Framing Ole Miss Coverage In Mississippi Newspapers

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FRAMING OLE MISS COVERAGE IN MISSISSIPPI NEWSPAPERS

A Thesis
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in the Meek School of Journalism and New Media

by

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ABSTRACT

The University of Mississippi, a public institution also known as Ole Miss, is naturally of public interest and consequently is the subject of constant, and sometimes controversial, media coverage. Through the last few years, Ole Miss Athletics has garnered much of that media attention due to its recent successes. However, coverage at Ole Miss, independent of its athletic programs, gets media coverage in a much different way.

Sometimes that coverage will involve academic achievements, large financial donations and campus changes. However, other types of coverage, especially over the last four years, have been controversial, dealing with student conduct issues and race-related incidents.

The purpose of this study is to explore the types of coverage of Ole Miss that exist in Mississippi newspapers and to determine if the majority of news coverage is negative. An internal perception is that Ole Miss is subject to much more negative than positive coverage. However, a content analysis of 402 newspaper articles from Mississippi newspapers revealed that Ole Miss tended not to receive undue amounts of coverage that reflected negatively on the university. In fact, quite the opposite relationship emerged.

The results of this study show journalists tend to frame Ole Miss as a positive light. From the sample of 402 articles, 293 (73%) dealt with non-controversial, positive topics such as research and accomplishment recognition.
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CHAPTER 1
BACKGROUND

The University of Mississippi, past and present, has been associated with racial tension. These racial incidents involve issues on campus that create a discussion about race relations at the university and often include a call for change or response from students, faculty, staff, alumni and community members.

The university has a storied past. During the Civil War, enrolled students left the university to join the confederate army. In 1962, a riot occurred on campus as the first African-American, James Meredith, enrolled, requiring then-President John F. Kennedy to send the National Guard to the Oxford campus. As a result of this history, as well as the fact that it is the flagship and largest public institution in the state, Ole Miss is also the subject of constant media coverage. Although the reminders of the racial history of Ole Miss have always been present, the last four years have resulted in more turmoil on the university campus. In October 2012, Ole Miss was celebrating the 50th anniversary of Meredith enrolling in the university. Less than one month later, Barack Obama was reelected as President of the United States. Just before midnight after results were announced, students gathered, both in support of Obama and in protest. The incident, first reported by students on social media, began as arguments on two sides of the political spectrum. However, the disagreements became racially charged, bringing the word “riot” to the forefront on social media and some media reports, on both state and national levels (Banahan & Melear, 2013). A study conducted by an internal incident review committee concluded erroneous reports of a riot and
gunfire as well as inaccurate descriptions of events and racially charged comments began on Twitter (2013). Much of that information was re-tweeted by the dozens and picked up by student media. The IRC found that the majority of the 400 of students present were observers, but their passive presence resulted in difficulties with crowd control and negative coverage (2013). The university was also quick to condemn these actions, releasing a statement and holding a candlelight vigil the following day. When this report was released two months after the incident, the only report of violence witnessed by students occurred when a young woman slapped a young man in the face. But the damage to Ole Miss was already done, and this incident was yet another black eye to the reputation of the university.

In 2014, Ole Miss was subject to state wide and national scrutiny once again. On February 15, three students and fraternity members placed a noose around the statue of James Meredith, located behind the Lyceum, along with an old Georgia state flag, which includes a Confederate emblem. Those actions were condemned by the university, and the case was turned over from University Police to the Federal Bureau of Investigations. Two of the men have been charged and sentenced. As the legal process in this case continues, so does the news coverage, bringing constant reminders of the association of racial incidents to Ole Miss.

According to former University Communications Chief Communications Officer Tom Eppes (personal communication, April 18, 2016), positive stories about donations, university improvements and student achievements garner some coverage throughout the state. However, negative events such as student misconduct stories and any instances involving race are subject to much more coverage, often resulting in national news organizations making their way to the campus. This coverage has negatively affected the brand of the university even though several on-campus organizations are working towards racial reconciliation and equality, such as the
William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation and the Center for Inclusion and Cross Cultural Engagement. Eppes also said that constant association with racial incidents is cyclical, meaning these incidents continue to happen on campus because prospective out-of-state students feel the university is a “haven for racist activity,” (Eppes, 2016). He added that when reporters cover racial incidents at the university, they also tend to cover other student misconduct stories with more scrutiny as well, once again causing more coverage that reflects negatively on Ole Miss. Of prospective students in Mississippi surveyed by telephone, 75 percent indicated they were likely to apply to Mississippi State University, while 65 percent likely to apply to the University of Mississippi (Ivanova, 2013). Of the other universities mentioned in the study, University of Southern Mississippi, University of South Alabama and the University of Alabama, the University of Mississippi is the only one in which participants mentioned the atmosphere was “not good, racist, prejudiced or snobby” (2013).

Most recently, the university has taken proactive measures concerned race. In October 2015, Ole Miss removed the Mississippi flag from campus, which bears the Confederate emblem in the upper left corner, at the request of the Associated Student Body, Faculty Senate, Graduate and Staff Councils. It became the fourth university in the state to do so, following three historically black institutions. In March 2016, Chancellor Jeffrey Vitter has worked with campus and historical organizations to provide historical context to the Confederate symbols and names still present on campus. Both issues were covered by newspapers across the state.

This thesis will explore the relationship between type of incident and the way it is covered to see if incidents of race are covered only negatively, for example, while other newsworthy events are covered positively. The comparison will determine if Ole Miss gets any
positive coverage of racial progress, or if the history of the university has forever tarnished the way it is presented in news stories across the state.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Throughout the research process of analyzing how stories involving race-related incidents about Ole Miss are framed by Mississippi newspaper reporters, communication theories of media framing, agenda-setting and gatekeeping appear.

Framing

Media framing is the concept that news media take a certain issue and focus attention on certain events within that issue when presenting it as content, thereby placing those events within a specific field of meaning (McQuail, 2010). Attitude or opinion the media consumer derives from a news story is not because of what is being reported, but how it is reported and presented (Scheufele & Iyengar, 2011). In this study of newspaper articles, how the reader interprets information depends on how that information is contextualized (Scheufele & Iyengar, 2011). Schuefele distinguishes two types of frames: media frames and individual frames (Qin, 2015). Media frames serve as interpretive packages that give context and meaning to an issue, while individual frames are internal structures in the mind of the reader that give meaning and understanding to a whirlwind of events (Qin, 2015).

In a psychology study conducted by Jerome Bruner and Leigh Minturn in the 1950s, a symbol was shown to participants that could either be interpreted as the letter “B” with a slightly detached line or the number “13” (Scheufele & Iyengar, 2011). When subjects were shown numbers prior to the symbol, they interpreted it as the number 13. When they were shown letters,
they interpreted it as the letter “B” (Scheufele & Iyengar, 2011). This study sums up how different presentations of the same information can cause a different reaction. Scheufele describes media framing as an equivalent to how a gallery owner would display a painting (2011). Potential customers would view a painting in a large, gold-plated frame much differently than if the same painting was shown in a plain, aluminum frame (Scheufele & Iyengar, 2011).

Media frames are patterns of interpretation expressed by the journalist producing the piece (Bruggeman, 2014). Framing goes beyond news bias, as it is not merely a slant in coverage, but the journalist deciding what issue is to be reported to the public. According to Bruggeman, frame-building by journalists has not been deeply explored. However, it is essentially unavoidable for reporters, because the way a newspaper story is framed is based on the sources the journalist speaks to about an issue. Sources of information for the story frame their messages, and media users interpret the information they receive (Bruggeman, 2014).

Journalists use frames as a way to quickly put together and simplify a story for their readers. For the purposes of this research, the focus will be on the frame the journalists create in their news stories, which includes the sources cited and past negative occurrences mentioned in the story. Both would create a journalistic frame around the information presented.

News framing falls under the applicability model (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). This means the way an issue is understood by readers and applies the information is based on the way that issue is characterized in media reporting (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). The focus of framing, as opposed to agenda-setting, is on the construction of the message. This is not to say that news framing is unethical. News becomes relevant when it is placed in the context of society. Journalists do not always put a “spin” on a story to deceive the reader (Scheufele &
Tewksbury, 2007). Instead, framing allows reporters to break down a complex issue, like stem cell research, so that the layperson can understand the story. Framing effects are more likely to occur when the reader pays close attention to a story, rather than skimming the news report (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007).

**Frames of Accountability**

Media framing also involves the journalists’ responsibility and accountability. Four frames of media accountability have been identified (Dennis, 1989). The first is the frame of law and regulation. This frame involves public policy, and the goal is to keep healthy relationships by reducing harm to private and public interests (Dennis, 1989). In the market frame, the interests of media organizations and producers, as well as clients and audiences, are balanced. The frame of public responsibility involves the society’s needs being directly expressed and the media fulfilling a civic duty of building a relationship between media and society. According to Dennis, multinational control of media and media concentration undermine this framing model. The final frame is that of professional responsibility. It involves the ethical development of journalists who are held to a standard and is perhaps the most common media frame. This frame scope encourages self-improvement and self-control (Dennis, 1989).

Overall, the ideal goal of media framing when using one of the four frames of accountability is to achieve complete objectivity when reporting the story, because the news frame is a reflection of everyday reality. However, some believe that true objectivity cannot be achieved when a frame exists (Scheufele, 1999).

Framing is not a new concept and has been used in propaganda for centuries. Many associate propaganda with World War I and World War II because of its prominent role in those
conflicts, but according to the American Historical Association (2013), it can be traced back to ancient Greece. Today, stories are framed in many ways, defining the tone of the story as more than just positive or negative. This adds more angles and dimension to the content.

In a study conducted to determine public attitudes of embryonic stem cell research, researchers found that people use news frames to form opinions about scientific issues of which they have no extensive knowledge (Ho, Brossard, & Scheufele, 2008). Coverage of stem cell research includes terms such as “scientific progress” and “discoveries,” framing the issue positively. However, results of the study indicated that opinion often formed based on current predispositions and ideologies of an individual (2008). The stem cell study showed that individuals who were more religious still thought negatively about the research, even though it garnered positive coverage, whereas individuals who were moderately religious were more susceptible to a positive news frame (2008).

**The Involved Journalist**

In the 1930s, theories were developed about the role of journalists and how they should be detached from their work. However, since the practice of journalism requires collaboration with sources and editors, complete detachment is difficult (Hellmueller & Mellado, 2015). Research has shown the way journalists’ view their roles in their profession influences the way they report the news. This means journalistic roles influence journalism practice (2015). Because journalists are citizens of the societies they cover, they are subject to internal pressures to meet demands and keep relationships with sources, all of which are factors that influence how they frame a story.
For example, a research study conducted in Philadelphia for the Society for Nutrition and Behavior examined news coverage of obesity, specifically dealing with sugar-sweetened beverages, by gathering news articles published between October 2010 and March 2011. During this time, a health campaign was launched in January that focused on reducing consumption of sweetened beverages (Jeong, 2014). The study concluded the news media framed stories of obesity on the individual level before and after the campaign launched. In the weeks after the campaign, the media began to add focus and framing to the systemic level, including beverage companies. This study showed two points: 1) local media feed off of societal events when presenting stories and 2) public health officials consider the public support garnered from a news story when developing a policy or campaign (Jeong, 2014).

**Media and Public Policy**

The way coverage of race issues is framed can determine whether or not media users support public policies associated with the issue (Gandy, Kopp, Hands, 1997). Although background and social circumstances play a vital role in public opinion, media also have a large influence (Gandy, 1997). Coverage of racial differences in the present-day can be a result of racial hostility, as evident from recent coverage of the Mississippi state flag debate and the Confederate symbols that tie-in with the issue. When issues involving race are framed for media coverage, even small details can influence users. However, now that social media have become more prevalent, controversial topics have become popular with readers and therefore garner more coverage.

When it comes to sensitive topics, readers are more interested in stories that are framed negatively (Trussler & Soroka, 2014). Because media act as a watchdog of government, they
have been historically referred to as the fourth estate since the 1950s and have acted as such since the eighteenth century (Schultz, 1998). As a result, journalists often have a very critical and cynical view of government entities. Because the University of Mississippi is a publicly funded institution, journalists often present it from a critical perspective. The fourth estate concept originated mainly for checks and balances on political figures and issues, but some of the concepts apply to controversial topics as well (Hutchison, Schiano, & Whitten-Woodring, 2016). For instance, the study explains that negative frames come from creating news that prioritizes new and exciting information (Trussler & Soroka, 2014). Because this information is churned out much faster than policy news, it can result in a negatively-toned frame. Surveys indicate that media users do not necessarily prefer negative frames; however, the political climate of the issue at hand influences the tone (2014). Support for one side or the other of a controversial issue may result in action, giving the media consumer an incentive to pay attention (2014). According to Zaller, (1999) the media consumer is engaged with conflict and bored with consensus. Therefore, when media highlight disagreements and controversies, they often gain readers.

A study in 2012 explored the framing theory involving coverage of race as it relates to school shootings (Park, Holody & Zhang, 2012). The way Park et al. studied race vastly differs from the purposes of this study, but it does provide interesting insight in the way attributes are mentioned in a news story when they are not really relevant (2012). This study investigates how newspapers in the United States racialized the shooting at Virginia Tech in 2007. There are several mentions that the shooter is Asian in prominent news coverage, though his race is not relevant to crime or mental illness (2012). In comparison, the shooter in the Columbine incident did not have their race reported prominently. Park et a. added that strong empirical evidence
shows that Americans have the false perception that immigrants are more prone to criminal behavior (2012).

An example of these types of attributes framing the story from a university perspective has occurred recently. For example, in March 2015, WREG television in Memphis reported a story, shown in Figure 1, and posted it to their website title “Update: Graphic video shows Ole Miss student biting the head off a hamster” (Rufener, 2015).

Figure 1.
WREG Story

While that information is true, the incident shown in the video did not even take place in the state of Mississippi, let alone the Oxford campus and the fact that the person in the video is a student is not really relevant to the horrific action in the video, yet it was mentioned prominently. On the contrary, a story reported by The Clarion-Ledger newspaper in Jackson reports a story on their website, shown in Figure 2, in August 2015 titled “Two Mississippians arrested for trying to join ISIS” (Apel, 2015).
The two subjects of the story were both Mississippi State students – once a recent graduate and another a sophomore. However, that information is not revealed until the fourth paragraph of the story. While these are two completely different media in two different locations, they are still examples of how constructing the presentation of factual information in a certain way leads to opinions and associations by the reader.

Pushing some attributes to the foreground while burying others in a story is a primary way a frame can affect a reader (Lechler & de Vreese, 2012). In coverage of the 2011 Egyptian revolution, a study concludes that both CNN and Fox News described the revolution in news coverage in a way that affects U.S. citizens (Guzman, 2016). The event received more coverage by American news organizations than any other international story from 2007 to 2011 (Guzman, 2016). To justify international coverage, American journalists often explain the relevance of a topic to the U.S. audience, including how they will be affected. According to the study, this
resulted in residents of Egypt and the surrounding region to be either portrayed as a friend or enemy to the United States, which cause frame political opinion of the viewer (Guzman, 2016).

In addition, a public perception of media bias can influence the way readers participate in politics (Ho, et al., 2011). For example, that state of Mississippi and the Ole Miss campus have received news coverage about the state flag issue within the last year. In fact, that coverage has been pretty heavy, with many news outlets features multiple stories on the issue, as it is a controversial one. In some cases, readers who want to keep the state flag have commented about the “liberal media” leaving out the “historical facts” of the flag to promote a political agenda. On the opposing side, residents who want the flag changed comment in and on these stories about wanting to put the issue on the ballot. This is directly influencing the political process and call to action.

**History Creating Controversy**

Because of the university’s tumultuous racial past, newspaper reporters in Mississippi are likely to frame stories covering race incidents in a manner that they would not if the university had not had such a negative history regarding race (Eppes, 2016). That history traces back to the Civil War, when university students left school to fight for the Confederacy. It also includes the conflict over the enrollment of James Meredith, the first African-American student at the university. That controversy resulted in a riot and death on the campus. More recently, the protest of the presidential results on election night in 2012 and the hanging of a noose on the James Meredith statue in 2014, have resulted in the history of Ole Miss being mentioned, even though the university has actively worked to create an inclusive environment and ease racial tensions. Based on the previous coverage of Ole Miss during race-related incidents, the
researcher predicts these incidents at Ole Miss are mentioned in stories in which the initial subject is not a race-related incident involving the university.

**Frame Sending**

Media framing also can occur from the source of information. Framing is when a journalist frames coverage based on personal interpretations of the information at hand. Frame sending differs from a journalists’ interpretation and refers to the journalist sending out the message of their source in their coverage (Bruggeman, 2014). However, this does not mean that quoting a source is frame sending. In fact, a minimal amount of frame sending will occur in any journalistic practice, as reporters tend to shorten statements and interviews before publication. In doing so, a journalist is framing by personally determining what information is more important within the issue at hand and what should be presented to the media users. Both frame-setting and frame sending are ways that journalists shape news content (2014).

Framing can also occur in the photography process. If a controversial photo accompanies a story, it will likely be viewed more times than a simple graphic or photo of a noncontroversial nature. Tighter shots to show emotion or the person involved are preferred in the news gathering process to wide shots, especially in controversial issues.

**Ethical Responsibilities**

Journalists reporting in a specific region have interests in that region. They want stories to appeal to readers in an area. Because of the proximity of the story to the community in which the journalist covers, the researcher predicts journalists in the southern portion of the state, or in areas with other prominent universities, will report more negative stories about Ole Miss than
journalists in the northern portion of the state near Ole Miss. Geographical proximity can determine newsworthiness and also set the frame of the story (Curtis, 2012).

Other news values can influence the frame of the story as well. The timeliness of the story, for example, if the event is breaking news, can influence accuracy and thoroughness of the story as well as tone, depending on the facts the journalist has currently gathered (Curtis, 2012). Impact involves the number of people the incident in the story will effect. Prominence deals with how high-profile the subject of the story is (2014). For example, if it involves a public figure or a well known institution, it is more likely to be covered by journalists. Any story involving conflict, meaning anything that causes public outrage or disagreement, is likely deemed for interesting, therefore published (2014). The more bizarre a story is, the more likely it is to be published, and in the age of new media, go viral. Lastly, currency determines newsworthiness as well. This means stories of public interest such as the Casey Anthony trial, publication of the last Harry Potter book, and the ongoing gun control debate are stories that are not necessarily impactful to a large group or happening near someone, but they are still a matter of public interest (2014). All of these values not only determine how the story is framed, but determine newsworthiness as well.

News reporters also are subject to commercial pressures. Although journalism is considered by many to be a public service, it is still a business seeking profit (Kim, Carvalho, & Davis, 2010). The “if it bleeds it leads” mentality in news is still evident today, as coverage of controversy, crime and violence tend to get more audience readership and engagement than positive stories. In a content analysis of the Occupy Wall Street movement, Xu found that in USA Today and New York Times articles, news coverage highlighted violent behavior and violent potential behavior of a few protestors, rather than the actions of the majority of peaceful
protestors or the movement as a whole (Xu, 2013). The coverage also focused on negative aspects of the protest, such as disruption to transportation or residents of the neighborhood, and attributes such as age, appearance and eccentric apparel, which he said trivializes the issue (2013).

**Gatekeeping**

The other theory in question is gatekeeping, which works in conjunction with the framing theory. In framing, the theory is based on how the story is presented, which is primarily the role of the reporter or author. However, gatekeeping falls under the purview of the editor or producer, who determines newsworthiness and placement of the story.

The communications theory of gatekeeping goes hand-in-hand with the theory of framing. Gatekeeping practices are a main portion of the editing process. It involves deciding which stories need to be covered, assigning those stories, and determining what final copy gets published – all of which are an editor’s judgment calls. This concept was applied in the 1950s after a wire editor determined what content would appear in the newspaper, and it has since been used to describe how journalists and editors select the news they cover and publish (McElroy, 2013). In new media, gatekeeping also refers to monitoring online comments within news articles and on social media websites to maintain civility and remove profane or vulgar language or derogatory insults (McElroy, 2013).

The essence of gatekeeping is deciding what stories are relevant enough to be produced for public consumption (Roberts, 2005). The producers and editors are the gatekeepers of news, and they control what happens throughout the news process.
Positive stories about Ole Miss are covered, but University Communications CCO Tom Eppes (personal communication, April, 18, 2016) said the intensity of coverage for negative stories published about Ole Miss is greater than a positive story. The researcher predicts the sample of content articles will illustrate this belief.

Eppes (personal communication, April 18, 2016) also noted that many negative events, incidents and problems that occur on the Ole Miss campus happen on other college campuses as well, some to an even larger degree. He said the constant negative coverage of Ole Miss is likely due to the aggressiveness of the daily student newspaper on campus, *The Daily Mississippian*. Eppes (2016) said because of the hard work and attention to detail of the award-winning student journalists at the university, stories are told that would otherwise go unnoticed at other universities. Because this paper is a daily newspaper, it is part of the Mississippi Press Association and other state newspapers either publish or further investigate the content originally reported by the student newspaper.

The news process begins with the raw material, which is turned into a story and then edited to become a finished product. That means content travels from the news gatherers to the news processors. However, McNelly (1959) argued that the focus should be primarily on the news gatherers, because stories that are not reported on will never reach the level of processing. Those gatekeepers also can be responsible for assigning content to be gathered, which brings them into a deeper level of the process. In addition, gatekeepers also are responsible for final headlines as well as fine-tuning the content. As a result, a particular frame of news content can occur. Because editors are the decision-makers when it comes to headline, story placement and photos accompanying a story, the researcher predicts that controversial stories about Ole Miss
have a negative tone in the headlines, are placed on a more prominent page in the newspaper and have more photos to accompany the story than a noncontroversial story about Ole Miss.

Finally, from a perspective of assigning stories to reporters, gatekeeping questions the newsworthiness of a topic, and factual information as well. It is an editor’s responsibility to determine which stories add value to public conversation and knowledge, and it is the responsibility of the journalist to keep false information from spreading to a mass audience.

The idea of gatekeeping expands throughout media to include literary publishers and editorial and production work in both print and television (McQuail, 2010). Gatekeeping in media has strengths and weaknesses. Because of editorial gatekeeping, newsworthy and factual stories are sought for coverage and publication. However, because this is a subjective process, this also can result in a weakness of the concept, allowing lesser or non-newsworthy stories to be published while others deserving of publication may be deemed unimportant and not published. A selection criterion leads to some news stories being presented, while others are left out. This results in news managers influencing decisions about what is available for public consumption (McQuail, 2010). In the current age of new media and instant access to information, the original concept of gatekeeping has completely changed. Before search engines, the main form of information came from information editors who decided to present on nightly newscasts or in newspapers (McQuail, 2010). Now, a simple search term offers media users a variety of options to receive their information, opening the gates to the flow of information on any specific topic.

Social media have changed the gatekeeping practice through citizen journalists and user generated content. Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Periscope and blogs allow anyone to post and share information to engage an audience. This increases the amount of information from a story that is available and offers different and unique angles of coverage (Ali, 2013). This strongly
differs from how journalists associated with traditional media choose content. However, media organizations still monitor these citizen journalists’ claims and stories, choosing which information to further investigate and creating their own content. It is not uncommon to see news stories of events or instances that first occurred on social media.

Traditional media mainly view user-generated content primarily as entertainment news. However, these social technologies also have influenced the way major events are covered (Ali, 2013). For example, social media revealed information about three major conflicts in the western world, including the uprising in Iran in 2009 after the victory of Ahmadinejad, the overthrow of Mubarak and the overthrow of Gaddafi’s regime (Ali, 2013). In the case of Ahmadinejad, citizens began documenting the way protestors were struggling on social media, getting this information out in a society where traditional media would otherwise not have known about this type of event. Twitter was heavily used during this time, and the story eventually reached the Washington Post and Newsweek. Traditional media, acting as gatekeepers, further investigated these stories from social media.

At the University of Mississippi, after the 2012 presidential election results were reported, a student protest was described as a “riot” on social media. Prominent media outlets picked up the content from social sites as the event was happening, acting as gatekeepers.

**Agenda-setting**

The idea behind both the theories of media framing and gatekeeping is agenda-setting. The concept of agenda-setting essentially was developed to convey that news media tell the public what the main issues are, which leads the public to perceive that those are the main issues when it comes to current events (McCombs & Shaw, 1993). Research shows that the public
attaches significance to the issues to which media give priority. According to theorists, three different agendas exist: media priorities, public priorities and policy priorities (McQuail, 2010). Although the ideas behind agenda-setting vary, exploring the possibilities has opened the door to understanding different media effects on individuals’ attitudes and behaviors. Those media effects include the bandwagon effect, the spiral of silence, the diffusion of news and media gatekeeping (McQuail, 2010). In essence, agenda-setting is the hypothesis that media sources give more or less attention to certain issues based on public pressure, world events or an interested group of people (2010). These media choices affect public opinion, but the effects are short lived, according to research.

Pingree (2013) suggests that news editors select stories based on what it believes is important. That selection directly influences agenda-setting, allowing journalists to prioritize social problems for an audience (2013). This introduces a bias, as media are telling society what is important. Research on the topic of agenda-setting concludes that exposure to news stories affects perceptions of social problems (2013). Agenda-setting in media is more of a process of making a news issue more accessible in the minds of media consumers. The gap in this research, however, is finding out how media consumers should prioritize issues without being prompted and what role media play in that process (2013). If a journalist writes with an agenda in mind about Ole Miss, for example, they can intentionally omit certain important facts to create a perception. From that, the researcher predicts there is a relationship between the information omitted in controversial stories about Ole Miss and live events happening. For the journalists, this may be due to pressure to get a story written quickly. It may also be based on media framing.
Other external factors can influence frame. Societal norms, organizational pressures, pressure from interest groups and the way a journalist gets their information can all have an effect on the frame of a news story (Kim, Carvalho, & Davis, 2010).

If a journalist fails to distinguish between students enrolled at the university and outside protestors with no ties to Ole Miss in events of racial tension and protests, the public perception will be that Ole Miss students are the primary participants in these actions. If the story is distributed more broadly, it can lead to the public believing Ole Miss harbors racist attitudes.

Agenda-setting is based on memory models and the idea that people process information for making decisions based on information that is most salient (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). This differs from the applicability model and is known as the accessibility effect (2007).

However, the two models do work together and have joint influence, so they are not mutually exclusive. For instance, an applicable frame is more likely to be activated when it is more salient (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). In essence, the salience of an issue refers to how often it is covered and the prominence of that coverage (Scheufele & Iyengar, 2011). The simplified version of the idea states that readers are more likely to feel an issue is important if it is covered daily and featured on the front page of the newspaper or website. Salience of attributes within an issue can influence frame as well. In the study of race in media coverage of school shootings, news reports frequently mentioned the race of the shooter, even in reports published well after the event when it was no longer newsworthy or relevant (Park, Holody, & Zhang, 2012).

Studies have shown accessibility can have a significant impact. Researchers from the Harvard Business School determined that scandals on college campuses – such as hazing, sexual assault or other crimes – can directly hurt colleges by causing a decline in applicants (Luca,
The study showed that if a scandal on a college campus was covered once by *The New York Times*, the university experienced a five percent drop in applicants. A scandal covered in-depth in a newspaper, referenced as longer than a two-page article in this study, led to a 10 percent drop (Luca, Rooney, & Smith, 2016). The upside of this for universities is the media coverage serves as a watchdog of the campus, and incidents of scandal are less likely to happen the following year (2016). Ole Miss, not included in this study, seems to be an exception to this. Several incidents that can be defined as “scandalous” (i.e. Meredith noose incident, election night incident) have occurred on campus the last four years, yet the enrollment continues to grow to the highest it has ever been in school history.

**BP: A Study in Strategic Framing**

In 2012, a study was conducted to analyze the strategic framing of the BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill of 2010 in the Gulf of Mexico. While most studies of framing focus on the journalistic aspect, this was incorporates public relations in a crisis, which is relevant to this study, as these controversial racial incidents at Ole Miss have resulted in crises from a PR standpoint. Incidents of crisis threaten an organization’s goals and reputation (Schultz, et al., 2012). The BP oil spill led to a large amount of media coverage. In this study of associative frames, the researchers consider the message and how the message is presented, but also the actors in the messages, which include BP, political actors, protestors, and issues, like the cause, consequence and solution of the spill (Schultz, et al., 2012). Schultz discovered through a content analysis that, in some cases, the agenda of a press release in somewhat present in news coverage (2012). For example, BP focused more on the spill and solutions and little to the cause. This tended to be reflected in coverage, meaning solutions and the spill itself were reported more than
the cause, or absence thereof when the company was still investigating (2012). The result of coverage focuses little on causes and placing more attention on the actors, such as BP and President Barack Obama, essentially allowed BP to frame this devastating crisis in such a way that they avoided responsibility, at least from the news media. This strategic framing allowed BP to maintain control of its image to more of a degree than the company would have been able to if the cause was consistently questioned (Schultz, et al., 2012).

**Hypotheses**

These theories allow several hypotheses to be presented regarding the University of Mississippi and the coverage it receives.

**H1:** More than half of the news stories about Ole Miss that are not race-related will mention racial incidents in the past.

The researcher creates this prediction based on association. Since the general public often associates the university with racial incidents, the majority of newspaper stories likely mention a racial incident at Ole Miss when the main topic of the story is about another subject.

**H2:** University response will be referenced in stories that are race-related or controversial incidents more often than when compared with non-controversial incidents. In the BP study, the company avoids responsibility by focusing on a solution. However, when it comes to Ole Miss, reporters want immediate responses as to what is being implemented from a university standpoint to solve this problem. From this, the researcher predicts journalists cite the university response in their story, even if it is listed as “no comment.”

**H3:** Negative stories will have photos that contain tighter, close-up shots more than wider shots.
Because tighter shots focus on one person or convey more emotion, the researcher predicts tighter shots are used more often in negative stories to inflict an emotional response from the reader.

**H4:** The region of the state where the paper is located also has an influence on tone of the story. Reporters in the northern region of the state are likely to cover Ole Miss more favorably than newspaper reporters in Jackson (central region) or along the coastal region.

**H5:** More controversial stories about Ole Miss are published in Mississippi newspapers than positive, non-controversial stories.

Eppes said in his experience leading communications, Ole Miss gets more negative coverage than positive coverage (2016).

**H6:** More than half of controversial articles mention *The Daily Mississippian* as an original source of the story.

Eppes said the negative coverage state-wide and nationally was a result of the aggressive daily student newspaper on campus, which most other universities do not have. *The Daily Mississippian* is regarded as a professional publication, as stories and photos are picked up by other media organizations with some frequency.

**H7:** Stories about racial issues on the Ole Miss campus will have more than one photo.

Negative stories draw more attention, engagement and opinion from readers. Therefore, newspapers are likely to provide more photos with these types of stories to keep the audience engaged.

**H8:** Most articles dealing with controversial events will not distinguish between outside protestors and university students.
When reporters and editors are unclear about the information presented, it leads the public to believe students are behaving in a particular way as representatives of the university, rather than those unaffiliated with Ole Miss.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of this study, the information sought is how Ole Miss is presented in Mississippi newspapers and why that news coverage is organized and presented the way that it is. The most effective way to gather this information is through a content analysis of newspaper coverage in Mississippi.

Method

To properly analyze content based on this subject, the researcher examined newspaper articles over the last four years that covered race-related incidents as well as non-race news issues at the University of Mississippi. The choice of this date range was not accidental. In October 2012, the university celebrated the enrollment of James Meredith 50 years prior. Shortly after on November 6, 2012, following the re-election of President Barack Obama, an incident involving student protests led to heated arguments involving racial slurs and sparked racial tension among students. In February 2014, three fraternity members placed a noose around the statue of James Meredith. In October 2015, rallies and protests were held on campus regarding the state flag of Mississippi. In March 2016, the university began placing discussing the placement of plaques near existing Confederate symbols on campus. Interspersed with these racial incidents during this time period were also controversial topics, including the non-renewal of the employment contract for Chancellor Dan Jones in March 2015 as well as numerous incidents of student misconduct.
These articles came from both daily and weekly publications throughout the state of Mississippi. The sample frame from which the articles were chosen is the Cision, formally known as Vocus, public relations software database (2016).

The content within the articles that was analyzed included the headline, accompanying photo, tone of the story and topic covered, as well as numerous other variables. A full list of variables can be found on the code sheet (Appendix A). The code sheet was used as a guideline to record the variety of data in the articles into a numerical form so the information can be analyzed in a statistical software program.

**Procedure**

The procedure for content analysis began by searching within Cision from the date range October 1, 2012, to May 31, 2016, with the terms “Ole Miss” and “University of Mississippi,” which yielded 11,843 results (2016). By excluding mentions of athletics, duplicate wire stories and stories that only mention the university as part of a biography, but not in an anecdotal context, the results were narrowed to 2,007 articles, seen below in Figure 3, and organized primarily in order of date.

Figure 3.

Vocus Listing Screen
Using systematic sampling, the researcher chose every fifth article from the sample frame. One issue encountered when choosing the sample was that some older articles were unable to found in their entirety. When this happened, the next available article was chosen. For example, if number 100 could not be found, 101 to 104 were searched until a news article was found. However, while using systematic sampling, some articles labeled to be from, for example, *The Oxford Eagle*, resulted in the publication of a verbatim press release from the University Public Relations Department. A university press release was completely unrecognizable, as seen in Figure 4, until the text for the story was searched for using Google.

Figure 4.

Vocus Article List

These were left in the sample to measure the percentage of this occurrence and what type of story in which this happened. This method resulted in a final sample of 401 articles. The news articles were not readily available from the Cision system. Therefore, the researcher performed internet searches for each article in order to find the story. In some instances, searching the title, author and newspaper title did this. In other cases, a Google search of the abstract text of the story, listed near the bottom of Figure 3, produced the story result.
Prior to coding, the primary researcher conducted a training session with an additional coder to ensure the definitions of the criteria were clear and a discussion was held to determine the definition of tone or slant of the story and headline. In many cases, the tone or slant was neutral and provided only facts. Though the tone was neutral, the story or headline could still have reflected negatively on the Ole Miss. This led to the creation of an additional column to include a variable that describes how the tone or slant reflects on the university.

The headlines were analyzed for positive, neutral or negative tone, terminology, publication, and how they mention the university and reflection on the university (Appendix A). The body of the articles is reviewed for tone, sources quoted or paraphrased, mentions of racial incidents and which incident was identified. The photos that accompanied the articles are analyzed as well. Questions to be asked in reviewing the photos included: how many people are shown in the photo? Was it a tight or a wide shot? Does the photo contain symbols? and Does the photo match the headline and body of the story (Appendix A)? In testing three variables of headline tone, story tone, and reflection of the story on Ole Miss for inter-coder reliability between the primary researcher and additional coder, Krippendorf’s alpha was .89, .65 and .83, respectively.

**Defining Criteria**

In coding each portion of the news story, there are clear operational definitions for the criteria. For publication type, newspaper is defined as a traditional publication printed daily or weekly in the state of Mississippi. Wire is defined as a story originating, for these purposes, from the Associated Press and printed in a Mississippi newspaper. A University Relations publication
is defined as a news release distributed from the public relations department and appears in its original form in a Mississippi newspaper.

A news story is one that is defined as a breaking news article or a first or second day story of an event or announcement, while a follow-up story is one that continues coverage of an ongoing event. An op-ed piece is an editorial, usually written by an editor or an executive board of a publication offering a commentary on a subject. Finally, a feature or analysis is a story not written in inverted-pyramid style that adds an in-depth commentary on an ongoing story or profiles an individual or event.

The state of Mississippi can be broken into five regions when determining location of a publication: the Gulf Coast, which includes Harrison, Hancock and Jackson counties; Southern Mississippi which extends north of the Coast to Jackson and includes McComb and Natchez; Central Mississippi, which includes Jackson and extends east to Meridian and North to Columbus and the surrounding areas; Mississippi Delta in the western portion of Mississippi which encompasses the areas of Clarksdale and Cleveland and extends south to Vicksburg; and North Mississippi, which is the area above Winona that extends east to Tupelo and north to Corinth.

To determine sources cited in an article, university administration is defined as senior leadership, such as chancellor, vice-chancellors and department directors. Mississippi legislators are categorized as the governor and his staff, state and U.S. House and Senate members as well as city leaders, including mayors, city councils and boards of aldermen. University faculty and staff includes department deans, professors and any staff employee at Ole Miss. Athletics staff members include the athletics director, coaches and sports information directors. Mississippi
residents and non-Mississippi residents are defined as community members not affiliated with the university.

If the information was not applicable to a story, the criteria were left blank. For example, it would be erroneous to answer that the noose incident was not mentioned if it had not happened yet; therefore for all stories published prior to February 15, 2014, that information would not be applicable. The same thought process went behind the question “were protestors sourced in the story.” If the story did not involve a mention of a protest, this question was not applicable.

All coded information was added to the statistical data analysis software program JMP (Version 12).
CHAPTER 4
RESULTS

Several findings emerged. Of the 402 articles, the majority of news articles, 294 (73%), were from newspaper publications. However, 78 (19%) stories were published in Mississippi newspapers, yet originated from a wire service. The remaining 30 (8%) of stories published in a Mississippi newspaper were verbatim news releases distributed by the University Relations Department at Ole Miss. Through the Vocus system, Memphis news media was manually added, and the original search results lists included stories from the WMC-TV website. However, due to an unknown error, articles from The Commercial Appeal did not appear in the search results list and therefore could not be sampled.

A large majority of the coverage throughout the last four years, understandably, came from The Daily Mississippian. The on-campus publication was responsible for 92 (23%) stories in the sample. The Associated Press produced 79 (20%) of those stories, followed by The Northeast Mississippi Daily Journal with 56 (14%) stories, The Clarion-Ledger with 48 (12%) stories, The Oxford Eagle with 43 (11%) stories, and the Mississippi Business Journal with 20 (5%) stories. The remainder of the sample included stories from the Chickasaw Journal, the Clinton News, The Commercial Dispatch, The Daily Corinthian, The Greenwood Commonwealth, The Hattiesburg American, Jackson Free Press, Mississippi Press, Mississippi Today, Natchez Democrat, New Albany Gazette, Oxford Citizen, Sun Herald, The Local Voice, The Neshoba Democrat, the Webster Progress Times and the Winston County Journal, all making up the remaining 64 (15%) stories in the sample.
News stories dominated the sample chosen at 238 (59%) stories. Feature stories accounted for 90 (22%) stories in the sample and follow-up news accounted for 32 (9%) stories, while 42 (10%) stories were editorial articles. Additionally, about 259 (64%) stories in the sample included a photo or graphic of some kind, while 143 (36%) did not. No story in the sample included a map of any kind.

Racial incidents made up a minority percentage of mentions in stories analyzed. The 1962 integration of James Meredith was mentioned 34 (8%) times. The removal of the school mascot was mentioned 9 times (2%). Of the 393 stories in the sample written on or following the election night incident on November 6, 2012, 10 (3%) mentioned the incident and 383 (97%) did not. Of the 295 samples articles written after a noose was placed on the James Meredith statue on February 15, 2014, only 21 (7%) mentioned the incident and 274 (93%) did not. Of the 95 articles in the sample published on or after the date of the student rally and KKK counter protest involving the state flag on October 16, 2015, 5 (5%) mentioned the rally and 90 (95%) did not. Of the 95 articles written following the vote by the Associated Student Body October 20, 2015 and Faculty Senate October 22, 2015 to remove the state flag from campus, 11 (12%) mentioned the vote and 84 (88%) did not. Finally, of the 80 stories in the sample written after October 26, 2015 when the state flag was removed from campus, only 9 (11%) mentioned the action, while 71 (89%) did not.

Other descriptive statistics can be found in more detail on the following page in Table 1.

Table 1

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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>11</td>
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Through the JMP data analysis software, the hypotheses concerning news framing of Ole Miss were tested.

**H1:** More than half of the news stories about Ole Miss that are not race-related will mention racial incidents in the past. *Word did not find any entries for your table of contents.*

Of 353 articles that did not deal with race, only 16 (4%) of them mentioned a race-related incident. $\chi^2(1) = 161.3, p < .001$. More than half of news stories about Ole Miss that were not race-related also did not mention racial incidents in the past, likely because journalists chose not to frame these stories by included irrelevant facts a majority of the time. This hypothesis was not supported.
H2: University response will be referenced in stories that are race-related, such as coverage of the student tying the noose on the Meredith statue, or controversial incidents, such as the job status of former Chancellor Dan Jones, more often than when compared with non-controversial incidents.

In the sample, 229 news stories mentioned a response from either university administration, faculty or spokesperson by way of quotation or paraphrased comment. Only 55 (14%) of those were controversial and 174 (43%) were non-controversial, $\chi^2(1) = 2.57, p < .11$. This result is likely due to the fact that gathering sources and responses for a positive or non-controversial news story is a much quicker and easier process than if the topic is controversial, as sources need time to gather their response before speaking to media. This hypothesis was not supported.

H3: Stories that negatively reflect on the university will have photos that contain tighter, close-up shots more than wider shots.

From the sample, 63 stories had a negative reflection on the university, but 39 (62%) of those stories contained photos. Of the 39 stories, 34 (87%) contained a medium shot or tight shot, including head-shots of sources and authors. Only 5 (13%) stories contained a wide shot. The relationship was significant, $\chi^2(1) = 24.19, p < .001$, and this hypothesis is supported.

H4: The region of the state where the paper is located also has an influence on tone of the story. Reporters in the northern region of the state are likely to cover Ole Miss more favorably than newspaper reporters in Jackson (central region) or along the coastal region.

News stories from North Mississippi newspapers comprised 59% of the total sample. From this region, there were 163 positive stories (69%), 27 neutral stories (11%), 26 mixed reflection stories (11%) and 21 negative stories (9%). In the Delta region of the state, only one
story was published from this sample, and it was positive (100%). Central Mississippi, which includes Jackson and larger publications such as The Clarion-Ledger and The Associated Press, resulted in a total of 156 stories from the sample. Positive stories accounted for 48% (75), while 26% (41) were negative, 15% (23) neutral and 11% (17) mixed. In Southern Mississippi, only three stories were published and 2 (66%) were positive and 1 (33%) was negative. Five stories were published on the Gulf Coast, 3 (60%) positive, 1 (20%) negative and 1 (20%) neutral. The North Mississippi has the largest sample size and the largest positive reflection of coverage on the university, $\chi^2(12) = 29.89$, $p < .4304$. Therefore, this hypothesis is not supported. It is important to also note that Krippendorff’s Alpha for this variable was .65, so results are suspect.

**H5:** More controversial stories about Ole Miss are published in Mississippi newspapers than positive, non-controversial stories.

Of the 402 stories analyzed, 109 (27%) dealt with controversial incidents including race, the firing of former Chancellor Dan Jones and student misconduct and 293 (73%) dealt with non-controversial topics such as research, professor and student recognition and donations.

Based on this sample, Mississippi newspapers publish substantially more non-controversial stories than controversial stories, $\chi^2(1) = 87.4$, $p < .001$. This surprising result is likely due to readers sharing negative stories more often on social media and discussing them, creating the appearance that more negative coverage exists. This hypothesis was not supported.

**H6:** More than half of controversial articles mention The Daily Mississippian as an original source of the story.
Of 109 controversial articles (27% of the sample), 26 stories (24%) either referenced *The Daily Mississippian* or originated from the publication, meaning 83 (76%) did not reference the student newspapers, $\chi^2(1) = 31.34, p < .001$.

Controversial stories tended not to reference *The Daily Mississippian* as an original source. This is likely due to the fact that, because the entire coverage area of the student publication is the university campus, a majority of stories written by them are positive. This hypothesis was not supported.

**H7:** Stories about controversial issues on the Ole Miss campus will have photos, while noncontroversial stories will not.

In the sample, 58 (14%) stories were either the topic of a race-related incident or mentioned race. Of those stories, 55 % included photos. However, 28 (48%) of the stories included only one photo, two stories included two photos, one story had six accompanying photos and one story had seven photos. A possible error in this data could have resulted in the way the articles were retrieved through Internet searches. By searching in Google for older articles, the format was sometimes compromised. There’s a possibility more photos or graphics could have accompanied the photo, but were no longer available at the time of research. Nonetheless, with a result of $\chi^2(8) = 8.66, p < .371$, there is no relationship and this hypothesis was not supported.

**H8:** Most articles dealing with controversial events will not distinguish between outside protestors and university students.

This variable was only applicable in two stories of the 402 where confusion between, unaffiliated protestors or organizations and students were mentioned. In both instances (100%),
the reporter made a clear distinction between outside protestors and students. For example, in a story published in The Clarion-Ledger, this paragraph offers a clear distinction:

“Nonstudents identifying themselves with the International Keystone Knights — a Ku Klux Klan affiliate — and the League of the South staged a counter rally, which led to heated exchanges involving profanity between the two groups, NAACP members and other students. This hypothesis is not supported” (Swayze, 2015).

CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

The idea for this study formed due to the internal perceptions the administration, staff, alumni and students have regarding media coverage of University of Mississippi. However, this study and its hypothesis revealed that notion is untrue, at least in the examination of newspapers articles from October 2012 to May 2016. Negative or controversial coverage may be more salient, but, from an overall standpoint, the coverage of Ole Miss is framed more positively than negatively.

Theories

This study does not negate the fact that journalistic framing occurs in race-related stories or any other stories involving Ole Miss. In fact, very few stories analyzed were neutral (16%) in frame and the majority included either a positive, negative or mixed tone, meaning there was a journalistic frame in one direction or other. The information reported and the manner in which is
it presented likely has an impact on the reflection of the university and public perception. Previous studies have shown an individual can interpret the same piece of information differently solely by the way it is presented (Scheufele & Iyengar, 2011). Though it cannot be determined from this study the manner in which a media consumer interpreted the information, we do know that this frames serve as a packaging method for reporters to provide context and meaning for a layperson, especially when a complex issue or event is involved (Qin, 2015).

Although racial incidents or mentions did not dominate the topics of coverage involving Ole Miss, it did account for 14% of the sample. According to Trussler and Soroka (2014), readers are more interested in controversial topics. While that information cannot be directly determined by this study, it is still interesting to not that media coverage reflects society, but society also reflects media coverage. And, as noted, when the media feature conflict in stories, readers are often gained (Zaller, 1999).

One of the more interesting theories that did appear in the results of this study is the one of salience as it relates to the agenda-setting portion of framing. While the study revealed that education was the most covered topic by Mississippi newspaper reporters (58 stories, 14%), the single most covered incident was that involving the firing of Chancellor Dan Jones. The majority of stories were published in March and April 2015, but the ongoing saga made of 12% of the sample with 48 stories. In previous studies, accessibility of a story or topic can have a significant impact on changes (Luca, Rooney, & Smith, 2016). The heavy coverage of this topic resulted in mostly positive reflections on Ole Miss, but overwhelming negative reflections on the governing
board of Mississippi colleges and universities, the Institutions of Higher Learning. The more salient the story, the more likely the public is to promote action. In this case, constant coverage and the publishing of editorials could possibly have resulted in the rallies calling for the renewal of his contract as well the decision of the IHL to offer Jones an extension, which he ultimately declined. As stated in previous studies, the salience of a story can affect public perception and value of the topic by the reader (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007).

This model of accessibility and magnitude of coverage ties into gatekeeping as well, as it is the final call of the editor to decide how often a story of a certain topic is published. For example, 49 stories (12%) from the sample were published in Mississippi newspapers that had a topic of a racial incident at the university. The editors decide how many times those incidents are covered and how many follow-up stories are published about a topic by assigning the story to the reporter. Similarly, 48 stories (12%) were published about the chancellor controversy within a span of just a few months. If editors feel a topic is of more importance to the reader, they are likely to assign more stories involving that topic to a reporter. As stated earlier, salience of a story can result in a different interpretation by the reader (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007).

Therefore, framing, frame-sending the concept of salience in agenda-setting and gatekeeping are all theories closely related and not mutually exclusive.

While frame-sending is not the result in merely quoting a source (Bruggeman, 2014), several journalists did use several of the same sources and similar remarks from this sample of articles. Because frame sending is defined by sending out the intended message of the source in coverage, one can conclude from this study that news publications did participate in frame-sending when verbatim news releases from the university were printed in their publication or website. This implies that, while uncommon, frame-sending does occur. In this study, frame-
sending tends to occur when the story involves a positive reflection of Ole Miss, such as an achievement.

In a time where news is gathered and reported and reported instantly by both professionals and citizen journalists, the former definition of “news values” have become blurred. What would have previously been deemed uninteresting or unimportant two decades ago now has the potential to “go viral” on social media, and a small local story can easily spread to tens of thousands of media consumers. The seven traditional news values journalists learn when studying their trade include timeliness, impact, conflict, currency, human interest, prominence and proximity (Curtis, 2014). In this study, news content seemed to be framed mostly based on traditional news values. For example, coverage of the chancellor job story involved several elements, including timeliness, impact, conflict and prominence. However, because of the magnitude of coverage of this ongoing topic, one can conclude electronic media allows a story to be framed by salience that it remains timely and impactful, as there is no limit on space or recurring stories when it comes to posting on a publication’s website or social media page, whereas when only a print publication existed, space was limited.

Because controversy falls under the news value of conflict, it was surprising to find the majority of news coverage by Mississippi newspapers of Ole Miss involved non-controversial topics. Based on the information in this study, journalists tended to frame the university in a positive light, even if the story was controversial. While a controversial topic tends to receive salient coverage, it does not mean the frame will be negative.

Since framing and agenda-setting can also occur through salience, this study shows that proximity is of high value when covering a topic, as evident that the majority of stories about Ole Miss were published in the North Mississippi region. This suggests that topics are selected for
coverage and magnitude of coverage, both of which fall under gatekeeping and framing, respectively, based on where they are happening or where the subject of the story is prominent.

Images accompanying stories in this study were predominantly medium to tight shots. These photos tend to show people, rather than the alternative of a wide shot of a building. By showing humans in the photos accompanying a story, the topic is humanized. For instance, the tight shot of former Chancellor Dan Jones in his office smiling while having no hair on his head invokes emotions and thoughts of sympathy, as this photo illustrates his battle with lymphoma and cheerful attitude in the midst of controversy over his job.

When a journalist is curating a story, no matter what the topic, they are receiving information, choosing which parts of that information they believe are important to the reader and organizing it in a matter which simplifies a complex issues (Bruggeman, 2014). However, even if the tone of the story is neutral, a frame can still be present. Furthermore, when reading a story that appears neutral, the reader is unaware of what information the journalist did not include in the article. Though this is likely an undetectable frame without reading several other versions of the same story from different publications, it is still a frame. In this study, very few stories covered had a neutral reflection on the university as a result of the frame, therefore, this study likely supports the idea that no news story can achieve complete objectivity (Scheufele, 1999). This study also closely ties together the theories of framing, gatekeeping and agenda-setting. Though salience of the story falls under the concept of accessibility within agenda-setting (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007), it is the decision of the editor, or gatekeeper, to keep a topic in the news by publishing stories about it multiple times or for multiple days in a row. Additionally, a news frame is more likely to be applied and activated by the reader if it is more
salient (Scheufele & Iyengar, 2011). Therefore, these theories, rather than completely separate concepts, tend to be reliant on one another.

**Future Research**

This study explored the types of newspaper stories in Mississippi that involved Ole Miss. While this offered a solid representation of the media in Mississippi over the last four years, there are many issues in framing, gatekeeping and agenda-setting this study did not explore. For example, the study did not examine national news coverage of Ole Miss from larger outlets such as *USA Today* or *The New York Times*. In further research, it would be interesting to see how news stories involving the university and racial incidents and discussions are framed on a national level. This study also did not analyze television news coverage, which could offer different hypotheses on both a local and national level, such as controversial stories receiving more minutes of coverage than noncontroversial and more live, on-location coverage of negatively-toned stories. It would also be interesting to analyze the vocal tone of the television reporter and whether he or she adds emotion, opinion or personal commentary while reporting.

To further examine the thoughts of journalists when creating news stories, a survey could be conducted to ask how journalists how they receive assignments and information, what they believe are the most important roles of journalists and how they feel, as members of the media, about coverage of Ole Miss. This could also be conducted by interviewing Mississippi newspaper reporters commonly covering Ole Miss stories, such as the Associated Press, *The Northeast Mississippi Daily Journal*, *The Oxford Eagle* and *The Clarion-Ledger*, in order to gauge how these particular individuals cover stories at Ole Miss, what types of stories they seek and what types of stories earn a more prominent placement in their publication. In order to
compare the attitudes and perceptions held by journalists involving coverage of Ole Miss with that of University Relations staff, leaders of the department could be surveyed or interviewed as well to determine if opinions of coverage or belief of bias differ.

News stories can be framed in many different types of ways, but it begins to truly reflect on the university through public opinion. It would be interesting to conduct a study of how the public perceives the university, based on the types of coverage, at both a state and national level. This could be done through focus groups or even through a content analysis of news stories posted on social media. Facebook, for instance, would offer a lot of insight into the types of comments and the magnitude of them as well as how many people were reached by the story (through likes or reactions) and how many times the story was posted.

A content analysis could also be performed to compare two universities in Mississippi – the University of Mississippi and Mississippi State University, for example. By taking the information from this study and adding the applying the same criteria to a similar sample size of stories from Mississippi State, one can determine which university receives more general, positive and negative coverage.

**Implications for University Relations**

From a public relations standpoint, the purpose of this study was to offer insight on the types of stories published by Mississippi newspapers. Furthermore, this study determined if racial incidents were a predominant topic of coverage or if racial incidents incidents were often mentioned in stories not initially about race. It also explored the magnitude of controversial and noncontroversial stories found in Mississippi publications. Prior to this study, University Relations staff perceived news coverage of Ole Miss as negatively biased. As a result, time has
been spent previously to discover how this assumedly negative coverage affects the university’s image through national research studies. Now that the university is aware the majority of news coverage in Mississippi is of a non-controversial nature, the public relations department can focus on releasing more types of stories involving recognition, awards and advances in research to create a larger margin between controversial and non-controversial stories, which currently stands at 27% and 73%, respectively.

Additionally, by reviewing the coverage of the 58 stories in this sample that involve race, or implementing future research, the university can determine the needs of campus as it relates to providing a more inclusive and diverse environment, such as hosting events, discussions and counseling through both the university itself, the William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation and the Center for Inclusion and Cross-Cultural Engagement. University leadership can also use this information by educating closely allied constituencies, such as student leaders in the Associated Student Body, fraternity, sorority and other student organization representatives, and faculty and staff. By discussing with the groups the importance of the news focus involving research, academic achievement and diversity, it will allow all representatives of the university, including alumni and students, show leadership and care when addressing racial issues.
LIST OF REFERENCES


LIST OF APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

ANALYSIS CODE SHEET FOR NEWSPAPER ARTICLES ON RACE-RELATED INCIDENTS AT OLE MISS

1. **Coder's initial** or your last name.

2. **Story ID number** (number of the sample in Vocus (i.e. 5, 10, 15, 20)


4. **Story type**:  1. Breaking news (1st- or 2nd-day story)  2. Op-ed piece  3. Feature or analysis  4. Follow-up Story  5. Other type _________________

5. **Name of publication**: _______________________________________________________________________________


7. **Story Headline**: _______________________________________________________________________________

8. **Month** (1-12): ______________________

9. **Date** (1-31): ______________________

10. **Year**: ____________________________

11. **Location** of event covered(city and state): ____________________________

12. **Dateline provided?**  1. Yes  2. No

13. **Number of Photos in Story**: _______

14. **Number of Maps in Story**: __________

15. **Number of Graphics in Story**: __________
16. **Topic of the Story:**
- 1. Racial Incident
- 2. Student Misconduct
- 3. Professor/Alumni recognition
- 4. Student Recognition
- 5. Research
- 6. Construction/Parking
- 7. Chancellor Job
- 8. Tuition
- 9. Donations/Funding
- 10. Education
- 11. Other
- 12. Event
- 13. UMMC

17. **Headline Ole Miss Mention:** Does the headline mention Ole Miss?
   - 1. Yes
   - 2. No

18. **Headline Racial Incident Mention:** Does the headline refer to a racial incident?
   - 1. Yes
   - 2. No

19. **Headline Tone:** What is the tone or slant of the headline towards Ole Miss?
   - 1. Positive
   - 2. Negative
   - 3. Neutral
   - 4. Mixed

20. **Lead:** Does the first paragraph (or first three sentences) mention a racial incident at Ole Miss?
   - 1. Yes
   - 2. No

21. **Photo Matches:** Does the photo accompanying the story match what the headline describes?
   - 1. Yes
   - 2. No
   - 3. Somewhat

22. **Photo Type:** What type of shot is the photo?
   - 1. Tight Shot
   - 2. Medium Shot
   - 3. Wide Shot
   - 4. Head Shot of Source
   - 5. Head Shot of Author

23. **Photo People:** How many people does the photo show? ________________

24. **Photo Location:** Where was the photo taken?
   - 1. Ole Miss campus
   - 2. Oxford
   - 3. Jackson
   - 4. Other
   - 5. Not sure

25. **Photo symbols:** Which symbols related to racial incidents at Ole Miss are present in the photo?
   - 1. Confederate Flag
   - 2. State Flag
   - 3. Colonel Reb
   - 4. Lyceum
   - 5. Protest signs
   - 6. KKK symbol/hood
   - 7. None
   - 8. Meredith statue
   - 9. Other

27. **Meredith Incident Mention:** Was the 1962 Meredith Integration mentioned?
   - 1. Yes
   - 2. No

28. **Mascot Removal Mention:** Was the removal of Colonel Reb mentioned?
   - 1. Yes
   - 2. No
29. **Election Night Mention**: Was the 2012 presidential election night protest mentioned?
   1. Yes     2. No

30. **Noose Incident Mention**: Was the noose hung on the Meredith statue in 2014 mentioned?
   1. Yes     2. No

31. **Flag Rally/Protest Mention**: Was the rally to take down the state flag and KKK protest of 2015 mentioned?
   1. Yes     2. No

32. **ASB/Faculty Senate Vote Mention**: Was the ASB and Faculty Senate vote mentioned?
   1. Yes     2. No

33. **State Flag Removal Mention**: Was removal of the state flag from the Circle mentioned?
   1. Yes     2. No

34. **DM sourced or is source**: Is the Daily Mississippian referenced as an original source for the story?
   1. Yes     2. No

35. **University Administration**: Is University Administration mentioned as a source?
   1. Yes     2. No

36. **Legislators**: Are Mississippi Legislators mentioned as a source?
   1. Yes     2. No

37. **Faculty and Staff**: Are University Faculty or Staff mentioned as a source?
   1. Yes     2. No

38. **Alumni**: Are University Alumni mentioned as a source?
   1. Yes     2. No

39. **University Police**: Are University Police mentioned as a source?
   1. Yes     2. No

40. **Athletics Staff**: Are University Athletics Staff Members mentioned as a source?
   1. Yes     2. No

41. **University PR spokesperson**: Is a University Spokesperson mentioned as a source?
   1. Yes     2. No

42. **Protestors sourced**: Are Protestors mentioned as a source?
1. Yes 2. No

43. **Students sourced:** Are Students mentioned as a source?
    1. Yes 2. No

44. **Mississippi residents:** Are Mississippi residents unaffiliated with Ole Miss mentioned as a source?
    1. Yes 2. No

45. **Anonymous sources:** Does a story cite an anonymous source?
    1. Yes 2. No

46. **Non-MS residents:** Are Non-Mississippi Sources Named?
    1. Yes 2. No

47. **Other Sources:** Are Other Sources Not Listed named?
    1. Yes 2. No

**Other Source** ________________________________

48. **Distinction:** Does the article distinguish between those unaffiliated with Ole Miss and students?
    1. Yes 2. No

49. **University Response:** How did the article indicate the university’s response to the incident?

______________________________________________

50. **Story Tone:** What is the tone or slant of the story towards Ole Miss?

51. **Headline Reflection on UM:** How does the headline reflect on the university?

52. **Story Reflection on UM:** How does the story reflect on the university?
VITA

Christina Steube
cmsteube@olemiss.edu

Education

B.A. Journalism, 2011, University of Mississippi, Oxford, Mississippi

Professional Experience

Communications Specialist, University of Mississippi, Oxford Mississippi
September, 2014-Present
Job Duties: works in the University Relations department to provide information about new occurring at Ole Miss by creating written content, managing social media, facilitating interviews between university representatives and media and developing marketing plans for on-campus departments and events

Multimedia Journalist, Sun Herald, Gulfport, Mississippi
August, 2012-September, 2014
Job Duties: reported news in the Jackson County area, which included city and county government, events and feature stories, by writing daily stories for print and website publication and by taking photos and videos to accompany stories
Radio Co-host, Rebel Sports Radio
February 2013 – November 2013
Job Duties: researched the latest news surrounding Ole Miss sports to develop talking points for a weekly online radio show.

Production Assistant, Fox News Channel, New York, New York
February 2012 – August 2012
Job Duties: worked alongside the production staff to produce news content for Fox News Channel and Fox Business Network by gathering video content for use on television programs, quickly editing footage to supply to bureaus in New York and Washington, D.C., and facilitating interviews via Skype between news anchors and subjects

News Reporter, The Daily Mississippian, Oxford, Mississippi
January 2010 – May 2011
Job Duties: developed news, sports and feature stories for both print and digital editions of the newspaper, as well as produced video packages for TheDMOnline.com

Freelance Reporter, Sun Herald, Gulfport, Mississippi
May 2012 – August 2010
Job Duties: contributed news, sports and feature stories to the Sun Herald by pitching ideas to editors and traveling across the Gulf Coast to cover news

Media Relations Intern, Ole Miss Athletics, Oxford, Mississippi
September 2010 – May 2011

Job Duties: worked with Ole Miss Media Relations and Ole Miss Sports Productions to create written and video content for website publication by writing news releases and producing original video.

Digital Content Intern, Fox Sports South, Atlanta, Georgia

June 2010 – August 2010

Job Duties: assisted in managing FoxSportsSouth.com as well as their social media platforms by creating stories, photos, video and social media content for the content management system.

Certifications

Poynter-Cronkite Certificate Program for Adjunct Instructors, Poynter. News University

June 2016

Federal Emergency Management Agency, Public Information Officer Awareness Certificate

June 2016

Associated Memberships

Public Relations Association of Mississippi, Member, 2014-Present

Vice-President, January 2016- Present

Southern Public Relations Federation, Member, 2014-Present