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Framing of the 2008 presidential election in print news

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Abstract

This study examines newspaper coverage of the Democratic and Republican presidential and vice presidential candidates in the 2008 U.S. election. Since the composition of candidates involved in this election is so unprecedented, this study seeks to uncover the ways in which they are portrayed through the lens of framing theory. The study focused on three major frames: experience, race and viability. A total of 225 newspaper articles randomly collected from *The New York Times*, the *Chicago Tribune* and *USA Today* were content analyzed. The following questions were asked: What is the most dominant frame used in the coverage of the 2008 election? Is there a relationship between the dominant frame used and candidate focus? Is there a difference in the way news articles and non-news articles (feature stories, editorial/op ed.) frame candidates? Which received the greater amount of media attention in the 2008 election, image or issue-focused stories? What aspects of image are most frequently used in describing the candidates? How frequently is age used to describe the candidates in the 2008 election? How frequently is gender mentioned to describe the candidates?

The results show that consistent with previous research, the media continue to place a greater importance on candidate image and viability than on policy issues. The media paid little attention to the subject of age, but discussed race, gender and experience more thoroughly. The discussion of gender and the one female candidate was stereotypical and used harsher and more negative language than that used for the male candidates, especially when found in editorial/op ed. articles. This suggests that contrary to what many believe were improving conditions for female political candidates, the media still put a much greater emphasis on their gender than for their male counterparts.

Chapter I: Introduction

Once every four years the American public has the opportunity to put their democracy to work and vote the next president of the United States into office. This decision is not one taken lightly, and the months leading up to the election serve as an important time when most people begin to learn the crucial information about political candidates that will later shape their voting behavior. Since it would be nearly impossible for most citizens to ever hear each of the candidates speak in person, let alone have the opportunity to talk with them one-on-one, they must rely on outside organizations to provide information about each person running for office and a thorough background analysis of their respective campaigns and issues. Because the mass media is the most convenient way for most people to obtain this information, candidate coverage becomes especially important when it has the potential to be used in determining voter preference. Considering the critical nature of presidential elections, the accuracy and reliability of the information presented to the public by the news media is paramount.

A significant amount of research in the area of political communication is concerned with the notion that rather than simply reporting "just the facts" of elections and the candidates involved in them, the media often insert their own personal biases and opinions into their coverage by how they choose to report. Although the extent to which personal interpretation occurs is somewhat debatable, its existence does not necessarily signify a conscious attempt to present potential voters with one-sided news. Rather, a certain degree of interpretation on the part of the mass media has instead been argued by some to be result of a natural and unavoidable tendency for reporters to insert their own voice and experiences into the news before it is ultimately delivered to the public (Cook, 1998; Patterson, 1994). Because some individuality in reporting is inevitable, it should be expected that no two media sources would report news in

exactly the same way. However, there are several common practices in news reporting on presidential elections.

Despite attempts at neutrality, media coverage of any election may portray candidates and their issues in either a negative or positive light. Since a distinct story valence is frequently identified in political communication research, it is therefore an important element of research covering elections (Stemple & Windhauser, 1991). In studies that examine the overall story tone for common media frames used during election coverage, there is often a strong distinction between negative vs. positive media coverage (Diamond & D'Amato, 1996). Media coverage sometimes positions stories in either a favorable or unfavorable manner, (Bystrom et al., 2001) and the amount of positive vs. negative coverage a candidate receives not only changes the meaning of that story, it could have serious implications on electibility (Norris, 1997).

Often, the media have a proclivity toward portraying candidate interactions, speeches and quotes as more negative than they actually are (Rothwell-Truran, 2000). While this can't always be said of coverage for candidates in general, there have been exceptions where certain candidates are consistently covered in a more negative manner than others. In his study of the 2000 election, Patterson (2002) found that the overwhelming majority of coverage on both of the two major party candidates, George H. W. Bush and Al Gore was portrayed in a negative tone. Although perhaps significant, this finding was not necessarily unique to the 2000 election. Patterson (2002) also found that at the time of the 2000 election, no major party or presidential candidate had ever received a majority of positive coverage in more than two decades (Patterson, 1993). However, this might be due to the fact that for the large part the majority of candidate coverage is often neutral, rather than decisively positive or negative (Bystrom et al., 2001; Stemple & Windhauser, 1991). Regardless, the overall norm of neutrality does not mean that

media valence will remain consistent across all medium levels and there have occasionally been situations in which one media source was drastically more positive or negative toward certain candidates than the others (Carroll & Schreiber, 1997).

A considerable amount of political communication research has looked at this phenomenon, with results that often show large disparities in the amount of positive and negative slants used not only from candidate to candidate, but also in the amount of negative and positive stories across media networks and by reporter as well (Blumler, 1987; Carroll & Schreiber, 1997; Stemple & Windhauser, 1991). Some scholars believe that the disparity between the amount of negative or positive coverage of candidates, while apparent nonetheless, aren't actually an intended consequence on the part of the reporter, but rather an attempt to provide both sides to each story (Stemple & Windhauser, 1991).

Coverage of political news or events can often be somewhat difficult to comprehend, especially when it includes information that is hard to follow without sufficient background knowledge. Because of this, the media usually try to compensate by creating "something for everyone" (Kosicki & McLeod, 1990). This can frequently include focusing less on details of campaign and policy issues in favor of what are arguably "softer" aspects, such as perceived candidate image, poll standings and controversies that arise along the campaign trail. Some scholars argue that the media's focus on these "strategic" or non-issue topics can even be influential enough to ultimately dissuade voters from participating in elections altogether (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Valentino, Beckmann & Buhr, 2001). While it may be arguable that media coverage of these issues alone can be responsible for a significant impact on voter turnout, most scholars agree that focusing on aspects other than policy issues has become a negative trend in recent political journalism (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Valentino et al., 2001).

Among the criticism that the news media receive on their coverage of political elections are persistent accusations that rather than reporting the election as a serious event with consequences that have the potential to impact the entire world, it is instead often described as a high stakes "game" that involves strategy and tact to move forward, not necessarily just voter support (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Reber & Benoit, 2001; Valentino et al., 2001). In fact, although the exact terminology has varied between scholars, previous research has often classified coverage of political elections into two general categories: coverage that is primarily concerned with various aspects of candidate image, and coverage with a predominant focus on the candidate's political platform and policy issues (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Patterson, 1994; Valentino, et al., 2001). Although they may still hold a certain degree of importance to potential voters, many scholars believe the media focus on factors related to candidate image should be considered superficial aspects of the campaign. These arguably less-important issues often include things like "performance, style, and perception of the candidate" (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997, p. 33) and the most commonly utilized, how they are faring in the polls compared to one another (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Freitag, 2000; Johnson, 1993; Patterson, 1994). This last phenomenon has typically been referred to as "horserace" media coverage (picture two horses jockeying back and forth in a race) and is used by the media through their constant polling updates. Horserace coverage has been shown to be not only the most frequently identified type of "image" focused coverage, (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Valentino, et al., 2001) it has also been repeatedly shown to be the most common way for reporters to cover political elections in general (D'Angelo, Calderone & Territola, 2005; Domke et. al., 1997; Mantler & Whiteman, 1995; Stempel & Windhauser, 1991). Perhaps an alarming issue present in this trend is that as coverage focusing on polls and candidate image has been increasing, coverage reporting on campaign

platforms and major policy issues has also been on the decline over the past three decades (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Patterson, 1994).

Although there are no obvious, agreed-upon answers for what is at the root of this shift in media coverage, perhaps the change may be due, at least in part, to the emergence and now ubiquity of 24-hour news networks. Since these news networks are constantly running, reporters are forced to try to create new and exciting angles for stories that have already been discussed at length; attempting to make what may already be old news feel current without being tired or stale. Because of this, polls and minor events occurring on the campaign trail are usually a reliable change of pace from the otherwise mundane reporting on the same stump speeches. Further, while adding a new angle, they seem to provide seemingly unbiased or objective information (Rosenstiel, 2005). Perhaps adding some legitimacy to this belief is that although these news networks may provide access to political information 24-hours a day, their existence has not necessarily resulted in a better informed or more politically savvy public (PEW Research Center for People & The Press, 2007).

Another possible cause of such coverage is the fact that as more and more news sources are bought and owned by media monopolies and major wire service agencies it is possible that an increasing number of editors are picking up wire service stories rather than hiring journalists to write their own articles in a struggling economy. Therefore, because there are fewer sources that the news is coming from to begin with, the result could be at least somewhat responsible for potentially causing less diversity in political coverage (Klinenberg, 2007).

Regardless of the cause, a significant portion of political communication research reflects the feeling that “news media do not simply mirror the world” (Cook, 1998, p. 91). This sentiment stems from the idea that journalists often make their own interpretations of the news, and thus

"frame" issues according to what they deem most critical for public knowledge. The information that the public receives on political candidates is largely dependent upon which frame is utilized in that news coverage. This study hopes to add to the growing body of research on media framing by identifying some of the frames the media used most often in their coverage of the 2008 presidential election. However, before framing theory can be introduced, it is pertinent to consider the circumstances present in the 2008 presidential election.

The 2008 election

In addition to the gravity of both domestic and international issues facing the U.S. in 2008, the composition of candidates running for office creates an unprecedented and historical situation for both major parties. Barack Obama, the first-term Illinois Democratic senator was the first African American to run in a general election as a major party presidential candidate. His running mate and vice presidential candidate, Delaware Sen. Joe Biden, has served more than three decades in the Senate and before the election, was chair of both the Committee on Foreign Relations and the Subcommittee on Crime and Drugs in addition to serving as a member on eleven other Senate committees. Republican presidential candidate John McCain is also a seasoned U.S. senator from Arizona who has served more than 20 years in the Senate in addition to being a revered war hero and former prisoner of war in Vietnam. McCain's Senate experience includes serving as a ranking member of the Armed Services and as a member of seven other Senate committees. Republican vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin is a first-term Alaska Governor and although she is the only person of the four major candidates to have executive experience, at the time that McCain announced her as running mate, she was a relative newcomer to the national political scene. Palin is only the second woman to ever make it to the

vice presidential candidate level, (Geraldine Ferarro was Walter Mondale's running mate during his unsuccessful 1984 presidential bid) and is the first to do so for the Republican Party.

Because the dynamic of the 2008 election is so unprecedented in terms of the diversity represented in the major candidates, it is not surprising that media coverage would emphasize the unique characteristics of the candidates running for office. In an analysis of campaign news articles, the Project for Excellence in Journalism (2008) found that the media did, in fact, often highlight the historical aspect of the election in their campaign coverage more than any other specific issue. However, while one might assume that high levels of public interest might be reflected in high levels of media attention, increased coverage by no means indicates that the coverage will be positive (Stempel & Windhauser, 1991).

The unique context of the 2008 election not only presents an interesting composition of candidates and issues, it also allows for an opportunity to examine the ways that the media covered this event in terms of the already identified common characteristics of political news. Because the election of the president of the United States is a serious matter with important consequences, considering how the media present information that can contribute to voter decisions merits scholarly attention. Finally, since a large amount of this research is centered on media coverage of political issues and events, this study will examine the 2008 election coverage as it relates to framing theory.

Chapter II: Theoretical Background

Framing Theory

One of the first scholars to illustrate framing as a complete theory of mass media was Robert Entman (1993), who defined media framing as a process by which the media "select some aspect of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text in a way that can promote a certain definition, interpretation, moral evaluation or treatment recommendation" (p. 52). In the current study, media frames refer to the way the media describe candidates (in terms, for example, of candidate race, experience or viability) using metaphors, catch phrases, and key words**.**

Over the past several decades, scholars have continued to define exactly what constitutes media framing. "Ideally, framing research examines the construction of news stories, how these stories articulate frames, and how audience members interpret these frames" (Carragee & Roefs, 2004, p. 215). The majority of framing research that has been conducted on the mass media has followed various aspects of this process (Entman, 1991, 1993; Gamson, 1992; Reese, 2001).

Other scholars have defined framing as "a 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" (Tankard, 2003, p. 100). Further definitions explain that "… frames construct particular meanings concerning issues by their patterns of emphasis, interpretation, and exclusion" (Carragee & Roefs, 2004, p. 17). Although many definitions have been presented to describe framing theory, it can broadly be described as being concerned with the way the media portray the news in their discourse and how these portrayals shape audience opinions and cognitions (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997).

Framing also has distinct dimensions: the topic of a news item, presentation, cognitive attributes (what is included in the frame) and affective attributes (the tone of the frame in the news story in which it is found) (Ghanem, 1997). Many scholars also believe that media framing is part of a greater process that involves "frame-building" and "frame-setting" (de Vreese, 2005, p. 52). Frame-building is primarily concerned with how the media are influenced to develop the frames that they employ, and frame-setting considers how these frames may impact existing audience beliefs and knowledge (de Vreese, 2005).

Finally, a considerable amount of framing research also considers the fact that media frames can serve as both dependent and independent variables (de Vreese, 2005; Scheufele, 1999), and can be both general and issue specific (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Iyengar, 1987, 1989, 1996). In this study, the candidate frames will be analyzed as independent variables and issue specific. The candidate frames are being considered independent variables because previous research has shown that media framing has the potential to impact public opinion on those issues.

While they are sometimes obvious, frames are often more subtle in nature, which can make them difficult to detect. "Frames may be explicit components of messages, implied by word or name selections in the text of the message, or even activated in the audience without the audience's awareness that the activation has even taken place" (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997, p. 44). However, regardless of how overtly they appear, media frames can have the same impact. "The subtlety of framing is in the way it can construct reality, impact interpretations and influence audience responses and opinions toward a particular event after the event enters the public agenda" (Dimitrova & Stromback, 2005, p. 405).

Cappella and Jamieson (1997) suggest that even very small changes in wording can have a significant impact on audience understanding of the news item. Similarly, Valentino, Beckman & Buhr (2001) found in their study, in which they used fictitious newspaper articles, that something as small as a change in one or two words can completely alter the perceived frame of the story. According to Entman (1993), this is possible because with just a few words, the media can emphasize bits of information about the item they are covering, and in doing so, increase their seeming importance. In the especially unique presidential election of 2008, where the presidential and vice presidential candidates vary greatly in types of experience, age, gender and race, this has the potential to take many different forms**.**

Although Entman (1993) originally defined the framing paradigm to be used with communication research, he claims that framing "could be applied with similar benefits to the study of public opinion and voting behavior in political science" (p. 56). Many scholars agree. "The origin of framing research in media sociology directly linked the framing process to the distribution of social and political power in American society" (Carragee & Roefs, 2004, p. 221).

Furthermore, a distinction should be made between framing theory and other mass communication theories, specifically agenda setting. Agenda setting is generally examined as the way that the media place issues in order of importance (Weaver, McCombs & Shaw, 2004) where media frames are often examined in the context of how these issues are then relayed to the public. However, there has been growing interest in the area of second-level agenda setting that also examines message attributes. The basic idea behind the issue of message attributes is that when an object (the topic of the news article) is placed on the public's radar through agenda setting, certain characteristics (or attributes) of that object are also emphasized (Weaver et al., 2004, p. 259). However, this differs from framing theory in that in second-level agenda setting,

attributes are not necessarily the focus or dominant theme of the overall story, and may rather sometimes serve as tangential points.

Framing and Political Communication

Framing theory is frequently used by scholars examining the impact of political communication. D'Angelo, Calderone and Territola, (2005) claim that this is the case because of the dichotomy between the frames the candidates wish to impose upon themselves, and those that the media place them in. Despite this sometimes contrasting relationship, most people argue that in the U.S., the press ultimately has control of candidate framing (Patterson, 1994).

Previous scholars have concluded that media use directly contributes to the political knowledge of audiences and potential voters (Chaffee, Zhao & Leshner, 1992; Lemert, 1993; Zhu, Milavsky & Biswas, 1994). In other words, the way that the candidates are framed by the media can be crucial to the public's understanding and interpretation of the presidential election. Entman (1993) claims that frames can often be self-reinforcing. Therefore, if the media portray one candidate as being significantly more experienced and viable than another, it may become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Even though considerable research has been conducted on frames utilized in political messages, D'Angelo et al. (2005) claim there is still significant room to examine the ways in which these frames are used in media content. This study examines the frames that were employed in the 2008 presidential election, where the political climate and the composition of candidates at this level in the presidential race are both radically different than ever before in U.S. history.

Framing the Candidates

Since framing theory is used so frequently in research of political communication, it is pertinent to examine the types of frames employed in candidate coverage. This study will examine three separate frames as they relate to media coverage of political elections.

Experience frame

Perceived experience has long been an important element of a successful presidential bid, and can be deemed a necessary criterion for being considered a qualified candidate. Because it is so crucial to candidate electability, it is often heavily emphasized by the media, with the 2008 election serving as no exception (Jones, 2008). Since the issue of experience is often somewhat subjective, the media have the opportunity to frame it as something similar to a perceived level of competency. Media coverage of candidate competencies and perceived level of experience are paramount in determining how voters feel about each person running for office (Sullivan, Aldrich, Borgida & Rahn, 1990). In fact, some scholars even believe that media coverage of the perceived level of candidate experience is not only a commonly utilized frame, but one of the most important factors in an election (Sullivan et al., 1990).

The two major parties in the 2008 election had both a long-term Senate veteran (McCain and Biden) and a less-experienced, arguably more novice candidate (Obama and Palin). This created an interesting dynamic for voters in terms of perceived candidate experience. In a 2008 PEW research poll, the American public expressed concerns with the experience of these two candidates, especially with regard to Palin, whom more than 51% of people said was not qualified for the vice presidential candidacy. Since perceived candidate experience has been shown to be a commonly emphasized element of election coverage, (Sullivan et al., 1990) one could assume that the 2008 situation, which had candidates weighing in at each end of the

spectrum, would certainly be no different – especially with the public voicing concerns for two of the candidate's lack of experience in the months leading up to the election.

Race frame

Although poll after poll has shown that voters claim race does not play a significant role in their voting decisions (Newport, 2008; Powers, 2007), it has been recognized that the media have continued to utilize this frame during elections involving minority candidates (Powers, 2007). Some scholars feel that the media focus heavily on the issue of race in politics because there is a little-discussed assumption that a candidate must be white in order to successfully win an election (Duerst-Lahti, 2008).

Others, including some media critics, have claimed that the issue of race is a "journalistic standby," a familiar frame used in media coverage (Powers, 2007, p. 64). It has also been suggested that this is an especially frequent aspect of media coverage in elections when the media have reached a point where policy issues aren't as heavily emphasized (Norris, 1997). Arguably the most common framing technique that the media uses when covering race in elections is to portray minority candidates as outsiders breaking through, with somewhat smaller changes of winning (Sinclair-Chapman & Price, 2008).

Undoubtedly, one of the greatest "historic" elements of the 2008 election was the fact that for the first time in the history of the United States, one of the two major party presidential candidates was an African American. This often led the media to frame this as a monumental characteristic of the 2008 presidential election in the preceding months (Jones, 2007; Powers, 2007). According to Sinclair-Chapman and Price (2008), Obama's candidacy began similarly to other minority candidates: large support from college communities, grassroots organization and running as somewhat of an outsider (p. 740). However, part of what made Obama the

Democratic Party's pick for their presidential candidate is the same thing that the media latched onto: his mainstream appeal and portrayal of the "American dream," an aspect that emphasized in his campaign and the media (Sinclair-Chapman & Price, 2008, p. 739). Since it has also been shown that many people have an unconscious belief that a candidate must be white in order to win, (Duerst-Lahti, 2008) the presence of a major party candidate with a very real chance of winning the election (who just happens to be an African American), captures significant media coverage.

Viability frame

In presidential elections, the media commonly place a very large emphasis on candidate viability and poll standings. This is often done using a technique referred to as "horserace" news coverage which can either give the impression that candidates are in for a close race or that a winner has already been determined from an early point. As a widely used form of campaign coverage, (Patterson, 1994) viability could be considered a type of media frame because it tells audiences to focus on poll standings rather than issues.

Despite the incessant criticism it receives, horserace-style coverage that focuses primarily on candidate viability prevails, and has been shown to be one of the most dominant media themes throughout election coverage over the past 30 years (Domke, Fan, Fibison, Shah, Smith & Watts, 1997; Mantler & Whiteman, 1995; Stempel & Windhauser, 1991). Many scholars agree. Reber and Benoit (2001) observe that "the media have a strong proclivity toward the 'horserace' aspects of campaigns: who is ahead, what states are being contested, and who is campaigning where" (p. 31). Constant media reliance on pre-election polls that stress one candidate's viability over another have been criticized by many scholars as trivializing an extremely important event like presidential elections and explaining them as though they were

little more than a game (Valentino et al., 2001). Regardless, this type of coverage not only continues, but remains extremely prevalent in contemporary elections (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Patterson, 1994; Valentino, et al., 2001). Since this type of coverage has become such a staple in American media that it is now the largest amount of campaign coverage, (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Patterson, 1994; Valentino, et al., 2001) news articles focusing on the candidates in the 2008 election should be no exception.

Image vs. Issue Focus

Outside of framing theory, there are several elements that have been identified in media coverage of political events. As mentioned in the previous chapter, one of the most oft-cited criticisms of coverage of political campaigns is the media's proclivity toward presenting a greater amount of stories that focus on candidate image rather than issue or policy stance (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Domke et al., 1997; Mantler & Whiteman, 1995; Patterson, 1994; Stempel & Windhauser, 1991). This basic idea has often been identified and referred to as "strategic" coverage in previous research (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Patterson, 1994; Valentino, et al., 2001). However, for the purpose of this study, news stories will be considered to either have a primary focus on candidate image or issue.

Image

The way that the media covers candidate image has been an essential element of campaign success in every election since the advent of television (Rothwell-Truran, 2000). Although it is often not overtly discussed in the media, considerable research supports this claim (Wattier, 2004). This is particularly true for female candidates, whose physical appearances are more often the subject of media attention than their male colleagues (Dimitrova & Geske, 2009; Gidengil & Everitt, 2003; Herzog, 1998; Kahn, 1996). This can include everything from the

candidate's physical attractiveness, clothing choices, hair color and style to their age, and has been shown to be disproportionately bestowed upon female candidates (Braden, 1996; Devitt, 2002; Herzog, 1998). While Bystrom et al., 2001 found this trend to be declining overall, a considerable amount of coverage of Sarah Palin in the 2008 election seemed to focus heavily on her physical image and personality traits (Kim, 2008).

While media messages containing descriptions of a candidate's physical image are relatively obvious to detect, this study considers image as taking the form of anything from physical appearance to mannerisms, personal speaking style and poll standing. Research has shown that the image imbued upon candidates by the media may be so important that it has actually been at the root of considerable public support or contempt (Stempel & Windhauser, 1991; Wattier, 2004). In fact, some scholars have found that the way that the media covers or portrays candidate's image and personal attributes can ultimately be as important as party affiliation and issue stances when voters are deciding who is closest to their personal preferences (Sullivan, Aldrich, Borgida & Rahn, 1990). Since previous research has also shown that media coverage of political elections has become increasingly focused on candidate image and poll standings (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Patterson, 1994) this too, is a trend that is likely to not disappear.

Issue

Coverage focusing less on policy issues has become increasingly the norm in American media. In just a four-year time span (1988-1992), policy or "issue" coverage decreased by 7 percent (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997, p. 33). Similarly, Patterson (1994) also found a sharp decline in policy focus over time in a study of *New York Times* headlines from 1960 to 1992. This may have negative implications for potential voters that reach beyond having a less well-

informed electorate. It has been shown that consistent exposure to what could be considered "image" focused news may increase voter cynicism and be influential enough to dissuade voters from participating in elections (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Valentino, Beckmann & Buhr, 2001). In fact, continued media focus on candidate image and viability, among other things, and the tendency to do so in either starkly positive or negative ways has repeatedly been a major criticism of political communication (Stemple & Windhauser, 1991). Since this trend has been increasing for decades (Patterson, 1994), it is likely to be the same in the coverage of the 2008 election.

Age and Gender

Other relevant characteristics of election media coverage that will be identified in this study are discussion of the candidate's age and gender in each of the news articles. These elements have each been identified as important in the coverage of political elections in the past, and because of the composition of candidates in 2008 this study will seek to examine their presence. In addition to identifying the elements in news stories, the study will also suggest whether they are found as part of an issue or image-focused article.

Age

When age has been displayed as an element of media coverage, it is often used in a way that questions how it will impact the candidate in office (Abrams, 1998). In the case of Republican presidential candidate Bob Dole in 1996, the media frequently covered age as a question of whether at age 73, he would be able to hold up to the demands and pressures of the presidency, govern effectively and remain healthy enough to finish his term (Abrams, 1998). Because his ability to successfully withstand the pressures of the president's office and survive a

full term in office were covered so extensively, previous research found that the media also placed more of an emphasis on who he selected as a running mate (Diamond & D'Amato, 1996).

Some scholars believe that the mention and discussion of age during political campaigns is often a blatant example of "ageism" on the part of the mass media as it is rarely done with the same level of frequency for young candidates (Diamond & D'Amato, 1996). In the case of Bob Dole in 1996, Diamond and D'Amato (1996) said, "When he is full of energy it is in spite of his age, and it's news when he seems to be flagging or fumbling, because of his age" (p. 43).

Age has arguably been an important and frequently discussed element of the 2008 election (USA Today, 2008). At 72 years old, McCain would be the oldest president ever elected into office, and on the other end of the spectrum, at just 47, Barack Obama would be the fifth-youngest president in U.S. history. However, the two extremes present in this election are not the first time that candidate age has been an issue of public concern. Although public polls have consistently shown race, gender and religious affiliation to be declining in importance among voters over the past fifty years, candidate age has remained critical (Jones, 2007). In fact, according to a *USA Today* survey conducted in March 2008, 40% of Americans cited both McCain and Obama's ages as major concerns in the upcoming election.

Obama's appeal to younger Americans has also been a source of campaign discussion, particularly because of the record of poor voter turnout among members of that demographic. However, efforts to increase youth-voter participation in recent elections have helped bolster turnout across the country (Bystrom & Dimitrova, 2007) which made this aspect of the campaign somewhat unpredictable.

Gender

Differential treatment according to gender continues to be a common and lamented quality of news coverage of female politicians in American media (Kahn, 1994, 1992; Leeper, 1991; Smith, 1997). Previous research on media coverage of politicians has consistently shown that the disparity between the genders is largely detrimental to female candidates, (Kahn, 1994, 1992; Gidengil & Everitt, 2003; Leeper, 1991; Sapiro, 1982) although Bystrom, Robertson and Banwart (2001) have found this trend to be declining in more recent elections. One other consistent theme in media coverage of female candidates is to give them slightly less coverage than their male counterparts (Smith, 1997; Stempel & Windhauser, 1991). The media also often focus more heavily on the physical appearance of female candidates and accentuate both their feminine or masculine characteristics in a way that reinforces traditional gender stereotypes (Herzog, 1998; Kahn, 1996). This is commonly done by describing their personalities in ways that try to place them into roles such as a wife and mother (Dimitrova & Geske, 2009; Kahn, 1994; Norris, 1997) or as having volatile and sensitive emotions (Ross & Sreberny, 2000). Although female candidates and women leaders abroad are extremely diverse and few fit stereotypical gender stereotypes (Norris, 1997), research has shown that they are consistently placed into these generalizations (Kahn, 1994; Norris, 1997). Further, according to Bystrom et al. (2001) the overall issue of gender, marital status, and having children are far more likely to be discussed about female candidates than males in the same role even though female candidates don't necessarily discuss their families more often (Bystrom et al., 2001).

Other common ways that the media addresses candidate gender involve the interpretive language used when relaying messages of female candidates. It has been shown that female candidates, their issue stances and their responses are often described in much harsher and more

severe terms than are male candidates (Eagly, Makhijani & Klonsky, 1992; Gidengil & Everitt, 2003).

A considerable amount of accusations were made at the sometimes blatantly sexist comments made about current Secretary of State and then New York Sen. Hillary Clinton during the 2008 Democratic primaries (Farhi, 2008). Coverage focusing on her appearance was often negative (Kim, 2008) and a considerable amount focusing on her personality emphasized the ways in which she differed from stereotypically feminine traits as defined in previous research (Bystrom, Banwart, Kaid & Robertson, 2004; Dimitrova & Geske, 2009; Norris, 1997). So when Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin was announced as the Vice Presidential candidate for the Republican Party within the same election, it was easy to assume that very little would have changed for a woman in such a role.

Research Questions

Based on the forgoing literature review, the following research questions are posed:

RQ1: What is the most dominant frame used in newspaper coverage of the 2008 presidential election?

RQ2: Is there a relationship between the dominant frame used and candidate focus?

RQ3: Is there a difference in the way news articles and non-news articles (feature stories, editorial/op ed.) frame candidates?

RQ4a: Which received the greater amount of media attention in the 2008 election, image or issue-focused stories?

RQ4b: What aspects of image are most frequently used in describing the candidates?

RQ5: How frequently is age used to describe the candidates in the 2008 election?

RQ6: How frequently is gender mentioned to describe the candidates?

Chapter III: Methodology

To address the research questions posed in the previous chapter, a content analysis was conducted. Content analysis, as defined by Kerlinger (2000) is a "method of studying and analyzing communication in a systematic, objective, and quantitative manner for the purpose of measuring variables" (as cited in Wimmer & Dominick, 2006, p. 150).

Content analysis is appropriate for this study in that it aims to uncover media frames used in the 2008 presidential election.

Analyzing the News Articles

To determine the frames most often utilized in the 2008 presidential campaign, three frames were identified: experience, race and viability. Since the mainstream media are the most convenient way to find information on each of the candidates, people often turn to those channels to learn more. Because of their ability to reach large groups of people, inexpensive nature and large amount of content, newspapers have often been a source of examination for content analysis. Further, since they are utilized by so many people to obtain campaign information, newspapers are also often the focus of thorough examination of political news **(**Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; D'Angelo, et al., 2005; Patterson, 1994; Stempel & Windhauser, 1991; Valentino, et al., 2001). This study intends to add to this research by examining newspaper articles about the election in the major U.S. newspapers *The New York Times*, the *Chicago Tribune* and *USA Today*. These newspapers were selected because they are all within the top 10 newspapers with the largest circulation in the United States, with *USA Today* at number one (Newspapers.com, 2007). Further, *The New York Times* has long been considered the "paper of record" for the U.S. and the *Chicago Tribune* is published in the home city of one of the presidential candidates (Obama).

Arriving at the Sample

For the purposes of this study, 75 randomly selected newspaper articles in each paper were gathered from *The New York Times*, the *Chicago Tribune* and *USA Today*, within the time period August 29, 2008 – November 3, 2008. These dates were selected because they range from the day that the final candidate (Palin) was announced and spans to the day before the election.

To collect the stories to be examined from all three newspapers, a search was conducted using the online archiving database Access World News. A separate search was conducted for each paper between the given dates and using the search term "2008 Election." The search yielded 1,334 results for *The New York Times*, 407 for the *Chicago Tribune*, and 584 for *USA Today*. The sample of 75 news articles from each paper was selected using a table of random numbers to produce a total of 225 articles to be analyzed.

Each of the articles was analyzed using a code sheet adapted for this study from previous political communication research including Bystrom (2008).

Operational Definition of Variables

Candidate Frames

This study examined three separate types of media frames used to describe the candidates in the 2008 election. Because it is likely that more than one frame will be present in each article, the study focused on the most dominant frame first (identified in the code sheet as "frame 1", followed by any others ("frame 2", "frame 3").

Since more than one candidate was mentioned in each story, the primary candidate being discussed in the focus of the dominant frame was identified as "candidate 1", followed subsequently in terms of focus by each other candidate mentioned ("candidate 2", "candidate 3", "candidate 4").

The individual candidate frames are as follows:

1. The *experience* frame emphasizes the candidate's experience as a major theme of the story. This frame may talk specifically about political or personal life experience as the basis of candidate credibility (Jones, 2008).
2. The *race* frame is present in stories that emphasize the racial differences between the candidates, a technique that is commonly used by the media in situations with racial diversity (Powers, 2007). This can also include how race may impact voter decisions or preferences.
3. The *viability* frame emphasizes the likelihood of the candidate(s) being elected in the general election. Messages using this frame may appear in horserace-type coverage and stress how far ahead or behind one candidate is compared to another, a phenomenon that has been well-documented in previous research on political communication (Domke et. al., 1997; Mantler & Whiteman, 1995; Stempel & Windhauser, 1991).

Image vs. Issue Focus

This study classified each story as being either predominantly focused on candidate image or issue. Since both aspects of image and issue were present in each article, coders were instructed to identify the dominant overall focus of the story.

Image and issue focus are as follows:

1. Messages possessing a focus on candidate *image* have a heavy focus on the physical appearance and personal attributes of the candidates, and includes discussion of facial expressions, body language, clothing or hair (Braden, 1996; Devitt, 20002; Dimitrova & Geske, 2009). Image-focused stories also primarily discuss candidate position in polls,

tactics, speaking style and other aspects of either the candidates or their campaigns that are not related to policy issue.

2. Stories with a focus on *issue* are present in media messages stressing the candidate's campaign platforms, proposed policies or issue stances. Articles that have are predominantly focused on issues include little to no discussion of the candidate's physical image, personal attributes or poll standing.

Describing the Candidates

Because of the unique situation presented in the composure of major party candidates in the 2008 election, this study also examined the ways in which age, gender and article valence are used in media coverage.

The definitions of these variables of interest are as follows:

1. Age was coded as present in the news article if it was mentioned in reference to the age of a political candidate. If age was mentioned, coders indicated whether it was discussed as a candidate asset, candidate detriment or whether it was mentioned as related to potential voters. Coders were provided with the option to record other discussions of age as a string variable.
2. Coders identified whether gender was mentioned in reference to each candidate. If gender was mentioned, coders indicated whether it was discussed as related to candidate appearance, the candidate's parental role or the candidate's masculine or feminine traits. Coders were provided with the option to record other discussions of gender as a string variable.
3. A distinctly positive or negative slant of the story is frequently identified in election coverage and can be considered the overall tone, or *valence* of the story. A positive or

negative slant is present in articles that contain strongly loaded positive or negative terms or appear to be more favorable toward one candidate than the other. Those articles without a negative or positive slant or with balanced coverage were coded as "neutral" or in the case of no clearly identifiable valence, they were coded as "can't be determined".

Inter-coder Reliability

"The concept of reliability is crucial to content analysis" (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006, p. 165). Because content analysis aims for an accurate recording of "relatively objective (or at least intersubjective) characteristics of messages" (Neuendorf, 2002, p. 141) in a given text, the reliability of those messages being detected is paramount. Inter-coder reliability is defined by Wimmer & Dominick (2006) as the "levels of agreement among independent coders who code the same content using the same coding instruments" (p. 165).

Two graduate students, including the author, coded for the variables. The nominal variables of interest in this study were coded and inter-coder reliability was assessed using Cohen's *kappa*:

$$\text{Cohen's } kappa = \frac{\%\text{ observed agreement - }\%\text{ expected agreement}}{(\#\text{ of objects coded}) \times (\#\text{ of coders}) - \%\text{ expected agreement}}$$

Using this method, a minimum reliability coefficient of 0.75 must be obtained. Most general textbooks on content analysis recommend using at least a minimum of 10% of the entire sample size when determining inter-coder reliability (Neuendorf, 2002). This study tested for inter-coder reliability on a sub-sample of 34 articles, or 15% of the total sample size of 225.

Table 1: Inter-coder reliability results

Variable	*Kappa*=
Story Focus	.824
Frame 1	.915
Frame 2	.752
Frame 3	1.0
McCain valence	.847
Obama valence	.843
Palin valence	.818
Biden valence	.841
McCain gender mentioned	1.0
Obama gender mentioned	1.0
Palin gender mentioned	.892
Biden gender mentioned	1.0
Gender discussed in terms of appearance	1.0
Gender discussed as parental role	.717
Gender discussed in terms of masculine/feminine traits	.872
McCain age mentioned	1.0
Obama age mentioned	1.0
Palin age mentioned	1.0
Biden age mentioned	1.0
Age discussed as a candidate asset	1.0
Age discussed as a candidate detriment	1.0
Age discussed as related to potential voters	1.0
McCain image: appearance	1.0
McCain image: spouse mentioned	1.0
McCain image: children mentioned	1.0
McCain image: poll standing	.884
McCain image: personality	.842
Obama image: appearance	.788
Obama image: spouse mentioned	1.0
Obama image: children mentioned	1.0
Obama image: poll standing	.943
Obama image: personality	1.0
Palin image: appearance	1.0
Palin image: spouse mentioned	1.0
Palin image: children mentioned	.875
Palin image: poll standing	.908
Palin image: personality	.924
Biden image: appearance	1.0
Biden image: spouse mentioned	1.0
Biden image: children mentioned	1.0
Biden image: poll standing	1.0
Biden image: personality	1.0

Note: Average *kappa* for all variables in table = .940

Statistical Tests

The statistical analysis computer program SPSS (Statistical Program for the Social Sciences) was used to obtain descriptive statistics for responses to each of the research questions posed in the previous chapter. Full responses to several of the research questions required the use of more than one test. For the answers to RQ1, RQ4a, RQ4b, RQ5 and RQ6, frequency distribution data were collected. For answers to RQ2, RQ3, RQ4b, RQ5 and RQ6 cross-tabulations and chi-square tests were conducted.

Chapter IV: Results

This study explored newspaper coverage of the 2008 presidential election within the context of framing theory. The results presented in this chapter examine the frames elicited from three leading U.S. newspapers, *The New York Times*, the *Chicago Tribune* and *USA Today*. The study also discusses various aspects of coverage focusing on each of the four major party candidates.

A total of 75 articles from each paper, published between August 29 and November 3, 2008, were collected and analyzed. Most articles, (116, or 51.6%) were published during the month of October, and 163 (72.4%) were written by local staff reporters of each respective paper. The majority of the articles analyzed, (110, or 48.9%) were news articles, followed by 71 (31.6%) feature stories and 44 (19.6%) editorial/op ed. pieces.

As one might expect, both major party presidential candidates Barack Obama and John McCain were mentioned in a large majority of articles, 191 (84.9%) and 189 (84%) articles respectively. Vice presidential candidates Sarah Palin and Joe Biden were mentioned much less frequently, at 89 (39.6%) and 33 (14.7%) articles respectively, with Biden being referenced considerably less often than the other three. McCain was most often the primary focus in articles, with a total of 95 (42.2%) concentrating on him over other candidates. Obama was the primary candidate in 85 (37.8%) articles, and receiving less media attention were the two vice presidential candidates, with 29 (12.9%) of articles focused predominantly on Palin, and a total of 3 (1.3%) articles had Biden as the primary focus. There were a total of 13 (5.8%) articles for which a primary candidate could not be identified, leaving 212 articles with a primary candidate discussed.

In the 189 articles that mentioned McCain, 9 (4.8%) were considered positive, 30 (15.9%) were considered negative, 148 (78.3%) were neutral and 2 (1.1%) could not be determined. Similarly, in the 191 articles that mentioned Obama, 22 (11.5%) were positive, 10 (5.2%) were considered negative, 155

(81.2%) were neutral and 4 (2.1%) could not be determined. Palin was mentioned in 89 articles, 10 (11.2%) of which were considered positive, 27 (30.3%) negative, 50 (56.2%) were neutral and 2 (2.2%) could not be determined. Of the 33 articles that Biden was mentioned in, 4 (12.1%) were positive, none were negative, 25 (75.8%) were neutral and 4 (12.1%) could not be determined. Although the majority of articles for each candidate were neutral, McCain and Palin both received a greater percentage of negative articles and fewer positive articles than both Obama and Biden. Palin in particular had the greatest amount of negative articles, with just over half of hers appearing as neutral.

Dominant Frames

RQ1 asked: "What is the most dominant frame used in newspaper coverage of the 2008 presidential election?" The literature suggested three frames relevant to the 2008 election that have been identified in previous coverage of presidential races: experience, race and viability. A dominant frame could not be identified in 93 articles, leaving a sample size of 132 articles with clearly dominant frames of interest to this study. Excluding the stories where a dominant frame could not be identified, the viability frame emerged as the most dominant of the three being examined, appearing as the predominant frame in 83 (62.9%) articles. Following viability was experience, which was the dominant frame in 25 (18.9%) of the articles. Very close to experience was the race frame, which appeared as the dominant frame in 24 (18.2%) articles.

RQ2 asked: "Is there a relationship between the dominant frame used and candidate focus?" Excluding articles for which a dominant frame could not be determined, the remaining 132 articles with a dominant frame present were analyzed. Of the 95 articles listing McCain as the primary candidate, a dominant frame was identified in 53. In the 85 articles identifying Obama as the primary candidate discussed, a dominant frame was identified in a total of 60 articles. Finally, in the 29 articles with Sarah Palin as the primary candidate, a dominant frame

was identified in 19. The three articles displaying Biden as the primary candidate did not have a dominant frame identified.

As Table 2 shows, the viability frame was the most dominant in articles with a primary focus on both McCain (42, or 79.2%) and Obama (35, or 58.3%). Only 8 (15.1%) articles focusing on McCain as the primary candidate had experience as the dominant frame, and 3 (5.7%) had race as most dominant. After viability, 21 (35%) articles with Obama as the primary candidate had race as a dominant frame, followed by the experience frame, which was most dominant in 4 (6.7%) articles. The most frequently occurring frame used for Palin was experience, which was most dominant in 13 (68.4%) articles. Following experience was the viability frame, which was most dominant in 6 (31.6%) of articles where Palin was the primary candidate. The race frame was not present in any articles with Palin as the primary candidate discussed.

Due to the low number of observations in some cells, chi-square tests could not be performed.

Table 2: Frequency of dominant frames by primary candidate discussed.

	McCain	**Obama**	**Palin**	**Total**
Experience	8 (15.1%)	4 (6.7%)	13 (68.4%)	25
Race	3 (5.7%)	21 (35%)	0 (0%)	24
Viability	42 (79.2%)	35 (58.3%)	6 (31.6%)	83
Total	53	60	19	132

RQ3 asked: "Is there a difference in the way news articles and non-news articles (feature stories, editorial/op ed.) frame candidates?" A dominant frame was identified in 66 news articles, 43 feature stories and 23 editorial/op ed. pieces. Eliminating articles for which a dominant frame could not be determined, the experience frame was present in 25 articles. It was most commonly seen in editorial/op ed. pieces, where it was identified in 8 (34.8%) articles, followed by news stories, where it appeared in 11 (16.7%) articles and feature stories where it was used as the primary frame in 6 (14%) articles.

The race frame was most often found in editorial/op ed. pieces, where it was identified in 6 (26.1%) articles, followed by feature stories, with 9 (20.9%) articles and 9 (13.6%) news articles.

The viability frame was most often identified in news stories, where it emerged as the dominant frame in 46 (69.7%) of the articles. This was followed by feature stories, where viability was the dominant frame in 28 (65.1%) of the articles. Finally, viability was present as the dominant frame in 9 (39.1%) editorial/op ed. articles analyzed.

As Table 3 shows, the editorial/op ed. articles were more likely to use the experience and race frames than were feature or news stories. News and feature articles, however, more often utilized the viability frame than editorials. Viability appears as the most frequently occurring frame in each type of article. The differences in framing among news stories, feature stories and editorial/op ed. articles were statistically significant, but only at the .10 level ($\chi^2 = 8.10$, df = 4, p = .088).

Table 3: Frequency of dominant frames by story style.

	News Articles	Feature Articles	Editorial/Op Ed. Articles	Total
Experience	11 (16.7%)	6 (14%)	8 (34.8%)	25
Race	9 (13.6%)	9 (20.9%)	6 (26.1%)	24
Viability	46 (69.7%)	28 (65.1%)	9 (39.1%)	83
Total	66	43	23	132

Image and Issue Focus

RQ4a asked: "Which received the greater amount of media attention in the 2008 election, image or issue-focused stories?" Of the 225 articles coded, 147 (65.3%) had a predominant focus on aspects of image and 78 (34.7%) were focused on issues. Articles with an image focus were more concerned with physical appearance, speaking style and poll standing. Those focusing on issue were articles discussing candidate policy issues (both existing and those that came up during the election season) and campaign platforms.

RQ4b asked: "What aspects of image are most frequently used in describing the candidates?" The answer to this question varied somewhat considerably depending on the candidate in question and whether or not they were the primary candidate discussed in the article, versus just being mentioned. Various aspects of image were often observed in the same article for most of the candidates.

In the 189 articles in which McCain was mentioned, his popularity or poll standing was identified in 63 (33.3%) articles. This was followed by personality, which was discussed in 41 (21.7%) articles. McCain's spouse and children were mentioned less frequently, appearing in 7

(3.7%) and 5 (2.6%) articles, respectively, and mentioned the least often were McCain's physical image characteristics (hair, dress and facial features), which were mentioned in 4 (2.1%) articles. In the 95 articles in which McCain was the primary candidate discussed, popularity or poll standing was still the most frequently referenced aspect of image, done at around the same percent of times, appearing in 32 (33.7%) articles. Following popularity or poll standing was personality, which was referenced in 27 (28.4%) articles, and McCain's spouse, who was mentioned in 5 (5.3%) articles. Receiving the fewest amount of media mentions were McCain's physical image and children, which were brought up in 3 (3.2%) and 2 (2.1%) articles each.

Overall, aspects of Obama's image were mentioned somewhat more frequently than McCain's. In the 191 articles in which Obama was mentioned, the highest amount of image references came in the form of his popularity or poll standing, which was mentioned in 70 (36.6%) articles. Obama's personality was the next most often discussed aspect of his image, and was brought up in 33 (17.3%) articles. Physical image was mentioned in 13 (6.8%) articles for Obama, and his spouse and children were referenced in 9 (4.7%) and 8 (4.2%) articles, respectively. In the 85 articles in which Obama was the primary candidate discussed, the image attributes receiving the greatest amount of media focus remained the same. Popularity or poll standing was mentioned in 38 (44.7%) articles, followed by discussion of Obama's personality, which was brought up in 20 (23.5%) articles. Following personality were aspects of Obama's physical appearance, which were discussed in 11 (12.9%) articles, and his spouse and children, mentioned in 9 (10.6%) and 7 (8.2%) articles each.

References to Palin's image were considerably higher than those for the other candidates, and unlike McCain and Obama, in the 89 articles in which she was mentioned, personality was the most cited, being mentioned in 33 (37.1%) articles. Next were poll standing or popularity,

which was discussed in 18 (20.2%) articles and her children, who were brought up in 16 (18%) articles. Very close to mentions of children were aspects of Palin's physical image, mentioned in 13 (14.6%) articles, and least mentioned was her spouse, who was referenced in 9 (10.1%) articles. In the 29 articles in which Palin was the primary candidate discussed, personality remained the most frequently referenced image aspect, being mentioned in 20 (69%) articles. However, unlike the articles in which she was mentioned, when Palin was the primary candidate discussed, the next most frequently cited aspect of her image was her children, which were brought up in 12 (41.4%) articles. Next came mentions of Palin's physical image, which was referenced in 10 (34.5%) articles, popularity or poll standing, mentioned in 9 (31%) articles, and her spouse, discussed in 7 (24.1%) articles.

Biden's image was very rarely referenced, but when it was discussed in the 33 articles mentioning him, it was found to be done equally for popularity or poll standing, personality and his spouse, which were all referenced in 3 (9.1%) articles each. Biden's children were mentioned in 2 (6.1%) articles and his physical image was never referenced. In the 3 articles in which Biden was the primary candidate, his spouse and children were each mentioned in 1 (33%) article, and aspects of his personality, popularity or poll standing and physical image were never addressed.

Interestingly, popularity and poll standing were both identified as the most frequently referenced aspects of image for McCain and Obama, while Palin was more likely to have aspects of her personality and children discussed. Biden was equally likely to have both, but had very few references to image overall. Both Obama and, especially, Palin had aspects of their physical appearance discussed, but this was very rarely done for McCain and not at all for Biden.

Age and Gender References

RQ5 asked: "How frequently is age used to describe the candidates in the 2008 election?" In the 189 articles in which McCain was mentioned, his age was discussed in 8 (4.2%) articles. In the 95 articles listing him as the primary candidate discussed, McCain's age was brought up in 4 (4.2%) articles. Of the 191 articles mentioning Obama, his age was discussed in 8 (4.2%) articles. Most of these mentions appeared in the 85 stories listing him as primary candidate, where his age was talked about in 7 (8.2%) articles. Although she was mentioned much less overall, in the 89 articles mentioning her, Palin's age was mentioned in 6 (6.7%) articles. In the 29 articles listing her as the primary candidate it was discussed in 4 (13.8%) articles. Biden's age was discussed much less frequently, appearing in only 1 (3%) article of the 33 in which he was mentioned. Age was not discussed in the 3 articles listing Biden as the primary candidate. Interestingly, considering that Palin is mentioned overall in far fewer articles than McCain and Obama, she is almost twice as likely as the two male candidates to have her age discussed.

Overall, when age in general was discussed in the 225 articles, it was most often mentioned as being detrimental to the candidate; these references occurred in 7 (3.1%) articles. Age was next likely to be mentioned in reference to potential voters, where it was found in 5 (2.2%) articles. Finally, age was discussed as a candidate asset in 3 (1.3%) articles analyzed.

RQ6 asked: "How frequently is gender mentioned to describe the candidates?" In the 189 articles in which McCain was mentioned, his gender was discussed in 1 (0.5%) article. Similarly, in the 191 articles mentioning Obama, his gender was also addressed in 1 (0.5%) article. Palin's gender was referenced in 35 (39.3%) of the 89 articles mentioning her, and Biden's was brought up in just 1 (3%) article of the 33 mentioning him. Because gender was only really mentioned for Palin, further analysis was conducted to examine the ways in which it was used. Often, more

than one aspect of gender was identified within the same article. Overall, in the 35 articles mentioning Palin's gender, it was discussed in 9 (25.7%) articles in terms of physical appearance, in 16 (45.7%) articles in terms of her parental role because of gender, and in 15 (42.9%) articles in reference to her masculine or feminine traits.

Of the 89 articles in which Palin as a candidate was mentioned, her gender was discussed in terms of her physical appearance in 9 (10.1%) articles, in 17 (19.1%) articles in terms of her parental role because of her gender and in 15 (16.9%) articles in terms of her masculine or feminine traits. In the 29 articles in which she was the primary candidate discussed, her gender was mentioned in 6 (20.7%) articles in terms of her physical appearance, in 12 (41.4%) articles in reference to her parental role because of her gender and in 11 (37.9%) articles in terms of her masculine or feminine traits.

A further post-hoc observation noted that in the 95 articles that listed McCain as the primary candidate discussed, Palin's gender was mentioned in 13 (13.7%) articles. In the 85 articles with Obama as the primary candidate discussed, Palin's gender was discussed in 5 (5.9%) articles. Of the 29 articles that listed Palin as the primary candidate discussed, her gender was mentioned in 17 (58.6%). Finally, the three articles focusing on Biden did not mention Palin's gender. For this reason, they were eliminated from the 212 articles with a primary candidate discussed, leaving a total of 209 articles to be analyzed. The differences between candidates and mention of Palin's gender were statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 44.3$, df = 2, p = .000). Worth noting is that as Table 4 shows, Palin's gender was mentioned in more than half of the articles that had her as the primary focus.

Table 4: Cross-tabulation of primary candidate discussed and mention of Palin's gender.

	Palin's gender mentioned		
	Yes	**No**	**Total**
McCain	13 (13.7%)	82 (86.3%)	95
Obama	5 (5.9%)	80 (94.1%)	85
Palin	17 (58.6%)	12 (41.4%)	29
Total	35	174	209

Chapter V: Discussion and Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to examine the framing of the major candidates during the 2008 presidential election. The study examined how newspaper coverage depicted the presidential and vice presidential candidates for the Republican and Democratic parties. The study focused on aspects of experience, race, viability, age and gender because of their use in prior media research and their relevance to the unique composition among the leading candidates in the 2008 election.

The content analysis of three leading U.S. national newspapers: *The New York Times*, the *Chicago Tribune* and *USA Today* showed some interesting results.

Media Framing in the 2008 Election

Considering the three frames identified and examined in the study: viability, experience and race, the results were consistent with previous political communication research that has shown horserace, or viability-focused coverage to be the dominant way of discussing political candidates (Domke, Fan, Fibison, Shah, Smith & Watts, 1997; Mantler & Whiteman, 1995; Stemple & Windhauser, 1991). In every type of story style examined (news article, feature stories, editorial/op ed.) viability was the dominant frame discussed, although it was more common for news and feature articles. As one might expect, the discussion of viability was largely surrounding the two presidential candidates John McCain and Barack Obama and not used as heavily for vice presidential candidates Sarah Palin and Joe Biden. The viability frame was used consistently throughout the August-November course of media coverage and was present in each of the three newspapers examined.

An interesting observation made about the viability frame was how often it took the tone of the somewhat familiar “game” frame that has also been connected to the idea of horserace

coverage. An example of just how blatantly the media can sometimes treat elections as though they were merely high-stakes games comes in an October 21 *New York Times* news article by Katharine Seelye, "Mr. Obama has achieved a milestone: he is now neck and neck with his Republican rival and is even slightly ahead in some polls." Another instance where the media literally used the horserace analogy to describe the election was found in a September 20 *New York Times* news article by Julie Bosman, "…as both Mr. McCain and Mr. Obama jockey to prove their superior ability to lead the nation through the crisis…" Not all of the viability coverage related to games focused on the election in terms of a race, however. A September 26 *Chicago Tribune* feature story by Newton Minow consistently referred to an upcoming debate as the "big game", and news stories such as an October 27 *Chicago Tribune* article by Jill Zuckman and an October 20 *USA Today* article by Chuck Raasch described candidates in terms of their "defensive" or "offensive" positions.

Much more frequently identified in the viability frame, however, were discussions of candidate poll standing, outcome predictions, and commentary on tactics that each campaign team was currently using to win over new voters. Each of the three newspapers had a substantial number of articles that referenced one poll or another, and although the poll results were generally straight-forward and without much interpretation on behalf of the journalist, there were also a large number of stories that tried to forecast the outcome of the election. An example of this can be found in an October 30 *Chicago Tribune* news article by Eric Zorn, in which he predicted, "… Barack Obama will nevertheless win handidly…" Similar assumptions were made in an October 17 *Chicago Tribune* article by Jim Tankersley, where referring to several "undecided" states he said, "…John McCain cold sweep them all and still lose the presidency" and much earlier in a September 7 *Chicago Tribune* feature story by John Kass that declared,

"…even though Obama probably has this election won…" Still other articles based assumptions on much less than current public opinion polls, such as an October 9 article in the *Chicago Tribune* that made outcome predictions based on the number of Halloween masks bearing the two candidate's likeness were sold.

Tactics were often discussed in terms of exactly what each of the candidates must accomplish to take the election. This was frequently done in reference to the electoral college and states that they would need to win, such as evidenced in this October 6 *Chicago Tribune* news article by John McCormick:

> In the days before and after Tuesday's second presidential debate, Barack Obama will spend his time in states where Democratic presidential candidates rarely go, especially this close to an election. Obama now is focusing on Virginia, North Carolina and Indiana.

Further discussion of candidate tactics were made in an October 20 *USA Today* article by Chuck Raasch, which described McCain's desperation to win key states by saying that he "planned to campaign in Virginia and North Carolina on Saturday, two states that in past elections would have been well in GOP hands this close to an election."

Because the viability frame was visible in so many articles (in fact, far more than any other frame), it can be concluded that it remains a very commonly utilized frame for the mass media when covering political elections. Even more, the news media doesn't necessarily just focus on viability in terms of poll standing, but rather it often describes the candidates and the entire election as a competition that is based on strategy and tactics, rather than issues.

The other two frames analyzed in this study were race and experience. Although neither were identified even remotely as frequently as viability, they were still visible in the 2008 election coverage. The second most frequently utilized frame was experience, which was typically only discussed in terms of the arguably less-experienced candidates, Obama and Palin.

This in itself is not surprising considering that McCain and Biden both have served two and three decades, respectively, in the U.S. Senate. However, what might be of interest is that only the lack of experience in both Obama and Palin's record was ever really discussed, with very little mention of it as a positive quality for McCain and Biden. In fact, although experience was used more often as a frame in articles focusing on McCain than those focusing on Obama, it was often regarding his decision to pick a relatively inexperienced running mate. An example of this can be seen in the November 2 *Chicago Tribune* feature story by Christi Parsons:

> McCain's selection of Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin as his running mate and later the hasty decision to suspend his campaign to work on the Wall Street bailout made it harder for him to press the argument that started out as his natural advantage: that his ticket offered voters more experience.

Unlike the other candidates who had viability as the most dominant frame, when Palin was the primary candidate discussed in an article, the most frequently utilized frame was experience. Many of the articles using this frame discussed her lack of experience harshly, such as an October 3 *New York Times* editorial article by David Brooks that claimed she "took her inexperience and made a mansion out of it" during the recent vice presidential debate. Several articles even discussed recent polls conducted during the election regarding Palin's level of experience. One example is an October 3 *USA Today* article that described a recent 2008 poll conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press showing, "…the number of people who believe Palin is qualified to serve as president has dropped to 37% from 52% in early September." Although Obama too received media criticism for his relatively low levels of experience, they were significantly less often and less severe than those regarding Palin.

Perhaps some of the severity in the way Palin was described was due to the fact that her most heavily utilized frame was present in a greater percentage of editorial/op ed. stories than in news or feature stories. Because editorials are characteristically much more opinionated and

"colorful" than news or feature stories, the fact that so many of those analyzed were devoted to her inexperience gives an overwhelmingly negative valence to this frame when applied to her.

The final frame, race, was most often used in all three newspapers as a reference to the groundbreaking nature of race in this election. Although the discussion of Obama as the first African American to ever win a major party nomination and his chance to be the first African American president was generally mentioned as fact with little elaboration, an exception is a November 2 *New York Times* feature story by Susan Saulny, in which she talks with an elderly man who never thought he would "have the chance to vote for a black president." This too is fairly consistent with what has been identified as a media tendency to sometimes portray minority candidates as "breaking through" (Sinclair-Chapman & Price, 2008).

The race frame was also used in regards to commentary on existing racism in the United States, whether it be easily visible or covert. This was often described as how it would relate to voter preference, as evidenced in an October 26 *New York Times* feature story by Bruce Lambert that called race the "great unknown in this election." Some articles used this same basic idea of race as a large enough deciding factor for voters that it could potentially influence election outcomes. The implied impact referenced the "Bradley effect," which suggests that white people may tell pollsters that they would vote for a black man, but never actually do so because of their own prejudices. However, in an October 22 Chicago Tribune editorial article, Kathleen Parker suggests that, "…equally significant this time may be the reverse-Bradley effect: whites who would never admit to voting for a black man, but do." Other articles, such as an October 27 *Chicago Tribune* feature story by Dawn Turner-Trice discuss race as being such a major factor that there were discussions of riots on election night.

Race was also referenced as a political move, as illustrated in articles published on October 23 in *The New York Times* and on October 29 in the *Chicago Tribune,* both of which discussed the accusations of former Secretary of State Colin Powell's endorsement of Obama as being racially motivated. Other mentions of race and its role in the election were generally in the form of the Republican Party using it to play into the public's covertly racist feelings, such as is described in this October 12 *New York Times* editorial piece by Frank Rich:

> Is there still enough racism in America to prevent a black man from becoming president? And, will Republicans play the race card? The jury is out on the first question until Nov. 4. But we now have the unambiguous answer to the second: Yes.

Another example of this is found in an October 22 Chicago Tribune editorial article where Kathleen Parker criticizes Palin's "pals around with terrorists" comments as an attempt to appeal to xenophobic, racist voters who might not vote for Obama because of anti-Muslim feelings.

Not surprisingly, and consistent with research done on the 2008 election thus far, the discussion of race as a ground-breaking "first" received a considerable amount of newspaper coverage. This was generally very neutral and discussed as fact, rather than as an accusation or prediction. Although previous research, polls, and perhaps most importantly, the 2008 the election results have shown that racism might not be a significant enough factor to impact the outcome of elections, it was an issue discussed by the media, nonetheless.

Although all three frames examined were identified in the coverage of the 2008 election, the most heavily utilized regardless of story style was the viability frame. Both race and experience were discussed, but typically when this was done in news and feature stories it was focused much more strictly on fact, and as could be expected, was much more opinionated (sometimes harshly) in the editorials.

Describing the Candidates

Even though each candidate was discussed in the media coverage of the 2008 election, the amount of coverage they each received varied considerably. The presidential candidate from each party, John McCain and Barack Obama, were mentioned nearly the same amount of times, which was far more often than the two vice presidential candidates, Sarah Palin and Joe Biden. Interestingly though, Palin received considerably more media attention than Biden, who was very rarely discussed. In the few times that Biden was referenced, it was almost never as the primary focus of the article. This comes in contrast to previous research that showed female candidates as receiving fewer amounts of coverage than their male counterparts (Smith, 1997; Stemple & Windhauser, 1991). Although the cause of this cannot be determined in this study, it could possibly be due, at least in part, to the fact that Palin was the first woman to ever be nominated by the Republican Party for vice president, or that the 2008 election was the first time that most of the country had been exposed to her while Biden had been a figure on the national political scene for decades. Or, if research on Bob Dole in the 1996 election holds true, (Diamond & D'Amato, 1996) it could be because McCain's age subconsciously made people more interested in who he was selecting as a running mate.

Consistent with previous research, the majority of coverage for each of the four candidates was neutral (Bystrom et al., 2001; Stemple & Windhauser, 1991). However, as previous research also suggests, the amount of positive to negative coverage that each candidate received varied greatly from person to person (Carroll & Schreiber, 1997; Patterson, 2002). Obama had the highest percentage of neutral articles, and around twice as many positive as negative. His running mate Biden not only had the highest percentage of positive articles, but also the lowest percentage of negative descriptions. McCain's percentage of neutral articles was

close to that of both Obama and Biden, but he received the lowest level of positive articles overall and more negative coverage than either of them. Finally, Palin received by far the greatest amount of negative articles, but at the same time, garnered a percentage of positive articles so high that it rivaled coverage of Obama. It seemed that the articles discussing her were far more polarizing than the other candidates, as barely over half of hers were considered neutral.

Also consistent with previous research, e.g., Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Domke et al., 1997, articles focusing on candidate image were more prevalent than those discussing issues (campaign or policy-related). The majority of image references for the two presidential candidates came in the form of candidate popularity or poll standing, which is no surprise given the frequent occurrence of the viability frame. However, there were other mentions of candidate image that came up, and this too, varied from candidate to candidate. Biden's image was very rarely addressed, but when it was he was equally likely to be described in terms of his popularity or poll standing, personality and spouse. While popularity and poll standing were the most identified image characteristic discussed for the two presidential candidates, Palin's was most often referenced in regards to her personality or children. Regardless of whether she was just mentioned or appeared as the primary candidate discussed, Palin's children, physical image and spouse were all referenced in greater percentages than any of the other candidates. This is somewhat in line with past research considering that a large amount of media coverage on female candidates tries to fit them and their personalities into traditional gender stereotypes such as wife and mother (Dimitrova & Geske, 2009; Kahn, 1994; Norris, 1997) and mentions their children and martial status more frequently than those of male candidates (Bystrom et al, 2001).

However, the McCain/Palin campaign strategy of boasting her "hockey mom" image makes it slightly harder to decipher exactly how much of this was because the media continues to

enforce outdated gender stereotypes upon female candidates, and how much was relaying her campaign rhetoric and self-framing. Regardless of the media's reinforcement of Palin's image as mother and wife, her physical image was undoubtedly discussed without her initiation. One example of both her physical image and personality in the media spotlight is in a September 12 *New York Times* editorial:

> Choosing as his running mate an attractive, almost unknown, feisty young woman with little political experience, a contentious ideology and offbeat worldview over far more qualified members of his party has gotten Senator McCain the media attention he was seeking.

As with the issues of race and experience, the very descriptive mentions of Palin's physical image appeared almost exclusively in editorials and much more rarely in news or feature articles. However, regardless of where they appeared, the severity has a damaging potential considering prior research demonstrating that the way candidates are portrayed in terms of image and personal attributes can be as important as party affiliation to people determining their voting choices (Sullivan et al, 1990).

Age was not a major part of the media coverage in the 2008 election, and although it was most often referenced as a detrimental candidate asset as previous research has suggested (Diamond & D'Amato, 1996) it was done equally for McCain and Obama, which implies that it was applied as much for being young as for being old – perhaps contrary to what previous research had shown about it only being concerned with older candidates (Diamond & D'Amato, 1996). It is also interesting that age was mentioned so infrequently because a poll conducted by the PEW Research Center showed that age was a concern for 40% of voters. A similar survey showed that experience was a concern for 50% of voters, just 10% more than age, yet this was covered considerably more by the news media.

Gender was mentioned very rarely for the three male candidates, and although still not the majority of the time, much more frequently for the one female candidate. This was especially true in articles with Palin as the primary focus, where it was mentioned in more than half of the articles. As in the case of the race frame, a large number of these mentions were focused on the prospect of the ground-breaking nature of a female vice president and the fact that she was the first person to ever run in such a position for the Republican Party. However, many of the articles took a much more traditionally sexist tone, such as a September 20 *New York Times* editorial by Charles Blow that describes Palin's appearance and candidacy as "superficial" and just after the announcement of her candidacy, an August 29 *USA Today* feature story by John Yaukey that discusses her history in Alaskan pageantry, physical attractiveness, inexpensive wedding and children in much greater detail than her political history.

Overall, when Palin's gender was mentioned, it was discussed more often in regards to her role as a mother or in reference to her masculine or feminine traits. While these mentions may seem exceptionally high, this is not to belittle the fact that when her gender was mentioned overall, it was discussed in more than a quarter of articles in terms of her physical appearance.

In both articles mentioning Palin and those focusing primarily on her, gender was a major issue that was often discussed in terms of her physical appearance and role as a mother. This shows that although it was sometimes described as a groundbreaking first to have a Republican woman running for vice president, the media very often used outdated and stereotypical ways to describe Palin as a female candidate. Perhaps the most significant finding though, was that her gender was mentioned in the majority of the articles in which she was the primary focus, which to some extent may be expected because of the historic nature of her candidacy. However, while nevertheless still worthy of consideration, the other major "first" in the 2008 election, race, was

mentioned much less frequently in articles with Obama as the primary focus than gender was for Palin.

However, as with race, experience and image, when gender was described several of the editorials took a much bolder approach, such as a September 15 *Chicago Tribune* editorial by Katha Pollitt:

> John McCain chose the supremely underqualified Sarah Palin as his running mate partly because she is a woman. If you have a problem with that, you're a sexist. She talks incessantly about being a mother of five and uses her newborn, Trig, who has Down syndrome, as a campaign prop.

Regardless of the story style that they appeared in, the higher amount of attention paid to Palin's physical appearance and role as a mother supports past research that shows this as being more likely to happen to female candidates, (Kahn, 1994; Norris, 1997; Ross & Sreberny, 2000) and comes in contrast to more recent research that had found this trend to be declining (Bystrom et al., 2001).

Conclusions

Overall, the findings of this study provide evidence that the framing of the candidates in the 2008 election was largely consistent with that of previous elections. The media did continue to portray candidates using the viability frame. Race and experience framing included the harsh descriptions of candidates, which were largely present in editorial/op ed. articles while news and feature stories appeared to take a much more neutral approach. This can also be said for the issue of gender, which was addressed much more bluntly in editorial articles. While this is a characteristic of editorials in general, many of the harshest descriptions were in reference to Palin, which is similar to what previous scholars have found about female candidates being described in much harsher terms than their male counterparts (Eagly et al., 1992; Gidengil & Everitt, 2003). Although it can't be said definitively that the media coverage of Palin was more

detrimental to her than the other candidates, as was once the case with women running for political office, (Kahn, 1994, 1992; Gidengil & Everitt, 2003; Leeper, 1991; Sapiro, 1982) it undeniably contained more negative and stereotypical references. Palin's gender was mentioned much more frequently than that of the male candidates and when it was discussed, it was often done in very outdated ways, such as her physical appearance and her role as a mother. This comes in contrast to research done on more recent elections that showed the conditions for female political candidates in the media to be improving (Bystrom, et al., 2001). However, that may be due in part to the fact that for the first time, a woman almost won the Democratic nomination for president and a woman was nominated by the Republican Party for vice president. Perhaps this is why the media reacted by placing them into traditional stereotypes. Or, perhaps women face less gendered stereotypes by the media when they run for legislative, rather than executive, office.

Discussions of viability still receive an incredible amount of attention from the news media and more than half of all coverage examined focused on candidate image rather than campaign or policy issues. The dominance of image over issue may be a serious problem for a public who turns to the media for information on candidates, especially considering that some scholars have shown consistent exposure to news without considerable issue focus having potentially damaging impacts on voters (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997). The predominant emphasis on viability framing coupled with heavy image focus may lead to increased political cynicism and voter apathy as well as a lack of public knowledge about candidate issues.

Implications

Media framing of politics and elections can have multiple implications on potential voters. Regardless of the type of frame employed, news audiences may interpret the article

messages primarily within the context of the frames and therefore only really consider the elements which have received a greater media emphasis. In the case of viability, this may be especially troublesome since the constant updates on poll standing and strategy may not only assign a certain level of potential on each of the candidates, but also make voters less interested in participating in an election that they feel is petty or has already been determined. In the case of gender, by portraying female candidates in outdated stereotypical ways that focus on their physical appearance and role as a mother, the media are sending a message to potential voters that they are somehow less qualified than their male counterparts: women first, politicians second.

The implications for journalists and other industry practitioners must first begin by recognizing that rather than reporting elections as a serious event, most main news sources currently cover them as little more than a high-stakes competition. Since this has been shown to increase levels of audience cynicism, this coverage may lead to lower levels of trust in these media sources – reducing credibility with audiences. Media practitioners need to take an objective stance that focuses more heavily on candidate policy issues and campaign platforms. Doing so provides important information to potential voters who are making decisions about a major election.

The media also have an obligation to help level the playing field for female politicians, rather than make it more difficult for them to win voter support by reporting on their gender harshly or as an attribute more important than their political prowess. This study shows that race was a much less discussed element of the 2008 election than gender. Although both issues were addressed with some regularity, the media references to gender were much more frequent, outdated and blatant.

Limitations

This study was conducted exclusively on newspaper articles and didn't take into consideration other forms of media. Decline in readership continues to be an issue for many newspapers and television remains the most popular source of information. Also, in recent years many people have begun turning to the Internet to receive campaign information and although most online news sites don't do original reporting and may use stories already published in newspapers, it would have been beneficial to consider this medium as well. Also, the sample size selected was relatively small considering the number of articles published from each of the sources during the period of time examined.

The code sheet asked only for frames present in each article to be listed as most dominant, second most dominant, and third most dominant. This design made it impossible to capture additional frames per article.

Suggestions for Future Research

A more thorough examination of candidate descriptions through various media platforms would provide a more well-rounded vision of the way that each of the candidates were depicted in coverage of the 2008 election. Even more beneficial, perhaps, would be to consider what impacts these various descriptions have on the opinions and understanding of potential voters. This could be done using secondary poll data or via surveys or experiments in an effort to detect a causal link between various media frames and voting behavior or understanding. Further research in this area could be conducted to determine the frames presented through the media and how they compare to audience frames.

Finally, it is important to consider exactly what leads to this type of media framing in the first place. Understanding the elements that make up the frame-building process, whether they be

journalistic bias, societal factors or national culture, would add significantly to the area of framing research.

Code Sheet

Coder Name: _____

Article Number: _____ (enter as string variable)
1

Source _____ (1) The New York Times, (2) USA Today,
2 (3) Chicago Tribune

Month: _____ (1) August, (2) September, (3) October, (4) November
3

Date: _____ (01-31)
4

Name: _____ Name of journalist reporting the story (enter as string variable),
5 (99) unknown/can't determine

Gender: _____ Gender of journalist reporting the story: (1) female, (2) male
6 (99) unknown/can't determine

Story source: _____ (1) Associated Press (or other wire service) (2) Local staff reporter
7 (3) National columnist (4) Reporter from another paper
(5) Can't determine

Story style: _____ (1) news (2) feature (3) editorial/op ed
8

[A *news* story focuses on reporting information about a recent event. It is written to move quickly through the "five Ws and H"—who, what, where, why, when and how—in the "inverted pyramid" style, with the most important information in the first paragraphs and decreasingly important information in subsequent paragraphs.

A *feature* story is not meant to report breaking news, but to take an in-depth look at a subject. Features are often significantly longer than news articles, are more likely to be written from a personal perspective, and often delve deeper into their subjects. Although written to be more colorful, they do not include the opinions of the reporter.

An *editorial/op ed* column expresses the opinion of the writer and/or news publication. Most editorials take the form of an essay or thesis, using arguments to promote a point of view.]

[Articles with a dominant focus on *Candidate Image* will primarily discuss physical appearance, speaking style and delivery and candidate poll standing in comparison to one another.

Articles with a dominant focus on *Candidate Issue* will primarily discuss candidate or campaign platforms and policy issues.]

Story focus: _____ (1) Image (2) Issue
9

McCain mentioned: _____ (0-no, 1-yes)
10

Obama mentioned: _____ (0-no, 1-yes)
11

Palin mentioned: _____ (0-no, 1-yes)
12

Biden mentioned: _____ (0-no, 1-yes)
13

[*Candidate focus 1* is the primary candidate discussed in the news article. Subsequent *Candidate Focus* should go in order of the candidates with the next largest amount of attention in the news story.]

Candidate focus 1: _____ (1) McCain, (2) Obama, (3) Palin, (4) Biden, (99) N/A
14

Candidate focus 2: _____ (1) McCain, (2) Obama, (3) Palin, (4) Biden, (99) N/A
15

Candidate focus 3: _____ (1) McCain, (2) Obama, (3) Palin, (4) Biden, (99) N/A
16

Candidate focus 4: _____ (1) McCain, (2) Obama, (3) Palin, (4) Biden, (99) N/A
17

McCain image: (0-no, 1-yes if mentioned in story)

_____appearance (hair, dress, facial features) _____ spouse mentioned
18 **19**

____ child/children mentioned
20

_____ poll standing/
21 popularity mentioned

____personality (qualities and traits related to candidate's character, behavior,
22 temperament, emotions and mental state)

Obama image: (0-no, 1-yes if mentioned in story)

_____appearance (hair, dress, facial features)
23

_____ spouse mentioned
24

____ child/children mentioned
25

_____ poll standing/
26 popularity mentioned

____personality (qualities and traits related to candidate's character, behavior,
27 temperament, emotions and mental state)

Palin image: (0-no, 1-yes if mentioned in story)

_____appearance (hair, dress, facial features)
28

_____ spouse mentioned
29

____ child/children mentioned
30

_____ poll standing/
31 popularity mentioned

____personality (qualities and traits related to candidate's character, behavior,
32 temperament, emotions and mental state)

Biden image: (0-no, 1-yes if mentioned in story)

_____appearance (hair, dress, facial features)
33

_____ spouse mentioned
34

____ child/children mentioned
35

_____ poll standing/
36 popularity mentioned

____personality (qualities and traits related to candidate's character, behavior,

37 temperament, emotions and mental state)

[*Experience frame* is present in stories in which the main focus is on the perceived level of candidate experience among potential voters. An example is: "Obama's lack of experience may hurt his credibility among voters."

Race frame is present in stories which are predominantly focused on either the candidate's race as it relates to the election, or as it relates to potential voters. Examples are: "If elected, Obama would be the first African American president." Or, "Because it is the first time that an African American is a major party candidate, minorities are expected to turn out to voting booths in record numbers for the 2008 election."

Viability frame is present in stories with the main focus on candidate poll standing, or potential to garner voter support. Examples are: "Mr. Obama is now running neck and neck with his Republican rival, Senator John McCain." Or, "McCain's strategists contend that Obama's lead is narrowing and predict a historic upset."

*It is possible that articles may possess none, as few as one, or as many as all three frames.]

Frame 1: (the most dominant frame utilized in the story)
_____ (1) Experience, (2) Race, (3) Viability, (4) Can't determine
38

Phrase 1: (the term, metaphor, phrase, or complete sentence that define Frame 1 – if applicable)

_____
39

Frame 2: (the second most dominant frame utilized in the story)
_____ (1) Experience, (2) Race, (3) Viability, (4) Can't determine
40

Phrase 2: (the term, metaphor, phrase, or complete sentence that define Frame 2 – if applicable)

_____
41

Frame 3: (the third most dominant frame utilized in the story)
_____ (1) Experience, (2) Race, (3) Viability, (4) Can't determine
42

Phrase 3: (the term, metaphor, phrase, or complete sentence that define Frame 3 – if applicable)

_____

43

Candidate's gender mentioned: (0-no, 1-yes)

____McCain ____Obama ____Palin ____Biden

44 **45** **46** **47**

If yes, was the candidate's gender mentioned in terms of the following: (0-no, 1-yes)

____ Appearance ____ Parental role ____ Masculine/feminine traits

48 **49** **50**

____ Other (enter as string variable)

51

Candidate's age mentioned: (0-no, 1-yes)

____McCain ____Obama ____Palin ____Biden

52 **53** **54** **55**

If yes, was it discussed as the following: (0-no, 1-yes)

____ As a candidate asset ____ As a candidate detriment

56 **57**

____As related to potential voters ____ Other (enter as string variable)

58 **59**

[*Positive* slant (valence) stories include mostly positive references/comments by reporter, positive quotes, positive predictions in favor of candidate;

Negative slant (valence) stories include mostly negative references/comments by reporter, negative quotes, negative predictions not in candidate's favor;

Neutral (valence) stories include a balance of positive and negative comments/quotes AND/OR stories in which no journalistic opinion is included.]

McCain Valence: (overall valence of the article toward McCain)

_____ (1) Positive (2) Negative (3) Neutral (4) Can't determine/NA

60

Obama Valence: (overall valence of the article toward Obama)

_____ (1) Positive (2) Negative (3) Neutral (4) Can't determine/NA

61

Palin Valence: (overall valence of the article toward Palin)

_____ (1) Positive (2) Negative (3) Neutral (4) Can't determine/NA

62

Biden Valence: (overall valence of the article toward Biden)

_____ (1) Positive (2) Negative (3) Neutral (4) Can't determine/NA

63

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