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MEDIA AND CORPORATE BLAME: GATEKEEPING AND FRAMING  
OF THE BRITISH PETROLEUM OIL SPILL OF 2010

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A Thesis  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts  
in  
Communication Studies

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by  
Kudratdeep Kaur Dhaliwal  
June 2013

MEDIA AND CORPORATE BLAME: GATEKEEPING AND FRAMING  
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Kudratdeep Kaur Dhaliwal  
June 2013

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## ABSTRACT

Gatekeeping and framing of the 2010 BP oil spill are examined in the study using content analysis of 25 U.S. newspaper articles. Political economic indicators such as ownership, circulation, and geographic region of the newspapers are examined in relation to news content. Findings indicate a strong relationship between these political economy indicators and media framing.

*Keywords:* gatekeeping, agenda-setting, claimsmaking, typification,

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my utmost gratitude to my Graduate Committee Dr. Mihaela Popescu, Dr. Bradford Owen, and Dr. Victoria Seitz. Thank you for the guidance, support, encouragement, and inspiration throughout this process.

## DEDICATION

To my family and friends who have supported me in this process. I thank you for the long chats and inspiration.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

"Men [sic] discern situations with particular vocabularies, and it is in terms of some delimited vocabulary that they anticipate consequences of conduct" (Wright Mills, 1940)

#### Research Question

To what extent does the political economy of media influence the framing of corporate blame in news? The political economy of media refers to ownership, labor, practices, market structures, subsidies, policies, and occupational codes of conduct (McChesney & Pickard, 2011, p. 151). Since democratic participation depends upon information gathered by media sources, it is important that media be observed with critical lens. Does the political economy of the media (e.g., circulation, ownership, or market-share) influence news content and to what degree? Moreover, how balanced are the news? Do the voiceless actually get a platform to make their voices heard? This study inquires about the relationship between the political economy of news media and news content by concentrating on the framing of corporate blame. How do

the corporate ownership of newspapers and their circulation influence the construction of corporate blame?

The study will focus on the coverage of the 2010 BP oil spill at Macondo Bay in Gulf of Mexico, when 4.9 billion barrels of oil were sent gushing into the ocean.

The accident was considered an environmental disaster of immense impact in that it not only destroyed the marine life and migrating birds, but it also disrupted the lives of those that depended on fishing for survival and the tourism industry in the region. Environmental disasters are a good case for examining gatekeeping at work. When a disaster occurs, there is usually a search for an explanation as to why it occurred and if it could have been prevented. In the process of investigating the whys and the preventative measures, claims-makers emerge to typify the disaster or problem. These claims-makers usually take to general media, press, journals, or television, to assert their claims (Gusfield, 1981; Gusfield, 1980). The typification of the problem or disaster will result in the identification of probable solutions to the problem. Even the amount of coverage of the disaster sheds light on the importance afforded to the disaster at hand. However, as Bagdikian (2004) and others suggest, professionalism in journalism is hardly neutral,

objective or democratic, in that it depends on a variety of organizational restrictions. Thus, it becomes imperative to identify how indicators related to the political economy of media companies influence the construction of corporate blame. Only by a critical identification of barriers to news quality can media reform occur. When the fourth estate is in danger, democracy is threatened. To that end, this study is designed to provide a starting point for understanding the framing of corporate blame in relation to political economy of media.

Literature in the area of media and gatekeeping theory has not been concerned enough with the ramifications of corporate take-over of current media.

The effect of the transition of media from independent outlets has been noted by previous research (Bagdikian, 2004; McChesney, 2011). The extent to which news media have been affected needs to be granted a closer look if we are to preserve the true democracy that our country was first established on. Only a small portion of society, "the invisible governors," according to Bernays (1928) are in charge of the fate of thousands who consult media each day for their news. Moreover, this situation leads one to wonder whether true accountability is

actually being exercised towards big corporations, when it is in fact they who fund the journalistic process. To what degree is journalistic objectivity still prevalent in the profession with the onset of the gradual changes that have occurred in the political economy of media? To address these concerns, this study will examine differences in the coverage of the BP oil spill among newspapers whose parent companies are characterized by a two economic indicators: ownership type and newspaper circulation.

### Corporate Reputation and the British Petroleum Oil Spill

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has been adopted into the business model as a corporate response to issues that arise at home and abroad in media. Globerman (2011) defines corporate social responsibility as a means for fulfilling expectations of stakeholders, improving the quality of life of employees, their families, the local community, and society at large.

According to Krippendorff and Eleey (1986), organizations construct their social responsibility and monitor their reputation through the symbolic environment characterized by media productions, such as news articles, magazines, and television broadcasts. The symbolic environment is the organization's identity which is

instrumental in establishing relationships to other organizations, recruiting employees, and guiding customers to products and services available (Krippendorff & Eleey, 1986). Due to the relative importance of creating a favorable impression, organizations monitor their symbolic environment through their public relations efforts. The ultimate fruit of the practitioner's efforts is the type of publicity the event of current concern receives from media. According to Doorley and Garcia (2011) public relations efforts are the only form of reputation management for the business. Most organizations do not have formal programs to manage reputation since reputation is viewed as being something that is intangible in form (p. 9). Nevertheless, many organizations have sprouted "reputation management" in their names since the Sarbanes-Oxley Act in the wake of U.S. corporate scandals, according to Doorley and Garcia (2011).

Public relations is a function of corporate communication and it can make a huge impact on the way issues are presented by gatekeepers to the public. Since newspapers refer to press releases for a news lead, it can be problematic when newspapers are unable to investigate claims made in the press-releases due to budget cuts. Thus, some news organizations may fail to exercise a



critical view when it comes to corporate reputation management. Since corporations depend on a favorable image to move goods and services off shelves, the potential for distortion of facts cannot be left unconsidered.

A case in point is the 2010 BP oil spill in the Mexican Gulf. The explosion of BP's drilling rig in the Gulf of Mexico on April 20, 2010 killed 11 people, injured several others, and produced the largest oil spill in the history of the oil industry, with grave consequences on the environment (Safina, 2011). This incident illustrates how various stakeholders, including media, interpret corporate social responsibility and frame a social problem resulting from the lack of corporate responsibility thereof. While a human being responsible for killing the masses would most likely be institutionalized, jailed or in some states be subjected to the death penalty, it is puzzling for society to come up with a punishment for a fictitious entity. The most popular legal sanction has come in the form of fines and perhaps even dismissal of business officials. According to Safina (2011), many signs were present that foreshadowed an insecure drilling site. However, as Voiculescu and Yanacopulos (2011) point out businesses often cut corners in their race to the bottom where the cheapest labor and production is available. This

attempt to maximize profits has often come at the expense of harming the environment where products are actually produced but not consumed.

According to Safina (2011), the 2010 Gulf of Mexico blowout could have been prevented since there were numerous signs of trouble with the rig at Macondo Bay. Further, although the disaster has become almost synonymous with BP who designed the rig, there were other companies involved. Curiously enough, we do not read much about Transocean, Halliburton, or Cameron International. Transocean was the lead driller while Halliburton once headed by Dick Cheney before his vice presidency was hired for cementing services. On more occasions than one, Halliburton warned BP to use 21 centralizers than 6 to stabilize the oil pipe, but BP completely disregarded the reports and warnings. Perhaps the workers felt threatened to blow the whistle and voice their concerns.

Since the company was concerned with the bottom line, it did not heed any of the warning signs that were indicative of a troubled drilling site (Safina, 2011). Additionally, the company cut many corners which contributed to the disaster that resulted. When the cementing company, Halliburton, recommended the use of nitrified cement usually used for shallow waters some

workers were most likely confused. The drilling site was not shallow, and nitrified cement, as it turned out was not effective in containing the oil. Additionally, the blowout preventer manufactured by Cameron International did not function during the critical moment, and it may have been a good idea to test it out from the very beginning. During the process of drilling, the company dumped extra kill pill fluid they did not end up using into the sea. According to Safina (2011), kill pill fluid is used to block problem zones in the well. The thick gooey fluid is harmful to the ocean's eco-system. Normally, oil companies will dump about 200 barrels of this fluid into the water but because they wanted to get rid of the extra fluid they dumped over 400 barrels (Safina, 2011, p. 23). This was socially irresponsible in that the company simply sought to get rid of the extra fluid without having to expend any of its resources.

BP continued to not own up to the extent of the damage. Instead the company made the spill seem less than it actually was. Perhaps this was the reason why it took authorities so long to respond to the disaster. Additionally, the BP oil clean up was seen as a sham by one author and some environmental activists (Safina, 2011) since BP claimed that 5,000 barrels were leaking and that

a mile long tube was being used to suck the oil out. This tube or clean up was virtually ineffective since the tube leaked more oil than it collected. Nevertheless, so long as BP appeared to be doing something they thought it would be good enough. Additionally, dispersants the equivalent of dishwashing soap and pesticides were dispersed into the ocean to hide the oil (Safina, 2011). This way they would not have to pay so much in fines. Coast Guard's Gulf region chief, Rear Admiral Mary Landry or the gatekeeper in the situation downplayed the extent of the damage. She typified the disaster as something that was "under control," when clearly it was not.

The economic concept of externalities where the government lifts the burden of managing social and environmental effects off the corporation came into play here. Unfortunately, according to some interpretations, the government took too long to respond to the situation. For example, according to Safina (2011), Obama's response to the disaster is criticized and interpreted as his desire to shut down offshore drilling for good to make the environmentalists happy. Other interpretations place the blame on the company for misleading both the government and the public.

As the preceding discussion demonstrates, media coverage of environmental disasters is essential in framing the problem, the harm, and the solution. This is why it is important to look carefully at the gatekeeping process and note how news content may be impacted by particular gatekeeping variables.

#### Definitions, Theoretical Context, and Assumptions

Genetic food engineering, second hand smoke, obesity, poverty, global warming resulting from human activity just to name a few, are potential social problems in that in some shape or form they affect the quality of life of a significant number of people. However, in order to become recognizable social problems, these issues need to be characterized as such by claims-makers. Social problems do not simply come into being; rather they are constructed through the process of typification and claims-making. The public's sense of a social problem is shaped by claims-makers. Claims-makers identify and organize those harmed directly by the conditions described in their claims (Gusfield, 1981). Along with this function, they also identify probable reasons why those conditions might have occurred, as well as possible solutions. It is important to understand that the description of the

problem more or less dictates the solution to the problem. The process begins where a claim is made to get the attention of those affected by a perceived problem. This task is usually taken on by politicians. Important to understanding social problems is the fact that social problems follow a general birth, life, and death life-cycle. They can be constructed just as they dissipate. I use the term "claims-maker" to refer to anyone who has public clout to make a claim such as politicians, religious leaders, and journalists.

Through the process of gatekeeping where some news are omitted while other news are promoted, media play a crucial role in identifying social problems. The public agenda set by media shape public perception. Editors and other gatekeepers leave out some news and include other news, shaping public perception in the process. The absence of an issue in the public sphere is equally noteworthy, as issues that do make it into the public consciousness. Absence speaks volumes in that the issue may have been disregarded as being irrelevant to those shaping the news; such crucial entities include for example the reporter doing the footwork out on the street all the way to the organization which operates under old the normative assumption. Typification relates to

agenda-setting in that some news information is included while other information is not (Gusfield, 1980; Jeness, 1995; Gusfield, 1981; Ben-Yehuda, 1990). The nature in which the news is written, the words used, lack of information, information included all affect the solution to the problem. Understanding the development of social problems will provide some insight to solutions that may not have yet been considered. The perception of the problem shapes the solution (Gusfield, 1980).

There are several stakeholders in the process of typification. For example, corporations shape news through press releases. Corporate communication at times of crisis comes in the form of press releases or if reporters are lucky, through press conferences where officials are at hand to answer media generated questions. Corporations or spokespersons for them define corporate conduct through vocabularies used which influence the consequences of conduct. Motives are words and they help explicate situational consequences of questioned conduct (Wright Mills, 1940). Further, they are accepted justifications for present, future, or past actions. More importantly, those who provide the motives or justifications firmly believe in them. Motives are often provided in the form of journalistic prose in newsprint. When a situation occurs,

journalists consult the parties responsible as they provide their motives. Recognizing the importance of public perception since it is the public who allows the corporation citizenship in the first place, the corporation at best attempts to manage its reputation presenting itself in the most favorable light possible. The problem arises when media are either unwilling or incapable of following up on corporate claims or motives. The function of media as gatekeeper becomes critical to examine, inasmuch as corporate claims of conduct are constructed by media and disseminated to the general public. The manner in which media spell out the motivation determines the consequences of conduct which often comes in the form of public scrutiny through protests, loss of profits, fines, or at times even regulation.

Although the "watchdog" (Francke, 1995) role has been claimed by journalists adhering to the norms of their profession since the muckraking days, commercialization and corporate ownership of media have to some extent hindered that endeavor. The media's role as "watchdog" is further complicated since corporations that own the newspapers and television stations are extended First Amendment protection of free speech by the government when issues arise in regards to content. In essence, some media



critics argue that the press, most often than not, provide coverage that favors the interests of those who own the media outlet. Despite the Meiklejohnian warning that First Amendment corporate protection would result in loss of the integrity serving only commercial interests (McChesney, 2011) many argue that this is the reality of news today. Corporate concentration of media most definitely impacts the news content along with dependence on advertising for support. The implications of this situation on democracy are immense, in the sense that the public looks to media for information on the basis of forming attitudes and voting. As Baker (2007) points out, democracy involves a struggle among different groups who each have their own projects, interests, needs, and concepts of what the world should be. However when corporations monopolize media, profit maximization guides the information published rather than the genuine desire to inform the public. This muddles the notion of democracy since some information is omitted or downplayed in the process for what sells.

Media are the mediator between the public and the government in that it plays a crucial role in influencing public opinion and will formation. According to Baker (2007), democracy means respecting the view that each person is equally entitled to voice his or her opinion in

regards to choosing officials, laws, policies, and culture. However, the layperson's voice is seldom heard when public does not have access to media to make its voice heard (Pember & Calvert, 2011).

The problem is further exacerbated considering the changes in FCC regulations regarding media cross-ownership over the past several years. June 2003 was a turning point for American viewers as cross-ownership rules were relaxed by the Biennial Review Order (Federal Communications Commission 2003) with a 3-2 vote. The Republican Commissioners voted to change the rules and won. One of the main arguments was that allowing media organizations to consolidate under one roof would help localism since most organizations faced dwindling resources due to the state of the economy. Consolidation or corporatization means more resources for media expenditures such as increased number of staff, the man-power needed for in-depth investigative stories, printing paper, and ink just to name a few. Despite the public outcry against these changes, the regulation came to pass.

Another notable change was the increase in the broadcast cap. Now any one media firm could reach 45 percent of the audience, at least that's what the Order proposed. The previous law had only allotted 35 percent.

The FCC compromised with 39 percent. Although the change was intended to only be temporary it became permanent. A suit emerged in the Third Circuit Court of Appeals where the court decided to stay the changes and the Order was remanded back to the FCC (Yanich, 2010). In light of this discovery and the relaxation of FCC ownership regulation, one wonders the effect on news content and moreover on investigative journalism. From Upton Sinclair's novel about meatpacking that influenced pure food legislation (Sinclair, 1990) to Richard Nixon and Woodstein (Zimmerman, 2006), it wouldn't be a far cry to say that journalism has influenced public policy by exposing corruption and conflicts of interest. For this reason, it is crucial that the effect of media centralization on media content be observed. Are such vigorous investigations prevalent today? Are journalists really going that extra-mile to move beyond the smoke and mirrors to the actual facts of the story? As Ivens (2011) cited in (Hedges, 2011, p. 205-213) laments, it is rarely enough for the press to report both sides of the story. Usually a story has many sides but it is widely accepted that reporting both sides suffices journalist's desire for objectivity. It remains to be seen how the conglomeration of media outlets affects news content especially when it

comes into investigating scandals. Are reporters as likely to probe deeper for the facts and move beyond any walls of officials they may come across?

This study argues that in order to understand the development of policy and legislation, it is crucial to examine how blame is constructed by the media. It is also noteworthy that corporations are inclined to present themselves in favorable light to stake-holders through the issuance of press-releases. Reporters once critical of sources may find themselves accepting such forms of corporate communication at face-value.

This study assumes that the political economy of media, here measured with two variables, ownership, and circulation, is an important influence on the framing of corporate social responsibility and corporate blame. The gatekeeping processes are influenced by organizational constraints due to dependability on outside entities for resources, as well as market conditions. Powerful social forces, including economic forces, shape the decisions made by individual journalists. Past studies suggest that these variables will influence the gatekeeping process and, ultimately, the content of the newspaper. Advertising poses external pressures on publishers since they rely on advertisers for revenue. This reliance on advertisers

comes at a price in that publishers often feel the need to reciprocate by allowing advertisers to ask for the omission or inclusion of particular news items (Delorme & Fedler, 2005; Price, 2003; Richards, & Murphy II, 1996; Rinallo & Basuroy, 2009; Warner, Goldenhar, & McLaughlin, 1992). Additionally, studies show a relationship between circulation and newspaper content in that newspapers with higher circulations are able to afford the resources necessary to establish news. These higher circulation papers tend to be less dependent on advertisers for revenue and thus are less susceptible to swaying under their pressures (Soley & Craig, 1992). Past studies have also found that competition is positively correlated to content. Competing newspapers tend to carry similar content so they can easily substitute one another. This causes the papers to find other ways besides content to differentiate themselves from their competitors (Weaver & Mullins, 1975; White & Andsager, 1990). Additionally, ownership in its two forms, chain and private, play an influential role as well since the goals for each entity differ. Chain-owned or publicly owned papers will be concerned with the maximization of profits since they will be addressing the concerns of stock-holding investors (Coulson & Hansen, 1995; Mathews, 1996).

In this study, it is understood that several gatekeeping processes are at play at the individual and organizational levels. These assumptions are derived from agenda-setting and gatekeeping theories to study the construction of corporate blame in news.

### Methodology and Data

The strategy throughout the study is to compare the framing of the BP oil spill in news articles function of two economic indicators characterizing the media companies that own the newspapers in my sample. The data include 170 news articles from a sample of 25 randomly selected newspapers throughout the United States, during the April 21, 2010 - May 31, 2010 timeframe.

The study used systematic quantitative content analysis to code all the news items (Krippendorff, 2004). Content analysis serves to make replicable and valid inferences from texts to the contexts of their use (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 18). The coding instrument uses claims-making concepts derived from research on the topic (Gusfield, 1980; Best, 1997; Gusfield, 1981; Ben-Yehuda, 1990) and reputation management strategies employed by corporations during crisis communication (Benoit, 1995), and used two independent coders to code all the data.

## The Importance of the Study

This study provides insight into how media frame an environmental disaster and construct blame under the influence of certain political economic indicators such as circulation, competition, advertising, and ownership. Although the constraints of the study did not allow me to collect data on competition and advertising revenue, in the study I provide an exhaustive review of the impact of all these four variables on newspaper content. As the media landscape changes under the consolidation of corporate ownership it would be ignorant not to ponder the consequences of such changes. Past research already points out the influence of these political economic indicators on news content and style (Donohue, Olien, & Tichenor, 1971; Johnson, & Wanta, 1993; Soley & Craig, 1992; Thrift, 1974; Warner, Goldenhar, & McLaughlin, 1992).

Studying the relationship between journalists' framing of blame for the BP oil spill in the Gulf in American and the circulation and ownership type of the newspapers which published those articles helps to validate past research and provide new insights into how American media treat environmental disasters and their perpetrators.

## Organization of the Study

The study is organized as follows: Chapter 2 provides an overview of current media criticism which claims that commercial constraints on the media have produced a decline in the quality of news journalism. Chapter 3 reviews the literature on gatekeeping theory, with special emphasis on research about the influence of circulation, ownership, competition, and advertising revenue on news content. Chapter 4 will contain a discussion of the method employed in the study along with the construction of the coding instrument. Chapter 5 analyzes the findings of the study. The concluding Discussion chapter interprets the findings and their implications.



## CHAPTER TWO

### COMMERCIAL CONSTRAINTS ON THE MEDIA

Ideally the media have assumed a watchdog role by providing the public with information regarding policies and social development. Information provided by the media allows the public the ability to make informed decisions. The watchdog function of the press means that media hold government officials accountable both legally and morally to the standards of public service, and keep business and professional leaders accountable to expectations of integrity and fairness as defined by society (Downie & Shudson, 2009). As media continue to proclaim this role, it is important to examine carefully whether this role is actually being fulfilled and under what conditions. The chapter will begin with a discussion of the main criticism against current media functions, describe the process of gatekeeping that in some situations may produce biased media coverage, and review several economic influences on the process of media gatekeeping.

#### Criticism of Current Media

Lacking the funding necessary to operate independently, many newspapers have become a part of media conglomerates. The Faustian bargain is such that in

picking up the bill Corporate America does not hesitate at the chance to peddle its products and any policies that directly benefit it at the cost of the public's ability to make informed decisions (Jackson, 2011, p. 204).

According to a May 2008 survey conducted by the Pew Research Center, which asked respondents to rate newspaper credibility on a scale from 1 (lowest level of trust in media) to 4 (highest level of trust in media), most Americans (25%) rated newspapers with a 3. However, there are still some Americans who do not find print media credible (Journalism, 2012). The reason behind this lack of trust in the media is that dependence on advertisers for funding leaves newspapers in a vulnerable position to commercial pressures (Alterman, 2008, p. 31). Unlike U.K. newspapers, which are dependent on the government for revenue, U.S. newspapers rely on revenue from subscriptions and advertisers, which means that the decisions made by individual journalists depend not least on economic factors that affect the financial health of their media outlets. For example, corporate investors may influence the coverage of critical topics especially when they run counter to the financial interest of ownership (Blethen & Blethen, 2011, p. 197). A case in point is the 2003 Florida Appeals Court ruling in the case of *Akre and*

*Wilson vs. Fox News* where the court ruled that the media had the right to shut down stories, even if they are important to the public. Although initially excited about Akre and Wilson's story about Monsanto Corporation's unethical use of Bovine Growth Hormone (BGH), Fox news pressured the reporters to change the story according to suggestions made by a Monsanto Attorney. Despite the public's right to know about the cancer causing agents in the milk and the mistreatment of animals, Fox News swayed under corporate pressure and chose to conceal the truth. Akre and Wilson were fired for their whistle-blowing. While the court originally ruled that it is not unlawful for media to distort or slant news on a television broadcast, the rulings were reversed in 2003. The court ruling was reversed in favor of Jane Akre who said she was pressured by Fox to air false information about the widespread use of the rBGH hormone manufactured by Monsanto.

As marketplace of ideas theory holds that the ultimate good can be reached effectively through an uninhibited free flow of ideas (Pember & Calvert, 2011, p. 44), it is important that media are able to fulfill the duty of informing the public about important issues. The omission of pertinent information is detrimental for the

public. It is important that media are able to produce unbiased coverage of publicly important issues while keeping advertisers' pressures at bay. Such free-flow of information could guard against situations such as when the Bush Administration asked the Global Change Research Program to delete its report on acceleration of the climate change resulting from human activity despite the strong evidence to the contrary (Safina, 2011).

However, against absolutist claims of media bias, the constructivist perspective argues that "truth" is in the eye of the beholder, in this case media gatekeepers, which is why it is important to understand what goes into the creation of this "truth." Some perceived realities are purported as the 'truth' in news while others are omitted. The solutions to a particular social problem depend on the version of "truth" adopted by the media.

Those with the monetary or political power are the ones who get to shape the news. According to Jackson (2011), "[i]t matters very much who is in the room when decisions are made, and how much power they have" (p. 206). Journalists usually find their stories edited or even tossed by editors who are under pressure from the publisher who in turn is under the influence of his or her

investors as evident in the Monsanto case mentioned earlier.

The following review of media criticism concentrates on the following: The decrease in the diversity of news content; the emergence of a regulatory environment favoring media concentration; the impact of newsroom resources on content diversity; and, the dependence of news content on advertising revenue. The recent trend of downsizing news staffs has caused the quality of news to suffer in terms of the resources, because there are not enough investigative journalists who can go beyond just presenting both sides of the story. There is often not enough time or resources available to actually go out and investigate these self-proclaimed corporate truths that come in the form of the modern day press release. According to McChesney (2011) facts may be purposefully selected or stage-managed by public relations specialists within the traditional news establishment (p. 210).

News content has become increasingly less diverse due to the relaxation of ownership laws by the Federal Communications Commission along with other media trends such as the downsizing of staff and greater dependency on advertisers for revenue. All of these factors affect the diversity of media and news content.

Ownership concentration has increased as result of the removal of the ownership cap. Corporations including Bain Capital, CBS, Comcast, Gannet Co., News Corp., Time Warner, Inc., Tribune Company, Viacom, Walt Disney Company, and Washington Co. together dominate media landscape (Free Press: Reform Media, 2012). In allowing concentrated control over the country's information system, the government has failed in ensuring a variety of voices and independently gathered news (Gilens & Hertzman, 2012). According to Blethen and Blethen (2011), in allowing concentrated control over the country's information system, the government has failed in protecting free speech and facilitating a variety of voices in independently gathered news (p. 198). Corporations are treated as persons protected by the fourteenth amendment (Schiller, 1989). This means that corporations can sue and be sued under the common law.

Although the government originally put a cap on the number of broadcast properties a single individual or company could own to uphold the First Amendment theory that more voices ensure the truth (Pember & Calvert, 2011), the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) recently made revisions to this regulation. While in 1975 the FCC had banned cross-ownership by a single entity of a

daily newspaper, television, or broadcast station operating in the same local market, since 2007 the Commission evaluates proposed ownership on a case-by-case basis in relation to serving public interest (Federal Communications Commission, 2012). Considerations for public interest include competition, localism, and diversity. For example, a combination of a newspaper and a radio station is in the public interest in the top 20 markets according to the FCC. Public interest is defined by the following, according to the FCC website: 1) The TV station is not ranked in the Designated market Areas (DMA) and 2) At least eight independently owned major media voices would remain in the market following the transaction (Federal Communications Commission, 2012). Additionally, DMA's 21 and under are not considered within the public interest thus winning approval may be difficult in such cases. Further, the National TV Ownership rule does not limit the number of stations an individual entity owns nationwide if it reaches no more than 39 percent of all U.S. television households (Federal Communications Commission, 2012). In changing the rule, the FCC helped decrease media diversity. As less competition means less diversity and the perils of less competition have already been noted in previous research in that news quality

depreciates, the relaxation of FCC rules only exacerbates the problem. While more media does not necessarily result in a more rich and diverse information environment since most media are alike (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009, p. 2), rules have eroded away over the past quarter century due to industry and congressional pressures (Pember & Calvert, 2011, p. 601).

Shrinking revenues have led newspapers to downsize staff and subscribe to wire services for news content. Wire services serve as a 'pool' for news to which most news organizations subscribe. In subscribing to the same source for news the content generated by various media outlets tends to be identical. Lack of revenue also impacts the newspaper's ability to delve further into news topics since investigative journalism often requires considerable man-power and resources.

Organizational rules that dictate journalistic practice have become increasingly relaxed in light of advertisers' pressures. Publishers tend to accommodate advertiser's concerns about news items often omitting or reformulating news to provide favorable coverage to the advertiser. If publishers do not take into consideration advertiser's concerns they risk losing revenue. Loss of revenue affects the functional ability of the newspaper.



Advertiser influence is discussed in greater detail later in the paper.

As a result of this economic reality, many media critics argue that news content is unacceptably dependent on corporate control. In permitting the fox (corporations) to watch the hen-house (the information system), society has allowed corporate power to weaken the public's ability to understand the forces that shape the American social scene. A main and obvious source of concern is big business's drive to maximize profit at any cost.

Corporations that stand to benefit from the election of one political candidate over another will exercise their resources to make sure that the particular candidate finishes first. Additionally, corporations can also issue censorship by refusing to endorse products that are infused with particular ideas. While the First Amendment protects against governmental censorship, it does not protect against community or corporate censorship (Pember & Calvert, 2011).

It is also important to note that all media have friends otherwise known as "sacred cows," a metaphor for those who are given preferential treatment in the news. These "sacred cows" are immune to criticism in the sense that embarrassing information about them never makes the

news. These people that often make up the corporations are almost guaranteed a positive image. Schiller (1989) summarizes the result of this rule of thumb best: "No sacred cow has been so protected and has left more generous residues in the news than the American Corporation" (p. 154). There are ways in which news is shaped and gathered to protect against preferential treatment in the news. Objectivity is one-way journalists approach the news-making process.

Objectivity itself is a social construction. The creed of objectivity transforms journalists into mere observers where they are permitted to watch, but not feel or speak in their own voices (Hedges, 2011, p. 209). Objectivity is not accomplished in merely presenting both sides of a story. Rather, a story has multiple sides which often are not presented. Objectivity is a myth in that news organizations cannot help but frequently commit the sin of omission. Additionally, facts are often self-selected or strategically stage-managed by public relations specialists within the news establishment (Hedges, 2011, p. 210). Reporters often quote "experts" found within the confines of the powerful elite in their attempt at objectivity. However, the views of the few tend to be presented while other sides of the story are

generally left out. Although reporting is presented to the public as neutral, objective and unbiased and as journalists often do believe themselves, reporting is highly subjective and interpretive. In addition to stylistic constraints they must also face barriers to official sources during stories about Wall Street, Congress, the White House and the State Department (Hedges, 2011, p. 211). True factual objectivity is an unattainable ideal. As Jackson (2011) points out, all reporting involves making choices about what's important, the legitimacy of a source, and the constitution of balance on a disputed issue (p. 202). This indicates that reporting cannot be done "objectively" (McChesney & Pickard, 2011, p. 206), but it involves a process of framing that sometimes may even escape the notice of the journalist involved. It is always someone's point of view on something stemming from one's core values, beliefs, and judgments. In the newsroom, the reporter and editor's values directly shape the news. In turn these two are influenced by corporate priorities which fund them.

Two issues stem from the guise of objectivity (Berkowitz, 1997) such as the journalist and organization's enjoyment of the benefit of not being accused of biased reporting as accuracy is dependent on

the sources providing information (p. 144). Second, the organization's monopoly position is secured in the marketplace by overt political reporting. In other words, competition from news organizations holding opposing points of view does not occur. So long as news is reported "objectively" monopolization does not become a concern for journalists, advertisers, and media owners.

Reporting objectively has simply come to mean reporting both sides in the news story. However, as Ivens cited in Hedges (2011, p. 209) points out, presenting both sides of the story is not enough, since as previously mentioned, stories usually have more than two sides. Reporters must report critically and readers must think likewise. Critical thinking about news consumption includes pondering the independence, fairness, and accuracy of stories along with attention to the views of those outside of corporate or political power (McChesney & Pickard, 2011, p. 207).

### CHAPTER THREE

#### THE GATEKEEPING PROCESS AND ECONOMIC VARIABLES IMPACTING IT

Faced with tons of potential newsworthy items, gatekeepers need to select those which would best serve the media outlet. Before the advent of digital news, the argument in favor of gatekeeping was that lack of space required a news selection. Even if some might argue that all interesting news items can now be uploaded on the website of a newspaper, selection still exists. For example, the editors need to select which news items make it to the top of the page, where internet users are more likely to pay attention.

Gatekeeping is defined as a practical process that involves encoding messages via selection, omission, transmission, formulation, display, repetition, and timing. News items either make it into the news or they don't. If they do, they are shaped by the gatekeeper. The true gatekeeper in every sense of the word is the news organization. Shoemaker and Vos (2009) identify three types of organizational control which includes the communication handler, channel mediator, and content manipulator (p. 20). While the individual journalist may

not select the beat that is assigned, the gatekeeping process really begins with them in the newsgathering stage. The reporter gathers a raw mass of data and organizes it into a conventional journalistic format according to Chibnall (1997) as cited in Shoemaker and Vos (2009). Thus by the time the story reaches the desk of the editor important gatekeeping decisions have already been made. Although professionalism provides independence for the journalist, organizational norms also exert control in the form of policies. While there is room for creativity, journalists must work within a framework of action. If a particular story hurts a particular advertiser that is providing revenue to the paper, it may be at the sole discretion of the publisher to forego such a story.

The norm of late has been to report news items that concern us nationally and internationally rather than those that occur within our neighborhoods and cities. The reason behind this is the financial strain newspapers have suffered and their shift from independent papers to chains. It is far more economical to subscribe to a wire service that provides the news of the day than to actually go out and develop story leads. Particularly here, there are some news items that are used while others are disposed of. Although, individual gatekeepers have a

choice as to what they will use as news they must select from the wiring mix before them. The mix is suggestive of what news categories should be given the utmost importance. While others view gatekeeping as a subjective process, Gieber (1956) as cited in Shoemaker and Vos (2009) describes gatekeeping as a mechanical process where the editor is influenced by structural considerations such as the number of news items available, their size, pressures of time and mechanical production (p. 16). With this view, the media's role is seen as monolithic where individual workers collectively act as one gatekeeper following a set of rules. There are particular conditions that can affect how well gatekeepers can respond to their roles.

#### Independent Variables: Changes in Newspaper Structure and their Impact on the Gatekeeping Process

Various studies have emerged exploring the impact of newspaper independent variables such as circulation, ownership, competition, and advertising on the gatekeeping function of newspapers and more specifically, news content. Studies have found these variables affect newspaper content to some degree. Competition has decreased while the emergence of chain owned newspaper has

increased. This has resulted in many changes in regards to how newspapers are run. Chain papers under public ownership will mostly be concerned with maximizing profits since they need to meet investor's expectations. This economic concern has a definite impact on news selection priorities. Advertiser's influence on content is yet another concern in regards to newspaper content. As a newspaper becomes more dependent on advertisers for revenue, advertisers will more or less dictate what does and does not make the news. The following studies provide some insight into these concerns.

In the sections that follow I will first discuss the impact of various media political economic indicators on the gatekeeping process and invariably news content. I will begin by discussing past research on the impact of ownership, competition and advertising on news content.

#### Impact of Ownership on Gatekeeping/News Content

Various studies have emerged exploring the link between the ownership and media content. While previous research points out that there is in fact a strong link between ownership and news content, the degree of influence and the positive and negative effects are not established yet. A study that included a content analysis of the coverage of the 1996 Telecommunications Act in 27



papers that were broken into three categories: newspapers without television holdings, those owning five or fewer stations and those owning nine or more television stations found that although coverage did not vary among the newspapers there was a considerable difference in the content (Gilens & Hertzman, 2012). Of the substantial TV ownership papers, 26% claimed that a media company would not be able to own more than one TV station per market under new legislation. On the other hand, from the 'limited ownership' group only 15% of the stories made this claim while only 4% of the stories from the 'no TV ownership' group made this claim. Although the 1996 legislation called for a reconsideration of the FCC regulation banning companies from owning more than one TV station per market, it did not ban it. Thus the articles published in substantial TV ownership papers were misleading. In regards to the positive portrayal of loosened ownership restrictions in the three categories, newspapers with no TV ownership were most likely to mention the negative consequences in their coverage of the ownership caps. The negative consequences that new legislation would result in additional media mergers and buyouts was mentioned in 29% of the stories appearing in papers with no TV ownership, while only 15% appeared in

papers with limited ownership, and none appeared in TV stations with substantial ownership. Since an unbiased version of the reportage of the 1996 Telecommunications Act does not exist, it cannot be assumed that papers with no television holdings published stories with too much negative emphasis on the consequences and nor can we say that papers with substantial holdings published too little. However, what can be derived from the study is that the coverage of the issue was directly related to the ownership interests of the corporate parents.

The implications of this study suggest that media concentration will inevitably result in the decreased pluralism of voices heard. The study makes one case to prove that ownership has a direct impact on newspaper content especially when that news content impacts the financial livelihood of its corporate parent. Papers owned by corporations with no financial interests in TV stations printed three and a half times more articles suggesting negative consequences of the change of ownership caps as positive consequences. Papers owned by companies with large numbers of TV stations published twice as many positive consequences as negative consequences.

Another study by Meyer and Weardin (1984) measuring the effects of public ownership on newspaper companies

found that people running publicly held companies would most likely develop attitudes like their security analysts than those people running privately held companies. Since there is a difference between the degrees of influence of security analysts from publicly as opposed to privately held companies on employees, one can expect this influence to spill over onto news content. The study also found that publishers of publicly owned companies, being closest to the analysts, would be influenced first and therefore have attitudes more like the analysts than would their editors and news staffs. Additionally, Meyer and Weardin (1984) found that if new attitudes moved down the chain of command, editors would, at any given point in the process have attitudes closer to their analysts than would their staffs. Noting that the expectations for publicly held newspapers, security analysts if you will, include selling the product and keeping the pocket-books of investors full, it is evident that the influence that publishers and editors exert on their staff stems from this expectation. Thus one cannot help but wonder if and how this influence affects newspaper content.

Studies have explored how content differs between chain papers and independent papers. Donahue et al (1972) compared coverage of conflict in dailies vs. weeklies and

locally owned papers vs. non-locally owned papers. Data analysis included the content analysis of 83 Minnesota newspapers published in 1965 compared with the same papers in 1979. The 1965 sample included 49 weeklies, 15 semi-weeklies, and 19 dailies. The 1979 sample included 52 weeklies, 10 semi-weeklies, and 21 dailies. Four editions of the paper were content analyzed for each year during the month of February. For weeklies it was every edition of the month while for the semi-weeklies it was every other edition, while for dailies it was one edition of each week. Coding was done for local conflict which was defined as the space devoted to reporting about differing positions or statements about a public issue from at least two persons, factions, or interest groups within the community. The article had to make clear that a controversy was involved and who the participants were. The space devoted to the controversy was measured via column in inches. Categorization was implemented to differentiate between stories involving local government and those that did not. Local government stories involved legislative agencies such as city councils, county boards, and administrative units of these governments. Nongovernmental conflict included any stories relating to education, law enforcement, courts, churches, business

organizations, or other local bodies or groups. The primary indicators of structural pluralism included county and community population, per capita income, percent labor and proprietor's income from manufacturing, and percent labor and proprietor's income in farming. Donahue et al. (2012) found that as the system as a whole becomes more pluralistic, community newspapers generally will report more conflict. Conflict reporting increased in all sectors from 14.9 column inches in 1965 to 45.2 in 1979. Additionally, local conflict reporting in all sectors, between 1965 and 1979 was more rapid in less pluralistic regions than in more pluralistic ones. According to Donohue et al. (1972) the rapid increase in conflict reporting may be attributed to increasing dependence of other centers of power in the system and to the pullback of metropolitan newspapers from rural areas. Additionally, locally owned newspapers will report more conflict than non-locally owned newspapers. Based on these findings, Donahue et al. (1972) point out that media operate with a concern for the bottom line rather than prioritizing the dissemination of information to the public (p. 490). The trend has been for outside ownership to be introduced among papers in larger communities where profit potential is greater and daily news papers are more likely to be

sought by corporate owners rather than weeklies (Donohue et al., 1971, p. 490). The effect of this is best summed up by an old adage which has evolved from, "all news fit to print" to "all news that maximizes a profit" (Donohue et al., 1971, p. 491).

Thrift (1977) measured changes in newspaper content based changes in ownership and found supporting evidence that changes in content do in fact occur as a result of ownership. The study measured declines in vigor by comparing independently owned dailies which were not absorbed by chains with newspapers that belonged to chains. A content analysis was conducted on 24 West Coast daily newspapers' editorials where the independent dailies served as the control group. Vigor was operationalized by coding for the following necessary characteristics: topic must be local, of argumentative form, controversial and proving mobilizing information in that the reader is encouraged to do something about the situation by using the contact information provided in the article. Thrift (1977) found that independent daily newspaper's editorials decline in vigor after chains purchase the papers. Once chains purchased the papers in the sample changes in content began to emerge. The amount of space devoted to editorials concerning local matters declined considerably

after the newspapers had been purchased by chains. Additionally, argumentative editorials on local matters were published more often in independent newspapers than those belonging to chains. Topics in controversial contexts were also far more popular in independent papers.

While the critical corporate model theory predicts the decline in information quality in newspapers due to corporate concern for the bottom line and profits, Demers (1998) found that quality of newspaper content actually improves under corporate structure. According to Demers (1998) corporate newspapers place less emphasis on profit compared to smaller newspapers. Smaller newspapers are more concerned with their survival while corporate newspapers, already doing well, can exert their energy in producing a high quality paper. Corporate newspapers spend the most money on news editorial costs, are likely to mention product quality as the most important goal, make fewer spelling errors, devote the most space to editorials and letters to the editor, adhere to a journalistic code of ethics, hire highly qualified journalists, report a greater amount of social conflict, conduct opinion polls, win Pulitzer prizes while launching more investigative projects (Demers, 1998, p. 24). Thus, according to Demers (1998) corporate newspapers tend to put forth a higher

quality product, have more editorial autonomy control, and encourage quality journalism. For 250 U.S. newspapers randomly selected, the top ranking managers (e.g. publishers, general managers) and editors had been asked to complete questionnaires in regards to how much importance they place on profit maximization.

In another study Coulson and Hanson (1995) compared a Kentucky newspaper, *The Courier-Journal*, before and after corporate acquisition by Gannett. Coulson and Hanson (1995) found that following acquisition by the Gannett, the *Louisville Courier-Journal* increased in terms of the number of pages. Whereas the paper's newshole made up 19 pages previously, it now made up 25 pages. Additionally, advertising decreased between 1984 and 1988. The study found that advertising decreased from 3,375 in 1984-1985 to 3,135 in 1987-1988 (Coulson & Hansen, 1995, p. 209). Other findings included that the number of news stories during weekdays increased, more soft news emerged, use of wire services on weekdays increased, staff written copies increased, local news during the work week rose, use of photographs and informational graphics also increased (Coulson & Hansen, 1995, p. 211). However, the average length of news stories decreased since Gannett's style was snappier and was directed towards a readership dependent



on television also. Hard news coverage also declined while use of wire services in stories greatly increased in comparison to staff contributions. According to Coulson and Hanson (1995) this can be attributed to Gannett's policy which called for more reliance on wire services (p. 212). The Louisville Courier-Journal was analyzed for a period of two years before Gannett's purchase in 1986 and during the two years the followed the purchase. Five-day weeks for each year were the subject of the study. Newspaper content and management meetings were also personally observed by one of the researchers in the study. A quality index was applied in the survey. Journalistic qualities considered most important by journalists were included in the index. These qualities included the following: (1) amount of news content, (2) ratio of news content to advertising, (3) ratio of staff written copy to wire service copy, (4) average length of stories in news sections, (5) ratio of hard news stories to soft news stories, (6) ratio of local news stories to other geographic categories of news coverage, and (7) ratio of photographs and graphics to text (Coulson & Hansen, 1995, p. 208). A total of 6,000 news stories were analyzed, which included hard and soft news stories. Hard news stories concerned any stories on serious

subjects such as government, the economy, and international affairs whereas soft news stories included feature stories and human interest articles. The newshole included any non-advertising space in the newspaper.

In another study, Mathews (1996) found that publishers employed by publicly owned newspaper chains will have less autonomy than publishers employed by privately owned newspaper chains. Private publishers have more managerial authority in comparison to public publishers. Mathews (1996) also found that publishers employed by publicly owned newspaper chains place a greater emphasis on generating income for their owners than publishers employed by privately owned newspaper chains (p. 347). Mathews (1996) mailed a survey to publishers from both publicly owned chains and privately owned papers. The publicly owned chains included Gannet, Knight-Ridder, Times Mirror, Thomson Newspapers, and New York Times Co while the privately owned chains included Newhouse Newspapers, Cox Enterprises, Hearst, Media News, and Donrey Media (Mathews, 1996, p. 346). The publishers were asked to respond to issues of autonomy in regards to the frequency and type of communication they have with their home offices, the types of actions they have authority over without the need for corporate approval,

etc. Questions dealt with if they had any authority over hiring, firing, increasing news or advertising staff size, purchasing equipment, donations and opening an out-of-town news or advertising bureau (Mathews, 1996, p. 347). The respondents were also asked to rank the importance of providing income for stockholders to test the second hypothesis in the study. According to Mathews (1996) chain ownership is doubling over the years for newspapers are they are becoming increasingly corporatized. This corporatization of American journalism means newspaper companies are controlling the newspaper in order to maximize profits. There are two types of ownership, chain-ownership, or independent ownership. Chain ownership is used to describe when a single individual or firm owns two or more daily newspapers in different cities (Mathews, 1996, p. 343). There are usually chain-mandated policies for budgeting, news allocation, wire service and syndicated material purchases, hiring and firing of employees. However, independent newspapers are free from such control and have work-related autonomy which means having the freedom to work in accord with one's professional training (Mathews, 1996, p. 343). Corporate approval is not necessary for such papers. Publicly owned

firms on the other hand have to answer to stockholders and thus must maximize their profits.

#### Impact of Competition on Gatekeeping/News Content

Studies have sought to determine the difference in content in competing newspapers and whether format and content are positively related to higher circulation in a competitive situation (Johnson, & Wanta, 1993; Lacy, 1980; Lacy & Blanchard, 2001; Lacy, 1990; Rarick, G., & Hartman, 1966; Weaver & Mullins, 1975; White & Andsager, 1990). Weaver and Mullins (1975) define a competitive situation as one in which two or more daily newspapers are separately owned and published while being located in the same city (p. 259). All studies have found that newspaper content, more specifically financial expenditure, is positively correlated to competition. According to Weaver and Mullins (1975) who compared content in leading and trailing papers in Western, North Central, and Northeastern states during a competitive situation, there are significant differences between the two types of papers. Weaver and Mullins (1975) found that leading newspapers devoted the most space to editorial content in comparison to trailing papers. Additionally, Weaver and Mullins (1975) believe that news about the home, human-interest news and sports may have some relationship

to higher circulation. However, in comparing the amount of space devoted to each news content category in leading and trailing papers Weaver and Mullins (1975) found that there was not a significant difference. In breaking down the newspapers by size and region of country the study also found no significant difference between the two types of papers. The only categories for which the study found a difference were news about home, human-interest news, sports and total editorial content in newspapers located in North Central states. Region-wise, leading papers in Western, North Central, and Northeastern states devoted less space to editorial content in comparison to other papers. Instead leading papers in this area devoted greater percentage of space to advertising. However, these findings only held true for only three of the eight analyses conducted. In regards to format, trailing papers tend to use more contemporary layout techniques, photographs, and color. Weaver and Mullins (1975) also found that leading papers had a tendency to have eight or nine-column front pages, include a high number of photos on page one, more items on the front page and column rules. The trailing papers on the other hand, had a higher tendency to use color photos, tabloid format, few items, and large photos, which were more than four columns wide.

Additionally, trailing papers in the West used a more contemporary design. They were also characterized by the usage of a six-column format, color photos, fewer stories on the front page along with fewer heavy borders. Weaver and Mullins (1975) also noted that trailers tended to use a more modern format while the leaders tended to adhere to traditional formats (p. 263). Differences were also found in regards to editorial characteristics in that leading papers subscribed to an average of 3.7 news services per paper in comparison to trailers who only subscribed to 2.6 per paper.

While past studies and as the gatekeeping theory suggests that journalistic norms may produce standardized content across all competing newspapers, Johnson and Wanta (1993) uncovered astounding results in their study that indicate quite the contrary. In comparing three competing newspapers, the *Globe-Democrat* 1852-1986, the *Sun* 1989-1990, and *Post-Dispatch* 1878 Johnson and Wanta (1993) found significant differences in both content and appearance. Content differences included differences in subject matter. For example, the *Post-Dispatch* favored hard news over softer stories in comparison to its competitors. Additionally, twice as many political stories were included in the *Post-Dispatch* in comparison to the

*Globe-Democrat*. The *Globe-Democrat* differed from the other papers in that it favored soft news, ran more human-interest stories, along with stories about social issues concerning the environment (Johnson, & Wanta, 1993, p. 140). The *Sun*, however, opted for expanded sports coverage instead. Thus, despite the wide acceptance of journalistic norms, editors are faced with dozens of stories and chances are they will make different decisions each time.

Past studies have found that newspapers wanting to differentiate themselves from the competition will devote more space to features, photos, and graphics (Lacy, 1975; Lacy & Blanchard, 2001; Lacy, 1990; Lacy, 1992); however this finding was only partly true for this study. Johnson and Wanta (1993) found that the *Globe-Democrat* and the *Post-Dispatch* devoted equal amount of space to news (p. 140). While the three papers varied little in regards to the amount of space devoted to editorial content, the *Sun* devoted a significant amount of space to news in comparison to the other two papers. Additionally, while the *Sun* ran more pictures and graphics in comparison to the *Post-Dispatch*, the difference was not that significant. The *Globe-Democrat* did not run more features

than the *Post-Dispatch*, however it did run a significant amount of comics and amusements instead.

In regards to the issue of diversity of news content, the newspapers did subscribe to an increased amount of wire services due to the competition as previous researchers have pointed out that increased competition leads to increased usage of wire services (Weaver & Mullins, 1975). Johnson and Wanta (1993) found that the *Post-Dispatch* carried stories from a wider range of wire services in comparison to either the *Globe-Democrat* or the *Sun*. Additionally, it is important to note that while the *Post-Dispatch* and *Globe-Democrat* had a similar balance of wire and staff-written copy, the two papers differed in how they used the wire stories. The *Sun* used more Associate Press articles while the *Globe-Democrat* used United Press International wire and the *Post* subscribed to a greater variety of services (Johnson, & Wanta, 1993, pp. 140-141). The study by Wanta and Johnson (1993) also found that the newspapers did differ in regards to where their stories originated (p. 141). The *Globe-Democrat* ran fewer international stories while the *Sun* devoted more space to national stories and less to state and local articles than the *Post-Dispatch*. The notion from previous studies that competing newspapers will differentiate via



visual elements rather than content is partly true, Wanta and Johnson (1993) found. The three newspapers compared did not differ significantly in that respect. Also significant differences were found in regards to content in that the *Sun* published the largest and visually eye-catching headlines in comparison to the other two papers.

Thus, the monopolistic theory and the financial commitment theory which assumes that newspapers must differentiate themselves in order to remain competitive while still remaining substitutes proves to hold true based on some of the past studies. Rarick and Hartman (1966) found that a daily newspaper will devote a larger proportion of its non-advertising space to local content under conditions of intense competition that it will when it has no competition or when it has the dominant competitive position (p. 460). Additionally, Rarick and Hartman (1966) found that a daily newspaper will devote a larger proportion of its news and feature space to sensational and human interest content under conditions of intense competition that it will when it has no competition or when it has the dominant competitive position (p. 460). A total of 54 issues of the Tri-city Herald serving the cities of Kennewick, Pasco and

Richland, Washington were content analyzed in the study for three periods: October 1, 1948 through June 30, 1949 (without competition with circulation at 10,000), October 1, 1953 through June 30, 1954 (high competition between *Herald* and the *News* with circulation between 12,000 to 13,000) and October 1, 1962 through June 30, 1963 (*Herald* as the dominant paper with circulation at 18,000). Thus the *Herald* was compared with itself during a time of no competition to times of high competition and a time where it became the dominant competing paper. News editorial items were coded for type of story: news VS feature stories, pictures, editorial, or column of opinion. Second, they were coded as to locale: local, state, national or international. Third, they were coded for space as number of column-inches (Rarick & Hartman, 1966, p. 461). Rarick and Hartman (1966) found that during a time of greater competition the *Herald* devoted most of its non-advertising space to local content in comparison to any of the other two time periods of no competition. During times of intense competition more space was also given to local material. However, editorial space declined for each of the three periods examined. However, the amount of space devoted to editorial content was greater during the time of intense competition, making the

hypothesis valid. Additionally, it is important to note that the amount of space devoted to editorials during the time periods was relatively low to begin with. For example, the absolute amount of space was only 524 column inches in 1962-63 compared to 612.4 in 1953-54 (Rarick & Hartman, 1966, p. 462). They also found that during times of intense competition newspapers tend to publish more immediate reward news also known as stories of crime-vice, accidents-disasters, and features-human interest.

However in another study White and Andsager (1990) found mixed support for their hypothesis that the product quality of a media news product is positively related to the financial expenditure on the product. Rather, while advertisers do not receive any benefit from greater competition, readers get more newsprint for their money (White & Andsager, 1990, p. 912). It is also important to note that White and Andager (1990) found no support for the alternate conclusion that intense competition leads to the depreciation of quality. Instead strong support was found in regards to how newspapers will spend more money on the product in the face of intense competition, which ultimately benefits the reader. Data consisted of newspapers falling into the NC, SP, JOA, and PC categories. NC, not discussed previously, is a fourth

dimension added by White and Andsager (1990) which stands for 'No competition' papers. The *Editor and Publisher International Yearbook* was used to establish the list of newspapers that belonged to the above mentioned categories. Pulitzer Prize winners were categorized into four categories including, No Award, Local, National/International, Commentary, and Photography. The establishment of the Pulitzer Prize categories helped to determine the effect competitive schemes have on the winning of Pulitzer Prizes for different kinds of journalism. Commentary and photography are easily visible in the paper while awards for reporting national and international news are characterized by activities that require more resources, time, and logistic expertise in comparison to other journalistic activities (White & Andsager, 1990, p. 915). Awards for the reporting of national/international news are characterized by categories that fall into the area of local news reporting. However, there are perceived limitations to the study in that first, Pulitzer Prizes may not be an adequate measure for journalistic quality. Perhaps, Pulitzer Prizes are awarded to the most popular papers regardless of journalistic quality. A more descriptive measure for journalistic qualities may yield different

results. Since increased competition leads to increased expenditure of resources as the financial commitment and economic theory suggest and because a greater variety of news is covered, newspapers are more likely to win Pulitzer Prizes. In other words, they have more chances to win due to the increase in news categories. According to White and Andsager (1990), competition does not have a significant effect on the quality of journalism, rather it simply increases the variety of news offered (p. 919).

Differences in the subscription of press services between competing newspapers have also been found (Lacy, 1990). Lacy (1990) found that as the intensity of competition increases, the number of press services carried by a newspaper will increase, controlling for circulation. The study included a content analysis for 98 newspapers which were either separately owned or jointly operated. Additionally, a random sample of 100 monopoly newspapers was also included. The 198 -paper sample represents approximately 11% of the 1,745 daily US newspapers from 1980 (Lacy, 1990, p. 80). The number of wire services carried by each newspaper was determined by the listings for each paper in the *Editor and Publisher International Year Book*. Competition intensity, the independent variable in the study, was measured in

two-newspaper markets by subtracting the percentage of total circulation of the trailing newspaper from the percentage held by the leading newspaper. According to Lacy (1990) competition leads to newspapers spending more, which results in the fruition of the financial commitment theory. Additionally, this study found that greater the competition newspapers face the greater the likelihood that they will subscribe to press services. It is also important to note that the completeness of coverage improves for each paper as the number of newswire services subscribed to increases (Lacy, 1990, p. 81).

Thus, research on the impact of competition on news content suggests that news content is impacted by competition (Johnson, & Wanta, 1993; Lacy, n.d., 1980; Lacy, 1990; Rarick & Hartman, 1966; Weaver & Mullins, 1975; White & Andsager, 1990).

#### Impact of Advertising on Gatekeeping and News Content

Under certain conditions, advertisers may control media content. According to Richards and Murphy (1996) this form of economic censorship is extremely dangerous in that consumers of such information are misled to believe that what they are reading is actually news because it comes in the form of editorial content. Media allow

advertisers to hide messages in non-advertising content such as infomercials, documericals, product placement in televisions shows along with commercial video news releases (Richards, & Murphy II, 1996, p. 23). Not only is content manipulated but information is often left out to please advertisers. The chilling effect describes media attitude towards advertisers when reporters and producers avoid stories critical of advertisers or about controversial topics altogether (Richards, & Murphy II, 1996, p. 23).

In fact, advertisers are so concerned about their image that they have been known to employ firms to pre-screen advance tapes of programs in which their commercials may appear. Richards and Murphy (1996) offer an example where Proctor & Gamble threatened to pull its ads out of any program that singled out its products in an unfair manner. Another example is RadioShack whose Vice President of Advertising cancelled all contracts for ad placement in *InfoWorld* due to a story published in the magazine that upset him (Richards, & Murphy II, 1996, p. 22). Other examples include *Seattle Times* who faced a reduction in advertising due to publishing articles about Nordstrom Department Stores' labor problems (Richards, & Murphy II, 1996, p. 25). Mobil Oil Company stopped running

ads in the mid 1980's in the Wall Street Journal after the paper published some negative stories about the company and its executives (Richards, & Murphy II, 1996, p. 25).

The historical analysis conducted by Delorme and Fedler (2005) also supports the finding that advertisers generally attempt to influence editorial content hoping to create a favorable image of themselves in the mind of the reader (p. 8-9). Advertiser's dislike for unfavorable or controversial stories can result in stories being withdrawn from publications. Newspapers often threatened with the loss of advertising profits may feel pressured to leave out some stories. Delorme and Fedler (2005) provide several examples where this has occurred in the past in their historical analysis exploring advertising pressures on journalists and editorial content. Take for example airlines who often demand their advertisements be withdrawn from publications reporting airplane crashes (Delorme & Fedler, 2005, p. 8). Another example of this is the Chrysler Corporation which as directed magazines to inform it about any material that involves sexual, political, or social issues that could be considered offensive or provocative (Delorme & Fedler, 2005, p. 8). Just as companies are concerned about product placement and advertisement aesthetics, they are concerned about



anything that may impact the company negatively. Thus, newspapers content cannot help but be influenced to some degree. According to Delorme and Fedler (2005) the news and advertising departments are kept separately in order to protect journalists and their work from outside influences (p. 9). The "Church and State" analogy explains how news departments are isolated in order to protect their independence and the value of information published (Delorme & Fedler, 2005, pp. 9-10). Advertiser's influence on news content can indefinitely hurt the newspaper's credibility just as advertisers fear the stories published in the paper can hurt their business. According to Delorme and Fedler (2005) advertisers are notorious for wanting special favors such as favorable stories or changing or playing down negative ones (p. 10).

As newspapers are becoming more dependent on advertisers for revenue to meet expenses for running the organization they are becoming increasingly susceptible to advertisers' pressures in regards to news content. According to a study on magazines and cigarette advertisements by Warner, Goldenhar, and McLaughlin (1992) there is a strong correlation between a magazine's acceptance of any cigarette advertising during a given year and the probability of the magazine's publishing any

articles on the issue of smoking and health during that year. The authors found that if a magazine included cigarette advertisements then it had a tendency to not publish any articles related to the hazardous effects of cigarette smoking. Additionally, it was found that women's magazines were more susceptible to this occurrence in that they mostly depended on cigarette ads for revenue. The study reported that the likelihood of publishing articles regarding the hazards of smoking increased if these elements were present: (1) as the coverage of other health risks increase; (2) as the size of a magazine's readership increased; (3) for news-magazines, as compared with all other magazines; (4) In 1964 when the surgeon general issued a warning about smoking; and (5) in the 1960s, as compared with the 1970s and 1980s (Warner, Goldenhar, & McLaughlin, 1992, p. 307). The study used 99 U.S. magazines for the years 1959 through 1986 with the exception of magazines from 1970 through 1972 for the study. Data that was collected included: 1) annual data on cigarette advertising revenues along with total advertising revenues from leading National Advertisers/Publishers' Information Bureau, 2) data on magazine's coverage of 10 different health risk factors from the Magazine Index, 3) Demographic data on readers

provided by Simmons Market Research Bureau, and 4) data on yearly paid and unpaid subscriptions from the Audit Bureau of Circulation (Warner, Goldenhar, & McLaughlin, 1992, p. 306). Although the study is limited in that it only concerns magazines instead of print news and the external validity is limited in that it is only concerned with articles related to hazardous health issues related to smoking cigarettes, this study sheds some light on the advertiser's control over content irrespective of the medium.

Further, with advertisers paying the bills newspapers feel compelled to provide coverage to their advertisers. Rinallo and Basuroy (2009) found in their study on advertiser's influence on international publishers that the more a company advertises in a given publisher, the greater is the coverage of its products in that publisher's magazines. They also found that the influence of advertising on product coverage is greater in the case of less diversified publishers that are largely dependent on a single industry for their advertising revenue. In other words, the less outlets a publisher has for generating advertising revenue, the greater the likelihood that it will be influenced by advertisers. In addition to this, Rinallo and Basuroy (2009) also found that the

influence of advertising on product coverage in a given publisher is (a) greater the more a given company's products are covered by competing publishers and (b) smaller the higher the variance in the coverage of a given company's products in competing publishers. This means that the more outlets the advertiser has to advertise its products, the more leverage it has over the publisher to go somewhere else to conduct business. The publisher must have diverse advertisers in order to remain in power and guard against advertiser's influence over content because ultimately it is the revenue generated from advertising that helps pay the bills. Further, Rinallo and Basuroy (2009) found that the influence of advertising on product coverage is stronger for innovative companies than for non-innovative companies (p. 39). Since one of the important aspects a news item must have in order to pass through the gates is 'newsworthiness', the product must be innovative in order to be included in the publication. The gatekeeper or publisher must be able to find the element of newsworthiness in the advertiser's news item. This is perhaps most misleading for consumers since they are inadvertently lead to believe that what they are reading is free from gimmicks and is genuinely news. Little do they realize that a rule of reciprocity

exists between the publisher and advertiser (Rinallo & Basuroy, 2009, p. 34). Additionally, Rinallo and Basuroy (2009) found that corporate advertising assumes a greater influence on coverage when the advertiser and publisher are from the same country. However, they did not find support for their hypothesis that predicted that advertising influence on editorial content is similar across all countries. The results for each of the five countries considered in the study, Italy, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States were all different. The study analyzed the Italian fashion industry known for its global presence and reputation as a producer for fine fashion since the 1950s. A total of 291 fashion companies and the coverage their products received in the 2002-2003 period across a sample of 123 publishers internationally was the subject of this study. The sample of international publishers included 61 publishers from Italy, 15 from France, 15 from Germany, 16 from the United Kingdom, and 16 from the United States (Rinallo & Basuroy, 2009, p. 36). Visual Box, an independent market research company in Italy, provided the data regarding the sampled company's media coverage and advertising. The volume of media coverage a given company received by a given publisher's magazine served as the dependent variable in

the study. It was measured in the following two ways:

1) the number of product placements, and 2) the number of equivalent number of pages in fashion magazines and newspapers.

Advertising was the independent variable in the study, which was defined as a fashion company's total number of advertising pages in each publisher's portfolio of magazines for 2003 (Rinallo & Basuroy, 2009, p. 36). The degree of specialization in the fashion industry for each publisher was the other independent variable and it was measured by counting the share of magazines in the publisher's portfolio for fashion in 2003. Control variables in the study included company age, number of employees, turnover, total assets, and profitability from secondary sources (Rinallo & Basuroy, 2009, p. 37).

Price (2003) points out that news content is not just a by-product of journalistic norms, but rather many roles are involved in the making. For example, news decisions are often impacted by executives who are responsible for making sure news output divisions meet budget expectations, along with producers who make sure that their programs conform to budget, quality, and policy guidelines (Price, 2003, p. 177). Finally, correspondents are responsible to the individual stories they establish.

Each of these roles full-fill a specific purpose and it is only expected that news content is impacted in some way in the process. As gatekeepers, media organizations will generally choose one story over other potential news items. According to Price (2003) advertisers are in control of what constitutes news for news companies since they must continue to generate advertising revenue in order to make a profit (p. 180). Thus, advertisers have what Price (2003) calls 'privileged access' to the news. Price (2003) cites several examples where news content was manipulated in order to fit the desires of the networks advertisers. A Dayton, Ohio reporter said that if a reporter lost an affluent advertiser over a story, that reporter's job was history (Price, 2003, p. 181). These fears are very much a reality since companies like Disney own ABC (Price, 2003, p. 176). The concern that arises out of these fears is would ABC reporters say something negative about Disney? Chances are they won't despite the story's proximity and timeliness, which are some of the positive characteristics of valence that help story pass through the gates in the gatekeeping process.

Threats of pulling ads out of publication are nothing new as other studies also indicate. Hays and Reisner (1990) conducted a study on journalists for agricultural

publications and found that they felt pressured by advertisers and saw that this pressure spilled over onto news content. The study consisted of an open-ended questionnaire which was mailed out to farm writers and editors belonging to the American Agricultural Editors Association (AAEA). Questions revolved around occupational duties, basic socio-demographics, ethical considerations, practices, and organizational policies. The study found that approximately 62 percent of the 190 AAEA members who responded reported being threatened by advertisers who vowed to withdraw ads over content disputes (Hays & Reisner, 1990, p. 939). Additionally, Hays and Reisner (1990) found that more than a third of the respondents felt that advertiser's influence was harming the agricultural journalism profession (p. 940). Further, approximately 89 percent of the respondents in the study reported being gifted by business representatives. It is inevitable that journalists will feel forced to compensate the gifts through favorable coverage of company events.

In another study An and Bergen (2007) found that editors at small newspapers are more likely to compromise editorial integrity than editors at large newspapers. The study used a random sample of 400 U.S. daily newspapers found in Bacon's 2003 newspaper directory. Questionnaires



were mailed out and phone interviews were conducted with ad directors regarding a total of four scenarios. On a scale from 1 (very acceptable) to 5 (very unacceptable), Ad directors were asked to rate the following four scenarios: 1) Whether they thought it was acceptable to be asked to interview someone from a nursery that is a big local advertiser when writing a section story on summer lawn care. Also they were asked if it was acceptable to be asked to avoid anyone from the other nursery that never advertised in the paper, 2) whether it was okay to ask the photo editor to include pictures of the little league team in which the logo was clearly displayed in the photo since it was the logo of a big advertiser, 3) Whether it was acceptable to ask the editor to include feature story written by the restaurant advertiser in the food section of the paper, and finally, 4) whether it was acceptable to kill a story regarding the DUI and arrest of an owner of a car dealership after the owner threatened to pull out the company's ads from the paper (An & Bergen, 2007, p. 114). The responses received in regards to the summer lawn care interview dilemma indicate that smaller newspapers indeed tend to view the situation as more acceptable in comparison to large newspapers as predicted (An & Bergen, 2007, p. 115). It is important to note however that there

was no significant difference found between chain newspapers and independently owned newspapers in regards to ethical sensitivity.

In regards, to the scenario that asked the ad director's degree of acceptance in regards to including a photo that included the logo of a major advertiser in the paper, the majority of those who found the situation acceptable came from small newspapers. Approximately 14% of small newspaper advertising directors found the situation very acceptable, while only 5% ad directors felt that way from large newspapers. Thus, the vast majority of ad directors who thought the situation was very unacceptable came from large newspapers with approximately 59% indicating their dismay in the study. Those ad directors who felt that it was acceptable justified their decision by indicating that it wouldn't hurt anybody and that it is important to take care of the customers in the open-ended question section in the survey.

In regards to the responses for the restaurant scenario, more small-newspaper rather than large newspaper ad directors found the situation acceptable. According to the survey, 5% of the ad directors from small newspapers found the situation acceptable, while no ad directors at large newspapers found it acceptable (An & Bergen, 2007,

p. 116). For the responses to the car dealer scenario, An and Bergin (2007) found that overall 84% of all respondents found the request very unacceptable. However, more small-newspaper ad directors rather than those from large newspapers found this situation acceptable.

When An and Bergin (2007) compared the acceptability of small chain-owned newspapers with that of large independently owned newspapers, they found support for their hypothesis that in all three scenarios advertising directors at large independently owned newspapers expresses higher resistance toward the situations in comparison to small chain-owned newspapers (p. 117). However, responses for the drunk car dealer's story did not show any group differences in that both respondents from small and chain-owned papers felt that it would be unacceptable to retract the story upon the advertiser's request.

Craig and Soley (1992) found similar results in that circulation size and advertising pressures are negatively correlated. The study by Soley and Craig (1992) found that just over 90 percent responding editors experienced advertisers' attempts to influence news and feature stories. Further, approximately 77% of the editors in the survey said they were pressured to kill stories, while

90% of the editors said that advertisers withdrew advertising due to disputes over content (Soley & Craig, 1992, p. 7).

However, the results from the study do not support initial hypothesis that small circulation newspapers will be more likely to have experienced advertising pressure than large circulation papers. According to Soley and Craig (1992) all newspapers irrespective of size have been pressured by newspapers. However circulation size the study found was negatively related to successful advertising pressure. As circulation increased newspapers were more immune to advertiser's pressures do the lack of dependency for financial support from advertisers. Thus, smaller financially insecure papers are more susceptible to advertisers' pressures in comparison to large, prestigious papers, magazines, or television networks (Dunn, Barban, Krugman, & Reid, 1990; Soley & Craig, 1992). A total of 250 U.S. daily newspapers were chosen for this study as they were randomly sampled from a 1991 copy of *Editor and Publisher International Yearbook*. A questionnaire regarding advertiser's attempts to influence news and feature stories was mailed to wire and national news editors.

The end result is that media consumers receive very limited and biased information, according to Richards and Murphy (1996). As Baker (1992) said anything that prevents the press from providing information and commentary is a serious threat to social policy pocketbook censorship is just as dangerous as government censorship (Richards, & Murphy II, 1996, p. 23). This is in direct conflict with democratic principles in that citizens are prevented from pertinent information that may guide their decision-making and the diverse flow of ideas. As noted by Richards and Murphy (1996) objective truth can only be arrived at through uninhibited, robust, and wide-open discussions (p. 26).

Thus, copious research on the impact of ownership on the gatekeeping process points out that content is impacted by the nature of ownership (Coulson & Hansen, 1995; Donohue et al., 1971; Gilens & Hertzman, 2012; Mathews, 1996; Meyer & Wearden, 2012; Thrift, 1974). Additionally, past research indicates that content is impacted negatively with the exception of Demers (1988) who claims that the quality of newspaper content actually improves under corporate ownership. According to Demers (1988) this is the case because corporate newspapers are able to place less emphasis on making profit and more on

content whereas smaller newspapers are mostly concerned with survival. However, another study found the impact of corporate ownership to be negative in that publishers employed by publicly owned newspaper chains will have less autonomy than publishers employed by privately owned newspaper chains. Corporate independence allows newspaper staff to be committed to tenets of professional journalistic training. Thus changes in content are inevitable. For example, Thrift (1974) found that space designated for local editorials concerning local matters declined after chain-ownership. Further content does differ between chain and independent papers as Donohue et al (1971) found in the study comparing coverage of conflict in dailies vs. weeklies and locally owned papers vs. non-locally owned papers. Community papers reported more conflict in comparison to other papers the study found. Beyond content, the style of reportage is also impacted by ownership as Coulson and Hanson (1995) witnessed changes in the number of pages and writing style of a Louisville newspaper after it was purchased by Gannet. Further Meyer and Weardin (1984) found that employee attitudes become identical to their superiors. The study found that people running publicly held companies would most likely develop attitudes like their

security analysts than those people running privately held companies.

Research on the impact of competition on news content also suggests that news content is impacted by competition (Johnson, & Wanta, 1993; Lacy, n.d., 1980; Lacy, 1990; Rarick & Hartman, 1966; Weaver & Mullins, 1975; White & Andsager, 1990). All research I consulted indicates that financial expenditure is positively correlated to competition. Content space varies among competing and leading newspapers in that leading newspapers devoted the most space to editorial content as Weaver and Mullins (1975) found in the study. Other findings include that increased competition leads to increased usage of wire services (Weaver & Mullins, 1975). Additionally, leading papers tend to have eight or nine-column front-pages along with a high number of photos on the front page (Weaver & Mullins, 1975). Trailing papers, the study found, tend to use color photos, tabloid format, few items and large photos to compete. Johnson and Wanta (1993) found similar results in that leading newspapers vie for hard news stories and eye-catching headlines versus soft news stories. Thus, differentiation from competition includes devoting more space to features, photos, and graphics (Lacy, 1980). Thus, the monopolistic and financial

commitment theories are supported based on this research. However, while White and Andsager (1990) found mixed support for product quality and its positive correlation with financial expenditure, they found no support for an alternate conclusion either.

In consulting past research on the impact of advertising on news content, the found that the extent to which newspapers depend on advertisers on revenue dictates the amount of influence advertisers will have over the product (Delorme & Fedler, 2005; Price, 2003; Richards, & Murphy II, 1996; Rinallo & Basuroy, 2009; Soley & Craig, 1992; Warner, Goldenhar, & McLaughlin, 1992). Advertisers extract unfavorable coverage from newspapers by threatening to withdraw ads (Richards, & Murphy II, 1996). Delorme and Fedler (2005) made similar findings in that airlines withdraw ads from publications reporting on plane crashes. Further circulation size determines how susceptible newspapers are to advertiser's pressures found Craig and Soley (1992). Thus, there is a substantial amount of evidence that suggest advertising is an important variable to look into in regards to its impact on news content and the gatekeeping process.

Thus exploring these variables and their effect on the gatekeeping process during media coverage of the BP



oil spill is compelling to study since the crisis is something that affects everyone irrespective of ownership, circulation, competition, or degree of dependence on advertisers for revenue. This study hopes to further the understanding of the gatekeeping process under the conditions that these variables will present.

CHAPTER FOUR  
CONTENT ANALYSIS OF 170 UNITED  
STATES NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

In order to determine the relationship between political economy variables characteristic of U.S. newspapers and the construction of corporate blame, I created a random sample of U.S. newspapers found on the Lexis-Nexis Database site. After weeding out articles that did not pertain to the research time period (April 20, 2010 to May 31, 2010) or the BP Oil Spill incident, 25 newspapers were left in the sample.

Data Collection and Sampling

The first step in sampling is to list all the members of the class of documents for which inferences are to be made (Holsti, 1969). For this particular study the list was originally derived from the Audit Bureau of Circulations website since it lists all newspapers in publication throughout the US. However, a search in Lexis-Nexis database from where the news articles were to be retrieved revealed that not all newspapers were available in the database. Thus, this original list was abandoned and the newspaper list in Lexis-Nexis was adopted. Here, exactly 249 newspapers were listed.

The next step is to implement a sampling design (Holsti, 1969). In this case a multi-stage sampling design was used. According to Holsti (1969) this can involve as many as three steps: selecting sources of communication, sampling documents, and sampling within documents. Thus, communication sources were the first sampling decision for this study. It had to be ascertained exactly what newspapers were to be included in the sample. From the 249 newspapers listed on Lexis-Nexis, 50 newspapers were selected through systematic random sampling. This procedure is useful when every source is considered equally important for the study. Every fifth newspaper in the list was chosen for the study, since  $249/50 = 4.98$ .

A search for "BP oil spill 2010" in all 50 newspapers published between April 20, 2010 and May 31, 2010 decreased the sample of newspapers to 25, because not all newspapers in the sample published articles about BP during that time-frame. The final sample contains 170 articles.

Next, all articles were downloaded and indexed. Each article was assigned an ID for coding purposes and an article index was created to generate a list of articles and the ID assigned to each one for reference.

For each of the 25 newspapers, the study used *Editors and Publisher's Weekly* to collect information about circulation size, ownership, and revenue. All 25 newspapers were to be called individually in order to collect data on advertising revenue, but none of the newspapers shared the information. Please see [Appendix B] for the listing of newspapers and their respective political economy indicators.

#### Method of Data Analysis

Systematic quantitative content analysis was used to analyze the construction of corporate blame in the 170 U.S. news articles. In what follows, the method of content analysis is described and how it is applied to the sample.

Content analysis is defined as the systematic reading of a body of texts, images, and symbolic matter (Krippendorff, 2004). Further, content analysis is a method by which any problem can be investigated where content of communication serves as the bases for drawing inferences about research data (Holsti, 1969). The earliest form of quantitative newspaper analysis occurred in 1893 where researchers asked the question, "Do newspapers now give the news?" (Krippendorff, 2004). The analysis revolved around whether newspapers had decreased their coverage of

religious, scientific, and literary matters in favor of gossip, sports, and scandals. Quantitative analysis provides scientific ground for journalistic arguments. Numbers and facts that can be quantified are considered irrefutable (Krippendorff, 2004). According to Barelson cited in Krippendorff (2004), "content analysis [is] the use of mass communication as data for testing scientific hypotheses and for evaluating journalistic practices" (p. 8). Thus, systematic quantitative content analysis was the ideal method to conduct the study.

According to Holsti (1969), content analysis embodies objectivity, system, and generality. Objectivity requires that each step is carried out under explicitly formulated rules and procedures throughout the research process (Holsti, 1969). The investigator must be able to make judgments based on these rules. Hence, the requirement of clarity and understanding of the rules and procedures is necessary. For example, investigators must be able to differentiate what belongs in each category. They must be able to decipher from the established criteria what content unit (word, theme, story, etc.) goes in one category instead of another (Holsti, 1969). Objectivity also entails the reason that leads to one inference at the

expense of another after the document has been coded and findings are summarized (Holsti, 1969).

The rules are meant to mitigate the possibility of the findings reflecting the analyst's subjective predispositions rather than the content of the documents under analysis. One way to make sure that this does not occur is to make sure that all coders have a similar understanding of the rules and procedures for dealing with the same data. Thus, it is necessary that the researchers communicate thoroughly their procedures and criteria for selecting data, for determining what in the data is relevant and what is not, and for interpreting the findings (Holsti, 1969). "Systematic" refers to the fact that all data is included according to consistent rules. In other words, the data does not pertain to only what supports the researcher's hypothesis (Holsti, 1969). Generality is also necessary according to Holsti (1969), in that all findings need to have theoretical relevance. Descriptive information proves irrelevant if it is unrelated to other attributes of documents or characteristics of sender or recipient of the message (Holsti, 1969).

Another important aspect of content analysis is that it helps analysts predict phenomenon that often cannot be

observed directly (Krippendorff, 2004). Absent direct phone interviews with reporters about how they report on corporate blame, the media texts themselves may be used to draw inferences about the construction of corporate blame. The method has the advantage of producing conclusions about the topic of study when the authors of the news items themselves are unavailable for interviews. Content analysis proves beneficial when data accessibility is problematic and the investigators data are limited to documentary evidence (Holsti, 1969).

Thus, content analysis of newspaper texts is the best approach to access the construction of corporate blame in the randomly selected sample of newspapers. According to Leites and Pool (1942; as cited in Krippendorff, 2004), content analysis serves four functions which include: confirming pre-existing beliefs, correcting illusions of specialists, settling disagreements among specialists, and formulating and testing hypotheses about symbols. Thus, by relating the content analysis of media texts to variables about the context of production of those texts, we are able to make inferences about the relationship between political economy indicators such as advertising, circulation, market share, competition, and ownership to media coverage. Through content analysis focusing on one

incident, the BP oil spill of 2010 this study will be able to investigate this relationship.

In content analysis, data coding relies on a coding instrument developed by the researcher. The coding instrument needs to contain not only the variables to be coded based on the given texts, but also detailed instructions that ensure that coders working independently arrive at the same result (Krippendorff, 2004). Coding involves transcribing, recording, categorizing, or interpreting given units of analysis into the terms of data language (Krippendorff, 2004). The language is then compared and analyzed. Data is either single-valued or multi-valued. Each unit of description receives a unique description, meaning there is only one value for each variable. Multi-valued data, on the other hand, receives multiple descriptions or interpretations.

The basic unit of analysis for this study was the news article. According to Neuendorf (2002), a unit of analysis is defined as message which serves as the bases for identifying the population and drawing a sample on which variables are measured. For each article in the sample, coders were asked to identify the type of article (whether a brief news item, a report, an editorial, etc.), as well as various characteristics related to the



construction of harm, victims, blames, perpetrators, and causes of the incident. The coding instrument used in this study is available in [Appendix A].

In order to achieve objectivity it is necessary that measures and procedures are reliable (Holsti, 1969). In other words repeated measures with the same instrument on a given sample of data should compute to similar results. It is important to note that "reliability is a function of coders' skill, insight, and experience, clarity of categories, and coding rules which guide their use; and the degree of ambiguity in the data" (Holsti, 1969, p. 135). Unless computer programs are available to code, researchers must rely on the judgment of individual coders. Thus, individual reliability is necessary in that coders must agree on their interpretation of the coding materials (i.e. codebook, coding instrument, and sample references).

For this study, training sessions were conducted with two coders and the coding instructions were explained to both. to ensure that coders understood what it was that they were to code. As cited in Holsti (1969) according to Kaplan and Goldsen (1949) experimental studies have revealed that training prior to coding can significantly increase the level of inter-coder agreement.

Category reliability is also necessary in that same vein in that analysts are able to formulate categories for which the empirical evidence is clear enough so there is no disagreement in regards to which items belong to a particular category and which do not (Holsti, 1969). Instances where poor agreement exists among coders, analysts should reconsider their category assignments. The inter-coder reliability coefficient (Krippendorff, 2004) is a measure of agreement among coders and ensures the reliability of the coding procedure. There are different measures of inter-coder reliability, including computing the ratio of coding agreements to the total number of coding decision. For this study, I have used Krippendorff's alpha, which is one of the more robust inter-reliability measures (Krippendorff, 2004). Krippendorff's alpha ranges from 0 to 1, which measures over 0.80 indicating high levels of coder agreement. The overall inter-reliability coefficient for my coding instrument was 0.89, with the minimum alpha ranging between 0.70 and 0.79 on three of the variables.

In order to characterize the journalistic framing of the 2010 BP oil spill in the Gulf, the sample of 170 articles from 25 US newspapers were coded for the following items: harm/magnitude and types, victims,

perpetrators, blame, strategies for avoiding blame, retribution, government response, expertise for the claims based on statistics and types of sources used.

Harm magnitude is assessed in the article with the presence of statistical information about the number of victims, amount of monetary loss, or the number of regulations violated. Along with the presence of harm magnitude, claims about specific harm types were also coded for: (1) environmental damage (natural resources/animals), (2) deaths and injuries (number of victims), (3) financial loss (monetary loss for reasons such as litigation, cleanup, etc.), (4) violation of regulation (any mention of laws/regulations violated resulting from incident), (5) violation of social values (values such as environmental protection by exacting least amount of harm possible), (6) violations of the mission statement (mention of irresponsibility, not performance driven, absence of relationship development, lack of commitment to safety and environmental protection, etc) and (7) Other (open-ended response for any harm types that do not fit into any of the preceding categories).

Coding for harm victims included the frequency of the following items in an article: (1) environment, (2) fishing industry, (3) tourism, (4) oil industry in

general, (5) rig workers, and (6) others (for open-ended responses).

Additionally, the presence of blame was coded for in regards to whether the article as a whole (1) specifically blamed BP for the incident, (2) specifically defended BP or, (3) maintained a neutral point of view while citing opposing sources that defended and blamed BP. Company strategies in dealing with the onset of blame were also identified and coded. The coding instrument operationalized these strategies using Benoit (2007) framework for corporate apologia was coded for: (1) Denial (denies the accusation), (2) Intent (claims that offensive act resulted despite good intentions), (3) Bolstering (attempts to increase positive feelings towards oneself in light of act, (4) Transferring/Blame Shifting (argues that another is responsible for the offensive act, (5) Counterattack (claim that offensive act is in response to another's provocations), (6) Minimization (attempts to minimize negative feelings towards negative act), (7) Mortification (accepts responsibility for the act and begs forgiveness), (8) Excuses (claims lack of control over situational information or argues that the offensive act is an accident), and (9) Justification (response to another's offensive act).

Calls for different categories of sanctions for BP were also coded for; the specific types of sanctions deemed relevant were: (1) Fines (mandatory state monetary compensation for harm), (2) Prohibitions (laws restricting future operations), (3) Involvement with cleanup activities (demands that the company do more to cleanup), (4) Restitution to victims (demands the company provide compensation to victims for act).

Another indicator of how the incident was framed included mentions of the government response to the accident and claims about its adequacy or inadequacy thereof. These claims were categorized into: (1) adequate (effective response to disaster), (2) not adequate (criticism of governmental response) or (3) not specified/cannot determine from the article.

Journalists back their claims by drawing on a variety of sources and types of expertise. In order to account for this aspect of the incident's framing, the coding instrument included both the nature of the cited sources and the forms of expertise invoked by an article. The codes for the nature of the sources included: (1) BP employees or the generic "BP"; (2) BP executives (officials and referred to as such in titles); (3) EPA personnel or EPA agency as a whole (Environmental

Protection Agency officials); (4) Fishermen (those who depend on fishing for a living); (5) Government officials (officials at legislative level representing the government); (6) Environmental NGO members or organizations (non-governmental/non-profit focusing on environment); (7) Other NGO members or organizations (any other non-profit and non-governmental groups focusing on development or advocacy); (8) Residents of affected areas with unspecified occupations. Additionally, the coders had to identify in an open-ended question in the coding instrument forms of expertise mentioned in an article that were different from the expertise of the sources listed above. After the coding was completed and the open-ended responses were categorized, they included the categories of academic experts, environmental experts, other experts, scientists unaffiliated with the academia other oil companies, legal experts, publications, businesses, family of victims, city officials, and tourism industry officials.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### FINDINGS

#### Descriptive Findings

As expected, almost two thirds of the 170 articles (63.5%) mentioned the incident magnitude, with varying degrees of specificity. In some articles, the exact magnitude of the disaster was less specific, for example, an incident which "unleashed a sickening gusher of millions of gallons of crude" (Werner & Babington, 2010), whereas other articles gave exact statistics, for example "[according to] the most conservative estimate, 7 million gallons of crude have spilled into the Gulf of Mexico" (Bluestein, 2010). In about a third of these articles, the magnitude of the disaster was described via references to past incidents, most often the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill off Alaska, which, after spilling 11 million gallons of oil, was acknowledged as the worst in U.S. history.

Two elements characteristic for the construction of harm were coded for: (a) the type of harm (whether harm to the environment, to people, monetary harm, legal harm such as violations of regulations, societal harm as defined by violation of societal values, and reputational harm, as defined by violations of BP's mission statement); and

(b) the magnitude of the harm. Table 1 shows the types of harm most mentioned in the articles:

Table 1. Type of Harm<sup>1</sup>

Type of Harm	Percentage (%)
Environment	69.4
Mission statement	58.8
Death and injuries	46.5
Financial loss	10.0
Violation of societal values	4.7
Violation of regulations	1.2

Surprisingly, the framing of the oil spill in terms of environmental harm was the most frequent, closely followed by a framing in terms of loss of reputation for BP.

The death of the rig workers was mentioned in almost half of the articles. However, much less frequent were framings of the incident in terms of violation of environmental regulations, financial loss to the region, or violation of societal values such as the importance of

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<sup>1</sup> The percentages do not add up to 100% because an article may mention more than one type of harm.



preserving the environment in general, as a human resource.

More than half of the articles (57.1%) provided statistics about the magnitude of harm, for example the fact that 11 rig workers died, or estimates of how much economic loss the region is going to suffer.

The coding instrument included five specific types of victims: the environment, the fishing industry, tourism, the oil industry in general and rig workers, as well as open ended categories where coders could enter types of victims not explicitly specified in the coding instrument. Table 2 below indicates the most frequent victims.

Table 2. Types of Victims

Type of Victim	Percentage (%)
Environment	60.0
Rig workers	40.6
Fishing industry	21.2
Tourism	11.2
The reputation of the oil industry	0.6

Just like for the framing of harm, most articles (60%) identified the biosphere as the most likely victim, followed by the rig workers who died during the explosion

(41%), the fishing industry (21%) and the tourism (11%). A tiny percentage, less than 1%, also believed that the incident was likely to hurt the oil industry in general.

An overwhelming percentage of articles (88.2%) tried to maintain neutrality and not blame BP specifically, with only 10.6% of the articles assigning blame to BP. Only one article defended BP. Of those who blamed BP, two thirds believed that BP hid evidence, for example by claimed that the company had "the capability to prevent a serious oil spill in case of a well blowout" (Daly, 2010, p. 25), even though that proved not to be the case. A small percentage of the articles (5.3%) also assigned blame to the government, especially the Minerals Management Service, said to have entertained a "cozy relationship" with the oil industry executives by accepting favors such as sport tickets in return for turning a blind eye to regulation violations. Less than 6% of the articles called for specific BP sanctions, such as fines, operational prohibitions, or restitutions for victims, although 10% of the articles identified a need for broader regulatory change in regard to the oil industry. A small percentage of the articles (10.6%) specifically evaluated the government response to the spill, with more than half of those articles framing the response as inadequate.

Generally, companies have a number of strategies to respond to accusations (Benoit, 1997). Companies may deny the accusation, they may emphasize their good intentions despite the offending behavior, they may bolster their image by increasing positive public opinion, they may transfer blame to someone else, counter-attack by attacking the accuser, attempt to minimize the harm and the negative feelings ensuing from it, accept responsibility explicitly, make excuses by explaining how the lack of information or resources the companies to disaster, and finally provide justifications for their actions. Of all these strategies, two were predominant in the claims of BP executives: mortification (accepting responsibility) and blame-shifting. Mortification was present in 8.2% of the articles: BP executives claimed that the company was doing everything possible to contain the spill. For example, BP spokesman John Curry said: "We want what everybody wants--to stop the flow at the source as quickly as possible...We understand the frustration and we just want to bring this to closure" (Bluestein, 2010). In 6.5% of the articles, BP tried to shift the blame to the other two oil companies involved in the incident, Halliburton and Transocean.

An important characteristic of U.S. journalism is its attempt to appear neutral by providing different angles to a story by citing a variety of sources, as well as providing the appearance of objectivity by referring to experts.

On the average, the articles in the sample cited two sources, with some articles citing up to 7 different sources. The most frequent sources are identified in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Types of Sources

Type of Source	Percentage (%)
Government	54.1%
BP executives	30.0%
BP employees	24.7%
Fishermen	14.7%
Residents	5.9%
Environmental NGO's	2.9%
EPA	2.4%

Table 4. Types of Experts

Type of Expertise	Percentage (%)
Engineering and military expertise	16.4%
Academic expertise	10.6%
Environmental expertise	9.4%
Government experts	7.6%
Other scientists	5.3%

The most frequent form of expertise invoked by the newspapers in the sample was engineering and military expertise (16.4%), followed by academic expertise (10.6%) and environmental expertise (9.4%). Governmental experts and other scientists such as biologists unaffiliated with the academia were only mentioned in a small number of articles. Only 3 articles, not shown in the table, invoked legal expertise for possible BP liability.

#### Relationship between Political Economy Indicators and Content

The following section presents the results of association tests between the political economic indicators circulation size and ownership and several measures of how the incident was framed: (a) whether or not an article made assertions of harm; (b) whether or not an article blamed BP; (c) whether or not an article called

for BP to make amends for the disaster; (d) whether or not the article mentioned any victims. Additionally, the relationship between these two political economic indicators and the number of sources used in an article is also tested, along with the association between the identity of the source and newspaper ownership and circulation size respectively. For each of the tests described, the association with the geographic region is also tested.

Assertions of harm are distributed almost evenly among articles from different geographic regions, with newspapers on the two coasts slightly more likely to mention harm. There is no association between geographic region and presence of harm claims in an article [Please See Appendix D for Table A].

Table 5. Assertions of Harm by Newspaper Ownership Type

Harm Mentioned?	<u>Ownership Type</u>			Total
	Family (%)	Regional Chain (%)	Big Chain (%)	
No	25.0	10.9	25.0	13.5 (23)
Yes	75.0	89.1	75.0	86.5 (147)
Total	2.4 (4)	81.2 (138)	16.5 (28)	100% (170)

$$\chi^2 = 4.433; df = 2; p = .039$$

Articles belonging to newspapers owned by regional chains are significantly more likely to mention harm, as compared to articles in family-owned (private ownership) newspapers or articles from newspapers owned by big, national chains.

Table 6. Assertions of Harm by Circulation Size

Harm Mentioned?	<u>Circulation Size</u>			Total
	Small (%)	Medium (%)	Large (%)	
No	9.8	36.0	9.3	13.5 (23)
Yes	90.2	64.0	90.7	86.5 (147)
Total	60.0 (102)	14.7 (25)	25.3 (43)	100% (170)

$$\chi^2 = 12.657; df = 2; p = .002$$

Articles from small and large circulation newspapers are significantly more likely to mention harm, whereas articles from newspapers with medium-size circulation are less likely to mention harm.

Articles from East coast and Midwest newspapers are more likely to explicitly identify BP as the party responsible for the environmental disaster, with articles from South newspapers less likely to do so. However, the relationship between geographic region and

presence/absence of claims of blame is not significant  
[Please See Appendix D for Table B].

Table 7. Assertions of Blame by Newspaper Ownership Type

Blames BP?	<u>Ownership Type</u>			Total
	Family (%)	Regional Chain (%)	Big Chain (%)	
No	75.0	93.5	71.4	89.4 (152)
Yes	25.0	6.5	28.6	10.6 (18)
Total	2.4 (4)	81.2 (138)	16.5 (28)	100% (170)

$$\chi^2 = 12.853; df = 2; p = .002$$

Articles coming from both family-owned and big chain newspapers are significantly more likely to assign responsibility to BP for the oil spill, with articles from regional chains more likely to keep silent about who is to blame for the incident.

The relationship between a newspaper's circulation size and the likelihood that its articles would mention blame is not significant [Please See Appendix D for Table C]. However, articles from both medium-size and large-circulation newspapers are slightly more likely to keep silent about blame. There is no significant relationship between region, and whether or not the articles included calls for sanctions for BP [Please see



Appendix D for Table D]. However, articles published in the East and Midwest were more likely to call for sanctions for BP.

Table 8. Call for Restitution/Sanctions by Newspaper Ownership Type

Sanctions Mentioned?	Ownership Type			Total
	Family (%)	Regional Chain (%)	Big Chain (%)	
No	75.0	89.9	71.4	86.5 (147)
Yes	25.0	10.1	28.6	13.5 (23)
Total	2.4 (4)	81.2 (138)	16.5 (28)	100% (170)

$$\chi^2 = 7.216; df = 2; p = .027$$

There is a significant relationship between ownership type and the presence of the call for sanctions for BP. Articles both in big chain-owned newspapers and privately-owned newspapers were more likely to call for sanctions for BP. Articles from regional chain-owned newspapers called for the least amount of sanctions.

There is not a significant relationship between circulation size and whether or not the article mentioned of sanctions for BP [Please see Appendix D for Table E]. However, articles in medium circulation newspapers were more likely to mention sanctions for BP, whereas both

articles from small circulation newspapers and large circulation newspapers called for the least amount of sanctions.

There is not a significant relationship between geographic region and the mention of victims in the articles [Please see Appendix D for Table F]. Articles from the Midwest region newspapers were more likely to mention harm to victims. However, articles from the East, South, and West were not as likely to mention victims.

Table 9. Claims of Victimhood by Newspaper Ownership Type

Victims Mentioned?	<u>Ownership Type</u>			Total
	Family (%)	Regional (%)	Chain Big Chain (%)	
No	75.0	21.7	39.3	25.9 (44)
Yes	25.0	78.3	60.7	74.1 (126)
Total	2.4 (4)	81.2 (138)	16.5 (28)	100% (170)

$$\chi^2 = 8.888; df = 2; p = .012$$

There is a significant relationship between ownership type and claims of victimhood. Articles in regional chain-owned newspapers were more likely to mention victimhood claims. Articles in privately-owned newspapers, followed by big chain-owned newspapers were less likely to mention claims of victimhood.

Table 10. Claims of Victimhood by Circulation Size

Victims mentioned?	<u>Circulation Size</u>			Total
	Small (%)	Medium (%)	Large (%)	
No	21.6	48.0	23.3	25.9 (44)
Yes	78.4	52.0	76.7	74.1 (126)
Total	60.0 (102)	14.7 (25)	25.3 (43)	100% (170)

$$\chi^2 = 7.519; df = 2; p = .023$$

There is a significant relationship between circulation size and claims of victimhood. Articles in small circulation newspapers were more likely to mention claims of victimhood, followed by large circulation newspapers. Articles in medium circulation size newspapers were less likely to mention victimhood.

Table 11. Influence of Geographic Region on the Number of Sources Used as Evidence

Region	Mean Number of Sources/Article
East	1.86 (std = 1.68, n = 49)
Midwest	2.04 (std = 1.48, n = 26)
South	1.30 (std = 1.38, n = 53)
West	2.19 (std = 1.89, n = 42)
Total	1.79 (std = 1.65, N = 170)

An ANOVA analysis of the mean number of sources per article reveals that there is a significant difference among the geographic regions in respect to the average number of sources likely to be mentioned in an article ( $F = 2.685$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p = 0.048$ ). A post-hoc test shows that the variation is due to the significant difference between articles from Southern newspapers, more likely to rely on one source only (mean number of sources/article is 1.30), and articles from newspapers in the West, more likely to cite two different sources (mean number of sources/article is 2.19).

Table 12. Influence of Ownership Type on the Number of Sources Used as Evidence

Ownership	Mean Number of Sources/Article
Family	1.25 (std = 2.50, n = 4)
Regional chain	1.96 (std = 1.57, n = 138)
Big chain	1.07 (std = 1.72, n = 28)
Total	1.79 (std = 1.65, N = 170)

An ANOVA analysis of the mean number of sources per article reveals that there is a significant difference among articles from newspapers with different ownership types in respect to the average number of sources likely

to be mentioned in an article ( $F = 3.705$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p = 0.027$ ). A post-hoc test the variation is due to the significant difference between articles from regionally-owned newspapers, more likely to rely on two different sources (mean number of sources/article is 1.96), and articles from newspapers owned by big chains, more likely to cite one source only (mean number of sources/article is 1.07).

Table 13. Influence of Circulation Size on the Number of Sources Used as Evidence

Circulation size	Mean Number of Sources/Article
Small	1.96 (std = 1.68, n = 102)
Medium	0.88 (std = 1.54, n = 25)
Large	1.93 (std = 1.49, n = 43)
Total	1.79 (std = 1.65, N = 170)

An ANOVA analysis of the mean number of sources per article reveals that there is a significant difference among articles from newspapers with different circulation sizes in respect to the average number of sources likely to be mentioned in an article ( $F = 4.726$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p = 0.010$ ). A post-hoc test shows the variation is due to the significant difference between the mean number of

different sources mentioned in articles from small circulation newspapers versus articles from medium circulation newspapers ( $p = 0.009$ ), as well as a significant difference between the mean number of different sources mentioned articles from medium circulation newspapers versus articles from large circulation newspapers ( $p = 0.028$ ). Articles from small circulation and large circulation newspapers were more likely to reply on two different sources, whereas articles from medium circulation newspapers were more likely to rely on one source.

There is not a significant relationship between geographic region, and whether or not the article mentions BP as a source [Please see Appendix D for Table G]. Articles in Eastern region newspapers were more likely to mention BP as a source, followed by Western region newspapers and Southern region newspapers. Articles appearing in the Midwest region newspapers were less likely to mention BP.

Table 14. Source Identity: British Petroleum by Ownership Type

BP Mentioned?	<u>Ownership Type</u>			Total
	Family (%)	Regional chain (%)	Big chain (%)	
No	100.0	55.1	89.3	61.8 (105)
Yes	.0	95.4	4.6	38.2 (65)
Total	2.4 (4)	81.2 (138)	16.5 (28)	100% (170)

$$\chi^2 = 14.073; df = 2; p = .001$$

There is a significant relationship between ownership type and whether or not BP is mentioned in the article. Articles in regional chain-owned newspapers were more likely to use BP as a source. Privately-owned newspapers followed by big chain-owned newspapers were less likely to mention BP.

Table 15. Source Identity: British Petroleum by  
Circulation Size

BP Mentioned?	<u>Circulation Size</u>			Total
	Small (%)	Medium (%)	Large (%)	
No	57.8	100.0	48.8	61.8 (105)
Yes	42.2	.0	51.2	38.2 (65)
Total	60.0 (102)	14.7 (25)	25.3 (43)	100% (170)

$$\chi^2 = 19.183; df = 2; p = .000$$

There is a significant relationship between circulation size and whether or not BP is mentioned as a source in the article. Articles appearing in large circulation size newspapers were more likely to use BP as a source. Articles in medium circulation size newspapers were less likely to mention BP.

There is no significant relationship between geographic region, and whether or not government officials are mentioned in the article [Please See Appendix D for Table H]. However Midwest region newspapers were more likely to use government officials as sources in the articles, followed by West, East, and South region newspapers.



Table 16. Source Identity: Government Officials by  
Ownership Type

Government Officials Mentioned?	<u>Ownership Type</u>			Total
	Family (%)	Regional Chain (%)	Big Chain (%)	
No	75.0	41.3	64.3	45.9 (78)
Yes	25.0	58.7	35.7	54.1 (92)
Total	2.4 (4)	81.2 (138)	16.5 (28)	100% (170)

$$\chi^2 = 6.350; df = 2; p = .042$$

There is a significant relationship between ownership type and whether government officials are mentioned. Articles in regional chain newspapers seem more likely to mention government officials, whereas articles in both big chain-owned newspapers and privately-owned newspapers are less likely to mention government officials.

Table 17. Source Identity: Government Officials by  
Circulation Size

Government Officials Mentioned?	<u>Circulation Size</u>			Total
	Small (%)	Medium (%)	Large (%)	
No	41.2	72.0	41.9	45.9 (78)
Yes	58.8	28.0	58.1	54.1 (92)
Total	60.0 (102)	14.7 (25)	25.3 (43)	100% (170)

$$\chi^2 = 8.058; df = 2; p = .018$$

There is a significant relationship between circulation size and the mention of government officials. Articles in medium circulation newspapers seem less likely to mention government officials, whereas articles in both small circulation newspapers and large circulation newspapers are more likely to mention government officials.

Table 18. Source Identity: Fishermen by Geographic Region

Fishermen Mentioned?	<u>Geographic Region</u>				Total
	East (%)	Midwest (%)	South (%)	West (%)	
No	93.9	69.2	86.8	85.7	85.9 (146)
Yes	6.1	30.8	13.2	14.3	14.1 (24)
Total	28.8 (49)	15.3 (26)	31.2 (53)	24.7 (42)	100% (170)

$$\chi^2 = 8.566; df = 2; p = .036$$

There is a significant relationship between geographic region and the mention of fishermen. Articles in Midwest newspapers seem more likely to mention fishermen, whereas articles in regional papers in the South, West, and East, respectively are less likely.

There is no significant relationship between ownership type, and whether or not the article mentions fishermen [Please See Appendix D for Table I]. Articles in regional chain-owned newspapers seem more likely to include fishermen, whereas articles in big chain-owned newspapers and regional chain-owned newspapers are less likely.

There is no significant relationship between circulation size, and whether or not the article mentions fishermen [Please see Appendix D for Table I]. However, articles in small circulation newspapers are more likely

to include fishermen, whereas articles in large circulation and medium circulation are less likely.

Other potentially interesting tests, such as the relationship between calls for regulatory changes and the ownership type or the circulation size of the newspapers, or relationships between the nature of expertise and the two political economy indicators, could not be run because of the lack of variance in the sample (e.g., small percentage of articles who actually called for regulatory change) .

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

#### Summary of Findings

Only 25 newspapers, out of the 50 newspapers selected for data collections, covered the incident during the month immediately following it. This finding is concurrent to the conclusions of scholars such as (Hansen, 1991; Miller & Riechert, 2000; Molotch & Lester, 2012; Allan, Adam, 2000; Ungar, 1992; Wilkens, 1989) that environmental issues are high on the public agenda as defined by U.S. media.

Nevertheless, in the sampled articles environmental harm is the most frequently mentioned harm type in addition to victimhood type.

#### Circulation

Articles from large circulation newspapers called for sanctions the least as expected. Large circulation papers tend to be publicly owned and are thus interested in protecting corporate interests. Dependence on stockholders and investors for resources may be the cause for this refrain.

Additionally, articles from large and small circulation newspapers mentioned claims of victimhood

most. The fact that large newspapers (76.7) predominantly under public ownership and small newspapers (78.4) under private ownership mention victimhood almost equally is interesting. Large circulation newspapers have the manpower and resources to investigate claims further while small newspapers are uninhibited by corporate interests.

Articles from large and small circulation newspapers contained more sources per article in comparison to medium circulation newspapers. An overwhelming number of large circulation newspapers are publicly owned while small and medium circulation newspapers are privately owned. This difference between small circulation and medium circulation newspapers in their use of sources is interesting since both are predominantly under private ownership.

Articles from large circulation newspapers (51.2) mentioned BP as a source the most. As large circulation newspapers are predominantly under public ownership it makes sense that such news organizations would dance to the tune of the corporate actors and those socially affluent.

Additionally, articles from large circulation newspapers mentioned government officials the most. Again, since a majority of large newspapers are publicly held

they will subscribe to those higher up the social ladder to define issues.

### Ownership

Articles from regional chain newspapers (public ownership) mentioned harm the most in followed by articles in big chain newspaper (public ownership) while family owned newspapers (public) mentioned harm the least. Regional chain newspapers along with big chain newspapers tend to carry a large circulation while family owned newspapers tend to have a smaller circulation. Perhaps the lack of resources available to small circulation newspapers explains this.

Articles from big chain newspapers blame BP the most. Perhaps, with a large circulation, big chain newspapers are less susceptible to corporate pressures. Income from having a large circulation may serve as a security blanket allowing big chain newspapers to boldly blame BP. Family owned newspapers, having a smaller circulation, may fear corporate retribution and lawsuits.

Another interesting finding was big chain newspapers were more likely to mention sanctions. A large circulation may have provided this freedom to boldly mention sanctions for BP in addition to having more manpower to generate more copy.

Additionally, articles from big chain and regional chain newspapers mention victimhood the most. Big chain and regional chain newspapers tend to have large circulations. The large circulation size allows for devotion to newsgathering and news copy.

While regional chain newspapers cited more sources on average per article, big chain newspapers cited only 1 source per article.

Additionally, articles from regional chain newspapers (95.4) use BP a source the most. Under public ownership, regional chain newspapers voice corporate interests over other types of sources. With higher circulations, regional newspapers would have been expected branch out beyond BP officials for sources in their quest to 'objectively' define the crisis.

Articles from big chain and regional chain newspapers mentioned government officials the most. These newspapers tend to be publicly held and thus are vested in propagating the interests of the powerful in society. Entrusted with a high circulation, it would have been expected that such newspapers would entertain the capability of investigating the claims of the powerful by providing a voice to those lower down the totem pole.



### Geographic Region

It is alarming that articles from Southern region newspapers use the least amount of sources per article in comparison to the East, Midwest, and West regions. Southern newspapers had the most access to sources who were immediately involved in the BP oil spill.

Additionally, while fishermen were at hand to discuss the fishing industry (one of the least mentioned type of harms) they were not given a voice to express their woes. In fact, articles from this region mention fishermen as sources the least. Perhaps, newspapers in this region were interested in preserving income generated from tourism in the area. Potential negative coverage about the devastation to the beaches, marches, wildlife, and menus at local eateries might have been enough for newspapers to stray away from the locals. Surely, the fishermen and local residents would want to talk about how they have been impacted by the crisis. An area already suffering from the blow of the spill, could not afford to lose its tourists too.

### Implications

The results of this study resonate with previous studies in that two of the political economy indicators

examined in this study, ownership and circulation have an impact on news content. Further, gatekeeping and agenda setting theories are reaffirmed in that there are constraints present at the individual and organizational level in the construction of news stories.

The implications of this are immense in that if such factors influence news then how can the average citizen access news critically? Thus, based on the findings of this study it is highly recommended that media literacy programs be put in place to educate the public on how to evaluate news critically. Public knowledge is crucial for democracy to function properly. With news that omits one claim over another due to vested corporate interests citizens are not getting the full picture to make informed decisions.

The implications are quite serious: instead of giving a voice to the voiceless, news media propagate the views of those in power. Those in power include corporate investors who control the coverage of critical topics, especially when they run counter to the financial interest of ownership (Blethen & Blethen, 2011).

Thus, the advent of online news is quite promising in that news organizational costs are less than other mediums. Less pressure to generate profits to establish

news material can only help to mitigate the effects of ownership and circulation on news content.

This study found additional confirmation of this conclusion in history. The 2003 Florida Appeals Court ruling in the case of Akre and Wilson vs. Fox News found that media had the right to lie and slant stories. Although initially excited about Akre and Wilson's story about Monsanto Corporation's use of Bovine Growth Hormone (BGH), Fox news pressured the reporters to change the story according to suggestions made by a Monsanto Attorney. Despite the public's right to know about the cancer causing agents in the milk and the mistreatment of animals, Fox News swayed under corporate pressure and chose to conceal the truth. Although it would be inaccurate to claim the journalists were pressured to report the view of those who are powerful, in this case BP, there is a strong relationship between the differential power of a source and what is eventually printed in the media.

Additionally, the study found that the use of government officials as sources in the sample articles varies by ownership as well. This finding is also important because it suggests that the powerful are defining the situation, rather than other less affluent

people who were directly affected by the environmental disaster. For example, fishermen, businesses, and residents in the affected areas were not given the opportunity to define the problem. The families of those victims who died or were maimed from the blow-up were rarely used as sources. After all, is it not they who are most immediately involved with the problem? As acknowledged by the articles in the sample and confirmed by my reading of government officials' quotes, the government did not have a good grasp of the exact magnitude of the problem, and seldom accounted for the impact of the disaster on the residents' way of life. One would think that the residents who have experienced the incident first-hand would have first-hand knowledge, yet they are seldom quoted.

Although the environment is the most popular victim and type of harm mentioned in the 25 newspaper articles used in the study, the fact that only 25 newspapers from a pool of 50 newspapers selected for data collections covered the spill during the month immediately following it suggests that environmental issues are not as prevalent in news media as they should be.

In sum, the study demonstrated that although it is up to our news media to announce instances of corporate

irresponsibility, media seldom do so. According to (Globerman, 2011), the only remedy to ambiguous corporate accountability is to develop explicit laws that spell out acceptable and unacceptable behaviors. Societal concerns should be established through laws. Further, societal concerns can only be heard if society is given a voice to make its opinions matter. For this reason it is necessary to incorporate the general public in the construction of news stories. As (Pember & Calvert, 2011) point out, if one does not have a voice in the media, then protection of freedom of expression does little good. One example is the Pointe-au-Chien tribe whose lifestyle was deeply disturbed by the BP oil spill, along with the lifestyle of many other residents who depended on fishing for survival (Safina, 2011). While the BP oil case made national headlines after the disaster, the most immediate victims did not have access to the media to make their concerns heard before and after the disaster.

Further, these results, along with the handling of the BP oil spill, have implications for the definition of corporate social responsibility (CSR). It is important to note that since CSR is multifaceted and it means many different things to different people, it is difficult to measure or adhere to it from a functional perspective

(Voiculescu & Yanacopulos, 2011, p. 2). As a result, since laws are not codified they are almost impossible to enforce (Globerman, 2011), the ethical lens is broad, to say the least. Some degree of social responsibility is necessary, especially since large corporations are becoming global due to smaller supply chains and cheap production available beyond international borders. The ethical principles that business should operate by are unclear due to the lack of codification of specific laws. As a result society is often unable to assess the extent of corporate malfeasance. It is important that corporations realize that they are granted corporate citizenship based on their perceived need and merits.

According to (Banerjee, 2007), under the iron law of responsibility, society grants businesses the legitimacy and power to exist. If businesses do not exercise power in a socially responsible manner, that power can be revoked. Society can voice its concerns through voting or media. According to (Carol, 1979) social responsibility is exercised during the economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary activities a business conducts. Corporations have an economic responsibility in that they are expected to produce goods and services desired by society and sell them at a profit. The manner in which business fulfills

its economic duty must encompass legal responsibility which means following the laws and regulations of the society that allows it to exist in the first place. Although legal and economic responsibility stem from ethical expectations, ethics is considered a third dimension of responsibility. Since these expectations are not codified into law, they are rather difficult to monitor. For this reason, perhaps the fulfillment of discretionary responsibilities by corporations seems to trump all other responsibilities. Donating a few dollars to a charitable cause are the types of stories that seem to make the headlines these days releasing the corporation from all other responsibilities. Additionally, discretionary activities are not definitive in nature as they are open for interpretation. CSR allows corporations to present themselves in a favorable light to the world.

#### Limitations

This study has several limitations. The most important one is the fact that the sample, while designed to be a random and therefore representative sample for the population of newspapers indexed by Lexis-Nexis, is no longer representative, as a result of the fact that not all newspapers selected published incident-related

articles. The fact that the newspaper sample might not be representative limits the extent to which the findings in this study may be generalized to the entire population of newspapers. Additionally, this study is cannot be generalized to other news media such as television and online news.

Additionally, the expectation behind the design of the study was that newspapers would publish more or less the same amount of articles about the incident. Instead, the final sample over-represents some newspapers and under-represents others, since newspapers differed seriously in the frequency of incident-related articles they published. This situation potentially biases my findings.

The validity of the study needs to be confirmed. Journalists were not available to comment on how much autonomy they felt they had in regards to formulating news content.

Another limitation is that some political economy association tests cannot be generalized in that they have no significance. Finally, it is regrettable that other political economy indicators such as advertising revenue (which would illustrate advertiser influence on news content) were not available. Past studies have identified



a strong relationship between news content and advertising revenue. When individually called, newspapers were unwilling to disclose this information, as they are not required to do so by the Securities Exchange Commission (SEC) if they do not make a certain amount of profit.

APPENDIX A

CODING INSTRUCTIONS FOR NEWSPAPER

ARTICLE CONTENT ANALYSIS

## Coding Instructions for Newspaper Article Content Analysis

**Purpose:** *The aim of this content analysis is to understand how U.S. newspapers portrayed the BP oil spill incident. You will receive several newspaper articles. For each of them, go through the following questions and provide an answer based on the text and the coding instructions.*

The coding instrument uses concepts borrowed from social problems literature (Gusfield, 1981) and the framework of corporate apologia (Benoit, 1995).

**Coder ID:** Please enter the coder id that was assigned to you.

**Article ID:** Please enter the article id assigned to the article (provided next to the article title in the list)

1. **Number of words in article** are indicated by the 'LENGTH' heading that appears on the document.

*The length is either stated in numerical form or is missing. If the numerical information is stated please indicate otherwise leave blank if missing.*

2. **Oil spill and aftermath in title.** Does the title pertain to the oil spill or its aftermath?

*Code 1 if it is clear to a reader such as yourself that the title refers explicitly to the BP oil spill. Code 0 if the title is either generic (for example "Breaking News") or a reader would not be able to reasonably infer, just by the title, that the article pertains to the BP oil spill.*

3. **What adjectives, if any, are used in the title?**

*If you answered 1 at question 2 above, then identify whether or not there are any adjectives in the title. An adjective is a word that describes or qualifies something, for example: "funny kids"; "they are funny"; "the kids, funny as they could be...". Code 1 if there are any adjectives in the title, code 0 if there aren't any.*

4. **If Yes=1 for question number 2 above, then indicate whether there are adjectives in or adjectival nouns in the headline.**

*If you answered Yes=1, please list the first five adjectives in the headline (string up to 50 characters, all lowercase; leave empty if none)*

5. **Type of article.** What type of article is it?

Choose the code that best applies:

1= Brief news item (less than 150 words, usually without an author)

2=Report

A report is the most common type of article you will encounter. It usually has an identified author who reports on an issue and cites a number of sources.

3=Editorial (newspaper point of view)

An editorial represents the point of view of the newspaper and it is usually identified as such.

4=Interview

A formal written conversation between a journalist and a source involving questions from the journalist and answers from the source.

5=Op-ed/letter to the editor (somebody's point of view)

An opinion piece, either written by a journalist or someone from the community, with a definite point of view. This category could also include letters from the readers.

6=BP Press release

Usually, such a news item will specify that it is a press release.

7=Other

**6. Comparisons with past incidents.** Are there any comparisons with past incidents?

Yes=1

Code only if the article contains **explicit comparisons with past incidents**, such as comparisons with past incidents that have occurred within the oil industry as a whole (may include past BP incidents or incidents of other oil companies).

No=0

**7. Statistics about incident magnitude.** Are there statistics about the magnitude of the incident (e.g. gallons of oil) used in the article?

Yes=1

Code only if there are **explicit statistics of incident magnitude** in the article, indicated by any numerical data used to express the severity of the incident (i.e. "10 billion" tons of oil spilled into the gulf). Do not confuse statistics about the magnitude of the incident with statistics about the cost of the cleanup effort.

No=0

8. **Statistics about cleanup effort magnitude.** Are there statistics about the magnitude of the cleanup effort (e.g. millions of dollars) used in the article?

Yes=1

Code only if the article mentions **explicit- statistics on the magnitude of the cleanup effort**, indicated by any numerical data about the monetary cost or amount of labor necessary for cleanup (i.e. "2.4 billion" dollars were allotted by BP for the clean-up).

No=0

9. **Identification of the direct causes of incident.** Are the direct causes of the incident identified?

Yes=1

Code only if a direct explicit cause is identified, for example BP's negligence, lack of proper technology, and so on. If the incident is said to be an accident (that is, not to have a direct cause), code 0. Do not code if the cause is supposed to be related to more general issues such as lack of governmental oversight or lack of proper environmental regulations, since those are not direct causes of this specific incident.

No=0

10. **ANSWER ONLY If YES=1 for question 9 above, indicate if incident causes were preventable or not.**

1= Preventable

*The turnout of events was within the control of the parties involved; if certain action(s) were taken or avoided, the event may not have occurred.*

2=Not Preventable

*Code only if there is justification provided as to how the event turnout was not within the control of the parties involved.*

3=Not Specified/Cannot determine from the article

11. **Identification of Social Cause.** Does the article identify a larger social cause than the incident at hand?

Yes=1

*Code if the causes are said to be more general than the direct cause of the incident, such as lack of environmental regulation, corporate greed and so on. Usually, social causes have to do with certain social arrangements that enable environmental incidents to occur, rather than specific causes at work in this particular situation.*

No=0

- 12. Problem/cause Nature. ANSWER ONLY If YES=1 for question 11 above:** What is the nature of the cause/problem?

Describe briefly using all lower case letters up to 200 characters, leave empty if not applicable.

- 13.** For each of the sources below: Indicate the number of times different sources in each of the categories below are quoted in the article.

ENTER THE ACTUAL # OR 0 IF NONE. Count the different sources, not the number of quotes.

13a. BP employees (include the generic "firm")

*Those who perform duties for BP at the ground level*

13b. BP executives

*those who perform duties for BP at the official level and are usually referred to by an official title before their name*

13c. EPA personnel or EPA agency as a whole

13d. Fishermen

13e. Government officials

*any officials on the legislative level who represent the Government, these individuals are usually referred to with a title (i.e. "Senator" Jack Brown, and "President" Obama)*

13f. Environmental NGO members or organizations

*a group that is non-governmental and non-profit that focuses on environmental issues*

13g. Other NGO members or organizations

*any other groups that are non-profit and non-governmental that focus on development or advocacy.*

13h. Residents from affected areas with unspecified occupation.

- 14. Other expert testimonies not included in above table.** Were there any other expert testimonies not included in the table above? List up to 5.

14OtherId1. (Indicate using 50 characters or less; all lower case; leave empty if not applicable).

14OtherId2. (Indicate using 50 characters or less; all lower case; leave empty if not applicable).

14OtherId3. (Indicate using 50 characters or less; all lower case; leave empty if not applicable).

14OtherId4. (Indicate using 50 characters or less; all lower case; leave empty if not applicable).

14OtherId5. (Indicate using 50 characters or less; all lower case; leave empty if not applicable).

## HARM AND VICTIMS

### 15. Specification of explicit harm.

*Harm refers to negative consequences resulting from the incident, such as environmental damage or monetary loss.*

For each of the following categories, code "1" if the article contains explicit claims about harms in the categories listed below, or 0 otherwise. If there are explicit claims of harm that do not fit in any of the listed categories, list up to 5 of them in the category marked "Other". Do not code implicit harm, as implied when the article talks about damages in a vague, non-specific manner.

Type of harm	Present in the article?
--------------	-------------------------

a. Environmental damage	
-------------------------	--

*Harm caused to the environment as a result of the spill (includes natural resources and animals)  
Examples: "oiled birds washed up ashore" or "tar balls washed up on the marshes".*

b. Deaths and injuries	
------------------------	--

*The number of victims (either dead or injured) is explicitly mentioned*

*Examples: "11 rig workers were reported dead"*

c. Financial loss	
-------------------	--

*Harm is expressed as a sum of money (be it for litigation, cleanup or other activities directly resulting from the incident)*

*Examples: "12.5 billion has been set aside for the clean-up"*

d. Violation of regulation	
----------------------------	--

*Mention of any laws/regulations that have been violated during or as a result of the incident*

*Examples: "Although the cementing adhesive is generally not used in deep drilling operations, Transocean used it anyway."*

e. Violation of societal values	
---------------------------------	--

*Social values include protecting the environment and conducting business operations exacting the least amount of harm to the environment as*

*possible. This category is different from (1) above in that here you should include all statements that do not identify a particular harm to the environment (for example, the death of a species of fish), but protection of environment as a value (for example, "the environment should be protected, and BP violated that mandate")*

*Examples: "Although the BP Mission statement mandates that the utmost protection be given to the environment, the company has failed in that respect."*

*f. Violation of mission statement*

***Any violations of BP's mission to be progressive, responsible, innovative, and performance driven as indicated in their mission statement:***

***"Progressive*** - We believe in the principle of mutual advantage and build productive relationships with each other, our partners and our customers."

***"Responsible*** - We are committed to the safety and development of our people and the communities and societies in which we operate. We aim for no accidents, no harm to people and no damage to the environment."

***"Innovative*** - We push boundaries today and create tomorrow's breakthroughs through our people and technology."

***"Performance Driven*** - We deliver on our promises through continuous improvement and safe, reliable operations."

*Examples: Any violations of the following:*

*"productivity, responsibility, safety for people and the environment". For example: "Although the drilling procedure was deemed unsafe, the company pressed on since it needed the rig for another operation coming up next month. The operations were rushed and as a result safety was sacrificed for the sake of profit."*



Q15Other

For the 'OTHER' category: LIST UP TO FIVE ITEMS IN 50 characters or less, all lower case; leave empty if not applicable.

15Other1: \_\_\_\_\_

15Other2: \_\_\_\_\_

15Other3: \_\_\_\_\_

15Other4: \_\_\_\_\_

15Other5: \_\_\_\_\_

- 16. Statistics about harm magnitude.** Are there explicit statistics about the magnitude of harm (e.g. number of victims, amount of monetary loss, number of regulations violated) used in the article?

Yes=1

No=0

- 17. Specific identification of victims.** For each of the following categories of victimhood, code "1" if the article contains explicit claims about victims harmed during or as a result of the incident or 0 otherwise. If there are explicit victims mentioned that do not fit in any of the listed categories, list up to 5 of them in the category marked "Other". Do not code implicit victims that do not have a specific identity, such as "we all know who those harmed by the incident are."

**Type of victim**

**Present in the article?**

**a. Environment**

**b. Fishing Industry**

**c. Tourism**

**d. Oil industry in general**

**e. Rig workers**

**Q17Other. Others not included above**

LIST UP TO FIVE ITEMS. IN 50 characters or less, all lower case; leave empty if not applicable.

17Other1 \_\_\_\_\_

17Other2 \_\_\_\_\_

17Other3 \_\_\_\_\_

17Other4 \_\_\_\_\_

17Other5 \_\_\_\_\_

## BLAME

- 18. Blame, Defense, Neutrality towards BP.** Does the article as a whole blame, defend or is neutral toward BP?

1= Specifically blames BP

*Code only those news articles that explicitly assign blame to BP (for example: "BP is guilty of negligence.") and does not try to review alternative points of view.*

2=Specifically defends BP

*Code only those news articles that explicitly absolve BP from wrongdoing (for example: "BP is not guilty") and does not try to review alternative points of view.*

3=Maintains a neutral point of view, although it might cite sources who both blame and defend BP.

*Code if the author of the article neither blames, nor absolves BP. That is, the article might review several points of view, some pro-BP and some against, but would not commit to a particular stance regarding BP's guilt or lack thereof.*

- 19. ANSWER ONLY IF YES=1 FOR QUESTION 18 ABOVE, reasoning behind BP's guilt.** Does the article give a reason why BP is guilty?

Yes=1

No=0

- 20. NSWER ONLY IF YES=1 FOR QUESTION 18 ABOVE, identify reason why BP is guilty.** If the article does give a reason why BP is guilty, what is the reason? For the 'OTHER' category: LIST UP TO FIVE ITEMS IN 50 characters or less, all lower case; leave empty if not applicable.

1=Hid evidence

**Hid evidence-** *refers to any information that was not brought to light initially.*

2=Did not heed warnings

**Heeding warnings** *refers to the idea that the incident may have been prevented.*

**Other-** *none of the top choices qualify.*

3=Other not included above (list up to five) Q20Other1, Q20Other2, Q20Other3, Q20Other4, Q20Other5.

- 21. Blames Someone besides BP.** If the article suggests that somebody else besides BP should be blamed, who is it? LIST UP TO FIVE ITEMS IN 50 characters or less, all lower case; leave empty if not applicable.

Q21Other1, Q21Other2, Q21Other3, Q21Other4, Q21Other5.

**Other blamed party:** *Anyone who is attributed responsibility for causing the incident besides BP (e.g. Transocean, Halliburton, America, Obama, owners, builders, sites, staff, etc.)*

- 22. Regulatory change.** Does the article specifically issue a call for regulatory change?

**Regulatory change** refers to any modifications or additions of regulations (laws, clauses, fines, etc.)

Yes=1

No=0

- 23. anctions specified.** Here, you need to determine if the article specifically issues a call for sanctions for BP. For each of the following categories of sanctions, code "1" if the article contains explicit calls for that particular type of sanction against BP, or 0 otherwise. If the article calls for explicit sanctions not included in the categories listed, list up to 5 of them in the category marked "Other". Do not code implicit, non-specific sanctions such as "the government needs to do something about BP."

Type of sanction

Present?

a. Fines

*any fines the harm-doer is ordered to pay to the state*

b. Prohibitions or restrictions on future operations

c. Involvement in clean-up activities

d. Restitution to victims

Q23Other. Others

LIST UP TO FIVE ITEMS IN 50 characters or less, all lower case; leave empty if not applicable.

Other1 \_\_\_\_\_

Other2 \_\_\_\_\_

Other3 \_\_\_\_\_

Other4 \_\_\_\_\_

Other5 \_\_\_\_\_

- 24. Governmental Response.** Does the article specifically evaluate the U.S. government's response?

***Code 1 if the article refers explicitly to how the U.S. government responded to the incident.***

Yes=1

No=0

- 25. ANSWER ONLY IF YES=1 FOR QUESTION 24 ABOVE.**

**Adequate/Inadequate response:** If Yes at question 24, is the U.S. government response adequate or not adequate?

1=adequate

*The government response is not criticized in the article and is accepted as appropriate in relation to the incident.*

2=not adequate

*The government response is criticized as not being appropriate in relation to the incident.*

3=not specified/cannot determine from the article

- 26. Strategies used in article.** Are there any of the following strategies used in the article? Code "1" if the strategy is present, 0 otherwise. Try to fit any strategy you identify in the category that best matches it.

**Strategy**

**Present?**

**a. Denial- A direct denial of the accusation.**

*Ex: Pepsi denies that soft-drinks contain unhealthy chemicals.*

**b. Intent-the offensive behavior conducted with good intentions.**

*Ex: After customer store credit card information was leaked to online hackers, Sears assured its customers that it would never intentionally violate its customer's privacy and that all measures were being exercised to investigate the situation.*

**c. Bolstering-attempts to strengthen audience's positive feelings towards itself in order to offset the negative feelings associated with the negative act.**

*Ex: After a cell-phone overheated and exploded on a*

*customer, Tel-Cell created new heating monitors for all cell phone products to prevent future occurrences.*

**d. Transferring/Blame shifting- arguing that another is responsible for the act.**

*Ex: Odwalla, Inc. argues that the manufacturer of apples for its products is to blame for the tainted Odwalla Bars.*

**e. Counterattack- a response to another offensive attack where behavior is seen as a reasonable reaction to provocation.**

*Ex: A company argues that it chose to operate elsewhere due to a change in the law that reduced its profit margins.*

**f. Minimization-attempts to minimize negative feelings towards act.**

*Ex: The company operating during the disaster in Bhopal, India argues that the extent of damage is exaggerated by third-party investigators.*

**g. Mortification- accepts responsibility for action and begs for forgiveness.**

*Ex: After the Toyota recall, the company decided to accept responsibility for the failed brake pads. To appease affected customers Toyota offered free maintenance repairs for car manufactured between 2000 and 2009.*

**h. Excuses-**

**1. Defeasibility- there was a lack of information to control over the elements of the situation.**

*Ex: A company official claims they missed an important meeting as they were not informed that the meeting was moved one day early.*

**2. Accident- argues the action in question happened accidentally.**

*Ex: Ralphs Foods, Inc. argues the expired packages of Sara Lee Bread made it onto store shelves due to a malfunctioning time-stamper.*

**i. Justification-a response to another's offensive act.**

*Ex: A company argues that it chose to operate elsewhere due to a change in the law that reduced its profit margins.*

**27. Strategy User.** Who is using the strategy?

1= BP or BP officials

2=Not BP

3=Both BP and not BP

4= None/Unable to Determine

APPENDIX B

LIST OF NEWSPAPERS IN THE SAMPLE AND  
THEIR CIRCULATION AND OWNERSHIP

## List of newspapers in the sample and their circulation and ownership

Newspaper	# of Articles	City, State	Area	Circulation	Ownership	Ownership Type
Chattanooga Times	3	Chattanooga, TN	South	35,000	WEHCO Media, Inc.	Regional Chain
Farmington Daily News	1	Farmington, NM	West	15,727	MediaNews Group	Big Chain
Fort Wayne News Sentinel	1	Fort Wayne, IN	East	18,956	Ogden Newspapers Inc.	Big Chain
Las Cruces Sun News	30	Las Cruces, NM	West	20,125	Texas-New Mexico Newspaper Partnership	Regional Chain
Lowell Sun	3	Lowell, MA	Northeast	44,225	MediaNews Group	Big Chain
San Gabriel Valley Tribune	1	San Gabriel Valley, CA	West	58,553	Media News Group	Big Chain
San Jose Mercury News	3	San Jose, CA	West	577,665	MediaNews Group	Big Chain
St Louis Post Dispatch	1	St. Louis, MO	West	196,232	Lee Enterprises	Regional Chain
Star News	27	Wilmington, NC	South Atlantic	40,596	Halifax Media Group	Regional Chain
Tampa Tribune	3	Tampa, FL	South	164,568	Tampa Media Group, Inc.	Regional Chain
The Atlanta Journal	11	Dunwoody, GA	South	183,415	Cox Media Group	Big Chain
The Augusta Chronicle	1	Augusta, GA	South	55,444	Morris Communications	Regional Chain
The Berkshire Eagle	1	Pittsfield, MA	Northeast	25,083	MediaNews Group	Big Chain
The Herald Sun	3	Durham, NC	South	23,812	Paxton Media Group	Regional Chain
The Lebanon Daily	1	Lebanon, PA	Northeast	17,597	MediaNews Group	Big Chain
The New York Post	2	New York, NY	Northeast	522,874	News Corporation	Big Chain
The New York Times	38	New York, NY	Northeast	916,911	The New York Times Company	Regional Chain
The Pantagraph	23	Bloomington-Normal, IL	Midwest	41,318	Lee Enterprises	Regional Chain
The Patriot Ledger	1	Quincy, MA	Northeast	38,537	GateHouse Media	Regional Chain
The San Francisco Chronicle	3	San Francisco, CA	West	235,350	Hearst Corporation	Family/Individual Owners
The Santa Fe New Mexican	1	Santa Fe, NM	West	22,506	Robin McKinney Martin	Family/Individual Owners
The York Dispatch	2	York, PA	Northeast	22,275	MediaNews Group	Big Chain
Topeka Capital Journal	3	Topeka, KS	Midwest	36,762	Morris Communications	Regional Chain
Tulsa World	5	Tulsa, OK	South	93,558	BH Media	Regional Chain
Whittier Daily News	2	Whittier, CA	West	14,810	MediaNews Group	Big Chain



APPENDIX C  
NEWSPAPER CODES FOR FIGURE 1

### Newspaper codes for Figure 1

Newspaper	Newspaper code
Chattanooga Times	CTFP
Farmington Daily News	FDT
Fort Wayne News Sentinel	FWNS
Las Cruces Sun News	LCSN
Lowell Sun	LS
San Gabriel Valley Tribune	SGVT
San Jose Mercury News	SJMN
St Louis Post Dispatch	SLPD
Star News	SN
Tampa Tribune	TT
The Atlanta Journal	AJC
The Augusta Chronicle	AC
The Berkshire Eagle	BE
The herald sun	HS
The Lebanon Daily	LDN
The New York Post	CTFP
The New York Times	NYT
The Pantagraph	P
The Patriot Ledger	PL
The San Francisco Chronicle	SFC
The Santa Fe New Mexican	SFNM
The York Dispatch	YD
Topeka Capital Journal	TCJ
Tulsa World	TW
Whittier Daily News	WDN

APPENDIX D  
TABLES FOR INSIGNIFICANT RESULTS

### Tables for insignificant Results

Table A. Assertions of Harm by Geographic Region

Harm mentioned?	<u>Geographic region</u>				Total
	East (%)	Midwest (%)	South (%)	West (%)	
No	10.2	15.4	17.0	11.9	13.5 (23)
Yes	89.8	84.6	83.0	88.1	86.5 (147)
Total	28.8 (49)	15.3 (26)	31.2 (53)	24.7 (42)	100% (170)

$$\chi^2 = 1.174; df = 3; p = .759$$

Table B. Assertions of Blame by Geographic Region

Blames BP?	<u>Geographic region</u>				Total
	East (%)	Midwest (%)	South (%)	West (%)	
No	85.7	88.5	92.5	90.5	89.4 (152)
Yes	14.3	11.5	7.5	9.5	10.6 (18)
Total	28.8 (49)	15.3 (26)	31.2 (53)	24.7 (42)	100% (170)

$$\chi^2 = 1.300; df = 3; p = .729$$

Table C. Assertions of Blame by Circulation Size

Blames BP?	<u>Circulation size</u>			Total
	Small (%)	Medium (%)	Large (%)	
No	86.3	92.0	95.3	89.4 (152)
Yes	13.7	8.0	4.7	10.6 (18)
Total	60.0 (102)	14.7 (25)	25.3 (43)	100% (170)

$\chi^2 = 2.838$ ; df = 2; p = .242

Table D. Call for Restitution/Sanctions by Geographic Region

Sanctions mentioned?	<u>Geographic region</u>				Total
	East (%)	Midwest (%)	South (%)	West (%)	
No	83.7	84.6	84.9	92.9	86.5 (147)
Yes	16.3	15.4	15.1	7.1	13.5 (23)
Total	28.8 (49)	15.3 (26)	31.2 (53)	24.7 (42)	100% (170)

$\chi^2 = 1.979$ ; df = 3; p = .577

Table E. Call for Restitution/Sanctions by Circulation Size

Sanctions mentioned?	<u>Circulation size</u>			Total
	Small (%)	Medium (%)	Large (%)	
No	88.2	76.0	88.4	86.5 (147)
Yes	11.8	24.0	11.6	13.5 (23)
Total	60.0 (102)	14.7 (25)	25.3 (43)	100% (170)

$$\chi^2 = 2.747; df = 2; p = .253$$

Table F. Claims of Victimhood by Geographic Region

Victims mentioned?	<u>Geographic region</u>				Total
	East (%)	Midwest (%)	South (%)	West (%)	
No	26.5	23.1	26.4	26.2	25.9 (44)
Yes	73.5	76.9	73.6	73.8	74.1 (126)
Total	28.8 (49)	15.3 (26)	31.2 (53)	24.7 (42)	100% (170)

$$\chi^2 = 0.127; df = 3; p = .988$$

Table G. Source Identity: Bp By Geographic Region

BP mentioned?	<u>Geographic region</u>				Total
	East (%)	Midwest (%)	South (%)	West (%)	
No	57.1	65.4	67.9	57.1	61.8 (105)
Yes	32.3	13.8	26.2	27.7	38.2 (65)
Total	28.8 (49)	15.3 (26)	31.2 (53)	24.7 (42)	100% (170)

$\chi^2 = 1.819$ ; df = 3; p = .611

Table H. Source Identity: Government Officials by Geographic Region

Government Officials mentioned?	<u>Geographic region</u>				Total
	East (%)	Midwest (%)	South (%)	West (%)	
No	46.9	34.6	58.5	35.7	45.9 (78)
Yes	53.1	65.4	41.5	64.3	54.1 (92)
Total	28.8 (49)	15.3 (26)	31.2 (53)	24.7 (42)	100% (170)

$\chi^2 = 69.493$ ; df = 3; p = .090

Table I. Source Identity: Fishermen by Ownership Type

Fishermen mentioned?	<u>Ownership type</u>			Total
	Family (%)	Regional chain (%)	Big chain (%)	
No	100.0	84.8	89.3	85.9 (146)
Yes	.0	15.2	10.7	14.1 (170)
Total	2.4 (4)	81.2 (138)	16.5 (28)	100% (170)

$$\chi^2 = 1.063; df = 2; p = .588$$

Table J. Source Identity: Fishermen by Circulation Size

Fishermen mentioned?	<u>Circulation size</u>			Total
	Small (%)	Medium (%)	Large (%)	
No	81.4	88.0	28.1	85.9 (146)
Yes	18.6	12.0	4.7	14.1 (24)
Total	60.0 (102)	14.7 (25)	25.3 (43)	100.0 (170)

$$\chi^2 = 4.982; df = 2; p = .083$$



APPENDIX E  
NEWSPAPER OWNERSHIP

## Newspaper Ownership

### TYPE

Newspaper	Ownership
Chattanooga Times	Private
Farmington Daily News	Private
Fort Wayne News Sentinel	Private
Las Cruces Sun News	Private
Lowell Sun	Private
San Gabriel Valley Tribune	Private
San Jose Mercury News	Private
Star News	Private
Tampa Tribune	Private
The Atlanta Journal	Private
The Augusta Chronicle	Private
The Berkshire Eagle	Private
The Herald Sun	Private
The Lebanon Daily	Private
The San Francisco Chronicle	Private
The Santa Fe New Mexican	Private
The York Dispatch	Private
Topeka Capital Journal	Private
Tulsa World	Private
Whittier Daily News	Private
The New York Post	Public
The New York Times	Public
St Louis Post Dispatch	Public
The Pantagraph	Public
The Patriot Ledger	Public

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