings, attentively noting which opinions and modes of behavior meet with public approval or disapproval.
3. But people do not only observe their environment. They also—in part unconsciously—issue their own threats of isolation via what they say and do, via behavior such as turning away from someone, knitting their brow, laughing at someone, etc. These are the signals that individuals perceive, showing them which opinions meet with approval and which do not.
4. Because most people fear isolation, they tend to refrain from publicly stating their position when they perceive that this would attract enraged objections, laughter, scorn, or similar threats of isolation.
5. Conversely, those who sense that their opinion meets with approval tend to voice their convictions fearlessly, freely, gladly, and, at times, vociferously.
6. Speaking out loudly and gladly enhances the threat of isolation directed at the supporters of the opposing position, reinforcing their sense of standing alone with their opinion and thus also their growing tendency to conceal their opinion in public. A spiraling process begins, whereby the dominant camp becomes ever louder and more self-confident, whereas the other camp falls increasingly silent.
7. This process does not occur at all times and in all situations, but only in connection with issues that have a strong moral component, in other words, in situations where ideology, agitation and emotions come into play. The process of public opinion is not set in motion if there is no underlying moral fundament implying that those who think differently are not merely stupid but bad. This moral element is what gives public opinion its power and allows it to levy the threat of isolation that sets the spiral of silence in motion.
8. Only controversial issues can trigger a spiral of silence. Topics on which there is social consensus—by which we mean true consensus and not merely outward agreement—give rise to no disagreement and thus leave no room for a spiral of silence. Hence, a spiral of silence cannot arise in connection with the question of whether people are in favor of protecting the environment. Everyone is for that. Yet a spiral of silence most certainly can arise with respect to the question of how much priority environmental protection should take over other goals, such as economic growth, or what measures are more in the interest of environmental protection, as exemplified by the controversy over how to dispose of the defunct Brent Spar oil platform.
9. The actual strength of the different camps of opinion does not necessarily determine which view will predominate in public. An opinion can dominate in public and give rise to the pressure of isolation even if the majority of the population holds the opposing view that has come under pressure—yet does not publicly admit to holding this position.
10. The mass media can significantly influence the spiral-of-silence process. If the majority of the media takes the same side in a morally charged controversy,



- they exert a substantial, presumably even decisive influence on the direction that the spiral of silence takes. Thus far, we know of no instances in which there was a spiral of silence that ran contrary to the media tenor.
11. As a rule, people are not consciously aware of either the fear or the threat of isolation. They observe behavior in their environment that is indicative of self-confidence and strength and react with fear and silence to threats of isolation levied by their surroundings.
  12. Public opinion is limited by time and place. As a rule, a spiral of silence only holds sway over a society for a limited period of time. In this regard, there are both short-lived elements, such as the previously cited controversy over the sinking of the Brent Spar oil platform, and extremely long-term elements, such as the growing tendency in Western societies over the course of the past centuries to attach ever greater importance to the value of equality. In geographical terms, the area in which a certain climate of opinion predominates can be of varying size. Thus, there have even been a few cases of globally valid public opinion in recent history (Rusciano & Fiske-Rusciano, 1990), for example, the public opinion that isolated South Africa around the world for decades and ultimately forced the apartheid regime to step down from power. Generally, however, the process of public opinion and thus the spiral of silence tend to be limited by national borders or the borders of a particular cultural group. When viewed in hindsight or from an outsider's vantage point, it is hard to comprehend the degree of agitation and emotional fervor that accompany a spiral of silence.
  13. Public opinion serves as an instrument of social control and indirectly ensures social cohesion. Whenever there is especially strong integrative pressure in a society, as found in connection with the spiral of silence, this generally indicates that the issue or controversy that triggered the spiral of silence poses a particularly great threat to social cohesion. In extreme cases, the spiral of silence culminates in a situation where certain topics either can only be broached using a specific vocabulary (political correctness) or cannot be mentioned at all (taboo), lest people wish to be the target of extremely harsh signals of social isolation. Because these "vulnerable spots"—in other words, issues that pose a threat to social cohesion—crop up in different areas in different societies, the topics to which the rules of political correctness or even taboos apply vary from one society to the next: In Germany, for example, this includes practically all issues that are either directly or indirectly related to Germany's National Socialist past; in the United States, it applies to racial issues.

## **TESTING THE THEORY OF THE SPIRAL OF SILENCE**

As we can see, the spiral-of-silence model is contingent on a number of conditions and is not designed to be a universal theory that can explain every social situation. The phenomenon of the spiral of silence is only part of a more comprehensive theory of public opinion. Given the complexity of the spiral-of-silence model and the numerous conditions that must be fulfilled for the theory to apply, the question arises of how the theory can be empirically tested, an issue that many researchers

have addressed over the past few decades. In the process, there have been a number of misapprehensions concerning the theory.

The gravest misunderstanding is encountered in connection with the concept of the *quasi-statistical sense*, a term used in *The Spiral of Silence* (Noelle-Neumann, 1993) to describe people's tendency to monitor their environment constantly, thereby assessing which opinions are gaining ground and may be expressed in public and which views are losing ground and, hence, connected with the threat of isolation. The idea of quasi-statistical perception must not be misunderstood to mean that most people have a cash register in the back of their heads, so to speak, with which they continually estimate and record the percentage of the population that holds one opinion or the other. On the contrary, the spiral-of-silence theory assumes that the perception of which opinions meet with public approval or disapproval is not, as a rule, a conscious process. People who are not directly subjected to the pressure of isolation in a particular situation are apparently unable to rationally comprehend the behavior of those who do find themselves under pressure from the climate of opinion.

For this reason, there is generally no point in attempting to test the spiral-of-silence theory via hypothetical questions such as, "Do you tend to remain silent if you think that your opinion is held by the minority?" Questions asking respondents to estimate the percentage of people who hold a particular view are also of little value. When asked directly, "Do you think your opinion is shared by the majority?" most respondents tend to say "Yes." Yet speaking out and falling silent do not depend on whether people, on considering the matter rationally, claim to be in the majority. People who hold a view that is subject to pressure from the climate of opinion still become increasingly less willing to speak out even if they deny this when asked directly during the interview. In 1997, Carroll Glynn, Andrew Hayes, and James Shanahan completed a metaanalysis of a total of 17 studies designed to test the spiral of silence, ultimately determining that most of the studies included in their analysis revealed only a slight connection between respondents' willingness to speak out and whether they assumed that they held the majority opinion. Hence, the authors concluded that there was only weak empirical corroboration for the assumptions on which the spiral of silence theory is based. In fact, however, practically all of the investigations included in the metaanalysis focused on abstract, hypothetical situations. None of the studies analyzed created an interview situation in which there was in fact perceptible pressure from the climate of opinion.

This, however, is the prerequisite for a successful test of the spiral of silence. First, at the time when the test is conducted, there must be a social situation that could potentially give rise to a spiral of silence: In other words, there must be an issue that has a strong moral dimension, that is in the public spotlight, and on which the public is divided into different opinion camps. A spiral of silence is particularly likely to come into being in situations where the majority of the mass media clearly side with one of the opinion camps involved in the debate. Second, the pressure of the climate of opinion that emanates from the issue must be so strong that respondents directly perceive the threat of isolation during the interview and are not forced to imagine such pressure in a hypothetical situation.

Finally, on analyzing the findings, the behavior of respondents whose opinion is *actually* in the majority or gaining ground must be compared with the behavior of those who are in fact in the minority or whose opinion is under pressure from the climate of opinion. It may seem logical at first glance to compare "consonant" respondents—i.e., persons who believe that they hold the majority

opinion—with “dissonant” individuals—that is, those who believe that their views run contrary to the majority opinion—regardless of the concrete opinion they hold. Yet this approach obtains misleading results. According to the spiral-of-silence theory, the threat of isolation is inseparably entwined with concrete issues and opinions. Whether people rationally feel that their opinion is shared by the majority is irrelevant. Supporters of a standpoint that is subject to pressure from the climate of opinion tend to fall silent even if they, like most people, claim during the interview to hold the majority view.

If a suitable social situation for testing the spiral of silence can be identified, that is, a situation that involves a *real* struggle for public opinion, the following information must be obtained via surveys and media content analyses in order to test the spiral of silence.

1. The distribution of opinions on the issue among the population: Which view is held by the majority, and which by the minority? This information is needed to identify and compare the supporters and opponents of a particular opinion in the analysis phase of the investigation.
2. The climate of opinion, in other words, the population’s general feeling as to which opinion is stronger. This can be ascertained by means of questions such as “How do you think most people feel about this?” Although this question is not, as mentioned previously, suitable for identifying those individuals who are under pressure from the climate of opinion, it can identify issues that entail pressure from the climate of opinion. When the percentage of respondents who believe that most people hold a particular opinion is considerably greater than the share who take this stance themselves, this is a sure sign that we are dealing with an issue that could ultimately trigger a spiral of silence.
3. Future expectations: Which camp of opinion will become more significant in future? Which is gaining ground? Which is losing ground?
4. Willingness to advocate a certain position or speak out in public. This can, for example, be measured via the train test, which is the question originally used by the Allensbach Institute to test the spiral of silence: “Suppose you are taking a long train ride and one of the passengers in your compartment starts talking strongly in favor of (or against) opinion X. Would you want to talk with this person so as to get to know his or her point of view better, or wouldn’t you want to do that?” In countries such as the United States, where long train trips are not the norm, other question wordings can be used. The most common version is the so-called reporter question: “Suppose a television reporter approached you on the street and asked you on camera about. . . .”
5. The degree of emotionalization surrounding an issue, the strength of its moral component. There are a number of indicator questions that point to the degree of emotionalization that an issue entails. Using one tried and tested model, respondents are presented with a number of topics and asked, “Which of these are delicate issues that might get you into hot water if you were to talk about them?”
6. The intensity and bias of reporting on the issue by the opinion-setting mass media. Whereas the first five points in this brief outline concern information that can be obtained by means of survey research, this last point can best be clarified via quantitative media content analyses.

## A TEST DURING THE 1992 U.S. PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN

Considering the difficulties that many researchers have encountered in testing the spiral-of-silence theory, this section gives a detailed description of an investigation that employed a successful empirical approach for testing the theory. The study was completed by Cheryl Katz and Mark Baldassare (1994), who were able to identify a special social constellation that could potentially lead to a spiral-of-silence process. Taking advantage of this fortuitous situation, which they recognized at just the right moment, they conducted a test that included most of the factors mentioned above, ultimately obtaining findings that strongly pointed to the existence of a spiral of silence during the 1992 U.S. presidential election campaign.

The 1992 U.S. presidential election campaign was marked by extreme fluctuations in the population's opinion of President Bush. After the Gulf War, Bush's popularity had climbed to a level seldom found in the history of opinion research, with 80% to 90% of the American population expressing approval of his policies in the spring of 1991. By the fall of 1991, however, his popularity had begun to decline sharply, following a strong drop in positive reporting on television evening news programs. This is shown by the findings of the Washington-based *Media Monitor*, which has been continually tracking political reporting by the mass media since 1987 using the methods of quantitative media content analysis. An important aspect for communication researchers was the finding that opinions on Bush first became more negative in media coverage, followed considerably later by the population's expression of more negative opinions in Gallup surveys (Media Momentum, 1992).

These were the circumstances in which Katz and Baldassare (1994) conducted their test of the spiral-of-silence theory: circumstances that were quite favorable for such a test, thanks to the dynamic nature of the situation and the existence of precisely the social constellation—a shifting climate of opinion—to which the spiral of silence theory applies. Katz and Baldassare based their study on a series of telephone surveys in Orange County, California. The first wave of 600 interviews was conducted in May 1992, followed by a second wave in September 1992. The general political climate in Orange County tended to favor the Republican Party and thus President Bush. Fifty-seven percent of respondents in another representative survey described the political climate in Orange County as conservative. Only 15% claimed that it was “liberal.” Yet here, too, the surveys conducted by Katz and Baldassare revealed a rapid shift in the climate of opinion during the 1992 election year. By the time the first wave of the survey was conducted, Bush's popularity in Orange County had dropped from about 80% in earlier surveys to 46%. At the same time, the percentage of respondents who had a good opinion of Clinton grew substantially, from 28% in May 1992 to 42% in September. In the end, Bush won the election in Orange County with a relatively slim lead of 43% of the vote, whereas Clinton received 32%. The dynamics of the situation in Orange County were thus undeniable.

To measure respondents' willingness to speak out, Katz and Baldassare employed the reporter question described previously. In analyzing their findings, they did not compare respondents who claimed, when asked directly, to share the presumed majority opinion with those who thought their views conflicted with the majority; rather, they observed the two camps of opinion. In earlier surveys completed

in 1988, 1989, and 1991, Bush supporters were just as willing as other respondents to speak out. Now, however, in a situation where the media tenor had turned against Bush and his popularity was rapidly falling, Bush supporters became increasingly unwilling to speak out. In May 1992, 30% of Bush supporters said that they would be willing to be interviewed by a reporter about the election campaign, whereas 42% of Clinton's supporters said the same. The assumptions on which the spiral-of-silence theory is based were thus confirmed. This test was particularly remarkable given that it was completed in a Republican stronghold. Here, the actual distribution of opinions was not decisive but, rather, the general trend. Bush supporters fell silent even though their opinion was shared by the majority in their immediate personal surroundings. Despite the proximity of a protective reference group, they were still not immune to the climate of opinion and the threat of isolation.

Ever since the dawn of the age of Enlightenment about 300 years ago, philosophers and social theorists in Western societies have habitually devoted special attention to the question of man's rationality. The tremendous advances in the natural sciences point to the enormous accomplishments that the human intellect is capable of achieving. Consequently, the reasoning goes, it should also be possible to organize human coexistence based on man's intellect, to organize human society in a sensible, rationally ordered manner. It is also much more in keeping with the democratic ideal to assume that people base their opinions on rational decisions, that they arrive at their position by weighing the advantages and disadvantages of a particular standpoint, if necessary even by means of a totally subjective, egotistical cost-benefit analysis, so to speak.

Yet there is scant evidence indicating that human social life does in fact function solely—or even primarily—in this manner. The spiral-of-silence theory approaches the issue of social cohesion from a completely different perspective, from a completely different school of thought. Those who attempt to view the theory within the framework of rational choice theories—by trying, for example, to explain the tendency to speak out or fall silent in terms of a cost-benefit analysis—have clearly misunderstood the theory, which is concerned with social psychology and not the logic of the decision-making process. The spiral-of-silence theory deals with emotions, fears, and reflex reactions. In many instances, for example, it is neither sensible nor advantageous for people to conceal their opinion: On the contrary, they might even benefit more from voicing their opinion courageously and loudly. Yet most people act differently in the face of pressure from the climate of opinion.

The rationally inexplicable and oftentimes inappropriate sense of embarrassment, the sudden fear of isolation, the feeling that “I can't say that; that's dangerous”—all of these phenomena have no directly plausible, “manifest” function, to use the terminology of Robert K. Merton. Yet there are signs that they do have an indirect, “latent” function, enabling society to reach consensus and thus to take action on controversial issues that would otherwise lead to social division.

Ernst Pöppel, a neuroscientist in Munich, recently remarked that the centuries in which man discovered the natural world surrounding him will now be followed by the centuries in which man discovers his own nature, including his own social nature. As long as we do not recognize and attempt to decipher the social nature of man, as long as we continue to believe that opinion formation and public behavior are based solely on a rational process resembling a cost-benefit analysis, we will continue to misunderstand how humans behave and thus how societies function.

The spiral-of-silence model is intended to contribute to our understanding of the social nature of man.

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## Knowledge as Understanding: The Information Processing Approach to Political Learning

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*The very thing one needs one does not know,  
and what one knows is needless information.*  
—Goethe (Faust, verses 1066–1067)

When *The Onion*, a satirical weekly and self-proclaimed finest news source in America, parodied the news reporting of the last century, the pseudo-article about the 1947 invention of “the supreme tool of learning—television” predicted that with the proliferation of television, every man in America will be professor of science or law within 6 years, and the schools will be obsolete by 1970 (The Onion, 1999). “The television world will be one where learning is easy, fun, and available to all” (p. 73). The United States will be “filled with active and intelligent citizens, rushing about in a whirlwind of discoveries, inventions, innovations and theories” (p. 73).

*The Onion* report is funny because it exaggerates the educational potential of television, and it does so by using easily recognizable elements of popular discourse following emergence of any new medium. In some recent real reports the Internet is seen as bringing revolutionary changes “in the way we live and think,” all mixed with the hope that “we may thrive together” (Newsweek, 1999, p. 41). The availability of a limitless volume of information and the length of time people spend with that information typically are taken as implicit proof of a future with better-informed individuals and a more participatory society. The Internet must be good for democracy because it allows “millions of people to expand their horizons and to encounter a new world of topics and ideas” (Fallows, 2002, p. 7). Unfortunately, Americans’ fondness for entertainment and information, reflected in 2.5 hr of watching television every day, 2.4 hr listening to the radio, 1 hr reading books, approximately 55 min using the Internet, 30 min reading newspapers,



and about 25 min reading magazines (Gallup Poll, 2001), does not translate directly into “mass enrichment of mankind” (Onion, 1999). Although we assume that people are continually learning because it is one of the basic human capacities, there is more to learning than simply the time spent ingesting information from ubiquitous media.

## BASIC PREMISES

The basic premise of this chapter is that learning is a process in which individuals actively participate. Individuals actively collect, store, modify, interpret, and incorporate new information with what they already know about the world. This activity proceeds according to their goals, motives, and needs (Lachman, Lachman, & Butterfield, 1979). In this approach, known as the information processing paradigm, learning is not limited to acquisition of bits of information but also includes comprehension, or learning the gist of communication (Newell, 1990). The nature and structure of information are of much more concern than the quantity of information (Garner, 1974). Consequently, learning from media is not reducible to the amount of memorized or accumulated facts. It also involves connecting those facts into a meaningful whole that results in understanding, explaining, and seeing things in different ways (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1991). We argue that the media have the potential to provide citizens with a better knowledge base for support of democratic principles by producing content that stimulates people to think and develop wider-ranging interests and ideas. More diverse perspectives could help citizens to make connections between various aspects of reality, to evaluate and revise their preexisting knowledge, and thus to reach a more complete understanding of what is happening and why.

We also believe that the relevant content of media for learning in support of democratic principles is not restricted to political or campaign stories. We broaden the concern of what is learned from media from politics to public affairs content. Public affairs content is represented by reports on current social and political events of general interest and concern that provide citizens with both information and explanation of what those events mean. Public affairs content may cultivate psychological resources that may lead not only to a “correct” vote choice but to a variety of activities directed toward “making a difference” (Verba, Scholzman, & Brady, 1995, p. 511). A person who knows about public affairs “understands that what he thinks and feels as personal troubles are very often not only that but problems shared by others and indeed not subject to solution by any one individual but only by modifications of the structure of the groups in which he lives and sometimes the structure of the entire society” (Mills, 1975, p. 318). Through exposure to public affairs individuals may become closer to understanding what social changes are needed and develop political consciousness that supports participation in collective actions (Gamson, 1992).

Coverage of public affairs, generally presented in the national news section of the newspaper or the national news on television, overlaps with the coverage of politics. A snapshot analysis suggests that about 40% of news stories in the national news section of *The New York Times* consist of the stories that also appear in the politics, recently renamed Washington, section of the newspaper. What becomes national news has the potential to reach a broader news audience and, also, may be reflected in the entertainment content of media. With the rising popularity of shows disguised as news (e.g., *NBC Dateline*) and increasingly blurred boundaries between

entertainment and news, the hottest news show may well be a fake news show, *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* on the Comedy Central cable channel. Anchored in real events, *The Daily Show* gives a satirical spin to important current issues, with the potential to semi-inform, trigger alternative views on events, and entertain.

For large numbers of people television talk shows (e.g., *Late Show with David Letterman*) and dramas, especially those living in the twilight between fiction and facts (e.g., *The West Wing*), may be important sources of learning about public affairs and politics. About a quarter of Americans, among whom almost half are under age 30, say that they learned something about the campaign from late-night TV shows such as David Letterman and Jay Leno, and comedy shows such as *Saturday Night Live* and *Politically Incorrect* (Pew Research Center, 2000). The satirical cartoon television show, *The Simpsons*, can even trigger a public admission that “Everything I needed to know about life I learned from Homer Simpson” (Carriere, 2000). Learning from such content may not be reflected as much in individuals’ memory of specific facts about personalities and current events as in their understanding or summary evaluations of situations that may be integrated into their political decisions (Lodge, Steenbergen, & Brau, 1995).

## **RESEARCH ON POLITICAL LEARNING: BACKGROUND AND DEVELOPMENT**

In the previous edition of this handbook, issues of learning from media were approached from the perspective of political socialization (Atkin, 1981) and as a social learning process (Bandura, 1971) through which citizens acquire beliefs, feelings, and information toward producing their “mature” and “political” identities (Sigel, 1989). In keeping with early socialization research, which contended that individuals’ political dispositions become frozen at the end of the adolescent period (Sigel, 1989), effects of media on learning were primarily examined within adolescent populations. Atkin (1981) concluded that exposure to mass media content had important impacts on cognitive (e.g., awareness, knowledge, images of politics), affective (e.g., interest, attitudes toward political leaders, issues, and attachment to the political system), and behavioral (e.g., interpersonal discussion, political participation) aspects of young people’s political socialization. By the end of the 1980s political socialization research had come to the realization that change in political dispositions continues in varying degrees throughout the entire life course (Sigel, 1989). Accordingly, examination of media effects on traditional political socialization variables was extended toward adult populations.

The political socialization tradition, through its focus on political education, highlighted the effects of media on learning political information rather than on changing individuals’ attitudes on specific political issues (Beck, 1977). In doing so, however, it also inadvertently promoted the conception of knowledge as information about the workings of the American political system, or as the passive content of what is known, and what individuals possess like a trait (e.g., sophistication) or a thing (e.g., resource), rather than as a cognition or the act, process, form, or faculty of knowing (Torney-Purta, 1990). Knowledge measurement was driven by what could be easily assessed by questionnaires and surveys. The quest for simple conceptualization and strongest prediction resulted in recommending measuring individuals’ political knowledge by asking questions such as what job or political office is held by a particular person, which party controls the House

of Representatives, and what the parties' ideological locations are (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996). This line of research culminated in the work of Pippa Norris (2000), who used a huge variety of data sources (e.g., European Community, Eurobarometer, European Election and Post-election, British Campaign Panel, U.S. National Election Survey, and Pew Research Center for the People & the Press surveys) to document positive effects of exposure to news media on citizens levels of political knowledge, trust, and participation after controlling for demographics, attitudinal factors, and cultural differences. Political science research has thus discovered in the past decade the positive effects of news media use that have been known to communication researchers for several decades (Becker, McCombs, & McLeod, 1975; Blumler & McQuail, 1969; Chaffee & Schleuder, 1986; Chaffee, Ward, & Tipton, 1970; J. M. McLeod & McDonald, 1985; J. M. McLeod, Bybee, & Durall, 1979; J. M. McLeod, Rush, & Friederich, 1968–1969; Robinson, 1972). How media use may liberate individuals from constraints imposed by their social statuses and empower them to achieve their interests still remains to be discovered.

## **RESEARCH ON POLITICAL LEARNING: MEDIA EFFECTS**

The lack of cross-discipline citation has led to the lag in incorporating modern developments in mass communication research into the picture of political socialization and participation research. The focus continues to be on time spent with television (Putnam, 1995, 2000) despite 40 years of mass communication research that has documented the importance of medium- and content-specific measures of media use. Newspaper reading has a stronger effect on knowledge (J. M. McLeod et al., 1996; Robinson & Levy, 1986; Stamm, Johnson, & Martin, 1998) than does viewing of television news (Chaffee, Zhao, & Leshner, 1994) except among those who are less informed (Chaffee & Kanihan, 1997). Despite generally weaker effects, television news and debates are sources of issue information (Weaver & Drew, 2001). The stronger learning influence of newspaper reading could reflect differences in form (print allows readers to set their own pace) or in content (print news provides more context). The two media tend to specialize in the type of information they convey in campaigns. Television provides more information about candidates, whereas newspapers are more informative about political parties (Chaffee & Frank, 1996).

Watching entertainment shows (situation comedies, crime-adventure) has a modest negative effect on knowledge (Sotirovic & McLeod, 2001). Hollander (1995) finds that attention to MTV is negatively related to campaign knowledge, whereas talk shows such as *Donahue*, *Larry King Live*, and *Rush Limbaugh* have positive effects. Viewing of presidential debates produces only small increments of knowledge (Holbrook, 1999); however, attending to media analyses following these debates appears to contribute more substantially in helping viewers to identify candidates' stands on issues (J. M. McLeod et al., 1979). Attention to campaign advertisements has shown modest positive effects in some campaigns (Chaffee & Kanihan, 1997), though the disinformation in many attack ads may serve more to confuse than to inform voters.

Despite its rapidly growing prominence over the past decade, relatively little is known about the Internet as a source of political information. Most research concern has been devoted to issues of access to the Internet as a technology rather

than as a distinct medium that can be used for a wide variety of purposes. Internet use tends to be measured as a simple user vs. nonuser dichotomy or as number of hours spent using it. Such measures are woefully inadequate for estimating learning effects. More important are what content is selected and how it is used. For example, leisure use and playing video games on the Internet may be associated with lower levels of knowledge (Niemi & Junn, 1998; Shah, 1998), whereas use for information search and exchange is likely to have positive effects on political learning (Shah, McLeod, & Yoon, 2001). Accessing campaign news on the Internet was related to knowledge of political leaders and parties in the 1998 election (Norris, 2000). Experimental comparison of news stories recall tended to favor television and print newspapers compared to online newspapers (Eveland, Seo, & Marton, 2002). Although the purposeful search for information seems to be the key to learning from the Internet, it also appears that there may be some benefits from incidental learning (Tewksbury, Weaver, & Maddex, 2001).

Mass communication research also has shown the importance of including the level of attention that the person pays to the content in addition to the extent of exposure, especially for identifying effects for media such as television where audience members are most often doing things other than focused learning (Chaffee & Schleuder, 1986; Drew & Weaver, 1990; J. M. McLeod, 2000; J. M. McLeod & McDonald, 1985). With a genre (e.g., news) or specific content (e.g., campaign news), more valid measurement can be obtained by combining corresponding exposure and attention indicators into a single index (J. M. McLeod & Pan, 2002).

## **MEDIA USE AND EFFECTS ON KNOWLEDGE IN THE 2000 ELECTION**

Research has shown that media effects are not uniform, but medium and content specific. What media variables are used and how they are measured have a great deal to do with the estimates of their effects. The National Election Study (NES) of the U.S. presidential campaign of 2000 had a dozen media use measures that allow us to demonstrate this point. Table 14.1 shows the effects of media use variables on knowledge (an index [ $\alpha = .65$ ] consisting of [1] knowing which party had the most members in the House of Representatives in Washington before the election; [2] knowing where to place the Democratic and Republican parties on a liberal/conservative scale; and [3] knowing what job or political office Trent Lott, William Rehnquist, Tony Blair, and Janet Reno hold) controlling for gender, age, education, income, party identification, and need for cognition.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Need for cognition is a construct indicating the tendency of an individual to seek out and elaborate information and engage in effortful cognitive processes (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982; Cacioppo, Petty, Feinstein, & Jarvis, 1996). It has been viewed as a variable reflecting cognitive motivation and, therefore, related to the amount of knowledge a person possesses (Tidwell, Sadowsky, & Pate, 2000). The index of two items used to measure need for cognition in the NES 2000 survey (like/dislike thinking and like simple/complex problems;  $r = .49$ ) is correlated,  $r = .27$ , with the knowledge index. However, after controlling for demographics the relationship is reduced to .08. The average correlation between need for cognition and 12 media use variables in our analyses is  $r = .13$  (the highest coefficient is for "seen information about the campaign on the Internet";  $r = .26$ ). This suggests that cognitive motivations captured in the need of cognition variables are not of crucial importance for individuals' choice of media and their content. More importantly, people learn from media significantly, regardless of their need for cognition.

TABLE 14.1  
Levels of Media Use and Effects on Political Knowledge

<i>Media Use Variables</i>	<i>Level</i>			<i>Effect (<math>\beta</math>)</i>
	<i>Mean/Percentage</i>	<i>(Range)</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Number of days read newspaper	3.52	(0–7)	2.94	.13**
Read about campaign in newspaper	45%	(0–1)		.17**
Attention to newspaper articles about the campaign	2.10	(1–5)	1.37	.20**
Watch the national network news	3.33	(0–7)	2.81	.15**
Attention to news on national news shows about the campaign	2.83	(1–5)	1.39	.17**
Watch local television news shows in the late evening	2.58	(0–7)	2.71	.00
Watch programs about the campaign on television	83%			.10**
Number of programs about campaign watched	1.69	(0–3)	1.03	.17**
Number of times watched daytime television talk shows	.80	(0–9)	1.58	–.06**
Number of times watched morning news programs	1.94	(0–6)	2.30	.04
Seen information about the campaign on the Internet/Web	30%			.12**
Seen ads for candidates on television	76%			.03

*Note.* Data from National Election Studies (NES) 2000 survey.  $N = 1,555$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Evidence is found in varying degrees for differences in levels of use and effects on knowledge by medium, form of content, and between exposure and attention. Table 14.1 shows the highest percentage campaign *exposure* for television (83%), less for newspapers (45%), and the least for the Internet (30%). In contrast, reading campaign stories has the strongest relationship to knowledge ( $\beta = .17$ ), followed by using Internet information (.12), then watching television campaign stories (.10). The campaign *attention* measures show significantly higher ( $t = 18.52$ ,  $p < .001$ ) levels of attention for television news about the campaign ( $M = 2.83$ ) than for newspaper articles about the campaign ( $M = 2.10$ ). Newspaper campaign attention, however, shows a slightly higher  $\beta$  coefficient (.20) than does television campaign attention (.17).

Large differences in influence between various forms of content on knowledge are shown (Table 14.1). For newspaper use, reading of specific campaign content ( $\beta = .17$ ) is a somewhat better predictor of knowledge than is the more general days per week reading (.13). For television use, the strongest predictions are shown for two specific content measures, attention to national news campaign stories (.17) and number of campaign programs watched (.17). In contrast, watching local news (.00) and watching morning news (.04) are unrelated to knowledge as measured here by exclusively national political items. Despite high levels of exposure (76%), recall of seeing candidates' ads fails to add to knowledge (.03). Daytime

television talk-show viewing has a slightly negative ( $-.06$ ) relationship to knowledge. Small differences are shown favoring attention over corresponding exposure measures: newspaper campaign stories (.20 vs. .17) and television campaign news (.17 vs. .10).

The question arises, Which media use measures should be used in studying political knowledge? The answer implied in Table 14.1 indicates that even when knowledge is measured by general awareness of major political divisions and actors, content-specific measures are stronger than general news use measures. Both specific and general news measures are superior to time-based measures unless the research question concerns direct displacement of the person's time allocation.

## EQUIVALENCE OF MEDIA USE AND EFFECTS

A well-functioning democracy requires an informed and active citizenry. No less important to normative democratic theory is that informed participation be relatively equivalent across major forms of stratification and differentiation in the society (J. M. McLeod et al., 1979). Equality in receiving the benefits of democracy depends on equivalence of informed participation (Verba et al., 1995). To the extent that media convey knowledge essential to participation, they too need to be examined as to the equivalence of their use and their effects.

Here we examine education and age as key forms of difference in U.S. society. The same data set used in Table 14.1, the NES 2000, was used to examine nonequivalence in levels of knowledge and media use and effects of media on knowledge within education and age categories. Nonequivalence can be recognized as the familiar "knowledge gap" research that examines the consequences of media use for knowledge among status groups usually defined by educational levels (Eveland & Scheufele, 2000; Kwak, 1999; Tichenor, Donohue, & Olien, 1970, 1980; Viswanath & Finnegan, 1996).

## EQUIVALENCE BY AMOUNT OF EDUCATION

The strong relationship between education and knowledge found in much previous research is clearly shown to be present here in linear increments of knowledge across levels of education (Fig. 14.1). The question then becomes whether nonequivalence in the levels of use and strength of effect of three types of media use can partly account for wide disparities in knowledge among people with different amounts of education.

### Levels of Use

Exposure to information about the 2000 campaign in each of three media is shown along with knowledge in Fig. 14.1. Watching television news programs about the campaign, the most common behavior of the three, has the weakest relationship to education among the three media. Exposure to television campaign shows increases only about 15% from the less than high school group to college grads and then declines very slightly among the postgraduates. In contrast, reading of

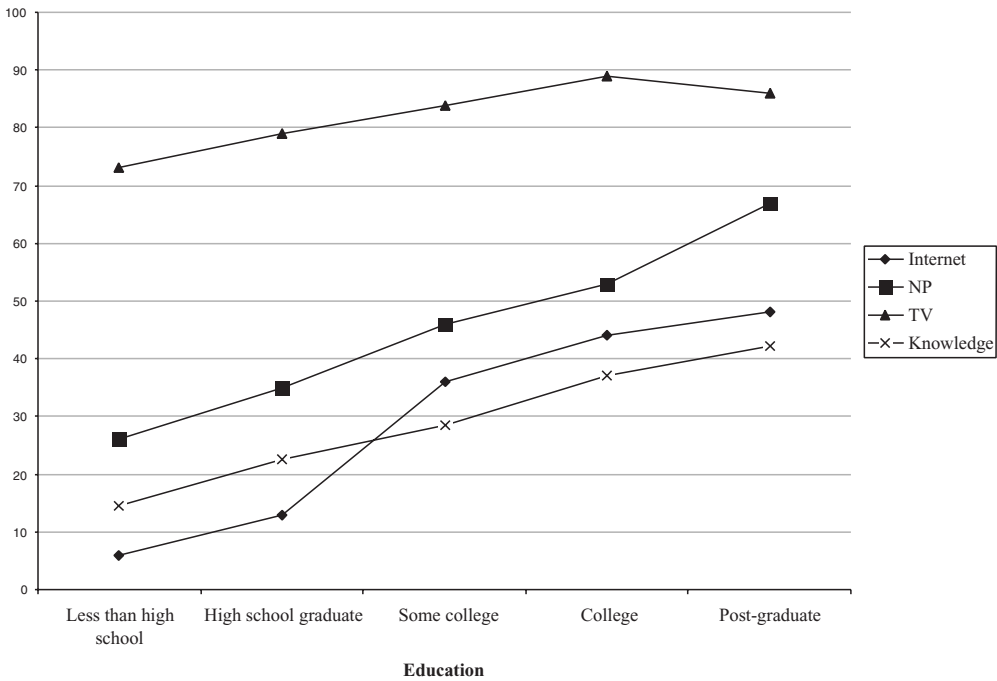


FIG. 14.1. Levels of three forms of campaign media use and political knowledge by education.

newspaper articles about the campaign reveals a linear pattern of growth across educational levels similar to that for knowledge. Using campaign information from the Internet, least common among the three media measures, demonstrates even higher levels of nonequivalence in being very low among high school grads or less, tripling to 36% among the some college group and increasing linearly to a 48% level for those with postgraduate education. Overall, the increases in the media measures provide strong evidence for nonequivalence of media use in the 2000 campaign.

### Strength of Effects

Status disparities in levels of use are only part of the larger issue of nonequivalence. To the extent that citizens with more education also are able to get more information from the same level of attention to news media content, the nonequivalence (gap) in knowledge will tend to increase. Whereas means were used to compare levels of knowledge and media use, regression coefficients are the basis of comparisons of effect sizes (i.e., effectiveness) of media use in various educational categories (Fig. 14.2). Because standardized  $\beta$  coefficients are susceptible to differences in standard deviations of variables within educational groups, unstandardized  $B$  coefficients are appropriate for our analyses of nonequivalent effects. All analyses of effects control for demographics and party identification.

Research on learning from television news suggests its advantages over print media in reaching and informing a wider spectrum of the public (Chaffee & Kanihan, 1997; Eveland & Scheufele, 2000). We see some evidence for that position in the

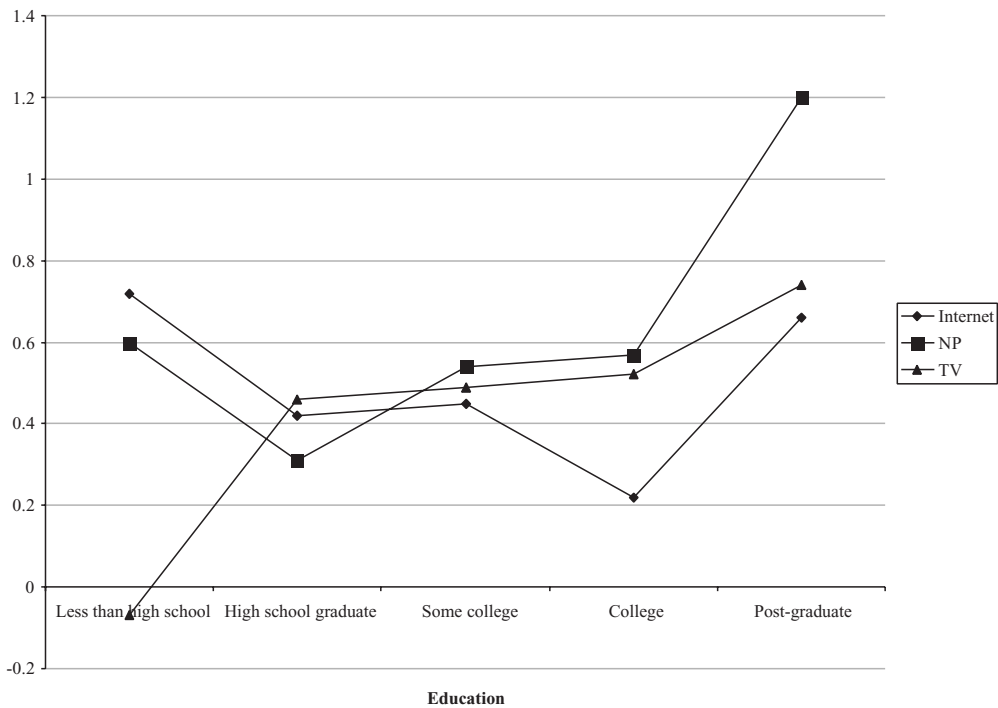


FIG. 14.2. Effects of three forms of campaign media use and political knowledge by education.

equivalence of television campaign exposure effects on high school grads, those with some college, and college graduates (Fig. 14.2). Though its relationship to knowledge is higher for postgraduates, the increase over college grads is less for television than for newspapers and the Internet. Contrary to the general pattern of equivalent effects for television, however, is the total lack of relationship to knowledge among the least educated respondents despite their relatively high level of television use. In fact, it is the only instance of null effects for any of the three media in any of the five educational subgroups. Perhaps the difficulty in selecting what is relevant among image-driven trivial information on television poses particular problems for learning among this least educated group.

Newspaper exposure to campaign stories shows a definitely nonequivalent pattern of relationship to knowledge (Fig. 14.2). Those with postgraduate education show an extremely strong influence from newspaper campaign stories, which goes along with their high levels of reading such content. Contrary to this pattern, however, the least educated respondents show a positive effect of reading campaign stories equal to that among college graduates.

The effects of encountering campaign stories on the Internet are in sharp contrast to their nonequivalent use pattern shown in Fig. 14.1. Whereas use of Internet stories increases steadily with amount of education, their effects indicate a reversal of the knowledge gap, with influence decreasing from strong among the least educated to weak among the college grads. The downward trend is reversed by strong effects among the postgrads, however. The extremely small number of Internet users among the least educated appear to learn something about the campaign.



## EQUIVALENCE BY AGE

Though it has long been recognized that younger citizens are less informed and less engaged in politics than older people (e.g., Converse, with Niemi, 1971), the disparity became an important focus for research when evidence began to accumulate showing stagnation in levels of political knowledge (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1991) and decay in political participation (Putnam, 1995). Further, research shows that recent generations of youth are less informed and politically engaged than were earlier generations when they were young (Bennett, 1997; Miller & Shanks, 1996), indicating that disparities in age were a cohort as well as a maturational phenomenon. The Pew Research Center (1995) concluded, based on an analysis of historical polling data, that Americans under 30 years of age represented a “generation that knew less, cared less, and read newspapers less” than previous generations of young people. The implications of this cohort change is that the pattern of cohort disengagement may well persist over the life course and threaten the health of American democracy.

Increased use of public affairs media content with age has also been noted throughout the history of media research. The growth in newspaper reading with age, for example, was originally attributed to maturation and growing attachment to community with years of residence. In recent decades, however, the media landscape has changed drastically. With the advent of new media technology, the size of audiences for traditional news media has shrunk greatly. The audiences for newspapers and network television news shows increasingly are made up of older Americans. As is the case for political engagement, the most recent cohorts have contributed disproportionately to the decline in newspaper reading (Peiser, 2000a, 2000b), and the same appears to be true for network news (Pew Research Center, 1996).

We found that in the 2000 NES data only 15% of those under age 30 report reading a newspaper daily (6 or 7 days per week), compared to 56% of those over 50 (data not shown). The age gap for newspaper reading (41%) is similar to that for watching national television news daily (38%), with 11% for under 30 and 49% for those over 50. The age gaps have widened since 1984 (NES data), by 5% for newspaper reading and 7% for national television news viewing.

### Levels of Use

Knowledge shows a generally positive growth pattern across age categories in the NES 2000 election data (Fig. 14.3). Knowledge increases, though at decelerating rates, from the youngest respondents (ages 18–23) to those 51–60, then it flattens out and drops markedly after age 70.

Strikingly different nonequivalence patterns are shown for use of each of the three media (Fig. 14.3). Viewing of television programs about the campaign shows roughly equivalent use, with an increase of only 11% (78% to 89%) from the youngest to the oldest respondents. This is in sharp contrast to the nonequivalent age patterns for viewing network television news, where those over 60 watch almost 5 days per week, compared with about twice a week for the two groups age 30 or under (data not shown). The anomalous pattern for campaign viewing may reflect the fact that televised programs are so plentiful that even the youngest are apt to have

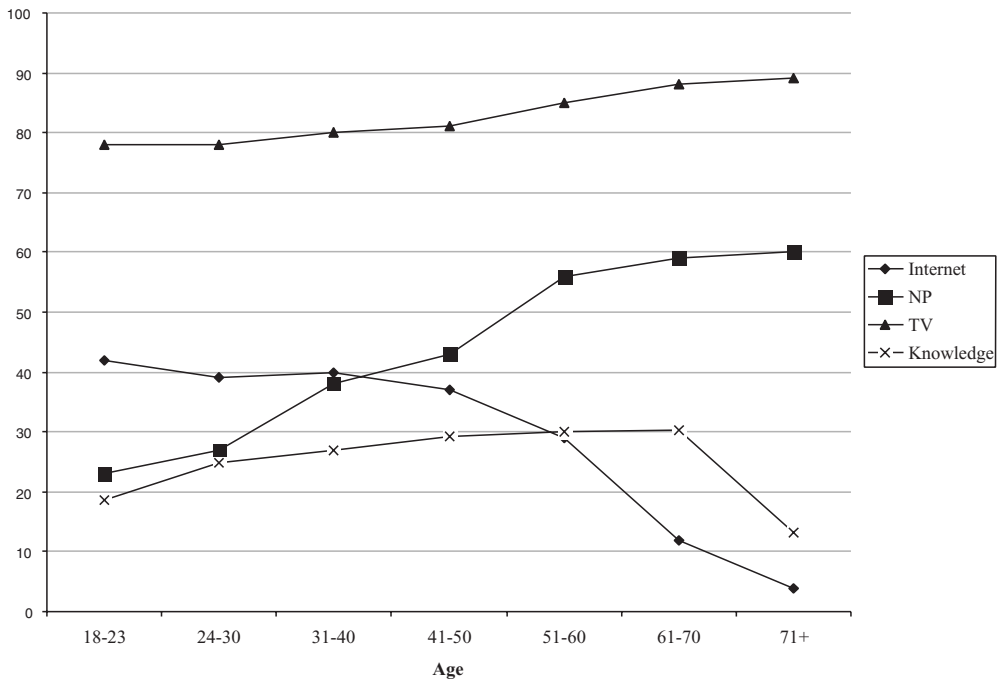


FIG. 14.3. Levels of three forms of media use and political knowledge by age.

watched at least one (78% did so). Reading newspaper campaign stories reveals the anticipated nonequivalence, with a fairly steady rise up to age 51–60 and then only a slight increase in each of the two oldest categories.

Internet use of campaign stories shows a pattern almost the mirror image of that for newspaper campaign stories. There is a steady and small decrease, from 42% to 35% campaign use, from ages 18–23 to ages 41–50, when the drop becomes steeper, ending at 12% and 4% among the oldest age categories. This agrees with past Internet research showing dominance of use among younger people (J. M. McLeod, Shah, & Yoon, 2002; Shah, Kwak, & Holbert, 2001; Shah, McLeod, & Yoon, 2001b).

### Strength of Effects

The effect sizes of viewing of television campaign programs are relatively equivalent across age categories (Fig. 14.4), though they vary considerably more than do levels of use for the programs described above. Television effects are strongest in the youngest group (ages 18–23) but then disappear among those ages 24–30. They then increase to an average strength through the rest of the life cycle except for a second peak at age 51–60. The effects of reading newspaper stories about the campaign produce a fluctuating pattern of strength that resembles that of television campaign program viewing. Overall, the newspaper pattern shows equivalence of effect in contrast to its nonequivalence of use. Once again, we find that levels of use and strength of effect operate differently for the same form of media.

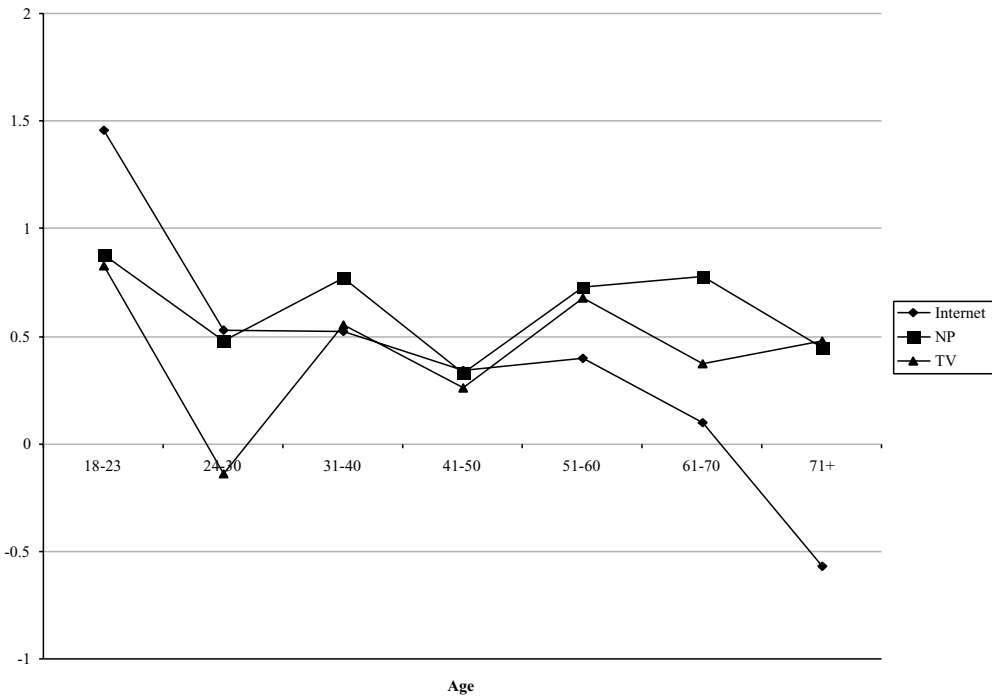


FIG. 14.4. Effects of three forms of media use on political knowledge by age.

Use of campaign information from the Internet reveals effect sizes that are extremely high among the youngest group (18–23 year olds), decrease to a moderate level for ages 24–30, then decrease slightly and remain significant until ages 51–60. They then drop to nonsignificance and become a negative influence on knowledge in the over-70 category. Internet campaign use has its strongest effects as well as its highest levels of use among young adults. This is consistent with findings using other measures of Internet use (J. M. McLeod et al., 2002; Tewksbury et al., 2001) and criteria of civic engagement (Jung, Qui, & Kim, 2001; Shah, Kwak, Holbert, 2001; Shah, McLeod, & Yoon, 2001).

## TRENDS IN KNOWLEDGE, MEDIA USE, AND ITS EFFECTS: 1976 TO 2000

Individuals are doubtlessly learning from media, but the positive effects on individual levels of knowledge are not reflected in aggregate levels of public knowledge or a more participatory society. Neither are Americans better informed about politics than in past decades (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996), nor do more of them try to persuade others how to vote, work in a campaign, or attend political meetings (Verba et al., 1995). Although vote turnout and memberships in political clubs have declined, the numbers of those contributing to political campaigns and contacting public officials have increased. Norris (2000) concludes that overall “activism has been remarkably stable over the past 50 years” (p. 304). However, this stability in both political knowledge levels and participation becomes puzzling and

problematic in the light of substantial increases in the levels of education and communication opportunities. Delli Carpini (1999) speculates that the over time “stability in political knowledge is the result of offsetting forces” (p. 33), among which changes in the quality and relevance of available political information in the mass media are of considerable importance.

## Levels of Use

Over the last five decades in America public levels of attention to campaign news have been relatively stable (Norris, 2000), suggesting that overall Americans did not become more disengaged from the campaigns. However, this stability in levels of individuals’ motivation does not necessarily mean that Americans’ rates of learning from news also remained the same. Media may have become more or less effective in promoting citizens learning due to changes in presentational formats and emphases on certain values in the content and structures of news stories. Graber (1994) suggests that learning of campaign information is primarily constrained by an overemphasis on isolated facts and inappropriate message framing of news stories. Table 14.2 shows the levels of media use (means and percentages) in four presidential election years starting in 1976.

Levels of specific types of media use varied considerably over recent decades (Table 14.2). The significant drop in days per week reading a daily newspaper from 1988 (4.02) to 2000 (3.52) reflects a more completely documented downward trend in U.S. newspaper readership from the 1960s to the present (Peiser, 2000a). Reading of newspaper campaign stories shows an even sharper drop, from 73.5% in 1976 to only 45.3% in 2000. Though not asked in 1976, levels of attention to newspaper campaign stories within the subgroup of respondents who read campaign stories shows a significant *increase* from 1984 (2.96) to 2000 (3.44), in contrast to the lower proportions who read such stories.

Use of television national news shows a significant drop from 1984 (3.60) to 2000 (3.33), in keeping with research indicating that large portions of the network news audiences have been lost to cable programming. Attention to television national news shows about the campaign was relatively flat, dipping from 3.53 in 1984 to

TABLE 14.2  
Levels of Media Use Across 4 Presidential Election Years

	1976	1984	1988	2000
Number of days read newspaper (NP)	—	3.94	4.02	3.52
NP campaign use	73.5%	—	50.0%	45.3%
NP campaign articles attention	—	2.96	3.32	3.44
TV national news use	—	3.60	—	3.33
TV campaign news attention	—	3.53	3.40	3.49

*Note.* Data from National Election Studies (NES) 1976, 1984, 1988, and 2000 surveys.  $N = 1,903, 1,926, 1,775,$  and  $1,555,$  respectively. Means for attention measures are based only on respondents who watched and read the relevant campaign content.

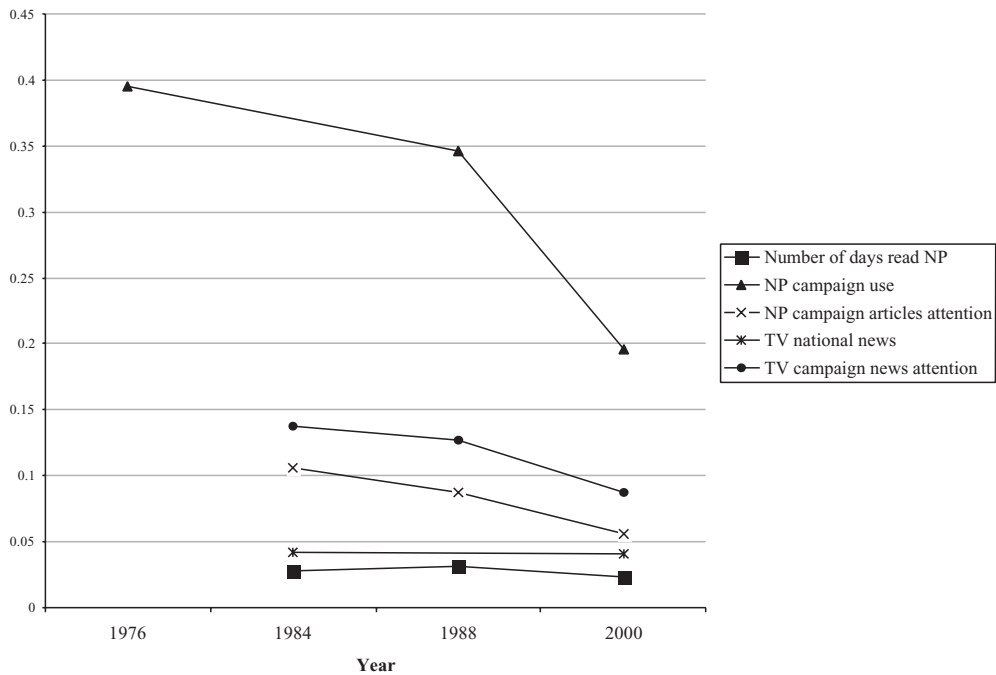


FIG. 14.5. Effects of five forms of media use on political knowledge.

3.40 in 1988 and then increasing slightly in 2000. Neither television measure was available in 1976.

### Strength of Effects

Figure 14.5 presents effectiveness (unstandardized regression coefficients) of media use on knowledge (an index consisting of responses to the questions which party controls the House of Representatives and what the parties ideological locations are) over time, controlling for gender, age, education, income, and party identification. Effect sizes can be compared across the four campaigns, but comparisons of effects of the various media measures should be avoided because each unstandardized coefficient utilizes the variances specific to a given media variable

The ability to predict political knowledge has declined over time for most media measures (Fig. 14.5). Reading of newspaper campaign story effectiveness reveals a marked drop parallel to that shown for its level of use, with effect sizes in 2000 only half what they had been in 1976. Prediction of knowledge by attention to newspaper campaign stories reveals a less severe linear decline over the three campaigns. Reading a daily newspaper effect size remained stable.

Television has fared much better than newspapers in that watching network national news shows stable effect sizes over time despite sharp declines in viewing levels in 2000. The effects of attention to television campaign stories weakened only slightly from 1984 to 1988; however, they declined more precipitously in 2000.

## **MEDIA USE AND POLITICAL LEARNING: IMPLICATIONS FOR CHANGE**

Citizens continued to learn political information from the mass media at the time of the 2000 presidential election. The use of traditional news media, along with information from the Internet, had independent effects on political learning. Critics of the media often overlook these positive contributions of the media; however, some of their criticisms should not be dismissed. We should not be complacent about the virtues of the media in the light of findings of negative effects of entertainment television shows (e.g., daytime talk shows) and documented trends of changing definitions of news toward featurized and people-oriented content and away from straight public affairs accounts (Committee of Concerned Journalists, 1998; D. M. McLeod, Kosicki, & McLeod, 2002).

We can draw further pessimistic conclusions. The dwindling of print and network news audiences is well known, as is evident in the declining levels of use in our analyses. What is less well known and more troubling is the erosion of their effectiveness in conveying basic political information. Americans learned less from traditional media in 2000 than did citizens in previous elections. The overall finding of shrinkage in both use and effectiveness of the traditional media is an ominous sign for American democracy. The key question becomes, Can the traditional news media content be refashioned in ways that will restore their popularity and effectiveness?

### **Equivalence**

Political knowledge continued to be unequally distributed across education levels in 2000. Consumption of news in traditional news media, a major process mediating the learning effects of education, mimics and perhaps perpetuates these status inequalities. Using the Internet for campaign information is also highly stratified and, for that reason, appears to be an unlikely source for reaching the lesser educated. On the other hand, both newspapers and the Internet showed evidence of their effectiveness among the less educated citizens, and thus the potential for overcoming knowledge gaps, *if* their use could be widened in these groups. Some prominent campaign events, such as debates, can reduce the level of information inequality in the electorate (Holbrook, 2002). Changing news content seems to be the key to regaining the audiences for newspapers and network news. The trend toward making news content more entertaining has not resulted in building audiences. The public appears to want news that is connected to them and helpful to their lives. More people complain that news is too superficial and sensational than fault it for being boring or opinionated (Pew Research Center, 1996).

The problems of traditional news media in retaining their audiences are exacerbated by their inability to attract the most recent youth cohorts, who are more withdrawn from politics and the news media than were earlier generations. Unless something is done to reinvigorate the news interests of the young, their pattern of low use is apt to be perpetuated as they age, and news audiences will continue to shrink. We should avoid oversimplifying generational changes, however. Today's youth have, to some extent, replaced their low interest in partisan politics with prosocial civic activities such as volunteering. They are unlikely to be habitual daily consumers of news but they may read or watch news when they encounter it in election campaigns or on days when other particularly salient stories dominate the news.

Youth are not simply replacing traditional news media with the new technology, as is commonly assumed. Users of the Internet of all age categories are *more* likely, not less likely to be consumers of newspapers and television news, in keeping with previous research (Shah, McLeod, & Yoon, 2001). Our analyses of effects show that exposure to newspaper stories and television programs about the campaign positively affect the young as much as older adults. The special problem is that today's youth has increasingly low levels of news use rather than any difficulty in comprehending news to which they pay attention. We cannot blame the young exclusively for the weakening of media effects on knowledge noted from 1984 to 2000. The explanation for the decline may have more to do with inadequacies of media coverage than with changes in audiences' interest.

### **Internet Prospects**

Can the rapidly growing use of the Internet make up for present deficiencies in the use and effects of traditional media? Grounds for optimism were particularly apparent among the young cohorts most deficient in political knowledge. Roughly 40% of those under age 40 reported campaign information use from the Internet, and its effects were strongest among the youngest group (ages 18–23). Given that Internet use will diffuse much further in the next decade and that today's youth and subsequent cohorts are likely to continue its use over the life course, there is hope for an increase in public awareness. On the other hand, we have noted that mere use of the Internet does not guarantee learning. When it is used for informational search and exchange, it is likely to increase political as well as other types of knowledge. Use for other purposes may produce null or perhaps negative effects on knowledge.

### **Knowledge for What?**

Our analyses suggest that individuals are learning less from the media over time despite maintaining their levels of attention. Diminishing learning from media over time may be the process that counteracts and depresses expected effects of increase in education on aggregate levels of knowledge. Without continuous learning from media, the effects of education on knowledge may be invisible. An additional problem not addressed so far is how knowledge conveyed by the media can be translated into democratic processes that foster political participation. We argue that media roles in political learning that can assume social relevance will not be clear as long as research ignores differences in content and structural characteristics of media messages, restrict conceptions of knowledge to storage of discrete memorized "facts," and overlook processes that may intervene between the communicators and their audiences (Atkin, 1981; J. M. McLeod et al., 2002).

## **THE INFORMATION PROCESSING APPROACH**

The information processing approach in cognitive psychology provides a useful framework for understanding learning from media by treating everything that a person knows as an interconnected network of mental representations (Lachman et al., 1979). Mental representations are defined as internal representations of reality, the result of encoding of information. They take different forms, such as features,

concepts, evaluations, and summary judgments (Smith, 1998). These various forms in turn may trigger different kinds of cognitive activities and ultimately they “influence the way we interpret the world around us, put our experiences in context, and plan our actions” (Smith, 1998, p. 392). Meaning and understanding emerge from the pattern of linkages between relevant representations (Smith, 1998). Learning from media thus may be defined as a process that involves not only storing but also transforming media information into representations that can be used in generalizing to new situations, solving problems, and creating the world as the place we want it to be.

## Principles of Learning

Principles of learning within information processing models (Anderson & Lebiere, 1998; Newell, 1990; Smith, 1998) are relatively abstract, and they do not specify how people learn from media. We focus on four principles that we think have implications for media use. They are summarized below.

(1) Learning involves intake of information and formation of mental representations and associative links connecting those representations into organized structures (e.g. networks, schemas or exemplars). Formation of mental representations is fueled by environmental and socially constructed information (Levine, Resnick, & Higgins, 1993), but individuals often supplement that information with preexisting mental representations (Higgins & Bargh, 1987). Information provided in the media can be regarded as a set of “common-sense” representations of reality constructed by journalists and other media writers. One can expect some degree of correspondence between media representations and individuals’ mental representations.

(2) Individuals’ goals set the context for formation of new representations and use of preexisting ones. On the one hand, people bring their own wishes and expectations to any communication situation (Neisser, 1976), which influences what they notice and remember (Smith, 1998). On the other hand, individuals’ goals, motives, and needs determine cognitive procedures they will use to process available representations (Smith, 1994). Individuals motivated to be accurate may put more cognitive effort and systematically process all relevant information, in contrast to individuals who just need to solve a problem most efficiently and process information heuristically (Chaiken, Lieberman, & Eagly, 1989; Taylor, 1998). Similarly, individuals vary in their goals when approaching media content and they may use different cognitive strategies to deal with media content according to those goals. The kinds of cognitive processes that the individual brings to bear on media content determine the mental representations they activate and construct.

(3) Frequently or recently used representations are more accessible and have greater influence on processing outcomes (Higgins, 1996). Some representations may be more frequently used because readily available and salient features of environment more often trigger them. Others can be used because they correspond to individuals’ motivations (Carlston & Smith, 1996). In media content some representations are more likely to appear than others. These media patterns may trigger certain kinds of mental activities and representations, which produce a pattern of outcomes.

(4) Individuals’ cognitive systems have significant processing limitations. There is only so much information a person can process at once (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Although individuals can increase their information processing capacities



by recoding, altering, and reorganizing information in accordance with their pre-existing representations (Lachman et al., 1979), their learning is affected by the cognitive load. Media can affect learning with the amount of information provided as well as by the content and structural features of their messages.

## Representations

Normative democratic theory stipulates that when people are presented with a common social problem, they discuss it, deliberate, criticize each others' positions, formulate viewpoints, and make judgments, choices, and decisions. These acts are democratic only if they are based on full and accurate information. Democratic conditions of completeness and correctness should lead to optimal decisions. What exactly constitutes information people need to make their decisions and act on them is empirically contestable, however. Just simple facts, even though they accurately represent the real world, may not be what citizens want or what they need to make adequate decisions. Most citizens, about 70%, say that they need both facts and context (American Society of Newspaper Editors [ASNE], 1999). Citizens need a context to be able to move from recognizing names of their political representatives to forming impressions of their honesty, knowing how well they are connected with people, knowing their records (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2000), and finally, perhaps, developing an understanding of who really rules (J. Nerone, personal communication, June, 2001). As the Commission on Freedom of the Press said in 1947, "It is no longer enough to report the fact truthfully. It is now necessary to report the truth about the fact."

A fact without adequate context can render information irrelevant. Irrelevant information can be as manipulative and misleading as an inaccurate fact. It is a fact, for example, that between 4 million and 6 million Americans either failed to cast votes or had their votes invalidated in the 2000 presidential election because of faulty equipment, mismarked ballots, polling-place shortcomings such as long lines, and foul-ups with registration or absentee voting (Gugliotta, 2001). So what? What does this mean? A fact is only one determinant of the communication content; the context within which it is presented is another. "One need not be a discourse linguist to know that the meaning of a sentence depends on what has been said (meant) before" (van Dijk, 1998, p. 9). Perhaps adding the fact that minority and poor precincts had up to three times higher rates of invalidated ballots (Mintz & Keating, 2000) may help answer the "So what?" question. The conclusions people reach may vary, but more important is that the context triggers interpretation through which facts may become useful to individuals. Moreover, the context may act as a constraint to ensure that the meanings formed by different people will be similar (Kintsch, 1998, p. 80). Construction of meaning of what is communicated, rather than exchange of facts, is at the core of how individuals think and respond to their experiences (McKinlay & Potter, 1987). Media content and public affairs reporting is empowering to the extent that it helps citizens make connections between their daily experiences and a broader social context, between individuals with whom they may not care about socializing and distant collectives that are being wronged. Understanding one's position in nets of power relations and social contexts that shape one's everyday life may energize individuals to attend a community meeting, contact public officials, come together to do some community or campaign work, or just express support for activities that can bring about change (Gamson, 1992).

**Journalists' Perspectives.** Providing people with information they need in their lives is the top reason for being a journalist for about two thirds of journalists (Pew Research Center, 1999).<sup>2</sup> Journalists overwhelmingly mirror the public's stand on what constitutes information. Only about 7% of journalists agree that news today is just getting the facts (ASNE, 1999). Instead, journalists want newspapers to present both facts and explanations. About a third of editors also emphasize the journalist's role as news explainer, above that of news breaker or investigative watchdog (Pew Center for Civic Journalism, 2001). In this attempt to provide content that is more useful to readers, editors say that they are shifting their focus to stories that deal with broader issues, outcomes, and ramifications of events, at the expense of routine coverage of meetings and governmental processes. This broader view of media professionals on what constitutes useful information does not compromise their support for the basic values of accuracy and balance. Everyone—editors, journalists, and media executives—almost unanimously agree that the core principles of journalism are getting facts right and getting both sides of the story (ASNE, 1999; Pew Research Center, 1999).

Journalists' views of news media roles in society are not necessarily reflected in what they write and publish. Media executives are, for example, more likely than journalists to consider journalism as a business enterprise, accountable to shareholders, and to see "helping to create a sense of community" as an important reason for being a journalist. The discrepancies between executive and journalistic values are not likely to be manifested as direct pressures on what journalists write, but they may contribute to a focus on a bottom line and create a commercial mindset in the newsrooms (Kovach, Rosenstiel, & Mitchell, 1999). Two thirds of journalists say that news organizations' attempts to attract readers or viewers have pushed them toward infotainment instead of news (Pew Research Center, 1999). Despite journalists' commitment to their high-minded roles, such as investigators of claims made by government and analysts and interpreters of complex social issues (see Weaver & Wilhoit, 1986), the proportion of stories with a feature or scandal emphasis relative to traditional hard news stories between 1977 and 1997 increased from 1 in 13 to 1 in 4 (Committee of Concerned Journalists, 1998).<sup>3</sup> Some journalists tend to justify these trends with a "We are just giving them what they want" attitude. About one fifth of journalists think that the public is uninterested in serious news (Pew Research Center, 1999). News content that emphasizes the entertainment value of events rather than their political relevance may limit audiences' learning (J. Gamson, 1994).

Media news content is a result of journalists' knowledge and perceptions, diverse assumptions about audiences, clash of professional and personal values, production routines, organizational rules, and technical skills. Therefore, it is a symbolic construction, a representation of reality that is constrained but not reduced

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<sup>2</sup>About half of journalists say that uncovering wrongdoings and witnessing history are very important reasons why they work in news, followed by about a quarter of journalists who prioritize the goal of reforming society. Only about 10% of journalists recognize creation of a sense of community and fame as top reasons for being a journalist (Pew Research Center, 1999).

<sup>3</sup>The proportion of personality, human-interest, quality-of-life, and bizarre stories increased from 16% to 28% on the television network news and from 15% to 24% on front pages of newspapers from 1987 to 1997. At the same time the proportion of in-depth analysis stories on television network news decreased by about 6 percentage points, to about 7%, whereas the proportion of those stories on front pages of newspaper increased by about 1 percentage point, to about 8% (Committee of Concerned Journalists, 1998).

to facticity. Journalists tell stories about reality; they do not present bulleted list of facts (unless they work for *USA Today*). Stories are told by organizing facts into “themes” or main “points” that convey meanings (Mencher, 1999, p. 150; Rich, 1997). And as in any text, themes in news stories can be viewed as subsets of cognitive representations in the mind of the writer (Meyer, 1983).

**Textual Representations.** Discourse analysis scholars agree with journalists that themes or topics are the main organizing elements of stories because they indicate what the text is about. They represent “the summary, gist, upshot” of the text (van Dijk, 1998, p. 9), and they are not reducible to the meaning of individual words, sentences, or facts. For example, the following lead of a *Washington Post* article suggests the theme of systemic corruption:

The lords of Enron cooked their books. They overstated their profits by hiding a billion dollars in losses, thus driving up the price of their stock. Their accountants winked at the subterfuge, then shredded the document. Before it all came crashing down in the largest bankruptcy in history, the executives got rich while employees and stockholders got screwed. It’s an outrage: It’s a scandal! And it is, of course, a time-honored American tradition. (Carlson, 2002, p. F1)

A number of additional themes, such as *greed*, *connection between business and politics*, *public accountability*, *stock fraud*, and *world of high finance*, are used in this article to tell the story of the collapsed energy-trading company Enron. These themes may or may not overlap with themes in other media stories. The news media are not monolithic in their presentations of reality, but the pattern lurks in the variety of images and ideas on display. Some themes are more likely to appear than others, and some media may emphasize certain themes over others. For example, *The National Enquirer*, a tabloid newspaper that specializes in “untold stories” and “what really happened” aspects of events, presented the Enron scandal through three dominant themes: *adultery*, *greed*, and *ripping off Americans* (Lynch, Hanrahan, & Wright, 2002). Our informal content analysis of 54 Enron stories published in *The Washington Post* and 46 broadcasts on *ABC World News* during February 2002, at the peak of the scandal, indicates the absence of the adultery theme. Instead, the tale of Enron on ABC news was largely driven by the video tracks featuring archival images of executives and their congressional hearing appearances in front of senators who insulted (*ABC World News Tonight*, 2002a) and denounced (*ABC World News Tonight*, 2002b) them. The sound tracks described executives as arrogant and less than truthful and detailed their unethical business practices. The stories often boiled down to a case of lying, cheating, and stealing. By the end of February *ABC World News Tonight* reported on mounting evidence that the Enron collapse might be the result of criminal activity. One of the frequent themes was centered on images of employees and investors and sound tracks documenting their losses of life savings and retirements in the company’s collapse. Employees were largely portrayed as victims of individual wrongdoing or people stricken by a natural disaster but without promises of help. In contrast, the *The Washington Post* stories downplayed criminal behavior and included more themes that suggested systemic causes, such as *deregulation of energy industries*, *business practices of investment banking*, *accounting rules*, *lobbying*, and corresponding systemic solutions. The prominence of any particular theme in the media content depends on how it

resonates with larger cultural themes, how writers perceive their audience interests, how skillful the information sources are in promoting their interests, and how journalists follow their professional conventions in producing newsworthy stories (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Price & Tewksbury, 1997).

**Audience Representations.** Themes in news stories are essential in communication processes because they are more likely to be remembered than any factual information used to support them (Kintsch, 1974). Studies have suggested a partial correspondence between certain recurrent themes in media and what was understood, believed, and remembered by the audience (Bennett, 2001; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; van Dijk, 1988). Audiences' goals of making sense of what was intended by the author of the message and their reliance on certain preestablished sociocultural conventions usually result in a high degree of correspondence across different individuals interpreting the same message. However, the themes intended by the writers often are not merely copied into their audiences' minds. Themes also trigger inferential processes through which individuals actively construct various types of new mental representations (Graesser, Gernsbacher, & Goldman, 1998). Individuals' mental representations thus consist of fairly accurate reflections of both media and directly experienced realities (Higgins & Bargh, 1987), as well as relatively abstract summary representations encoded along with environmental information in the forms of observations, categories, evaluations, and orientations (Wyer & Carlston, 1994). Doris Graber (1988) found that people tend to remember inferences and judgments drawn from news stories rather than facts and evidence presented in those stories. In the case of the Enron scandal the media reporting has "inspired waves of public outrage" but not the sense of a political scandal (Eilperin, 2002). Perhaps as a result of accepting Enron money, Democratic politicians were reluctant to spotlight the company's links to the Bush administration, and this resulted in relatively few stories that portrayed the Enron scandal as a political issue. Although increasing numbers of people saw the actions of Enron executives as illegal (an increase from 42% in January 2002 to 65% in February 2002), and another 26% thought that they were unethical but not illegal, public perceptions of the Bush Administration's involvement with Enron did not change much. About 15% of the public thought that members of the administration did something illegal (an increase of 5% from January), and 43% thought that they did something unethical (an increase of 7%). Although most Americans appeared to lack political representations of the Enron scandal, the issue did not settle down to wrongdoing by a handful of crooked executives either. About a quarter of the public thought that similar practices occur at most, and another 50% at some, other large corporations (CNN/USA Today/Gallup Poll, January 11–14 and February 8–10, 2002). Most of the public seemed to have understood the point of the Enron story without necessarily remembering details.

**Frames as Representations.** In response to the theme or topic in the text, people assign a topic to the text, or infer it from the text, and store it in their memory as a representation among other relevant preexisting representations (van Dijk, 1988). Cognitive psychologists refer to mental representations that approximate themes in the media stories and contain general types of information about familiar people, situations, and events, as frames (Minsky, 1975). Studies show that highlighting some properties of information by placing it in a certain context (i.e., framing it) evokes interpretative frames that influence individuals' consequent

decisions (Kahneman & Tversky, 1984). Mass communication research has shown that by activating some ideas and feelings more often than others, the media may “encourage particular trains of thought about political phenomena and lead audience members to arrive at more or less predictable solutions” (Price, Tewksbury, & Powers, 1997, p. 483). Valkenburg, Semetko, and de Vreese (1999) found that news frames affect readers’ thoughts on issues and that human-interest frames have negative consequences for recall of information. The influence of news media framing on citizens’ thinking about issues and their subsequent decisions has been also shown in election (Domke, Shah, & Wackman, 1998) and social movement contexts (Gamson, 1992; D. M. McLeod & Detenber, 1999). Although individuals do not simply copy what they have seen or read in the media, the media do seem to encourage or discourage use of specific frames among the audience by making them readily available (Gamson, 1992; Neuman, Just, & Crigler, 1992; Sotirovic, 2000).

**Schemas as Representations.** In comparison to frames, schemas are even larger-scale mental representations with significant internal structures (Smith, 1998). They are assumed to represent “abstract generic knowledge” (Fiske & Taylor, 1991, p. 98), and they work as both perceptual filters and inference mechanisms. Schemas allow “the perceiver to link the story events to a general framework of knowledge, filling in gaps and inferring unstated events” (Smith, 1998, p. 404). Information processing and understanding in traditional schema models are strictly top-down, preexisting knowledge-controlled processes. Research in text comprehension, however, suggests that mental text representations—or schemas—are mixtures of “text-derived and knowledge-derived information” whose parts are determined by the coherence and completeness of the text and adequacy and precision of preexisting knowledge (Kintsch, 1998, p. 104). Individuals’ knowledge organizations in a particular domain are shown to change in accordance with the text organizations (Ferstl & Kintsch as cited in Kintsch, 1998), justifying the need for conceiving of comprehension as a more bottom-up, text driven process (Kintsch, 1998, p. 94).

In mass communication research the concept of schema is used mostly to explain what people notice in the media and how they use their prior set of beliefs and general knowledge to interpret information, rather than how schemas are acquired or constructed. For example, people with more developed political schemas consume more news, learn more, and have more differentiated constructs and higher quality issue arguments (Rhee & Cappella, 1997). Fredin, Kosicki, and Becker (1996) found that schema-based orientations toward campaign-related information leads to information seeking and higher salience and attention. Graber (1988) found that people use their schemas to select and reduce the media information to useful essentials. However, when media stories include clear generalizations, even the less intellectually gifted are likely to process information in abstract terms. Unfortunately, media content most often seems to lack information that may help audiences to put the issues, such as crime, into perspective and to connect them into meaningful patterns (Graber, 1980). Neuman et al. (1992) showed that contextualizing the news by providing analytical hooks, such as historical background and economic impact, could motivate audience members who lack cognitive skills or motivation to become informed about complex issues.

**Exemplars as Representations.** When individuals perceive a person or an event they form mental representations, or exemplars, of that person or event

on the basis of inferences about their general or typical characteristics (Smith, 1998). Media regularly present social information in the form of exemplars, a person or an event that is supposedly typical for the whole category. However, media content often features inappropriate selections of cases in an effort to illustrate the issues in the most colorful ways. Through frequent and consistent exposure to such content individuals may construct inappropriate representations that may bias their judgments and decisions (Sotirovic, 2001c; Zillmann, 2002). Research shows that individuals base their perceptions (e.g., of the public's liking of wine and of the economic prospects of farming) on exemplar distributions, even when the apparent distribution was contradicted by the survey data or base rates (Brosius & Bathelt, 1994; Zillmann, Gibson, Sundar, & Perkins, 1996). Moreover, emotional exemplars in the news are more effective in influencing perceptions (e.g., risks of contracting skin cancer and getting killed in a carjacking) than nonemotional ones (Gibson & Zillman, 1994; Zillmann & Brosius, 2000).

## Audiences' Goals

**Preexposure Orientations.** Motivations that correspond to audiences' needs, desires, values, expectations, and goals influence communication choices. They also direct inference processes audience members engage in after receiving information. Most motivations that are studied within the communication field imply that media use is a function of gratification of immediate, personal, and hedonistic needs. For example, McCarty and Shrum (1993) found that individuals who value self-actualization and equality are more likely to watch television news programs, whereas those who value a comfortable life spend more time with television and watch comedies. Research shows that the use of media for instrumental purposes, such as seeking information, in contrast to their habitual use for time-passing and entertainment, lead to differential attitudinal, behavioral, and learning effects (Kim & Rubin, 1997; Rubin, 2002; Rubin & Step, 2000).

In addition to having expectations that media can satisfy their personal needs and help them achieve their personal goals, audience members approach news media as institutions with distinctive social functions that are instrumental in reaching certain societal objectives (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974; J. M. McLeod, Sotirovic, & Holbert, 1998). For example, if one perceives freedom and equality as important societal goals, these values may be translated into the view that media as social institutions have a function to provide a forum for a wide range of viewpoints that would lead to achieving those societal goals. In turn, these audiences' expectations of what roles and functions media should have as social institutions are related to both individuals' media use and their levels of knowledge. Individuals who stress the importance of pluralistic functions of news media, such as providing daily accounts of important happenings, serving as a watchdog over government, activating citizens, and providing a forum for ideas, are more likely to use public affairs media content. They are also more knowledgeable about current events and civil rights than those who prioritize consensual functions, such as promoting economic development and taking positions to guide citizens' decisions (J. M. McLeod, Sotirovic, Voakes, Guo, & Huang, 1998).

Evidence that the public is becoming more skeptical of what they read and see in media content is a threatening sign for learning. Support for the watchdog role of media is eroding, indicated by the increase in the proportion of people who

think that press criticism keeps political leaders from doing their job rather than preventing them from doing something that should not be done (from 17% in 1985 to 31% in 1999). About 72% of Americans say that watchdog reporting perpetuates scandal (Pew Research Center, 1999). The percentage of those who think that media hurt rather than protect democracy increased from 23% in 1985 to 38% in 1999. Perception of media bias may not be at the root of these negative trends. About half of the public thought that the news media often let their own political preferences influence the way they report the news in both 1992 and 2000 (PollingReport.com, 2001). To a greater extent, audiences' skepticism may be fueled by recognition of organizational and commercial motives in news production. Almost two thirds of the public thinks that news organizations do not care about the people they report on, up from about half in 1985. The majority of the public, about 60%, believe that newspapers are concerned mainly with making profits rather than serving the public interest, and 80% say that journalists overdramatize the news and cover sensational stories just to sell newspapers (ASNE, 1998). Among those who think that media have gotten worse, about 20% of newspaper audiences and 42% of television network news audiences explicitly complain about too sensational and shallow coverage (Pew Research Center, 1996).

Both personal motives and societal concerns are sources of media use and effects on learning. Like other forms of human behavior, outcomes of communication can be predicted from mixed motives: short-term hedonistic self-interest and long-term normative beliefs and social commitments (Mansbridge, 1990; Taylor, 1996). Therefore, it would be wrong to restrict communication theories to simple hedonistic assumptions that look at audience members as disconnected consumers rather than as concerned citizens who care about the larger world or their community. Communication theories that account for communication behavior with either only demographic or only psychographic (e.g., personality characteristics and motives) variables cannot explain the uses of media that facilitate formation of mental representations conducive to behaviors beyond individual self-interests.

**Postexposure Orientations.** Motivations and goals not only are important in directing media use, and what kind of information is remembered, but also interact with the received information to help a person achieve understanding (Taylor, 1998). Audience members engage in sense making or inferential processes that best address their goals, and these cognitive processes in turn determine the kinds of representations one generates (Carlston & Smith, 1996). Motivated persons use inferential strategies that involve consideration of a range of information and careful attention to its implications. In contrast, unmotivated individuals seize on a single piece of information and default to relatively simple representations (Chaiken et al., 1989).

The way people process information also has been found to have important implications for the effects of news media (Graber, 1988). Information processing strategies help individuals to cope with the vast amount of incoming news items and allow them to achieve meaning and understanding appropriate to their needs (Kosicki & McLeod, 1990). Basically, the strategies can be more effortful, elaborate, and analytic or less demanding, simple, and heuristic. More elaborated, active, processing is related to greater recall of news and greater exclusion of irrelevant information (Hsu & Price, 1993). Elaborative and reflective processing of news are found to be weakly related to public affairs knowledge but more strongly related to knowledge of candidates' issue stance (Eveland, 2001; Sotirovic & McLeod, 2001). However,

we should not assume that processing of the media content is only purposefully directed. Previous research has found that the tendency to think about news, recall stories later, and seek more information originates from perceptions of patterns in media content (Kosicki & McLeod, 1990).

Cues of a given story, such as the primary themes, causal antecedents and emotional responses, as well as its structural characteristics, such as choppy and coherence, can activate particular processing strategies (Graesser et al., 1998). The mere presence of the relevant stimulus can set into operation cognitive processes without individuals' conscious guidance or awareness (Berger, 2002; Wegner & Bargh, 1998). Sotirovic and McLeod (2001) found that both reading newspaper public affairs and watching television crime dramas and adventure show stimulate reflective processing, although individuals may approach these two types of media content with very different motivations. Most important, reflection mediates the influence of media use on political participation more effectively than does factual knowledge (J. M. McLeod et al., 2001; Sotirovic & McLeod, 2001).

Information processing strategies influence not only the variety of forms and content of representations but also their interconnectedness (Smith, 1998). Thinking about concepts in relation to each other forms associations or links between those concepts (Wyer & Carlston, 1994). The extent and strength of associative links in memory facilitate recall of information and also determine how a person interprets information and makes judgments (Smith, 1994, 1998). More complex thinking, which involves differentiation and integration of various dimensions of the issue, produces less retaliatory, punitive, attitudes (Schroder, Driver, & Streufert, 1967; Sotirovic, 2001a), and more moderate and balanced positions on political controversies (Sotirovic, 2001b; Tetlock, Peterson, & Berry, 1993). In democracy the most equitable choices are made through consultation and integration of various points of view, and cognitive processes that support these democratic principles may have social implications.

**Role of Interpersonal Communication.** Structures and processes of discussion networks are closely tied with both how we use media and how we participate in public life. With whom and how we discuss issues are affected by the social characteristics of our community, neighborhood, and larger social networks. Where we live, and work and with whom we associate are partly a matter of personal choice, but our discussion networks are the result of contextual circumstances imposed by social class, income, and life cycle (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995). As a result, discussion networks differ on three dimensions, the size, heterogeneity of composition, and openness to diverse points of view, which have distinct consequences for political participation. Heterogeneity and openness stimulate use of public affairs media, perhaps as a function of individuals' need for more varied and in-depth media information for use in network discussions. In turn, all three dimensions of network discussions and use of public affairs media promote frequent interpersonal discussion. Extensive networks and their heterogeneity also stimulate reflection about media content that results in higher levels of both factual knowledge and complex understanding (J. M. McLeod et al., 2001). Beyond individuals' discussion networks, length of residence and stability of neighborhood interact with media use to enhance civic participation (Kang & Kwak, 2003).

Interpersonal discussion and public affairs media use are thus related in complicated and reciprocal ways, facilitating each other rather than acting as competitors for political influence (Chaffee, 1982). The structure and norms of interpersonal



networks affect public affairs media use and media use strongly affects the frequency of discussion of public issues. Together they exert a strong influence on political learning.

## MEDIA USE AND EFFECTS ON COGNITIONS AND CIVIC PARTICIPATION

An empirical illustration of many of the above points about media and learning is provided by a study of media use and civic participation in Madison, Wisconsin, in 2000. The study focused on the issue of urban growth in the community, and consequently questions about reflection, knowledge, complexity, and participation were asked primarily in the local context.<sup>4</sup>

### Origins of Reflection

The first research question is, Why do some people reflect more than others about what they encounter in media stories? The demographic influence shown for reflection in Table 14.3 corroborates previous findings (Kosicki, Amor, & McLeod,

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<sup>4</sup>Hierarchical regression analyses were conducted predicting the five column variables by blocks of prior variables indicated by row variables. Block 1 consists of four demographic variables (gender, age, education, and income measured in customary ways) plus ideology measured by self-rating on a 7-point scale ranging from very liberal to very conservative.

Block 2 was the respondent's (R) rating of the importance of six goals for his or her community. *Postmaterial values* was a factor score of three values: help each other, provide opportunities to express opinions, and a community where ideas are more important than money.

Block 3 included five media use variables. *Newspaper public affairs use* was an index of four ratings (10-point scales) of exposure and attention to national and local newspaper stories. *Television public affairs use* was attention to this same content on television news. *Newspaper issue* was exposure and attention to newspaper stories about urban growth and the environment. *Television issue* was attention to urban growth and environmental stories on television news. *Internet search and exchange* asked of Internet users how often (three 10-point scales) they searched information for school or work, searched for information about issues and politics, and shared ideas about issues and politics. Nonusers were coded "1" on each item. The three scales were summed to form an index.

Block 4 was *reflective processing* of information about community issues in local news stories. The four items, using 10-point scales, concerned what R does after reading or viewing the stories: recall it later and think about it, think about how it relates to what I already know, make sense of it by comparing it to my experiences, and use it to organize thoughts about issues.

Block 5 was made up of two forms of cognition. *Knowledge* was measured as the number of correct answers to six questions: recall of the two U.S. senators from the state, recognition of who a local official and a prominent philanthropist were and what the initials EDF and EPA stood for, and accuracy of estimating the local unemployment rate. *Complex thinking* was coded from transcripts made from recorded responses to an open-ended question that asked respondents to "explain the issue of urban growth and its impact on the quality of life in (the community)" to someone who was not from the community. Two dimensions were coded: differentiation, the number of nonredundant ideas R used; and integration, the number of connections among different ideas (Sotirovic, 2001; Streufert & Streufert, 1978). The two scales were then standardized and added.

Measurement of the first three dependent variables is shown above. In addition, two forms of participation were analyzed. *Traditional participation* was comprised of seven actions ranging from voting in a local election to working on behalf of a candidate or group. Respondents were asked whether or not they had participated in each action during the past 2 years. The number of "yes" responses formed the index. *Nontraditional participation* was the combination of four questions about R's willingness to participate in a local forum about urban growth and willingness to engage in eight types of action on the issue of urban growth. Each was measured on a 10-point scale.

TABLE 14.3  
Effects of Demographics and Ideology, Values, and Communication on Reflection,  
Cognition, and Participation

	<i>Media Reflection</i>	<i>Knowledge</i>	<i>Complex Thinking</i>	<i>Traditional Participation</i>	<i>Nontraditional Participation</i>
Demographics & ideology					
Gender (male)	.03	.10 <sup>#</sup>	.03	.00	.08
Age	.21**	.27**	.08	.26**	.12*
Education	.10 <sup>#</sup>	.28**	.18**	.21**	.15**
Income	.03	.09 <sup>#</sup>	.04	.14**	.07
Ideology (liberal)	.17**	.15**	.07	.21**	.17**
Incremental $R^2$	8.18**	19.01**	5.15**	18.75**	7.95**
Postmaterial values	.15**	.04	.16**	.16**	.30**
Incremental $R^2$	2.00**	0.09	2.14**	2.05**	7.36**
Media					
Newspaper public affairs	.28**	.25**	.01	.22**	.28**
Newspaper issue	.22**	.24**	-.02	.19**	.29**
Television public affairs	.25**	.12*	.09 <sup>#</sup>	.13*	.28**
Television issue	.19**	.04	.12*	.11*	.26**
Internet search & exchange	.14*	.20**	.13*	.18**	.16**
Incremental $R^2$	9.36**	8.16**	3.47*	5.94**	12.25**
Reflective processing		.08	.15**	.23**	.32**
Incremental $R^2$		0.53	1.92**	4.19**	8.06**
Cognition					
Knowledge				.30**	.13**
Complex thinking				.19**	.16**
Incremental $R^2$				8.40**	2.93*
Total $R^2$	19.54**	27.79**	12.68**	39.33**	38.55**

Note.  $N = 341$ . Data are from the Mass Communications Research Center 2000 survey, University of Wisconsin–Madison. Entries are  $\beta$ s immediately before entry, controlling for all prior blocks of variables. \*\* $p < .01$ ; \* $p < .05$ ; <sup>#</sup> $p < .10$ .

1987; Sotirovic & McLeod, 2001). Older citizens, and marginally the more educated, reflect more about local news stories, as do those who are more liberal and hold postmaterial values for their community.

More crucial to our understanding reflection is the strong influence of media, particularly the use of public affairs content ( $\beta = .28$ , newspapers; .25 television). We can conclude that engagement with issues and diverse points of view in the media stimulates a more sustained and reflective consideration of public issues.

## Effects of Reflection

The second research question examined is, What are the consequences of citizens adopting reflective strategies after attending to media stories about local issues? Very different reflection effects are shown for the two cognitive variables, knowledge and complexity. Reflection stimulates complex thinking ( $\beta = .15$ ) but its relationship to knowledge is eliminated after control for the media block (Table 14.3). Reflection has a strong direct effect on traditional participation (.23) and an even

stronger impact on nontraditional participation (.32) after controls for 11 antecedent variables. An appreciation of the strength of reflection's influence can be gained by comparing it to other sources of influence. In predicting both types of participation, reflection had higher coefficients than education and each of the other 10 variables in the first three blocks at each stage of entry. Further, reflection mediates the effects of most of these antecedent variables (J. M. McLeod et al., 2001). Reflection can be seen as generating more diverse and complex representations of local issues that in turn make participation more likely.

### **Knowledge and Complex Thinking**

Our data provide evidence for the third research question: How do knowledge and complex thinking about the local urban growth issue differ in their antecedents and effects? The most obvious difference is that knowledge is more strongly predicted than is complexity (27.8% vs. 12.7%), particularly by age, education, ideology, and newspaper and Internet use (Table 14.3). Only education in the first block affects complexity. Attention to urban growth issue stories on television and the Internet, but not newspaper use, affects complex thinking. Newspaper use influence on complexity is entirely indirect through its strong effect on reflection. Reflection has a strong impact on complexity but not on knowledge. Both knowledge and complex thinking have effects independent of each other on the two forms of participation, though traditional behavior is more influenced by knowledge and complexity has a greater impact on nontraditional activities. Through their complex thinking about a local issue, citizens appear to form representations that provide them with the utility beyond that of factual knowledge and lead them to take action on behalf of the community.

### **Understanding Participation**

The final question answered from the data in Table 14.3 is, What does the evidence add to our understanding of political participation? It is obvious from their predictive structures that traditional and nontraditional participation differ greatly. Traditional participation is more embedded in social structure in that the first block of variables accounts for more than twice as much variance in traditional (18.8%) than in nontraditional (8.0%) participation. Media use is clearly important for participation, though it has twice as much influence on nontraditional (12.3%) as on traditional (5.9%) participation. The strong influence of media use on nontraditional participation may reflect the fact that a local newspaper and two television stations have sponsored issue forums in the community. As noted earlier, reflection also had stronger influence on non-traditional participation.

Interpersonal discussion of the local issue also has independent effects on participation (not shown). Nevertheless, the pattern of relationship among media use, cognition, and participation persists after controlling for frequency of local issue discussion.

Finally, the block of two cognition variables contributes more than twice as much in terms of incremental variance to traditional (8.4%) than to nontraditional (2.9%) participation. As noted above, knowledge has the stronger influence on traditional forms, whereas complex thinking is stronger for nontraditional activities.

The differing patterns of prediction of traditional and non-traditional participation testify to the importance of including both types in future research.

### **Availability and Accessibility**

Representations that are most available in the media become more accessible in audiences' minds and are more likely to be used in subsequent judgments and evaluations (Price & Tewksbury, 1997). Despite the lack of one-to-one correspondence between media and mental representations, both ethnographic and experimental research generally shows a significant overlap between the two, and survey research indicates that those representations that are made more available in the media have a higher probability to occur in audiences' thinking.

Individuals' patterns of media use can be important sources of representations. On the one hand, people use and interact with the media in relatively stable and distinctive ways that are inherent within individuals and may or may not change over time (J. M. McLeod & McDonald, 1985). On the other hand, different media are likely to have dominant and relatively stable patterns of presentations of issues because of the specific production processes involved within the medium. For example, multiplicity or greater diversity of themes is expected in a 1,500-word newspaper story than in a 90-sec-long segment on national television news. Iyengar (1991) found that event-centered and focus-on-person frames occur more frequently on television news, whereas contextually rich frames predominate in newspaper stories. Different genres within a medium can also have different dominant patterns of presentations in response to specific audience expectations. Feature stories in newspapers and entertainment programs on television are more likely to present issues by emphasizing individual behaviors and their emotional reactions than by defining complex social situations. Focus on ideas and arguments rather than on concrete events and emotional reactions can trigger different inferential processes and result in different representations among audience members. Repetition of the pattern of presentation within the particular medium and genre, and audience members' more or less frequent and consistent exposure to that medium and genre, may result in the pattern of representations individuals form and use in their judgments (Sotirovic, 2000, 2001c; Zillmann, 2002).

### **Information Overload**

In popular culture references to information overload are frequently used to suggest audiences' difficulty in processing information due to the increase in amount of available information from multiple sources. Journalists use the concept of information overload as a major justification for their loss of audiences (Pew Research Center, 1999). Members of audiences disagree, however. Only about a quarter of Americans cite information overload as a factor in their media decisions (Committee of Concerned Journalists, 1999). The myth of information overload may be based on the knowledge that people can remember only about seven chunks of information in short-term memory task (Miller, 1956). The emphasis on limited capacity of working memory does not give credit to individuals for their ability to extend, apply, explain, generalize, interpret, or use those seven chunks of information in meaningful ways. Very complex meanings can be generated effortlessly by

connecting a few pieces of information in the working memory with some extant representations in individuals' knowledge networks (Kintsch, 1998, p.74).

The more serious impediment to learning than working memory limitations is a learner's failure to construct coherent mental representations of the material and to link them to their pre-knowledge (Kintsch, 1998). Understanding of the text can be improved even among individuals who lack background knowledge by making a text locally coherent. This can be accomplished by supplying bridging inferences (Britton & Gulgoz, 1991) or adding explanatory coherence by emphasizing causal relations (Beck, McKeown, Sinatra, & Loxterman, 1991). Improving global coherence of the text by making its macrostructures explicit through titles and subtitles (Beyer as cited in Kintsch, 1998) and reorganizing the paragraphs so that they corresponded to the subtopic structure (McNamara, E. Kintsch, Songer, & W. Kintsch, 1996) also resulted in increased understanding and learning.

Communication research similarly indicates that to counteract information overload the best strategy is not to simplify or glitzify media content but to allow audiences to better comprehend messages by improving their organizational and logical structures (Potter & Lang, 2000). Television news produced in the tabloid style that uses music, sound effects, slow motion, flash frames as transitions between shots, and the obtrusiveness of the reporter's voice does not improve recognition or recall of information and viewers find them less believable, less informative, and less enjoyable than stories produced in the standard formats (Grabe, Zhou, Lang, & Bolls, 2000). News stories that use emotion sparingly, keep the pace slow to moderate, match audio and video, use concrete words and pictures, and use strong chronological narratives are better remembered, and they are rated by audiences as more comprehensible, interesting, and informative (Lang & Potter, 2000).

## CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter we have argued that democratic citizenship requires more than factual knowledge. It requires understanding that social issues and individual situations are complex, interconnected, and usually optimally explained by more than one perspective. In a democratic society media could have an educational role that goes beyond providing bits of simple facts by presenting stories designed to stimulate reflection and encourage individuals to create meaning that can assume social relevance.

We have focused on media representations as a basis for individuals' learning about public affairs. We have argued that mass media content consists of representations that invite audiences to make sense of that content. Learning is therefore a sense-making process that involves not only storing but also transforming media representations into various forms of mental representations. This type of learning is about trying to understand, and it enables individuals to explain things, to see the world differently, and to think about things in different ways (Stevenson, 1994).

By making some representations more or less available media are crucial for shaping the ways the public interprets and understands issues. However, to be able to explain how these individual understandings are translated into social actions, we need to examine both processes that lead to media use and processes that are triggered by media use. Differences in the content and structure of media presentations, as well as the cognitive activities individuals engage in to make sense

of those presentations, are still largely ignored in social science research on media influences. This lack of attention leads to two alternative myths of media effects: one of massive and monolithic, and the other of weak and inconsequential.

Differential processes by which people construct meanings and understand public issues depend on their predominant pattern of media content use. In turn, those understandings induced by media content patterns have important behavioral outcomes. Media can either help or hinder the development of one's ability to process information in the ways that are more affective or cognitive, more simple or complex, more active or passive. Information less actively processed is less meaningful either because preexisting representations are not used to interpret it or because it is not used to modify and update preexisting representations. Research should examine other strategies that people may use to make sense of media messages. Particularly interesting may be strategies that involve skepticism and "reading through" the messages, as well as those that involve scanning and skimming. Skeptical processing may result in critical and oppositional interpretations that may produce a sense of empowerment because they call for alternative definitions of situations. In contrast, scanning may encourage reinforcement of already existent representations and result in status quo tendencies. The responsibilities of journalists would be to devise strategies that induce audiences to process important information in ways that are more likely to result in reasonable and equitable choices for all.

We view individuals as active producers of meanings, not as mindless respondents to stimuli or collectors of facts. Hence, the media influences are manifested in the processes of interpretations, when messages are evaluated in the light of already existing mental representations and integrated into individuals' consciousness. More sensitive approaches to accessing those interpretations should be used. For example, using open-ended survey questions to record and analyze individuals' interpretative processes combines the advantages of more subtle responses that arise in in-depth studies and the representativeness of sample surveys. Although the "free responses" are much more time-consuming and demanding to collect and analyze than preformatted responses, they are more valid and they enrich our understanding of media effects. Other techniques used by psychologists to reveal how mental representations are constructed and used in interpretations, such as true/false judgments about text statements, their importance ratings, and ratings on the extent to which they are conceptually related (Graesser et al., 1998), may be easily adapted by media researchers.

Most research on political learning addresses news representations; however, the effects of media entertainment should be studied too. Entertainment content contains representations about human behavior and problem solving that may cultivate certain mental misrepresentations. Nonetheless, these misrepresentations may enter into viewers' political judgments. Documenting the effects of entertainment is particularly important when the news media stand accused of yielding to commercial pressures that value violence, sex, and gossip above meaningful and useful information. By infusing the news with softer content and by focusing on dramatic and affective elements of controversies, the media fail to contribute to informed debate. Soft coverage may encourage skimming rather than reflecting and hinder understanding of issues, reduce political participation, and contribute to the erosion of democracy. Now when television networks and stations no longer have to fear the FCC and license renewal or need to show public service credentials (Kurtz, 2002), these trends may only become more prominent.

Responsibility for the health of democracy is shared among many community organizations: media, but also community officials and leaders, schools where democratic principles and media literacy can be taught (not only how to reflect, to seek connections, but also what not to reflect on), and, finally, families. However, media should be at the center of reform efforts. Without further enhancement by media, the effects of other socialization agents are diminished. Particularly for the less educated, the mass media constitute both a potential source of exposure to different ideas and an opportunity to learn what was not learned in school. The Internet may be the “hook” and effective panacea for narrowing the knowledge gap between older and younger people who are abandoning traditional media and know less than any generation before. Much depends on how the use of computers and the Internet is taught in our schools. Disadvantaged youth attending less affluent schools are apt to be taught mostly rudimentary word processing by undertrained teachers (Packard Foundation Report, 2001). To the extent that learning of more conceptual information search skills from well-trained teachers is confined to affluent schools, status inequalities in knowledge are apt to be perpetuated. Adequate teacher training for all schools and civic intervention programs connecting Internet use with other media is essential if the Internet is to become a resource for strengthening democratic processes.

Newspaper editors recognize the potential of the Internet for regaining some of their audiences. They see incorporation of public’s comments on issues and stories given through interactive means as increasingly important part of news coverage (Pew Center for Civic Journalism, 2001). Incorporating the public’s views in reporting through various practices of civic journalism is also seen as an opportunity for newspapers to reconnect with their audiences’ interests and to connect more effectively community interests with broader social forces that shape individuals’ everyday lives.

Dramatic examples illustrating this need for connections are abundant in the 2003 political scene. Columnist Jonathan Alter notes that while President Bush attributes the \$445 billion budget deficit to the War on Terrorism, the Congressional Budget Office says that his huge tax cuts have cost the Treasury nearly three times as much as the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, September 11 reconstruction, and homeland security measures combined (Alter, 2003, p. 36). Required by law to balance their budgets, states are forced to fill the vacuum created by the tax cuts. Cuts in federal funding combined with Congressional “unfunded mandates,” have forced states to raise taxes and cut services in the face of growing numbers who need their services.

Adding to the problem is that a large proportion of citizens make no connection between federal tax cuts and problems at the state and local levels. Alter questions whether citizens

will see that their new \$400 child credits are chump change compared with all the new fee hikes and service cuts. Will they understand that they’re paying more in states and local taxes so that a guy with a Jaguar putting up a McMansion down the block can pay less in federal taxes? Will they connect those 30 kids cramming their child’s classroom to decisions in far-away Washington? (p. 36)

Alter says that explaining all this politically requires “trusting the voters with complexity” (p. 36). If citizens are to make important connections between distance

federal actions and the immediacy of their own lives, they will require contextualized news that provides complexity within stories rather than writing separate stories that treat federal policies and state and local problems as independent and unconnected events. The failure of citizens to make such necessary connections, or their readiness to make false connections such as linking Saddam Hussein to 9/11, may reflect the successful manipulative media strategies of the current administration and defective reporting unable to expose them. Media have a responsibility to provide adequate connective information so that citizens can understand what is really happening around them and how they might act on their true interests.

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## Mediating Democratic Engagement: The Impact of Communications on Citizens' Involvement in Political and Civic Life

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*[P]olitics is a drama taking place in an assumed and reported world that evokes threats and hopes, a world people do not directly observe or touch.*

—Murray Edelman (1995)

*[People] live in a community by virtue of the things they have in common; and communication is the way in which they come to possess things in common.*

—John Dewey (1916)

Normative theories of modern representative democracies presume an information environment in which citizens are able to learn about pressing issues of the day, follow the actions of elected and government officials, and communicate their views to these officials. Theories of direct democracy assume a richer communications environment that helps provide citizens with the motivation, ability, and opportunity to participate in more ongoing, demanding, and varied ways. In turn, limitations in the communications environment are pinpointed as a primary reason why democratic practice falls short of normative expectations, whereas enhancements to this environment are held out as a way to improve this state of affairs (Abramson, Arterton, & Orren, 1988; Barber, 1984; Dahl, 1989; Entman, 1989; Fishkin, 1991; Patterson, 1993; Putnam, 2000; Rosen, 1999).

Empirical research documenting the impact of communication in general and the mass media more specifically on the amount and quality of citizens' engagement in public life both supports and complicates this picture. As discussed here, numerous studies have found that media use is positively correlated with many core elements of democratic engagement such as political interest, knowledge, and participation. At the same time, there is evidence that media use can also foster

cynicism, apathy, ignorance, and disengagement. Understanding the impact of the media on the engagement of citizens requires careful consideration of the specific elements that make up both *engagement* and *media*.

## Defining Democratic Engagement

What constitutes an engaged citizen? Although there is no simple answer to this question, most theory and research would include (1) adherence to democratic norms and values; (2) having a set of empirically grounded attitudes and beliefs about the nature of the political and social world; (3) holding stable, consistent, and informed opinions on major public issues of the day; and (4) engaging in behaviors designed to influence, directly or indirectly, the quality of public life for oneself and others. Underlying all of these elements is the assumption that citizens also have the skills and resources necessary to develop informed values, attitudes, and opinions, connect them together, and translate them into effective action.<sup>1</sup>

“Democratic norms and values” include internal and external efficacy, political and social trust, political interest, civic duty, and political tolerance. These orientations provide the emotional and cognitive underpinnings necessary for engagement in public life that balances conflict with consensus, self-interest with collective interests, and a healthy skepticism with faith in the institutions and processes of democratic governance.

“Attitudes and beliefs” refer to one’s overarching views about the social and political world in which we live. Attitudes and beliefs are distinguished from opinions in that they are more likely to form early in one’s life, are less issue specific, and are less amenable to short-term change. Politically relevant attitudes and beliefs can include one’s ideological orientation, partisanship, views on the relative importance of equality versus freedom, a sense of whether the world is a safe place, relative commitment to individual versus collective rights, and general notions about race and diversity. Unlike democratic norms and values, there is no presumption that *specific* attitudes or beliefs are more or less beneficial to a democratic society. This does not mean that they are equally reasoned or reasonable, however. Rather, the hope is that attitudes and beliefs—although containing an affective or emotional component—are also based on an accurate assessment of the empirical world. For example, if a person has a deep-seated commitment to the Democratic party, one would expect that this commitment is based on some understanding of what this party stands for and how it relates to his or her other values, beliefs, and opinions.<sup>2</sup>

If values, norms, attitudes, and beliefs form the foundation on which engagement is based, “opinions” serve as the more proximate and concrete formulation of these orientations as they apply to specific issues, policies, candidates, officeholders, and the like. For example, if a person’s deep-seated attitudes lead him or her to identify as a conservative and/or a Republican, one would expect, all things being equal,

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<sup>1</sup>Effective democratic citizenship also requires institutional and systemic structures and processes—democracy is not simply a matter of individual will and choice. Given the focus of this chapter, however, the emphasis is on individual requisites and attributes.

<sup>2</sup>The distinction among democratic values, general attitudes and beliefs, and opinions is somewhat arbitrary, and all such orientations are ultimately “essentially contestable” (Connolly, 1983; Gallie, 1955–1956). Indeed, part of the goal of a democratic society and the role of media in it is to provide an environment in which values, beliefs, and opinions can be regularly debated and, as appropriate, renewed or revised. Nonetheless, the distinction remains a valuable one, with each having a different theoretical and empirical relationship to the media.

that this would be reflected in his or her opinions regarding specific issues such as a potential tax increase, public financing of campaigns, or affirmative action.

The holding of opinions—especially opinions that are stable, consistent, and informed—is a crucial element of the democratic process and of democratic citizenship. Equally or more important, however, is the “behavioral expression” of these opinions. Opinions can be expressed directly or indirectly. Direct expression includes talking informally with others, participating in more formal deliberations and meetings, signing a petition, writing a letter to the editor, and contacting public officials. Indirect expression includes other forms of political or civic activity, from voting, to membership in an organization, to volunteering in the community.

Often a distinction is made between political and civic behavior. *Political* behavior is generally defined as activities intended directly or indirectly to affect the selection of elected representatives and/or the development, implementation, or enforcement of public policy through government (for example, voting, working for a political party, or contacting an elected official). *Civic* behavior refers to participation—as an individual or a member of a group—intended to address public concerns directly through methods that are outside of elections and government (for example, volunteering to work in a soup kitchen or homeless shelter or forming a neighborhood watch association to address the problem of crime). For the purposes of this chapter I include both civic and political engagement under the broader heading of *democratic engagement*.

Developing foundational values and attitudes, connecting these to specific opinions, and expressing these opinions through appropriate forms of political and civic behavior require a range of skills and resources. Included here are basic skills such as reasoning, argumentation, and oral and written communication, as well as resources such as knowledge or information about the substance, processes, and people of politics and public life.<sup>3</sup> Such skills and resources increase the likelihood not only that citizens will be engaged, but also that they will do so in effective ways that are connected to their self-interest and their sense of the public interest.

In sum, a democratically engaged citizen is one who participates in civic and political life, and who has the values, attitudes, opinions, skills, and resources to do so effectively.

### **Defining “Politically Relevant Media”**

Democratic engagement includes a number of distinct but ultimately related elements. Politically relevant “media” or “communications” are no less complex concepts. At a minimum one must distinguish face-to-face versus mediated communication; one-to-one versus one-to-many versus many-to-one versus many-to-many communications; types of media (telephones, mail, magazines, newspapers, radio, television, movies, the Internet); and “genres” (news, talk shows, opinion pieces or editorials, documentaries, drama or humor). Each of these types of communication has the potential for affecting different aspects of democratic engagement (from foundational values and attitudes to specific civic and political behaviors), and different parts of the population (based on age, income, gender, race, and ethnicity), and to do so in different ways.

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<sup>3</sup>For a fuller discussion of the relationship between the media and political information and knowledge, see Chapter 14.



Adding to this complexity is that individual citizens do not limit their media use to single types or genres but, rather, live within larger media, communications, or information environments. These environments are shaped in part by available technology, but also by factors such as one's social, cultural, and economic circumstances, as well as more personal preferences and choices. Finally, the media can serve simultaneously as the *channels* through which information is transmitted and received, as the *source* of particular kinds of information, and, increasingly, as the *public space* in which democratic engagement actually occurs.

## **MEDIA USE AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF DEMOCRATIC NORMS AND VALUES**

### **Political Efficacy**

Research on political participation has identified a number of deep-seated norms and values that are positively associated with the amount and quality of democratic engagement. One of the most central of these is political efficacy, or the sense that one's participation can actually make a difference (internal efficacy) and that the political system would be responsive to this participation (external efficacy). Efficacy is strongly correlated with political and civic participation (Almond & Verba, 1963; Campbell, Gurin, & Miller, 1954; Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960; Finkel, 1985; Niemi, Craig, & Mattei, 1991; Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993; Verba & Nie, 1972; Verba, Scholzman, & Brady, 1995). There is also evidence that one's sense of political efficacy begins to develop early in life and is an important predictor of likely future engagement (Center for Information and Research in Civic Learning and Engagement, 2002; Easton & Dennis, 1967; Hess & Torney, 1967; Jennings & Niemi, 1981).

Although political efficacy is affected by a number of demographic, contextual, and cultural factors, the media plays an important role in its formation and expression. In general, greater political efficacy appears to be positively associated with greater use of public affairs media, though the causal direction of this relationship (i.e., Are more efficacious people more likely to follow public affairs? or Does following public affairs lead to greater efficacy?) is somewhat unclear. There is some evidence that this relationship is the result of the intervening effects of political knowledge, with greater public affairs media use leading to greater knowledge, which in turn increases one's sense of efficacy (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996).

Closer examination of the relationship between media use and efficacy suggests a more complex picture, however, in which the impact of the media is tied in part to the tone and content of the information provided. For example, Miller, Goldenberg, and Erbring (1979) found that attention to negative newspaper reports about politics significantly lowered levels of efficacy. And in his study of the impact of viewing a public television documentary critical of government, Robinson (1976) concluded that "reliance on public affairs television is, in fact, associated with lower scores on an efficacy index" (p. 425).

In a more recent study Neuman, Just, and Crigler (1992) examined television, newspaper, and newsmagazine coverage of five issues then in the news (South Africa, the Strategic Defense Initiative, the stock market crash, drug abuse, and the AIDS crisis), as well as the way people interpreted or "constructed" meaning from

this coverage. They found that on average a third of the coverage was presented within a “powerlessness” frame that emphasized a lack of control over the issues in question. In turn, the people they interviewed about their views on these issues tended to reflect this sense of powerlessness in many (22%) of their comments. And a study by Cappella and Jamieson (1997) found evidence that the print and electronic news media’s tendency to frame events (elections) and issues (health-care reform) in terms of strategy rather than substance increased citizens’ political cynicism, an orientation connected conceptually and empirically to the more specific notion of efficacy.

A similar relationship between media exposure and efficacy has been found in studies of political campaign advertisements. Using both experimental and survey research, Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1995) and Ansolobahere, Iyengar, and Simon (1999) conclude that viewing negative ads decreased citizens’ sense of political efficacy. And a metaanalysis of the impact of negative campaign advertising by Lau, Sigelman, Heldman, and Babbitt (1999) identified three additional studies (Freedman & Goldstein, 1999; Goldstein, 1997; Thornson, Ognianova, Coyle, & Denton, 1996) that found evidence of lowered political efficacy as a result of viewing such ads (see also Wanta, Lemert, & Lee, 1998).<sup>4</sup>

Although research suggests that exposure to negative or cynical portrayals of public affairs can reduce citizens’ sense of efficacy, there is less known about the impact of positive coverage. There is a great deal of research documenting the shortcomings of the current news environment and theorizing about the *potential* of more civic-minded public affairs coverage to improve civic involvement (Patterson, 1993; Rosen, 1999; Sirianni & Friedland, 2001; West, 1997). Unfortunately, the actual impact of this kind of coverage on political efficacy remains largely untested. In one of the few studies to explore this relationship indirectly, Cappella and Jamieson (1997) found only mixed evidence that issue (as opposed to strategic) coverage of health-care reform reduced public cynicism about politics.

There is also at least mixed evidence that the type of media attended to is related to political efficacy. Research on talk radio and television has found that heavy listeners, viewers, and callers score higher on some measures of efficacy, though the differences are often small (Davis & Owen, 1998; Hofstetter et al., 1994; Newhagen, 1994). Several studies have found suggestive evidence that political deliberation and discussion increase one’s sense of political efficacy (Gamson, 1992; Gastil, 2000; Smith, 1999). And at least one study has found that Internet users have greater internal efficacy than the general public (Davis & Owen, 1998), though other research looking specifically at those who rely primarily on the Web for political information found no such relationship (Johnson & Kaye, 1998). Johnson and Kaye (1998) did find that those who rely primarily on either television or newspapers for political information are likely to be more efficacious than the general public. On the other hand, Hart (1994) makes a compelling case that television, by its very nature, is likely to have a distorting effect by exaggerating the political efficacy attributed to individuals and groups who are featured on this medium, discounting the efficacy of those who are ignored, and giving viewers an illusory sense of their own efficacy because of a misperceived sense of intimacy with the political world.

Despite its importance to democratic engagement, there are a number of gaps in our knowledge of the relationship between media use and political efficacy. In

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<sup>4</sup>For a more in-depth discussion of the negative advertising, see Chapter 7.

particular, more research is needed on the impact of new media such as the Internet, as well as that of the entertainment media. In addition, little is known about the possible intervening effects of race, ethnicity, gender, class, and age, although variations in the amount and type of media use across these groups, coupled with differences in how they process and use media information (Graber, 2001a), suggest that such effects may exist. For example, Newhagen (1994) found that African Americans who viewed and/or called in to television talk shows featuring presidential candidates in 1992 scored higher in personal efficacy, a concept that is closely related to political efficacy.

### **Political Trust, Alienation, and Cynicism**

A second set of foundational political orientations—political trust and its counterparts such as political alienation and cynicism—demonstrates an equally complicated and inconclusive relationship with the media. The predominant theory regarding this relationship is the “video” or “media malaise” thesis (Bennett, Rhine, Flickinger, & Bennett, 1999; Robinson, 1975, 1976), which posits that exposure to media in general and television in particular leads to increased cynicism and alienation and decreased trust in government and politics. The hypothesized roots of this presumed relationship vary, from the increasingly negative and cynical coverage of politics in the news (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Fallows, 1996; Kerbel, 1995; Patterson, 1993; Robinson, 1975; Sabato, 1993), to the negative portrayal of government and politics that dominates the entertainment media (Lichter, Lichter, & Amundson, 1999; Lichter & Rothman, 1994), to the debilitating effects of television on political discourse and social connectedness (Hart, 1994; Postman, 1985; Putnam, 1995a, 2000).

Research on the impact of media use on political trust or cynicism has provided mixed support for the media malaise thesis, however. In the most systematic test of this thesis, Bennett et al. (1999), using data from the 1996 National Election Studies (NES), found that general exposure to entertainment television, local or national television news, and/or newspapers was unrelated to trust in government. They also found evidence that attention to media accounts of presidential and congressional campaigns was *positively* associated with trust and that following politics through talk radio decreased trust, though both of these relationships were statistically insignificant when controls for demographic and attitudinal variables were added to their model. Importantly, however, Bennett et al., did find that opinions about media fairness were associated with political trust, with those who mistrusted the media also more likely to mistrust government. They conclude that

the time has come to take a more nuanced view of the relationship between the public’s opinions about the media and political cynicism. General Social Science and Pew Center data show that confidence in government and confidence in the press are positively associated. The 1996 NES suggests that if people believe that the media do not fairly cover the political fray, they take a critical view of government’s trustworthiness. Thus perceptions of the media and of the government may rise and fall together. This may reflect a broader trend: that support for institutions in general has changed. It may indicate the emergence of the media as another power broker and thereby an

institutional power in the eyes of the public. Such a judgement by members of the public may lead them to view the media through the same lens that they view government. (Bennett et al., 1999, p. 17)

Although other studies (Norris, 1996, 1999) support Bennett's conclusion that media use does not automatically contribute to declining political trust, other research (Becker & Whitney, 1980; Chan, 1997; McLeod, Brown, Becker, & Ziemke, 1977; Putnam, 1995a, 2000) finds greater, if still mixed, evidence for the media malaise thesis. One difficulty in establishing a relationship is that aggregate levels of trust have declined precipitously over the last 30 years, whereas exposure to media of various kinds has increased over the same period. Although this general pattern could suggest some kind of cause-and-effect relationship, the ubiquitousness of the media, coupled with other societal changes occurring over the same time frame, has led one researcher to conclude that "the question of whether the mass media contributed to the growth of political malaise . . . will never be satisfactorily answered" (Zukin, 1981, p. 382).

Despite the lack of consistent support for a *general* impact of media use on political trust, studies that look more specifically at the tone of coverage find, much as with political efficacy, that negative or cynical coverage of government contributes to what Cappella and Jamieson call the "spiral of cynicism" (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Miller, Goldenberg, & Erbring, 1979). Studies of the impact of negative campaign advertisements on political trust generally draw a similar conclusion (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995; Thornson et al., 1996; but see Martinez & Delegal, 1990).

As with other aspects of democratic engagement, the impact of the media on political trust may vary not only by the content and tone of coverage, but also by the type of media used. There is surprisingly little research on such differential impact, however, and the research that does exist draws different conclusions. For example, Davis and Owens (1998) found little evidence that talk radio listeners, television news magazine viewers, or Internet users differed in their levels of trust, either from each other or from the general public. Pinkleton and Austin (1998) also found that most forms of media use by Washington state voters during the 1996 presidential campaign had no effect on levels of cynicism, with the exception of newspaper use, which was associated with *lowered* cynicism. However, Johnson and Kaye (1998), using a nonrepresentative sample, found a negative association between political trust and reliance on the Web for political information and positive associations between trust and reliance on television or newspapers. And although levels of political trust are known to vary by education, race, age, and gender, the impact of media use on these differences is largely unexamined. One exception to this is Bennett (1997), who finds evidence that the generally negative coverage of politics in the media has contributed to younger Americans' political cynicism and negativism (see also Rahn & Hirschorn, 1995, on the impact of negative campaign ads on the "political mood" of children).

The dramatic increase in reported trust in government that followed the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, raise interesting, but as yet unexamined questions regarding the relationship between political trust and the media. Given that the vast majority of Americans "experienced" these attacks and their aftermath exclusively or primarily through the media, it seems reasonable to assume that something about the events and the way they were represented combined to produce the rapid and widespread increases in trust. Understanding the dynamics of this process

could help in more fully understanding the media's role in the development and maintenance of political trust.

## Social Capital and Trust

Though the term has earlier roots, the concept of "social capital" has become an important area of study in recent years, spurred largely by the work of Robert Putnam (1995a, 1995b, 2000). Social capital generally refers to

those tangible substances [that] count for most in the daily lives of people: namely good will, fellowship, sympathy, and social intercourse among the individuals and families who make up a social unit. . . . The community as a whole will benefit by cooperation of all its parts, while the individual will find in his associations the advantages of the help, sympathy, and fellowship of his neighbors. (Hanifan, 1916, p. 130, as cited in Putnam, 2000, p. 19)

Although acknowledging that social capital can have its "dark side," Putnam (2000) persuasively argues and documents that the presence of social capital—broadly a connectedness of citizens to others in their community—results in a wide range of individual and collective benefits including better education, safer and more productive neighborhoods, economic prosperity, healthier, happier children and adults, and a more vibrant, participatory democracy (pp. 287–363).

The relationship between social capital and democratic engagement is twofold. On the one hand, the concept of social capital includes within it many forms civic and political engagement, including membership in civic organizations, attending public meetings, talking about political issues, volunteering, and participating in elections. On the other hand, high levels of general community involvement and social interaction (which are also components of social capital) are likely to increase more explicitly civic and political engagement and so strengthen the quality and effectiveness of democracy.

Putnam's argument and evidence regarding the positive benefits of social capital have been generally well received. More controversial, however, has been his research documenting the erosion of social capital over the past three decades and his theories regarding the sources of this decline. Of particular relevance to this chapter is his indictment of television (especially entertainment television) as a major source of decreasing social capital in general and democratic engagement in particular (Putnam, 1995a, 2000). Putnam's (2000) evidence on the decline in newspaper readership, the penetration of television into the American household, the growth in the number of hours of watching television and of having the television on even when not watching, and the dominance of television over other forms of more social leisure activity (pp. 216–228) is compelling and supported by other data and research (Bogart, 1989; Bowden & Offer, 1994; Comstock, 1989; Graber, 2001a; Kubey & Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; various surveys conducted by the Pew Research Center on the People and the Press; *The Statistical Abstract of the United States*, 2001).

His hypothesized relationship between the rise of television and the decline in social capital has been a matter of dispute, however (Norris, 1996, 1999). Putnam (2000) argues that this impact, which is especially prevalent among younger generations, results from a combination of television's usurpation of time that could (and in the past was) otherwise be used for more civic-minded activities, the

psychological effects of television that inhibit social participation, and the specific content of television that undermines civic motivations.

One key to understanding the link between media use and social capital is through the concept of *social trust*. Social trust (also known as *interpersonal trust*) is a dispositional orientation toward others in one's community. High social trust indicates feelings of connectedness to and faith in fellow citizens, or more simply, "a 'standing decision' to give most people—even those whom one does not know from direct experience—the benefit of the doubt" (Rahn & Transue, 1998, p. 545). People scoring high on measures of social trust are significantly more likely to interact with fellow citizens informally, as well as through belonging to community groups, working with them to solve a local problem, or volunteering (Borgida et al., 1997; Brehm & Rahn, 1997; Rahn & Transue, 1998; Uslaner, 1995). In short, social trust is an individual-level, psychological measure of the more behavioral and collective concept of social capital.

Research indicates that the level of social trust in the United States has declined significantly over the past 30 years, paralleling other indicators of declining social capital (Brehm & Rahn, 1997; Putnam, 2000). This decline is especially noticeably among younger adults. Much as with arguments regarding the decline in overall social capital, television and, to a lesser extent, new media such as the Internet, have been singled out as a major cause of the decline in social trust. As noted by Shah, Kwak, and Holbert (2001), this argument is based in part on aggregate trends in increasing television and Internet use and declining newspaper readership, as well as "time displacement" and "mean world" theories of television:

Time spent with television is thought to privatize leisure time at the expense of civic activities and to foster beliefs that the world is as threatening as the social reality of the "airwaves" (Brehm and Rahn, 1997; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, and Signorielli, 1980; Morgan and Shanahan, 1997). Likewise, epidemiological research has connected amount of television viewing with lower levels of physical and mental health (Sidney et al., 1998). These studies, albeit crude in their operationalization of media variables, lend support to the view that media use is related to changes in life contentment, social trust, and civic participation. (p. 143)

This argument has been extended to the Internet. Research by Nie and Erbring (2000) suggests that time spent "on-line" comes at the direct expense of more social activities, leading heavy Internet users to become physically and psychologically disconnected from their social environment. And Kraut et al. (1998) conclude from their research that "[l]ike watching television, using a home computer and the Internet generally implies physical inactivity and limited face-to-face social interaction" (p. 1019).

Research has not uniformly supported this view, however, as it applies to either television or the Internet. In one of the more comprehensive efforts to explore this relationship, Shah et al. (2001) distinguish among overall television use, the use of television for "hard news," overall newspaper use, the use of newspapers for "hard news," overall Internet use, and the use of the Internet for "social recreation," "product consumption," "financial management," and "information exchange." They find that when controlling for demographic characteristics, only using newspapers for hard news and using the Internet for information exchange (measured as "exploring an interest or hobby," "searching for school or educational purposes," or "sending an e-mail") had a significant effect on social trust for the general population, with

both *increasing* levels of trust. They also find differences by age, however. For the Civic Generation (pre-baby boomers), only using newspapers for hard news produced a significant (positive) effect on social trust. For baby boomers, only using the Internet for information exchange produced a significant (positive) effect. And for Generation Xers, use of the Internet for social recreation produced a significant *negative* effect on social trust, whereas using the Internet for information exchange produced a significant positive effect.

Experimental research on the impact of on-line deliberative discussions also finds a positive impact on participants' level of social trust (Price, Goldthwaite, & Cappella, 2002). The conclusions of this and other research in this vein (Norris, 1996, 1999, 2000, 2001; Norris & Jones, 1998; Shah, 1998; Uslaner, 2000) suggest that arguments about the negative impact of television and the Internet are overly generalized and miss important differences in the content of different media, the types of people using these media, and the purposes for which they use them. A more specific conclusion emerging from this research is that "informational and communicative uses of the media may prove beneficial to the health of society, whereas recreational and entertainment uses may erode public involvement" (Shah et al., 2001, p. 144). This conclusion is for the most part consistent with that of Putnam (2000), who acknowledges that the negative impact of television and the Internet on social capital is most evident among those who use these media as their major source of entertainment (pp. 219–221, 231–233).

### Political Interest, Duty, and Tolerance

Efficacy, political trust, and social trust are three of many norms and values that are important to the amount and quality of democratic engagement. Interest in politics and public affairs is also strongly related to civic and political participation (Bennett, 1986; Milbrath & Goel, 1977; Verba et al., 1995). The relationship between political interest and media use has not been extensively studied, however. In general, interest is treated as a motivator for following politics and public affairs in the media, with the "roots" of political interest found "in socioeconomic factors—in having educated parents, a good education, and a high-level job, as well as organizational membership" (Verba et al., 1995, p. 494).

In one of the few studies to examine specifically the relationship between different types of media use and levels of political interest, Davis and Owen (1998) found that talk radio listeners, viewers of television newsmagazines, and Internet users were more likely to say that they follow government and public affairs "most of the time" than was the general public. Talk radio listeners and television newsmagazine viewers were also more likely to report being "very interested" in presidential campaigns, though no such relationship was found for Internet users. Johnson and Kaye (1998) found that reliance on the Web for political information was positively and significantly associated with interest in politics, whereas reliance on television was negatively associated with interest, though the latter relationship was not statistically significant (reliance on newspapers showed a modest and statistically insignificant positive relationship).<sup>5</sup> In general, although political interest has been found to be positively associated with the use of public affairs media, little is known regarding the extent to which this reflects the seeking-out of political information

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<sup>5</sup>However, as they acknowledge, limits in their sample design make drawing conclusions to the general population difficult.

by already interested citizens, the socializing effects of media on interest, or some interaction between the two. Little is also known about the effects of non-public affairs media on political interest or how the tone of coverage affects interest, though in both cases the research on efficacy, political and social trust, and cynicism just discussed would suggest that there are likely both direct and indirect effects.

Civic duty, or the sense that one has a social obligation to participate in politics, is also related to democratic engagement (Almond & Verba, 1963; Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Verba & Nie, 1972), though little is known about its connection to media use. However, given the close conceptual ties between civic duty and social capital, one might expect to find a similar set of relationships between media use and the former as for the latter. Similarly, civic duty is associated with other democratic norms and values, such as interest, efficacy, trust, and cynicism, and so should be directly and indirectly connected to media use through these norms and values.

Surprisingly, the impact of media use on political tolerance also has not been directly studied. Again, however, the relationship between tolerance and other variables such as psychological security, political interest, and political knowledge (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Sullivan, Piereson, & Marcus, 1982; Marcus, Sullivan, Theiss-Morse, & Wood, 1995), coupled with what we know about the connection between these variables and the media, suggests that such a relationship should exist. One also strongly suspects that levels of intolerance and tolerance would be affected (or at least reinforced) differently by different media types (for example, television compared to newspapers), genres (for example, news compared to talk radio or a situation comedy), and, ultimately, content (for example, that of a general news Web site compared to that of an explicitly racist or homophobic “hate site”).

Putnam (2000) argues that social capital is related to tolerance, though in complex and potentially conflictual ways. Specifically, high levels of social capital (especially capital that builds bridges across different groups) generally increase tolerance through the creation of a sense of collective civic community that transcends group differences and encourages equality. At the same time he acknowledges that “bonding” social capital in heterogeneous communities can, in certain circumstances, reinforce distinctions between “in-groups” and “out-groups” and, so, exacerbate intolerance. He further argues, however, that tolerance in the absence of social capital can devolve into a kind of individualistic relativism that is antithetical to democratic engagement, whereas *intolerance* in the absence of social capital can lead to anarchy (pp. 350–363).

Finally, research suggests that communications (either face-to-face or mass mediated) that foster deliberation can, in certain circumstances, encourage consensus building and intergroup understanding and, thus, should lead to increases in political tolerance (Fishkin, 1991, 1995; Gastil, 2000; Guttman & Thompson, 1996; Lindeman, 2002; Luskin & Fishkin, 1998; Mendelberg, 2002; Price, Cappella, & Nir, 2002; Price, Goldthwaite, & Cappella, 2002; Price, Nir, & Cappella, 2002).

## **MEDIA USE AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF POLITICAL ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS**

In addition to holding norms and values such as those discussed above, democratically engaged citizens are also assumed to have a set of foundational attitudes and beliefs. These attitudes and beliefs are important in that they provide individuals with ways to think and act in a political world that is often overwhelmingly complex, with which they have only indirect contact, about which they have incomplete



information, and in which they often have only limited time and interest to engage (Downs, 1957; Popkin, 1991; Sniderman, Brody, & Tetlock, 1991).

Although attitudes and beliefs (and the network of relationships that develop among them) play an important function, there is no guarantee that they will enhance the amount or quality of civic engagement, as they can be more or less well connected to each other and to the empirical world they are meant to represent. In the best case, attitudes and beliefs can serve as effective heuristic devices, providing short-cuts to political decision making. In the worst case, however, they are based on misconceptions, stereotypes, and inaccuracies and, so, can lead to opinions and actions that are antithetical to one's self-interest, the interest of others, and the interest of the community as a whole (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Kuklinski, Quirk, Schweider, & Rich, 1997; Peffley & Shields, 1996). Key to whether attitudes and beliefs enhance or limit effective democratic engagement is the role of both cognition and affect. In turn, what Americans know (or think they know) and feel about the political and social world, and how they use this information, is affected by the communications environment in which they live.<sup>6</sup>

## The Formation of Political Beliefs and Attitudes

The study of political beliefs and attitudes shares several key concepts with psychology. Two central concepts are *cognition* and *affect*. Cognition (from the Latin, "to know") refers to the ways in which individuals process and use information. The study of cognition focuses on issues of "attention, perception, learning, and memory" (Eysenck, 1994, p. 64), as well as thought, language, reasoning, and problem solving (Wade & Tavis, 1993, pp. 275–309). Individual cognitions produce the *beliefs* one holds about any external stimulus, including "things, people, places, ideas, or situations, either singular or plural" (Oskamp, 1977, p. 8). A belief is "a person's subjective probability that an object has a particular characteristic" (Oskamp, 1977, p. 11) or "what a person holds to be true about the world" (Wade & Tavis, 1993).

Whereas cognitions refer to what people *believe* about some aspect of the world, affect (discussed in more detail subsequently) refers to how one *feels* about it. Thus, affect is necessarily evaluative and involves emotional responses to stimuli. For example, "Most politicians are corrupt" is a belief, whereas "I dislike politicians" is an affect.<sup>7</sup>

Another key concept in the study of mass political opinion is *attitude*. Although there is no agreed-upon definition of an attitude (Manstead, 1994, p. 30), the most comprehensive view remains that of Gordon Allport (1935):

An attitude is a mental or neural state of readiness, organized through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence upon the individual's response to all objects and situations with which it is related. (p. 810)

<sup>6</sup>As noted earlier, although in this chapter I distinguish between "norms and values" and "beliefs and attitudes," this distinction is not a black-and-white one. Much of the discussion in this section concerning the formation and expression of attitudes and beliefs could also apply to norms and values.

<sup>7</sup>As discussed later, the distinction between cognitions/beliefs and affect/emotion has been questioned, with some arguing that feelings and unconscious information processing can be considered cognitions (Marcus et al., 1996).

The relationship among beliefs, affect, and attitudes is a matter of some disagreement in the psychological literature. Some view the former two constructs, along with *behavioral intention*, as components of attitudes (Krech, Crutchfield, & Ballackey, 1962; Triandis, 1971). Behavioral intention refers to the “predisposition to respond in a particular way to the attitude object” (Oskamp, 1977, p. 8). Others argue that the term attitude should be limited to affective/evaluative predispositions, thus separating the concept more clearly from beliefs and behaviors (Manstead, 1994; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1972; 1975; Oskamp, 1977). From this perspective, attitudes—defined as “a learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favorable or unfavorable manner with respect to a given object” (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975, p. 6)—and beliefs affect each other, and both in turn affect behavioral intentions.<sup>8</sup>

Whether one treats beliefs, affect, and behavioral intentions as components of attitudes or as separate constructs, what is clear is that they are deeply inter-related. One’s expressed opinion and behavioral intention is the combination of what one feels about the “attitude object” and what one believes to be true about that object. Underlying this model of attitude development are two important assumptions. First, beliefs (what one *thinks* is true) are the mainspring of attitude formation, connecting values, and affect to produce attitudes and behavioral intentions. Second, beliefs can be based on more or less accurate information. For example, if I value equality, and (incorrectly) believe that Blacks and Whites have similar unemployment rates or incomes, then, all else being equal, I am likely to oppose programs that are designed to assist Blacks in these areas. If I (correctly) believe, however, that the Black unemployment rate is over twice that of Whites’ or that Blacks earn significantly less than Whites, then, all else being equal, I should be more likely to support such programs.

Of course the process of attitude formation and expression is more complex than this simple example suggests—all other things are seldom equal. People hold numerous, often conflicting values that they draw on in different circumstances (Bennett, 1980; Connolly, 1983). Preexisting beliefs combine into more elaborate, often inconsistent cognitive structures or schema (Fiske & Taylor, 1984) through which new information is processed (Cohen, 1994; Kuklinski et al., 1997). These schema can affect what new information is attended to, how it is perceived or interpreted, how (and if) it is stored in long-term memory, and when and how it is recalled for later consideration (Haste & Torney-Purta, 1992; Price & Zaller, 1993; Sniderman et al., 1991). And in certain circumstances, new information can lead to changes in previously held beliefs, attitudes and schema (Luskin and Fishkin, 1998). Preexisting *feelings* regarding the object in question can also affect the way one attends to, perceives, interprets, stores, and uses information (Lodge, McGraw, & Stroh, 1989; Lodge & Taber, 1996). Finally, behaviors can lead to cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) and the desire to achieve cognitive consistency or balance

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<sup>8</sup>There is also disagreement on the relationship of attitudes and beliefs to *opinions* and *values*. *Opinions* are sometimes equated with beliefs (Oskamp, 1977, p. 12), sometimes equated with attitudes (McGuire, 1969, p. 152), sometimes treated as the overt statement of an attitude (Childs, 1965), and sometimes treated as more specific, less stable, cognitive and/or affective predispositions to respond. Values are more clearly delineated and are defined as standards “towards which the individual has a strong positive attitude. . . . They are ends rather than means; they are the goals a person strives for and which help to determine many of his (her) other attitudes and beliefs” (Oskamp, 1977, p. 13). In this chapter I define opinions as the expression of attitudes.

(Heider, 1946), which in turn can lead to adjustments in what one thinks and feels about the political and social world.

### **Early Socialization to the Political and Social World**

As one of several socializing agents, the media provide much of the “raw material” that make up social and political beliefs, attitudes, and schema. This mediated socialization process starts early in life and operates in both indirect and direct ways. Although research on the specific impact of mass media on children’s political and social attitudes is sparse,<sup>9</sup> a number of factors point to a potentially powerful role. First, it is clear that from a very early age children begin to develop political and social beliefs about “authority, property, decision making and political symbols” (Graber, 2001a, p. 198). Research has found that as early as age 5 and increasingly through adolescence, children hold (initially inchoate but increasingly defined) orientations regarding the president and other political leaders, political institutions, political participation, political parties, social issues, community and nationality, efficacy, trust, tolerance, and ideology (Center for Information & Research on Civil Learning & Engagement, 2002; Cook & Scioli, 1972; Dawson, Prewitt, & Dawson, 1977; Dennis, 1973; Greenstein, 1965; Jennings & Niemi, 1974, 1981; Jennings & Stoker, 2001; Merelman, 1969; National Association of Secretaries of state, 1999; Renshon, 1977; Schwartz & Schwartz, 1975; Sigel & Hoskin, 1981; Stoker & Jennings, 1999).

Second, the fact that children and adolescents have little direct experience with politics, coupled with the fact that much of politics is experienced indirectly for adults as well, means that the development of political beliefs and attitudes is necessarily mediated. Although a good deal of this early learning occurs through interactions with parents, other family members, peers, and teachers, much of what is “taught” to children and adolescents through these interpersonal forms of communication originates from the media (Chubb & Moe, 1988; Graber, 2001a, p. 198).

Third, in addition to this indirect impact, from the very earliest ages children spend a great deal of time with the media. According to a recent study of the media use of children 18 and under, (Roberts, Foehr, Rideout, & Brody, 1999), those between age 2 and age 7 spend an average of over 3.5 hr a day using media (electronic and print), with the vast bulk of this time devoted to watching television. Significant percentages of this age group have a radio (42%), tape player (36%) television (32%), VCR (16%), CD player (14%), or video game player (13%) in their bedrooms. Sixty-two percent of 2 to 7 year olds have a computer at home, 40% have Internet access, and on an average day 26% of this age group uses a computer. Fifty-eight percent of children under the age of 8 live in households in which the television is on during meals, and 42% in households in which the television is on “most of the time.”

The average amount of time that 8 to 18 year olds (compared to those under 8) spend using media nearly doubles to just under 7 hr a day, though the percentage of time spent with specific media tends to be more diversified than for younger children, with relatively less time (though still more in absolute amount) spent watching television and more time (in relative and absolute terms) with computers,

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<sup>9</sup>Much of the work on childhood and adolescent political socialization was written in the late 1960s through late 1970s. Since then, research in this area has been a good deal less frequent.

radio, CDs, and other media (Roberts et al., 1999). This age group also has increasing access to various media in their homes. For example, in 1999 more than three in four had a radio or tape player in their bedroom, two thirds had a television or CD player, and one in five had a computer.

Summarizing the literature on young people's television use, Graber (2001a) notes that

millions of babies watch television. In the winter, young children in the United States spend an average of thirty-one hours a week in front of the television set—more time than in school. Between the ages of twelve and seventeen, the weekly number of hours spent viewing television drops to twenty-four. Eighty percent of the programs children see are intended for adults and show incidents that differ substantially from those in the child's limited personal experiences. Children watch military combat, funerals, rocket launchings, courtships, seductions and childbirth. If they can understand the messages, the impact is likely to be great because, lacking experience, they are apt to take such presentations at face value. (pp. 198–199)

Although television continues to be the dominant communications medium in young people's lives, the Internet is growing in use and potential impact. According to Roberts et al. (1999) over half of children between 8 and 18 years of age use a computer on any given day, and overall this age group spends an average of 1 hr and 41 min a day on the computer. In a typical day those using a computer will spend about a third of their time on the Internet, e-mailing (9%), chatting (10%), or surfing/using the Web (15%). This same age group reports that they are slightly more likely to "learn interesting things most of the time" through the Internet (26%) than through television (20%). A more recent survey conducted by the Pew Internet and Public Life Project (2001) found that 73% of 12 to 17 year olds use the Internet. Of those who go on-line, 74% have used "instant messaging," 55% have participated in chat sessions, 38% have gone to a Web site to register an opinion, and 68% have used the Web to get news.

Although several studies have concluded that young people who use the Internet are also more likely to use other media (Pew Internet and Public Life Project, 2001; Roberts et al., 1999), there is also evidence of significant age and generational differences in the amount and type of public affairs media use. Several surveys and reports on adolescents' and young adults' (variously between 15 and 25 years of age) media use patterns conclude that younger Americans in general and post-baby boomers in particular are less likely to follow public affairs, with the decline especially noticeable in newspaper readership but also in both national and local news viewing (Pew Research Center on the People and the Press, 2000; Project Vote Smart, 1999; Zukin, 1997). At the same time, young people appear to be embracing the Internet as a source of news. For example, one recent survey found that 70% of 18 to 25 year olds believe that the Internet is a "useful" source of political and issue information (compared to 48% of those over 25), outstripping television news, newspapers, radio, magazines, personal conversations, and direct mail (Project Vote Smart, 1999).

Evidence of the early and ongoing development of beliefs and attitudes, the indirect experience of young people with much of the political and social world, and the large and increasing role of various media in young people's lives suggest that the media can be an important socializing agent. However, disentangling and

demonstrating the specific impact of media on young people's attitudes and beliefs have been difficult for a variety of reasons, including the ubiquitousness of the media, interactions with other types of experiences and communications, poor research design and measurement, and the fact that many studies were conducted prior to the more recent explosion in types and penetration of the media (Graber, 2001a, p. 199).

Nonetheless, several studies of young people have uncovered evidence of a relationship between media use and political attitudes and beliefs. Some of these studies have treated public affairs media use as an *indicator* of civic and political involvement. These studies have generally concluded that young people who have been socialized through their schools or parents to be more interested in politics are subsequently more likely to follow public affairs through the media (Chaffee, McLeod, & Wackman, 1973; Jennings & Niemi, 1974, 1981; Schramm, Lyle, & Parker, 1961).

Other studies have explored the impact of media on young people's political and social attitudes more directly. For example, Pingree (1983) found that heavy media users were more likely to understand basic concepts such as free speech, fairness, and equality under the law and to support such values. Byrne (1969) found that viewing television news increased children's and adolescents' favorable views of government. Chaffee, Ward, and Tipton (1970) and Torney-Purta, Schwille, and Amadeo (1999) found that public affairs media use correlated positively with various measures of political knowledge. Rahn and Hirschorn (1995) found that viewing negative campaign ads increased children's anxiety and anger about politics. Gross and Morgan (1985) and Morgan and Rothschild (1983) found that heavy television viewing led adolescents to view the social world in similar ways to its often distorted presentation. And Conway, Wyckoff, and Ahern (1981) and Garramone and Atkin (1986) found that high school students self-identified television as the major influence on their attitudes regarding issues such as race, the economy, and war, far outstripping families, friends, teachers, or personal experience.

### **The Maintenance and Development of Beliefs and Attitudes in Adulthood**

Although political and social beliefs appear to form early, this is not to say that they are impermeable to later influences (Abramson, 1983; Mutz, Sniderman, & Brody, 1996). Political socialization is a continuing process influenced by ongoing interactions with family and friends, the workplace, and significant personal and societal events, as well as through life cycle changes that affect one's contact with and relationship to the political and social world (Sigel, 1989). The media, as an ongoing source of information about the world, should thus remain an important factor in the maintenance of and/or change in beliefs and attitudes. In a typical day the average adult spends over 4 hr a day watching television, 2 hr listening to the radio, up to 45 min reading newspapers, and up to 30 min reading magazines (Graber, 2001a, p. 200). Over half the adult population uses the Internet (Pew Internet and Daily Life Project, 2001), with a third of adults using the Internet at least weekly for news and public affairs information (Pew Research Center, for the People & the Press, 2000).

Heavy exposure to the media "contributes to the lifelong process of political socialization and learning" Graber (2001a, p. 200), by "cultivating" particular orientations about how the world operates:

[Mass media make up] the mainstream of the common symbolic environment that cultivates the most widely shared conceptions of reality. We live in terms of the stories we tell, stories about what things exist, stories about how things work, and stories about what to do. . . . Increasingly, media-cultivated facts and values become standards by which we judge. (Gerbner, Gross, Beeck, Fox, & Signorielli, 1978, pp. 178, 193)

Both entertainment and public affairs media use in adulthood appears to continue to shape one's perceptions of social reality including subjects such as sex, sexual orientation, age, class and racial stereotypes, religion, and crime and safety (Funkhauser & Shaw, 1990; Gerbner et al., 1978; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1980; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1986; Gross, 1984; Morgan, 1982). Media use is also associated with orientations toward political institutions, processes, and figures (Carlson, 1985; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1982; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1984; Gerbner et al., 1986; Reese & Miller, 1981), the relative importance of individual versus systemic causes for societal problems (Delli Carpini & Williams, 1994a; Iyengar, 1991), and political knowledge (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996). And research on both face-to-face and on-line deliberations has found at least limited evidence that this kind of interpersonal communication can lead to at least short-term changes in political and social beliefs (Fishkin & Luskin, 1999; Lindeman, 2002; Mendelberg, 2002; Price & Cappella, 2001, 2002).

Although these and other studies suggest that media use affects both children's and adults' political and social orientations, all told the evidence of impact is remarkably thin given the extent of the media's reach and its theorized import. As with other aspects of democratic engagement, noticeably absent are studies exploring the impact of different types of media (especially those other than television) and the impact of media on different segments of the population.

## **MEDIA USE AND THE FORMATION OF PUBLIC OPINION**

### **Connecting Foundational Orientations to Specific Opinions: Heuristic Decision Making**

One of the major criticisms of democratic theories that assume an active, informed citizenry is that they expect citizens "to yield an unlimited quantity of public spirit, interest, curiosity, and effort" (Lippmann, 1925, p. 2), thus setting standards so high as to make democracy impossible (Schattschneider, 1960, pp. 134–136). A partial solution to this dilemma is the view that citizens, drawing on their foundational values, norms, beliefs, and attitudes, can come to reasonably effective judgments about issues of the day (Berent & Krosnick, 1992; Graber, 1988; Hurwitz & Peffley, 1987; Lau & Sears, 1986; Peffley & Hurwitz, 1992; Popkin, 1991; Shapiro et al., 1991; Stroh, 1992). In this view citizens are seen as "cognitive misers" (Hewstone & Macrae, 1994) who attempt to make efficient, rational decisions in circumstances of limited ability to process information, limited incentives to become politically engaged, and limited information (Downs, 1957; Mondak, 1994; Popkin, 1991). Citizens achieve this low-information rationality through the use of information short-cuts or heuristics:

Citizens frequently can compensate for their limited information about politics by taking advantage of judgmental heuristics. Heuristics are judgmental shortcuts, efficient ways to organize and simplify political choices, efficient in the double sense of requiring relatively little information to execute, yet yielding dependable answers even to complex problems of choice. . . . Insofar as they can be brought into play, people can be knowledgeable in their reasoning about political choices without possessing a large body of knowledge about politics. (Sniderman et al., 1991, p. 19)

The notion of heuristic decision making is rooted in Anthony Downs's (1957) economic theory of democracy and research by psychologists Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky (1972, 1984; Kahneman, Slovic, & Tversky, 1982; Tversky & Kahneman, 1981). Kahneman and Tversky identified four simplifying heuristics: representativeness, availability, adjustment and anchoring, and simulation. *Representativeness* is assigning an item to a particular class and then using what one believes about that class to form opinions about the item in question. For example, I know that President Bush is a Republican, so I use what I believe about Republicans to make judgements about him.

*Availability* refers to the ease with which an individual can retrieve relevant information from long-term memory. For example, in being asked my opinion about the job George Bush is doing as president, I might easily recall that he recently cut taxes, and so give him a favorable rating, as I am opposed to high taxes. *Anchoring and adjustment* is a simplifying process in which individuals form an initial response and then adjust that response by considering additional information related to that response. For example, I might give Bush a favorable rating based on his having cut taxes but then adjust my opinion in a more negative direction as I think of other ways in which he might have hurt the economy. Thus, my initial opinion anchors my subsequent reflections.

Finally, *simulation* "facilitates decision making when information is lacking . . . decision makers mentally play out [hypothetical] sequences of events relevant to the judgment under consideration" (Mondak, 1994, p. 123). For example, in deciding whether to vote for Al Gore or George Bush, I draw on easily accessible information and beliefs to "predict" how each candidate *might* address issues of importance to me.

Popkin (1991) uses both representativeness and availability in theorizing about how citizens are able to use heuristics in coming to political judgments, and Ottati and Wyer (1990) and Iyengar (1990) discuss an "accessibility" heuristic that is similar to "availability." Ottati and Wyer (1990) also discuss the use of "stereotypes" in a way that is similar to Kahneman and Tversky's representativeness heuristic. In addition, political scientists have hypothesized and tested other heuristics. For example, Sniderman, Hagen, Tetlock, and Brady (1986) and Sniderman et al. (1991) refer to a "desert heuristic" in which individuals make political judgments based on whether they believe that an individual or group is deserving of the action or policy in question. And Riggle (1992) and Riggle, Ottati, Wyer, Kuklinski, and Schwarz (1992) distinguish "procedural" heuristics (rules for how information should be processed) from "categorical" heuristics (rules for what kinds of information should be used in different circumstances).<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup>For an excellent, comprehensive review of heuristic decision making and its use in political science, see Mondak (1994).

The role of the media in heuristic decision making is twofold. First, as discussed previously, the media play an important role in the formation of the foundational orientations that are drawn on in reaching specific opinions. Second, the media provides much of the new information that serves to “trigger” heuristic decision making (directly or indirectly). Citizens have a wide, often inconsistent range of norms, values, beliefs, and attitudes on which they can draw. By *framing* information in different foundational (for example, partisanship, ideology, equality, freedom, gender, race, patriotism) and/or substantive (for example, local, national, or international concerns, economic versus social issues, individual versus collective causes or impact) contexts, the media can *prime* citizens to attend to these particular aspects of the issue in question, activating different schema, and thus producing different opinions (Ansolabehere, Behr, & Iyengar, 1993; Huddy, 1994; Gilens, 1999; Iyengar, 1991; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Neuman, Just, & Crigler, 1992; Peffley, Shields, & Williams, 1996; Zaller, 1992).

### The Role of Emotion in Opinion Formation

There is general agreement in the literature that citizens draw on foundational orientations in the formation of opinions and that the media can affect this process through the way they frame information. Less certain is the extent to which attitude and opinion formation is an active, conscious, and rational process. In one view, both general orientations and specific opinions are continuously being constructed and reconstructed through remembering, thinking, reasoning, and communicating. The media remain an important factor in this process, but their impact is less “automatic,” with prior information, reflection, and deliberation mitigating more reflexive, unconscious responses (Connolly, 1983; Crigler, 1998; Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Delli Carpini & Williams, 1998; Fishkin, 1995; Fishkin, & Luskin, 1999; Gastil, 2000; Gamson, 1992, 2001; Lindeman, 2002; Luskin, & Fishkin, 1998; Mendelberg, 2002; Neuman et al., 1992; Wade & Tavis, 1993; Zaller & Feldman, 1992).

At the other extreme, both attitude and opinion formation is seen as being heavily driven by affective or emotional responses to information. Psychological research into affective information processing provides a strong basis for the importance of emotions in attitude and opinion formation. This research reminds us that “information” is much broader than facts, that “cognitions” are not limited to conscious thought, and that there are many “information-processing” systems in the human body. Drawing on this literature, Marcus et al. (Marcus, Neuman, MacKuen, & Sullivan, 1996; Marcus, Neuman, & MacKuen, 2000) distinguish three interrelated information processing systems in humans: reflexive action, emotional responses, and deliberative thought. Deliberative thought is consistent with the more rational, constructivist approach already described. But Marcus et al., argue that emotional information processing has important, and under- or poorly studied, implications for political decision making as well.

Psychologists now believe that affective responses to information are processed through the “limbic system”—literally a group of brain areas (the hippocampus, amygdala, mammillary body, septal nuclei, septum, cingulate, cingulate gyrus, and fornix) involved in emotional reactions and motivated behavior (Wade & Tavis, 1993). A particularly useful theory of how the limbic system operates is J. A. Gray’s (1981, 1985, 1987, 1990) model of emotions. According to Gray, the limbic system can be divided into three more specific systems. The *fight/flight* system regulates the emotions of rage and terror in response to “direct sensory input of punishment and



non-reward” (Marcus et al., 1996, p. 38). The *behavioral approach* system is associated with positive affect regarding the parts of our personal and social environment with which we are familiar. This system “provides people with an understanding, an emotional report card, on actions that are already in one’s repertoire of habits and learned behaviors” (p. 43). The *behavioral inhibition* system, on the other hand, is associated with negative affect and “acts to scan the environment for novelty and intrusion of threat [and to] warn us that some things and some people are powerful and dangerous” (p. 43).

According to Marcus et al., the fight/flight system has limited (though potentially powerful) applications to politics. The behavioral approach and behavioral inhibition systems, however, are more likely to play regular roles in processing political information. In combination, these systems produce a two-dimensional model of affective responses, or moods (adapted by Marcus et al. from Watson and Tellegen’s, 1985, circumplex model). The *positive affect* dimension (produced by the behavioral approach system) ranges from high positive affect (feeling active, elated, enthusiastic, excited) to low positive affect (feeling drowsy, dull, sleepy, sluggish). The *negative affect* dimension (produced by the behavioral inhibition system) ranges from high negative affect (nervousness, distress, fear, hostility) to low negative affect (calmness, placidity, relaxation). Other, nonorthogonal, moods can be viewed as combinations of high positive and negative affect (astonishment or surprise), high positive and low negative affect (contentment, happiness, kindness, pleasure), low negative and low positive affect (quiescence, stillness), and high negative and low positive affect (sadness, sorrow, unhappiness).

A key to the relationship between emotional and deliberative information processing in the formation of political attitudes and opinions is the speed with which different kinds of information are processed, and the extent to which they involve conscious thought. For example, reflexive responses to information (moving one’s hand away from a hot stove) can take place before one has either a conscious awareness or a sensation of pain. Certain emotional responses to information, although not as quick as reflexive responses, are processed more quickly and less consciously than is rational thought (Lodge & Taber, 1996). For example, when I watch a campaign ad, listen to a presidential address, or read a newspaper article, I may be reacting to that information both emotionally and deliberately, but my emotional reactions are happening more quickly and less consciously. Thus, at a minimum, emotional responses are likely to affect the extent to which factual information is attended to and the way it is perceived, stored, and recalled. And it is possible that emotional responses alone are enough for citizens to develop political attitudes, even in the absence of the conscious use of factual information or rational thought.

One well-developed approach to the interaction of emotions and factual information in attitude formation has been developed by Lodge et al. (1989; see also Anderson & Hubert, 1963; Lodge, Steenbergen, & Brau, 1995; Sanbonmatsu & Fazio, 1990). According to this model of information processing (known alternately as the “impression-driven” or “on-line” model), individuals make political evaluations at the moment information is presented, storing their affective impressions in memory and then “‘forgetting’ the actual pieces of evidence that contributed to the evaluation” (Lodge et al., 1989, p. 401).<sup>11</sup> Affective judgments—rather than factual

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<sup>11</sup>The theory is ambiguous on whether the factual information is actually forgotten or is simply stored but no longer relevant or easily accessible. The central point, however, is that the factual information itself is not consciously used in decision making.

information or rational thought—about particular individuals, groups, or issues are mentally stored in a running tally that is updated when new information is encountered. It is these emotional tallies that are retrieved into short-term memory when citizens encounter new information and/or make decisions about the person, group, or issue in question.

The on-line model differs from constructivist approaches to opinion formation in two important respects. First, it suggests that findings of generally low recognition and recall of political facts (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996) tell us little about people's exposure to or use of political information. Citizens may have little memory of such facts, yet have used them to develop their attitudes. For example, I may be able to tell you that I disapprove of the job the president is doing, and have based that opinion on a wealth of factual information, but be unable to recall what those specific facts are. Second, it suggests that people's political decisions are driven by affective rather than cognitive schema—citizens come to political judgment about many issues through visceral emotions rather than deliberation and thought. In this model, political sophistication is defined as the speed and efficiency with which citizens can process factual information into affective tallies. At best, tests of factual knowledge are indicators of one's cognitive processing ability, rather than substantively important pieces of information that are called up for active use in forming and expressing political opinions.

Emotions have also been found to play a role in heuristic decision making. One example is the "likability heuristic" (Brady & Sniderman, 1985; Carmines & Kuklinski, 1990; Sniderman et al., 1991). As the name implies, this model assumes that citizens use short-cuts in making political decisions. However, these short-cuts are driven by how one *feels* about the issue, person, or group in question. In the version of this model developed by Brady and (1985) and Sniderman et al. (1991), citizens infer stands to individuals and groups by attributing their own views to individuals and groups they like and attributing opposing views to those they dislike. For example, if I am pro-gun control and I like George Bush, then I assume that he is pro-gun control as well. Carmines and Kuklinski (1990) also assume that affect (likability) drives decision making but argue that one's feelings toward the individual or group, coupled with beliefs about where they stand, cues citizens as to where they themselves stand on the issue in question. For example, if I like George Bush and I believe that he supports gun control, then I decide that I, too, must support gun control. Although the direction of causality is important, the point here is that both models see affect, rather than beliefs or knowledge, as the mainspring of attitude formation and change.

Recently, Lodge and Taber (1996) have further developed the on-line model, combining it with the concepts of *hot cognitions* and heuristic decision making to develop a theory of motivated political reasoning. According to this theory, *all* social information is affectively charged at the moment the information is encountered, and this "affective tag" is stored directly with the concept in long-term memory (p. 2). These hot cognitions (Abelson, 1963) are then updated and revised in the face of new information through the on-line process discussed earlier. Finally, when asked (implicitly or explicitly) to evaluate a political object, people will use the "how-do-I-feel" heuristic (Clore & Isbell, 1996) by moving the affective tally into working memory and using the resulting feelings to guide their response, with negative net tallies producing a negative judgment and positive net tallies producing a positive judgment.

Taken as a whole, this research clearly shows that emotions play important, multiple roles in political information processing. They can create moods that

affect one's motivation to attend to or avoid politics, thus affecting the likelihood of learning political facts (Marcus et al., 1996: 52). They can interact with knowledge and beliefs, affecting the way information is perceived, stored, and used (Carmines & Kuklinski, 1990; Lodge & Taber, 1996; Lodge et al., 1989). And they can substitute for factual information in the formation and expression of political attitudes (Brady & Sniderman, 1985; Lodge & Taber, 1996; Marcus et al., 1996; Sniderman et al., 1991).

What is also clear is that the specific role played by emotions (and factual knowledge) is context dependent. Lodge et al. (1989; 1990) found that when experimental conditions encourage, forming *immediate* impressions (for example, when subjects are told, before being given information about candidates, that they will be asked to evaluate them) political "sophisticates" (significantly, defined as those scoring highest on a test of factual knowledge) are most likely to process new information "on-line." But when the experimental conditions are altered (for example, when subjects are not told that they will be asked to make an evaluation until after information is presented) or when the topic being evaluated is relatively complex (for example, a policy issue rather than a candidate), political sophisticates are the most likely to draw on information that is stored in memory. And Lodge and Taber (1996) suggest that the how-do-I-feel heuristic is most likely to be employed under certain conditions, including those where affective judgment is called for, where the consequences of being wrong are minor, where objective information is not readily available, where disconfirming evidence is not highlighted, and where one is distracted or under time pressure (p. 3).

Even if attitude and opinion formation is driven primarily through reflexive, emotional responses to information, the media remain important for the same two reasons discussed earlier. First, they are a primary source of the information on which the affective responses that shape foundational orientations are based. And second, the way the media implicitly and explicitly use affect to frame particular issues (for example, cynicism, trust, fear, anger, loyalty) can help determine what emotions are tapped and, thus, what opinions are expressed. Indeed, the nonverbal cues contained in visual and aural communication may make certain media (for example, television or movies) and certain genres (for example, entertainment or ads) more effective in shaping attitude formation and opinion expression through emotions than through reason (Graber, 1996, 2001b; Marcus et al., 2000).

### **Media Effects on Stability and Change in Political Opinions**

Theory and research such as that described above paints a complex picture in which the media, interacting with previously held norms, values, beliefs, and attitudes (among other things), can affect individual opinion on particular issues in subtle and context-dependent ways. What does this mean for broader patterns of stability and change in public opinion and the impact of the media on these patterns? Several studies have explored this issue. Lang and Lang (1983) found that public opinion regarding Richard Nixon during the Watergate scandal was at least partially influenced by media coverage of that event. Miller and Krosnick (1996) found evidence that media coverage of the Iran–Contra scandal and the Persian Gulf war, respectively, lowered President Ronald Reagan's and increased President George Bush's approval ratings. And several studies have found that negative political advertising decreased support for the targeted candidate, though these results have been inconsistent (Lau et al., 1999).

In an extensive analysis based on aggregate trends in public opinion regarding 32 foreign policy and 48 domestic policy issues over a 14-year period, Page and Shapiro (1989, 1992; see also Page, Shapiro, & Dempsey, 1987) found that print and broadcast comments by acknowledged experts on the issues in question, editorial opinions expressed directly by newspapers and broadcast news reporters, and statements by presidents (especially popular ones) had a measurable impact on shifting public opinion in the direction advocated. However, comments by spokespeople for interest groups (especially those viewed as being overly narrow, self-interested, or antisocial) either had no influence on public opinion or shifted opinion in the opposite direction intended by the groups.

Zaller (1992) combines theories of individual-level opinion formation with theories regarding the nature of the larger media environment to produce what is arguably the most comprehensive model and analysis of media effects to date. Simplifying his model somewhat, Zaller argues that two sets of characteristics are crucial to how citizens respond to media messages. The first is their level of “political sophistication,” which includes political knowledge, interest, and intellectual engagement in politics. The second is their foundational orientations toward the political world, which can include their ideological or partisan leanings, hawkish or dovish views on war, underlying beliefs about race, and the like. The greater one’s political sophistication, the more likely one is to attend to, comprehend, and retain information provided by the media on any particular issue. In turn, this information is likely to be filtered through one’s predispositional attitudes, leading to specific opinions about the issue in question.

As summarized, Zaller’s model is consistent with much of the theory and research discussed earlier in this chapter. But he takes his analysis a further step, arguing that media impact also depends on the content of the message. Because the vast majority of what the news media reports is based on elite discourse, the range of information and views presented by the mainstream press is circumscribed by this discourse. This produces a “Catch-22” of sorts, in which political sophisticates, who are the most likely to attend to media reports, are also the most susceptible to any bias contained in those reports.

Zaller uses this model to explore shifting opinion on a host of issues including the Vietnam war, job guarantees, school desegregation and busing, the admission of China into the UN, race and gender policy, defense spending, U.S. involvement in Central America, the state of the economy, a nuclear weapons freeze, and support for candidates. He finds that when the media environment is relatively homogeneous, public opinion shifts in the direction of this mainstream opinion, with the shift most noticeable for more sophisticated citizens. Significantly, although this shift is greater for those whose predispositions would incline them toward the view in question (for example, self-proclaimed “hawks” taking a pro-Vietnam war stance), the direction of the shift is the same even for those whose predispositions would lead one to expect the opposite (for example, self-proclaimed “doves” become more supportive of the war). If, however, the media environment presents “two sides” to an issue, the result is more polarized opinion, with those predisposed in different directions shifting in ways consistent with these predispositions (for example, hawks become more supportive of the war and doves become more opposed).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Whereas Zaller finds convincing evidence across numerous issue areas for his argument, more recently (Zaller, 1998, 2001) he has noted that for at least one issue (the Clinton sex scandal), public opinion appears to have been immune from the mainstreaming and polarizing effects of the media. See also Delli Carpini and Williams (2001) on this topic.

## MEDIA USE AND POLITICAL AND CIVIC BEHAVIORS

Ultimately, democratically engaged citizens are citizens who *act*—through voting and other forms of electoral involvement, contacting public officials, membership in political and civic organizations, volunteering in their community, or even protesting and demonstrating. As with the other aspects of democratic engagement discussed in this chapter, the relationship between media use and civic and political behavior is complicated and only partly understood. Overall there appears to be a positive and consistent correlation between public affairs media use and participation—more active citizens are more likely to say that they follow politics, read newspapers, watch or listen to the news, and visit Internet news sites. (McLeod et al., 1996; Norris, 1996, 2001; Pew Research Center for the People and Press surveys; Putnam, 2000; Rhine, Bennett, & Flickinger, 1998).

The causal relationship between public affairs media use and participation is unclear, though the general assumption is that it is bidirectional—more participatory citizens are more likely to follow public affairs in the media, but exposure to public affairs media also increases participation. The positive impact of media use on participation is largely indirect, occurring through its effects on motivation (for example, political interest) and ability (most centrally, political knowledge). However, the media can also have a more direct impact on participation through the provision of “mobilizing information” such as specific calls to action and the identification of specific opportunities to act (Lemert, 1981, 1992; Merritt, 1998; Sirianni & Friedland, 2001).

Although the general impact of media use on participation and its prerequisites is positive, the content of the media mitigates and can even reverse the relationship. For example, there is at least some evidence that negative campaign ads can depress voter turnout, though the findings are mixed (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995; Ansolabehere, Iyengar, Simon, & Valentino, 1994; Ansolabehere et al., 1999; Bullock, 1994; Finkel & Geer, 1998; but see Freedman & Goldstein, 1999; Garramone, Atkin, Pinkleton, & Cole, 1990; Geer & Lau, 1998; Kahn & Kenney, 1999). And the evidence, discussed earlier in this chapter, that cynical, strategy-oriented coverage of public affairs can lead to lower social trust and political efficacy suggests that such coverage has at least an indirect, negative impact on participation.

Although different types of public affairs media tend to be intercorrelated with each other (Pew Internet and Public Life Project, 2001), there is some evidence that different media are more or less likely to facilitate participation. In general, print media (newspapers and magazines) have the strongest relationship, with the relationship between participation and television news viewing less consistent and strong (Atkin, Galloway, & Nayman, 1976; Eveland & Scheufle, 2000; Patterson, 1980; Robinson, 1976; Robinson & Levy, 1986; Robinson & Sheehan, 1983; Van Dijk, 1988). This view has been disputed, however, with some arguing that television’s audiovisual nature is actually superior in conveying certain kinds of information that can affect participation, such as “impressions of people and long-term memory for dramatic events” (Graber, 2001a, p. 197; see also Graber, 1996, 2001b). The attributes of television such as sound, motion, and color have also been found to “attract attention and stimulate psychological involvement and ultimately learning” (Neuman et al., 1992, p. 79; see also Graber, 1990). Neuman et al. (1992) conclude from their research that because people find television more entertaining and accessible, it “is particularly successful at breaking the attention barrier and getting people

interested" (p. 93). At the same time, "print media are particularly successful at providing in depth follow-up" (p. 93). In the end, both types of media appear to lead to increased political learning, which in turn is likely to lead to greater participation. Television may also be particularly effective at motivating and educating—and so increasing the participation—of less politically sophisticated citizens (Kwak, 1999; McLeod, Bybee, & Durall, 1979; Miyo, 1983).

There is also evidence that television viewing and newspaper reading differ in their impact on different kinds of participation. For example, Eveland and Scheuffe (2000) found that both television and newspaper use were positively correlated with voting, though the former relationship was smaller and statistically nonsignificant. However, only newspaper use was positively associated with other forms of campaign-related participation (displaying a campaign button, sign, or sticker, attending a meeting or rally, working for a party or candidate, or donating money to a candidate or party). This fact, in combination with the interaction between newspaper use and levels of formal education, led to an increased gap in overall campaign participation between more and less educated citizens, but not for voting.

Other forms of media have also been shown to be positively associated with civic and political participation. For example, Bennett (1998) found that listeners to talk radio were significantly more likely to participate in a variety of ways. However, although public affairs media appears to be positively associated (to varying degrees) with participation, entertainment media is another story. Putnam (2000, pp. 230–238) finds that although television *news* viewing is correlated with increased civic and political participation, there is a consistent negative relationship between the amount of time spent viewing *entertainment* television and a host of activities including attending a public meeting, writing a letter to a congressperson, attending a meeting or serving as an officer or committee member of a local organization, or volunteering in the community. And Brehm and Rahn (1997) conclude that watching a single hour less television each day would have the equivalent, positive effect on civic engagement as 5 or 6 more years of formal education.

As with the relationship between social trust and television viewing discussed earlier, entertainment television's impact on participation is presumed to result from a combination of competition for scarce time, psychological effects that inhibit social interaction and specific program content.

Although the "time scarcity" argument is compelling, arguments based on psychological impact and specific program content require greater refinement and specificity. For example, there is at least some argument to be made (and evidence to support it) that the content of entertainment media can, in certain circumstances, be more informative and better contextualized than that of the news (Delli Carpini & Williams, 1994a) and that citizens are willing and able to draw on entertainment media, often in positive, constructive ways in deliberations about important issues (Baum, 2002; Delli Carpini & Williams, 1994b; Edelman, 1995; Fiske, 1996).

To date there is less evidence regarding the specific impact of the Internet on participation. Given its combination of print, audio, and video/images, it is arguable that the Internet combines characteristics of radio, television, and newspapers in ways that would make it particularly effective in increasing citizens' participation. However, Putnam (2000, p. 221) finds that people who depend primarily on the Internet for political information are *less* likely to participate in civic and political life than average. And Bimber's (2001) analysis of 1996 and 1998 NES data on participation suggests that the only demonstrable link is between Internet use and financial contributions to campaigns in 1998.

Despite the apparent lack of impact to date, the Internet's most distinctive qualities—the marriage of increased information, targeting by providers, filtering and active self-selection by consumers, and bidirectionality of communication—seem to offer truly new prospects for civic engagement. In particular, the Internet's ability to provide information to citizens and simultaneously permit them to act on that issue (for example, by communicating a reaction to friends, interest groups, or public officials, giving money, signing a petition, registering and voting, joining an organization, and agreeing to attend a meeting) is a radically new feature of the information environment (Delli Carpini, 2000; Sirianni & Friedland, 2000, pp. 232, 335; Uslaner, 2000). The Internet also has potential to increase participation in forums and deliberations about important public issues and, in doing so, increase the resources (for example, knowledge or reasoning and argumentation skills) and motivations (for example, interest and social connectedness) necessary to engage in other forms of participation (Price & Cappella, 2001, 2002).

Although the Internet's value for increasing civic engagement has only begun to be exploited, there is suggestive, if anecdotal, evidence of its potential. For example, it appears that the Internet was critical to organizers of the Seattle protests against the World Trade Organization, the anti-land mine campaign, and the Free Tibet movement. Bimber (1998) provides two additional examples of mobilization via the Internet (a national campaign on home schooling and a local issue involving the homeless in Santa Monica, California). He describes this general phenomenon as “accelerated pluralism,” arguing that the Internet will not change the basic logic of pluralism. Citizens will continue to participate in politics and be mobilized largely through groups to which they belong. At the same time, he argues that the Internet

will lower the obstacles to grass-roots mobilization and organization by political entrepreneurs, activists, and others, and will speed the flow of politics. Lower costs of organizing collective action offered by the Net will be particularly beneficial for one type of group: those outside the boundaries of traditional private and public institutions, those not rooted in businesses, professional or occupational memberships or the constituencies of existing government agencies and programs. (Bimber, 2000, p. 53)

He speculates that this, in turn, will lead to an intensification of group-centered politics and a decreased “dependence on stable public and private institutions” (p. 53).

## **CONCLUSIONS: THE MEDIA AND DEMOCRATIC ENGAGEMENT**

Over much of the last 40 years of quantitative research on media and politics, the consensus mantra has been that although the media does not influence what people think, it can influence what people think about. This view has long been questioned (most cogently by scholars writing from a “critical studies” perspective), but recent theory and research has reintroduced the notion that “the media matters” into the mainstream. The admittedly incomplete review presented in this chapter in large part confirms this view. Stepping back from the details of individual studies to take a broader view of the field, one can certainly conclude that the media

influence the norms, values, beliefs, attitudes, opinions, and actions that constitute democratic engagement. This impact begins early in life and continues throughout the life cycle. It is mitigated or enhanced by a number of factors, from the type and amount of media attended to, to the content of media messages, to characteristics of viewers, listeners, and readers. The effects of media are both direct and indirect and operate through both affective and rational pathways.

That said, there remains a sense that what we can conclude about the impact of media pales in comparison to more theoretical and even commonsensical expectations. In particular, four important questions emerge from existing theory and research that require answers if we are to understand more fully (and, hopefully, contribute to improving) the media's impact on democratic engagement.

### **If the Media Are So Important, Why Do Effects Seem So Small?**

With few exceptions (e.g., Putnam, 2000; Zaller, 1992), the magnitude of most effects demonstrated through empirical research remain small, equivocal, and inconsistent or at least heavily context dependent, with most studies being limited in their findings and cautious in their conclusions:

No empirical research has gone so far as to argue that the direct persuasive impact of mass communications is, in general, large. "Not so minimal" is perhaps the best characterization of the current consensus among quantitative researchers on the size of media effects. Words like *massive* are used only in a denial. (Zaller, 1996, p. 18)

Zaller goes on to challenge this view, suggesting that "at least in the domain of political communication, the true magnitude of the persuasive effect of mass communication is closer to "massive" than to "small to negligible" and that the frequency of such effects is "often" (p. 18). What explains this gap between the reasonable expectation that the media is a powerful influence on democratic engagement and the general inability to document large effects? Zaller argues that observing large media effects requires better measurement of key variables, variance in key independent variables (especially the content of media messages), and appropriate models for capturing crosscutting effects.

In the frequent cases in which media messages (across media and time) do not vary significantly, it may be difficult or impossible to detect a significant impact, even though this impact may in fact be quite large. In the not uncommon cases where media messages change or vary, however, it should be possible to detect their potentially sizable impact on public values, attitudes, opinions, and behaviors. But to do this we must design research that simultaneously measures change in the content of media messages, the range of information provided in these messages, which citizens ultimately receive them, and the foundational orientations that citizens use to translate them into opinions and action. Too often such differential impact is lost because "impact" is defined as change in a single direction (i.e., citizens are expected to all be affected in the same way and amount). As a result, systematic but crosscutting change can be misinterpreted as no change at all. By acknowledging that the effects of the media environment can vary by content and context, and building models that can capture this dynamic, it should be possible



to document more fully the extent and direction of media effects on democratic engagement.

### **What Constitutes Politically Relevant Media?**

Not surprisingly, most theory and research regarding the role of the media in democratic politics focuses on news and public affairs genres. It is in public affairs media in general and news media in particular that politics is assumed to reside, and it is to this part of the media that the public is assumed to turn when engaging the political world. As a former network television executive put it, in the civic education of the American public, entertainment programming is recess.

Despite the seeming “naturalness” of the distinction between news and entertainment media, it is remarkably difficult to identify the characteristics upon which this distinction is based. The opposite of “news” is not “entertainment,” as the news is often diversionary or amusing (the definition of entertainment) and what is called “entertainment” is often neither. One might instead use the terms *public affairs* media and *popular* media, but these distinctions also collapse under the slightest scrutiny. Does the definition of public affairs media require that it be *unpopular*? Does the broadcasting of a presidential address shift from public affairs to popular media because too many people watch it? And how does one classify the many magazine stories, novels, movies, television shows (in all their rapidly changing formats such as melodramas, docudramas, docusoaps, and talk shows), and Internet sites that address issues of public concern. Clearly the concept of popular media does not provide a counterpoint to public affairs. To the contrary, the *public* in public affairs indicates that the issues discussed are of importance to a substantial segment of the citizenry, and most of what is studied under this heading *is* popular by any reasonable definition of the term.

The difficulty in even *naming* the categories on which we base so fundamental a distinction is more than semantics. Rather it highlights the artificiality of this distinction. A possible way to salvage the news–entertainment distinction is to identify the key characteristics that are assumed to distinguish politically relevant from politically irrelevant media. But this does more to blur than clarify the traditional news/nonnews categories. Public affairs media address real-world issues of relevance to a significant percentage of the citizenry, but so, too, does much of what traditionally falls outside of this genre: One would be hard pressed to find *any* substantive topic covered in the news that has not also been the subject of ostensibly nonnews media. And public affairs media generally, and the news more specifically, regularly address issues of culture, celebrity, and personality.

Attempting to define public affairs media in broader strokes also does little to resolve this conceptual dilemma. No less a student of journalism than Walter Lippmann (1922) defined news as “the signaling of an event.” And yet “entertainment media” often play this role, drawing the public’s attention to issues and events of social and political import (Delli Carpini & Williams, 1994a; Fiske, 1996). In short, all of the usual characteristics we associate with news or public affairs media can be found in other media, and those we associate with popular or entertainment media can be found in the news. I do not conclude from this that *all* media are equally relevant to politics or useful to democratic discourse. Rather I am suggesting that our traditional categories fail as a way of making such distinctions, that

they are social constructions that tell us more about the distribution of political power than about the political relevance of different genres. Further, I would argue that these categories are rapidly losing what power they once had to privilege certain gatekeepers and genres in the process of constructing political reality.

To understand more fully the impact of media on democratic engagement, it seems clear that we must expand our theories and research to a much wider range of genres. One potentially fruitful approach, suggested in a different context by Bimber (1998, 2000), is to think less in terms of specific media, technologies, or genres and more in terms of *the transfer of information*. Politically relevant information can take many forms (from facts to opinions to audiovisual cues), emanate from many sources (from face-to-face exchanges to newspapers to television to the Internet), and have many different impacts (from the shaping of foundational norms and attitudes to the triggering of different emotions to the shaping of specific opinions and actions). Beginning with the questions, “What information matters?” and “Where do people get this information?” and letting the answers to these questions determine the particular media and genres we study, would, I believe, produce a more nuanced, integrated, and ultimately accurate picture of how media affects democratic engagement (Williams and Delli Carpini, 2003).

### **Is Media Use Good or Bad for Democratic Engagement?**

One of the most intriguing patterns in the research summarized in this chapter is the general finding that public affairs media use is positively correlated with most forms of democratic engagement, coupled with evidence that the media’s cynical, negative coverage of politics seems to contribute to declining trust, efficacy, and involvement. How is this possible? Although I do not pretend to have an answer to this question, on reflection these findings may be less paradoxical than they seem at first blush. In a large, modern democracy, the primary way in which citizens learn about public life is necessarily through the media. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that more engaged citizens would be more likely to use public affairs media of various kinds. In addition, although the content of public affairs media may often fall short of what we might hope, taken as a whole, they certainly contain enough useful and usable information that citizens who regularly attend to them wind up learning things that enhance their civic and political engagement. Some (e.g., Edelman, 1988) argue that citizens are better off not attending to the elite-driven discourse that dominates mainstream media, but it is impossible to imagine how citizens could know anything about the political and social world without using the mass media as part of this learning process.

Acknowledging the benefits of media use does not discount its potential drawbacks, however. It is not surprising that exposure to negative ads, cynical and/or strategic news coverage, the barrage of crime and scandal stories, and so forth, would lead to doubts about the efficacy of one’s involvement, hesitancy about trusting fellow citizens or elected officials, even confusion about the issues in question. Were these the *only* messages citizens received through the media, one might expect only such negative impacts on engagement. But clearly individual stories, particular media and genres, and the information environment, more generally, are not this homogeneous in tone or content.

Viewed in this light, the dual effects of media seem less surprising. At a minimum, it may be that different citizens are reacting differently, with some better able to

glean what is valuable from the media, whereas others succumb to their more insidious messages. More likely, I suspect, is that in many cases the *same* people are simultaneously educated and confused, motivated and alienated, empowered and politically weakened by their exposure to the media and its interaction with their more deeply held knowledge, values, and beliefs. I know that this is how I react, often in the course of watching or reading a single news story. Do I learn from the news? Yes. Am I also confused by it? Yes. Does the media inspire me to act, sometimes out of anger, sometimes out of a renewed sense of community? Yes. Do I sometimes wonder whether or not it is worth it? Yes. Did I feel more connected to fellow citizens while watching coverage in the aftermath of September 11, 2001? Yes. Did I also wonder about the darker side of human nature and what it means for how trusting I should be? Yes. Did I find myself more inclined to support military actions despite my more pacifist, skeptical attitudes and beliefs about such actions? Yes. Do I remain less supportive of such actions than people whose orientations are more “hawkish”? Yes. Although not wanting to make too much of what may say more about my own schizophrenic tendencies than the nature of media and democratic engagement, I suspect that I am not alone in my “relationship” to the media. Developing theories, models, and methods (along the lines suggested by Zaller, 1992, 1996) that can capture this complex, individual-level relationship, while also aggregating these individual-level responses in ways that can identify and explain larger trends, seems crucial if we are to assess systematically the role of media in democratic engagement.

I would extend this observation to include the impact of entertainment media. Although Putnam (1995, 2000) makes a compelling case for the negative impact of entertainment television (and, less fully, the Internet) on civic and political engagement, one need only cursorily consider the wide range of programs, Web sites, and content this includes to realize that, as with public affairs media, entertainment media is likely to have a much more varied and complex impact than this. Without question, spending excessive time “watching” or “reading” *anything* necessarily means less time for interacting with others and acting in the social and political world. Beyond this, however, there is no reason to think that certain kinds of entertainment media cannot be as effective as, or more effective than, public affairs media in educating or motivating citizens to act. Watching less television or spending less time on-line may in fact be part of the solution to declining democratic engagement, but equally important is *what* programs are watched or what Web sites are visited. If forced to choose, I think a strong case could be made that citizens would be better off watching *Politically Incorrect*, *The West Wing*, or *The Simpsons* than *Hardball*, *The Capital Gang*, or most nights of their local news broadcast. The key is not whether a show is produced by the news or entertainment division of a television station or network, but whether the content and form of the media message are likely to enhance or detract from the motivations, abilities, and opportunities necessary for democratic engagement (Williams & Delli Carpini, 2003).

### **How Can We Distinguish Between “What Is” and “What Is Possible”?**

The ultimate value of theories and research on media and politics is in their ability not only to understand this relationship as it currently exists, but also to point the

way to how this relationship might be improved. Nowhere is this truer than for the issue of democratic engagement, which has at its roots the notion of agency. Although it is crucial that we maintain our objectivity and distance from the subjects we study, it is also crucial that we do not confuse findings that are dependent on the systemic and individual contexts in which they occur with broader, deterministic conclusions about the inherent value of certain mediums or genres.

Without question we need to know much more about the complex ways in which the media as it currently exists affect norms and values, beliefs and attitudes, opinions and actions. And it may well be that this undertaking will suggest that certain media or genres are superior to others. But before we reach such conclusions we also need to know much more about the democratic *potential* that may be locked within different media. Local television news as it currently exists may be a civic wasteland, but *if* it adopted the form and substance advocated by the civic journalism movement, might it not increase citizen engagement? Most entertainment media may do little more than take time away from more politically relevant activities, but might there not be ways (as in the past) to combine culture and politics to create a more relevant, engaging, and motivating public sphere? The Internet as currently used may be better at creating consumers than citizens, but might it not, in conjunction with more traditional forms of engagement, provide ways create a new, richer sense of connectedness and community?

A promising avenue for exploring this potential is the greater use of “natural experiments” in our research. Throughout the country there are numerous, ongoing efforts to harness and enhance the democratic potential of the media. Led by nonprofit organizations and largely funded by private foundations, these local, regional, and sometimes national efforts are often based implicitly or explicitly on existing theory and research. They include efforts to improve the quality of public affairs broadcasting and print media, news coverage of campaigns, political advertising, and political Web sites. They also include efforts to use a variety of media interventions to increase citizens’ knowledge about and participation in civic and political life.

These natural experiments provide a tremendous opportunity to understand better both the current relationship between media and democratic engagement and the potential for improving this state of affairs. By combining many of the strengths of pure experimental design (for example, the ability to disentangle hypothesized effects through the isolation and manipulation of particular “treatments” and, in certain cases, the ability to assign people randomly to different treatment conditions) with those of survey and field studies (most notably, greater validity and generalizability), research based on such natural experiments could provide insights that would simultaneously enhance the theory and practice of democratic politics.<sup>13</sup>

Regardless of the particular merits and shortcomings of natural experiments, the larger point on which I would like to end this chapter remains—as a field we must, as the political theorist Benjamin Barber (1993, pp. 71–72) reminds us, see democracy as “an end to be sought” and use our research and data to understand where and why we fall short and how this might be improved.

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<sup>13</sup>The use of natural experiments need not be limited to quantitative research and offers equal promise for more in-depth qualitative and/or anthropological approaches.

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## Women as Political Communication Sources and Audiences

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Women's progress in the United States political arena has been slow but steady. Once women won the right to vote in 1920, they entered the electorate slowly and in smaller numbers than men (Ford, 2002). Eighty years later, women are now more likely than men to register to vote and to cast their ballots at the polls. In absolute numbers, more women than men have voted in every presidential election since 1964. Since 1980, the proportion of female voters has been greater than the proportion of male voters. And since 1984, more women than men have registered to vote (Ford, 2002).

Women have shown similar slow, but steady, progress as political candidates in the United States. Since Jeannette Rankin was first elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1916, 222 women have served in the U.S. Congress (including six who have served in both the House and the Senate). In the past 25 years, women have increased their representation in the U.S. Congress from 4% to 13.6%, in statewide elective office from 10% to 25.3%, and in state legislatures from 9% to 22.3% (Center for American Women and Politics, 2003).

As women gained more presence as voters and as political candidates, researchers in a variety of fields have become interested in studying their role in the U.S. political process—including their role as political communication sources and audiences. This chapter summarizes some of the major trends and findings of women's political communication research over the past 25 years.

Specifically, this chapter looks at women as political communication sources by summarizing the research on their public speeches, television advertising, and Web sites. This chapter also provides an overview of studies analyzing the media coverage of women candidates, elected officials, and first ladies as well as the reactions of the public to women's political communication. Finally, it provides a look

at levels and sources of women's political knowledge. Not covered in this review are studies examining women's political communication in countries outside the United States as well as research on the media coverage of the women's movement, feminist organizations, and women's issues.

Research on women as political communication sources and audiences comprises scholarship from a variety of academic disciplines—including communication, political science, journalism, sociology, cultural studies, rhetoric, and history. In studying women's political communication, researchers employ a variety of methodologies—including surveys, content analysis, focus groups, and experimental designs. Scholars draw on a number of theories and constructs, including feminine style, videostyle, framing, and gender schema.

## **COMMUNICATION STYLES AND STRATEGIES OF WOMEN CANDIDATES**

From the time a candidate contemplates her candidacy to the day of the election, she will be engaged in some aspect of communication, including interpersonal communications with party officials, campaign staff, the media, and voters; public speaking at rallies, news conferences, political conventions, and debates; print materials such as direct mail appeals, brochures, posters, yard signs, and news releases; radio, newspaper, and television ads; and Web sites. Analysis of female candidates' communication during a political campaign reveals their styles and strategies in running for public office as well as offers a comparison with male candidates.

Much of the research on women's political communication focuses on their speeches and political advertising. More recently, researchers have begun to examine their Web sites.

### **Speeches**

Political rhetoric, spoken on the campaign trail or the floor of the U.S. Senate, is laden with language, strategies, and expectations built on a tradition of political discourse that is dominated by male speakers and male-mediated norms. Several recent studies, however, have applied Campbell's (1989) feminist rhetorical theory—feminine style—to examine the speech of female and, in a few cases, male politicians.

Feminine style does not forge an independent speech style but conforms to the expectations of public speech. Developed in the private sphere that has been the historical home of women, feminine style as defined by Campbell (1989) cultivates public speech that (a) is personal in tone; (b) addresses the audience as peers (by using inclusive pronouns and the discussion of similar experiences); (c) invites audience participation or action; (d) relies on personal experiences, anecdotes, and other examples; (e) identifies with the experiences of the audience; and (f) is structured inductively.

In contrast with feminine style, masculine speech strategies include (a) deductive logic and reasoning, the most common political speech strategy, in which the speaker presents his or her conclusions before giving examples; (b) affirmation of one's own expertise; (c) use of expert authority ("impartial" statistics or examples

provided by a third party, such as a newspaper); and (d) use of impersonal or incomplete examples (historical or hypothetical examples that are not connected to the experiences of the speaker or the audience) (Curtis, Shuler, & Grieve, 1994; Dow & Tonn, 1993).

Campbell's theory has been applied in case studies of women orators such as former U.S. Representative Pat Schroeder (Szplech, 1992) and former Texas Governor Ann Richards (Dow & Tonn, 1993), analysis of feminist social group movements (Zurakowski, 1994), and historical analyses of early feminist rhetoric (Campbell, 1989; Campbell & Jerry, 1988). Recent content analyses of speeches (Blankenship & Robson, 1995; Bower, 2003; Curtis et al., 1994; DeRosa, 1996; DeRosa & Bystrom, 1999) and political television advertisements (Bystrom, 1995; Bystrom & Kaid, 2002; Bystrom & Miller, 1999) have used feminine style to analyze and compare the communication patterns of male and female politicians.

Case studies of women political speakers have concluded that they synthesize gender expectations in their political discourse by using both "masculine" rhetorical strategies—such as formal evidence, deductive structure, and linear modes of reasoning—and elements of feminine style, such as personal anecdotes (Dow & Tonn, 1993; Szpiech, 1992).

In their study of 5 women and 5 men in the U.S. Congress, Curtis et al. (1994) found that 8 of the 10 used both feminine and masculine rhetorical strategies in their public addresses. However, women used a personal tone—a feminine style—more often than men, who were more likely to use a masculine deductive style.

In her content analysis of the speeches given by females and males at the 1992 Democratic and Republican national conventions, DeRosa (1996) found that speakers blended feminine and masculine speech strategies while concentrating on characteristically "masculine" issues. A content analysis (DeRosa & Bystrom, 1999) of the nomination, keynote, and featured speeches delivered during the 1996 Democratic and Republican national conventions found a similar blending of feminine and masculine speech styles by men and women. However, the structure of their appeals, application of familial roles, use of attacks, and emphasis on "masculine" vs. "feminine" traits and issues revealed striking differences between women and men and between Republicans and Democrats.

For example, women of both political parties were much more likely to structure their appeals inductively—a feminine rhetorical strategy—whereas men employed a deductive (masculine) style at the 1996 conventions (DeRosa & Bystrom, 1999). And whereas men emphasized their own political expertise, women built their credibility through a personal application of familial roles—particularly as wives and mothers. Another significant difference was seen in the use of attacks, with men much more likely to use negative rhetoric than women.

However, both female and male speakers at the 1996 conventions employed stereotypically masculine traits—such as leadership, action, and past performance—and issues—such as taxes, the economy, employment, and crime—in their political rhetoric (DeRosa & Bystrom, 1999). Unlike 1992—when "women's issues" were systematically ignored, downplayed, or simply avoided (Daughton, 1995)—1996 saw the Democrats paying considerable attention to such issues as education, health care, the environment, and child care.

Blankenship and Robson (1995) expanded the concept of feminine style through an analysis of the public discourse of women and men, including President Bill Clinton. They identified five discursive traits of women's political rhetoric—experiential, inclusivity, empowerment, holistic, and feminist.



Bower (2003) applied these traits in her analysis of congressional discourse on health issues by female and male representatives in the 107th Congress. She found few differences between these women and men in their discursive use of experience, inclusiveness, and empowerment. However, Democratic women were more likely than Republican women, Democratic men, and Republican men to use holistic and feminist traits in their speeches on health care issues, especially on women's health.

## Televised Political Advertising

With the increased numbers of women seeking political office, a developing line of political communication research has investigated the styles, strategies, and techniques employed by female and male candidates in their televised political advertising through case studies or content analysis. The importance of television advertising to today's political campaigns is underscored by the significant resources devoted to such communication (e.g., West, 1993) and the studies documenting the power of political advertising in influencing voter perceptions of candidates issues and images (e.g., Geiger & Reeves, 1991; Joslyn, 1984; Kern, 1989; Patterson & McClure, 1976).

Several researchers (Bystrom, 1995) have argued that television—and the control it affords candidates over campaign messages about their images and issues—is even more important for women candidates, whose speeches and comments are often framed in stereotypical terms by the media (Kahn, 1992, 1994a, 1994b; Kahn & Goldenberg, 1991.)

Studies analyzing the television ads of women and men date back to 1985 and, for the most part, have yielded inconsistent results. The earliest studies (Benze & DeClercq, 1985; Johnston & White, 1994; Kahn, 1993; Trent & Sabourin, 1993) looked at the political ads of female and male candidates running for office in the 1980s. Two studies (Kahn, 1993; Trent & Sabourin, 1993) found that women were more likely to emphasize social issues, such as education and health care, whereas men were more likely to focus on economic issues, such as taxes, in their political spots. However, whereas Benze and DeClercq (1985) found that women were more likely to emphasize compassion and men stressed their strength, Johnston and White (1994) found women more likely to emphasize strength rather than warmth. And Kahn (1993) found that both men and women emphasized stereotypical “masculine” traits such as competence and leadership.

The studies of women political candidates in the 1980s show some consistencies in the use of negative attacks. Despite conventional wisdom that women may be less likely than men to use negative attacks, the findings of case studies (Sheckels, 1994) and content analyses (Benze & DeClercq, 1985; Trent & Sabourin, 1993) of women campaigning for office in the 1980s have noted few differences in the frequency of negative attacks employed by female and male candidates. In fact, Kahn (1993) found that men were less likely to use negative ads in their campaigns, particularly when they faced a women opponent. Differences have been found in the types of negative ads used by female and male candidates. Three studies (Benze & DeClercq, 1985; Johnston & White, 1994; Kahn, 1993) found women more likely to attack on the issue stances, rather than the images, of their opponents. Trent and Sabourin (1993) found that women softened their attacks by picturing and

touching other people in their ads, whereas men used harsher attacks that more often included close-ups of themselves and pictured their opponent.

A few studies examining the television spots of women candidates in the 1980s looked at their nonverbal communication and production content. Trent and Sabourin (1993) found that men were more likely to dress in formal attire and use more voiceovers than women and that women were more likely to appear “live” in their spots. Johnston and White (1994) found that women preferred “feminized” business suits or sweaters and skirts and office or professional settings for their ads.

The inconsistencies revealed in the results of these earlier studies could be attributed to their small sample sizes (Benze & DeClercq, 1985; Johnston & White, 1994), mixed election levels (Benze & DeClercq, 1985; Trent & Sabourin, 1993), or unequal gender representation, including a combination of ads from female versus male and male versus male races in the same analysis (Benze & DeClercq, 1985; Kahn, 1993; Trent & Sabourin, 1993).

More recent studies (Bystrom, 1994, 1995; Bystrom & Kaid, 1996, 2002; Bystrom & Miller, 1999; Bystrom, Kaid, & Miller, 1997; Proctor, Schenck-Hamlin, & Haase, 1994; Williams, 1994) have capitalized on the larger numbers of women running for political office in the 1990s. They have focused on television ads in mixed-gender races for U.S. Senate (Bystrom, 1994, 1995; Bystrom & Kaid, 2002; Williams, 1994) or mixed-gender races for governor and U.S. Senate (Bystrom & Kaid, 1996; Bystrom & Miller, 1999; Bystrom et al., 1997; Proctor et al., 1994). Many of these studies (Bystrom, 1994, 1995; Bystrom & Kaid, 1996; Bystrom & Miller, 1999; Bystrom et al., 1997) also are similar in their methodology: they have studied the television “videostyles”—the verbal, nonverbal, and production components of political commercials—through a content analysis based on a construct introduced by Kaid and Davidson (1986) and refined in later studies (Bystrom, 1995; Kaid & Johnston, 2001) to compare and contrast the communication styles of women and men competing against each other for political office.

These studies of women candidates running for political office in the 1990s also have yielded some inconsistencies, though some trends seem to be emerging. In their content analysis of negative commercials used by 11 female and 10 male candidates in mixed-gender gubernatorial and U.S. Senate races in 1990, Proctor et al. (1994) found no significant differences in strategy. Both used confrontational, rather than comparative, attacks that focused on the issue orientation or ethics of their opponents. They concluded that a standard formula and style—rather than gender-based concerns—guide the construction of negative ads for both women and men.

In her study of four 1992 mixed-gender, open races for the U.S. Senate, Bystrom (1994) similarly found that these female and male candidates used negative attacks equally—in about 50% of their ads—but that women usually attacked the personal characteristics of their opponents, whereas men were more likely to attack their opponent’s issue stances. In analyzing mixed-gender 1992 U.S. Senate races in 12 states, Williams (1994) found that both women and men used negative appeals in about 30% of their spots.

The studies (Bystrom, 1994; Williams, 1994) focusing on the 1992 U.S. Senate campaign found that both women and men balanced “feminine” traits—such as warmth and compassion—with “masculine” images—such as toughness, strength, and activity—in their spots. Bystrom (1994) found that men emphasized the

economy in their ads, whereas women balanced mentions of the economy with social issues. Williams (1994) found that both men and women mentioned the economy and government reform most often—and in equal proportions—in their ads.

In a qualitative study of ads from mixed-gender gubernatorial and U.S. Senate campaigns from 1990 to 1994, Williams (1998) found that—no matter how negativity is measured—women and men “go negative” with similar frequency—about 36% for overt attacks and 30% for affective appeals. Both women and men talked about social programs (10% compared to 12%) and economic issues (25% vs. 22%) at about the same frequency in their ads; however, men were more likely to address social issues—which included crime—than women (41% vs. 29%). Although “masculine” traits were stressed by both women and men, women were more likely to emphasize “feminine” attributes (Williams, 1998).

A comprehensive study of female and male candidates in mixed-gender campaigns for the U.S. Senate from 1990 to 1993 (Bystrom, 1995) found that women and men used about the same percentage of negative attacks (39% of female ads, 35% of male ads) and talked about mostly the same issues and images. However, these female candidates smiled more, made more eye contact, spoke more often for themselves, appeared head-on, dressed more formally, and invited viewer participation and action more than male candidates (Bystrom, 1995). A study (Bystrom & Miller, 1999) of spot ads from the 1996 mixed-gender U.S. Senate and gubernatorial races found that women stressed “masculine” traits such as toughness even more often than male candidates, ran more negative ads, and actually stressed warmth and compassion less than male candidates.

Bystrom and Kaid (2002) summarized the results of studies analyzing female and male videostyles in mixed-gender U.S. Senate campaigns from 1990 to 1998. They found that female candidates had increased their use of negative attacks, compared to their male opponents, over the decade. Female candidates also continued to dress more formally and smile more than men.

However, the issues that female and male candidates mentioned in their television commercials seemed to be more attributable to the “context of the election year” than the gendered videostyle of the candidate (Bystrom & Kaid, 2002). For example, both women and men focused on education, the environment, and senior citizen issues in 1990; the economy, health care, and taxes in 1992–1993; taxes and crime in 1994; taxes, senior citizen issues, and education in 1996; and taxes, the economy, and senior citizen issues in 1998.

In addition, the study of commercials from 1990 to 1998 mixed-gender U.S. Senate campaigns (Bystrom & Kaid, 2002) found that female and male candidates emphasized similar images in their television commercials. They both emphasized mostly stereotypical “masculine” traits such as strength, aggressiveness, performance, and experience balanced with such stereotypical “feminine” attributes as honesty, sensitivity, and understanding. That is, both men and women seem to be presenting themselves as tough but caring—at least when running against each other.

The researchers (Bystrom & Kaid, 2002) concluded that the presence of a female candidate in a political campaign could change the issue and image discussion of their male opponent. That is, when women run for political office, their male opponents are called into a campaign dialogue that includes attention to issues associated with women and their societal concerns—such as education, health care, and senior citizen issues—as well as presentation of stereotypically “feminine” attributes, such as honesty, trustworthiness, and understanding.

In her doctoral dissertation, Banwart (2002) offers a comprehensive content analysis of the self-presentation strategies of female and male political candidates in mixed-gender gubernatorial, U.S. Senate, and U.S. House races during the general election cycle of campaign 2000, both in their television political advertising and on their Web sites. In their television spots, she found that female candidate videostyle differed from male candidate videostyle in a more “politically sophisticated” manner that blended the strategic strengths of a variety of candidacies. Male candidates differed from female candidates in a more “personal leader” videostyle that encouraged voter identification and yet emphasized legitimate leadership (Banwart, 2002).

## Web Sites

In recent years, the Internet has provided political candidates and officeholders with an important means of communicating with voters and constituents—and researchers with another way to look at the political communication of female and male politicians. As of June 2001, nearly all members of the U.S. House of Representatives maintained Web sites, some of which receive as many as 1,000 hits a month (Niven & Zilber, 2001a).

Much like traditional news releases, political Web sites are targeted to grab constituents’ attention and display the politicians’ “homestyle” (Owen, Davis, & Strickler, 1999). Many Web sites feature content which is similar to that of traditional newsletters used by members of Congress to communicate with constituents (Niven & Zilber, 2001a).

Similar to television advertising, Web sites represent a form of communication that is controlled by the politician, rather than interpreted by the media. Thus, researchers (Banwart, 2002; Niven & Zilber, 2001a, 2001b) are beginning to examine Web sites to see if female and male politicians present themselves differently when they use this form of communication.

Niven and Zilber (2001a) examined 388 Web sites of 47 female and 341 male members of the U.S. House of Representatives in operation during summer of 1998. Through a content analysis, they examined presentations of images, background, and experiences; issue priorities; Washington accomplishments; and memberships in groups. As for their image portrayal, they found that both women and men members of the House describe their experiences in Washington as “fighting for,” “leading,” and “being effective.” Women list slightly fewer details about their family than do men, and women dedicate more space than men to their personal qualifications (such as education and work experience) relevant to their position in Congress (Niven & Zilber, 2001a).

Niven and Zilber (2001a) discovered some differences in the issue presentations of female and male House members on their Web sites. Women were more likely than men to mention their record on “women’s issues” (women’s health research, sexual harassment laws, family leave, child care, and gun control laws); more likely to make “compassion issues”—such as poverty and human rights—a larger part of their Web presentation; and more likely to mention their affiliation with a women’s group or women’s right group.

However, most women in the U.S. House—like male members—dedicate more space on their Web sites to another issue not generally considered a women’s issue (Niven & Zilber, 2001a). In terms of legislative achievements, most women (47%)

said that they were most proud of bringing home dollars for economic development, compared to the 17% who listed a women's issue as their top accomplishment.

Additionally, Niven and Zilber (2001a) found that legislation introduced by women and men in the 105th session of Congress matched their legislative priorities as presented on their Web sites. Although women members of the House were more active than men (78% compared to 20%) in introducing legislation in a women's issue area, other issues dominated their legislative agendas. Of the legislation introduced by women members, 78% was not directed toward a problem of women, children, or families. Of the legislation introduced by men, 89% was devoted to nonwomen's issues.

In her dissertation research on both the television commercial "videostyle" and the Internet "webstyle" of female and male candidates running against each other in 2000, Banwart (2002) also found many similarities in the Web site presentations of men and women. Overall, both female and male candidates discussed "feminine" issues much more frequently than "masculine" issues on their Web sites. Both female and male candidates were equally as likely to discuss the "feminine" issue of education. On so-called "masculine" issues, male candidates were only slightly more likely to discuss taxes, whereas female candidates were slightly more likely to discuss the economy (Banwart, 2002).

Still, Banwart (2002) found some differences in the webstyle presentations of women and men running for governor and Congress in 2000. For example—and similar to the findings of Niven and Zilber (2001a) in their study of congressional Web sites in 1998—Banwart (2002) found that women candidates in 2000 were much less likely than men to be shown with their families on their Web sites. Female candidate webstyle also differed from that of male candidates in a more "feminine personal-professional" style, and male candidate webstyle differed from that of female candidates in a more "masculine up-front" style (Banwart, 2002).

Studies of the Web sites of women and men in the U.S. Congress in 1998 (Niven & Zilber, 2001a, 2001b) and those running for political office in 2000 (Banwart, 2002) led researchers to conclude that women portray the personal aspects of their lives—as well as issues and images—differently than the media covering their campaigns. For example, Niven and Zilber (2001a) contend that women in the U.S. Congress, through their Web sites, present themselves with a "much greater diversity of issue commitments that have nothing directly to do with gender" than portrayed by the media in their coverage of women politicians (p. 402). They posit that "widening Internet use could ameliorate some of the effect of media stereotypes" of women in politics by providing more direct, unfiltered messages to their constituents through their Web sites (p. 403).

## **MEDIA COVERAGE OF WOMEN POLITICAL LEADERS**

Women forging new political ground often struggle to receive media coverage and legitimacy in the eyes of the media and, subsequently, the public (Braden, 1996; Witt, Paget, & Matthews, 1994). Perhaps even more troubling, journalists often "hold women politicians accountable for the actions of their children and their husbands, though they rarely hold men to the same standard" (Braden, 1996, p. 1).

According to Braden (1996), journalists “often ask women politicians questions they don’t ask men” and describe them “in ways and with words that emphasize women’s traditional roles and focus on their appearance and behavior” (p. 1). For example, the hairstyles of former First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton, former Texas Governor Ann Richards, and U.S. Senate candidate Lynn Yeakel; Yeakel’s wardrobe; and U.S. Senator Barbara Mikulski’s weight and physical appearance were subjected to media coverage during the 1992 campaigns (Braden, 1996; Witt et al., 1994).

Women political candidates and leaders also are described and trivialized by the media’s use of “gender-specific terms” (Braden, 1996). For example, in *The Chicago Tribune’s* coverage of her 1992 campaign for U.S. Senate, Carol Moseley-Braun was described as a “den mother with a cheerleader’s smile” (Witt et al., 1994, p. 181). And, they are more likely to be the subject of “negative gender distinctions”—where their sex is described as an obstacle or barrier to political office—whereas men are more likely to be described in “gender-neutral” terms (Jamieson, 1995). Although male political candidates do encounter image problems in their campaigns, they generally have more latitude in how they dress and behave because the public is conditioned to accept men as leaders (Braden, 1996).

Whereas newspapers may stereotype women or ignore them and/or their campaigns, some (Braden, 1996) have argued that television has helped legitimize women politicians and candidates by showing them giving speeches in Congress and serving as members of committees. Braden (1996) supports her belief with statistics showing that two thirds of U.S. residents cite television as their main source of news and believe that television news is twice as accurate as newspapers.

Still, women in politics face considerable obstacles in campaigning for election to public office and in the perception of their public lives. The media, both television and print, have had a great impact on the public’s perceptions of candidates, their campaigns, and their families. In the coverage of women political leaders, the media often reflect the biases and stereotypes of the public.

In recent years, researchers from political science, journalism, and communication have examined the media coverage of female candidates, politicians, and first ladies. For the most part, they have found that women and men in politics are treated differently by the media, suggesting that gender stereotypes continue to pose problems for female politicians.

## **Women Candidates**

Extensive studies by Kim Fridkin Kahn (1991, 1992, 1994a, 1994b; Kahn & Goldenberg, 1991) examining the newspaper coverage of women candidates running for election in the 1980s found that this medium not only stereotypes female candidates by emphasizing “feminine traits” and “feminine issues” but also questions their viability as candidates. In an experimental design, fictitious female candidates gained viability when they received the same media coverage usually given to male incumbents (Kahn, 1992, 1994b).

However, Kahn (1994b) also has noted that gender stereotyped newspaper coverage—which reduces a woman candidate’s perceived viability—can sometimes be used to a women candidate’s advantage, e.g., by emphasizing warmth and honesty. Such positive stereotypes may actually create a favorable electoral environment for women candidates, Kahn (1994b) argues.

Studies conducted since Kahn's work (1991, 1992, 1994a, 1994b) on the media coverage of women running for governor and the U.S. Senate have both confirmed many of her findings and given some hope that media coverage of women candidates might be improving in the 1990s and 21st century. For example, a study examining the coverage of a gubernatorial campaign by two major newspapers (Serini, Powers, & Johnston, 1998) confirmed many of Kahn's (1991, 1992, 1994a, 1994b) findings that women receive less issue coverage and more negative assessments of their viability as candidates. A study examining media coverage of the 1996 races for the Illinois House of Representatives (Miller, 2001) also found some differences in the issue coverage of female and male candidates, but to a lesser degree.

Smith's (1997) study of newspaper coverage of female and male U.S. Senate and gubernatorial candidates in 11 races in 1994 provides "cautious inference" that reporters are treating women and men more equally. In this study, women and men received about the same quantity and quality of coverage. Women received less coverage in open races, more coverage in gubernatorial races, and more neutral coverage overall. Although this study found that the "rule was one of rough parity in coverage," it concluded that "most exceptions to the rule were at the expense of female candidates" (Smith, 1997, p. 79).

Similarly, a study (Rausch, Rozell, & Wilson, 1999) of two gubernatorial campaigns found that although women and men were treated more equitably in media coverage, female candidates received more negative coverage than their male opponents. And in his study of 1998 gubernatorial candidates, Devitt (1999) found that whereas male and female candidates for governor received about the same amount of coverage, women received less issue-related coverage than men did.

The 2000 campaign provided an opportunity to study the media coverage of not only women running for governor and the U.S. Senate (Banwart, Bystrom, & Robertson, 2003; Banwart, Bystrom, Robertson, & Miller, 2003; Bystrom, Robertson, & Banwart, 2001; Robertson, Conley, Scymcznska, & Thompson, 2002), but also the short-lived presidential candidacy of Elizabeth Dole (Aday & Devitt, 2001; Bystrom, *in press*; Heldman, Carroll, & Olson, 2000). A study of newspaper coverage of women and men running for their party's nomination for U.S. Senate and governor in the 2000 primary races (Bystrom et al., 2001) found that these women received more coverage than men in terms of quantity and that the quality of their coverage—slant of the story and discussion of their viability, appearance, and personality—was mostly equitable. Still, these women candidates were much more likely to be discussed in terms of their role as mothers and their marital status, which can affect their viability with voters.

Robertson et al. (2002) also studied the newspaper coverage of women candidates for governor and U.S. Senate in the 2000 general election. And Banwart, Bystrom, and Robertson (2003) compared the media coverage of women and men candidates in the primary versus general election.

In their study of the 2000 general election, Robertson et al. (2002) found that women received more much coverage—as well as more favorable coverage—in their campaigns, compared to previous research. However, significant differences were discovered in the quality of their coverage. For example, women were much more likely than men to be described in terms of their gender, marital status, and children. And, perhaps surprisingly, men were much more associated with the "feminine" issue of education in the general election than women—with 32% of male candidate-focused articles and 11% of female candidate-focused articles discussing the issue. Still, their study led the researchers (Robertson et al., 2002) to conclude

that a gradual evolution is taking place within newspapers' coverage of women running for political office. Although some stereotyping does exist, the playing field for female candidates is flattening, they determined.

In their comparison of the media coverage of women and men in the 2000 primary and general elections, Banwart, Bystrom, and Robertson (2003) found that female candidates received more newspaper coverage than male candidates in U.S. Senate and gubernatorial races, with more than 95% of the articles mentioning female candidates compared to about 75% of the articles mentioning male candidates. In terms of the quality of their media coverage, they found that the slant of male candidates' news coverage became more negative, whereas female candidate coverage remained more neutral from the primary to the general election. Yet these advantages did not translate to greater discussions of female candidates' viability in these races, as viability coverage remained equitable for female and male candidates during both the primaries and the general election (Banwart, Bystrom, & Robertson, 2003).

Further, the news coverage across both primary and general election races continued to define female candidates in terms of their gender, children, and marital status (Banwart, Bystrom, & Robertson, 2003). Such news coverage can ultimately affect how voters view female candidates' ability to hold political office by reinforcing their "other" status in the male-dominated world of politics as well as images of mother and wife, which have traditionally carried less authority and competence in the public arena (Witt et al., 1994).

This potential disadvantage for female candidates may be further exacerbated when news coverage is more likely to link male candidates with issues and traits voters have more commonly associated with female candidates. For example, male candidates in 2000 were associated at significantly higher percentages in their general election coverage (32%) than in their primary coverage (9%) with education/schools—a traditionally "feminine" issue—although still being associated with the traditionally "masculine" issues of taxes and the economy in both the general (43%, 41%) and the primary (22%, 11%) election (Banwart, Bystrom, & Robertson, 2003). Women candidates, on the other hand, were twice as likely to be associated with the "feminine" issue of health care in the general (17%) compared to the primary (8%) election, whereas their association with issues concerning the budget, unemployment/jobs, and immigration—traditionally "masculine" issues—decreased or became nonexistent in their general election coverage (Banwart, Bystrom, & Robertson, 2003).

The portrayal of candidate image traits did not differ significantly between the primary coverage and the general election coverage for either female or male candidates, except on the image strategy of using an "above the trenches" posture (Banwart, Bystrom, & Robertson, 2003). Thus, those traits on which female and male candidates differed significantly in their primary coverage again emerged with significant differences in their general election coverage. Such traits included associating male candidates more with the "feminine" trait of honesty, the challenger strategy of being a voice for the state, and the use of a personal tone—an element of feminine style—than female candidates (Bystrom et al., 2001).

Banwart, Bystrom, Robertson, and Miller (2003) extended the studies of women candidates' media coverage in 2002 by comparing the issue messages of female and male candidates in their political ads with the issue content of newspapers covering their campaigns. Their purpose was to see if any differences in media coverage were due to media bias or differences in candidate messages.



They (Banwart, Bystrom, Robertson, and Miller, 2003) found no significant association between the issue agendas of female and male candidates in their political ads and the issue agendas of their newspaper coverage. Though not significant, the correlation between the issue agendas in political ad and newspaper coverage was stronger for male candidates ( $p = .505$ , n.s.) than for female candidates ( $p = .310$ , n.s.). Whereas women candidates emphasized education, health care, senior citizen issues, taxes, and women's issues in their ads, newspapers emphasized taxes, education, health care, international issues, and the economy in their coverage of these candidates. Taxes and education were the top two issues mentioned by male candidates in their ads and newspaper coverage, and health care was in fourth place on both agendas. However, male candidates also emphasized senior citizen issues and the environment in their ads, whereas their newspaper coverage focused on the economy and international issues.

In addition to examining the media coverage of women running against men for governor and the U.S. Senate, the 2000 campaign provided a rare opportunity for scholars to analyze the media's treatment of a woman campaigning for a major political party nomination for president. Three studies (Aday & Devitt, 2001; Bystrom, in press; Heldman et al., 2000) examining the newspaper coverage of Dole—the first woman to seek a major political party nomination for president since former U.S. Representative Patricia Schroeder's short-lived consideration in 1988—during 7 months in 1999 found that she received less equitable coverage in terms of quality and, especially, quantity compared to her male opponents. Although polls consistently showed Dole as a distant runner-up to George W. Bush for the Republican nomination for president, she received not only significantly less coverage than Bush, but also less coverage than Steve Forbes and John McCain, who at the time were behind her in the polls.

In terms of the quality of coverage, all three studies found that Dole received less issue coverage than Bush, Forbes, or McCain. However, according to the two studies (Bystrom, in press; Heldman et al., 2000) that considered the types of issues mentioned, Dole's issue coverage was balanced between such stereotypical "masculine" issues as taxes, foreign policy, and the economy and such stereotypical "feminine" issues as education, drugs, and gun control.

The findings regarding Dole's image coverage were mixed. Aday and Devitt (2001) found that Dole received significantly more personal coverage, including descriptions of her personality and appearance, than the male candidates studied. However, Heldman et al. (2000) found that the media did not pay much attention to her appearance but did make reference to her personality in three fifths of the articles studied. Bystrom's (in press) study, which was limited to media coverage in Iowa, found that Dole was less likely than Bush to be covered in terms of her image, including appearance and personality.

Although these studies show that media biases toward women candidates still exist, it does appear that coverage is becoming more equitable. Women running for governor and U.S. Senate in 2000 received more coverage, in terms of quantity, than men in both the primary and the general election and mostly equitable coverage in terms of quality during the primary campaign (Banwart, Bystrom, & Robertson, 2003; Bystrom et al., 2001; Robertson et al., 2002).

And for future women presidential candidates, it is somewhat promising to note that Elizabeth Dole's media coverage in 1999 was more balanced and less stereotypical than found in earlier studies, particularly in the range of issues mentioned and the lack of attention to her appearance and personality. Still, Dole

received less coverage than male candidates, even those running behind her in the public opinion polls.

### **Elected and Appointed Officials**

Compared to women political candidates, women elected to political office have received much less attention from researchers, leading Larson (2001) to speculate that “it seems as though scholars lose interest in female candidates if they win their elections” (p. 228). Books, such as Braden’s *Women Politicians in the Media* (1996), provide anecdotal evidence from female politicians that they are often subjected to stereotypical comments and media coverage. And Niven and Zilber’s (2001b) study interviewing press secretaries of 28 women and 31 men serving in the U.S. House of Representatives found that the press secretaries of women were much more likely than the press secretaries of men to complain about media bias (68% to 12%) and lack of coverage (46% to 19%).

However, the few content analyses of women politicians’ media coverage (Carroll & Schreiber, 1997; Cook, 1989) have discovered few differences. In their content analysis of articles published about women in the 103rd Congress in 27 major newspapers throughout the United States from January 1993 to October 1994, Carroll and Schreiber (1997) found that women newly elected in 1992’s so-called “Year of the Woman” received more mentions than their male counterparts.

Articles covering women in Congress were much more likely to be placed in the front or national news sections of the newspapers studied, rather than relegated to the style section (54% compared to 14%.) Still, complaints by women in Congress, such as former U.S. Representative Pat Schroeder, about being covered less seriously than men appear to be quite justified, the researchers (Carroll & Schreiber, 1997) noted. In *The Washington Post*—a major source of political information for political elites, opinion makers, and officeholders—25% of the articles with a significant focus on women in Congress were found in the style section. Twice as often as the average of all major newspapers studied, *The Post* “seems to be sending out the message that the interest and activities of women in Congress are not important enough to be considered hard news” (Carroll & Schreiber, 1997, p. 137).

In addition to the amount and placement of news coverage of women in Congress, Carroll and Schreiber (1997) looked for possible biases and stereotypical themes. Of the stories with significant content on women in Congress, 15% mentioned themes related to sexism or exclusion, 4% discussed the problem of balancing a family and political career, and 3% made explicit references to their appearance or dress. Women were more likely to be discussed in terms of working together on issues of common interest (29% of articles with significant focus on women) or as agents of change (16%). Women were most often portrayed as working together on abortion issues (26% of articles), women’s health (21%), and health-care reform (12%) (Carroll & Schreiber, 1997).

The researchers (Carroll & Schreiber, 1997) conclude that the “high level of interest” surrounding the 1992 election seems to have influenced the media coverage of women in the 103rd Congress. Although they found that these women were portrayed mostly positively—as agents of change struggling against sexism, balancing work and family, and working together on women’s issues—this is only half the picture of their work in Congress. “What is missing from general press coverage on women in Congress is any sense that women are important players on legislation

other than women's health, abortion, and a handful of other related concerns," Carroll and Schreiber (1997, p. 145) note. "There is barely mention anywhere of women's involvement in foreign affairs, international trade, the appropriations process, or regulatory reform" (p. 145).

Carroll and Schreiber (1997) recommend additional research on the media coverage of women in the U.S. Congress, not only by examination of major national newspapers, but also through content analyses of their "hometown" newspapers. They also recommend examining media coverage across the media of newspapers, television, radio, and magazines to see if any patterns emerge.

## First Ladies

The relationship of first ladies with the media has been examined within a broader historical context by several scholars (Burrell, 1997; Caroli, 1995; Gould, 1985; Gutin, 1989; Rizzo, 1991). Recent studies also have examined their news coverage while in office (Gardetto, 1997; Scharrer & Bissell, 2000; Winfield, 1997a, 1997b) as well as the impact of their media treatment on their image with the public (Brown, 1997; Brown & Gardetto, 2000). Tien, Checchio, and Miller (1999) looked at Hillary Rodham Clinton's newspaper visibility in the 1992 and 1996 presidential campaigns. Another study (Bystrom, McKinnon, & Chaney, 1999) examined the media coverage of presidential candidates' wives as potential first ladies.

According to historical studies, the public's fascination with the wife of the President of the United States dates back to the founding of the nation (Caroli, 1995). However, the earliest first ladies were largely ignored by the press, except for increasing commentary on their role as presidential escort and social host (Winfield, 1997a). The "worthiness of a candidate's wife became a campaign issue" in 1828, when Rachel Jackson was attacked by the press for divorcing her first husband (Winfield, 1997a, p. 170).

Although national magazines began paying considerable attention to the wife of the president by the end of the 19th century (Winfield, 1997a), it was not until Eleanor Roosevelt that a first lady attracted wide media attention (Caroli, 1995). The first president's wife to host press conferences, Roosevelt met 348 times with the media during her 12 years as first lady—thus revolutionizing the relationship between the first lady and the media (Caroli, 1995).

Questions at First Lady Roosevelt's almost-weekly (except for summer) press conferences "ranged from trivial inquiries about the habits of visiting royalty to Eleanor's views on substantive matters" (Caroli, 1995, p. 322). Thus, Roosevelt became a "national celebrity" whose use of the media to publicize political and social commitments "permanently altered the expectations for presidential wives who followed her" (Gould, 1985, p. 531).

Although Roosevelt was instrumental in changing the role of the president's wife, it was not until the Kennedy administration and the invention of television that the public's fascination with and the media's scrutiny of the life and image of the first lady were significantly and permanently altered (Rizzo, 1991). "The new role of the first lady as a highly visible performer in the affairs of state is the necessary adjunct to presidents who, from the 60s on, have been elected by television," Rizzo observed (p. 23).

Television—which allowed the first family to seem even closer to the public than before—made the young, beautiful, and wealthy Kennedys not only political

leaders, but also celebrities (Caroli, 1995; Gould, 1985; Rizzo, 1991). Also, Jacqueline Kennedy's restoration project of the White House gave "new meaning to the role of the first lady and made it obligatory for all following first ladies to have a project or explain why they did not" (Rizzo, 1991, p. 25).

The increasing impact of television on society and modern campaigning made the image of the first lady more important throughout subsequent administrations as citizens learned more about their personalities, projects, and influence. Television ushered in a new era of "impression management" for candidates and their families (Hall, 1979, p. 299), prompting first ladies to publish autobiographies, invite television interviewers and cameras into the White House, and campaign for their spouses as "part of a presidential public relations campaign" (Rizzo, 1991, p. 24).

The transition of the first lady from an emerging spokeswoman to a political surrogate/independent advocate was completed during the Reagan administration (Gutin, 1989). By 1988, the presidential campaigns were using the wives as substitutes for the candidates and to help the candidates reach out to women voters on "pocketbook" issues such as "daycare, parental leave and pay equity" (Grimes, 1990, p. 25). For example, in 1988, Kitty Dukakis and Barbara Bush traveled with staffs of their own and did a combination of 1,084 television and print interviews, 277 events, and 38 "press availabilities" when their husbands ran for president (Grimes, 1990).

However, Elizabeth Hanford Dole raised the most eyebrows and questions about the role of the candidate's spouse in the 1988 presidential primary campaign when she decided to quit her powerful cabinet position as the Secretary of Transportation to campaign full-time for her husband, U.S. Senator Bob Dole (Grimes, 1990). Not only did Dole come "close to breaking with the conventional wisdom that in political households there is room for only one star," but she and other spouses who held professions also raised the issue of "whether a first lady will ever hold a powerful paying job outside the government while her husband holds office" (Grimes, 1990, p. 82).

Although Dole introduced the idea of a first lady working outside the White House in 1988, it was not until the 1992 campaign and election of President Bill Clinton that the role of the first lady would once again change significantly. The 1992 election marked a generational switch in leadership, not only between President George H. W. Bush and President Clinton, but also between their wives.

From the beginning, it was clear that Hillary Rodham Clinton—who is 1 year younger than the H. W. Bush's oldest child—was of a different generation and would hold different responsibilities in her husband's administration. Whereas Barbara Bush's role in her husband's administration was much more traditional—she was a hostess and campaigned for literacy—her successor was dubbed a "full partner" in her husband's administration and was appointed to chair the Education Standards Committee and reform the health-care system (Caroli, 1995).

Rodham Clinton's overt policy role and potential political power, which violated traditional norms, was sometimes praised but often condemned by the media (Winfield, 1997b). According to Gardetto (1997), who studied her coverage in *The New York Times* during the 1992 presidential campaign, Rodham Clinton challenged the public's and the media's notion about not only the role of the first lady but also that of a wife and mother in today's society. As "a married, middle class, career woman and mother, neither the emotional core of her family nor the subordinate of her husband," Rodham Clinton was viewed as "potentially threatening to the social imaginary family and the gender inequality upon which it rests" (p. 236).

Gardetto (1997) concluded that *The New York Times* struggled with the image of the “new contemporary woman” and conventional ways of looking at the wives of candidates and presidents by indicating that Rodham Clinton’s strength and intelligence somehow diminished that of her husband; by comparing her “wifestyle” to that of other political wives; and by raising questions about her equal, rather than subservient, status in the marital relationship.

Similarly, Winfield’s (1997b) study of the mass media’s coverage of selective newsworthy events during Rodham Clinton’s first 18 months as first lady found that her multifaceted role as a “supportive wife, a mother, a formidable corporate lawyer and a politician as well as a traditional first lady” (p. 251) was “complicated, [and] too hard to fit into the mass media’s usual, rigid boundaries of time and space” (p. 243). Brown and Gardetto (2000) similarly found that news reporters covering Clinton’s testimony before the grand jury in January 1996 over “Whitewater” events attempted to attach labels to her based on their idea that women must choose between work and family.

Another study (Scharrer & Bissell, 2000) compared the media coverage of the political and nonpolitical activities of First Ladies Nancy Reagan, Barbara Bush, and Hillary Rodham Clinton. They found that all three first ladies received negative media coverage when they were politically active. And, once a first lady’s image is set by the media, it may be hard to change with the public. For example, focus groups reacting to First Lady Rodham Clinton’s television news coverage in 1993 consistently viewed her as powerful, despite attempts by the White House to make her seem more domestic and less threatening (Brown, 1997).

Whereas most researchers have looked at the news coverage of first ladies while in office, one study (Bystrom et al., 1999) examined the newspaper and television coverage of Hillary Rodham Clinton and Elizabeth Dole as presidential candidate wives during the 1996 campaign, and another (Tien et al., 1999) compared Clinton’s newspaper visibility in 1992 and 1996.

Tien (et al., 1999) found that Hillary Rodham Clinton was much less visible in the major news markets in the 1996 compared to the 1992 presidential campaign. For example, the *Los Angeles Times* ran an average of 42.5 stories about Clinton in 1992 compared to an average of 17 in 1996. Whereas her lower visibility in 1996 might be explained by her familiarity with the press, many hypothesize that the “Clinton administration kept her role to a minimum [in 1996] because she was perceived as a liability to the president’s re-election efforts” (pp. 162–63).

Bystrom et al. (1999) found that candidate wives Clinton and Dole were equally more likely to be discussed in terms of their image (i.e., personality, appearance, qualities, etc.) than in terms of political issues, by a ratio of about 8 to 1, in the 1996 campaign. Also, contrary to expectations, only 25% of the stories focusing on the presidential candidate wives were neutral in their coverage. Clinton was significantly more likely than Dole to receive negative coverage and Dole was significantly more likely to receive positive coverage in these stories.

## **AUDIENCE RESPONSES TO WOMEN’S POLITICAL COMMUNICATION**

Although most studies of women’s political communication focus on its content, a few have attempted to assess audience reactions to the communication strategies employed. Using surveys, experimental designs, and focus groups,

such studies have examined the way women and men react to women's political communication—including their television advertising and speeches—and media coverage. In addition, researchers have used survey research designs to assess where women and men get their political information and how reliable they perceive this information to be. Findings from such studies could provide practical advice to women contemplating a campaign for political office.

## Reactions to Women's Political Advertising

Although few studies have examined viewer reactions to the television ads of female and male candidates, results seem to confirm what numerous content analyses show: Women and men are best advised to balance stereotypically "feminine" and "masculine" images and issues in their campaigns, taking into consideration the context of the election year.

Early studies (Kaid, Myers, Phipps, & Hunter, 1984; Wadsworth et al., 1987) found that "masculine" strategies work best for women candidates in their political ads. However, a more recent study (Banwart & Carlin, 2001) found that women were most effective when balancing stereotypical "feminine" and "masculine" traits. Hitchon and Chang (1995) and Hitchon, Chang, and Harris (1997) found that neutral—as opposed to emotional—appeals worked best for women candidates in terms of audience recall, especially for issue stances. As for issue emphasis, Iyengar, Valentino, Ansolabere, and Simon (1997) found that women were more effective when communicating about stereotypical female issues.

In an experimental design, Kaid et al. (1984) found that female candidates can be just as successful as male candidates in their television advertisements, especially when they appear in settings traditionally associated with men. In fact, the woman candidate received her highest overall rating while wearing a hard hat at a construction site, perhaps because the appearance of a female in that role was somewhat novel to the audience.

Similarly, in another experimental design, Wadsworth et al. (1987) found that audiences responded more favorably to hypothetical women candidates who used "masculine" (aggressive, career)—rather than traditional "feminine" (nonaggressive, family)—strategies in their television ads. Femininity is not a valued trait, they assert; rather viewers valued women candidates who were honest, smart, experienced, and rational. The researchers advised that a career-oriented approach is the best style and strategy for women candidates.

However, another study (Banwart & Carlin, 2001) comparing responses to negative commercials from 1990 and 2000 mixed-gender U.S. Senate and gubernatorial campaigns found that female candidates received more election "votes" only when they were evaluated higher on both stereotypical "masculine" and "feminine" characteristics. Male candidates were given more flexibility, as they received more election "votes" when they emphasized a balance of stereotypical "masculine" and "feminine" traits in some races and when they focused on stereotypical "masculine" characteristics in another race.

Hitchon and Chang (1995) suggest that voters' stereotypical beliefs may interfere with their processing of political ads. In an experimental design, they found that subjects recalled more mentions of family and visuals of appearance when the candidate was a woman. They had better recall of male candidates' names and campaign activities. Neutral appeals by women produced high levels of total recall and for issue recall.

Hitchon et al. (1997) also used an experimental design to assess audience reactions to the emotional tone of the political advertisements of female and male candidates. Similar to Hitchon and Chang (1995), they found that women received better evaluations from audiences when they employed neutral tones. They suggest that “women can benefit by adopting a rational, unemotional approach in mass media messages” (p. 64).

In their experiment on two 1992 U.S. Senate campaigns and the 1994 gubernatorial campaign in California—all of which pitted a woman against a man—Iyengar et al. (1997) concluded that women candidates were more effective in communicating with voters through commercials that focused on such stereotypical female issues as women’s rights, education, and unemployment than such stereotypical male issues as crime and illegal immigration. The researchers advise women candidates to “consider their constituents’ stereotypes when designing their advertising strategies” (p. 96) but to “pick the characteristics which will resonate best with voters based on the issue environment during that particular campaign season” (p. 98).

### **Reactions to Women’s Political Speech**

Corrigan (2000) looked at the public reactions—as assessed by the Gallup Poll—to President Bill Clinton’s and First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton’s efforts to “go public” with health-care reform. The first lady made 37 public appearances and gave two major television interviews on the topic during the 1993–1994 debate on the president’s plan. Whereas 60% of those polled approved of her handling of health-care policy when the plan was first introduced in September 1993, only 35% thought that she should be actively involved with policy making by April 1994. During that time frame, the first lady balanced many roles in the health-care debate—from mother and first “consoler” to policy maker (p. 158). Whereas the media and public found her to be persuasive when she identified herself as a “mother, wife, sister, daughter, and woman,” they were not comfortable with her attacks on the insurance industry and as an “openly aggressive political operative” (p. 158).

Corrigan (2000) concluded that “use of the first spouse as a major spokesperson for a policy initiative may have serious limitations” (p. 156). Instead, given the public’s ambivalence as to the appropriate role of first ladies in national policy making, he suggested that first ladies “may be more effective in encouraging supporters of presidents than in trying to attack opponents of presidential initiatives” (p. 158).

### **Reactions to Women’s Media Coverage**

A few studies have looked at audience reactions to the media coverage of political women, including the first lady. For example, Brown (1997) used focus groups to look at middle-class attitudes toward Hillary Clinton’s image as constructed by television news coverage. She found that “despite the endless remakes of her image, apparently to make her seem more domestic, Hillary Clinton was consistently seen as powerful” by members of the focus groups (p. 266).

Knopf and Boiney (2001) used data from the ANES Pooled Senate Election Study for the 1988, 1990, and 1992 election years to examine the relationship of newspaper and television coverage and the perceived viability of female and male

candidates. They found that increased exposure to print and television news coverage increased the viability—including recognition and favorability—of male candidates more than female candidates among survey respondents.

## **POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE AND SOURCES OF INFORMATION FOR WOMEN AND MEN**

Since 1980—when women started voting in greater proportions than men—candidates, the media, and researchers have become more interested in women's political participation, vote choices, and policy preferences. Much attention has been played—by political operatives, the media, and academics—to the notion of a “gender gap” in women's and men's voting behavior and policy preferences.

Another gap—also based on gender—has received attention by researchers interested in differences between men and women in their political knowledge. Although scholars are quick to clarify that the political knowledge gap does not suggest that women are less intelligent than men, research on political knowledge does indicate that men have been and continue to be better informed about (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1991, 1993, 1996, 2000; Kenski & Jamieson, 2001; Verba, Burns, & Schlozman, 1997) and more interested in (Bennett & Bennett, 1989) political issues than women.

In their study of changes in political knowledge over 40 years (1947–1989), Delli Carpini and Keeter (1991, 1996) note that the relationship between political knowledge and gender has remained constant; specifically, men possess more correct political knowledge than women. Even at the turn of the century, this knowledge gap persists. Kenski and Jamieson (2001) surveyed men and women during the 2000 general election to find that on two different questionnaires men responded correctly to 6.8% and 8.4% more of the questions than women.

In a study of perceived political knowledge in the 2000 election, Banwart and Bystrom (2001) found that men did report a significantly stronger belief in how informed they were about the campaign as compared to women. However, there were no significant differences in their reported levels of interest in the 2000 election.

To explain the gender gap in political knowledge, researchers have looked at structural and situational factors, including levels of education and how women are socialized to politics, and media use. Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996) suggested that women's advancements in education from 1947 to 1989 should have decreased the knowledge gap between higher- and lower-educated men and women. However, they found that the probabilities for correct responses based on education levels actually decreased slightly for both men and women during this time, although more so for women (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996).

Studies by Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996, 2000) have shown that women are socialized to be more involved with and understand local politics more than national politics. They surveyed women and men on local political issues and found that women were as knowledgeable as men about local party issues and the naming of local politicians. Further, Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996, 2000) found that women were more likely than men to know the name of the head of the local school system, a finding repeated by Verba et al. (1997). Overall, the local political knowledge gap actually favored women, although not at a level of significance (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996, 2000).



In understanding the political knowledge of men and women, researchers have turned to questions of media use in the attainment of political information (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1991, 1996; Kenski & Jamieson, 2001; Verba et al., 1997). Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996) found that attention to the media did have “at least modest correlations” with political knowledge at the end of the 1980s, although not as strong as factors such as gender and education (p. 182).

Gender differences also have been found by researchers studying political knowledge and media use. For example, men are more likely than women to gather political information from newspapers, newsmagazines, political television talk shows, political radio talk shows, and the Internet (Kenski & Jamison, 2001; Verba et al., 1997). Women are more likely than men to obtain political information from local television news, morning television shows, and conversation with others (Banwart & Bystrom, 2001; Kenski & Jamieson, 2001).

Banwart and Bystrom (2001) extended the findings of previous research by looking at the relationship between perceived political knowledge and interest and media use by women and men. Interestingly, women who perceived themselves as “highly informed” or “highly interested” relied on most of the same sources of political information as women who thought that they were uninformed and disinterested. They all watched morning talk shows and local television news more often than men. On the other hand, “highly informed” and “highly interested” men relied on more traditional media sources—newspapers and magazines—which researchers (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996) also have found to be most correlated with political knowledge.

## CONCLUSION

The scope and results of recent research on women’s political communication reflect the changes that have occurred in the past 25 years in women’s political participation as voters, candidates, officeholders, and political leaders in the United States.

Overall, it does appear that the number of women candidates who register, vote, and run for political office is having an effect on the political communication of female and male politicians. Though some gender differences still exist, both women and men candidates and elected officials seem to be balancing “feminine” and “masculine” issues and images in their political speeches and televised political advertising and on their Web sites.

The media and, especially the public, might be slower to change. Despite more equitable treatment in recent years, the media still treats female and male candidates and elected officials differently, especially in their issue coverage. The media still tends to associate women candidates and political leaders with traditional “feminine” issues, such as education and health care, which could hurt perceptions of their viability and leadership when “masculine” issues, such as the economy or international affairs, are at the forefront of voters’ concerns.

Though coverage of women candidates and elected officials has improved in recent years, the media still struggles with its coverage of first ladies. Perhaps reflecting the ambivalence of the public to the proper role of the first lady, the media seems to prefer more traditional first ladies than those who take a high-profile involvement in policy making.

The reaction of the public to women’s political communication also reveals continuing stereotypes about the role of women and men in our society. The public

seems to prefer women candidates who talk about “feminine” issues, emphasize “feminine” and “masculine” traits, and use neutral, unemotional appeals in their political ads. In addition, they prefer their first ladies to operate as wives, mothers, and supporters of their husbands—rather than overt political operatives and policy makers.

Women and men continue to differ in their actual and perceived knowledge about politics, although recent studies show that their level of interest in politics is becoming more similar. A question awaiting researchers, then, would be to determine why women perceive themselves as less knowledgeable than men but still vote in greater numbers and proportions.

Future research on women’s political communication could be broadened in various other ways. For example, most research on women’s political communication looks at the television ads and media coverage of candidates for governor and U.S. Senate. More research is needed on other forms of political communication—including news releases, campaign literature, speeches, and Web sites—of candidates for local, state, and national office. As the Internet becomes a more frequently used source of political information, studies should continue to look at how female and male candidates and elected officials communicate to the public through this technology.

Analysis of televised political advertising of female and male candidates also should be expanded beyond gubernatorial and U.S. Senate campaigns to include candidates for the state legislature, other statewide elected offices, and the U.S. House of Representatives. And as more women run against each other for political office, studies could compare the differences and similarities of women running against women, women running against men, and men running against men.

Similarly, analyses of the media coverage of women political leaders should be expanded beyond newspaper coverage of candidates for governor and the U.S. Senate and first ladies. Although a few studies have looked at the newspaper coverage of female and male candidates for the state legislature and U.S. House of Representatives and elected members of the U.S. Congress, additional research is warranted. Researchers should not only look at the media coverage of women candidates at all levels of office, but also expand the scope of their inquiry to include television and radio, as well as newspaper, coverage. And they should continue their analysis of women’s media coverage beyond the election to assess how they are treated while serving in political office.

Finally, more experimental research is needed to assess the effects—as well as the content and coverage—of women’s political communication. How do the strategies and styles employed by women and men political leaders in their speeches and television ads and on their Web sites resonate with voters? What effect does the media coverage of women and men political candidates and elected officials have on voters? Why do women consider themselves less knowledgeable about politics but vote more than men?

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PART

V

**INTERNATIONAL  
PERSPECTIVES ON POLITICAL  
COMMUNICATION**





## Political Communication Research Abroad: Europe

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Since the 1960s political communication has evolved into a major field of research in Western Europe. Two studies spearheaded this development. On the occasion of the 1959 General Election in Great Britain, Joseph Trenaman and Denis McQuail, both at that time affiliated with the Granada Television Research Unit of the University of Leeds, investigated the role of television for voters during the campaign. Their findings were published in 1961 under the title *Television and the Political Image* (Trenaman & McQuail, 1961). Although there was no evidence for an influence of television on voters' attitudes toward the parties, the data indicated that exposure to electoral broadcasts helped voters increase their knowledge about party politics. Five years later, for the British election in 1964, Blumler, who had succeeded Trenaman as head of the Research Unit, and McQuail undertook another study on the role of television during election campaigns that was designed closely after the model of the earlier study (Blumler & McQuail, 1968). However, the 1964 study went beyond the predecessor in an important point, which was in applying a uses-and-gratifications perspective by asking not only what the influence of television was on voters but also which motives guided voters' use of television during the campaign. Both studies together can take credit for having brought the mass media, and television in particular, (back) to the attention of European electoral research after their influence had been regarded as negligible since *The People's Choice* (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1948) attributed them only minor effects on voters. In addition, the history of agenda-setting research, when localizing its beginnings in North Carolina, USA, has overlooked that both British studies had already revealed agenda-setting effects but referred to them as "developments in issue salience."

Equally important for drawing attention to the mass media was Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, who, in the early 1970s, published the first articles on the "spiral of

silence,” which later led to her theory of public opinion. These early publications emerged from research undertaken in the context of elections in Germany. Due to its special features, television, by giving viewers an—not necessarily correct—impression of the public’s climate of opinion, was attributed a central role in the spiral of silence and thus in election campaigns and for the voting decision (Noelle-Neumann, 1976a, 1976b, 1980). Accordingly, Noelle-Neumann (1973) soon pleaded for a “return to the concept of powerful media.”

The new interest in the mass media and their effects on voters must be seen in close connection to the diffusion of television in Europe during those years. Great Britain was at the head of this development, with a rapidly growing TV audience since the early 1950s. In Germany, on the other hand, television was introduced in 1952 but only reached full household coverage in 1980, when almost 100% of German households owned a TV set. Thus, it was not until the 1960s that politicians also regarded television as an important campaign channel and directed their campaign activities to it.

That they finally turned to television and made it their prime channel went hand in hand with the attention researchers gave to television and the effectiveness they ascribed to it. The new interest of political actors in television and its potential for political communication also led to the allocation of research money for studies on the role of the mass media, particularly during election campaigns, and their effects.

In the following decades, research into the structures and processes of political communication flourished in such a way that, in their 1990 account of political communication research in Western Europe, Blumler, Dayan, and Wolton concluded, “... first, that political communication research of a certain kind is now firmly rooted in the academic centres of most Western European societies; and second, that since the late 1960s, it has built up an impressively cumulative record of conceptual and empirical development” (p. 261)

What the authors called “political communication research of a certain kind” was a reference to the by then dominant notion of “the political.” They distinguished two perspectives, one concerned primarily with institutional politics and the other with cultural politics. The first was associated “with struggles over the power to govern”; the second, “with struggles over meaning” (Blumler et al., 1990, p. 262). By focusing their account on the political rooted in political science, they came out in favor of the more narrow definition, which is indeed the one that dominates the European perspective on political communication today. The second perspective, associated with the cultural studies approach, has become more important for the study of media entertainment.

So political communication in this sense still largely matches the definition given it by Bob Franklin (1995) in his overview of “Political Communication Scholarship in Britain”: “The field of political communication studies the interactions between media and political systems locally, nationally, and internationally” (p. 225). This covers analyses of the political content of the media, a perspective on the actors in the political and in the media system who produce the respective content, and the effects of the media on the audience as well as on political processes.

When Blumler et al. delivered their account of political communication research in 1990, they limited their observations to the development in Western Europe. It was the time shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall, which symbolized the end of the division of East and West Europe and brought an end to the Cold War. Their assessment of “West European perspectives” therefore covered only the “old”

democracies in Western Europe and did not venture into the developments in the East European countries.

It is easy to see that the questions posed by research into political communication—in the above sense—are highly dependent and also vary with the status and changes of the political and the media systems. Therefore, the political changes at the end of the 1980s—the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the democratization of the Central and East European countries—are an important watershed for political communication research that brought about new topics, new structures, and new possibilities for research, and not just in the countries directly concerned by the changes.

Just a few years earlier, political communication researchers had found new avenues for their work as private-owned broadcasting appeared in West Europe, largely during the 1980s, bringing with it the commercialization of media markets and of the broadcasting sector in particular. And with the diffusion of new communication technologies, the perspective on changes in the media environment has recently been broadened further.

### **CHANGES IN THE EUROPEAN MEDIA MARKETS—THE NEW MEDIA ENVIRONMENT AND ITS CONSEQUENCES**

With the exception of Great Britain, which has had a commercial channel since 1955, and Italy, where the privately owned stations were allowed to enter the market in 1976, most West European countries introduced commercial broadcasting during the 1980s (for an overview, see the country chapters in Gunther & Mughan, 2000). Until then, broadcasting stations guarded a monopoly in these countries, being either state-owned or organized as public service independent of the state. With competition now guiding the behavior of the actors on the broadcasting market and commercial channels in many cases soon reaching higher ratings than the public stations, several questions came up that bear relevance for political communication research. First, this development initiated a discussion about the role of public broadcasting. If it lost its attractiveness for the audience, how could their further existence be legitimized, particularly its being financed by fees that are obligatory for everyone? Can public stations be abandoned to the forces of the market? Second, public discussion as well as research turned to the development of content under the impact of commercialization, more specifically the fate of political content, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Third, this brought up the question of changes in audience behavior as a consequence of media diversification and how viewers would be “coping with plenty” (Becker & Schoenbach, 1989). Because many critics of commercial broadcasting had predicted that audiences would begin an “entertainment slalom,” meaning a media use that avoids political contents by switching from one entertaining program to the other, attention was given particularly to the consumption of political shows. Finally, what would be the impact of the new variety of channels and the changes in the content and the way politics is presented to the audience?

Several authors from different countries have discussed the future of public broadcasting in a commercializing environment (Findahl, 1999; Siune & Hulten, 1998; Søndergaard, 1999; Syvertsen, 1999). Some have cast doubts on the

legitimization of public stations with revenues guaranteed by an obligatory fee to be paid by everyone, even those who do not watch the public channels. At the level of the European Union, the matter of whether broadcasting fees have the character of a—in that case forbidden—subsidy also became an issue.

The structural changes on the West European media markets as well as the media policies leading to these changes have been documented in the publications of the Euromedia Research Group, a group of social scientists, so far only from West European countries, who established a network in 1982 in order to observe and analyze the developments in the media (McQuail & Siune, 1998; Østergaard, 1992, 1997). The changed situation for public broadcasters, now confronted with commercial competitors after enjoying the comfortable position of a monopoly for several decades, brought on fears that the public interest would not be safeguarded. Against this background, the authors who contributed to a book edited by Jay Blumler (1992) identified “vulnerable values” in West European broadcasting—like their general mandate, diversity, and cultural mission—and discussed the forces threatening these values and what could be done to protect them. Beyond legal regulations and a strengthening of the public broadcasting bodies, they also called for an activation of forums of public accountability to defend the public interest (Blumler & Hoffmann-Riem, 1992).

How competition and the multitude of channels affected the content of broadcasting was addressed from different perspectives. One line of research dealt with the hopes for new diversity (de Bens, 1998), how the programming of public stations adapted to the new conditions, and whether the coexistence of public and commercial broadcasting would lead to a convergence of programs and formats (Bruns & Marcinkowski, 1996; Pfetsch, 1996). If such a convergence came about and both systems presented similar offerings, this in turn would lead to a revival of the discussion about the further necessity of public stations. The main issues for research here were changes in the news programs, concerning either the topics, the proportion of “hard news” vs. “soft news,” or its framing (Hvitfelt, 1994; Powers, Kristjandottir, & Sutton, 1994; van Praag & van der Eijk, 1998). Changes in the framing of news or other formats have been referred to under the heading of tabloidization (see the chapters in Sparks & Tulloch, 2000).

Infotainment became the buzz word for the new blending of political information and entertainment. It has been used to describe processes that others called tabloidization or to designate new formats, both assumed to be found more commonly on the commercial channels, reflecting their need to draw large audiences and thus advertising and therefore expose politics to the laws of the audience market. Kees Brants (1998) asked, “Who’s afraid of infotainment?” after analyzing the television shows frequented by politicians during the 1998 Dutch national election campaign and finding that the traditional informative programs still accounted for the main share of the air time with politicians. His plea to accept the easier digestibility of politics packaged as infotainment, and put up with this popularization of the political to prevent losing the viewer completely, evoked a concerned response by Jay Blumler (1999; cf. also Brants, 1999).

After pessimists warned, even before commercial television was introduced, that new multichannel environment would incite viewers to increase their watching time and quickly switch over to the more entertaining fare, the study of audience behavior became a major concern. An early example of the discussion was a book edited by Lee Becker and Klaus Schoenbach (1989) that presented experiences from different, mainly European, media markets. The ratings for the commercial

channels, which in many countries have surpassed the public stations, or data from surveys polling viewer preferences (Holtz-Bacha & Norris, 2001) speak for the success of the newcomers and their entertainment focus and thus confirm the earlier worries.

Before the arrival of the commercial competitors and the establishment of dual broadcasting markets, many speculations had been voiced about the effects these changes would have on the audience. These were expectations that concerned the macrolevel as well as the level of the individual. Several studies have addressed the question of the cognitive and attitudinal consequences of the changes in the way politics is presented on television. At least one study showed that the preference for public TV correlates positively with better knowledge of political matters (Holtz-Bacha & Norris, 2001). Following up on the hypothesis of the videomalaise that—in its earlier U.S. version—assumed a relation between the reliance on television for political information and political cynicism, authors from different countries undertook studies to see if this was now true in Europe, as no negative correlations between TV use and the publics' attitudes toward politics had been found under the conditions of the public broadcasting monopoly (e.g., Holtz-Bacha, 1990). Findings, however, were mixed. Although some authors did not find support for a media malaise (e.g., Newton, 1999; Norris, 2000), others corroborated the predicted negative impact on attitudes in the new media environment (e.g., Schulz, 1998a; Wolling, 2000; for a long-term analysis cf. also Kepplinger, 1998).

With the arrival of the new technologies the media environment is undergoing more change. High hopes have been engendered by the possibilities of interactivity, particularly for the political realm, the idea being that on-line communication will allow for direct connections between the political representatives and the citizen, giving noninstitutionalized groups and activities a new means to communicate their goals, independent of the established media. However, an unequal diffusion of hardware and the unequal skills in dealing with and using the possibilities of the Internet have provoked warnings of an increase in the knowledge gap.

## **The Transformation of Central and Eastern Europe**

In the second half of the 1980s, Gorbachev's policy of *glasnost* and *perestroika* and the resultant transformations in the countries of Central and East Europe changed the relation between the governments and the media. In the Soviet Union and the other countries under its control, the media were centralized and in the hands of the state and served a propaganda function for the ruling communist party. With the lifting of the "iron curtain," the splitting-up of the Soviet Union, and the ensuing transformation of the political and economic systems, the conditions for the media also changed completely. However, it was not a homogeneous development. For example, the situation was different in the countries that had been part of the Soviet Union such as the Baltic States or Ukraine and only then (re)gained their independence. Also, among the countries that belonged to the Warsaw Pact, some were more closely connected with the USSR than others. In some countries, even after the first free elections, communist parties or candidates still played an influential role. Finally, the situation was completely different in East Germany. As it was united with West Germany, it did not develop its own new system but rather was absorbed into the West German political and the media system (e.g., Hesse, 1990; Kilborn, 1993).

The political transformation of the countries in Central and Eastern Europe and the role of the media in this process as well as the changes in the media systems remain important topics for research (e.g., Corcoran & Preston, 1995; Jakubowicz, 1990; Kopper, Rutkiewicz, & Schliep, 1999; Lauristin & Vihalemm, 1990; McNair, 1994; O'Neil, 1997; Paletz, Jakubowicz, & Novosel, 1995; Pavlik & Shields, 1999; Rantanen & Vartanova, 1995; Thomaß & Tzankoff, 2001). Among the foci of the debate were the release of the media from state dependence and the development of press freedom (Goban-Klas, 1994; Molnar, 1999; Post-communism and the Media in Eastern Europe, 1996; Radojkovi, 1994; Zassoursky, 2000). These questions go hand in hand with the discussion about an independent education of journalists for the newly liberalized media (Fröhlich, in press) and the adoption of new journalistic practices (e.g., Voltmer, 2000).

A new topic was forced on Europe with the splintering of Yugoslavia and the wars in and among the emerging states. Although the Gulf War, which also involved European troops, had already caused a wave of research on media and war (e.g., Fleury-Vilatte, 1992; Löffelholz, 1993; Österreichische Gesellschaft für Kommunikationsfragen, 1991), the Balkan war, being closer and having consequences (refugees, NATO troops being involved) more evident in other European countries, pushed the topic even more to the forefront. Among the questions being raised were new dangers for the freedom of the press from censorship, physical dangers for the war journalists, and the role of the media in conflict resolution (e.g., Raskin, 2000). The *European Journal of Communication* devoted a whole issue to "The media and the Kosovo conflict" (2000), with articles from different countries mostly reporting the results from analyses of press coverage of the war in Kosovo and other conflicts.

## The European Focus on Electoral Research

(West) European political communication research, particularly effects research, has always been very much centered on the electoral campaign. That is also due to a close orientation of this line of research with U.S. approaches (cf. also Blumler et al., 1990. The concentration on campaigns holds true to this day (cf., Franklin, 1995; Neveu, 1998; Schulz, 1997a) but is also legitimized by the fact that election campaigns are times of condensed political communication, where its special features are made visible like light through a prism.

Whereas electoral campaign research has traditionally focused on questions of effects, it has recently given more attention to the "production side" of campaigns. This relatively new interest is a consequence of the ongoing professionalization of political actors vis-à-vis the media and the electorate. Over the years, the political marketing perspective on elections campaigns has become at least equally important in Europe as the search for effects and has inspired researchers to analyze the logistics and the features of modern campaigns (Franklin, 1994; Maarek, 1995, 2001; Scammell, 1995; Wring, 1999).

Whereas the changes in European campaigns were dubbed Americanization by the public, European researchers rather tend to call it professionalization. It is regarded as a consequence of the modernization process and changes in the media systems, namely, the process of their commercialization (cf. Mancini & Swanson, 1996). Although several authors have critically discussed the term Americanization (Holtz-Bacha, 2000; Negrine & Papathanassopoulos, 1996; Schulz, 1998), the professionalization of political actors has been studied from various perspectives and in

different countries (cf. the different chapters in Swanson & Mancini, 1996; see also Blumler & Gurevitch, 2001; Mancini, 1999; Plasser, Scheucher, & Senft, 1999; Scammell, 1997). For obvious reasons, these processes were studied mainly in Western Europe. However, with the democratization of the East European countries and free elections being held, the same trends could be observed there and became the object of scrutiny (cf. the different chapters in Kaid, 1999; see also Falkowski & Cwalina, 1999).

The study of election campaigns has caused many authors to surmise the existence of tendencies that may be generalized for political communication. These concern the diagnosis of a “mediatization” of politics and its consequences for democracy (Mazzoleni, 1995; Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999), the overall professionalization of political actors (individual candidates, parties, PR and advertising experts, political institutions), and the development toward the “permanent campaign.”

### **The Upcoming Comparative Perspective**

European political communication research has always been nationally orientated and produced single-country studies. However, the advantages of addressing research questions in international comparisons have gradually been acknowledged and comparative research is no longer the exception.

Jay Blumler, who legitimately can be called one of the founding fathers of political communication research in Europe, has been a long-term advocate of broadening the perspective across countries and also among the first to undertake international comparisons in this field. In 1978, Blumler published a study together with Roland Cayrol and Gabriel Thoveron, comparing election campaigns and audience reactions in Great Britain, France, and Belgium (Blumler, Cayrol, & Thoveron, 1978). At about the same time, he initiated an ambitious study on the occasion of the first direct election of the European Parliament in 1979 with researchers from all (at that time nine) EC member states taking part and applying the same multimethod concept to study the role of television during the European Election campaign. This study took advantage of a unique situation with the same event taking place at the same time in nine countries. The data from this research were analyzed from different angles and documented in a book edited by Blumler (1983).

The comparative method was further promoted when Blumler, as President-Elect of the International Communication Association (ICA), organized the program for the 1989 conference in San Francisco under the title “Comparatively speaking. . . .” The discussions in preparation of the conference and some of the papers presented there led to a book with the same title, edited by Blumler, McLeod, and Rosengren (1992).

Taking stock at the end of the 1980s, Gurevitch and Blumler (1990) call the macro-comparative approach still “an extending frontier” where research efforts have “progressed from infancy to—if not yet full adulthood—at least late adolescence” (p. 305). For Europe, this means that the perspective for political communication has indeed broadened; in many cases, however, it is the comparison between a European country and the United States, not between European countries.

Different approaches have been taken to cross-country research. Some publications compile single-country chapters on a common topic and along the same structure and then discuss differences and similarities in conclusion. Examples of this approach that include several European countries are Becker and



Schoenbach (1989) for assessing the consequences of media diversification, Swanson and Mancini (1996) for electoral campaigning, and Kaid and Holtz-Bacha (1995) and Kaid (1999) for political advertising in Western and evolving democracies. Others compare political phenomena and their relation to the media in different countries according to certain criteria. This has been done, for instance, by Farrell (1996) on campaign strategies. Comparative research in the strictest sense applies the same instrument for the study of the same event or issue (e.g., elections, analysis of TV news). The above-mentioned multicountry study on the occasion of the 1979 European election (Blumler, 1983) and studies on later European elections (e.g., Cayrol, 1991; Schulz & Blumler, 1994) are prime examples for this approach. Another case is the work by Hallin and Mancini (1984, 1992) on TV news and media events. Due to the lack of differentiated media variables, the data from the Eurobarometer, a survey done regularly in all member states of the European Union (EU) with the same questionnaire and, thus, an ideal source for comparisons across countries, are rarely used for research into political communication (cf. Holtz-Bacha & Norris, 2001; Scherer, 1995).

However, theoretical diversity and different academic and research cultures are the main obstacles for comparative research, particularly when countries or researchers from outside Europe are involved. Against the background of experiences from a French–U.S. study on the presidential campaigns in both countries in 1988 (Kaid, Gerstlé, & Sanders, 1991), Swanson (1992) describes the difficulties of cross-country comparisons and discusses strategies for dealing with incompatibilities.

Although the EU has a major impact on national politics and the social life of governments and citizens of its currently 15 member states, “Europe” has only hesitantly become a topic for communication research. Beyond a focus on media policy, it is mainly the questions of the integration of the member states into the supranational community and the development of a European public sphere that challenge political communication research. As just described, the direct elections of the European Parliament have raised some research interest. However, the communications dimension of European integration and the legitimization of the EU and its institutions, both necessary if EU citizens are to identify with the European community, have not drawn systematic and continuous attention of researchers.

Because of the language barriers in Europe, transnational media have been successful only where they address an audience that shares a common language (like 3SAT, produced in cooperation by German, Austrian, and Swiss broadcasters) or are independent of language (like MTV Europe and Viva). The attempt to attract a European readership with a newspaper like *The European* failed. This means that “Europe” lacks a medium of its own and instead is rather dependent on the national media to help develop a European identity. Coverage of European matters in the media, however, proves to be often negative and mostly done with a national angle (Gerhards, 1993; Morgan, 1995; Schönbach, 1995). Against this background, the development of a European public sphere and the need to overcome the legitimization gap of European institutions are a difficult process that will even be more of a challenge when more countries join the EU (Hjarvard, 1993; Kopper, 1997; Schlesinger, 1993, 1999). Thus, implanting a sensitivity for European matters and the greater European vision has also become a goal for journalism education and has led to some specific Eurojournalism projects (Kopper, in press).

Beyond Europe, the ongoing process of economic and political globalization has also given communication researchers a transnational focus (e.g., Rantanen, 2000). The topic was mainly discussed in light of its consequences for the

transformation of the public sphere(s) and for national or cultural identities (e.g., Dahlgren 1991; Garnham, 1995; Keane, 1995a, 1995b; Kivikuru, 2001; Morley & Robins, 1995; Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1996).

### **Political Communication Research in Europe: Where Is It Now, Where Is It Going?**

By now, not only is political communication research well established in Europe, but also its important stake in mass communication research has inspired other fields of the discipline. The publication of several books taking stock of political communication research and taking some first steps toward developing a theory of political communication (Gerstlé, 1992; Jarren, Sarcinelli, & Saxer, 1998; Mazzoleni, 1998; McNair, 1995; Negrine, 1996; Schulz, 1997b) and the specific overviews for Great Britain, Germany, and France in the journal *Political Communication* (Cayrol & Mercier, 1998, 2000; Franklin, 1995; Neveu, 2000; Schulz, 1997a) support this assessment. Recently, an Italian journal specializing in political communication, *Comunicazione politica*, was founded.

However, as is the case for the whole scientific community in communications and its research efforts, the study of political communication remains mainly a national endeavor. Accounting for this are the language barrier and the lack of a European association of communication. Europe consists of more than 40 countries with many different languages. Even the EU, with its 15 member states, has 11 official languages, which demonstrates the European problem of understanding in a literal sense. Even English, often referred to as *lingua franca* in academia, does not guarantee transnational exchange. The language problem also includes the fact that literature that is not published in English has *per se* no chance of being acknowledged across borders.

Although lamented for decades and despite several attempts, there is still no comprehensive European association of communication, which could bring together and thus integrate researchers from the different countries. Regular contacts in such an association would help bring about mutual exchange and could act as a catalyst for international research projects. Recently, the European Consortium for Communication Research (ECCR), designed to associate the national organizations and research institutions, was launched, but it remains to be seen whether it will attract enough members to fulfill the integration function. The European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR), which assembles the national organizations for political science and other institutions and is explicitly devoted to cross-national cooperation, deals with matters of political communication only marginally and irregularly.

Thus, only the *European Journal of Communication*, founded in 1986 with the introduction, "The expanding field of communication research has been inadequately served in Europe by the opportunities available for publication and thus for the circulation and exchange of ideas and of research findings within Europe and internationally" (Blumler, McQuail, & Rosengren, 1986, p. 3), has succeeded in creating a forum for European communication researchers.

In January 2000, the European research councils for the humanities and social sciences in the European Science Foundation (ESF) launched an interdisciplinary 5-year program on Changing Media—Changing Europe. This project, which is codirected by Peter Golding (U.K.) and Ib Bjondeberg (Denmark), enables networking

among researchers from 18 European countries and thus gives a kickoff for joint projects and publications (cf. Bjondeberg, 2001).

However, even more than 10 years after the political changes in Central and Eastern Europe, and despite several teaching and student exchanges, joint projects, and West European scholars' discovery of new opportunities and new topics in Eastern Europe, Europe remains, in a way, a continent divided. If comparative research in communications in general and looking across borders is still in an adolescent phase, this is even more the case for a transnational perspective from West to East.

Nevertheless, there is much unity across Europe in what have been the most important issues for political communication research during the last years and will be in the future. A survey undertaken in preparation of this chapter<sup>1</sup> revealed common problems and research interests. Among the topics mentioned most frequently as persistent were questions revolving around strategic communication, particularly election campaigns and the professionalization of politicians and consultants, with its consequences for the relation between the media system and the political system. The blurring of the lines between politics and entertainment, which were once regarded as separate and opposing contents, goes hand in hand with a shift to new subjects. Several colleagues also expressed their expectation that electoral research will further expand to levels other than the national.

For the future, the impact of new technologies on political communication is a dominant topic. On-line communication changes the political communication process in many ways and offers political communicators new opportunities to speak directly to the citizen, with journalists losing their intermediary role. On the other hand, the new technologies represent a new instrument for political participation and thus bring about new opportunities to influence the political process, opening the one-way street that leads from top to bottom to oncoming traffic in the other direction.

Finally, several respondents referred to questions concerning the fate of the public sphere in a commercialized media environment where the responsibility of the media in a democratic system becomes beset by economic criteria and in a globalized world with dissolving boundaries.

Altogether 80% of the respondents regard political communication as a "fairly important" or "very important" part of communication science (mean, 3.12 on a 5-point scale with 1 being the lowest), whereas 60% said the same about the role of political communication research in political science (mean, 2.96). However, the relation of political communication scholars and politicians is overwhelmingly regarded as "not close." Moreover, the practical use of political communication research is seen rather ambiguously. Asked whether they think that publications by political communication researchers are recognized by politicians, a majority of 60% answered "no." In addition, only 40% expect that publications about political communication research have any impact on politicians. It remains open whether

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<sup>1</sup>The survey cannot be called representative in any way because a population of political communication researchers in Europe cannot be defined and no sample be drawn. A questionnaire was sent to colleagues either known to the author as being active in political communication research or found as authors of respective articles or books. The respondents were also asked to name other colleagues in their country whom they thought should get a questionnaire. Thus, 26 questionnaires were sent back by respondents in 11, mostly West European, countries. The author acknowledges the cooperation and input of these colleagues. She also wants to thank Jörg Richter at the University of Mainz, who helped with the survey and its analysis.

the latter results should be interpreted as ignorance on the part of the politicians vis-à-vis scientific results or as an indicator of political communication researchers asking the wrong questions.

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## Political Communication in Asia: Challenges and Opportunities

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Communication research in Asia has a long tradition, comparable to what has been accomplished in the West. According to Chu (1988), the field of communication studies was introduced into Taiwan in the mid-1950s, into Hong Kong in the mid-1960s, and into Mainland China in the early 1980s. Other Asian countries, such as Japan and Korea, also have well-established and active communication research communities and have contributed greatly to what we know about the mass media in Asia today. Overall, the community of Asian researchers is growing rapidly, with at least two established English-language journals specifically devoted to Asian communication research: *Asian Journal of Communication*, which is affiliated with the Asian Media Information Center (AMIC) in Singapore and *Keiō Communication Review*, which is published by Keiō University in Japan. Although studies from Asia are still the exception in large communication journals such as *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* and *Journal of Communication*, the number of communication studies from Asia has risen steadily during the last two decades (Chan, 1992a).

The development of communication research in Asia, however, has been supplemented only recently with research focusing on political communication processes. In Hong Kong and China, for example, the first political communication studies appeared in the early 1980s (Chan, 1992a). Whereas many of the earlier political communication studies from Asia focused on general descriptions of the interactions between the media and the state, the past 10 years has been marked by a slow increase in the number of studies that pay more attention to media effects and public opinion formation. This trend has been aided by important political events in Asia, such as the political crackdown in Tianamen Square in 1989 and the handover of Hong Kong to China in 1997—events that renewed interest in the role of the media in politics and democratization processes.

Unfortunately, many of the political communication studies conducted in Asia have not been published in English and are only available in national or regional journals. Moreover, the increase in political communication studies from Asia has been rather uneven between countries. Although there has been a steady flow of studies from China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan—and somewhat less so from Japan and Korea—very few political communication studies have originated in countries such as Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, or Malaysia.

There are a number of reasons for this uneven distribution of political communication research in Asia. The dominance of communication research from China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, for example, can be partially explained by the large number of Chinese communication scholars trained in the United States. Many of these scholars have successfully published in English-language books and journals, often with a focus on their native countries. The lack of publications from other Asian countries is likely the result of political, social, and cultural differences that make it difficult to produce and publish political media research similar to what has been done in the United States and other Western nations. Researchers in China and Singapore, for example, cannot conduct public opinion polls that investigate perceptions of political leaders or candidates. The same has been true, until recently, in Malaysia and Indonesia. The restricted freedom to conduct political communication studies in Asia is compounded by the small research community, the often limited financial and institutional support, and the size and quality of research infrastructure and personnel.

The limited number of political communication studies originating in Asia can be also explained by differences in the political systems themselves, which make it difficult to apply theories of media effects developed in Western democracies. For example, the procedures of how political candidates are chosen and elected in Asia, the way people participate in politics, and how political information is discussed in the media all differ significantly from political processes in Western nations. It is therefore hardly surprising that very few Asian media studies have analyzed the role of the media in elections and in public opinion formation based on political communication theories developed to fit the political systems of Western nations.

In addition, real and perceived differences in culture have caused many Asian researchers to question the applicability of Western mass communication theories in Asia (see, for example, Dissanayake, 1988). Menon (1988), for example, noted more than a decade ago that “there is a widespread feeling among communication scholars in Asia that there is a pressing need to reexamine Western communication theories in light of Asian cultures and traditions” (pp. ix–x). Critiques of Western communication theories, such as that by the renowned Chinese communication scholar Godwin Chu (1988), charge that the “Western perspective of communication research and theory, by and large, ignores the social structure and pays relatively scant attention to the societal functions of communication. In the Western perspective of communication theory, culture is rarely explicitly taken into consideration in the research conceptualization, because culture is usually not regarded as a variable” (pp. 205–206). Chu also claimed that the focus of Western communication research on the individual and the reliance on quantitative methodology limits research to “problems that can be handled by quantitative measures and statistical tests” (p. 206). The result, according to Chu, is that “communication research in the Western perspective tends to become repetitive and lacks a clear focus, tackling problems that may seem to be trivial or irrelevant, although methodologically rigorous” (p. 206).

Unfortunately, it seems that the debate about the importance of a “unique” Asian perspective in communication has influenced, if not hindered, political communication research in Asia. The realization that there are important political, social, and cultural differences between the West and the East likely left many media researchers doubtful about the applicability of Western media theories in their nations. However, as we will later argue in more detail, differences between cultures should encourage us to test established media theories in different contexts, rather than abandon them as not applicable. The hope of this chapter is to clarify that such a viewpoint will advance and revitalize political communication research both in Asia and in the West.

The main purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the political communication research conducted in Asia during the past 10 years. This admittedly limited time frame allows a fairly comprehensive review of the most recent and academically important political communication studies conducted in Asia. Because not all Asian countries can be reviewed in the narrow context of this chapter, we decided to focus on those countries for which a significant number of political communication studies is available in the major English-language communication journals. Although we acknowledge that such a selection is likely to ignore a lot of important research in each of the countries discussed here, we would like to provide interested scholars with a review of the literature that is easily accessible and not limited to a specific Asian language. Specifically, we focus in this chapter on political communication studies conducted in the following seven countries: China, Hong Kong (China, SAR), Taiwan, Korea, Japan, Singapore, and Indonesia. We chose these countries because of their significant contributions to the field of political communication in Asia and the relative large number of articles from each country available in English.

To compile a relevant list of research articles, we searched for studies published during the past 10 years in major communication journals such as *Communication Research*, *Gazette*, *Journal of Communication*, *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *Political Communication*, and the *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*. A fairly large number of studies were also included from the regional *Asian Journal of Communication*, which is not as readily available as other, more established communication journals. In addition, we included a number of relevant books and book chapters on political communication in Asia.

It should be noted that we explicitly excluded studies of the historical development of media institutions in Asia, studies that focus on development communication or news flow, and the literature revolving around the question of “media imperialism.” Excluded were also content analyses of news coverage of Asian countries in the Western media. These studies of media content tend to focus on issues relevant to Western media rather than political communication processes in Asia.

## China

According to the Chinese communication scholar Jonathan Zhu (1997), communication research in China has developed in three waves. The first wave of books on communication in China appeared in the late 1950s and examined the structure, functions, and operations of Communist propaganda in China during the Cold War, often comparing it with the Soviet model. The second wave during the 1970s, driven

by research on national development, further analyzed the role of the propaganda machinery in China, with a focus on economic modernization efforts. The third wave of publications on mass communication in China, prompted by the prodemocracy movements of 1989, focused on political and traditional culture.

Zhu (1997) noted that “books about Chinese political culture zero in on public opinion and political participation, with the state treated as an object, rather than a subject, of the mass movements” (p. 159). Whereas books of the first two waves relied on analyses of official publications and personal interviews, the latest analyses, in the third wave, “followed the more rigorous social science paradigm that aims at testing falsifiable hypotheses against first-hand data collected through systematically designed procedures” (p. 159). These empirical studies, said Zhu, “signal the increasing maturity and sophistication of Chinese communication research” (p. 159).

One of the first compilations of studies on political communication in China is found in C. C. Lee’s (1994b) book *China’s Media, Media’s China*, which chronicles the interactions between press freedom and democracy movements in China and Taiwan. A series of essays examine the origins, mechanisms, and measures of ideological control in China and describes how the mass media have manipulated information to mold public opinion and maintain social order during the reform area of the 1980s. Other essays provide context for a historical understanding of Western media’s coverage of China and the impact of international news media on media coverage in China. A common conclusion most authors support is that the changing role of the Chinese press cannot be stated as a simple struggle between the market and Communism. Rather, it seems that both the Chinese government and the market forces try to manipulate the mass media to their advantage.

Whereas a majority of the early political communication studies from China focused on government–press interactions or questions of press freedom (Goodman, 1999; C. C. Lee, 1990; C. C. Lee, 1994a; Ling, 1991; Lull, 1991; Zhang, 1990), media scholars soon started to focus attention on the impact of China’s economic reform policies that started in the late 1970s (Guo, 2001; He, 2000; C. C. Lee, 2000; Liu, 1998; Zhao, 1996, 1998, 2000). Lynch’s (1999) recent book on media and politics in China, for example, argues that a combination of administrative fragmentation, property rights reform, and technological advance has weakened the Party’s ability to use the mass media to control the Chinese people. According to Lynch, this loss of control has not led to a liberalized public sphere but to a “praetorianism” in which no force can control the mass media. Similarly, J. M. Chan (1994) argued that the internationalization of the Chinese media, which followed the economic reforms and open-door policies adopted by China after 1979, eroded the party’s ideological control over the Chinese mass media. However, Chan also noted that the party continues to balance the tensions that arise from the disjunctive forces of democratization and economic reforms in China by controlling the mass media through “antiforeignism” and cultural protectionism.

Similar arguments about the mutual reinforcing effects of economic reforms and press freedom have been made by other media scholars, often arguing that the market reforms have unintentionally liberalized China’s media system by formally acknowledging the media’s entertainment function (Chu, 1994). H. Liu’s (1998) analysis of several national and regional newspapers in China, for example, shows that financial independence prompted many Chinese newspapers to increase entertainment content, maximize advertising income, and venture into other, non-media businesses.

Taubman's (1998) insightful discussion of the threats the Internet might pose to nondemocratic governments focuses on the regulations the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) implemented between 1994 and 1997. According to Taubman, the Chinese government is attempting to "square the circle" by expanding the presence of the Internet while continuing to develop measures to control what their citizens can access in cyberspace. He concluded that "given that the party has not fully solved the domestic political problems associated with greater Internet access, the temptation for the CCP to intervene in the realm of cyberspace will never cease" (p. 268).

A series of analyses have also centered on the effects of China's economic reform policies on foreign news coverage found in the Chinese mass media. Stone's (1994) analysis of China's foreign policy news in the *China Daily*, for example, found that China's primary foreign policy concerns between 1989 and 1993 were sovereignty and territorial integrity and that China considers itself primarily a regional rather than a global power. T. K. Chang, Wang, and Chen (1994), however, note that foreign news coverage at the regional level does not necessarily follow the dictate of the central news authority, the New China News Agency (NCNA). Instead, the authors argue that the focus of the foreign news coverage in the Chinese regional press was determined predominantly by China's position in relation to other countries and not by external events such as the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe. Similarly, T. K. Chang, Wang, and Chen's (1998) comparative analysis of U.S. and Chinese national television news suggests that the selection of news in each country does not necessarily depend "on the properties of the event or the issue itself but, rather, on its position in the broader social structure within which a country situates itself and views its relationships to other nations" (p. 1).

A series of communication studies also focuses on the practice of journalism in China after the Cultural Revolution (Polumbaum, 1991; Huang, 1994) or following the Tiananmen Square protests (He, 1996; Zhang, 1993). Starck and Yu's (1990) survey of 38 Chinese journalists in 1987, for example, shows that China's economic reforms and the open-door policy allowed journalists to express views challenging the official line on important global communication issues two years before the Tiananmen Square incident. Zhu, Weaver, Lo, Chen, and Wu's (1997) comparative study of journalists in China, Taiwan, and the United States found that societal factors (country of origin), rather than organizational factors (type of media industry), have the strongest impact on journalists' views about media roles. Individual factors, on the other hand, had no impact.

The bloody suppression of the 1989 protests at Tiananmen Square in Beijing provided the context for a number of excellent studies analyzing the role of the Chinese and foreign press during this political crisis (Faison, 1999; Friedland & Zhong, 1996; He & Zhou, 1994; Kim, 2000; Larson & Chen, 1992; C. C. Lee & Chan, 1990b; C. C. Lee & Yang, 1995). Probably the most interesting analysis of the mass media's relevance during and after the Tiananmen protests is provided by the Chinese communication scholar Zhou He (1996) in his book *Mass Media and Tiananmen Square*. The author draws on a wide range of sources, including a mail survey of Chinese students in the United States; in-depth interviews with Chinese and U.S. journalists, exiled student leaders, and other dissidents; and content analyses of *People's Daily* and the *Voice of America*. Based on a detailed account of the interplay among protest activists, Chinese media, and overseas media during the Tiananmen movement, He argued that the Chinese national media "both legitimized and delegitimized the movement at different times" (p. 148).

Other political communication studies from China depend on detailed content analyses of Chinese news coverage to analyze the role of the mass media in China's democratization process. T. K. Chang, Chen, and Zhang's (1993) content analysis of Chinese regional newspapers before and after the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown, for example, shows that earlier mass propaganda and persuasion models "cannot adequately address the fundamental changes in structure and processes of the contemporary Chinese press as a result of China's domestic reform policies and its sustained opening to the West" (p. 189). Based on a content analysis of Chinese television programming between 1970 and 1990, J. Wang and Chang (1996) analyzed the impact of China's socioeconomic structure on its foreign television programming. They concluded that the fragmentation of state authority since the economic reforms in the late 1970s led to an increase in foreign programming and more content diversity, with capitalist countries becoming major suppliers (see also Yu, 1996). Similarly, Yu's (1992) analysis of the Shanghai-based *World Economic Herald* during China's political democratization in the 1980s suggests that this semiofficial Chinese newspaper became more politically outspoken in its coverage of key political issues.

Kenney (1993), on the other hand, looked at the influences of politics and economics on photographic content in Chinese newspaper. His analysis of photos in three "official" and hybrid "official-commercial" Chinese newspapers during the midst of the economic and political reforms in China in 1987 shows that political pressures on Chinese journalists decreased, whereas financial pressures upon their newspapers increased. "Photographs expressed conservative, moderate, and even radical values. A substantial percentage of photographs served an entertainment function, while others served a political or cognitive function" (p. 71). Kenny also shows that Chinese newspapers with the strongest economic ties to the party gave the least importance to photographs overall.

A critical view regarding the political impact of Chinese mass media on the public is provided by T. K. Chang, Wang, and Chen (1994). Based on a content analysis of news from the government broadcasting station Chinese Central Television (CCTV) and the government newspaper *People's Daily* in 1992, the authors argued that the Chinese news media has provided the Chinese people with the basic knowledge needed for building a "forced consensus" (p. 52). This was accomplished, the authors suggested, by stressing the government's commitments to economic reforms and social restructuring, while limiting the scope of public understanding and perception of the world. Similarly, Zhang and Kraus's (1995) analysis of Chinese newspapers before and after the Tiananmen Square protests reveals that top leaders manipulated symbols given to the media in order to highlight the dominant ideology of the Chinese Communist Party while isolating the movement participants. According to Zhang and Kraus, "Symbols were devised to eliminate the movement participants from the 'people' category into the 'enemy' category. The press construction of public opinion legitimized the military crackdown and the dominant ideology of the CCP was reinforced through the media" (pp. 423-424).

A somewhat more optimistic perspective is provided by Fan and Ostini's (1999) comparative analysis of news coverage of human rights in China, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Taiwan. The study shows that civil-political rights were emphasized in regions with the greatest exposure to the West (through colonialism), while regions with less exposure focused on social-economic rights. Fan and Ostini (1999) found that Hong Kong's media emphasized individual civil-political rights the most, followed by the media in Singapore, Taiwan, and China. However, the authors noted

that “much of the press coverage that used the term ‘human rights’ involved rhetorical responses to Western criticism without articulating specific ideas about rights” (p. 1).

Despite the limited number of public opinion polls available in China and the tight government supervision of the polling industry, a relatively large number of communication studies from China are based on survey data. In fact, some Chinese authors have developed interesting new perspectives for understanding public opinion in nondemocratic societies or from a particular Asian viewpoint. A. P. L. Liu’s (1996) pioneering work on public opinion and political behavior in Communist China, for example, argued that Chinese political culture is manifested at two stages that are sequentially connected and alternated: “general public opinion,” which stays as an undercurrent most of the time but, when its discontent level is intensified, develops into “specific public opinion” (i.e., social movements, protests). In comparing public opinion between China and the United States, Liu found that public opinion in China is not institutionalized because the Communist Party “has preempted all formal channels of communication and representation” (pp. 6–7). This uninstitutional public opinion, so Liu believes, gives rise to a mass political culture that is both alienated from the party system and isolated among the public itself.

Drawing on Confucian philosophy, Cho (2000) presented the Chinese concept of *li* for understanding public opinion in Asian societies. According to Cho (2000),

*li* represents the body of tradition and conventions of Chinese society. In the broader perspective, *li* encompasses mutual respect and regard in civilized social encounters. *Li* also provides the detailed guidelines of the kinds of language, attitude, and behavior to be used in different social functions and relations, including the patterns of greeting, marrying, mourning, fighting, and conducting commerce as well as the modes of being a ruler, father, son, wife, and friend. (p. 303)

In short, *li* is a reflection of how individuals act in their relationships with others to achieve social harmony. What makes this concept relevant to processes of public opinion formation is the fact that, in the context of *li*, not all opinions are equal. The parents’ and the elders’ rights to express opinions precede those of the children’s and younger person’s, and parents’ and elder’s opinions rate more highly than the children’s and younger members of society (Cho, 2000, p. 318). The author argued that the normative notion of public opinion as personal cultivation in China has served as a source of social control and concluded that the moral nature of *li* may have implicitly helped the ruled not to question the greater sociopolitical structure in traditional China.

In one of the few public perception studies conducted in China, J. Chen (2001) focused on perceived threats from the United States and Japan. Based on a representative public opinion survey conducted in 1999 among 720 adult residents from Beijing, Chen’s findings indicated that about 75% of the respondents agreed that the United States had hostile intentions against China, whereas about 67% of the respondents thought so about Japan. Moreover, a majority of the respondents perceived the United States and Japan as possessing military or economic powers dangerous to China. Chen also found that respondents who were most interested in national and international affairs and those who were least certain about the



adequacy of China's capabilities to defend its interests and security were significantly more likely to perceive threats from the United States and Japan.

Another public perception study, by Wei and Leung (1998), found that Chinese citizens in Mainland China and Taiwan held similarly negative views toward politics despite the different sociopolitical changes that took place in each country. The authors speculated that such a similarity may be the consequence of a shared cultural heritage, particularly the influence of traditional values of obedience and submission to authority. On the other hand, Mainland Chinese were more negative and Taiwanese were more positive toward authorities. The amount of attention both groups paid to the media also correlated strongly with attitudes toward authorities and political efficacy, whereas media exposure appeared to have a significant effect only in Taiwan.

## Hong Kong

Although political communication is one of the most researched areas in Hong Kong (Chan, 1992a), most of the studies conducted in this former British colony focus on the possible consequences of Hong Kong's return to China in 1997. But despite the fears that the Hong Kong press would eventually come under Beijing's control, the Hong Kong media continued to publish news reports and commentaries critical of the Beijing and SAR governments. Nevertheless, many media critics still worry about a possible co-option of the Hong Kong press by China and continue to investigate questions of press freedom and the impact of the political transition on Hong Kong's media in general.

Unfortunately, relatively few empirical studies in Hong Kong focus on the role of the media in elections or public opinion formation. As Chan (1992a) noted, "Unlike Western nations where political communication centres on the formation of opinions and campaign effects, Hong Kong communication researchers are more concerned about the institutional interactions between the mass media and political power centres, be it in the context of Hong Kong or China" (p. 145). Thus, despite the fact that the political transition from British to Chinese rule has "rendered Hong Kong a valuable laboratory to observe the interactions between power realignment and mass communication," political communication research in Hong Kong is characterized by a very narrow range of topics and a general lack of empirical studies (Chan, 1992a, p. 145).

The first concerns over press freedom in Hong Kong emerged during the British colonial rule. C. C. Lee and Chan (1990a), for example, discuss how the British colonial administration controlled the production and distribution of government news to Hong Kong's mass media through the Government Information Service (GIS). The authors conclude that press control was "effectively wielded not only through coercion but primarily through management of news production and distribution" (p. 136).

The criticism focusing on the British manipulation of Hong Kong's mass media was soon replaced by worries about Hong Kong's handover to China in 1997. Probably the most comprehensive study of how this unique political transition affected the Hong Kong press is provided in Chan and Lee's (1991) book *Mass Media and Political Transition: The Hong Kong Press in China's Orbit*. After examining the historical background of Hong Kong's political transition and its implications for the press, the book systematically examines the impact of the political transition on

Hong Kong's mass media and focuses on how the press aligned itself with the newly constituted power structure. The authors documented changes within the media by drawing on publicly available sources and opinion surveys and showed a general shift in journalistic paradigms as the previously pro-British press accepted the inevitability of a Chinese takeover. The study concludes that the centrist and rightist newspapers, because of organizational and ideological inflexibility, did show much greater accommodation to China than the ultrarightist newspapers, which opted out or softened their hardline anticommunist rhetoric (for a similar study, see Chan, 1992b).

In another study of media performance during the political transition of Hong Kong, Chu and Lee (1995) suggested that China has only three options in dealing with the return of Hong Kong: "co-existence," "changing itself," and "slowing down the democratization process in Hong Kong" (p. 1). The authors argued that in the near future, Hong Kong's media are likely to play the "public relations" or "propaganda" role, whereas in the future when China democratizes, the media may be able to resume its "reformist" or "public forum" roles that they developed in the early 1990s. Similar pessimistic analyses by P. S. N. Lee and Chu (1995, 1998) predict that "after the handover, the press will continue to legitimate the new master without feeling great discomfort" (1998, p. 75) because it has done so under British rule and will do so under Chinese rule. The authors also concluded that the Chinese government will have little need to impose censorship because self-censorship is on the rise. Likewise, Fung and Lee (1994) argued that the media are bought by international media conglomerates or pro-China or China-affiliated businesses, and as a result, "media content is being increasingly depoliticized, while journalists are apprehensive about criticizing China" (p. 132).

Other studies of media and politics focus on how the media covered political issues before and after Hong Kong's transition to Chinese rule (Cao, 2000; Chan, 1994; Cheng, 2000; Knight & Nakano, 1999; C. C. Lee, Chan, Pan, & So, 2000; C. C. Lee, Pan, Chan, & So, 2001; Ma, 1999; Sciutto, 1996). P. S. N. Lee's (1993) content analysis of editorials from major Hong Kong newspapers, for example, found that newspapers shifted their focus from public service to civic and political issues, but seldom criticized the Hong Kong or Chinese government in this time period. Similarly, C. C. Lee's (1998) survey of 553 Hong Kong journalists conducted in 1996 shows that "many Hong Kong journalists perceive their colleagues as being afraid to criticize China but think of themselves as being more courageous" (p. 55). Lee also documented that journalists from the pro-China party press behaved differently from their colleagues from the market-oriented press—for example, by being less likely to feel that press freedom would be affected after 1997 or by being less likely to criticize the Chinese government.

Pan, Lee, Chan, and So (1999), on the other hand, examined how the media from China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong constructed their respective narratives about the handover of Hong Kong. Based on the concept of media framing, the authors investigated how news stories about the handover were shaped by institutional configurations, the relevance of the story to home constituencies, and the conventions of newsmaking in each country.

The political handover of Hong Kong to China in 1997 was accompanied by a large number of public opinion polls about people's confidence in the future of Hong Kong, reactions to the pace of political reform, perceptions of social problems, and attitudes on emigration. The surge in polling also drew the attention of media scholars interested in the impact of the mass media on public opinion during

Hong Kong's political transition (Atwood & Major, 1997; McIntyre, 1995; Raghbir & Johor, 1999; Willnat & Wilkins, 1998). Willnat (1996), for example, analyzed the impact of perceptions of majority opinion on political outspokenness in Hong Kong. Based on a telephone survey of 660 Hong Kong residents conducted in 1993, the study found that people were more willing to publicly express their opinions about Hong Kong's political transition when they perceived the majority opinion to be on their side or when they perceived a trend in support of their own viewpoint. People's willingness to express their opinion publicly was primarily boosted by higher issue salience and higher political interest and efficacy.

Wilkins's (1995) survey of 502 Hong Kong residents found that women were less likely to have faith in the political future of Hong Kong than men. The relationship between political cynicism and gender was positively related to socioeconomic status, whereas newspaper exposure was associated with less cynicism of the future transition among men. In a similar study, Wilkins and Bates (1995) concluded that among men with higher levels of socioeconomic status television exposure was positively associated with trust in China, whereas women and younger people tended to distrust China, regardless of their news exposure.

Based on the psychological theory of media priming, Willnat and Zhu (1996) examined the potential link between news content and public perception of the last governor of Hong Kong, Chris Patten, and his democratic reform plan for Hong Kong. Based on data from 52 weekly public opinion polls and a content analysis of three leading newspapers in Hong Kong between 1992 and 1993, the authors found that newspaper coverage of Governor Patten's reform plan greatly inflated the relative importance of his proposal in the public's evaluation of his overall performance, with a one-week delay. Thus, the findings provide strong evidence supporting the media priming theory on an aggregate data level.

A number of studies have also investigated the interaction of politics, media, and public perceptions of media performance. Fung's (1995, 1998) analyses, for example, show that in response to the change in public opinion, the media started to give consent to the emergence of party politics in various stages of its political transition in the 1990s. Martin, Wilson, and Meng's (1994) study, on the other hand, shows how Hong Kong residents felt about the protection of press freedom, commercial free speech, and media programming in Hong Kong. Based on responses to telephone surveys, in-home interviews, and mall intercepts conducted in 1993, the authors concluded that "Hong Kong residents rate free press and freedom of expression highly as abstract concepts, but are generally desirous of limiting protection on the basis of what they disagree with or find offensive" (p. 119). Guo (2000) argued that a significant portion of public perception of media performance is rooted in people's social backgrounds and media habits. Findings from his survey of 503 Hong Kong residents conducted during the 1998 Legislative Council election in Hong Kong indicate that audience expectations of campaign media performance stemmed from different social backgrounds and patterns of media use. The author concluded that media effects on political knowledge and participation are mediated by what audience members expect from media coverage.

## Taiwan

Political communication research in Taiwan is relatively well established and covers a wide variety of issues and concerns, ranging from historical overviews of the

political function of the media to issues such as campaign coverage or political advertising. C. C. Lee's (1993) monograph *"Sparkling a Fire,"* for example, provides a comprehensive historical review of Taiwan's struggle over press freedom between the early 1950s and the end of martial law in 1987. Lee showed that "owners of the big media in Taiwan tended to be integrated into the established interests, imbued with the dominant ideology, and unlikely to challenge the status quo" (p. 28). Small media, especially political magazines, however, "became a center of organized intelligence for the opposition movement" (p. 28). Lee concluded that despite the sharp decline of state censorship in Taiwan since 1987, Taiwan's media has to face four challenges: (1) a trend toward media concentrations; (2) technological developments that will defy national borders and subvert state authority; (3) the cultural "spillover" from Japan and China; and (4) the question of national identity.

The strained relationship between the government and the press has been the focus of most political communication studies from Taiwan (Berman, 1992; Hong, 1999; Rampal, 1994; Wei, 1998). P. Kuo's (1993) analysis of the democratic function of the Taiwanese news media after 1987, for example, concludes that, although credit has to be given to Taiwan's press for its role in the country's democratization and liberalization process, "Taiwan's newspaper media remains in an ambiguous state, with disturbing signs that it is falling short of the standards for a professional media in a democratic society" (p. 109). Lo, Paddon, and Wu (2000), who examined how the end of martial law influenced the publication design of Taiwan's daily newspapers between 1952 and 1996, found that the legal and political environment in Taiwan strongly influenced the appearance of major newspapers. Similarly, Lo, Cheng, and Lee (1994) showed that television news in Taiwan heavily relies on government officials as primary sources and, as a result, provides only a very limited view of Taiwan's political landscape. Another study, by S. Y. Chen (1998), notes that government control of the Taiwanese press has changed from formal regulations and censorship to a form of "market censorship," which is primarily characterized by indirect government controls through news management.

The impact of media coverage on elections in Taiwan has been analyzed in a series of studies published in the mid- to late 1990s. Lo, King, Chen, and Huang's (1996) content analysis of television coverage of the 1995 legislative election in Taiwan, for example, indicates that "state-owned broadcast television stations were far more likely than privately owned cable television channels to give greater coverage to the ruling party and its candidates, to use ruling party officials as news sources, and to offer more news coverage favorable to the ruling party than to other party" (p. 353). The authors concluded that "cable television has become a force for balance in coverage, diluting a pervasive pro-government party bias" and that it has "made a contribution to the development of democracy" (p. 340).

A similar study of campaign coverage during Taiwan's first presidential election in 1996 shows significant differences in how the state-owned broadcast television and the privately owned cable television stations covered political candidates (Lo, Neilan, & King, 1998). The study concludes that "privately owned cable TV stations were more fair and balanced in their coverage of the presidential campaign. Structural bias in TV news, instead of political bias, may account for the greater amount of coverage devoted to the ruling parties" (p. 60).

Chiu and Chan-Olmsted's (1999) study of the impact of cable television on Taiwan's election campaign strategies supports these findings. Based on secondary data analyses and a series of in-depth interviews with both campaign organizers

and observers, the authors trace the development of Taiwan's cable television industry after 1987. The study concludes that cable television has "shattered the long-existing monopolized television news reporting of the three government-controlled television networks" (p. 506) and provided an alternative platform for the opposition parties after the lifting of martial law in 1987.

Although audience studies analyzing effects of political media coverage are less popular in Taiwan, a few studies have investigated people's trust in the media and the impact of social background factors on news consumption and political knowledge. Gunther, Hong, and Rodriguez (1994), for example, investigated how the shifting relationship between press and government during Taiwan's democratization process affected people's perceptions of media credibility and their levels of trust in the media and the government. Though the authors speculated that, as a result of Taiwan's relaxation of print media censorship, people would trust newspapers more than television, findings from a survey of 453 adults in Taipei did not support this contention. In spite of government control, television news was generally regarded as more credible than newspaper news by most respondents. However, the data also indicated that most people clearly distinguished between trust in media and trust in government.

An interesting study by Lo (1994) tested the interactive effect of media exposure and personal involvement on political knowledge about the Gulf War among 735 Taiwanese high school students in 1991. As predicted, his findings indicated that students with higher levels of cognitive (attention to news, thinking about news) and behavioral (news exposure, discussion of news, search for information) involvement were more likely to use newspaper rather than television news and had greater knowledge about the Gulf War compared to their less involved counterparts.

On the basis of a rare comparative analysis of polls conducted in the United States and Taiwan, Wanta, King, and McCombs (1995) investigated how personal factors such as demographics, motivation, and media use affect the perception of important issues among respondents in both nations. The findings show important differences in how each of these factors influenced perceived issue diversity in both countries. Whereas younger, more educated and politically interested Taiwanese with higher levels of media use tended to be able to cite more issues, Americans with higher levels of issue diversity tended to be older, well read, and more likely to feel a strong sense of civic duty (see also King & McCombs, 1994). A similar comparative study of the content and the appeal of political television spots from the 1996 presidential elections in Taiwan and the United States found "substantial evidence of cultural variation" in how Taiwanese and Americans perceive these advertisements (C. Chang, 2000, p. 14).

## Japan

Despite the relatively large community of Japanese media scholars, the field of political communication research in Japan is still limited in terms of theoretical approaches and depth of research. Although Japanese and other Asian communication scholars have created some unique media theories based on concepts such as "shame" and "keeping face," the focus of much of Japan's media research is determined by governmental or organizational research. Moreover, the research sponsored by quasi-government organizations, such as the Broadcasting Culture

Research Institute (BCRI) of the Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK), has centered on audience research, which has been relatively void of theoretical approaches (for reviews of Japanese communication research, see Cooper, 1997 and Ito 1990, 1993b, 1993c, 2000).

One of the more interesting media studies published from a Japanese perspective is Ito's (2000) review of political communication research in Japan. Ito argued that cultural characteristics of Japanese "make it difficult to apply Western theories on public opinion formation to Japan" because of its unique cultural characteristics (p. 69). According to Ito, the spiral of silence theory, for example, cannot be adequately tested in Japan because Japanese tend to be socially "cohesive" and often shun political subjects in personal conversations in order to avoid disagreement or confrontation. In addition, the strong influence of the government on the Japanese public, said Ito, makes it problematic to apply the "dominant paradigm" of powerful media effects to Japan. Instead, Ito introduced the *tripolar kuuki* model, which suggests that only when two of three major components of political consensus formation agree with each other (i.e., the public, the media, and the government), a process called *kuuki* is created and functions as a social pressure on the third component (p. 74). The author claimed that *kuuki* (an atmosphere or climate of opinion requiring compliance) can explain or predict changes of mass media content in terms of compliance to pressure created and maintained by a coalition of the government and the public (pp. 74, 76).

Although there are relatively few English-language articles on political communication in Japan (while available, most political communication studies are published in Japanese only), a number of comprehensive books about media and politics in Japan have been published in recent years. Probably the best book about the relationship between the mass media and politics in Japan is Pharr and Krauss's (1996) *Media and Politics in Japan*. The book, which provides contemporary perspectives on media and politics in Japan, includes a series of studies about Japanese press-government relations, the impact of the media on Japanese politics and policy change, and the role of the media in Japanese election campaigns. What makes this book particularly useful is its focus on comparative approaches to studying the role of the mass media Japanese politics and democracy and a strong emphasis on media effects. As Pharr and Krauss noted, "Remarkably few scholars outside Japan have conducted research on the contemporary Japanese media's role in politics. In Japan itself, despite the existence of key media research centers at the University of Tokyo, Keiō University, and elsewhere, relatively little research has focused on the broad effects of the media on political life in a comparative framework" (p. ix).

Feldman's (1993) *Politics and the News Media in Japan* describes and analyzes political communication in Japan, with a particular focus on the relationship between the news media and Diet members (members of the Japanese parliament). It shows how the close interaction between reporters and Diet members influences political coverage and how the news media and reporters function as information sources for Diet members. Feldman discussed the importance of national newspapers in Japanese political life, reporters' work patterns, and their formal and informal interaction with political news sources, and revealed how Japanese cultural factors influence the role reporters play in politics.

An interesting analysis of Japan's press or *kisha* clubs, which serve to control access to and presentation of news, is provided in Freeman's (2000) book *Closing*

*the Shop: Information Cartels and Japan's Mass Media*. Freeman's goal was to analyze the implications of press clubs for the press-politics relationship in Japan, the extent to which these clubs are distinct to Japan, and the issue of change and reform in the role of the press in contemporary Japan. The author showed that

within the club structure, sensitive information is limited to an exclusive group of news organizations and is governed by tacit rules of reporting. Reporters and their companies face expulsion if they break these rules regarding confidentiality and the divulgence of privileged information. The clubs are also in large part responsible for the uniformity of views apparent in the Japanese media and make investigative reporting by major newspapers virtually impossible. (p. xvii)

Akhavan-Majid's (1990) review of the press as an elite power group in Japan showed that the Japanese press—by virtue of its integration into the elite power structure—exercises direct participation in government policy making. According to the author, the “mass media-elite integration is due to the interlocking between media conglomerates and the Japanese bureaucracy, arising from the regular flow of high-level bureaucrats into top executive positions in the media industry” (p. 1008). Like other media scholars who have written about the relationship between media and politics in Japan, Akhavan-Majid identified the press clubs and the dependency of media professionals on the friendship and favor of government officials as the major factors responsible for the subtle government control of the newsgathering process.

A number of analyses have investigated the importance of media sources in Japan's political communication environment. Makita and Uemura (2001), for example, showed that most Japanese think newspapers rather than television are the most useful medium for thinking about political and social issues. Interestingly, though, when asked which medium exerts the most influence on public opinion concerning political and social issues, most Japanese chose television instead of newspapers. However, Feldman's (1995) analysis of editorial cartoons in Japan reveals “a growing importance the media allocate to the national political leader as a source of political information and coverage” (p. 571). His conclusions show that editorial cartoons have become an important form of political communication in the Japanese news media since the 1980s, as indicated by the growing number of periodicals that display cartoons illustrating political figures and political situations.

## **Korea**

Although South Korea has a fairly strong communication research tradition, most of the Korean communication studies are not published in English. Thus, similar to Japan, studies published in English-language journals represent only a small slice of Korean political communication research. However, due to the growing number of Korean doctoral students studying at communication programs in the

United States, we should expect to see more media studies from Korea published in English-language journals in the near future.

Despite the relatively limited number of political communication studies from Korea, what is available is characterized by a variety of topics, ranging from analyses of press freedom (J. K. Lee, 1997) to investigations of news media and political advertising in election campaigns (Messaris & Woo, 1991; S. Lee, Kaid, & Tak, 1998). Woo's (1996) content analysis of television news coverage of the 1987 and 1992 Korean Presidential elections, for example, found that private and official television networks in both elections tended to frame events in accordance with the ruling party's vision by eliminating dissenting perspectives, marginalizing the opposition, and narrowing the spectrum of the political discourse. Woo explained these similarities in news coverage with the persisting government controls of the Korean media system through licensing, appointments, elite influence, and censorship.

Focusing on the cultural aspects of political advertising, Tak, Kaid, and Lee (1997) analyzed political newspaper advertisements from six presidential elections in Korea and eight presidential elections in the United States between 1963 and 1992. The findings indicate that Korean candidates tended to use fewer negative and image-based advertisements than their counterparts in the United States but were more likely to mention specific issue positions. According to the authors, this shows that "political advertising messages transmitted by the American and Korean candidates were highly reflective of their cultural orientations" (p. 413). However, a similar content analysis of political television advertisements in the 1992 presidential election in Korea and the United States (S. Lee, Kaid, & Tak, 1998) revealed "a clear sign of 'Americanization' in Korean political advertising in the related categories of logical appeals, emotional appeals, and fear appeals" (p. 83). The study noted, however, that despite the dominance of American campaign styles in Korean political advertising, Korean culture values persisted and were clearly visible in the advertisements' ethical appeals.

Another comparative study, by T. Kim (1995), investigated media effects on uncommitted voters from North Carolina in the 1992 U.S. presidential election and the 1992 presidential election in South Korea. Whereas the main purpose of this study was to identify the usefulness of discriminant analysis for predicting voter behavior (and did not include media variables as predictors), the author showed that cross-national analyses of elections are possible even when these elections differ significantly in terms of culture, the number of candidates, or the nature of the voters themselves.

## Singapore

The fate of political communication research in Singapore has been determined by a number of political and social factors. In his review of communication research in Singapore, E.C.Y. Kuo (1991) noted that "communication research in Singapore has been carried out by researchers from various academic backgrounds without the support of a strong institutional base, and without an established research tradition" (p. 120). This in turn, said the author, has led to a dominance of descriptive rather than theoretical studies conducted at an *ad hoc* basis. Kuo concluded that "communication research in Singapore is lagging both in quality and quantity" (p. 121). Political communication research also might have been discouraged



during the past decade because of Singapore's tight social and political controls and the fact that election research remains a sensitive topic in this city-nation.

Despite these difficulties, the official adoption of the Development Press model by the Singapore government allowed media researchers to conduct a number of carefully phrased studies focusing on press performance. Based on a content analysis of letters to the editor in the national newspaper, *The Straits Times*, Ramaprasad and Ong's study (1990), for example, concluded, that "the salience of the national development themes seems to have been successfully transferred by government into the minds of the people and publishers" (p. 53). The study points out, however, that in contrast to the demands of the traditional Development Press model, some of the letters, although focusing on development issues, were rather critical in tone.

Similarly, Choi's (1999) content analysis of news coverage of juvenile delinquency examines how Singapore's newspapers were able to play a nation-building role while maintaining their individuality throughout the 1990s. The study concludes that the "Singapore press plays a nation-building role by propagating public campaigns initiated and managed by the government" (p. 145). Especially the leading Chinese newspaper, said Choi, emphasized the government policies, whereas other newspapers simply covered cases and events of juvenile delinquency or remained neutral.

The first truly empirical 'media and election' study conducted in Singapore is E.C.Y. Kuo, Holaday, and Peck's (1993) analysis of the role the media played during the 1991 General Election. The study, which is based on a quota sample of 435 Singapore residents, found that the electorate relied heavily on the mass media for information about the election but perceived the election coverage to have low credibility and to be skewed heavily toward the ruling party. The authors suggested that the effectiveness of the media in setting the public agenda during this election was contingent on the critical ability of the audience and their perception of media credibility (see also Holaday & Kuo, 1993). Similarly, Hao's (1996) analysis of data obtained in a telephone poll of 570 randomly selected Singapore residents found that although people in Singapore are basically satisfied with the overall performance of the local press, they also question its credibility, especially with regard to news coverage on domestic politics and government affairs. Hao warns that an increasingly younger, better educated, and critical public might soon begin to question the fundamental credibility of Singapore's press.

In recent years, a growing number of studies focusing on public opinion in Singapore have been published. T. K. Chang (1999), for example, examined the form and content of public opinion reporting in Singapore's news media to determine their social implications for public policy decision making. The findings show that "public opinion surveys in Singapore are fraught with theoretical and methodological problems and that their reporting in the news media leaves much to be desired" (p. 11). The author pointedly concluded that the frequent but incompetent reporting of polls in Singapore's media might lead to the illusion of a responsive government and political complacency in the public.

Gunther and Ang's (1996) analysis of the third-person effect hypothesis examines public opinion about television censorship in Singapore. Data for this study came from face-to-face interviews with 506 randomly selected Singaporeans who evaluated 10 categories of "sensitive" television content. The authors not only found a substantial perceptual bias in all content categories (people feeling that "sensitive" television content influenced others more negatively than themselves), but

also strong opinions favoring censorship of television content. According to the authors, the significant relationship between these two factors suggests that people may support censorship of media in part because of a tendency to overestimate its negative influence.

A recent study by Willnat, Lee, and Detenber (2002) provides partial support for the spiral of silence hypothesis in Singapore. Based on a representative telephone poll of 668 Singaporeans, the study tested the assumption that political outspokenness is largely a function of people's perception of the dominant opinion climate, their perceived importance of critical issues, or other psychological predispositions. As predicted, the findings indicate that respondents who perceived a trend in public opinion against their own beliefs and who considered the tested issues important were less likely to express their opinions on these issues in public. The study also shows that political outspokenness in Singapore is associated with respondents' self-concept of interdependence, fear of social isolation, and general communication apprehension.

## Indonesia

Relatively few political communication studies have been conducted in Indonesia, most likely as the result of President Suharto's tight political control. It is, therefore, not surprising that most of the political communication studies coming from Indonesia focus on the role of the mass media in the collapse of Suharto's regime in 1998. However, due to enormous political changes in Indonesia in the past years, it is reasonable to expect a significant increase in media studies from this important Asian country.

One of the few political communication studies published before Indonesia's democratic reforms is Soesilo and Wasburn's (1994) comparative content analysis of news coverage of the Gulf War in *The New York Times* and the Indonesian newspaper *Kompas* between 1990 and 1991. Based on a framing analysis of the news coverage found in these two leading national newspapers, the study concludes that the "media in Indonesia is ideologically committed to the norms of a 'developmental press' that support the social and economic needs of their nation and give priority to news and information of their government" (p. 7). A similar analysis by Massey (2000) investigates how Asian newspapers framed the smoke cloud that covered Southeast Asia in 1997 and 1998. On the basis of an analysis of news coverage of the haze in *The Straits Times* (Singapore), *New Straits Times* (Malaysia) and *The Jakarta Post* (Indonesia), the author found that "the newspapers tended to emphasize generally non-confrontational frames and to downplay those that potentially were politically sensitive" (p. 72). Massey concluded that Asian journalism distinguishes itself from Western news reporting because of the strong influence of regional and national ideologies and a political sensitivity toward neighboring nations.

The first investigation of how the Indonesian mass media influenced the democratic reforms that started with Suharto's resignation in 1998 was provided by McCargo (1999). The study examines the political significance of government banning of three leading weekly publications in Indonesia, *Tempo*, *DeTik*, and *Editor*, arguing that the banning illustrated a loss of focus and direction by then-President Suharto, and were part of an attempt to balance rival interest groups and suppress political dissent. A more comprehensive analysis of this issue is offered in Sen and Hill's (2000) recent book *Media, Culture, and Politics in Indonesia*. The authors

provided an interesting overview of the interactions between the mass media and the political institutions in Indonesia, and the role the media have played in the collapse of Suharto regime. d'Haenens, Gazali, and Verelst (1999) provided a similar analysis of the roles played by Indonesian television news during the political reforms in Indonesia. The authors sketched the fast-changing Indonesian television landscape before and after Suharto and examined the extent to which Indonesia's national context allows for 'quality' in television news. Based on in-depth interviews with local news makers and policy makers at both state and commercial television stations, the authors concluded that political control and a lack of professionalism still obstruct Indonesian news making.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has shown that political communication in Asia is a relatively under-developed and incoherent field of research. Many of the studies discussed here are descriptive in nature and do not attempt to incorporate theoretical approaches developed in either the West or the East. And although many of the descriptive media studies found in Asia provide fascinating insights into the political function of the mass media in narrow national contexts, they only offer little theoretical significance to the rest of the world. Undoubtedly, the persistent focus on government–press relations and political events in political communication studies from Asia has supported this descriptive, non-theoretical trend. Of course, such a focus is hardly surprising, given the fact that press freedom and government control of the mass media are pressing issues in most Asian countries.

It is, of course, understandable that significant political events such as the student protests at Tiananmen Square or the political handover of Hong Kong have captivated the attention of many Asian media scholars. Unfortunately, the attentiveness to press freedom and political events found in Asian political communication research has led to a neglect of research on more theoretical issues, especially empirical research analyzing media effects and public opinion formation.

It would be unfair, however, to blame only media scholars for a descriptive bias in Asian political communication research. Institutional differences between the political systems in the East and those in the West, a lack of democratic election politics in some Asian countries, an often limited freedom to conduct political studies, and a general shortage of research funding have made it difficult for researchers to conduct political communication research in Asia.

What seems obvious, though, is the fact that the international visibility of political communication research from Asia will only increase if researchers adopt more theoretical perspectives in their research. One way to enhance the international significance of political communication studies from Asia would be to adopt a comparative research approach. Such an approach would not only avoid a possibly narrow national perspective (and therefore make research interesting to a wider international audience), but would also allow scholars to incorporate and then test the validity of theoretical ideas and concepts across nations.

The call for more comparative studies extends, of course, to all political communication research, be it descriptive or not. In general, the field of political communication research has been characterized by narrow national perspectives around the world, not only in Asia. The consequences have been relatively dull and

repetitive political communication studies analyzing a myriad of variations of the same basic ideas, especially so in the United States and Europe. The lack of studies comparing media theories across nations or cultures clearly shows that, for too long, political communication theories have been tested within national contexts only, often ignoring the potential impact social or cultural variables might have. As McQuail (2000) noted,

the task for the future is not to achieve a body of “unbiased” theory, since this is not humanly possible or even desirable. But we need theory that is not vitiated by its (inevitable) cultural and value bias and not simply a branch of ideology. We need especially a diversity of (better) theory to cope with the increasingly complex interactions between the seeming imperatives of communication technology and the many different cultural situations and value systems. (p. 12)

In other words, there is an apparent need for more comparative studies that would establish the validity of prominent media theories in different political, social, and cultural settings. Asia, of course, provides a rich testing ground for re-examining established media theories in a “new” (or relatively unexplored) political, social, and cultural context. The quest for more theoretical and comparative political communication studies in Asia, for example, might focus on the possible significance of the concept “culture” in future political communication studies. The inclusion of such concepts as individualism/collectivism, “saving face,” or the Chinese concept of *li* in studies of public opinion formation is likely to open up a variety of new research venues that could invigorate the field of political communication.

Noelle-Neumann’s (1974) spiral of silence theory, for example, which analyzes the impact of perceptions of opinion distributions in society as a predictor of political outspokenness, has been successfully tested in a number of different countries. What has been largely ignored, however, are social and cultural differences that might affect political outspokenness in each of the tested nations. In Western countries such as the United States, for example, people who speak up are likely to be perceived as competent, friendly, or intelligent. In cultures where personal uniqueness is less desired and verbal challenges are considered impolite, though, outspokenness can be regarded as a negative characteristic.

As this example shows, political, social, and cultural differences between countries or regions of the world should be seen as opportunities to test media theories in other settings and under different conditions—rather than as obstacles that demand a basic rethinking of the theoretical approach. The challenge of such comparative studies will be, of course, to provide valid and coherent explanations of diverging media effects observed in different cultures.

Although a number of prominent Asian media scholars have asked for the development of a unique Asian perspective on communication research because of their belief that many of the Western media theories cannot be applied to the special political and cultural environments found in Asia, such a perspective has materialized in only a few studies so far (Ha & Pratt, 2000).

However, other Asian scholars have begun to question the usefulness of a possible “Asian” communication theory and started to reject the call for a unique Asian perspective that would “shake off” Western influences. G. Wang and Shen (2000), for example, argue that Asian researchers should recognize their cultural heritage,

but, at the same time, “enrich the existing body of knowledge through testing and formulating theories” (p. 29).

What is obvious is the fact that Asia has an enormous potential for offering fresh and exciting research opportunities to political communication researchers. The greatest potential for new studies can be found in Asian countries that have been neglected or ignored during the past decades. While the number of political communication studies from Japan, Korea, and Singapore published in English-language journals has been rising slowly during the past 10 years, research output from other Asian countries, such as Thailand, Indonesia, and Malaysia has been minimal. Considering the unique political, social, and cultural characteristics of these countries (not to mention their importance based on sheer population size), this indicates a major gap in Asian communication research.

Other opportunities for new political communication research can be found in the relatively underdeveloped field of public opinion and election research in Asia. The noticeable lack of studies on the role of the media in Asian elections indicates that researchers need to pay more attention to media effects on political attitudes and voting behavior. Moreover, because most of the available media and election studies in Asia have focused on institutional-level effects, what is called for at this point are studies that *empirically* test political media effects at the individual rather than the institutional level. In other words, what is needed are more studies based on public opinion polls and experiments.

Finally, more attention should be paid also to the potential impact of information technology on political events and developments in Asia. The growing use of cell phones and text messaging throughout Asia, for example, might support the dissemination of political information in nations that do not have a well established or politically free media system. The claim that text messages transmitted via cell phones were instrumental in the success of political protests in the Philippines and in Indonesia indicates that new communication technologies can play an important political role in Asia. Another example is Japan’s highly developed communication infrastructure, which offers fascinating opportunities to study the impact of new communication technologies even before they reach Western nations. Noteworthy also is the fact that the political function of the Internet in the ongoing democratization process of many Asian countries remains largely unexplored.

Overall, the future of Asian political communication research seems bright and full of opportunities for researchers interested in expanding the findings of Western studies and in re-examining established media theories in different contexts. The hope is that an increased awareness of political communication studies from Asia will help generate new ideas and a better understanding of how profoundly the media affect our lives around the world.

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PART

# VI

## **NEW TRENDS IN POLITICAL COMMUNICATION CHANNELS AND MESSAGES**



## **Changing the Channel: Use of the Internet for Communicating About Politics**

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What a fascinating time for political communication researchers. Rarely do we get to witness the launch of a medium with such broad and sweeping potential to change significantly communication behavior. Not since the introduction of the television more than a half-century ago has there been such a flurry about a communication medium. Whether referred to as cyberspace, the Web, the information superhighway, or, more formally, the Internet, this new medium has linked the world through a shared, virtual space that brings a whole new meaning to McLuhan's (1964) conceptualization of the global village.

Understandably, the Internet's launch immediately fascinated researchers and triggered positivist, interpretive, and critical researchers alike to explore its role in practically all aspects of the diverse communication field. Whereas the Internet has broad implications for virtually all communication research areas spanning interpersonal, organizational, mass, intercultural, and international communication, its arrival coincides with many global occurrences that make it particularly interesting for political communication. The development and expansion of global economic partnerships, the dramatic revolt against communism and subsequent struggles to restore governments throughout Eastern Europe, China's uncertain movement toward a free-market economy (Taubman, 1998; Toulouse, 1998), and the war against global terrorism provide an extraordinary political backdrop for the Internet's emergence and development.

The Internet quickly transformed the way individuals, organizations, political institutions, and governments communicate and negotiate political information and political roles. Although only a decade young, considerable academic inquiry into the Internet's political potential and limitations already exists. The Internet appears to have polarized political observers into camps of optimists and skeptics.

Generally, optimists hope that the Internet will transform and stimulate participatory democracy, whereas skeptics disregard the Internet as little more than a tool to reinforce political communication mechanisms currently in place. Reports regarding the Internet's political and social impact obviously cannot be conclusive at this early point in its development, particularly since the Internet is not only penetrating into societies at a blistering pace but also maturing in function and form. We need only compare the evolution of television throughout the decades to understand the depths of transformation that will certainly alter the Internet as we know it. Nevertheless, academicians have started building programmatic research agendas, exploring the Internet's characteristics, adaptation, content, effects, and future development possibilities. Although the Internet is certainly a global medium with implications for cross-national comparisons of its role in various governments, the majority of the research in this review is limited to the American experience.

Clearly, American candidates and voters have recognized the convenience of the Internet as a tool of political communication. In fact, Selnow (1998) argues that the expected growth rates for the Internet and its popularity among candidates and public assure that it will grow to become as essential to political communication as traditional media. As the Internet ushers political communication researchers into a new era of study, this chapter aims (1) to provide an overview of the dominant theoretical and philosophical foundations of scholarly inquiry regarding politics and the Internet, (2) to present an exploration of Internet characteristics and their implications for politics, (3) to describe developments and trends in Internet users and uses, (4) to discuss research exploring Internet political content and effects, and (5) to offer some directions for future research inquiry.

Investigation of topics such as the characteristics of the medium, its uses and users, its effects, and its potential for development and improvement are characteristic of what Wimmer and Dominick (2000) identify as the four phases of mass media research. Although these research phases may be envisioned in linear fashion, Internet research is flourishing at various stages in each of the four areas. Emergent lines of political communication research span such issues as the Internet and public access, credibility of on-line political information, media ownership and commercialization of cyberspace, on-line political campaigning and political activism, and Web site content variables. Additional research explores elements of theory ranging from Habermas's notion of political participation and the public sphere to democratic pluralism and elitism. As the Internet penetration rates increase, candidates and political organizations will certainly rely more on the medium as a means to communicate with constituents. As campaigns, candidates, and citizens begin to "change the channel" and provide the Internet a more prominent role in modern politics, it is fruitful to assess scholarly commentary and criticism, theoretical developments, research obstacles, and the evolution in our understanding of the medium's impact on politics.

## **THE INTERNET AND THE POLITICAL/MEDIA ENVIRONMENT**

An overview and assessment of the Internet must place this medium within the context of its development. Expectations of the Internet are undoubtedly influenced by its emergence within the context of a somewhat precarious time in American

political history. For example, civic engagement, as evidenced by record low voter participation rates in many elections, is at all-time lows (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Putnam, 1995a, 1995b). Additionally, scholarly acknowledgment of the paucity of participation in civic affairs and the increasing public cynicism (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Elshtain, 1995; Fishkin, 1995; Putnam, 1995a, 1995b) raises concern about the potency of our democracy.

Even though some scholarly criticism of our current state of low civic engagement is directed at candidates and citizens, the media (particularly television) are the targets of much of the disapproval (e.g., Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Patterson, 1993; Sabato, 1991). For example, as Kaid, McKinney, and Tedesco (2000) summarize, political communication scholars argue that television has a seducing effect on viewers and produces feelings and behaviors that promote civic indolence (Hart, 1999). Furthermore, it is argued that our political news is presented “as ‘peek-a-boo’ politics—a series of short, hit-and-run stories that emphasize the visual more than the substantive aspects of social issues and public policy” (Gronbeck, 1996, p. 32). Compounding the criticisms of media reporting styles is the finding that the amount of campaign coverage by the major U.S. networks is decreasing. For example, campaign coverage during the 1996 general election was down by nearly 50% from the amount of coverage provided during the 1992 general election (Lichter, Noyes, & Kaid, 1999). Even more discouraging is the limited campaign content among local news media, which serve as the primary source of the majority of citizens’ campaign information (Kaid et al., 2000). As the majority of Americans report that television news is their primary information source, the discouraging findings and observations call into question whether citizens are able to make informed voting decisions based on the content they receive from television news.

The electorate’s large reliance on televised media is central to criticism regarding mediated political information presentation and content. As described by Bennett (1996), by controlling political information, media control the most important commodity of democracy. Similarly, Swanson (1992) describes a “political-media complex” in which politicians are hostage to the established media formats; getting their message to the public necessitates packaging the message according to the established news structure. According to Swanson, “things are going from bad to worse... Constructed news spectacles, sound-bite news, personalized issues, negative campaigning, and other afflictions of contemporary political communication are the products of a self-serving, self-absorbed political-media complex” (p. 399). Despite criticism of news for various reasons, Norris (2000) provides convincing evidence that “many theories suggesting that journalism in general and TV news in particular contribute to public cynicism and disengagement receive no support from the individual-level survey evidence” (p. 305). Norris, using numerous media and political activity indicators, completed a trend analysis of National Election Survey (NES) data from 1952 to 1996 to argue that “American democracy and American news media are far healthier than many naysayers would have us believe” (p. 306). Although it does not appear that evidence exists to support the hypothesis that news exposure increases political cynicism, the previously stated comments from political communication scholars indicate a clear recommendation for higher-quality media coverage of political communication content.

Given the status of communication in U.S. political campaigns as presented above, it is no wonder that there was both hopeful expectation and explicit skepticism regarding the Internet’s potential as a vehicle for reinventing



American democracy and increasing political participation. Optimists argued that information in cyberspace would enable candidates, citizens, and political organizations to bypass the news organizations' current grip on the content, tone, and flow of the majority of political communication. Moreover, it was expected that the Internet would facilitate the move away from the entrenched and restricting mold of current broadcast news structure. The Internet appeared boundless to limits of individual expression, provided hope for lateral communication structure, and offered promise to sever the hierarchical public dependence on the established media. However, initial observers portrayed cyberspace as a complex maze of too much raw information that was often unofficial, unsubstantiated, and impenetrable and rarely accomplished its interactive potential (Barber, Mattson, & Peterson, 1997).

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MEDIUM

The Internet is the by-product of a Department of Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency program that was charged with the task of building a communication network able to endure a nuclear attack (Glass, 1996; Rheingold, 1995). As Delli Carpini (1996) aptly declared, "Defining new technology is no simple task," particularly because "new technologies interact with older ones to produce hybrid forms of communication" (p. 37). Attempts to define the Internet exhibit a clear example of the problems associated with defining new technology. For example, policy makers and member nations of the United Nations, along with the International Telecommunications Union and the World Trade Organization, battle over whether the Internet should be defined as a broadcast medium or a telecommunications medium. Although the political battles these organizations endure over broadcast spectrum and satellite space allocation go beyond the scope of this chapter, they exhibit Delli Carpini's argument regarding the conceptual and political difficulties of defining new technology. The Internet, dubbed the "master medium" (Selnow, 1998), is revolutionary because it is a hybrid of the largely one-directional print, audio, and video media while offering the opportunity for a two-way communication feedback loop. Another revolutionary feature of the Internet is its lack of information control structures or gatekeeping that characterize traditional print and broadcast media (Margolis, Resnick, & Tu, 1997).

What delineates the Internet from traditional print and broadcast media, at least in theory, is that its communication network offers ordinary citizens unrestricted access and ability to voice their political agenda to a worldwide audience. One of the primary reasons that the Internet is so widely appealing to political candidates and political organizations is that this medium offers a source-controlled form of communication. Although advertising also provides a source-controlled, unmediated communication message, Internet sites are much less expensive than advertisements. Furthermore, the expanse of the Internet offers candidates, citizens, and political groups unlimited space to articulate completely policy positions, biographical information, speech texts, press releases, and a variety of other important political information (Tedesco, Miller, & Spiker, 1999). As Tedesco et al. (1999) argue, the unmediated aspect of the Internet is considered an asset by media skeptics but perceived as potentially disadvantageous to citizens reliant on media to contextualize and interpret political information.

## Structural Opportunities

The hope for the Internet rests with its inherent structural opportunities. In an essay entitled “Tocqueville and the Internet,” Glyn Davis (1997) offered an insightful comparison of his observations of the communication dynamism surrounding the Internet in the 1990s with Tocqueville’s account of the vibrancy and multiplicity of American journalism during the 1830s. Although Davis does not explicitly refer to the Herculean task required to circumvent the entrenched political–media complex (Swanson, 1992) and its stronghold on American politics, he is optimistic that the quick response by many Americans to embrace the Internet and use it to voice their opinions signifies the health and endurance of American democracy. Comparing his observations to those of Tocqueville, Davis (1997) argues that “the same restless energy once found in American journals, the profusion of sources—and the same variable quality of messages—have found a new domain in cyberspace” (pp. 123–124). Although most political observers are not quick to assign democratic merits to the Internet solely on the basis of its ingenuity, Davis’s observations during the early years of the Internet suggest that, if nurtured, the Internet structure offers the public an opportunity to recapture the “spontaneity and multiplicity” reminiscent of Tocqueville’s observations.

Following the 1996 presidential election, researchers at Rutgers University completed a comprehensive analysis of the content of political Web sites and presented an overview of the possibilities and impediments impacting the Internet’s potential to contribute to a more participatory, direct democracy (Barber et al., 1997). Their overview demonstrates that the Internet contains the following structural possibilities for electronically enhanced democracy:

- (a) inherent interactivity; (b) potential for lateral and horizontal communication; (c) point-to-point and non-hierarchical modes of communication; (d) low costs to users (once a user is set up); (e) rapidity as a communication medium; (f) lack of national or other boundaries; and (g) freedom from the intrusion and monitoring of government. (Barber et al., 1997, p. 8)

Similarly, Sparks (2001) cited six advantages of the Internet as a political tool. In addition to some of the structural advantages identified by Barber et al. (1997), Sparks included anonymity of social actors, discursive requirements, and search mechanisms as central advantages of the Internet. According to Sparks (2001), anonymity should be considered as an advantage because it removes otherwise repressive, socially identifiable criteria such as age, sex, race, and accent that might otherwise prejudice or exclude a participant’s contribution to political dialogue (pp. 79–80).

Despite the possibilities and advantages identified by these two comprehensive explorations of the Internet’s potential, the authors indicated that most web sites failed to take advantage of the Internet’s intrinsic interactive potential. Specifically, the authors conclude that most sites succumbed to the Internet’s innate obstacles for public participation and interaction, such as information overload, hierarchical structure, and passive, noninteractive design (Barber et al., 1997). Although the Internet offers candidates and citizens tools for quality communication, extensive research, such as the Congress Online study addressed later in this chapter,

demonstrates that few political sites capitalize on the Internet's enhanced communication opportunities.

## **INTERNET USERS AND USES**

### **Internet Access and the "Digital Divide"**

Initially, criticism addressing the Internet's role in politics focused on issues of limited access. For example, researchers argued that the variance between Internet users and nonusers was explained mostly through economic factors (Anderson, Bikson, Law, & Michael, 1995). In fact, Anderson et al. (1995) indicated that a mere 7% of low-income households had computers, whereas the penetration rate was a significantly higher 55% for high-income households. At the time of their study, the rates of usage for computer-mediated communication among low- and high-income households were 3% and 23%, respectively. Hacker (1996a) added that understanding about the future of electronic democratization must reflect the fact that the majority of Americans remain technologically unsophisticated. He cautioned that citizens who are inclined to use the Internet for political participation are the same politically active individuals that use the other available means of participation. Hacker's observations from these initial years of the Internet indicated that increased access to the Internet did not necessarily translate to increased political participation. Furthermore, a 1996 Pew survey showed that the on-line population was not uniformly representative of the national demographics as a whole. Survey results showed that the on-line population was younger, more educated, more male, and wealthier than the average population. Results from the 1996 Pew study indicated that race was not a discriminating predictor of on-line access.

Without a doubt, the Internet is in its most mature form in the United States (Sparks, 2001). As Sparks reported, data from two U.S. Census Bureau door-to-door interviews with 48,000 citizens showed that household ownership of computers (from 24.1% to 36.6%), modems (from 11% to 26.3%), and e-mail (3.4% to 16.9%) increased significantly during the 3-year period from October 1994 to October 1997. The diffusion of the Internet among higher-income households appears in keeping with established patterns of diffusion of innovations (Rogers, 1995). However, a report from the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA, 1998) cautioned that social indicators such as education, income, and age demonstrate a "digital divide" between information haves and have-nots. Similarly, data collected between 1994 and 1997 showed a widening gap in diffusion rates of computer technology among higher-income and lower-income households (Sparks, 2001).

Additional research on the digital divide in the United States challenges "utopian predictions of the universal benefits provided by the tools of the digital revolution" (Hindman, 2000, p. 557). Hindman's research demonstrates that structural barriers based on residential location were not as strong predictors of access to the Internet as social indicators of age, income and education. In fact, Hindman (2000) presented evidence that the gaps in traditional social indicators for innovation adaptation were widening and he speculated that traditional social indicators also discriminate Internet impact and effectiveness on the lives of users. Perhaps more significant than the divide in adaptation was the finding that social indicators that advantage access also appeared to advantage the rewards gained from access.

Similarly, Kling (1999) draws a distinction between technological access and social access, with the former relating to the physical equipment and the latter referring to what Kling describes as “know-how,” or basic functional Internet literacy and skills to operate the equipment. Drawing from Kling’s distinction, Bucy (2000) investigated several discriminating factors that predict social access to the Internet. Bucy’s analysis of surveys in North Carolina and Indiana supports national data and general trends in social indicators of income, education, and age as predictors of Internet access. Slow or lagged adaptation of the information technology and the subsequent tools of that technology put rural citizens and organizations at an obvious disadvantage (Hindman, 2000). Additionally, as the world moves toward technological and media convergence, the consequences of citizen failure to join the new era of communication could result in complete detachment from society (Hammond, 1997).

Thus, during the initial years of Internet development and penetration, criticism regarding a digital divide and social barriers predicted by age, income, and education were well documented by researchers. However, the most recent evidence from the Pew Internet and American Life Project demonstrates that Internet diffusion is occurring more rapidly than diffusion of other forms of communication technology (Howard, Ranie, & Jones, 2001). Perhaps more significant to the ramifications of Internet access on political communication variables is the finding from this report that shows “94 million American adults have Internet access” (p. 383). Access rates, according to this major survey of more than 12,000 Americans, show that gaps in gender have closed, and the divide among race, education level, and economic status groups is closing. The Pew Internet and American Life Project findings indicate that

there has been a sharp increase in access to the Internet among those with less than college education, those from households with middle- and working-class incomes, and especially among African Americans and Hispanics. The overall online population is looking more and more like the population of the country. (Howard et al., 2001, p. 384)

These researchers predict that gaps in access will continue among age and economic groups, with elderly and low-income groups less likely to close the gaps in access.

### **Candidates Turn to Political Web Sites**

The 1992 Clinton campaign holds the distinction of being the first political campaign to distribute speech text over the Internet (Whillock, 1997). As Hacker (1996b) acknowledges, the Clinton–Gore administration was the first to utilize the Internet in such a way as to promote electronic democratization. In fact, the Clinton “administration began distributing press releases and general interest information over the Internet on January 20, 1993” (Whillock, 1997, p. 1213).

By the 1996 political election cycle, all serious presidential candidates, the majority of U.S. congressional candidates, more than 1,500 governments of various levels, and countless interest groups had established an on-line presence (Browning, 1996; D’Alessio, 1997; Davis, 1999; Klotz, 1997; Tedesco et al., 1999). The quick adoption of the Internet as a prominent means for political campaigning is

emphasized by Hill and Hughes's (1998, p. 133) observation that 1994 candidates with even the most rudimentary Web sites were innovators of the "Information Age," while they charged that candidates without Web sites in 1997 were antiquated. Analysis of candidate adoption of the World Wide Web from 1996 to 1998 demonstrated a clear preference among challengers to adopt the Web as a campaign tool (D'Alessio, 2000). Although candidates recognized the need to establish a Web presence, assessment of candidate communication via the Web indicated that candidates were not using Web tools to make the candidate-public relationship stronger. Candidates also failed to use the Web for its efficient fundraising prospects (Dulio, Goff, & Thurber, 1999). In fact, D'Alessio's analysis of candidate Web strategies during the 1996 and 1998 election cycles indicates that the nature of candidate Web presence signified little more than an on-line campaign brochure. D'Alessio (2000) concludes that such limited strategies do not capitalize on the full possibilities of the medium and, as a result, will not lead to a more participatory democracy.

However, the Internet's unlimited access opportunity led to expectations that third-party candidates, and otherwise financially mismatched or underrepresented voices, would embrace the medium as a means to increase the representation of their voice in campaign dialogue. Even the most financially challenged campaigns usually have sufficient resources to post Web pages that can rival their dominant Republican and Democratic opponents. Because Web sites enable unmediated access to Internet users, third-party campaigns and political groups otherwise unrecognized by media have the ability to articulate their messages fully in cyberspace. However, although Klotz's (1997) analysis indicates that 50 of 68 major party candidates in the 34 1996 U.S. Senate races had Web sites, less than half of the Libertarian candidates in these races followed suit. Despite the argument that Libertarians would be expected to embrace the free access possibilities of the Internet, Klotz found that only 9 of the 20 Libertarian candidates established Web pages. Despite the access possibilities and the potential to rival their major party candidates by fully articulating issue platforms, posting press releases, and providing speech transcripts and extensive biographical information, Libertarian candidate Web sites often were found to be less complete and more mundane than those of their major party rivals.

Although Whillock (1997, p. 1216) argues that "strategists for underdog candidates viewed the Internet as a way to circumvent traditional news filters to get their message straight to the public," she also reminds us of Ellul's (1962) notion of the "technological bluff," which cautions that technology should not be held capable of solving all problems, as it may also be responsible for its own set of problematic consequences. Certainly, the move to the Internet presented numerous obstacles for candidates and citizens alike.

## **The Internet, Politics, and the Public Sphere**

The issue of access is at the foundation of the widely explored notion of the Internet and the public sphere. Many researchers analyzed the possibilities inherent in the Web's ability to promote an all-inclusive public sphere and offer an electronic Athena (Bennett & Entman, 2001; McIntosh & Cates, 1998; Resnick, 1998; Roper, 1998; Streck, 1998). According to Bennett and Entman (2001, pp. 2-3) the public sphere is "comprised of any and all locations, physical or virtual, where ideas and feelings relevant to politics are transmitted or exchanged openly." Pulling

from the foundations of Habermas (1989), Bennett and Entman (2001, p. 3) argue that in “the ideal public sphere, all citizens have equal access to communication that is both independent of government constraint, and through its deliberative, consensus-building capacity, constrains the agendas and decisions of government in return.” Researchers argue that citizens want an accessible, noncommercialized public sphere where they can engage in political information exchange (Bryan, Tsagarousianou, & Tambini, 1998).

As the numerous research studies cited previously conclude, equal access to the Internet is not quite realized. Internet access is widely available at most public libraries throughout the country, which is helping to diminish the digital divide. However, as Kling (1999) and Hindman (2000) argue, the technological skills necessary for access present obstacles for the achievement of an ultimate public sphere. Although Gamson (2001, p. 56) acknowledges that “there is a recurrent theme that, in a democracy, public discourse can and should empower citizens, give them voice and agency, build community, and help citizens to act on behalf of their interests and values,” it is clear that the majority of citizens are neither empowered to use the Internet to achieve community nor skilled to share their interests on-line.

Although there are various forms of functional democracies observable throughout the world, most norms include a reasonably active and engaged polity with freedoms to speak and assemble on behalf of their interests. Such norms certainly reflect the expectations envisioned in Habermas’s public sphere. However, political theorists debate whether the health of a democracy is contingent on high rates of public participation and an all-inclusive public sphere. For example, not all democratic theories embrace the participatory, public-sphere model as the ultimate goal of democracies. For example, the limited citizenship model and its followers argue that representative democracy can function well, perhaps more efficiently, when citizens are limited in their political participation beyond electing leaders (Gamson, 2001).

Although optimists hoped that the Internet would result in an electronic Athena, Bimber (1998) predicts that the Internet will result in a system of “hyperpluralism.” Hyperpluralism results when too many special interest groups engage in policy making, which scholars argue will confuse and clutter legislative process and lead to gridlock (Lowi, 1979; Olson, 1971). Whereas populists held hopes that the Internet would promote the public sphere and empower citizens, thus enabling them to escape from current political elitism, Bimber (1998, 2000) argues that the political environment will be reformed with pluralism at the center of political activity. Public groups formed or collected for the purpose of mobilizing or managing a particular issue may result in the fact that pluralism “increasingly takes on a fragmented and unstable character, through the rapid organization of issue publics for the duration of a lobbying effort” (Bimber, 1998, p. 156). More recently, Bimber (2000, p. 332) argues that “groups and organizations formed only for the duration of a single political effort or civic event may increasingly replace more traditional, institutionalized entities as organizers of civic engagement.” Others question whether the economic and social shifts that have led to a period of poststructuralism or globalization will result in citizens engaging less around traditional campaign politics and more around “lifestyle” issues such as the environment, labor issues, and human rights (Bennett, 2000). Thus, although some observers hoped that the Internet would immediately promote a public sphere representative of the diverse set of voices, it is clear that not all voices are contributing to the virtual public sphere. Furthermore,

as noted, some theorists suggest that the expectation of a virtual public sphere is both unrealistic and potentially disruptive to an efficient democracy.

## INTERNET EFFECTS

### The Internet's Structural Obstacles

Numerous scholars cite media, television in particular, as a contributing factor to public cynicism and the decrease in basic political functions such as party alignment and voting (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Gronbeck, 1996; Hart, 1999; Putnam, 1993, 1995a; Swanson, 1992). Scholars argue that the Internet's ability to foster the public sphere is threatened by the existing media structure. For example, Gandy (2001) is skeptical about the Internet's ability to transcend the current media environment. Although Gandy acknowledges that the Internet transforms the political landscape in significant ways, especially distinct "from the largely one-way, source-driven character of traditional media" (p. 150), he is not optimistic that attempts by media to apply the broadcast model to the Internet will result in a more engaged and active public. Similarly, scholars caution that

the Internet may develop just as American broadcasting did: after a somewhat anarchistic period of open access and high hopes for diversity, noncommercial sites will become marginalized, difficult to find, and not very influential. And as opposed to broadcasting, where as we have discussed, most nations operated until recently on different bases from that in the United States, the American commercial model could more or less completely and rapidly take over the Internet. (Bennett & Entman, 2001, p. 4)

Even prior to the Internet, Entman (1989) recognized that as tools are developed for more selectively targeted communication "commonality of public engagement may diminish to the point of having democracies without citizens" (p. 17).

Furthermore, critics warn that Web technology alone will not create deliberative democracy and civic involvement (Barber, 1998; Barber et al., 1997); but exploiting the possibilities of developing technology makes deliberative democracy and civic involvement accessible in another form. Others argue that without governmental controls or regulation, media organizations have little incentive to encourage political participation and civic engagement or assume other public service roles (Bennett & Entman, 2001).

Gandy (2001) argues that the Internet's structure enables more sophisticated segmentation and targeting, which are exclusionary in practice and contradictory to the fundamental assumptions of the inclusive ideals of the public sphere. Similarly, Bennett and Manheim (2001, p. 282) argue that increased segmentation and targeting of political messages "subordinate the ideal of deliberation and transparency to the achievement of narrow political goals." Others argue that the need for more specialized targeting techniques resulted from the growth in media choices and the recognition that the truly massive mass audience from early broadcast days no longer exists (Bennett & Entman, 2001). Similarly, Liebes and Peri (1998) recognize that "sphercules," or narrowly and locally allied audience groups, are more likely than a public sphere to result from segmentation. Thus, it is speculated that the

Internet provides tools that will result in a more segmented public that will become marginalized by their inability to communicate a shared experience.

In fact, researchers argue that the Internet is moving in the direction of the traditional media, with a focus on entertainment and marketing strategies of segmentation and targeting, which are in conflict with the prosocial information possibilities of this new medium (Barber et al., 1998; Gandy, 2001). Additionally, McChesney (1999) recognizes a global trend in the increase of media entertainment, lifestyles, and commercial content, which he argues is detrimental to political content and undermines public media. Selnow (1998) best captured the entertainment and commercial shift of the Internet, as follows:

Afraid to be a breakthrough behind, the big players in the Fortune 500—such as GE–NBC, Disney, ABC, Westinghouse–CBS, and the national news organs—sent their claims takers into Cyberspace. Their money has had quite an effect on the evolution of the medium. (p. xxiii)

These structural obstacles, coupled with the unrealized structural opportunities presented previously, raise fundamental questions about the Internet's potential to increase civic engagement.

### **Civic Engagement and Civic Participation**

Conventional wisdom would dictate that citizens who are not inclined to watch television news or political debates, let alone exercise their right to vote, would not be inclined to access the Web in search of political interests unless it was demonstrated to be easier, more gratifying, or personally rewarding. One of the first research studies to measure the effects of computer-mediated political communication on patterns of political activity reported that motivation to use computer-mediated political bulletin boards was predicted by previous patterns of political participation (Garramone, Harris, & Pizante, 1986). Garramone et al. (1986) concluded that this new technology worked to widen the gap between politically active and politically inactive. Similarly, both Hacker (1996a) and Baran (1995) concluded that computer-mediated communication eventually would increase the gap between the economically and educationally privileged and the underprivileged.

Gamson (2001, p. 56) identifies that in the public discourse literature, “a recurrent theme that in a democracy, public discourse can and should empower citizens, give them voice and agency, build community, and help citizens to act on behalf of their interests and values.” As mentioned previously, the recurrent theme of a participatory democracy is epitomized by Barber's (1984, p. 151) strong democracy, which he defines as “self-government by citizens rather than representatives.” Gamson reminds us that some democratic theorists acknowledge that a healthy democracy can endure, and perhaps function more fluidly, when large segments of the citizenship are passive and limited in their political roles. In the limited (or elitist) democracy, encouraging civic engagement or deliberation are not media requirements.

The theoretical framework to which a scholar prescribes undoubtedly influences differences in their assigned expectations and prescriptions for the Internet. For example, although Dahl (1977) suggests that most forms of democracy are based on assumptions of an informed and rational citizenry with available means of



participation, there are clear differences in the levels of democratic achievement in various nations. For example, as Entman and Bennett (2001) suggest, Dahl's (1989) *comparative theory of polyarchy* assesses governments based on a continuum of political participation. Ranges of political participation among the majority of citizens in various governments span from freedom to vote as a minimum democratic right to fully engaged, citizen-defined policy agenda. As Entman and Bennett (2001) identify, political and/or information elitism constrains governments and people from achieving the latter, more deliberate democracy (p. 469). As Norris argues (2000), rather than placing blame on media for creating less than ideal democracies in such diverse postindustrial societies as the United States, Nigeria, Turkey, and Japan, for example, reform should focus on the flaws in the democratic institutions that comprise these governments. Nevertheless, questions about whether the Internet will help to create reform exist. Have scholars placed too heavy a burden of expectation on the Internet?

### **Political Mobilization or Political Reinforcement**

Although the public access rates are increasing to the point where an on-line public sphere is becoming more representative of the American public, the research on civic engagement demonstrates that structural barriers may prevent the Internet from fostering changes in political participation patterns for average citizens. Despite the encouraging access statistics generated from the most recent Pew study, data regarding traditional news viewership continue to show that income, gender, and age still predict attention to traditional news media (Davis & Owen, 1998; Hill & Hughes, 1997; Norris, 2000). Generally, scholars investigating Internet access conclude that traditional predictors of political participation (with the exception of age) are predicting Internet usage for political means. Nevertheless, based on survey research results, Chandrasekaran (1996) estimated that approximately 8.5 million Americans indicated that information found on the Internet influenced their voting decision during the 1996 election.

Norris (2000) recognizes that speculation surrounding the Internet's influence on politics appears to be polarized around support for either *mobilization* or *reinforcement* theories. As Norris identifies, "on the one hand, mobilization theories claim that 'virtual democracy' promises a cornucopia of empowerment in a digital world," whereas "reinforcement theories suggest that use of the Net will strengthen, not radically transform, the existing patterns of social inequality and political participation" (p. 121). Much of the political communication research concerning the Internet addresses one of these disparate views in either theory or application. The least common denominator for the majority of Internet political research is based on whether the medium is energizing a new form of political engagement or whether it is fortifying established power structures. In fact, Sparks (2001) acknowledges that communication access is a significant predictor of "power and equality in modern democracies" (p. 2). His observation that "Communication can shape power and participation in society in negative ways, by obscuring the motives and interests behind political decisions, or in positive ways, by promoting the involvement of citizens in those decisions" (p. 2) is at the root of much of the scholarly investigation of politics and the Internet.

Despite optimism that the Web would empower on-line communities of like-minded citizens (Keane, 1995), promote a better democracy with more informed

voters (Sullivan, 1995), and reunite our previously alienated and fragmented electorate, most research on the Internet and politics draws similar, discouraging conclusions about its impact on civic engagement. Furthermore, Margolis et al. (1997) shed doubt that the Internet will beget fundamental change for democracy or American politics. These authors argue that despite the fact that the Internet will lower informational costs (both financially and physically), the structural advantages of the Republican and Democratic parties will transfer to the Web and make it difficult for lesser-known candidates from third parties to use the Internet as a way to build new constituents.

If the Internet is to realize theorists' hopes of motivating new forms of political activity and civic engagement, it is necessary to explore whether structural factors encourage engagement and to determine whether evidence exists to show that the Internet is altering political communication and political participation. Rheingold (1995, p. 14) argued that the "Internet offered promise and hope to transcend limitations of existing mass media." Yet other scholars anticipated that the Internet "will fragment and polarize society, rob us of our political commons (the currently shared space of newspaper and broadcast journalism), and isolate us from each other" (Neuman, 2001, p. 303). Thus, scholarly debate exists as to whether the Internet will be realized of its potential for direct democracy and participatory politics or whether it will assume similar patterns of structure and control held by established print and broadcast media.

In one of the initial observations of the Internet and its effects, Mann (1995) argues that social activist have effectively built coalitions and established networks of support and cohesion through user groups. Additionally, Hill and Hughes (1997) found that on-line USENET groups were as capable of fulfilling users' support and communication needs as traditional peers and church groups. These authors content analyzed more than 1,000 message threads from a sample of 22 political USENET news groups. Their findings demonstrate clear support that USENET groups function much like other forms of political groups in that they offer debate, information sharing, recruitment possibilities, and social reinforcement. Kern (1997) contributed further mobilization support by suggesting that candidates, politicians, and citizens were working to achieve the promise of the Internet and were starting to "reinvigorate social capital through exploring new communicative processes" (p. 1248).

Additionally, Norris (2000, p. 121) cites work that demonstrates the Internet's possibility for building community (Schwartz, 1996), increasing social capital through bulletin board information exchange (Rheingold, 1995), and decreasing the power distance between government and governed (Grossman, 1995). According to Norris (2000),

By sharply reducing the barriers to civic engagement, leveling some of the financial hurdles, and widening the opportunities for political debate, for dissemination of information, and for group interaction, it is said that the Net may reduce social inequalities in public life. For enthusiasts, the Net promises to provide new forms of horizontal and vertical communication that can facilitate and enrich deliberation in the public sphere. (p. 121)

Unfortunately, research data confirming the Internet's ability to mobilize large segments of previously disengaged citizens are nonexistent at this point.

However, although traditional forms of political participation such as voting are on the decline, there is evidence that other forms of political activity, such as political activism, are on the rise (Inglehart, 1997). Evidence of the Internet's ability to impact group mobilization through political activism already exists in the public relations/issue management literature (Heath, 1998; Scammell, 2000). For example, Shell Oil Company, UK, and Greenpeace each facilitated public dialogue and debate on the decommissioning project involving a potentially dangerous environmental hazard with Shell's Brent Spar crude oil storage tanker. In an effort to understand better the policy environment and public concern about its decision to dump the oil tanker in the North Sea, Shell Oil used its home page to provide information and receive feedback from citizens and special interest groups concerned with this issue. Heath argues that the strategy was effectively used to help circumvent negative media attention and potentially problematic political fallout. Heath's example demonstrates that power is more uniformly distributed among companies, government agencies, and activist groups through on-line communication. Furthermore, Scammell (2000) posits that the Internet and consumer activism trends show increasing associations between political and consumption behavior. Furthermore, researchers conclude that dialogic features on a Web site enable activist organizations to build and strengthen relationships with their publics (Taylor, Kent, & White, 2001). So, although traditional forms of political participation, as measured through such standards as voting, do not appear immediately influential to large changes in political mobilization, there is initial evidence that the Internet is facilitating politically charged issue debate.

However, despite some optimism that the Internet encourages new forms of political participation, the majority of researchers conclude that the Internet, in its current form, is doing more to reinforce current electoral patterns than mobilize new political structures and patterns of personal influence. For example, Norris (2000, p. 122) cites access limitations (Davis & Owen, 1998) and traditional socioeconomic predictors of political participation (Murdock and Golding, 1989) as barriers that must be overcome if the Internet is to transform rather than reinforce the current political structure. Furthermore, Luke (1998) raises concern about Internet access and the structural hierarchy of access among the on-line community. Luke (1998) depicts a future in which the already powerful will develop more diffuse power on-line. Additionally, Barber et al. (1997) conclude that the current one-way public information model does not bode well for the ability of the Internet to realize its potential. Norris (2000, p. 133) presents evidence to support previous speculation that the "gap between the information-rich and the information-poor has widened substantially, at both the individual and societal levels, in the emergent Internet era."

Although the Internet certainly crowds an already supersaturated media environment, some scholars argue that it may be doing more to reinforce not only political behavior but also media behavior. For example, although the growth of the Internet would seem to be a logical cause for the decline in use of local and national television news and newspapers, research shows that Internet users and nonusers cannot serve to discriminate local or national television news viewership (Stempel, Hargrove, & Bernt, 2000). Furthermore, Stempel et al. (2000) show that Internet users were also largely newspaper readers, which they argue hints that Internet users can best be described as information seekers. This research suggests that the Internet serves as a reinforcement agent for information seekers and, as a result, will lead to a greater divide between information rich and information poor.

The Internet certainly provides a wealth of information about candidate backgrounds, qualifications, and issue positions. Unfortunately, as Gandy (2001) notes, identifiable nonvoters—usually the individuals most in need of political information—will most likely be bypassed in the strategic campaign targeting efforts of political campaigns. Instead, resources and communication efforts will surely focus on individuals who have demonstrated their inclination to participate in public affairs. The significant movement of existing media organizations to dominate the Internet and apply a broadcasting model will translate to little, if any, alteration in the political consumption of the information poor. Unfortunately, the prognosis that established media will come to dominate the Internet fits the model of cyclical cynicism espoused by Cappella and Jamieson (1997).

### **The Internet, Generation Next, and Traditional Media Patterns**

As presented earlier in this chapter, theoretical debate questions whether the decrease in participation is dangerous to democracy or a healthy sign of public confidence in the representative nature of democratic government (Bennett, 1998; Putnam, 1993, 1995a). Regardless of the theoretical position to which scholars prescribe, most scholars express concern regarding the decreasing levels of political participation among the 18- to 24-year-old population. Frankly, civic engagement, participation, and knowledge among the 18- to 24-year-old population has received a great deal of attention since the voting age was reduced. Recently, scholars noted the high levels of cynicism among the youngest voting group (Bennett, 1997; Owen, 1997). As Bennett (1997) explains, our young voters misinterpret political argumentation and issue wrangling as an inherent flaw instead of an expected by-product or norm of our governmental system of checks and balances.

Not surprisingly, because young citizens are the largest group to report frequent access to the Internet, young voters have indicated that they are more likely to use the Internet than traditional media for political information (Young voters, 1999). To study generational comparisons (Generation X, Baby Boomers, and the Civic Generation) of political Internet usage and effects, researchers analyzed variables from the 1999 DDB Life Style survey of more than 3,300 participants (Shah, Kwak, & Holbert, 2001). Building off of Putnam's (1993, 1995b, 2000) work regarding social capital—the interpersonal and community variables that bind individuals together—Shah et al. examined individual level Internet usage patterns and the associations these patterns have with positive and negative indicators of social capital. To guard against using the Internet and its effects solely based on aggregate of exposure time, the researchers analyzed specific functions and communication behavior on-line as predictors of the criterion variables of life contentment, interpersonal trust, and civic engagement. Findings from their analysis show that clear and distinct, though small, effects on criterion variables of life contentment, interpersonal trust, and civic engagement exist when various Internet usage predictor variables are isolated and controlled. Specifically, Shah et al. (2001) indicate that “use of the Internet for information exchange (i.e., searching for information and exchanging e-mail) has a universally positive impact across the three criterion variables *and* across all three generational groups” (p. 154, original emphasis). Conversely, individuals engaging in on-line entertainment, such as on-line games, or anonymous chat were found to report lower levels of the

criterion variables. Of particular note is the finding that among the youngest generation studied, recreational uses of the Internet led to lowered levels of interpersonal trust, whereas use of the Internet for information exchange increased trust among the Generation X participants. Thus, if the motivations to use the Internet for information rather than entertainment dominate, the impact of the Internet seems encouraging for the next generation. However, what is troubling about the findings from Shah et al. is that the majority of Generation X Internet users are motivated to access the Internet for entertainment purposes. Additional survey research from 520 undergraduate college students revealed that their patterns of Internet use were largely driven by entertainment motives (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2000). Despite the entertainment motives of Internet usage, the survey results showed a positive correlation between newspapers and the Internet as a source of news. Again, these studies seem to provide evidence that traditional information-seekers, or individuals who seek information from traditional media sources, are the individuals most likely to use the Internet for informational motives.

Delli Carpini's (2000) comparison of young adults to their older cohorts from generations past demonstrates that America's

young adults are significantly (1) less trusting of their fellow citizens, (2) less interested in politics or public affairs, (3) less likely to feel a sense of identity, pride, or obligation associated with American citizenship, (4) less knowledgeable about the substance or processes of politics, (5) less likely to read a newspaper or watch the news, (6) less likely to register to vote, (7) less likely to participate in politics beyond voting, (8), less likely to participate in community organizations designed to address public problems through collective action or the formal policy process, and (9) less likely to connect individual efforts to help solve problems with more traditional, collective forms of civic engagement. (pp. 341–342)

According to Delli Carpini, what is most fundamentally troublesome about these findings is that they point to a decline in our "civic infrastructure" during the formative years of political socialization when these young adults are developing "civic habits." It is questionable, but unlikely, whether this generation will ever engage to the level of their older cohorts. Unfortunately, what is not clear are ways to use the Internet to interest, engage, and activate the young voter.

## **The Internet and Information Credibility**

Credibility of on-line information is at the source of much academic controversy and inquiry (Whillock, 1997). Whillock argues that verifying the validity of on-line information is very difficult to do without searching multiple sources for confirmation and support of claims posted by candidates or other politically interested parties or groups. As Glass (1996) acknowledges, the "Internet offers far fewer clues to its users to help them discern the good from the ugly" (p. 140). Citing the lesson learned from the 1996 Dole campaign in which the site [www.dole96.org](http://www.dole96.org) was a fictitious Web site developed to link Bob Dole with the fruit company bearing the same name, Glass demonstrates that credibility is an issue for candidates when

imposters acquire URL addresses that might be confused for actual candidate home pages. Similar problems of this nature are presented on nonofficial White House pages that not only disgrace the national home of the president, but also raise legitimate questions about decency.

Despite the awareness that there are many unofficial Web sites, survey research on Web users shows that on-line counterparts are perceived as credibly as traditional print and broadcast media (Flanigan & Metzger, 2000; Johnson & Kaye, 1998). Johnson and Kaye's (1998) survey of 308 politically interested Web users determined that "online newspapers and online candidate literature are viewed as more credible than their traditionally-delivered counterparts" (p. 334). Flanigan and Metzger (1998) surveyed 1,041 individuals (both college students and adults) and reported high levels of credibility for on-line information. Perhaps most interesting about the data reported in this study is the conclusion that information acquired on-line was not rigorously verified by subjects. Additional research shows that the presence of source attribution adds to the perception of credibility for online news (Sundar, 1998).

Accountability is closely linked with the concept of credibility. Along this line, Jacques and Ratzan (1997) studied innovative approaches to political information accountability by hyperlinking transcripts of live candidate debates to databases containing text of candidate position platforms. Live expert commentary linked to text versions of the debates were used to hold candidates accountable for their debate arguments by comparing debate claims with texts from previous campaign claims. The design structure used in the debate offered interested citizens expert commentary on candidate claims in near-real time. Furthermore, by linking participants to Web sites related to specific debate content issues, this innovative strategy delivered voters a menu of sources where they could find support, additional information, or assess candidate consistency. This use of technology offers the interested citizens immediate expert analysis, contextualization of claims, and links to more extensive policy issues in the event the visitor has more concern. Such designs offer great promise to assist an otherwise overwhelmed and uncertain citizen navigate the complex Internet maze in search of means to enhance credibility of online information.

Undoubtedly, one of the biggest questions is whether the great expanse of information available on the Internet leads to more informed citizens. In a random survey of 320 Jackson County, Illinois, residents during the 1996 presidential campaign, Johnson, Braima, and Sothirajah (1999) explored the relationship between traditional and nontraditional (including Internet) media usage and attention with knowledge of the presidential candidates' issue positions. Citing the early phase of Internet development and the less than interesting campaign as potential barriers to their explorations, these authors found virtually no meaningful differences on the dependent variable of knowledge when they controlled for media consumption and a number of other control variables. Certainly, this study warrants a comparative investigation across campaign years and election levels to identify trends or track changes in civic knowledge.

## **IMPROVEMENTS AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENT**

Although described as the final phase of mass media research (Wimmer & Dominick, 2000), the improvements and future development of the Web have undermined

many of the issues regarding its characteristics, its users and uses, and its effects. Although it is doubtful that the Internet will realize utopian expectations for a fully engaged, all-inclusive public sphere, there are many ways that politically interested citizens, candidates, and organizations can refine usage to maximize the potential of this “master medium.” Although technology will deliver more sophisticated tools to accomplish more advanced interactive goals, much of the existing interactive potential is unrealized. For example, analysis of 1996 senatorial sites shows that most candidates and Web designers took a similar approach to one-directional, broadcast model of information posting (Klotz, 1997). Similarly, Tedesco et al. (1999) demonstrate that the presidential candidate Web sites were largely one-directional and offered little more than trivial games or arts and crafts (buttons, bumper stickers, etc.) as interactive components. Such limited interactive opportunities fail to realize the potential of the Internet to alter the communication relationship among candidates, political organizations, and citizens. In a lucid comparison of limited citizenship and strong democracy, Gamson (2001) analyzes media representation of collective action and collective agency with regard to five issues. He identifies ways media can encourage collective agency, including covering citizens engaging in politics, identifying the public as potential agents for change if they were to get involved, and bridging “experiential knowledge and public discourse” by providing citizens with “discursive opportunities” (Gamson, 2001, pp. 61–62). As noted in the section on structural opportunities, Barber et al. (1997) and Sparks (2001) share similar suggestions for including the public voice.

The potential for candidates to improve communication with constituents is clear. Scholars have argued that by providing a mix of audio, video, and print capabilities with clear feedback mechanisms, the Internet eliminates many of the previous structural barriers to direct candidate–citizen communication. To help facilitate candidate–citizen communication, political organizations and candidates may benefit from exploring some of the public relations strategies businesses are using to engage consumers and establish stronger relationship with constituent groups. In this regard, public relations research, particularly the *two-way symmetrical* model proposed by Grunig and Hunt (1984), offers instructive guidance for candidates and political organizations if they wish to capitalize on the Internet’s possibilities to promote civic engagement. Grunig and Hunt describe the evolution of public relations through the use of four dominant public relations models: press agency/publicity, public information, two-way asymmetrical, and two-way symmetrical. The *press agency/publicity* model is dominated by one-way, persuasive communication aimed at manipulating audience attitudes and behaviors, whereas the *public information* model that followed is less concerned with manipulation than with information distribution. Nevertheless, these early models established communication as one-directional, from organization to public. The significant shift occurred when public relations practitioners made efforts to alter the communication relationship from one-way communication to two-way communication, as evidenced by the two-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical models of public relations. In the *two-way asymmetrical* model, the organization–public relationship is not balanced. The primary goal for feedback under this model is to refine persuasive message strategies toward specific targeted publics in an effort to predict behavior. The two-way symmetrical model is characterized by relationship building. By promoting bonds of mutual trust between the organization and its publics by empowering them to shape and collaborate on organizational goals through feedback, the organization–public relationship is strengthened.

The best way to assess the nature of the public relations relationship between organizations and publics is to measure the opportunities for dialogue (Taylor et al., 2001), or what Gamson (2001) refers to as the discursive opportunities. Similarly, Glass (1996) recommends improving dialogue between candidate and voters. By capitalizing on the features of the Internet, “candidates will be able to take questions from voters directly, thereby enabling the entire nation to join in a vast ‘town hall meeting,’ one without walls, convened at legions of computer terminals (p. 145). Hacker (1996b) presents an elaborate interactive message system that demonstrates a five-step model for political interactivity. Again, Hacker emphasizes dialogue as a necessary component of interactivity and argues that candidates must complete the feedback loop by either demonstrating action or providing voters with a reason for inaction. Such direct access to the voter would certainly diminish the role of the media as gatekeeper but would most likely position media as the “authenticator” (Glass, 1996) of information, which is a feature that scholars argue we should preserve (Hallahan, 1994). However, content analysis of 100 candidate Web site showed that politicians do not engage in “public” interactive discussion with citizens (Davis, 1999). Stromer-Galley’s (2000) research shows that candidates are afraid to open their sites to more interactive possibilities because they fear a loss of control.

Moreover, analysis of congressional Web sites shows that members of Congress are not using Web sites to interact with constituents. Rather, research shows that the dominant feature of member Web sites is self-promotional material (Congress Online, 2002; Owen, Davis, & Strickler, 1999). The largest and most recent analysis of the dialogic relationship opportunities available from political Web sites is represented within the Congress Online project sponsored by The Pew Charitable Trusts. Congress Online investigated all 605 personal, committee, and leadership congressional Web sites. The comprehensive analysis included focus groups with constituents, interviews with congressional staff, and surveys of political reporters and advocacy group members, along with descriptive and quantitative analysis of specific Web-site features. Among the key findings from the Congress Online (2002) report was that a divide exists between Web audience expectations and Web site offerings. For example, the report concludes,

Constituents, special interest groups, and reporters are seeking basic legislative information such as position statements, rationales for key votes, status of pending legislation, and educational material about Congress. However, offices are using Web sites primarily as promotional tools—posting press releases, descriptions of Member’s accomplishments, and photos of the Member at events. (p. iv)

Furthermore, the report identifies five key building blocks for effective Web sites, in order of importance, as audience, content, interactivity, usability, and innovations. The Congress Online report recognizes that audience needs, not member promotion, should be the most essential and important feature of the site. Although the majority of users access sites for their content, interactivity was recognized as the third most important building block for Web site effectiveness. The team of researchers assessing Web sites looked for the Web site mechanisms audiences could use to voice their concerns, offer feedback, and communicate both on- and off-line. The report acknowledges some improvement from previous assessments, but the “vast majority” of Web sites still were evaluated as either fair or poor in



overall quality, “suggesting that the large majority of sites have only begun to tap the communication potential available on the Internet” (p. iv).

Similar to the Congress Online project, Musso, Weare, and Hale (2000) examined 270 municipal Web sites in California to assess whether their features might lead to positive reforms in governance. Unfortunately, their report found that the vast majority of municipal Web sites failed to offer participatory mechanisms to visitors, whereas few offered communication elements expected to enhance democratic processes.

As recommendations from comprehensive research reports like Congress Online begin to alter design and Web strategies for candidates and members of Congress, other trend analyses should add to the understanding of shifts in Internet effects on such criterion variables as civic engagement, information credibility, and trust and variables representative of mobilization and reinforcement.

Although there are a host of research opportunities left unexplored to date, certainly future research investigation will need to monitor development, content, and effects of political banner advertising. If the predictions materialize, political advertising, in the shape of banner ads, will come to represent a significant feature of future political campaigns (Phillips, 1999). Phillips, president of the Aristotle political software firm in Washington, DC, predicts that banner ads will increase in significance to campaigns and consultants as more sophisticated segmentation and targeting strategies are developed. As more Americans spend time on-line at home and the office, it is realistic to expect Internet banner ads to attract more attention from consultants, especially to motivate the already politically active to visit candidate Web sites, make contributions, and vote. Phillips argues that technology has enabled registered voter files to be merged with Internet Service Provider (ISP) subscriber lists, which will make targeting voters extremely easy and cost efficient. Structural obstacles imposed by commercialization and the established broadcast model beget questions regarding the Internet’s capacity to mobilize the polity. Such developments in targeting and segmentation will surely have implications for other measures of civic engagement, alienation, and political knowledge. It will also be interesting to assess whether increased targeting and segmentation leads to more negative campaigning on-line.

Furthermore, Neuman (2001) suggests that study of fragmentation (dispersion), polarization of opinions, stratification of publics, and strength of social cohesion are particularly promising areas of political communication research for Internet studies. Additionally, Neuman (2001, pp. 308–310) identifies diffusion patterns, the Hawthorne effect, McGuire’s (1985) channel and size effects questions, and analysis of the “technical architecture” of the net as promising research directions. As Bimber (2000, p. 329) acknowledges, “The technological revolution associated with the Internet is coinciding with energetic scholarly and public interest in the state of civic engagement.” However, Bimber points to the need for researchers to move beyond the use of the “Internet” as a construct. Citing integration—or the tightly connected and merging activities associated with technology—and mutualism—or “the interdependence of new and old modes of communication in civic life” (pp. 339–330), Bimber argues that isolating the Internet as an independent variable will become increasingly difficult for researchers. Instead, Bimber suggests that researchers focus on the specific processes and functions performed by Internet users and their ability to predict Internet effects. Similarly, Dahlgren (2000) argues that the relationship between on-line and off-line activities promises fertile ground for research agendas and theory building. Dahlgren suggests case studies that

explore similarities and differences in Internet usage patterns between highly engaged groups such as nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and activist groups. These research possibilities are only some of the many promising possibilities for political communication exploration.

## **Political Communication Research Methods and the Internet**

As the Internet assumes a more significant role in political communication, researchers will undoubtedly search for methodological tools to answer questions regarding changes in its content and effects. A number of scholars provide some basic methodological hints and recommendations for researchers as they amend their methods to suit on-line communication. It seems fitting to end this chapter with a brief discussion of some of those recommendations and suggestions.

As noted, adaptation of the Internet into the political communication landscape forces some reconsideration of some of our traditional research methods. McMillan's (2000) review of Web-based content analysis research characterizes the Web as a "moving target" and identifies the unique challenges the Internet presents for the major content analysis research procedures. Despite the dynamic nature of Web-based communication, McMillan reports that a number of researchers were successful at developing strategies to build rigor into study designs. Although McMillan acknowledges the need for researchers to contextualize content analyses in a theoretical framework, the biggest obstacles appear to be identifying sampling units and a sampling frame from which to draw a truly random, representative sample of Web content. Stempel and Stewart (2000) also acknowledge the problems in identifying populations of Web sites from which random or systematic samples may be drawn. Even though Web-based messages are dynamic, and capable of changing from hour to hour, where legally permitted, Web sites can be downloaded and stored for coding. Because intercoder reliability is jeopardized and measurement error is magnified if coders are not working from identical content information, saving on-line content for analysis and possible replication is recommended when possible.

Although there are obvious limitations associated with content analysis of Web sites, McMillan points out that the medium has facilitated research projects as well. For example, coders in remote locations can be trained using computer-mediated mechanisms. Although not all content analyses of Web content have employed rigorous research designs, some research projects have adapted the method in very unique and powerful ways (McMillan, 2000).

As with content analysis procedures, the most difficult task for on-line survey and polling methods becomes the identification of a sampling frame. Although it is acknowledged that Web-based features enable construction of interesting surveys that allow for instantaneous results, random sampling procedures for normally distributed populations are almost impossible to produce without jeopardizing anonymity of research participants (Rosenblatt, 1999). Whereas it is relatively easy to sample from populations of subscribers to particular Internet sites (e.g., a sample of on-line subscribers to ABC's Breaking News listserv or on-line subscribers to National Journal), a probability sample representative of the entire "connected" population appears to be nearly impossible. Although

lists of e-mail subscribers could be identified through service providers, the proliferation of e-mail host sites, the multitude of aliases, and multiple e-mail account holders demonstrate not only a daunting research task but also the likelihood of large sampling error (Rosenblatt, 1999). Thus far, large research organizations with formidable resources, such as the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, offered the most convincing sample of randomly selected Internet users. Pew's sample was culled from pooled national samples of the population.

Despite the problems of content analysis and survey research, experimental methods for Internet research do not appear to be as complex. Random assignment to experimental condition is not jeopardized by this medium, whereas stimulus manipulation and control are possible through Internet software. Furthermore, since the majority of Web users interact with the medium one-on-one, nonobtrusive and externally valid on-line experimental research is not necessarily problematic.

Focus groups, Delphi panels, intensive interviews, and other descriptive techniques are widely appropriate for on-line research questions. In fact, descriptive detail regarding political usage of the Internet is largely absent from political communication literature. Much understanding of Internet behavior could result from studies aimed to observe and describe ways citizens use the Internet for communicating about politics.

## CONCLUSION

Certainly it appears as though both candidates and citizens are hesitant to "change the channel" and fully embrace the Internet. Sure, candidates have adopted the Internet in large numbers, but their communication patterns reflect a one-directional structure typical of other communication media. Similarly, research shows that citizens are turning to the Internet, but the same politically interested citizens using traditional media are more likely to use the Internet for political purposes. So, although politicians and citizens are using the Internet, not much real change in mobilization has resulted.

If the postindustrialists are correct, perhaps political communication researchers should focus on the few highly engaged citizens that rally around lifestyle issues as their motivations for political behavior. Perhaps the next generation, those who will most likely rely more on the Internet than other forms of media, will demand structural detachment from the broadcast model and insist that candidates provide them symmetry in on-line communication. Perhaps experience in evolving democracies, ones with traditions less steeped in commercialization and privatization, will better realize the Web's potential for participatory democracy. But it is possible that commercialization and segmentation will completely overpower the Internet's interactive political potential.

Befitting a chapter on a new medium, this chapter presents more questions and tentative results than definitive conclusions. With any luck, optimists will continue to search for on-line mechanisms to improve communication and our civic condition. Undoubtedly, the next decades are sure to provide fertile ground for researchers interested in exploring the Internet's role in facilitating or obstructing political communication.

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