

The Unintended Consequences of “Moderate Mitt:” The Ideologies of Mitt Romney & Second-level Agenda Setting

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Abstract

This second-level agenda-setting study suggests that Newt Gingrich’s vocal outbursts on Mitt Romney’s liberalism and moderateness, which were subsequently covered by newspapers, may have not only cost Gingrich votes in the 2012 GOP race but also encouraged moderate, liberal and independent voters to support Romney.

This study retrieved newspaper stories from Twitter and performed a content analysis. Combined with Gallup poll data that segmented voters by demographic and ideology, the researchers found sufficient support.

Introduction

Agenda setting has linked the salience of select issues in mainstream news media as an influencer of the public’s agenda (McCombs, 2004). Second-level agenda-setting studies have shown that, for a given issue, the attributes news media choose to emphasize can also dictate how the public evaluates that issue (McCombs, 2004). This study compared newspaper stories found on Twitter to popular public opinion polls.

***** **FIGURE 1 HERE** *****

Prior to attempting the study, the researchers had noticed a recent trend in news coverage of the 2012 GOP race. In online newspapers, a significant amount of coverage was being dedicated to the hashing out of each candidate’s “conservative credentials.” The following question appeared to be asked again and again in the media: “How conservative are the candidates, really?” Moreover, Newt Gingrich had been quoted in the news several times as discrediting Mitt Romney’s conservative credentials, even going so far as to call him “Moderate Mitt” and “Massachusetts Moderate” several times throughout the campaign (Shear, 2012).

A research question developed, “What effect did news coverage of Gingrich’s comments have on voter polls in the Republican GOP primaries?” To test this research question, online newspaper coverage of the 2012 Republican presidential primary elections were tracked across a total of two months. Additionally, the Gallup Poll’s weekly survey of registered Republican voters, which segments voters by demographic and ideology, was obtained as a measure of voter polls.

This investigation first required a detection of the salience of online news coverage of Romney’s ideologies over time. More specifically, the times Romney was

labeled as “moderate” and “liberal” had to be documented. Then, leveraging the voter polls from Gallup, a time-series analysis was required to measure if news coverage successfully predicted Republican voter polls.

Background and Literature Review

Agenda Setting: A Brief Overview

Agenda setting investigates if the media control what topics the general public holds salient. This key conceptual definition of salience is the cornerstone of this paper (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Agenda-setting theory has continued to evolve since its conception. Since the theory is so well established, it would be quite a task to cover all of the developments agenda setting has undergone since its origination. Instead, this paper first highlights second-level agenda-setting studies, the most substantial recent expansion of agenda-setting scholarship. Additionally, the recent corpus of works involving agenda setting and other social and digital media sites is discussed.

Understanding the measurement of salience

Salience is the key measurement in agenda-setting studies (McCombs, 1999). Virtually all agenda-setting studies include two measures of salience, one for the media and one for the public. Whether calculated as simple one-measurement variables or as more complex multivariate constructs, agenda-setting studies measure the salience of particular news issues in the media and the salience of those same issues in people's perceptions (McCombs, 2004).

The word salience generally can be defined as importance in seminal agenda-setting research. In this way, scholars like McCombs (1994) explain the concept of

the media’s salience for issues, or media salience, as the calculation of various news cues such as placement, size of headline, length and topic repetition. These measurements all indirectly indicate how important the news perceived an issue to be. For the measure of public salience, agenda setting scholars have used public opinion polls conducted by third party polling services like Gallup and Roper to determine how the public feels about issues (Funkhouser, 1973; Moon, 1999).

These measurements of what the press is talking about and what people are talking about over time serve as media and public agendas. Without these measurements and a time dimension, the agenda-setting effect cannot be empirically measured. Without measurement, no effect is shown.

Second-Level Agenda Setting

The seminal second-level agenda-setting study examined elections in Navarra, Spain, in 1995 (McCombs et al., 1997). This substantive expansion of agenda-setting was the first study to combine the first level of agenda setting with ideas from existing framing research in psychology. In this way, second-level agenda setting goes beyond just tracking the salience of news objects (stories).

“The focus is not on coverage of objects but on coverage of attributes of those objects. Second-level agenda setting argues that the *attributes linked to the object* in the news media are mentally linked to the object by the public. Thus, while first-level agenda setting suggests media coverage influences what we think about, second-level agenda setting suggests media coverage influences how we think, or frame, the issues about which we are thinking” (Craft & Wanta, 2004, p. 456).

Different types of attributes have been shown to frame public opinion in second-level agenda-setting studies. Attributes include: subtopics, framing mechanisms, affective elements and cognitive effects (McCombs et al., 1997; Craft & Wanta, 2004; Ghanem, 1997). These attributes can affect the way the public perceives issues.

Social & Digital Media Agenda-Setting Studies

Newer agenda-setting research has incorporated new methods that harness data from social and digital media. A preliminary study of agenda setting and the social and digital media service YouTube, Sayre et al. (2010) investigated if, when and to what degree videos posted on YouTube may have led or followed traditional news media. They looked at one specific issue: California’s Proposition 8, a controversial ballot proposition that would redefine the laws of marriage. The study took daily salience measurements for relevant stories in national cable news programs, national newspapers and YouTube video uploads. The study then applied an ARIMA time-series analysis to the three frequency counts and identified when and how traditional media led or followed YouTube content. While the findings had no single time-series model that could fit the entire 14 months in which the study was conducted, some significant conclusions could still be drawn. YouTube was found to both follow and lead. Prior to the day during which the public voted on Proposition 8, YouTube public salience followed mainstream media salience. However, following the election, YouTube public salience was found to lead the way. Speculation aside, the change seen immediately following the vote could not be empirically explained.

In another investigation of a digital of salience, Google Trends was operationalized (Weeks & Southwell, 2010). In this study, mainstream media was

compared to Google Trends, a free tool that shows the number of times Google users search for certain keywords. This study explored the potential relationship between mainstream media coverage of a particular political rumor – Barack Obama’s being Muslim – and its public salience as measured by online search behavior. The results showed that mainstream media coverage, especially television coverage, influenced Google Trends’ data reflecting public salience of the political rumor. This study supports and reinforces the original definition and suggests that mainstream media still have the power to influence issue salience of other media. The study also shows that the results of agenda setting were most greatly seen the same day (Weeks & Southwell, 2010). Researchers have concluded by calling for the need to investigate possible variables that may have affected the correlation between Google Trends and the traditional mainstream media. They cited blogs as a possible mediating source. The study opens the possibility that reporters and writers for mainstream media could be influenced by blogs they read. Such research acts as an invitation for an agenda-setting investigation to be conducted on new media such as blogs.

Twitter: A Public Platform

There are various types of social media today: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Tumblr to name a few. While all of these media vary in exact design and use, generally, they have been perceived as tools with which friends and family communicate and interact online. Twitter is the single best example of a popular social medium that is also public (Vieweg, 2010). This is different to the type of engagement seen on other social media that use internal conversations that are intended to be private (person-to-person) or semi-private (person-to-friends)

(Kwak et al., 2010). When treated as private or semi-private, social media comes with an expectation of confidentiality and privacy. Sites such as Facebook, which adopt this model of private or semi-private communication, face pressure to increase their privacy efforts. Twitter has avoided this issue by placing an emphasis on being a public medium. Twitter pays little attention to privacy when it comes to the distribution of the messages that users post. Twitter pegs itself as: “...a platform for you to influence what’s being talked about around the world. Search results spread across Twitter and in other ways across the Web so you can discover what’s happening on and off of Twitter.com (About Us, 2010).”

The overwhelming majority of Twitter accounts are created for public viewing. Free for all to see, search and analyze, general accounts are as public as Web pages or blogs. Making public what once was treated as private, Twitter has taken social networking and progressed it into a scalable and knowable body of information. Twitter’s body of knowledge should now be considered part of the ever-changing media landscape.

Since its conception in 2006, Twitter has become the ninth most populated website on the Internet and is still gaining users at an exponential rate. This amasses to a significant amount of Tweets: 250 million daily on average (Tsotis, 2011). Today, 17 million Americans actively use Twitter at least once a week. While the ages and demographics of users are not quite even, they are approaching a more even equilibrium (Webster, 2010). Smith (2011) has surmised that 13 percent of all online adults use Twitter in the U.S. More importantly, the reason why this social networking tool lends itself so well to data analysis is because virtually all of the

Tweets on Twitter are searchable and quantifiable. Various search tools have been created using Twitter’s Application Program Interface (API) that track trends, daily mentions and keywords on Twitter. These tools make Twitter a viable option for social science quantitative research (Java, 2007).

Hypotheses

This paper expected to see an agenda-setting effect similar to one observed in recent studies that incorporated digital and social media measurement of issue salience (Weeks et al., 2010; Sayre et al., 2008; Vargo, 2011). These studies agree with the general body of agenda-setting work that states that media salience should be a predictor for public salience.

Adopting this logic of salience transfer, this paper expected that the salience of news coverage that addresses Romney’s “moderate” and “conservative” ideologies would have a negative effect and make conservative Republicans less likely to vote for Romney (see Figure 1).

H1: Online newspaper coverage of Romney’s “moderate” and “liberal” ideologies (IV) will be a *negative predictor* for the percentage of conservative Republicans that intend to vote for Romney (DV).

Additionally, we suspected that if the coverage were salient enough, Gingrich would reap the lost conservative Republican voters, as this was likely his motivation to make such comments in the news media.

H2: Online newspaper coverage of Mitt Romney’s “moderate” and “liberal” ideologies (IV) will be a *positive predictor* for the percentage of conservative Republicans that intend to vote for Newt Gingrich (DV).

This paper predicted that the agenda-setting effects would be more rapid than if observed with traditional media (Weeks & Southwell, 2010). This expected acceleration is attributed to the instant availability of news as it is posted to Twitter. With these changes to the way consumers digest news, and using new digital media agenda-setting studies as a guide, this paper expected to see an accelerated effect.

H3: Mass media issue salience (IV) will transfer to public opinion (DV) salience within *a day*.

However, this paper expected online newspaper coverage of Mitt Romney’s political ideologies to positively predict public opinion polls for those groups that hold those same ideologies.

H4: Online newspaper coverage of Mitt Romney’s “moderate” and “liberal” ideologies (IV) will be a *positive predictor* for the percentage of independent, moderate and liberal Republicans that intend to vote for Mitt Romney (DV).

Method

The attributes found inside of a certain news story are key measurements in second-level agenda-setting theory. Attribute salience is the measurement of those characteristics that fill out the picture of a news story (McCombs, 2004). This second-level agenda-setting study manually coded attributes of candidate ideology in newspaper stories, following in suit with past second-level studies (Golan & Wanta, 2001; McCombs, 1997; Tan & Weaver, 2010). A public opinion source was needed to address the agenda-setting hypothesis. In order to have a measure of public salience, a major polling organization must have also asked a representative sample of the United States population how they intended to vote, as well as ask respondents about his or

her political ideology and demographics. The Gallup Poll was able to satisfy these requirements.

Independent Variable: Online Newspaper Articles as Retrieved via Twitter

Twitter news updates (Tweets) were taken from the top 44 most circulated newspapers in the U.S. After a content analysis was performed, a measurement of how many times Romney was mentioned (object salience) and how many times he was addressed as a liberal or moderate (attribute salience) was calculated for U.S. national newspapers. For a complete list of all 44 newspapers observed, see Figure 2.

***** **FIGURE 2 HERE** *****

Holcomb, Gross & Mitchell (2011) found that news organizations are similar in the use of Twitter. The findings showed that the vast majority of Tweets from these organizations promoted their own work and sent users back to their websites. Of the feeds studied, 93 percent of the postings offered a link to a news story on the organization's own website (Holcomb, Gross & Mitchell, 2011). More importantly, the news agenda these organizations promoted on Twitter closely matched that of their legacy platforms (Holcomb, Gross & Mitchell, 2011).

This justifies an exploration of it as a measurement of media salience. All of the news organizations' Twitter streams were captured for the study's duration of 60 days. When a Tweet was captured, the news article itself was also downloaded. Those news articles were then manually coded for mentions of Romney as well as for mentions of attributes of liberal or moderate ideology.

Dependent Variable: Gallup Public Opinion Poll

For this study, the concept of the public’s agenda was operationalized using questions collected by The Gallup Organization, which provides a publically accessible database of registered Republicans. In essence, public salience was determined by what percentage of the population responded in favor for voting for a candidate. In addition to asking current candidate preference, the poll also asks the following demographic questions: gender, age, region, education, independent status, ideology, religious beliefs and income. The poll results for each candidate were also tabulated by demographic and ideology. This measurement at a given point of time represents public salience for the sake of this study. For the 60 days observed, all questions were asked a total of 10 times. Linear interpolation was used for the remaining days.

Information Retrieval

To retrieve raw Tweets from Twitter, Twitter’s API was used to exhaustively retrieve Tweets from the usernames associated with the top 44 U.S. newspapers (see Figure 2). Then, a web crawler was used to fetch the corresponding documents from hyperlinks in the Tweets. Finally these documents were indexed with the Indri search engine. In an effort to only include articles that had some mention of Romney or of the primaries, a search was crafted to isolate articles that were likely to be relevant. Every article that included the words “Romney,” “Gingrich,” “Republican,” “Primary” or “GOP” in the title of the article was included. In addition, any article that mentioned a candidate’s name and at least one of the following keywords within 10 words of each other was also included: “liberal,” “moderate” and “conservative.”

Content Analysis

Initially, 3,221 articles were identified. Upon initial inspection, 984 of the articles came from one news source, The Washington Post. The researchers believe that this occurred due to The Washington Post’s politically aligned news reporting beats. To avoid an oversampling of The Washington Post’s agenda, an average was calculated for the remaining 43 newspapers. Each newspaper broadcasted an average of 50 news articles that were identified through our search. A quick inspection confirmed that this was more or less the case, as every other newspaper had 25 to 100 news stories in the sample. This average gave The Washington Post equal weight with other newspapers. 50 of the 984 Washington Post’s news articles were randomly selected to proceed to the content analysis.

With this adjustment, a new total of 2,254 articles were identified. Of these documents, 1,127 (50 percent) of the news stories were randomly selected for a content analysis. The procedure was designed to detect a presence of the object (Mitt Romney) and of the attributes (see Figure 3 for attribute sheet given to coders). The following variables were recorded through the content analysis.

Document ID# (Nominal): For each news story gathered, a unique document ID was associated with that story. This ID# allowed the user to access the specific story to be coded.

Publication Timestamp (Ordinal): The exact time the document first appeared on a specific newspaper’s Twitter feed.

Presence of Object (Ratio)(DV): If the article included any mention of an object (Mitt Romney) in the body of the news story, a 1 was recorded under a column for the corresponding candidate.

Presence of Attribute and Object together (Ratio)(DV): Every possible combination of attributes and objects received one column in the content analysis spreadsheet. See Figure 3 for a list of all attributes. For each column, a

score of 1 was entered if the attribute and candidate were mentioned in direct relationship with one another.

News stories were defined as all text inside of the Web page that does not directly pertain to advertising. Footers and headers of the websites were ignored. This selection of news is thought of by agenda-setting scholars to summarize the breadth and topic of coverage for this particular type of news medium (McCombs, 2004).

The content analysis featured two coders, one coder who coded all 1,127 and another who coded 150. The two coders each coded the same random sample of 150 news stories to test for intercoder reliability. Using the Holsti method, all of the variables were measured for intercoder reliability. For the object salience variable, the following measurement resulted from the application of the Holsti formula: .98. All of the reliability measures were corrected for chance agreement and category bias by Perreault and Leigh’s (1989) “I” calculation. The intercoder reliability measures for each attribute were as follows: liberal, .90, moderate, .94 and conservative, .91. The reliability measurements for attributes were within acceptable ranges of .90 and above.

Duration

The data collection period ran for 60 days, from Dec. 14, 2011 to Feb. 12, 2012. The time period of two months was chosen to satisfy a requirement of at least 30 data points, an amount beneficial for a significant ARIMA Time Series Model (Sayre et al. 2010). From Jan. 13 through Jan. 15, the Twitter API was inaccessible from campus servers due to a power outage. This break in data was supplemented with linear interpolation.

Results

For an agenda-setting effect to occur, there must be evidence to support a transfer from media salience to public salience (Weeks et al., 2010). To detect this possible transfer, an analysis of the variables associated with media salience and public salience had to occur. More specifically, time-series analyses for the IVs and DVs must be calculated. An ARIMA time-series modeling analysis sufficiently evaluated the effective predictability of each dependent variable.

ARIMA analysis is synonymous with time-series agenda-setting analysis. ARIMA was first proposed for journalism research in 1981 (Richard & Wunsch, 1981). A decade later, the first noted study to utilize ARIMA in agenda setting occurred in a study of AIDS in the news and public opinion (Rogers et al. 1991). The study had a key advantage over previous time-series analyses in that the ARIMA test was able to better mathematically model stationary and autocorrelation components. Since that breakthrough, the overwhelming majority of agenda-setting research has relied on ARIMA modeling for time series analyses.

This study used ARIMA to mathematically model IVs and DVs. The results showed how the different time series were related (Gonzenbach, 1996). Understanding the relationship and lag between the variables’ datasets ultimately addressed all the hypotheses.

Before the ARIMAs were calculated, two additional prerequisite calculations were done to validate the correlation of datasets. First, the dependent variables, public opinion polls of registered Republicans, were assessed for a bivariate correlation with the independent variables, newspaper media coverage. Then, if significant relationships

existed, an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression test, with the Durbin-Watson statistic, was also calculated.

The Durbin-Watson statistic inside of the OLS regression determines the relationship between dependent and independent variables separated from each other by a given time lag. Provided that the Durbin-Watson assessment could address the autocorrelation of the dependent and independent variables, then the autocorrelation was a violation of typical OLS assumptions. If the bivariate correlations were also significant, and the autocorrelation check was satisfied, the ARIMA model could then be calculated.

Findings

To test hypotheses H1 and H2, a look at the bivariate relationships between online newspaper stories and registered Republican polls was needed. The results are shown in Table 2.

******* TABLE 2 HERE *******

There were two IVs that needed to be addressed, the salience of online newspaper coverage that mentioned Mitt Romney as moderate (News Romney Moderate) and the salience of online newspaper coverage that mentioned Mitt Romney as liberal (News Romney Liberal).

For the first IV (News Romney Liberal), seven of the 12 voter demographics (DVs) studied showed positive correlation and were significant at the .01 level: the total number of voters for Romney ($r = .403$), the total number of women voters for Romney ($r = .375$), the total number of voters with a college education for Romney ($r = .368$), the total number of independent voters for Romney ($r = .421$), the total number of liberal

and moderate voters for Romney ($r = .402$), the total number of voters making below \$90,000 per year for Romney ($r = .373$) and the number of voters making above \$90,000 per year for Romney ($r = .374$).

Additionally, a negative correlation was shown with the total number of Gingrich voters for the following voter demographics (DVs) at the .01 level: the total number of voters with a college education for Gingrich ($r = -.339$), the total number of liberal and moderate voters for Gingrich ($r = -.395$) and total number of voters making above \$90,000 per year for Gingrich ($r = -.367$). More negative correlation was shown at the .05 level for the total number of women voters for Gingrich ($r = -.273$).

For the second IV (News Romney Moderate), six of the 12 dependent variables were positively correlated at the .01 level: the total number of voters for Romney ($r = .455$), the total number of women voters for Romney ($r = .416$), the total number of voters with a college education for Romney ($r = .380$), the total number of independent voters for Romney ($r = .424$), the total number of voters making below \$90,000 per year for Romney ($r = .477$) and the number of voters making above \$90,000 per year for Romney ($r = .366$). More positive correlation was shown at the .05 level for the total number of liberal and moderate voters for Romney ($r = .325$).

Moreover, a negative correlation was shown with the total number of Gingrich voters for the following voter demographics (DVs) at the .01 level: the total number of women voters for Gingrich ($r = -.416$), the total number of voters with a college education for Gingrich ($r = -.361$), the total number of liberal and moderate voters for Gingrich ($r = -.421$) and the total number of voters making above \$90,000 per year for

Gingrich ($r=-.366$). More negative correlation was shown at the .05 level for the total number of voters making below \$90,000 per year for Gingrich ($r=-.290$).

Through the bivariate correlations, there is a strong connection between both (IVs) and (DVs). Of the 24 DVs evaluated, all but three showed significant correlation at the .01 level. Even at this early stage, it is safe to say H1 can be rejected. There is no negative predictor for the percentage of conservative Republican voters that intend to vote for Mitt Romney. Instead, the coverage, if anything, has shown early signs of being a positive predictor. Along these lines, H2 is also rejected. There are no positive predictors for Newt Gingrich, as all correlations for Gingrich are negative. Because no time-series statistic is introduced until the final (ARIMA) calculation, H3 cannot be addressed at this time.

However, H4 was awarded robust support for the positive correlation between the total number of independent, liberal and moderate voters and news coverage of Mitt Romney and liberal and moderate.

All DV/IV pairings that were significant at the .01 level were then advanced to ARIMA time series modeling to assess whether any IVs could successfully predict the outcome of significantly correlated DVs.

Controlling for State Primary Wins

A control variable was introduced denoting each time and date that each of the two candidates won a Republican state primary. This measurement controlled for the momentum Romney gained during the time observed, winning four primaries to Gingrich’s one win. This event variable control ensured that hard spikes, or slopes in

coverage sparked by the candidate winning a particular state, did not inflate predictability.

ARIMA Time Series Analysis

An ARIMA 0, 2, 0 model was applied to the Romney News Liberal variable (IV). The model found the IV to be a significant positive predictor of: the number of overall voters for Mitt Romney, the number of women voters for Mitt Romney and the number of independent voters for Romney. All R^2 values remained significant ($p < .05$) and all Ljung-Box Q values stayed non-significant ($p < .10$) (see Table 3 for complete results). Given these values, there is confidence that the model was correctly specified and that the model used eliminated autocorrelation among residuals.

******* TABLE 3 HERE *******

An ARIMA 0, 2, 0 model was also applied to Romney News Moderate variable (IV). The model found the IV to be a significant positive predictor of: the number of overall voters for Mitt Romney and the number of voters for Mitt Romney with a college education. All R^2 values remained significant ($p < .05$) and all Ljung-Box Q values stayed non-significant ($p < .10$) (see Table 3 for complete results). Given these values, there is confidence that the model was correctly specified and that the model used eliminated autocorrelation among residuals.

******* TABLE 4 HERE *******

Additionally, an OLS regression was calculated with a Durbin-Watson statistic for all significant ARIMA predictors. All values were substantially less than two, which suggests a positive serial correlation among residuals. For a complete list of results, see Table 5.

***** TABLE 5 HERE *****

Summary of Data Analysis

In summary, H1 was completely rejected. Bivariate correlations suggested the opposite of the hypothesis. Instead of online newspaper coverage of Romney’s “moderate” and “liberal” ideologies being a negative predictor for the percentage of conservative Republicans that intend to vote for Romney, the polls suggest that he gained voters across all demographics and ideologies during the time that these news stories ran. This finding took the form of an alternative hypothesis for H1 (H1a). H1a was given support through ARIMA calculations for two IV and DV pairings: the number of overall voters for Romney and the number of women voters for Romney.

For H2, no support was given at any stage of the analysis. All correlations from IVs to DVs for Gingrich were negative, which means that regardless of the coverage and regardless of the demographic and ideology of the voter, Gingrich lost voters. This finding takes the form of alternate hypothesis (H2a) and is given support through ARIMA calculations with one IV and DV pairing, News Romney Moderate (IV) and Gingrich College (DV). In this case, the amount of moderate news coverage about Mitt Romney was able to negatively predict the amount of Republican voters that voted for Gingrich.

For H3, the hypothesis was given robust support across all significant ARIMA calculations. All of the cross-lag correlation times were reported with a zero day lag. However, it is important to note that the simultaneous occurrence of order fails to address the time order of variables, which is necessary for causation.

For H4, the hypothesis was given support through ARIMA calculations for three IV and DV pairings: the amount of liberal news coverage for Romney and the number of overall voters for Romney, the amount of liberal news coverage for Romney and independent voters for Romney and the amount of moderate news coverage for Romney and the number of overall voters for Romney. It appears that as the news labeled Romney as liberal and moderate, he gained appeal in those ideologies.

Conclusion

The Ineffectiveness of “Moderate Mitt”

It is with little hesitation that this paper is able to conclude that Gingrich’s statements regarding Romney’s ideologies had little or no negative agenda-setting effect on Romney. No negative correlations were shown for Mitt Romney, even as the amount of coverage labeling Romney as moderate and liberal grew across media. Even when controlling for Romney’s mounting success in winning several state primaries, the positive correlations persisted.

This is not to say that Gingrich’s intended effect of chilling the growing number of conservatives that supported Romney was not completely ineffective. This remains unclear. While Romney continued to gain in overall voter counts and in moderate and liberal ideologies, no significant gain from conservative voters during the time period was observed.

What is clear is the strong predictability the moderate and liberal news coverage of Romney had on Romney’s gain of more moderate and liberal voters. As the amount of online newspaper coverage of Romney as liberal and moderate grew, so did his voter

percentages in those same ideologies. Moreover, throughout the 60 days, Romney’s moderate and liberal news coverage did not help Gingrich gain voters in any demographic or ideology. In fact all correlations to news coverage for Gingrich were negative (see Figure 2).

This study should show that, at the very least, the labeling of Romney as “Moderate Mitt” was an ineffective strategy for Gingrich. Conversely, this study argues that by associating Romney with these ideologies, Gingrich may have actually bolstered those voters with similar ideologies to support Romney. While the specifics and degree to which Romney gained support from this association is more vague and subject to more debate, the overall ineffectiveness of Gingrich’s message strategy is clear in the bivariate correlations (see Table 2).

Second-level Agenda-setting Theory Applied

At first glance, it may appear that the transfer of attribute salience from news to public did not occur. After all, Romney being referred to as moderate and liberal failed to persuade conservative voters to vote against Romney. While this is one conclusion that may be drawn, this study suggests another.

Instead, second-level agenda-setting theory says that because the amount of moderate and liberal news coverage was able to positively predict the number of moderate and liberal voters, the attributes of moderateness and liberalism were indeed transferred to the voters. It is important to note that agenda-setting theory does not say that because an attribute transfers to the public, it will necessarily be unquestioned (McCombs, 2004). Instead, once an attribute is transferred, it is then evaluated against that individual’s own personal beliefs before persuasion occurs (Craft & Wanta, 2004).

Second-level agenda-setting suggests that if Gingrich’s quotations had mentioned more detail surrounding the ways that Mitt Romney was not conservative, or mentioned viewpoints that Romney possessed that differed from most conservatives, he might have better succeeded (McCombs, 2004). In this way, the voters would have been more likely to evaluate those attributes against their own beliefs. Only then, perhaps he may have been able to sway conservative voters to rethink their candidate choice. While the content analysis did not specifically look for these types of attributes, both coders agreed that in general, the coverage did not touch on attributes that questioned Romney’s conservative beliefs but, instead, largely blanketed him with the title of moderate and conservative. Little explanation of why he deserved those titles was offered in the newspaper coverage analyzed.

Because the attribute of “Moderate Mitt” seemed to have successfully bolstered Romney’s independent and moderate vote counts, this study suggests that the attribute of ideology for Romney transferred from news media to the public. This finding is similar to the vast majority of agenda-setting studies and suggests that the newspaper medium still possesses a strong influence on the agendas of the public in election processes (McCombs et al., 1997).

The Effectiveness of New Methodology

This paper embraced new technology from the computer science field in an attempt to answer agenda-setting hypotheses in a new manner. It provided a successful longitudinal investigation of attributes in online newspaper coverage.

Discussion & Limitations

Twitter as a different blend of online newspaper coverage

The manner in which newspapers seem to be using Twitter appears to be similar to the way they implement Really Simple Syndication (RSS), which was created to help readers stay up to date with new content that is uploaded to websites. With that said, there appears to be some type of selectivity and special consideration as to what stories appear on an online newspaper’s Twitter feed. While this study did not build in the resources to empirically track the different types of articles that were included, coders noticed that newspaper articles included opinion articles as well as blogs that included reader feedback. These types of articles do not appear in more traditional newspaper article databases such as LexisNexis. Because readers now have the option to receive articles via Twitter, it is conceivable to think that those readers who read this micro-blog version of the news may be receiving a different blend or frame of news when compared to a reader who reads that same newspaper’s traditional print form. Further study might compare agendas of traditional print media versus its online counterpart.

Time Order and Zero Day Cross-lag Correlation

This paper was unable to approach causation because it was unable to substantiate the time-order relationship between IVs and DVs. This limitation occurred due to the time window in which the Gallup Poll conducted surveys. With a frequency of once a week the survey was not myopic enough to discern rapid sways in public voting intention. While linear interpolation was able to “fill in” points and preserve the general trends in the data, it is possible that the data is not as granular as would be ideal to reveal intricate changes in public opinion. Further studies might adopt an alternative

measure of public salience with timestamps greater than one day. “Zooming in” on the data may better show when exactly public opinion shifts, or responds to mainstream news coverage.

Twitter as an Extension of the News Media

This paper acknowledges the many types of authors who write and contribute to blogs. For the sake of this paper, we assume that the majority of these people do not represent mainstream media. In a recent study of the 10 most prominent newspaper editors in the United States, only one used Twitter regularly (Romensko, 2011). Instead, others cited personal reasons, including distaste for the medium as a reason for abstaining. Even fewer editors use Twitter to disseminate news. Yet, certainly there are times when, indeed, this is the case. In this scenario, the medium of blogs would not be viewed as a measure of public opinion but, instead, a measurement of the media.

Figure 1 – The causal model

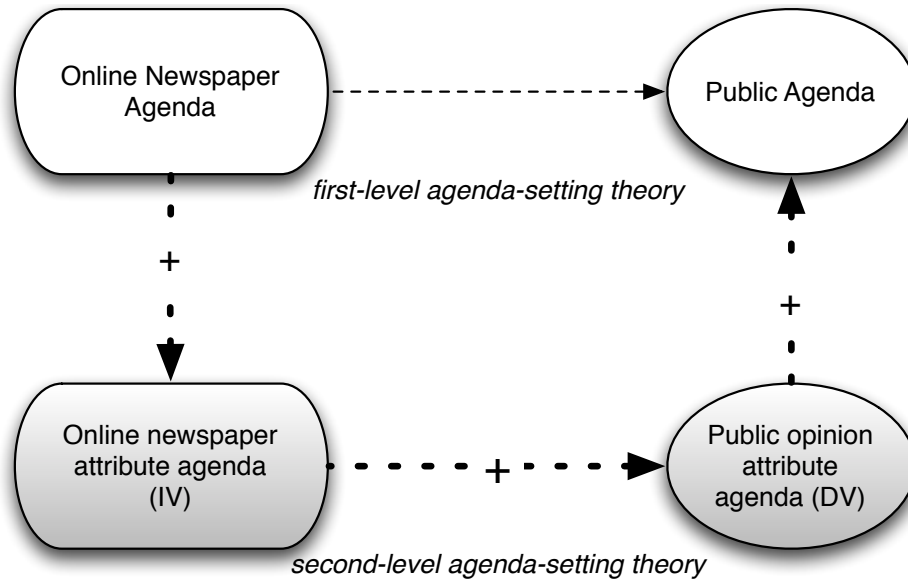


Figure 2 – List of Twitter usernames captured for online newspapers

ajc	denverpost	nydailynews	SFGate
ArkansasOnline	detnews	nytimes	startelegram
azcentral	DispatchAlerts	OCReggie	StarTribune
baltimoresun	HoustonChron	Oregonian	stltoday
CCTimes	KCStar	orlandosentinel	Suntimes
chicagotribune	latimes	PhillyInquirer	TheBuffaloNews
Cincienquirer	mercnews	PilotNews	theobserver
clevelanddotcom	MiamiHerald	PioneerPress	TribTotalMedia
courierjournal	newsday	reviewjournal	USATODAY
dallas_news	NewYorkPost	sacbee_news	washingtonpost
dallasnews	NJ_News	seattletimes	WSJ

Table 1 – List of attributes for Mitt Romney (object)

Does the article mention Romney (Object) and...
Attributes
...describe him as liberal in his policies or ideologies?
...describe him as moderate in his policies or ideologies?
...describe him as conservative in his policies or ideologies?

Table 2 – Bivariate (Pearson) Correlations for all IVs and DVs

Candidate Choice & Demographic (DV)	News Romney Liberal (IV)	News Romney Moderate (IV)
Romney (Overall)	.403**	.455**
Romney Women	.375**	.416**
Gingrich Women	-.273*	-.348**
Romney College	.368**	.380**
Gingrich College	-.339**	-.361**
Romney independents	.421**	.424**
Romney Liberals & Moderates	.402**	.325*
Gingrich Liberals & Moderates	-.395**	-.421**
Romney Below 90k/yr	.373**	.477**
Gingrich Below 90k/yr	-.243	-.290*
Romney Above 90k/yr	.374**	.336**
Gingrich Above 90k/yr	-.367**	-.366**

Table 3 – ARIMA Model for Liberal Newspaper Coverage as Predictor

(IV) Online Newspapers	(IV) Transformation	(DV) Republican Public Opinion Polls	(DV) Transformation		Estimate	SE	t	Sig.
News Romney Liberal	No Transformation	Romney (Overall)	Natural Log	Difference	2			
				Delay	6			
				Numerator Lag 0	.142	.045	3.160	.003**
				Difference	2			
News Romney Liberal	No Transformation	Romney Women	No Transformation	Difference	2			
				Delay	6			
				Numerator Lag 0	5.045	.849	5.943	.000**
				Difference	2			
News Romney Liberal	No Transformation	Romney independent	No Transformation	Difference	2			
				Delay	6			
				Numerator Lag 0	5.686	1.164	4.886	.000**
				Difference	2			

Model	Stationary R-squared	Ljung-Box Q(18)	DF	Sig.
Romney (Overall)				
Romney Women	0.166	14.341	18	0.707
Romney independent	0.417	20.367	18	0.313
Romney independent	0.323	15.504	18	0.627

Table 4 – ARIMA Model for Moderate Newspaper Coverage as Predictor

(IV) Online Newspaper Stories	(IV) Transformation	(DV) Republican Public Opinion Polls	(DV) Transformation		Estimate	SE	t	Sig.
News Romney Moderate	No Transformation	Romney (Overall)	Natural Log	Difference	2			
				Delay	5			
				Numerator Lag 0	.157	.054	2.886	.006**
				Difference	2			
News Romney Moderate	No Transformation	Gingrich College	No Transformation	Difference	2			
				Delay	5			
				Numerator Lag 0	-7.215	1.842	-3.916	.000**
				Difference	2			

Model	Stationary R-squared	Ljung-Box Q(18)	DF	Sig.
Romney (Overall)				
Gingrich College	0.139	19.566	18	0.707
Gingrich College	0.235	25.719	18	0.358

Table 5 – DW Values for Newspaper Coverage as Predictor

(DVS)	News Romney Liberal	News Romney Moderate
Polls Romney (Overall)	0.186	0.205
Polls Romney Women	0.15	Failed ARIMA
Polls Romney independent	0.198	Failed ARIMA
Polls Romney College	Failed ARIMA	0.13

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