The Relationship Between News Media Consumption and Public Opinion, Using the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act as a Case Study

Taylor Burdick
Thesis Presentation
Advised by Dr. Patrick Donnay
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Why Does This Relationship Matter?

- Public opinion is a driving force behind democracy.
- In October 2013 the US government went into a partial shutdown.
- The shutdown was caused by a polarized debate over the PPACA (Obamacare).
- The public by-and-large reflected this divide.
- What influences public opinion?
  - There are multiple theories on what shapes public opinion.
So What Shapes Public Opinion?

- News media may be partially responsible
- Other demographic factors also play a part
  - Region
  - Gender
  - Age
  - Race
  - Etc…

Theories on the Media’s Role in Public Opinion:

- Second-Level (Attribute) Agenda-Setting Theory
  - Priming
  - Framing
  - Agenda-Setting
- Minimal Effects Theory

* No existing theory completely explains the relationship
Thoughts, ideas, and memories are connected.

One belief can be connected to another through an emotional reaction

Most effective when the connection is close in time and is repeated

“Priming is providing a stimulus that influences the near-term future thoughts and actions, even though they may not seem to be connected.” Straker, D. (2010). Changing Minds in Detail. Crowthorne.
Framing

- Message is characterized in such a way as to have a certain affect on the audience
- Values–based theory
- Media sources reflect common goals or ideas of their audience
  - Appeals to beliefs of the audience

Agenda-Setting

- The media ‘sets the agenda’ for what the public thinks about
- The media puts importance on and issue and therefore the public believes it to be important
- Hierarchy in the media
  - “Elite media sources”

Second–Level (Attribute) Agenda–Setting Theory

- Elite media sources use concepts of framing and priming to set certain agendas for what the audience thinks about & how they feel
- Focuses on the ‘tone’ (attributes) of news coverage

Minimal Effects Theory

- The media does not have much effect on changing public opinion.
- People will seek out news that supports their previously held beliefs.
  - Selective perception and retention

My Theory:

- I hypothesize that news information is primed and framed in such a way as to promote a specific agenda
  - The ‘tone’ of the news
- The agendas differ depending on the news source
- The differing agendas are what cause the divide in public opinion.
Difference in Frame?

- MSNBC website (3-20-2014)
Difference in Frame?

Fox News website
(3–20–2014)
Methods and Data that were Used

- Data was collected by the Kaiser Family Foundation for their August and September 2013 health tracking polls.
- The *dependent* variable was a measure of the favorability towards the PPACA (Obamacare)
- 3 *independent* variables measuring:
  - Most trusted news source (MSNBC/Fox News/CNN)
  - Perceived tone of the media (control)
  - Knowledge of the law
Tests

- Crosstab tables showing relationship between variable
- Clustered bar charts showing the direction of the relationship between variables

- **Dependent Variable:**
  - Favorability towards Obamacare

- **Independent Variables:**
  - Knowledge index
  - Observed tone of news coverage

☑ All results are statistically significant at the 0.01 level (Chi-Square, two-tailed)
## Testing the Data

- How Much People Favor Obamacare Based on Their Most Trusted Health Care News Source

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Favorability Towards Obamacare</th>
<th>CNN</th>
<th>FOX News</th>
<th>MSNBC</th>
<th>Some other cable news channel</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very favorable</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>43</td>
<td><strong>124</strong></td>
<td>127</td>
<td>421</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>27.3%</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td>45.3%</td>
<td>29.7%</td>
<td>22.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat favorable</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>486</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>43.6%</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
<td>21.9%</td>
<td>32.7%</td>
<td>26.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat unfavorable</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17.2%</td>
<td>13.1%</td>
<td>19.7%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very unfavorable</td>
<td>56</td>
<td><strong>482</strong></td>
<td>36</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>674</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12.0%</td>
<td>68.9%</td>
<td>13.1%</td>
<td>23.4%</td>
<td>36.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>466</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>428</td>
<td>1868</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data from the August 2013 Kaiser health tracking poll

b. Significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Cramer's V moderate and positive relationship (0.34)
How Much People Favor Obamacare Based on Their Overall Knowledge of the Health Care Law

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Favorability Towards Obamacare</th>
<th>Overall Knowledge of the Health Care Law</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>very high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very favorable</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>52.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat favorable</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>34.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat unfavorable</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very unfavorable</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data from the September 2013 Kaiser health tracking poll
f. Significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)
Cramer’s V weak and positive relationship (0.25)
Percentage of People Who Do Not Favor Obamacare Based on Their Overall Knowledge of the Law and Separated by the Observed Tone of Their Media **

Overall Knowledge of the Health Care Law

Cases weighted by Weight using new first-stage weight computation

Significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed) moderate Somer's d relationship (0.271)
N = 1940

** Data from September Kaiser health tracking poll
What This All Means

- There is a relationship between the news media and public opinion
- Tone of media coverage impacts public opinion
- One of the most important factors is how much people know about the law
- The hypothesis was supported by the findings
Thank You!
Are there any questions?
References