POLITICAL ENTERTAINMENT: A MIXED METHODS STUDY OF MEDIA FRAMING IN THE US AND UK

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By

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This study looks at political coverage and media framing in two countries: the US and the UK. We focus on the entertainment frame of politics, which we define as including personal stories, scandal, soft news, and celebrity-related pieces. This research also explores how and why political coverage and media in general have changed over the past 20 years. To examine these questions, we perform an in-depth content analysis of newspaper coverage in the US and UK, which is supplemented by expert interviews and a US nationwide survey on media consumption habits. We found that, surprisingly, in the 2012 presidential election the US had just as much entertainment-framed coverage of politics as the UK, despite a much longer history of scandal and sensationalist coverage in the UK. The content analysis also told us that both UK and US newspapers were more favorable in their coverage to incumbent candidate Barack Obama. Through our interviews, we gained insight into why political coverage is the way it is, and found that technological advances have led to fierce competition between outlets, which often means they are more likely to report on “softer” pieces to attract an audience. Finally, we asked US citizens in our survey what media outlets they consume most often, and compared that to evaluations of politicians. We found that frequent readers of entertainment magazines are more likely to judge politicians on personal or sexual scandals, demonstrating the power of the media in shaping public opinion.
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With love,
Roxana
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INTRODUCTION

Introduction and Research Questions

In July 2008, then-senator Barack Obama addressed a crowd of over 200,000 supporters in Berlin, Germany, as part of a world tour following a historic Democratic primary, where he had eventually defeated Hillary Clinton to become the first African-American candidate from a major party for president. The speech was intended to demonstrate to Americans that the junior Senator from Illinois had a clear vision for America’s future, and that he could compete on the global stage just as well as his opponent, John McCain, and outgoing President George W. Bush. Obama achieved this goal by painting himself as an agent of change, but perhaps more importantly, the worldwide tour solidified his status as a global celebrity who attracted attention wherever he went. The trip was covered extensively at home and abroad, with German daily newspaper Bild calling him a “political pop star” (Zeleny, & Kulish, 2008). Six days later, the McCain campaign released an attack ad entitled “Celeb”, which juxtaposed images of Britney Spears and Paris Hilton with the Berlin crowd chanting for Obama, stating: “He’s the biggest celebrity in the world. But, is he ready to lead?” (Memmott, 2008). With the ad, McCain sought to highlight Obama’s relative inexperience as a political leader, but it didn’t seem to matter: on Election Day, Obama easily beat McCain, earning 365 electoral votes to McCain’s 173, making him arguably the most famous person in the world.

As politicians have become more like celebrities worldwide the coverage of politicians by the media has also changed. The public now feels they have a right to know every detail of a president or prime minister’s personal life, despite any relevance to one’s ability to lead a country (Miller, 1999; Schudson, 2004). Scandals, gossip, and the personal lives of public
figures are increasingly part of election narratives, and this type of reporting has become more prominent in recent years (Conboy, 2011; Mortimore, 1995; Sabato, 2000; Sampson, 1996). The landscape of political coverage has been changed by not only the inclusion of more entertainment-style coverage, but also by new platforms that have led to a proliferation of specialist outlets that are in competition with the mainstream media. In this study we will be looking at how and why political coverage has changed over the past 20 years. To do this we will examine the differences in political coverage in two closely linked countries that have quite different press histories and systems: the US and the UK.

Although the US and the UK are inextricably tied through their shared history and a common language, their press systems have developed separately and have unique values and focuses. The UK has a reputation for publishing scandal stories frequently, and the newspapers there are ruthless in taking down politicians who have engaged in sexual affairs or political wrongdoing. By contrast, the US has historically shied away from reporting on scandals revolving around their politicians. As recently as the Clinton years the American press have avoided reporting on rumors of extramarital affairs; although Clinton had a well-known reputation as a womanizer, it was not widely discussed until the Lewinsky scandal made it impossible to ignore. In Chapter 2 we will go into detail on the differences between the press in each country to explain how we arrived at our research questions and hypotheses. Below are our research questions and hypothesis broken down by topic, which compare the coverage in the US and the UK, and explore the changing nature of political coverage overall.
UK vs. US framing and coverage

RQ1: Is the entertainment frame of politics more prominent in the US or UK coverage of the 2012 US presidential elections?

H1: The entertainment frame will be more prominent in the UK coverage of US presidential elections than in the US coverage.

H2: UK coverage of presidential figures will focus more on personalities of figures, gaffes, and personal scandals than US coverage.

H3: US coverage will focus more on policy issues than UK coverage.

Tabloid vs. Quality newspapers framing and coverage

RQ2: How does framing and coverage of election stories differ in tabloid and quality newspapers?

H4: Articles in tabloid newspapers will be more focused on the entertainment frame and quality newspapers will have more policy coverage

H5: Tabloid newspaper articles will be shorter than quality newspaper articles.

Tone in the US vs. UK

H6: The UK will take a less favorable tone towards Mitt Romney than incumbent Barack Obama, and the US will have a more balanced tone overall.

Impact of digital media on journalism and political coverage

RQ3: What has been the impact of digital media and new technology on journalism and political coverage?

Impact of coverage on the public
H7: Those who get their news primarily from tabloid or entertainment sources will evaluate politicians on personal or sexual scandals more than those who get news from non-entertainment sources.

Framing

How the media “frame” stories, by presenting information to the public focusing on specific angles and consequences of an event (Cappella & Jamieson, 1996), has been studied for decades. This study will focus on framing in the 2012 elections, specifically looking at the prominence of the entertainment frame. The media’s ability to set the agenda and frame stories means that they are in control of messages the public receives regarding elections (Behr & Iyengar, 1985; McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Nelson, Oxley, & Clawson, 1997). Common frames used in campaign coverage include the horserace frame, which views campaigns through polling data and perceptions of who is “winning” or “losing” (Graber, 2010; Kerbel, Apee, & Ross, 2000; Miller, Andsager, & Riechart, 1998; Rhee, 1997), the policy frame, coverage of specific policy issues or political ideologies, and the entertainment frame (Graber, 2010; Kerbel et al., 2000). As we will explain in Chapter 2, the entertainment frame includes scandal, personal issues, soft news, and celebrity-based stories, and we will argue that it has proliferated in recent years due to several factors, including the rise of new media technologies.

Press in the US and UK

In this study we will be looking at how the coverage of the 2012 presidential elections differs in the UK and the US, and what frames are used most in each country. We are interested in the differences in coverage in the two countries, particularly what types of stories are featured most in the US and the UK. Over the past decade or so journalism has changed radically all over
the world, and many print outlets have been forced to close or cut back on hard-hitting reporting to save money. In addition, digital media has impacted how quickly the public receives news, and digital platforms make scandal coverage easy and exciting for readers; even small details emerging as a scandal unfolds can be instantaneously dissected. Despite the rise of digital media, newspapers in the UK still have quite good readership: the highest ranking newspaper in the UK, *The Sun*, has over 16 million print readers each month, averaging about 533,000 per day, whereas the highest circulating US newspaper, *The Wall Street Journal*, has just over 2 million readers per day. This is interesting given that the US population is about 5 times that of the UK, and it is significant that in the UK the most popular newspaper by far is a tabloid newspaper; the most highly circulated UK quality newspaper, *The Times*, has about half the readers of *The Sun*.

US presidential elections are covered intently by the press both in and outside of America, and presidential candidates in the US quickly become global figures, even if they ultimately lose. In the US, coverage of a presidential election begins over a year before Election Day, as the drawn-out primary process thrusts multiple candidates into the national and international spotlight. Throughout the course of an election, scandals are often revealed about candidates that can either mean a temporary blip in popularity or the end of a campaign. In the 2012 republican primaries, once front-runner Herman Cain was forced to drop out of the race because of allegations of sexual misconduct and extramarital affairs. Coverage of stories like this one can take over multiple news cycles, meaning that pertinent policy information is relegated to the back pages. Outside of the US, policies may be ignored altogether until the very end of a campaign.
The winner of a US presidential election becomes one of the most influential people in the world, with the power to start or stop wars, hand out aid to struggling countries, and impact international policy. However, international press coverage is often dominated by soft entertainment-style stories about a candidate’s personality, gaffes, or scandals. We are interested in the type of coverage given to the two main presidential candidates, Mitt Romney and Barack Obama, and what frames are used most by the press in both the US and UK. We will also examine the amount of coverage given to certain topics in each country, including entertainment topics, foreign policy, the economy, and campaign topics. We expect that the UK will have more scandal and entertainment stories, but are interested to see how prominent these stories are in the US as well, as coverage of a candidate can impact vote choice and change the outcome of an election. If stories that are considered to be under the entertainment frame are just as prominent in the US as they are in the UK, where the public doesn’t have a say in the outcome of the election, this will give us valuable insight into the state of journalism and politics today.

Outline

This study will be broken down into several sections. Chapter 2 will present a background of the press in both the UK and the US and examine how each country’s press has become increasingly sensational and focused on personal and scandal stories. The differences between the press systems in each country will be highlighted, as will the rise of tabloid newspapers in each country and the impact tabloids have had on political coverage. We will then outline the different frames commonly used in presidential election coverage, and define the sub-frames which will be part of our general entertainment frame: personal issues and character, scandal, soft news, and celebrity. This chapter will incorporate the relevant literature on both
sensationalism and framing, and our theoretical framework on the entertainment frame will stem from previous studies on political framing and coverage.

Chapter 3 will outline the methods we will be using to evaluate our research questions, and Chapter 4 will present and discuss the results of our research methods. We utilized several methods to answer our research questions: a content analysis of US and UK newspaper articles, interviews with journalists in either country, and a US nationwide survey on media consumption habits and political effects. For the content analysis, we coded over 100 articles from six newspapers, three from the US and three from the UK, to determine the article topics, tone towards candidate, and frames used. From this data, we will specifically look at the prominence of scandal and soft news coverage and how politicians are often covered as global celebrities. We will also discuss the differences in tone towards the candidates in each country and each newspaper. The content analysis is the main source of quantitative information for our research, and gives us a solid view of political coverage in each country. Through the data, we discovered that the entertainment frame as a whole is just as prominent in the US as it is in the UK, although there are several interesting differences in the type of entertainment framing in each country.

For this study we also conducted qualitative interviews with experts in the field of journalism. Professionals who work or have worked in the media in the US and/or UK were interviewed on the current state of journalism and their perceptions of political coverage in each country. These interviews add context to the content analysis data, and will be analyzed for re-occurring themes and keywords. We will use direct quotes for emphasis when the interviews reveal new information about framing, media coverage, and entertainment stories. Experts shared their opinions on not only if political coverage has changed fundamentally over the past
decade or so, but also why these changes may have occurred. Through the interviews, we gained valuable insights into the impact technology has had on competition between media outlets, and how the content of election coverage has changed over the past 20 years. The interviewees generally agreed that “soft” or entertainment-style coverage has increased, but argue that this shift in coverage is partly inevitable because of the increased competition and ability for the audience to access basic information about political candidates.

Finally, we will use data from a US national survey that asked questions about scandals, soft news, and news sources. The answers to these questions demonstrate if the public pays attention to scandal and entertainment coverage, and how much weight they give to scandal coverage when voting in an election. These data work together with the interviews and content analysis to show if and why scandal and entertainment coverage of politicians is so prominent. We found through the survey that although a majority of the population has encountered coverage of politicians in entertainment outlets, a smaller portion claims to enjoy such coverage. In addition, we discovered that those who read entertainment magazines are more likely to hold personal or sexual scandals against politicians than those who do not read the same sources. This indicates that consumption of entertainment coverage of politicians could have a direct impact on the public’s views of politicians, which is an important finding in light of the amount of entertainment-style political coverage we found through our content analysis.

When taken together, these three research methods cover all parts of Howard Lasswell’s communications model, which states: who says what in which channel to whom with what effect (Lasswell, 1948). The expert interviews give us insight into the who part of the formula, as the journalists indicate how they frame election coverage. What is said and in which channel
are answered by our content analysis, where we evaluate a sample of election articles from 
newspapers in the US and UK. Finally, the US national survey looks at whom is receiving the 
messages in the media, and what effect the messages have on their evaluation of politicians. In 
Chapter 4, our analysis and discussion, we will bring together all of the parts of our study and 
discuss the impact our results have on framing and election coverage. We will also discuss how 
our findings can be applied to the study of the media in the US and the UK, and in our 
concluding chapter, Chapter 5, will give our suggestions for future study of the entertainment 
frame in election coverage.
In this section we will provide an overview of the previous research that has been conducted on scandal coverage and tabloidization in the UK, US scandal and political coverage, and media framing. We will start by going over the history of the press in the UK, and will distinguish between the types of newspaper in the UK: tabloid, mid-market, and quality. We will explore how sensationalism in the UK has increased over the past decades, while policy coverage has decreased. We will then explain the history of scandal and political coverage in the US, where scandal and sensational coverage has increased since the Watergate scandal. Finally, the concept of media framing will be explored, and we will define the “entertainment” frame, which is the backbone of our theoretical framework.

**Political and Scandal Coverage in the UK**

**History of newspapers in the UK.**

The UK has an obsession with scandal, sleaze, and gossip that goes as far back as the 1600s, when London gossip Samuel Pepys discussed royal scandals and corruption in his diaries at a time when newspapers in the UK were censored (Sampson, 1996). During this time, news was disseminated and distributed mainly through handwritten newsletters shared among the educated and wealthy (Williams, 2010). State censorship ceased in 1695, and the early 1700s saw a huge increase in the number of newspapers produced, with 18 being published in London by 1709, including the first daily newspaper, the *Daily Courant* (Williams, 2010).

Unfortunately, in 1712 a new tax was imposed on newspapers, driving prices up drastically and meaning they were once again limited to a wealthy audience (Conboy, 2011; Williams, 2010).
In 1855 the tax on newspapers was abolished and newspapers became more accessible to the lower classes (Conboy, 2011). The Sunday papers became popular with a wide range of social classes, and one of their defining features was a mix of politics with sensationalism. They were able to combine entertainment and news, and outsold their weekday counterparts easily, leading to the rise of a press that focused on scandal and crime in popular culture (Williams, 2010). Other papers soon followed this model, such as the Star, launched in 1888, which found success in stories with large, gripping headlines and short columns. Stories such as the Jack the Ripper murders boosted the popularity of daily newspapers, who reported on serious events in an entertaining and easy to digest way.

One of the most significant advances in the UK newspaper system came with the 1896 launch of the Daily Mail, which called itself the “Busy Man’s Daily Journal”, and was the first newspaper to be aimed at the lower-middle class. The Daily Mail changed the model of British newspapers by concentrating on advertising rather than content, and became a huge commercial success. British newspaper mogul Lord Northcliffe founded the Daily Mail and several other newspapers, using his papers to promote his own political views. The power that Northcliffe’s newspapers held over its audience of over 6 million was so much that many have stated he “profoundly changed the nature of the British newspaper” (Williams, 2010, p 126). In addition to bringing competition and commercialization to the newspaper business, Northcliffe revolutionized the content provided in newspapers, giving readers stories they wanted to read in a shortened format and increasing newspapers’ readership. He was one of the first pioneers of the tabloid as a style of both newspaper format, which was smaller and easier to read, and
content, which was more sensationalized than previously. Because of this, the creation of the Daily Mail signified the birth of the tabloid in the UK.

Following the success of the Daily Mail, newspapers such as the Daily Express and the Daily Mirror were launched. During the Second World War the Daily Mirror especially became known as a voice of the ordinary person, and their style paved the way for the further tabloidization of the papers. Mirror editor Silvester Bolam defined his paper’s style of sensationalism and tabloid reporting as follows in 1949:

Sensationalism does not mean distorting the truth. It means the vivid and dramatic presentation of events so as to give them a forceful impact on the mind of the reader. It means big headlines, vigorous writing, simplification into familiar everyday language, and the wide use of illustration by cartoon and photograph. (Daily Mirror, July 30, 1949, p 1. From Conboy, 2011)

It is clear that at this point the newspapers in Britain were moving towards a more sensational style of coverage, and the re-launch of The Sun in 1969 demonstrated this. The Sun’s owner Rupert Murdoch, an Australian media tycoon, felt that papers such as the Daily Mirror were becoming too serious, and so re-launched The Sun as a tabloid with an entertainment agenda, letting go of all non-political news reporters (Conboy, 2011; Sampson, 1996). The Sun targeted itself towards a younger audience, and played up sexual scandals and TV-style entertainment, forcing other newspapers of the time to follow suit: the Daily Mail transformed itself to a tabloid in 1971, and the Express did the same in 1977 (Conboy, 2011; Sampson, 1996; Williams, 2010). The Mirror at first resisted becoming more down-market, but ultimately failed to compete with
The Sun, which became Britain’s best-selling newspaper, a position it retains to this day (Williams, 2010; Conboy, 2011).

**Tabloidization of the British media.**

As we have seen, there have been many significant changes to the British newspaper system since its inception. Since the 1970s, tabloids have dominated the print-media market in the UK. In this section we will examine the current state of entertainment and politics coverage in the British newspapers. But first we must explain the basic differences in the types of newspapers in the UK. Newspapers in the UK have historically been discussed in the two most prominent formats: the broadsheet newspaper and the tabloid newspaper, but in recent years the Berliner format has also become popular. Newspaper formats refer to the physical size and format of the newspaper, but the content in broadsheets and tabloids is also markedly different (Boykoff, 2008; Newton, 1999; Sparks, 2000).

Broadsheet newspapers are large (around 29” long and 23” wide in the UK, or 22” by 12” in the US), include more serious content, and are read by a more educated class of people who are often interested in political news (Newton, 1999; Sparks, 2000). In contrast, the tabloid paper is small and easy to carry around, and focuses on stories about crime, disaster, scandal, sex, gossip, and the like (Boykoff, 2008; Newton, 1999). In the UK, tabloid newspapers are much more popular than the broadsheets, also known as “quality” newspapers. Even before the decline of the newspaper industry it was reported that only about 10 percent of the UK population read broadsheets at least three times a week, and 54 percent read tabloids regularly (Newton, 1999). More recently, from October 2011- September 2012 the combined print-and-online readership in the UK was highest for the tabloid the Daily Mail, which had 18.4 million
readers per month. By contrast the most read quality newspaper, *The Guardian*, had only 9.5 million readers per month, significantly less than not only the *Daily Mail*, but also *The Sun*, *Daily Mirror*, and *Metro*, all tabloids (National Readership Survey, 2012).

The Berliner format is seen as a medium between broadsheet and tabloid, as it is a more compact version of the broadsheet newspaper. The “compact” format newspaper is viewed as a quality paper printed in a tabloid size; newspapers switching to a smaller format have avoided calling themselves tabloids because of the negative connotations of the tabloid press (McIvor, 2012). Interestingly, several major newspapers in the UK have changed to the Berliner or compact format in the last decade, leading to a less clear divide between the middle-market tabloid and quality press broadsheet. Newspapers who have switched format in the last decade include *The Guardian*, *The Observer*, and *The Independent*, leaving only *The Daily Telegraph* and the *Financial Times* in the traditional broadsheet size (Schlesinger, 2006). The alteration in format of these papers indicates a change in both format and a move towards shorter, pop-culture based stories. The inclusion of these types of stories in the news mix allows the quality papers to compete more with the popular tabloid newspapers. The importance of this shift cannot be understated, as it represents the change in reporting style in the past decade, and has a great impact on the framing of political stories in Britain.

Several scholars have examined the types of stories and frames that have become prevalent in the British newspapers, including the increased “tabloidization” of both the broadsheet newspapers and the tabloids themselves. McLachlan and Golding (2000) conducted a study on the change in content and type of story in British newspapers from the 1950s to 1997, examining broadsheet papers the *Times* and *The Guardian* (both now printed in Berliner or
Compact format), and tabloids the *Mirror, The Sun, and Daily Express*. They defined tabloidization as having four components: range of the story, form, mode of address, and market structure. The first, range, alludes to the fact that tabloids cover a narrow range of topics and little hard news; form describes the simple vocabulary and presentation found in tabloids; mode of address includes both the simple form and the provocative and sometimes jovial tone employed by tabloids, and market structure refers to the distribution of the paper and organizational pressures. The quantitative content analysis looked at several elements over the time period, finding that the number of international news stories in the broadsheets has declined over time, and the number of pictures has risen. They found that the number of human interest and entertainment stories has gone up in both tabloids and broadsheets, increasing steadily in broadsheets from 1982 to 1997. There has also been a large growth in the number of political stories in the tabloids, indicating that political stories may be increasingly viewed through a tabloid and entertainment frame (McLachlan & Golding, 2000).

The “tabloidization” of tabloids themselves has also been studied, with Uribe and Gunter (2004) comparing coverage in the *Sun* and the *Mirror* over 10 years. They found that soft news stories, which focus on entertainment-style stories instead of political information, are prominent, with only 3% of coverage devoted to hard international news that contains serious policy information. The coverage of private lives of politicians also increased, along with personal-focused items. Anthony Sampson (1996) discussed what he characterizes as the “crisis at the heart of our media”, saying that since the 1980s the differences between tabloid and quality papers have decreased, partly because they are competing for the same market in the
most competitive press system in the world. He states that this has led to less variety of coverage, less foreign news, and more sensational stories about sex and political scandals.

**Scandal coverage in the UK.**

While sensationalism of stories has been occurring since the dominance of the tabloid began in the 1970s, stories on corruption and sexual scandal became prominent in the 1990s (Johnston, Pattie, & Rossiter, 1997; Tumber, 2004). During the years of the John Major and Tony Blair administrations, from 1992-1997, and 1997-2007, numerous scandals arose highlighting the corruption of government officials. Several financial scandals were unearthed in the Major years, including the Scott investigation, which detailed a widespread effort by the government to mislead Parliament regarding illegal exporting of defense equipment to Iraq. *The Guardian* also uncovered a “Cash for Questions” scandal, finding that various Conservative Members of Parliament were accepting money to pose questions in Parliament. During this time, a number of sexual scandals involving ministers came to light, resulting in several high-profile resignations (Tumber, 2004). Interestingly, the usually competitive UK press sometimes praise each other for quality scandal investigations, shown by *The Independent* complimenting *The Guardian’s* Cash for Questions coverage as “fine journalistic digging” (The Independent, 4 July 1997, from Sanders & Canel, 2006). This demonstrates the media’s dedication to legitimate investigation and scandal coverage even in a competitive market.

The New Labour government, which came into power under Tony Blair in 1997, shifted the political and media landscape when several traditionally Conservative supporting papers endorsed Blair. This demonstrated a large change from their previous alliances and mirrored the views of many in the country, who wanted to get away from the conservative policies of the
Thatcher and Major years (Tumber, 2004). However, Blair’s government was not without its own wave of scandals, including sexual scandals, financial scandals, and “Cheriegate”, regarding Blair’s wife Cherie and her relationship to a convicted fraudster (Deacon, 2004; Tumber, 2004). This scandal was brought on by media interest in Cherie’s purchase of an apartment for her son and the involvement in the sale of a fraudster, Peter Foster. It was speculated that Cherie, a lawyer herself, had given Foster advice on a deportation order, which the Prime Minister’s office first denied before recanting as more details arose. Cheriegate alone played out for weeks in the British press, and resulted in Cherie making a tear-filled public statement about the matter.

This type of prying story has become more and more common, and increasingly the private lives of politicians are exposed (Deacon, 2004; Tumber, 2004). Roger Mortimore (1995) points out that along with the press, the public have also become more welcoming of private-life scandals; in 1977, only 8% of people thought a divorce case should be held against a Member of Parliament (MP), but by 1994 the figure had risen to 19%. Similar results were shown when participants were asked about holding an illegitimate child against an MP: 16% of respondents agreed with this in 1977, compared to almost 1/3 (32%) in 1994. The British press has not only been interested in the misgivings of their own politicians, but has often reveled in scandals overseas as well. The coverage of Bill Clinton scandals before the Monica Lewinsky affair was much more prominent in the UK than it was in the US, possibly because the UK press and audience was so used to reporting on sexual scandals (Tumber, 2004).

McNair (2003), Deacon (2004), and others have examined the situation in the press and public that has led to the prevalence of scandal and personal issues coverage in the UK and elsewhere. McNair argues that the press has increasingly become an agent of chaos, stating that
the sensational coverage of scandals is a result of “an information environment dominated by unpredictability and instability rather than control and order” (McNair, 2003, p 549). He lists three causes for this: technological innovation and faster information flow, the public sphere’s increasing interest in private concerns of elites, and the competitiveness of the media resulting in a press willing to expose any scandal to get ahead. McNair also mentions the political spin-doctors who respond to scandals, who are also discussed at length in Deacon’s (2004) piece on privacy and media intrusion in politics in Britain.

One reason for sensational political coverage is that the British press has seen a shift from issue-based political reporting to coverage of campaign strategy and motivation, which has resulted in politicians having to fight for coverage (Deacon, 2004). This competitive environment has led to the increased influence of spin-doctors, public relations and marketing gurus, and political messaging specialists. As more attention is paid to campaigns, politicians have had to craft their personal images, making it harder for the public to distinguish between what should be considered private information and relevant political knowledge. In addition, because political advertising and campaign budgets are strictly regulated in the UK, politicians and their advisors rely on the influential mainstream media to get their messages across to the public. This has led to a never-ending cycle of coverage, where politicians both complain about lack of privacy from the media, and play into the media’s celebrity culture when it is to their advantage (Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999; Deacon, 2004).

Blumler and Kavanagh (1999) agree with this position when describing the “Third age of political communication”, which they characterize as an accelerated news cycle and professionalization of political communication leading to “feeding frenzies” by journalists
whenever new political information emerges. They state the importance of framing in political coverage, saying that the “sleaze” and “scandal” frames have been used increasingly to report political stories since the 1990s. The 1997 British election was significantly framed by the media, and substantive issues coverage decreased from 1992 in favor of horse race coverage (Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999). Another study compared investigative and scandal reporting in Britain in Spain, and found that journalists consider themselves as taking on a necessary watchdog function in both countries (Sanders & Canal, 2006). The study states that scandal coverage includes journalists carefully crafting a narrative to engage readers, and that large scandals often take weeks or months to investigate before being publicized. They found that Britain has a higher amount of sexual scandal coverage, and perhaps because of this, British journalists on the whole are less respected than their counterparts in Spain (Sanders & Canal, 2006).

No matter the subject of the scandal, British tabloids have a recognizable way of covering stories that includes outrage, emotionalism, and sensationalism (Brookes, 2000). When “mad cow disease” emerged in the UK, tabloids added to the general panic by focusing on victims of the disease, and categorizing the government’s response to the situation as chaotic. Headlines such as “CAN WE STILL TRUST THEM?” underneath pictures of agriculture ministers were splashed on the front pages of papers, and words such as “chaos” and “fiasco” were prominent in tabloid coverage (Brookes, 2000). Similar framing is evident when we examine coverage of climate change in the UK and the September 11th terrorist attacks. A study of both tabloid and broadsheet newspaper coverage of September 11th compared stories in several papers, finding similar themes throughout both quality and tabloid papers. While three tabloids studied, The
Sun, Daily Star, and The Mirror, framed the story as an “end of the world” disaster, the differences in coverage with broadsheets was not clear, and the quality Guardian and tabloid Daily Express had almost identical headlines about a “declaration of war” (Bromley & Cushion, 2011). Another study looked at tabloid framing of climate change, finding again that headlines with fear, misery, and doom dominated tabloid coverage. Tabloids also used dramatic stories, satire, and irony in headlines to grab readers’ attention, which as we have seen is a common characteristic of tabloid reporting (Boykoff, 2008).

**Public perception of press and politicians.**

Seeing the amount of dramatic coverage of scandals and politics in the UK, we might wonder how the public’s views on the press and politics are influenced by sensational headlines and entertainment-based stories. Several scholars have looked at this question, with some such as Sampson (1996) and Schlesinger (2006) asking if the British tabloids have ruined the press system and created an uninformed public. Schlesinger (2006) argues that the current incarnation of the press-politics system came about following the 1997 election of the New Labour party, when “spin doctors” and strategic communications specialists came to prominence in the UK. He states that competing systems of belief between the press and politicians contributes to a never-ending cycle of blame: journalists criticize politicians for the use of public relations gurus and controlling the political and news agenda, while politicians blame the press for media trivialization, focus on conflict, and attacks on personalities and their private lives. Mortimore (1995) examined the public’s perceptions of sleaze and scandal coverage in the UK in 1994, finding that they were generally supportive of the media exposing scandal, although they were less supportive of personal scandals being revealed. However, even twenty years ago the
percentage of the public who want to hear about personal and sexual indiscretions was rising. He also found that the public confidence in Parliament is dropping, and many believe that Members of Parliament are fundamentally corrupt.

Others have looked at the different effects broadsheet and tabloid newspapers have on political knowledge, finding unsurprisingly that broadsheet readers are more educated and politically active than tabloid readers (Andersen, 2003; Newton, 1999). Newton looked at the media’s effects on democracy, asking if political coverage in the press leads to “mediamalaise”, characterized by increased cynicism and political apathy. He found that tabloids were not associated with either political mobilization (higher levels of direct political involvement and discussion) or mediamalaise, but that broadsheet readers have more mobilization than non-newspaper readers, and additionally have higher political knowledge and higher interest. Andersen (2003) studied the effects of reading different types of newspapers on vote choice and public opinion, finding that broadsheet readers were more supportive of the Conservative Party than the Labour Party (the Conservative party is more right-leaning than the Labour party, with the Liberal Democrats in the center). They also found that tabloid readers had some support for Liberal Democrats, but that in general the broadsheet readers were more consistent with their views, perhaps reflecting their more educated status overall.

Conclusion.

The study of scandal and entertainment-style coverage in recent years in the UK, combined with the tabloidization of the newspaper system, makes it clear that the lines between quality and tabloid newspaper coverage have become blurred. While tabloids are usually the first to report on political or sexual scandals, broadsheets are often forced to follow suit with
their own stories due to the intense competition between papers. Newspapers in the UK are extremely influential, and their readership in relation to total population is higher than that of newspapers in the US (Newspaper Association of America, 2004; Newton, 1999). The way newspapers frame stories is influenced by the competitive nature of the press, and by an audience who is used to scandal and sensation-filled stories. The focus on human interest and entertainment stories remains even when stories are of a serious nature, and the number of international stories in UK papers has gone down over the past 60 years, due partly to budget constraints and widespread shutting of foreign bureaus, while entertainment stories have gone up (Brookes, 2000; McLachlan & Goulding, 2000). This has had a great impact on how politics are reported on, and even how political campaigns interact with the media, with spin doctors and political messaging becoming more prominent every election (Conboy, 2011; Deacon 2004; McNair, 2003). Newspapers have shied away from reporting hard news, and are increasingly reporting political stories through entertainment and personality frames, rather than focusing on policy issues (Conboy, 2011). Because of this shift in reporting style, we feel that the UK media will provide apt comparison to the US press in a study of political framing effects and entertainment coverage.

**Political and Scandal Coverage in the US**

**Current US newspaper market.**

The history of the newspaper in the US is shorter than that in the UK, and newspapers today are arguably less influential than those in the UK due to the proliferation of 24/7 cable news channels, and the decline of the newspaper industry in the past decade. In the UK, BBC 1 and 2, the public broadcasting service channels, remain the most watched for both news and
entertainment, and 24/7 news channels do not have a large share of the viewing audience (Broadcasters Audience Research Board, 2012). The US newspaper market is primarily controlled by various national and regional corporations, and newspaper groups such as the Gannett Corporation, which publishes USA Today and many regional titles, control over 80% of daily papers in the US (Graber, 2010). While media in the United States still serves an important function, print newspapers have struggled to adapt to a more and more digital world. Many local papers have been forced to cease daily publication or close down all together, including the Cincinnati Post, Oakland Tribune, Seattle Post-Intelligencer, and Detroit News (Newspaper Death Watch). Major national newspapers such as the New York Times and the Wall Street Journal have implemented online paywalls to varying degrees of success, and even they have not been immune to downsizing. The Washington Post, once considered a rival to the New York Times and the recipient of 32 Pulitzer prizes, has seen its circulation drop over 40% since 1995, and in November 2012 its most recent editor stepped down after a period of financial challenges for the paper (Byers, 2012; Farhi, 2012).

Despite the recent struggles of print newspapers, they are still an important source of political information. In 2008 over 1/3 of people surveyed in the US claimed they had read a daily newspaper the day before, and mass media of all types provides interpretation of news events to the public (Graber, 2010). The top three newspapers in the United States by circulation are USA Today, the Wall Street Journal, and the New York Times. Two tabloid newspapers, the New York Daily News and the New York Post, are also in the top 10 most read newspapers, beating out more reputable outlets such as the Washington Post and Chicago Tribune. Although journalists in the US are more likely to be liberal or moderate politically than the general public,
newspapers are relatively balanced in treatment to politicians. For example, although the *New York Times* is considered to lean liberal and the *Wall Street Journal* leans conservative, the differences are much less than those of the British newspapers (Graber, 2010).

**History of US newspapers and tabloids.**

Press in the US today report on political and sexual scandals regularly, but this has not always been the case in America. Larry Sabato (2000) characterized the period from 1941-1966 as “lapdog” journalism, when journalists rarely challenged official messages, and notes that although President Kennedy engaged in several extramarital affairs, they were a taboo topic in the press and public. This period was followed by the “watchdog” press era from 1966-1974, which resulted in the unveiling of several high-profile scandals, including Watergate. Since then, political reporting in the US has taken on a different character: the media jumps on any scandal and harshly reports on politicians, focusing not only on their politics but also gossip and details of their private lives. In just the past two years, from 2010-2012, sexual scandals have ended the political careers of several nationally recognized politicians, including presidential candidate Herman Cain, Congressman Anthony Weiner, and CIA director David Petraeus.

Although the 1950s and 60s were characterized by shying away from sex stories by the mainstream media, we cannot say that sensationalism in the press only started in the 1970s. Tabloids in the US had enjoyed a period of great success from the 1920s to 1950s, starting with the launch of the *New York Daily News* in 1919, which was inspired by London’s *Daily Mirror*. By 1927 the *Daily News* had the largest circulation of any paper in the country, focusing on stories about crime, sex, and sensationalism. This era did not last long: several tabloids folded in the 1930s due to the Depression, and the *Daily News* abandoned some of its sensationalism in
order to survive. By the 1930s, the *Daily News* was reporting regularly on interlinked gang crime stories, framing some murders by bringing up unsolved killings and quoting bystanders who were fearful for their lives (Pelizzon & West, 2010). *The New York Post*, another of New York’s most prominent tabloids today, has an even longer history, although it has gone through many incarnations. The *Post* was founded by Alexander Hamilton in 1801 as the *New York Evening Post*, and was known for free speech advocacy, the anti-slavery movement, and quality writing and reporting (Walt Whitman Archive, 2012). The *Post* went back and forth between being a broadsheet and tabloid newspaper with various titles until 1976, when it was bought by Rupert Murdoch, who modeled it into a sensational tabloid as he had done with the UK’s *Sun*. Murdoch was forced to sell the *Post* in 1988, but reacquired it in 1993 and has owned it ever since (Hollywood Reporter, 2005).

*Scandal coverage since the 1970s.*

Scandal coverage by more reputable newspapers has been prevalent since the Watergate scandal of 1972, in which the uncovering of dirty campaigning tactics by the *Washington Post* led to the resignation of President Nixon (Schudson, 2004). Watergate had a huge impact on the nature of journalism, as reporters began to scrutinize the private lives of politicians. In addition, due to the seriousness of the Watergate affair, journalists realized that downplaying scandals could be detrimental and began treating every emerging scandal as an important news story. This was a drastic shift from the times when Kennedy’s sexual exploits were covered up and falsehoods spread by the government about Vietnam reported without question (Sabato, 2000).

While the uncovering of vast government corruption did shock the media into more thoughtful and investigative reporting, it has also led to intense investigation of smaller and more
personal scandals. The Whitewater and Lewinsky scandals of the Clinton era are two examples of this, although as we noted earlier, the British press still reported more on Clinton’s sexual escapades prior to the Lewinsky affair (Schudson, 2004; Tumber, 2004). The Whitewater scandal was of a political nature, and related to Clinton’s use of political influence to bend laws in Arkansas, but had it not been for Watergate’s influence on the media it might have been largely ignored. The discovery of Clinton’s affair with Monica Lewinsky while in office was also merely a shade of the scandal uncovered in the Nixon years, but frenzied coverage by the media led to President Clinton’s impeachment. Jonathon Alter (1998) of Newsweek compared the scandal to that of Watergate, stating that “If Richard Nixon had received oral sex and lied about it, the offense would have ranked about 568th on a list of Watergate abuses” (Fineman & Cooper, 1998). Notably, despite the constant coverage of “Lewinskygate”, Clinton’s approval rating actually went up in 1998, demonstrating that perhaps the public didn’t care as much about Clinton’s sex life as the press did (Miller, 1999).

Coverage of politicians’ private lives has become a routine part of elections, and campaign coverage now focuses heavily on character traits and potential indiscretions of candidates, even when said events occurred years before running for office. During Clinton’s run for office it was found that one in six TV stories about him were on his private life, and during Hillary Clinton’s presidential run in 2008 her rare display of emotion in the presence of cameras became a major news story (Graber, 2010). The increasing emphasis by the media on the character and integrity of political candidates has spiraled out of control, and scandals, no matter how minor or how old, are covered incessantly. This is due to several factors; as we spoke of earlier, candidate image management has become a vital part of politics, and campaigns
themselves revolve around the candidate more than they did in previous generations (Wattenberg, 1991). With the rise in candidate-centered campaigns has come a change in the way media reports, and there is no doubt that the media has contributed to this focus on personality-politics. In the next section we will look at how the media use different frames to cover campaigns and which frames are most prominent. We will also define the “entertainment” frame of coverage and the specific frames within it, which will be the basis of our content analysis of US and UK coverage of the 2012 presidential election.

**Media Framing**

**Background of media framing.**

Framing as a media effect has been studied extensively for decades, and is often grouped with two other media tools, agenda setting and priming. While the three effects are similar and are used together, they describe distinct processes. McCombs and Shaw (1972) defined agenda setting as how the mass media can impact the key messages for a political campaign by “influencing the salience of political issues” (p 177). Priming has been defined as “changes in the standards that people use to make political evaluations” (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987, p. 63). In other words, priming tells an audience what issues or factors they should focus on when making decisions about candidates, and is seen as very similar to agenda-setting (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007).

One study of agenda-setting looked at the correlation between issues voters reported as being important to them and media coverage of the same issues, and found that the two were strongly related (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). News coverage can also influence public opinion, and concern about issues goes up in accordance with the depth of coverage specific issues
receive (Behr & Iyengar, 1985). In contrast to agenda setting and priming, which can be thought of as guiding the public on what issues to concentrate on, framing influences how we evaluate stories. Framing includes the subject of the story (which is the focus of priming and agenda-setting), but also the content of the story and what angle the media takes when reporting a story, as we will demonstrate below (Graber, 2010; Nelson, Oxley & Clawson, 1997; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007).

The effects of framing have been studied in multiple fields, including psychology and communications. Frames create mental models for individuals to interpret events, and the mass media frame stories by associating an event with relevant issues (Nelson, et al., 1997; Rhee, 1997). Frames are not only used by the media to turn information into meaningful events and stories, but also by individuals to assist them in processing and storing information. With political news, frames are cognitive aids that can help individuals remember and categorize the salient information so that stories become clearer (Scheufele, 1999). An example of framing in the UK was the coverage of the September 11th attacks in New York City, when several British newspapers framed the events using the words “war” or “declaration of war”, indicating to audiences that they should view the attacks through a “war” lens (Bromley & Cushion, 2011).

Media frames are influenced by several factors, including social norms, pressure from outside interest groups, internal pressure from a news organization, or a journalist’s own political ideology (Scheufele, 1999). Entman (2007) has stated that complete frames perform four functions: problem definition, causal analysis, moral judgment and remedy promotion. A frame that is successful connects stories to issues that are important to the public, such as the economy or crime. The influence of a certain frame is related to the credibility of the source it is presented
from, and it has been found that people receiving information from a credible source are more likely to report the issues shown as important. One experiment on credibility asked individuals about stories labeled from either the *New York Times* (rated as a credible source) or the *National Enquirer* (an uncredible, sensationalist source), and found that those who read the *National Enquirer* stories did not rate the issues framed as more important after reading, whereas those who read the story from the *New York Times* rated the framed issues as important after reading (Druckman, 2001).

**Framing in politics.**

Several scholars have examined framing in political and campaign coverage, and common frames used to examine campaigns include the horserace frame, which pits candidates against each other in a “race” for office, the issues or policy frame, and the entertainment frame, which we will define as including personal issues, scandal, and celebrity coverage (Druckman, 2004; Flowers, Haynes, & Crespin, 2003; Freitag, 2000; Graber 2010; Miller, Andsager, & Riechert, 1998; Rhee, 1997). The horserace frame is the most commonly used frame, with Graber (2010) finding that 71% of campaign coverage in 2008 was devoted to horse race issues. The media is particularly receptive to horserace style messaging, even when it comes from campaigns themselves (Flowers et al., 2003; Miller et al., 1998). Additionally, Flowers et al. (2003) found the media are most hostile towards issues-based messages, and national media only picked up 8% of messages that were about a substantive or policy issue. Following a long-term study of New Hampshire primary coverage, Freitag (2000) concluded that media coverage has buried substantive policy coverage in favor of campaigning coverage since at least 1952.
One reason the horse race frame is used more than other campaign frames could be because neither journalists nor the audience want to hear complex and often dull details of policy issues (Graber, 2010; Sabato, 2000). However, even when candidates do not mention substantive policy issues in their press releases the media reports on them, and candidates themselves sometimes add to the horserace frame by promoting poll numbers (Miller et al., 1998). By contrast to the horserace frame, the policy frame discusses campaigns by focusing on either specific policy issues such as the economy, ideological differences between candidates and their broad platforms, or evaluations of a candidate’s previous record or policy promises made during the course of the campaign. Some scholars have suggested that reporters may focus on horserace news more than policy issues because it gives them an easy way to stay balanced in their coverage; while reporting straight poll numbers it is more difficult to be biased than when discussing ideological differences in candidate’s platforms (Kerbel, Apee, & Ross, 2000).

The question of how framing stories around different subjects affects audience’s interpretation of events and vote choice has been raised in multiple studies. Rhee (1997) conducted a study in which individuals received either horserace or policy news stories about a campaign, and then looked at how these individuals created their own narratives about the campaign. The study found that there is a framing effect in print news stories, and that those who read horserace pieces were more likely to think about the election in terms of a horserace, whereas policy readers described the election to others in terms of specific issues and policy positions. Priming can also affect audience’s feelings towards candidates; one study on a US senate campaign found that those who paid attention to the campaign before voting based their votes on factors such as taxes which were not emphasized by the campaigns or media. This
study also found that newspapers were more likely than television news to report on the campaign at all, and that newspapers used a policy frame significantly more often than television news, although both mediums used a horserace frame most often (Druckman, 2004).

Frames used by the media are impacted by the nature of a race (is it competitive, controversial, etc), by the outlet a story appears in, and by the topic of each specific story. We have already seen that newspapers often report on more substantive issues than television news, but the type of newspaper a story appears in also changes how frames are used. A study of Dutch newspaper coverage of political stories found that the “attribution of responsibility” frame and the conflict frame were used most often by the serious newspapers studied, while the human interest frame was used significantly more often by both television outlets and by the most sensationalist newspaper studied (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). This finding closely relates to our study, as the study ranked newspapers from most serious to most sensationalist, which we will also be doing in our study of quality versus tabloid newspapers.

The type of race being studied and major players in the race also affects the use of frames by the media. Studies have examined coverage of minority candidates, including both non-white and women candidates, and have found framing effects to be different in these races than in races with two white male candidates (Aday & Devitt, 2001; Caliendo & McIlwain, 2006; Kahn, 1994). Caliendo and McIlwain (2006) examined racial framing in the 2004 election, comparing races that were biracial to those that had either two black or two white candidates. They found that biracial and all-black contests had more racial references, and that the race of voters was mentioned 40% of the time in all-black races, but infrequently in all-white races. Another interesting finding was that use of the race frame in coverage also increased the
likelihood that the policy frame was implemented in the same article. Other studies have looked at coverage of women in campaigns, and have found that in Senate races women receive less coverage than their male counterparts, and in both Senate and presidential races they receive less coverage on substantive issues (Aday & Devitt, 2001; Kahn, 1994). Females often receive less coverage of policy positions than males, even though female candidates emphasize their issue positions just as much or more than males. Women also receive more coverage on their personal traits than their male opponents; Elizabeth Dole’s presidential race was framed using her personal traits much more than her male opponents despite her high qualifications for the office. In general, the media is also less receptive to messages from female candidates, preferring to focus on the competitive nature of their races using a horserace frame or their personalities using the entertainment frame, which we will describe below (Aday & Devitt, 2001; Kahn, 1994).

The entertainment frame.

This study looks specifically at the entertainment frame in the coverage of the 2012 US presidential election between incumbent Democratic candidate President Barack Obama, and his Republican challenger, former Governor Mitt Romney. For this study the overarching entertainment frame will include coverage of personality traits or personal issues, scandal or “nonevents” which do not relate directly to a candidate’s qualifications for office, soft news coverage of candidates, and mentions of celebrities in relation to candidates. Reporters today often focus on frenzied coverage surrounding breaking news events, which can lead to increased coverage of scandals, including government corruption allegations or sexual scandals (Graber, 2010; McNair, 2003; Sabato, 2000). In addition, because of the elevation of political candidates
to celebrity status, the media often investigate details of their private lives at length, which McNair (2003) attributes to the media’s acting as an agent of chaos rather than control.

As we have seen, scandal and sensational coverage of politicians has increased in both the US and the UK over time, and scandals that emerge in both countries, particularly sexual scandals, command a great deal of news coverage as they unfold. This, along with an increased expectation of audiences to know personal details about candidates for office, has caused the differences between “entertainment” versus “politics” and “celebrity” versus “politician” to become less obvious. There are several factors that have influenced this trend, including the increasing prevalence of new media strategies in campaigns. Scholars have debated whether the Internet fundamentally changes campaign communication, with some stating that the Internet merely reinforces the existing political structure and others arguing that new media strategies fundamentally change political communication (Margolis, Resnick, & Tu, 1997; Xenos & Foot, 2005). In particular, websites change some aspects of campaigns, as they enable candidates to share more information on both their policy stances and their personal lives. This has led to audiences who expect to know more than the basic biographical information of candidates, and candidates who frequently reveal personal details about themselves and their family to make themselves relatable to the public (Xenos & Foot, 2005).

The use of social networking sites (SNS) to gain political information has also increased in recent years, with 36% of SNS users saying that the sites are very or somewhat important to them in keeping informed on political news (Rainie & Smith, 2012). Candidates for office not only send out emails to supporters, but also actively engage them on sites such as Facebook and Twitter, sharing messages about issues, events, and their opponents. Given how
integrated political campaigns have become into our everyday lives, it is not surprising that audiences feel entitled to know personal information about candidates for office. Because of this, the media shares stories about candidates that are often unrelated to their campaign strategy or policy stances.

Barack Obama’s first presidential campaign in 2008 was significant for the blending of entertainment and politics, as not only was it the first presidential campaign in which social media sites were used regularly, but Obama’s position as the first major candidate of color was historic in the United States. The large number of outlets that now cover elections (including traditional media, 24/7 cable news, blogs, and social networking sites) has led to competition, which has forced outlets to report on sensational stories in order to gain a bigger audience. The 2008 primaries were an example of such media spectacle, as the race between Obama and primary challenger Hillary Clinton was historic and drawn out. Clinton framed herself using an image of “the fighter”, and mobilized celebrity supporters such as Jack Nicholson to help her campaign efforts. Obama solidified his status as a global celebrity by embarking on a world tour, which generated huge amounts of press coverage. He also drew support from many high-profile celebrities such as Will.i.am and Oprah (Kellner, 2009). Throughout the 2008 election it was not only the media that framed coverage using various elements of the entertainment frame, but also the campaigns themselves. McCain criticized Obama’s celebrity status in his “celebrity” attack ad, and then nominated Sarah Palin as his running mate, a scarcely known Governor from Alaska and former beauty queen. Palin quickly became the subject of media inquiry and spectacle as it was discovered, among other things, that her 17-year-old daughter was pregnant (Kellner, 2009).
Both Kellner (2009) and Marsh, Hart, and Tindall (2010) discuss different types of celebrity and how political celebrities differ from traditional celebrities. Kellner (2009) describes political celebrity as “attributed celebrity”, which is when fame results from scandal or media representation, whereas “achieved celebrity” is won by talent in a public sector, such as music or acting. Marsh et al. (2010) also differentiate between “celebrity politicians”, traditional politicians who engage with popular culture in similar ways to celebrities, and “celebrity politicians”, entertainers who use their celebrity to discuss politics or activism. Although it has proliferated in recent years, the history of politicians being treated as celebrities in the media goes at least as far back as the 1960s, when President and Mrs. Kennedy were frequently covered using the entertainment frame (Monoco, 1978).

For this study we will combine frames frequently found in political and election coverage under a new frame classification, the “entertainment frame”. We are combining frames found in several different studies to create the entertainment frame, which can broadly be defined as any story framed with non-political elements or sensationalized by the media. The first part of the entertainment frame relates to stories about candidates’ personalities or personal traits, which as we have seen are prevalent in both the US and the UK, particularly if candidates are women. This frame is based on Kerbel et al.’s (2000) personal character frame, stories about the personalities or characteristics of political candidates, which often focus on problematic traits or perceived character flaws. The second part of the entertainment frame is scandals or nonevents, so-called “feeding frenzies” around stories that are of a scandalous nature but may not relate directly to politics (Sabato, 2000). This includes sexual scandals, financial scandals, and political scandals, such as when a candidate is caught speaking inappropriately about his
opponent or a voter sector, and the media picks up on the story and covers it as a scandal. This frame category also includes candidate indiscretions, character difficulties, or any instance in which the press frames the campaign with scandal and improper candidate behavior (Kerbel et al., 2000).

Soft news stories are also part of the entertainment frame, which are entertainment-style political stories that contain little policy information. Soft news stories most often appear in outlets such as People Magazine, Entertainment Tonight, or The View, and cover human-interest aspects of a conflict or campaign (Baum, 2002). The “Oprah effect” is often discussed when referring to soft news, which finds that among citizens who consume little or no hard news, those with greater exposure to soft news are more likely to vote for a candidate who is aligned with their own political values (Baum & Jamison, 2006). For this study our soft news frame will focus on trivial aspects of a candidate or campaign, such as stories about clothing or food choices of the candidates or their spouses.

The final part of the entertainment frame is the celebrity frame. In this case the celebrity frame does not refer to politicians being treated as celebrities by the media, but rather to direct references to legitimate celebrities whose main position is not in politics. Endorsements of politicians by celebrities can be traced back to the 1920s, when numerous film stars endorsed Warren Harding for president, and are a campaign tool used frequently today. Oprah Winfrey’s endorsement of Barack Obama for president in 2008 was found to have an effect on voters, with 23% of Democrats saying her endorsement would make them more likely to vote for Obama, and some estimating that she generated over 1 million extra votes for Obama (Garthwaite & Moore, 2008; Marsh, et al., 2010). This endorsement was slightly controversial, as some did not think
an entertainment figure with so much influence should become involved with an election, but celebrity endorsements have become more and more frequent, and many campaign events now are centered around celebrity appearances. This frame will include coverage regarding celebrity endorsements or appearances at campaign events. It also includes discussion of celebrity appearances in campaign- or self-generated videos, such as Will.i.am’s “Yes We Can” video, which generated spectacle and media coverage for Obama (Kellner, 2009). These four specific frames within the overarching entertainment frame, *personal character and issues, scandal, soft news, and celebrity*, will form the basis of our research as we compare the prevalence of entertainment-framed stories to stories framed by the horserace or policy issues.
METHODODOLOGY

Overview of Methods

In order to test our hypotheses about differing political coverage in the US and UK and the prominence of the entertainment frame in each country, we will be using a mixed methods approach. Mixed methods is defined by Johnson, Onwuegbuzie and Turner (2007) as a type of research which combines elements of both quantitative and qualitative methods to ensure a broader understanding of a research topic. Quantitative research includes research instruments such as surveys or content analyses, and is analyzed by a researcher to provide answers to a question using data that can be tested statistically in various ways. Qualitative data are interviews or subject observations which are more subjectively studied by a researcher to give insight into a question.

By combining both quantitative and qualitative methods, the deficits of each individual method are accounted for. Quantitative research often lacks direct insight from participants and provides little context to situations, as only hard data are reported. Qualitative research provides the context and personal anecdotes missing in purely quantitative data, but also has downsides, as qualitative research is highly subjective and less generalizable than quantitative research (Kvale, 1994). Using a mixed method approach in this study will give us both rich narrative through qualitative interviews, and generalizable data that can easily be used to compare actual coverage in different newspapers and countries. In addition, by using several different methods we are able to examine all steps of Lasswell’s communication model, illustrated below in Figure 1.1 (Lasswell, 1948):
Our three methods are interviews with journalists in the US and UK, a content analysis of election year coverage in US and UK newspapers, and a nationwide US survey on media consumption and political attitudes. We will conduct the studies concurrently, and analyze them both separately and together; we will present the content analysis data first, followed by the interviews and the survey. Through this we can relate all of the studies to each other and provide a more complete analysis. In this chapter we will go through each method in detail, and provide a comprehensive look at how we arrived at the final version of each method. This will be followed by an explanation of how each part of the study was conducted. In the next chapter we will analyze the data and draw connections across the methods, providing a complete picture of the media and political landscape in each country and demonstrate how they interact.
Interviews

**Interviews as a method.**

The first method we will be discussing is in-depth interviews, which we used to gain additional insight into the field of journalism in both the US and the UK. Interviews as a method are one of the primary ways to collect qualitative data, which has several benefits over quantitative data. Interviews allow subjects to provide information in a narrative format, which helps the researcher construct a story from the data that is not possible from other data collection methods (Lindlof & Taylor, 2010).

For this study we used semi-structured respondent interviews, which means that participants were asked about their personal experiences and opinions. The main benefit of interviews is they allow participants to be detailed and open in their responses, which allows the researcher to gather more in-depth information than from a closed-ended survey or content analysis (Kvale, 1994). For this study we felt that in-depth interviews were the only way to find out *why* journalism is so different in the US and the UK, straight from journalists who are involved in the decision-making process at media outlets in each country. Interviews do have some drawbacks, as they cannot test a hypothesis statistically and are mainly exploratory. They also can be subjective, as information expressed is the personal opinion of each interviewee. Interviews can be interpreted differently by different researchers, which make them statistically unreliable (Kvale, 1994). However, for the purpose of this study, where we are using interviews in conjunction with other methods, the benefits far outweigh the downsides. These interviews gave us rich information on the background of journalism that helped inform our analysis of the quantitative data, and provided invaluable context to our study.
**Participants.**

We interviewed 3 journalists who have had many years experience in either the US or the UK media, or both. Because interviews are being used as one of three methods in this study, we felt that this number of interviews was sufficient. In addition, the quality of the interviews we did conduct was very high, which is more valuable to us than having a higher number of weaker interviews. Participants were selected through a convenience sample, but we aimed to have an equal number of participants from US and UK outlets, and wanted participants to be knowledgeable of political coverage in either country. We also wanted at least one or two of the interviews to be with journalists familiar with the outlets being analyzed in our content analysis *(The New York Times, The New York Post, USA Today, The Sun, The Daily Mail, The Guardian).* With these parameters in mind, we came up with a list of possible interview subjects that included both personal connections and well-known journalists at several print outlets. After going through this list to decide which journalists would be most receptive to talking to us, we gathered their contact information from public sources and mutual friends. While those contacted were either personal connections or friends-of-friends, they were arms-length participants and none were close enough to the researcher to bias their responses.

Some sources were contacted directly by the researcher, and some were initially introduced through the researcher’s personal contacts. After the participants indicated they would be willing to take part, we sent a second email that included more details about the study. We told the participants if they consented their name would be included in the study, and they would take part in a recorded interview lasting about an hour. We then scheduled interviews with those who agreed to the study terms. Although most journalists contacted had agreed to be
interviewed, some dropped out for scheduling reasons, and the researcher did not pursue these leads further as we already had a sufficient number of interviews scheduled.

The participants for this study were Toby Harnden, Washington DC Bureau Chief of *The Sunday Times of London*, Ewen MacAskill, Washington DC Bureau Chief for *The Guardian*, and John Heilemann, National Affairs Editor at *New York Magazine* and co-author of *Game Change: Obama and the Clintons, McCain and Palin, and the Race of a Lifetime*. All participants have worked in journalism for at least 15 years at various outlets, and were familiar with political coverage in the US and/or UK. Toby Harnden, in addition to working at the *Sunday Times*, spent a year at *The Daily Mail*, and 17 years at *The Telegraph*, so had a strong knowledge of both quality and tabloid newspapers and reporting in the UK. Ewen MacAskill has worked at *The Guardian* for 17 years, and has been the Washington DC Bureau Chief for the past 7 years. He covered both the 2008 and 2012 US presidential election for *The Guardian*, and is the author of several of *The Guardian*’s election stories that were in our content analysis. John Heilemann is a well-known US political commentator and author who has previously worked at outlets such as *The Economist* and *The New Yorker*. His book *Game Change*, released in January 2010, was one of the most successful books about the 2008 election, and was subsequently turned into an award-winning HBO movie of the same title. He also covered the 2012 election for *New York Magazine*, and at the time of this study is working on a follow up to *Game Change* about the 2012 elections.

These participants provided a varied view of the media and political coverage, as they had similar experiences in different settings. For example, both John Heilemann and Ewen MacAskill were on the trail in 2012 covering the election, but for different audiences. In
addition, while Ewen MacAskill and Toby Harnden are both British journalists who work for UK outlets in Washington, DC, they have had different career trajectories, as Toby left the quality newspaper *The Telegraph* to get new experiences at more low-market papers *The Daily Mail* and *The Sunday Times*. Ewen MacAskill and Toby Harnden were especially useful to the comparative aspect of our study, as they were intimately familiar with the workings of the press system in the UK, but also aware of the attitudes and coverage shown in US newspapers, having lived in the United States for over 5 years. Although John was not as knowledgeable about the British press, he had experience with the “entertainment frame” of politics that is the main focus of this study. *Game Change* discusses Sarah Palin’s various political scandals in detail as well as other entertainment or scandal stories. The book even revealed several unknown scandals after the election, including the state of John and Elizabeth Edwards’ marriage, and the claims that Cindy McCain had several affairs.

**Data collection.**

Interviews took place over a period of 3 weeks from February 27\(^{th}\), 2013 to March 18\(^{th}\), 2013 date, at a time and location of the participants’ choosing in order to accommodate their schedules. Interviews were in-person and locations included coffee shops and an office. The interviews lasted 30 minutes to an hour each, and the researcher recorded the interviews digitally using the iPhone Voice Memos App. We also took notes by hand during the interviews, in order to ensure we had a back up of the data and could note any interesting non-verbal cues. We came up with a list of initial interview questions based on the information found through our literature review, and followed a semi-structured format while conducting the interviews (Appendix A). This meant that while we had a list of questions prepared, the interview followed a natural flow
of conversation and was allowed to deviate from the questions written. Although participants were asked most of the same questions, they were not all asked in the same order, as we brought up new questions as they related to what the participant was discussing at that moment. We also asked additional questions when we felt questions warranted a follow-up, or when topics we didn’t anticipate discussing but were relevant to our study arose.

This structure allowed us to get straight answers to our most important questions (such as, “Do you think the US or the UK has more ‘entertainment-style’ coverage of politics?”), but also allowed the participants to bring up relevant topics even when we did not ask directly about them. We started off each interview by telling participants about the focus of the study, and then asked them to tell us about their background in journalism and political coverage. This led easily into the rest of our questions, about the different media systems in the US and UK, digital media’s impact on journalism, and entertainment-style coverage of politics. Some questions were tailored specifically for each participant, as they all had slightly different backgrounds and knowledge. For example, Toby Harnden and Ewen MacAskill had strong knowledge of the press systems in the US and the UK and how they compared, so could be asked questions about the differences between coverage in each country. On the other hand, John Heilemann is primarily a US political reporter, so for his interview we focused on US political and entertainment stories in the US press.

Following the interviews, we performed a thematic analysis on the data to determine recurring themes and anecdotes. Thematic analysis is a method of analyzing interviews by sorting data into categories so that the data are condensed and easy to interpret. Philip Burnard states that thematic analysis “stays close to the original material and yet allows for categories to
be generated which allow the reader of a researcher report to ‘make sense’ of the data” (Burnard, 1991, p 465). In this case, for example, thematic analysis enabled us to group together mentions of competition in the British press across interviews.

The primary researcher first transcribed all of the digital recordings into separate Microsoft Word documents. We also read through the hand-written notes, but as there were no problems with the quality of the recording, did not type up these notes. The transcripts were printed out, and color-coded by participant. To code the interviews, we read through the transcripts and underlined sections that were relevant to one or more of our research questions. We then wrote short summaries of the underlined statements in the margins of the paper. Transcripts were cut up, and portions that had not been underlined discarded. We sorted the codes into categories based on similar topics or themes, and went through the codes in each category to identify sub-categories if needed. After this process we were left with 8 primary categories and 17 sub-categories, which we then organized into a framework to demonstrate the relationship between themes.

**Content Analysis**

**Content analysis as a method.**

The largest portion of our data came from a detailed content analysis of articles in six newspapers in the US and UK: *The Sun, The Daily Mail* and *The Guardian* from the UK, and *The New York Post, USA Today,* and *The New York Times* in the US. Content analysis is a method by which large amounts of text or information are compressed as quantitative data into categories based on specific rules laid out in a codebook (Stemler, 2001). This allows us to sort through many articles and extract information relevant to our study, and then analyze that
information using statistics. For the purpose of this study, our content analysis provided us with both basic information about articles in each country (how many articles each country and outlet produced, length of articles, etc.), and descriptive information about the topics and actors present in articles, tone towards candidates, and frames used. Several past studies on media framing have used content analyses, including Scammell’s (2005) study on how the UK press covered the 2004 US presidential election, which included a content analysis of both TV and Newspaper coverage. Because of this, we felt that a content analysis was the best way to look at both our primary question regarding framing, and secondary questions about tone in coverage and entertainment stories.

**Content analysis sources.**

We conducted our content analysis on six newspapers, three from the US, and three from the UK, and limited our article selection to those that appeared in print versions of the newspapers. Online websites were not included in the analysis, although for most sources the articles were also available through the website, under various restrictions (for example, *The New York Times* has a paywall that only allows non-subscribed readers to read 10 articles online per month). We limited our analysis to print newspapers for several reasons, including time and resource constraints on the researcher. We also felt that, despite the decline in print journalism that has occurred in both countries over the past decade, traditional newspapers are still important sources of information in both the US and the UK. Especially in the UK, newspapers lead the rest of the press, and are thought of as agenda-setters more so than online or television sources. This is also true to a slightly lesser extent in the US, where *The New York Times* is still one of the most influential and highly regarded news sources. After conducting preliminary
research for our literature review we felt even more confident in the decision to use newspapers, as it became clear that the newspaper systems in each country are markedly different despite their superficial similarities.

The newspapers we selected were based on a matched-sample technique, where we matched newspapers of varying qualities in either country to each other so that each newspaper had a counterpart in the other country. We wanted to use newspapers that are well recognized and have high readership, and narrowed down the list of most-read papers to the three in each country that could most easily be compared to their foreign counterpart. We also wanted the papers to represent a range of styles, as we are looking at the differences between quality and tabloid newspapers. Thus we chose to have one tabloid newspaper, one mid-market paper, and one quality paper from each country. The newspapers we came up with were matched as follows: *The Sun*-New York Post (tabloid), *The Daily Mail*-USA Today (mid-market) and *The Guardian*-The New York Times (quality).

While these are not perfect matches due to several factors, such as the prominence of tabloids in the UK and the smaller size of the UK, we feel these matches are appropriate for our purposes. The matched pairs reflect both similar formats and similar political affiliation, which is important for a study examining political coverage. Although US newspapers do not show their political affiliations as outwardly as UK newspapers, both *The Guardian* and *The New York Times* are considered left-leaning, whereas *The Daily Mail* and *USA Today* are more conservative. *The Sun*’s political positions have changed over the years, but they are generally right-leaning, as is *The New York Post*. In addition, Australian mogul Rupert Murdoch’s *News*
Corporation currently owns both The Sun and The New York Post, adding an extra level of similarity.

**Codebook.**

In order to quantify data in the articles, we developed a codebook that ensured each article would be coded for information relevant to this study. Our codebook was based off of a codebook developed by the Comparative National Elections Project (n.d.), which specializes in national election surveys. The codebook we found as an example was an exhaustive codebook for newspaper articles in the 1992 US presidential election. It includes sections on general article information, topics in each article, reporter tone and Democratic/Republican bias. The data from this codebook and content analysis was used by Dalton, Beck, and Huckfeldt (1998) in an article on partisan cues in newspaper coverage. We used this codebook as a starting point for our own codebook, and used their language describing each code for several of our sections. We also structured our codebook in a similar order, going from descriptive information (length, newspaper, country) at the start, to more detailed codes such as article bias at the end.

After getting the codebook structure and initial codes from the CNEP codebook, we altered it significantly to tailor it to this study. We took out several sections and added in a section on framing. For the purpose of this study we developed definitions of both general frame classifications and specific frames, which we discussed in the theoretical framework section. Our codebook includes a table that lays out the four frame classifications: Politics, Process, Ideas, and Entertainment, and the specific frames that come under these classifications. We also included examples of each frame; for example, the “Political process” frame examples were
“campaign organization, election mechanics, campaign finance” (Appendix B). We amended the topics provided in the 1992 codebook to include a section on entertainment and scandal stories.

We coded a first batch of 30 articles using our developed codebook, and then altered it to reduce the number of “topic” codes, which was initially over 100. Since the topic of each story is not the main question of this study, we condensed topic codes; for example, instead of coding specifically for the war in Iraq, we coded for “general defense policy story”. After about 50% of our articles were coded, we brought in the codebook to a small group and went through the codes and descriptions with them. We made several changes based on their suggestions, clarifying the coding directions for a few of the sections, including what constitutes a “main actor” of an article versus an actor who is only mentioned in passing. Whenever changes were made to the codebook, we went back to the articles previously coded to make sure they were still coded appropriately.

**Intercoder reliability.**

Our intercoder reliability test was conducted on a total of 8 articles, or 7% of our total sample. Articles were chosen from a variety of dates and newspaper outlets, and were brought into a group of 5 coders, most of who were in the small group that had already seen and commented on our codebook. Coders were each given 1-2 articles and the finalized copy of our codebook. We then went through our central codes in detail to explain the differences in the frames and topics, and when to code for each variable. For example, we had to clarify that the four frame classifications are used for the article-wide frame, whereas the 12 specific frames are used for each paragraph’s frame. After the articles were coded and codes compared to the primary researcher’s, we met a second time to resolve the discrepancies. Some of the differences
were due to human error (for example, not noticing that Obama was mentioned in a paragraph primarily about Romney), and some were due to legitimate differences in opinion on the more subjective codes, such as frame, topic, and tone. We reconciled most of the differences between coders by discussing each variable in detail, and were left with a Cohen’s Kappa of .956, which demonstrates strong reliability. We had one article that was irreconcilable, an opinion piece about Mitt Romney, which we subsequently deleted from the entire sample. In total, it took about 4 hours to train the coders and complete the intercoder reliability.

**Data collection.**

We used our codebook to code a total of 114 articles, dating from September 3rd, 2012, to November 5th, 2012. This date range was selected as it started just after the Republican Democratic convention, when Romney was officially confirmed as the presidential candidate for the Republican Party. We collected articles up until November 5th, the day before the 2012 elections. Due to the large number of articles published in this time period, we took a sample of articles to be analyzed. We created the sample by selecting articles from our six newspaper sources from the Monday of each week within the selected date range\(^1\). After we finished the initial coding, we found that we only had 4 articles from UK newspaper *The Daily Mail*, which would be too small a sample to analyze statistically. We also wanted to increase the number of *USA Today* articles. Because of this we added two dates into our sample, October 24th and November 1st, which brought up the number of *Daily Mail* and *USA Today* articles. These dates were selected because they included *Daily Mail* or *USA Today* articles, but we did not feel they

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\(^1\) Our complete sample included 87 articles from Mondays, and 27 from other weekdays. Selecting articles primarily from Monday may have impacted the type of story we analyzed, as coverage can vary by day of the week.
compromised the overall sample. The final sample included 114 articles: 6 from The Daily Mail, 13 from The Sun, 27 from The Guardian, 17 from USA Today, 18 from The New York Post and 33 from The New York Times. This totaled 46 articles from the UK and 68 from the US, or 40.4% and 59.6% respectively.

Articles were drawn from Factiva, which is a database of news articles from a variety of international sources. We searched Factiva for articles that mentioned the Presidential or Vice Presidential candidates and the Presidential candidates’ wives in the headline of the article. Michelle Obama and Ann Romney were included because of their prominent roles on the campaign trail; both women headlined their own fundraising and rally events throughout election season. We searched for both first and last names of the candidates and wives in separate search strings, as most articles do not reference “Barack Obama” or “Mitt Romney” as a full name in the headline, more often referring to them as “Obama” or “Mitt”. Although we would have had a more complete sample by searching for these terms in the headline and lead paragraph or full article, we wanted to limit the sample to articles explicitly about the campaign. After searching for these terms in our six sources we went through and deleted articles that were not relevant; for example, both Paul Ryan and Joe Biden have common first names which led to the inclusion of articles that were not about the election. After selecting the relevant articles we downloaded each date’s articles in a PDF file. All of the initial dates, excluding October 24th and November 1st, were collected on November 27th, 2012.

Articles were then hand-coded by the primary researcher using the aforementioned codebook. We coded the articles into an SPSS data file so that we could easily analyze data at all stages of collection. Articles were coded by both full article and paragraph, which differed by
code. For example, we coded the frame classification for the whole article, but then coded each paragraph for the specific frame. We also coded both the main actors in the entire article and the actors mentioned in each paragraph. By examining both the overall themes of the articles and going into the more fine-grained analysis of paragraph-by-paragraph data we were able to get a more complete accounting of the content. This also meant that the number of cases we had for the paragraph data was very large (almost 2,000), which increased the reliability of our study.

After all of the coding was complete, we went back to examine the first articles coded to ensure the coding was consistent across all of the articles, as the coding was conducted over a 4-month period. We looked over codes from the first 10 articles we coded, and determined that they were in agreement with our later codes. This, combined with the intercoder reliability that we conducted, ensured that our codebook was sound and our data reliable.

Survey

In order to examine the impact media coverage of political candidates has on voter attitudes, a nationwide survey was conducted online using Amazon’s Mechanical Turk system. The survey was created as part of a research seminar class at Georgetown University, and included questions from several students on various topics. The survey was about political engagement in the 2012 presidential election, and was conducted in November 2012, after the election took place. Students and a professor collaborated to determine the questions about media habits in general and what demographic information to include, as well as the order of the questions. The survey had a total of 86 questions, which included both open and closed ended items.
The survey started with questions asking how interested participants were in the 2012 elections, and what media sources participants consume regularly. There were separate questions on television sources, print sources, and online sources, as well as social media sites used to obtain or share information about the 2012 election. Participants were asked to rate how often they watch or read certain sources, on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from “regularly” to “never”. The students determined which sources would be included, based on a previous survey which was adapted to their own needs. For the purpose of this study we included individual questions about consumption of sources *The New York Times*, *USA Today*, and *The New York Post*, as those were part of the newspaper content analysis. Participants were also asked questions on tabloid newspapers in general and entertainment magazines, as well as entertainment television shows, including daytime talk shows, late night talk shows, and evening entertainment shows. These questions determined media habits of the participants, and demonstrate how often entertainment-leaning sources such as tabloids or talk shows are consumed.

The section of the survey created for this study consisted of nine questions about participants’ evaluations of politicians, scandals, and candidate personalities. The first seven questions asked participants to agree or disagree with statements on a 5-point Likert scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree). Participants were asked if politicians should be evaluated on their personal lives versus policy issues, and also if they would hold it against a politician if they were involved in a scandal of a personal/sexual, political, or financial matter. Two questions related to coverage of politicians in entertainment based outlets. The final two questions asked how media coverage of policy issues versus candidate personalities influenced
vote choice, with the following options: reinforced my choice, changed my choice, helped me make up my mind, made no difference. All of the above questions were created by the researcher, and fine-tuned to clarify wording during a group session with other research seminar students. Basic demographic questions including age, sex, income, and education level were also included. The survey was constructed using the surveymonkey.com survey building tool, and was pre-tested by the professor to a random sample of 50 subjects before being released to the public. None of the questions used in this study were changed as a result of the pretesting.

The survey was released to the public on December 17th, after the US election on November 6th, 2012. It was released online using the Amazon service Mechanical Turk, which is a crowdsourcing platform that enables surveys to be spread online easily. Survey respondents get a small fee from each Mechanical Turk survey they complete, and Mechanical Turk respondents are generally thought to be at least as representative of the US population as more traditional respondent pools (Paolacci, Chandler, & Ipeirotis, 2010). Mechanical Turk allowed this study to be quickly spread to a wide population within the United States to ensure a representative sample. The survey was restricted to US citizens over 18, and to those who had a strong response rating on Mechanical Turk. In total 1,115 respondents took all or part of the survey, and 982 completed the survey, giving us a completion rate of 88%. The median age of participants in our survey was 29, which is lower than the median age of the US population, 37 (US Census 2009-2011 3 year estimates)2. Our oldest participant was 73, and 2.8% of the respondents were over 60, so despite the online nature of the survey we still had several older

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2 The comparatively low age of our participants may have affected our survey results: it has been found that there is a large partisan age gap, and voter turnout for young people has traditionally been low, despite a spike in 2008 (Benedict-Nelson, 2012).
participants. We also had a higher percentage of male respondents than the general population, 54.8 versus 47.0, which may be due to the political nature of the survey.

Once the survey had a sufficient number of respondents, data were downloaded from Surveymonkey.com in an SPSS data file. SPSS is a statistics software commonly used by social scientists that allows researchers to perform statistical analyses on data. Data was then analyzed using several statistical tests, and relevant findings compiled into tables and figures.

**Methods Conclusion**

The three methods presented in this section, interviews, content analysis, and survey data, complement each other and combine to give us an accurate and reliable picture of political coverage in the US and UK. In the next section, our findings and discussion, we will present the most important data from our research, and explain how the findings from the three methods can be intertwined to form an explanation of the changing nature of political coverage. We will also relate our findings to previous research in the field of media and politics, and discuss the data in relation to our hypotheses.
Analysis and Discussion

Introduction

In this chapter we will present our data from the content analysis, interviews, and survey, examine our research questions and test our hypotheses. We will also discuss our data in relation to previous literature, and highlight both the findings and non-findings that are most important to the continued study of media framing. Our content analysis data will be presented first, as these data are the cornerstone of this project. The content analysis will provide descriptive information about the articles in each country, and show the frames and topics used in each country and newspaper. Trends will be established and tests of statistical significance performed on the data to test our hypotheses.

Next, we will present the recurring themes that came up in our interviews, and see how journalists’ perceptions of political coverage in the US and UK differ. In this section we will also examine the journalists’ subjective answers to our research questions, and highlight significant topics that came up in one or more interview. We will then consider the content analysis and interviews jointly to illustrate the differences in the journalists’ perceptions of coverage, and the actual content in the coverage. This information will be discussed along with the findings of other scholars. Finally, the survey data will be interpreted, and questions relating to entertainment coverage and political versus personal scandals will be addressed.

As discussed in the previous section, these three methods were chosen to work together to demonstrate how framing and entertainment coverage of political stories in the US and UK are different, and how journalism has evolved in the past 20 years. They also combine to show the stages of Lasswell’s communication model: who, says what, in which channel, to whom, with
what effect (Lasswell, 1948). The interviews give context to the content analysis data, and show what experienced journalists’ views are on political coverage. As two of our interviews were with journalists who work for UK newspapers in the US, they were able to give a comparative analysis of the state of the media in both countries and highlight the major differences in coverage.

The content analysis of six newspapers, three in each country, demonstrate concretely how coverage of the 2012 US presidential election differed in both countries. We will also look at how framing, topics and tone differed in each of the newspapers, which were chosen using a matched-sample technique in order to accurately compare tabloids, mid-market, and quality newspapers. Newspapers were chosen rather than television or online sources because of their ability to set the agenda for political coverage, and because the newspaper systems in the US and UK have several major differences, despite some similarities. Lastly, the survey on political effects in the US will give us insight into how political coverage affects the average voter, and what issues are most important to them. An online survey was selected as the easiest and quickest way to get a representative sample of the US population to answer questions on entertainment coverage, scandals, and policy issues. In this chapter we will also discuss the overall implications of our findings and how they relate to the broader field of media and politics. The research questions and hypotheses that we are addressing are:

**UK vs. US framing and coverage**

RQ1: Is the entertainment frame of politics more prominent in the US or UK coverage of the 2012 US presidential elections?
H₁: The entertainment frame will be more prominent in the UK coverage of US presidential elections than in the US coverage.

H₂: UK coverage of presidential figures will focus more on personalities of figures, gaffes, and personal scandals than US coverage.

H₃: US coverage will focus more on policy issues than UK coverage.

**Tabloid vs. quality newspapers framing and coverage**

RQ₂: How does framing and coverage of election stories differ in tabloid and quality newspapers?

H₄: Articles in tabloid newspapers will be more focused on the entertainment frame and quality newspapers will have more policy coverage

H₅: Tabloid newspaper articles will be shorter than quality newspaper articles.

**Tone in the US vs. UK**

H₆: The UK will take a less favorable tone towards Mitt Romney than incumbent Barack Obama, and the US will have a more balanced tone overall.

**Impact of digital media on journalism and political coverage**

RQ₃: What has been the impact of digital media and new technology on journalism and political coverage?

**Impact of coverage on the public**

H₇: Those who get their news primarily from tabloid or entertainment sources will evaluate politicians on personal or sexual scandals more than those who get news from non-entertainment sources.
Content Analysis Data

The content analysis we conducted included a comprehensive study of articles in the US and UK from six newspapers. For each country, we selected newspapers of varying qualities, so had a total of two tabloids, two mid-markets, and two quality or broadsheet newspapers. The newspapers we will be analyzing, in order from tabloid to quality are: *The New York Post*, *USA Today*, and *The New York Times* in the US; and *The Sun*, *The Daily Mail*, and *The Guardian* in the UK. As explained in the Chapter 3, a selection of articles relating to the 2012 presidential campaign was analyzed thoroughly using a codebook we developed. For this study, we are focusing on the framing of the articles in each country, as well as topics covered and tone towards candidates. These elements were coded by article and by paragraph to give us concrete data that represents the landscape of political coverage in both countries.

Framing in the US and UK.

Our complete data set included 114 articles and 1,884 paragraphs. 46 articles, or 40.4%, were from the UK, and 68, 59.6%, were from the US. In the UK, there were 13 articles from *The Sun*, 6 from *The Daily Mail*, and 27 from *The Guardian*. In the United States we had 18 articles from *The New York Post*, 17 from *USA Today*, and 33 from *The New York Times*. We analyzed the frequency of topics and frames in the individual newspapers and across the countries to compare differences in newspaper content. The story frames were compared in three ways according to the frame chart we developed: the general frame classification for each entire article (politics, process, ideas, or entertainment), the specific frame for each paragraph, and the specific paragraph frames combined into the general frame classifications according to Table 1.1.
Table 1.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame Classification</th>
<th>Specific Frames</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Politics</td>
<td>1) Horserace/strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) Public Opinion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Process</td>
<td>3) Media Process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4) Political Process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Ideas</td>
<td>5) Policy Issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6) Ideology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7) Retrospective Evaluations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8) Prospective Evaluations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Entertainment</td>
<td>9) Personal Character</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10) Scandal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11) Soft News</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12) Celebrity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Frame Classifications for all articles, which were the primary frames for each article overall, were distributed as follows: 20.2% politics, 22.8% process, 35.1% ideas, and 21.9% entertainment. When the frames were analyzed by paragraph and then brought back into the four categories the distribution changed slightly, to 16.0% politics, 27.0% process, 39.5% ideas, and 17.4% entertainment. This represents the fact that although articles may have been primarily framed “entertainment”, they often also included paragraphs with other frames, such as horserace-framed paragraphs that mentioned polling data.

Several of the frames have noticeable differences between countries, including all of the frames in the “ideas” category. There are also differences in the four entertainment frames: personal, scandal, soft news, and celebrity, which we will discuss in more detail below. Interestingly, when we collapsed these specific frames back into the four general frame classifications, the differences evened out and were not significant. Therefore, although there was a difference in specific frames used in each country, there was not a significant difference in
the number of general “entertainment” framed stories in each country, which does not support our first hypothesis.

Table 1.2 shows the specific frames broken down by country, which has a Pearson’s Chi-Square of .000, showing that the results are significant and did not occur by chance. These results also have a Cramer’s V of .311, demonstrating that we are able to predict the paragraph frame 31.1% more accurately when we know the country.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame</th>
<th>UK</th>
<th>US</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Horse Race</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
<td>14.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Opinion</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media Process</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Process</td>
<td>25.8%</td>
<td>23.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy Issues</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideology</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retrospective Evaluations</td>
<td>17.1%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prospective Evaluations</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scandal</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soft News</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrity</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: The Pearson Chi-Square for Frames by Paragraph in the US and UK was statistically significant (p<.000). Total n=1,836. UK paragraphs had n=613, and US paragraphs had n=1223. Paragraphs with no frame (n=48) were not included in this analysis.*

Our second hypothesis stated: H2: UK coverage of presidential figures will focus more on personalities of figures, gaffes, and scandals than US coverage. When we combine coverage of personalities of figures, gaffes, and scandals together, this hypothesis is not supported. However, the UK did have more scandal-framed paragraphs than the US, 4.9% versus 2.8%, which
included both scandals and gaffes. The opposite of this hypothesis was demonstrated for coverage of personalities of the candidates, as the US used the personality frame for more than double the paragraphs than the UK. To examine this further, we isolated the entertainment cases in each country and ran tests of statistical significance. Table 1.3 shows the entertainment-framed paragraphs broken down by country, which were statistically significant (P<.000), and had a Cramer’s V of .51.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1.3 Entertainment frame by country</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frame</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scandal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soft News</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: The Pearson’s chi-square was significant (p<.000), and n=319, UK n=116, US n=203.*

As shown, the US framed 54.7% of its entertainment paragraphs with the personal frame, while the UK only used the personal frame for 21.6% of entertainment paragraphs. The UK used the scandal frame slightly more (25.9% compared to 16.7%), and the UK used the celebrity frame much more for entertainment stories: 38.8%, versus only 3.4% of entertainment paragraphs in the US.

The policy frames showed a similar pattern to the four entertainment frames. When the four sub-frames under the policy frame classification are combined, the difference between the two countries is not large: the UK had 37.7% policy frame versus 40.5% in the US. This does not support our third hypothesis that the policy frame would be used more often in the US.
However, there are bigger differences between the use of sub-frames in the US and UK. The US used the ideology frame for 6.1% of paragraphs, while the UK only used it for 1.8%. The retrospective evaluations frame was used more often by the UK: 17.1% to only 8.3% in the US, but the prospective evaluations frame was used more by the US, who had 6.2% forward-looking evaluations compared to 2.8% in the UK.

**Topics in the US and UK.**

Since we coded articles and paragraphs for both frame and primary topic (which could be different from the frame), we also can examine the differences in entertainment and other topics covered in each country. We collapsed the 56 topics that were coded into 8 larger categories: institutions, election, campaign, entertainment, foreign policy, economy, other domestic policy, and other. When examined by paragraph data, the topics covered were found to be significantly different in the US and the UK. Table 1.4 illustrates the differences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paragraph Topic</th>
<th>UK</th>
<th>US</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Institutions</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Election</td>
<td>20.5%</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campaign</td>
<td>35.3%</td>
<td>40.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Policy</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Domestic Policy</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: The Pearson Chi-Square for Topics by Paragraph in the US and UK was statistically significant (p<.000). Total n=1,884. UK paragraphs n=629, US paragraphs n=1255.*
The difference between entertainment topics in the US and UK is small (11.3% in the UK and 12.7% in the US), which reinforces the findings from the framing analysis that our first hypothesis is not supported. However, several other topics had larger differences in coverage in each country. Election topics, which included overviews and retrospectives of each campaign and presidential debate coverage, were covered more often in the UK press, which devoted 20.5% of its paragraphs to this category. Only 12.4% of the US paragraphs had a main topic in this category.

Several of the policy categories also differed by country. For example, the UK had over twice as many foreign policy paragraphs as the US, while the US had over twice as many economy paragraphs as the UK. Both devoted over a third of their space to campaign stories, which included stories on campaign organization, top candidates’ activities on the campaign trail, campaign advertisements, and election standings. When we look at our third hypothesis by the topic data rather than by the framing data it is supported. With the exception of foreign policy stories, the US had a greater percentage of coverage in every other policy category than the UK.

**Framing by newspaper.**

In addition to looking at frames by country, it is also interesting to examine how the frames covered differ by newspaper. As we included three types of newspapers from each country in this study (tabloid, mid-market, and quality), we expected there to be differences in frame and topic between the newspapers, especially when comparing the tabloid and quality newspapers at either end of the spectrum. When we analyze the frames by newspaper, all three measures of framing are found to be statistically significant. That is, the differences in framing were significant at both the paragraph and article level, and for both the 12 specific frames, and
condensed into the four general frame classifications. Table 1.5 shows the paragraph frames by newspaper, collapsed from the 12 frames into the four frame classifications.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspaper Type and Title</th>
<th>Politics</th>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Ideas</th>
<th>Entertainment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UK Tabloid: <em>The Sun</em></td>
<td>16.5%</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
<td>51.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US Tabloid: <em>The New York Post</em></td>
<td>29.2%</td>
<td>15.8%</td>
<td>31.2%</td>
<td>23.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK Mid-Market: <em>The Daily Mail</em></td>
<td>34.3%</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
<td>22.9%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US Mid-Market: <em>USA Today</em></td>
<td>19.2%</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
<td>40.9%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK Quality: <em>The Guardian</em></td>
<td>13.9%</td>
<td>32.2%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US Quality: <em>The New York Times</em></td>
<td>9.4%</td>
<td>31.1%</td>
<td>43.5%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* The Pearson Chi-Square for *Newspaper Frames by Paragraph* was statistically significant (p<.000). Total n=1,836. Paragraphs with no frame (n=48) were not included in this analysis.

This information supports our fourth hypothesis, which stated: **H₄:** Articles in tabloid newspapers will be more focused on the entertainment frame and shorter than quality newspaper articles. The two tabloid newspapers examined, *The Sun* in the UK and *The New York Post* in the US both had the largest percentage of entertainment-framed paragraphs in their respective countries. *The Sun* had 51.6% entertainment-framed paragraphs, while *The New York Post* had 23.8%. In addition, both tabloids had the least amount of ideas-framed paragraphs compared to the mid-market and quality newspapers in the US and UK. In the UK, *The Sun* had only 15.1% ideas paragraphs, while quality newspaper *The Guardian* had 48% ideas paragraphs. In the US, *The New York Post* had 31.2% ideas paragraphs, while *The New York Times* had 43.5% ideas paragraphs.
The distinctions between type of newspaper are less clear when we look at the mid-market papers in the US and UK. In these cases, *The Daily Mail* had over twice as many entertainment-framed paragraphs as *USA Today*, while *USA Today* had 18% more space devoted to ideas than *The Daily Mail*. The politics and process frames are also more difficult to predict by newspaper type; for example, *The New York Post* had 29.2% politics paragraphs compared to only 16.5% in fellow tabloid *The Sun*.

**Newspaper article length.**

We hypothesized that articles in tabloid newspapers would be shorter than articles in quality newspapers. To examine this question, we performed a one-way ANOVA to compare the mean lengths of articles in all six newspapers. The mean length in words, in order from tabloid to quality newspapers, was as follows: *The Sun*: 259, *The New York Post*: 412, *The Daily Mail*: 349, *USA Today*: 700, *The Guardian*: 889, and *The New York Times*: 1070. As expected, in both countries the length goes from shortest in tabloid newspapers to longest in quality newspapers, with the mid-market newspapers in the middle. In addition, significant differences at the p<.05 level were found between both tabloids and both quality newspapers, and the *Daily Mail* and both quality newspapers. *USA Today* had a significant difference in length from UK tabloid *The Sun* and US quality newspaper *The New York Times*. Finally, *The New York Times* had significantly longer stories than all newspapers except its matched-sample *The Guardian*. These data supports hypothesis five.

**Tone towards candidates.**

Our sixth hypothesis states that “The UK will take a less favorable tone towards Mitt Romney than incumbent Barack Obama, and the US will have a more balanced tone overall.”
Tone was coded both by paragraph, for reinforcing, deflating, or mixed comments, or straight description, and by article on a scale from “extremely negative” to “extremely positive” for both candidates. Overall, the differences in tone, without taking country into account, were significant, as shown by Table 1.6.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Romney</th>
<th>Obama</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reinforcing comments</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deflating comments</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed comments</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Straight description</td>
<td>57.1%</td>
<td>48.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: The Pearson Chi-Square was statistically significant (p<.00), total n=1,860. Romney n=914, Obama n=946.*

The main difference in tone was in the “reinforcing comments” category; 19% of paragraphs that mention Obama had reinforcing comments, and only 10.1% of Romney paragraphs included reinforcing comments.

Next we looked at how tone differed by candidate and by country. When comparing the countries’ tones towards each candidate individually, the differences in tone in the US and UK was significant for Obama mentions, but not for Romney mentions. The percentages can be seen in Table 1.7.
Table 1.7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tone towards candidates in the US and UK</th>
<th>US</th>
<th>UK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reinforcing Obama</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reinforcing Romney</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deflating Obama</td>
<td>29.3%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deflating Romney</td>
<td>30.8%</td>
<td>31.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed Obama</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed Romney</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Straight Description Obama</td>
<td>48.9%</td>
<td>48.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Straight Description Romney</td>
<td>57.8%</td>
<td>55.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* The difference in tone by country was significant for Obama (p<.05), but not for Romney. When comparing tone towards candidate within each country, both countries had significantly different tones towards Obama and Romney (US p<.000, UK p<.001). total n=1,860. Romney n=914, Obama n=946.

The main differences in tone towards Obama by country were in the deflating and mixed comments categories. In both the US and UK, around 19% of paragraphs had reinforcing comments towards Obama, whereas the US had 29.3% deflating paragraphs, while the UK only had 26% deflating paragraphs. The UK had more mixed paragraphs towards Obama than the US: 6.5% to 2.9%.

We then ran a cross tabulation on the difference in tone towards both candidates by country to determine if either country had significant differences in treatment towards Obama and Romney. There was a significant difference in tone towards Obama and Romney by paragraph both in the UK (chi-square p<.001), and in the US (chi-square p<.000). This shows that both countries had different tones towards Obama and Romney. As Table 1.7 demonstrates, both countries had more favorable coverage of Obama than Romney when comparing their
“reinforcing comments” percentages, which does not support our hypothesis that the UK would take a less favorable tone towards Romney than the US. Both countries had an almost identical percent of deflating paragraphs towards Romney, 30.8% and 31.3%, but that difference was not significant. This shows that Obama had different treatment in the US versus the UK press, but Romney had similar treatment in both countries. The US and the UK both treated the candidates differently, and both countries were more reinforcing towards Obama.

We also coded for the overall bias towards Obama and Romney for each article, and found that by country neither candidate had significant differences in bias. As with the paragraph data, we then tested to see if either country had a difference in tone towards each candidate. Neither of these comparisons had a significant difference, however the UK had a chi-square that was approaching significance (p<.09), whereas the US was not approaching significance (p<.67).

Finally, we examined the tone towards each candidate by newspaper. The results for each candidate were statistically significant when compared to the six newspapers, showing that, for example, The Sun had significantly less reinforcing comments towards Obama than USA Today. In addition, when comparing the two candidates’ coverage in each newspaper, all were significant except for the Daily Mail, which was approaching significance at (p<.11). These percentages are illustrated in Table 1.8.
Table 1.8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>The Sun</th>
<th>New York Post</th>
<th>Daily Mail</th>
<th>USA Today</th>
<th>The Guardian</th>
<th>New York Times</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reinforcing Obama</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>16.9%</td>
<td>20.8%</td>
<td>23.0%</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reinforcing Romney</td>
<td>22.4%</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deflating Obama</td>
<td>35.0%</td>
<td>44.6%</td>
<td>17.0%</td>
<td>24.5%</td>
<td>28.4%</td>
<td>29.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deflating Romney</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
<td>29.8%</td>
<td>33.1%</td>
<td>39.4%</td>
<td>35.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Straight Description</td>
<td>48.3%</td>
<td>38.5%</td>
<td>62.3%</td>
<td>52.5%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>50.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obama</td>
<td>67.3%</td>
<td>63.8%</td>
<td>61.7%</td>
<td>57.9%</td>
<td>51.9%</td>
<td>57.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romney</td>
<td>63.8%</td>
<td>61.7%</td>
<td>57.9%</td>
<td>51.9%</td>
<td>57.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The differences in tone by newspaper for each candidate were significant for Obama (p<.007) and Romney (p<.000). Comparing tone towards both candidates by newspaper, all were significant at a (p<.01) or higher level, except The Daily Mail (p<.11). Total n=1,802. Obama n=905, Romney n=897.

As shown, there are several notable differences in coverage by newspaper: The Sun and The New York Post both had more reinforcing comments towards Romney than Obama (22.4% vs. 16.7% in The Sun, and 18.1% vs. 16.9% in The New York Post). These two outlets also both had a much larger percentage of deflating comments towards Obama than Romney, and both had more straight description paragraphs towards Romney than Obama. The Sun had 67.3% straight description paragraphs towards Romney, and only 48.3% towards Obama, while The New York Post had 63.8% straight description Romney paragraphs, and 38.5% for Obama. The New York Times and The Guardian both had more than double the amount of reinforcing comments towards Obama than Romney; The Guardian had 21.6% Obama reinforcing comments and only
8.8% Romney reinforcing comments, while *The New York Times* had 18.9% Obama versus 7.4% Romney reinforcing paragraphs. *USA Today* and *The Daily Mail* also had more reinforcing comments towards Obama then Romney, although *The Daily Mail’s* results were not significant.

Out of outlets in the UK, *The Guardian* had the most reinforcing Obama comments (21.6%), and in the US, *USA Today* had the most reinforcing Obama coverage (23.0%). On the other hand, *The New York Post* and *The Sun* were most deflating to Obama (44.6% in the *New York Post* and 35.0% in *The Sun*). In the UK, *The Sun* was most favorable to Romney, and in the US *The New York Post* had the highest percentage of reinforcing comments towards Romney, 18.1%. All of the outlets except *The Sun* and *The New York Post* had over 50% straight description paragraphs towards both candidates.

**Content analysis conclusion.**

Our content analysis provided us with several findings that support our hypothesis, and some interesting non-findings. Our first research question asked: RQ1: Is the entertainment frame of politics more prominent in the US or UK coverage of the 2012 US presidential elections? We felt that the UK would have more entertainment-framed stories, and more coverage of personalities and scandal than the US. We also hypothesized that the US would cover policy stories more than the UK. These hypotheses were only partly supported. The entertainment frame as a whole was not more prominent in the UK than the US; in fact they had a very similar number of entertainment-framed paragraphs, which was not what we predicted in hypothesis one. The UK also did not have more coverage of personalities; the US had over double the amount of personal-framed paragraphs than the UK. As expected, the UK did have more scandal-framed coverage than the US. This partially supports our second hypothesis, but it
is not supported fully as the US had more personal stories. Our third hypothesis was supported by both the framing and topic data, as the US had more policy-framed stories than the UK, and a higher number of policy topics in all categories except foreign policy.

The second research question asked: RQ2: How does framing and coverage of election stories differ in tabloid and quality newspapers? We hypothesized that tabloid newspapers would have more entertainment stories and less policy than quality newspapers, and that tabloids would have shorter articles. Both of these hypotheses were conclusively supported. The last part of our content analysis looks at tone in the US and UK towards each candidate. Hypothesis 6 stated: H6: The UK will take a less favorable tone towards Mitt Romney than incumbent Barack Obama, and the US will have a more balanced tone overall. This was partially supported. While the UK was less favorable to Romney than Obama, the US was equally unfavorable to Romney. Thus, the US did not have a more balanced tone overall. We also looked at tone towards candidate by newspaper, and found that the two tabloid newspapers were the most supportive of Romney. In the next section we will lay out our interview findings, and we will then discuss the implications of the interviews and content analysis together.

**Interview Analysis**

We conducted 3 qualitative interviews with journalists who have familiarity with the press in the US or UK and political reporting. Our interviews were with Toby Harnden of *The Sunday Times*, *The Guardian’s* Ewen MacAskill, and *New York Magazine’s* John Heilemann. Interviews were analyzed by highlighting relevant quotes or passages and then placing them into categories based on emergent themes. This allowed us to easily combine and organize the content from all the interviews but still identify the quotes’ source. This method is called
“thematic analysis”, and allows a researcher to explain the data comprehensively without providing the entire interview transcripts (Burnard, 1991). The purpose of our interviews was to give context to our content analysis data, and to ask participants of their perceptions of political coverage in the US and UK.

**Interview themes.**

Our thematic analysis provided us with several themes and sub-themes that represented the content of our interviews. After combining some of the categories and establishing sub-categories, 8 main themes and 17 sub-themes remained. The main themes are: 2008 vs. 2012 elections, which includes analysis on the differences between the two elections; attitudes towards politicians, which demonstrates the public’s feelings towards Romney and Obama; pop culture in the news; policy stories; the changing nature of technology and news, which illustrates the changes in newsgathering and how technology has contributed to this shift; personal/“soft” information necessary, alluding to the availability of basic policy and biographical information; what the audience wants, and competition between newspapers. Passages that did not fit easily into any of our established categories were discarded (this only included 2 passages, which did not contain any information that added to our research). Each sub-theme had at least 4 supporting statements from the interviews. These themes and sub-themes can be seen in Figure 2.1.
Figure 2.1. Themes and sub-themes that came out of a thematic analysis of 3 expert interviews. Each theme is backed up by several related passages from the interviews.

Themes varied from general thoughts on the changing nature of technology and news, to more specific passages on coverage of policy or pop culture in both the US and the UK.

Several of the themes had sub-themes: for 2008 vs. 2012 elections these were: interest level in each year, and significant stories in 2008 and 2012; attitudes towards politicians had sub-themes...
on the gap between private and public images, British feelings towards candidates, and Romney as “out of touch”; the changing nature of news and technology theme had two sub-themes, new platforms and a shift in newsgathering. What the audience wants included themes on US and UK tone, Internet hits, and *The New York Times*’ as a “high priest of information”. Finally, competition between newspapers is broken down into influence of specific newspapers, competition, and tabloid versus quality papers. Each of our interviewees discussed politics and media from a different standpoint, but we were able to combine similar statements so that we could construct a picture of both the comparisons between the US and the UK, and how coverage of politics is changing overall. In general, content comparing the US and UK press and information about the traits of the UK press system came from Toby Harnden and Ewen MacAskill, who work for different UK newspapers in Washington, DC. The specific anecdotes about the 2008 and 2012 US presidential elections came from Ewen MacAskill and John Heilemann, who were both on the campaign trail in 2008 and 2012. They each have an intimate knowledge of presidential political coverage, but sometimes had different views as they were covering the races for different audiences.

**Framework of themes.**

To explain the themes in more detail as related to our hypothesis about the prominence of entertainment-style coverage in each country, and research question on the influence of new technology on journalism, we organized our themes into a framework. Figure 2.2 organizes the themes by illustrating how one theme influences another. This overarching framework attempts to explain how different factors have influenced media coverage, and what results from these changes in coverage. We were able to fit 7 of our 8 themes into this framework, with the 2008
vs. 2012 elections theme as an outlier. This framework shows that most of the themes stem from the changing nature of news and technology, which has impacted both the influence and competition between newspapers, and the necessity of personal or “soft” news. The change in competition between papers has then led into papers giving the audience what they want, and from this theme we go into discussion of pop culture and policy stories. The personal and soft information that has become more prevalent because of technology leads to changing attitudes towards politicians. These categories represent a flow from one to the next. Finally, the 2008 vs. 2012 election theme sits outside the framework, and is a case study that provides examples for the rest of the themes.

Figure 2.2. How the changing nature of technology and news has influenced both the press structure and content of political coverage in the US and UK.

**Changing technology and news.**

As Figure 2 shows, most of the themes that were discussed stem out of how technology and news have changed over the past 20 years. John Heilemann discussed at length how technological platforms have altered the news business, highlighting new technologies that have emerged in each election cycle since 1988, including affordable satellites for news, cable TV, the
Internet, Facebook, and Twitter (personal communication, March 18, 2013). He argued that these platforms have fundamentally changed several characteristics of news coverage, as they have broken down the hierarchy that used to exist in news outlets, gotten rid of any notion of a “news cycle”, and allowed more, less experienced people to be journalists, which has resulted in the traditional outlets losing money and resources for reporting. On this trend being a permanent shift in coverage, Heilemann stated:

So the things that have made it, that have eroded the economics of the traditional news business, that have empowered millions of people who were never considered journalists before to perform functions that traditional journalists used to perform, the basic commoditization of basic facts—therefore increasing focus on soft news, and on analysis, and on commentary— all of those things are baked in the cake…all of these forces are not abating, if anything they’re gathering steam, and the direction that we’re headed is really clear (personal communication, March 18, 2013).

Harnden and MacAskill also spoke about this shift in coverage away from traditional reporting and towards a new model that is heavily influenced by technology. Harnden noted that web traffic has a large impact on coverage, saying that journalists are often asked to write several pieces of online content a day, which takes time away from traditional reporting. MacAskill agreed that this is a permanent shift in coverage, noting that because young people get their news online, web platforms have become central to newspapers (T. Harnden, personal communication, February 27, 2013; E. MacAskill, personal communication, March 14, 2013).
Competition between papers.

From the changing nature of technology and news, our framework branches into the influences of this new media ecosystem. We will first discuss how technology has impacted competition between newspapers and outlets. Participants were asked which newspapers they thought were most influential in either the US or the UK. All three interviewees stated that the New York Times is one of the most influential papers in the US: Heilemann stated that it still sets the agenda for cable news and is a “consequential institution”; Harnden said that “there is still something here about the New York Times, as there always has been”; and MacAskill called it “one of the best papers in the world”. Heilemann also mentioned The Wall Street Journal and USA Today as influential in the US, and MacAskill mentioned The Guardian, The Times, and The Daily Telegraph in the UK. Harnden discussed the importance of two British tabloids; The Daily Mail because it is “the most middle-England, middle-class, person on the street” paper, and The Sun because of the weight it has over politics in the UK.

Harnden also noted the differences between US and UK tabloids, comparing the political endorsements of The Sun to the New York Post: “who the New York Post endorses is sort of interesting but not that important, but who The Sun endorses is huge” (personal communication, February 27, 2013). This brings us into the next sub-theme, the division between tabloid and quality newspapers in each country. Both MacAskill and Harnden stated that UK tabloids drive coverage in the quality newspapers. MacAskill said The Guardian doesn’t break sex scandals, but often covers them once they appear in the tabloids. Harnden also said that the lines between tabloid and quality newspapers have blurred in recent years. This is in contrast to Heilemann’s impression of tabloids in the US: he said that newspapers such as The
New York Post are still very much local papers, and have little national impact. Heilemann also spoke about The National Enquirer, using the John Edwards affair story as an example of their weak authority: “They were the only people who were reporting on the Edwards thing in real time, and because it was “just the national enquirer”, from the establishment press’ point of view…it didn’t go anywhere” (personal communication, March 18, 2013).

Technology has vastly influenced competition between papers. Both British journalists spoke about how newspaper websites change competition between outlets, and Harnden said that The Telegraph (a quality newspaper) sees its main competition as the tabloid The Daily Mail, partly because of The Mail’s online success. Harnden and MacAskill both referenced the fierce competition between papers in the UK: “Most of the British papers are located in London, the journalists know each other and they’re competing for the same audience. Whereas in America the papers are spread out” (E. MacAskill, personal communication, March 14, 2013).

A theme that came up repeatedly was technology’s breaking down of borders and its influence on newspapers. Because of competition for American web traffic, The Guardian no longer thinks of its rivals as within the UK, but instead regards The New York Times as a main competitor. Both Harnden and MacAskill had almost identical statements about the old relationship between the US and UK press. Harnden said “You can’t just regurgitate The New York Times or Washington Post, as I think used to happen a lot”, while MacAskill said of past coverage “So when I get up in the morning and there’s a good story in The New York Times or Washington Post, I could easily regurgitate it and present it as news to Guardian readers. Well that’s sort of long ceased to be the case.”
What the audience wants.

Fierce competition has led to a change in content in newspapers, as papers competing for the same audience have become more attuned to what people actually want to read. The stories that generate the most Internet traffic are often short entertainment stories: “if you look at the best read stories…it could be a sports story about David Beckham, it might be some strange video or some strange view about a current food fad. Now and again it might be Obama and a budget stand-off, but people are coming for those [previous] stories” (E. MacAskill, personal communication, March 14, 2013). Harnden mentioned that short Sarah Palin stories often generated hits, and both he and MacAskill emphasized the need for balance between policy and entertainment stories.

The tone of stories often differs in the US and UK, and MacAskill said “we can’t compete in terms of newsgathering [with US papers], so we do it in a different way…and it’s serious but there’s also a sense of humor, skepticism, that American papers don’t seem to like to engage in”. This demonstrates how trying to appeal to a UK audience is different from engaging with a US audience, even when covering similar topics. The idea of “objectivity” also came up:

In Britain you’re allowed to editorialize copy in a way that you wouldn’t in America. I don’t believe you can be truly objective in a news story…Americans have this idea, when you say X says something you have to say Y says something, and somehow that’s balanced…our attitude is, you try to be fair, you try to be honest. (E. MacAskill, personal communication, March 14, 2013)

Another example of a difference in coverage was when The Guardian presented the election in a graphic comic-strip format with tongue-in-cheek captions on their website. MacAskill said that
although this entertaining feature was popular online, he couldn’t imagine an American paper illustrating the election in the same way.

The idea of giving the audience what it wants to read, especially when there are now so many specialized news outlets, was something that resonated strongly with MacAskill and Harnden when speaking about American papers. Of The New York Times and their attitude while choosing what stories to cover, Harnden scoffed and said “they’re having this debate about what if we put this on the front page, that it sort of confers respectability on it, and you may get a little bit of that at The Guardian, but that sort of thinking is pretty absent from British papers” (personal communication, February 27, 2013). He referenced the American model of journalism as “what an elite group of people decide is good for you”, versus the British model where outlets such as The Daily Mail are more attuned to the audience’s desires.

MacAskill agreed, saying of an increase in entertainment stories:

I don’t see it in The New York Times, it’s certainly in The Guardian, and I think in general. Before there was an attitude in journalism that the reporters were kind of high priests of information, we would tell you what we think you would be reading. Well that’s gone now because of the Internet, people can choose who they want to read. As you know, the biggest readership is for The Daily Mail online, which has lots of celeb news and salacious stories (personal communication, March 14, 2013).

In the US, Heilemann also acknowledged that even The New York Times has had to change its reporting model, saying that they used to look down on entertainment stories, but “in this bigger, much more decentralized, democratized environment it’s much more like ‘give the people what they want’” (personal communication, March 18, 2013).
Pop culture stories.

The theme of giving the audience what they want leads into a discussion on the prominence of both pop culture and policy stories. All three journalists talked about the increasing presence of pop culture in politics, both in general and in the news. This has to do with not only providing the audience with stories they will read, but also because “as a culture, the broad scale celebrification and infection of popular culture into all aspects of the information sphere, that just takes up a much bigger space” (J. Heilemann, personal communication, March 18, 2013). The participants all acknowledge that pop culture is present in the news mix now, saying that there needs to be a balance between heavy policy and lighter entertainment stories. Both Heilemann and MacAskill said that the barriers between serious and frivolous don’t exist any more, and that mixing the two is necessary to attract audiences.

Heilemann pointed out that one of the reasons pop culture and politics are combined in the news now is because the barriers between the two have collapsed outside of the media as well. He stressed the importance of politicians relating to citizens, and said “that’s part of the increasing sophistication of politics— is that they recognize that part of the way you talk to people is by finding entry points into their daily lives, and a lot of that revolves around culture”.

Harnden stated that the UK has more entertainment stories than the US because pop culture and celebrities are seen as mainstream news in the UK. He cited the British obsession with reality TV and shows such as Downton Abbey, which take up a considerable amount of space in newspapers and magazines. Part of this coverage has to do with the accessibility of the topics and attracting readers, as Harnden said: “If there’s a way to make something very accessible, link it to a movie; if you write about something like the killing of Bin Laden they’ll
illustrate it with Jennifer Chastilain [sic] or whatever from Zero Dark Thirty” (personal communication, February 27, 2013). MacAskill agreed that British papers have more entertainment stories than US papers, saying Brits are often more interested in the lifestyles of politicians than policy.

Policy stories.

All three participants had numerous thoughts on media coverage of policy. MacAskill stated that there is a resistance to policy stories in both the US and the UK, and said it’s difficult to get a big readership for long stories on issues such as healthcare. He compared a heavy policy story to a sex scandal and said if you write about Afghanistan failing and the US military “you’ll get maybe a polite small readership. You write about David Patraeus involved in a sex scandal, there’s no comparison” (E. MacAskill, personal communication, March 14, 2013).

Harnden said that US foreign policy stories are often of interest to the British public because America’s actions affect the rest of the world. More entertainment stories don’t necessarily equal less depth in coverage. Of this he said, “Is there less depth than there used to be? Well I’m not so sure there is, there might be in individual newspapers, but the thing is with the web there are so many great specialist publications” (personal communication, February 27, 2013), something MacAskill also mentioned when referencing the numerous political stories of websites like Politico and The Hill.

On policy interest in America, Heilemann took a slightly different view, saying that “policy” stories can’t always be grouped together. He gave the example of Obamacare as a policy issue Americans cared about, versus the Benghazi story, which the public was not interested in: “It can be a glamorous story, it can even be a story that involves death, but it’s a
story that happened 7,000 miles away, and has no effect on the real lives of real people” (personal communication, March 18, 2013). Because of this, he said, “there are policy stories and then there are policy stories. You can’t categorize it all as one kettle of fish, it totally depends on the story and people’s ability to see the relevance to their life.” The three answers on policy differed slightly, but all agreed that the presence of specialized websites meant that heavy policy reporting has not disappeared, even if it is less prevalent in the mainstream media.

**Personal/“soft” information necessary in news.**

On the lower branch of our framework are two more themes that demonstrate how technology has influenced news and political reporting. One major influence technology has had on political coverage is the wide availability of basic information to the public. 20 years ago a reporter writing about a speech in Iowa would have to describe what was actually said in the speech, which would be news in itself. Now, anyone can watch a speech on Youtube “so you want to give the flavor of it, but more you want to say, well what was it like in the room and what was the context” (J. Heilemann, personal communication, March 14, 2013). Heilemann described this in the context of the 2012 Denver debate, saying that readers want behind the scenes information on what was going on in Obama’s head, not a detailed description of the debate itself.

Heilemann also talked about this change in reporting as relating to the increase in “soft” news and personal information about candidates. When writing stories about politicians, journalists need to find information that isn’t on a candidate’s website or Wikipedia page. This pushes journalists to report on candidates’ personalities and family life, rather than their commonly known policy positions. Of this need to delve into personal information to provide
new material, he said “that’s a direct consequence of this huge technological and social change, in terms of what’s available to people, at their fingertips, at any given moment.”

Politicians also sometimes court this softer, more personal approach to news, and Obama often goes for niche markets to get his message out more effectively. Harnden discussed the benefits of this type of coverage for politicians, stating

If you open up yourself to an hour long interview with The New York Times, you’ll get much tougher questions than if you do like Running World, who goes running with Obama. And when that happens, you get on the front page, and you get all of this gossip coverage (personal communication, February 27, 2013).

While Harnden said that local reporters occasionally ask tough questions to politicians, in general he emphasized that local or entertainment outlets result in softer pieces.

**Attitudes towards politicians.**

The softer nature of some political coverage can lead to differing attitudes towards politicians that are often based on personality. Within this category we have three sub-themes: the gap between the private and public images of politicians, the British attitudes towards Romney and Obama, and Romney being seen as “out of touch” by both the public and journalists. Even with the proliferation of intimate details about candidates, the public is still aware that the public and private images of politicians differ. John Heilemann discussed coverage of candidates’ personalities, saying “David Axelrod [Obama campaign advisor] always says presidential campaigns are like MRIs of the soul…there’s wall to wall coverage, intense, flesh blanching scrutiny all the time. The truth about people, who they are, will come out” (personal communication, March 18, 2013).
The disparity between the private and public image of candidates is something campaigns constantly try and manage. Heilemann discussed the 47% video, a secret video that showed Romney discussing his feelings on government entitlement. He explained that one of the reasons the video was such a huge moment in the campaign was that the public “rarely ever get a glimpse into the private... it reinforced like, so this is what he says when he’s with all the other rich people”

One of the major sub-themes was that Romney was distant and out-of-touch, and that he encouraged this view by committing gaffes on the campaign trail. MacAskill and Heilemann told of the continuous story line that the Romney campaign tried to fight; that he was rich, out-of-touch with the ordinary citizen, and had a wooden personality. They gave several examples of ways that Romney exacerbated his “plutocrat problem” rather than ameliorating it, including the $10,000 bet he made on stage in a debate, and his gaffe about his wife owning 4 Cadillac’s. Heilemann discussed one soft news story that voters continued to bring up: Mitt Romney strapping his dog to the roof of his car, and how a story so irrelevant to politics could be so influential. On its importance he said:

Many people would say not important at all compared to his views on what to do with a nuclear Iran. Other people would say, like, hugely revealing of his character. Those people would say, I have no fucking idea what he’s going to do about Iran once he gets in office, but I do know he strapped his dog to the roof of the car. You could belittle it, or you could be like, well, that’s a human thing. Most people understand that in a way they don’t understand the policy (J. Heilemann, personal communication, March 18, 2013).
MacAskill also mentioned Romney as an out-of-touch candidate, and in addition expressed his thoughts on Romney’s poor campaign management. He gave one example of a campaign event in Detroit held at a football stadium that was almost empty: “You thought, if anything encapsulates how badly run the Romney campaign was it’s this. Did his campaign staff not stop to think that, you know, we’re never going to fill this, we’re not even going to fill a small portion of this?” (E. MacAskill, personal communication, March 14, 2013)

**British feelings towards Romney/Obama.**

Harnden and MacAskill both spoke to the British feelings towards the candidates. One of our hypotheses is that the UK would take a less favorable tone towards Romney than Obama, and so we asked the two British journalists if they felt British papers were more favorable to either. Harnden immediately stated that British papers were more favorable to Obama, while MacAskill said he felt that newspapers just wanted an exciting story out of the campaign. He said journalists always felt Obama would win, and welcomed the polls tightening not because they liked Romney, but it made the story more engaging.

Romney’s trip to London before the 2012 Summer Olympics, during which he criticized the Olympic preparation, also came up. MacAskill noted “a sense of outrage in the UK over that,” and even British politicians such as Prime Minister David Cameron were outspoken in their criticisms of Romney. Of Romney’s press reception in the UK, Harnden said, “When Romney went over for his sort of fairly disastrous London trip, you know, he got a really rough reception. And ok, he did sort of screw it up a bit, but it wasn’t just that.”
A major reason for the negative attitude towards Romney was that the UK still adores Obama in a way that the US public has ceased to. Harnden described Obama’s perception in the UK by saying:

There’s still like a starry-eyed kind of attitude towards Obama. And it’s not just the press; David Cameron came over here and had hot dogs at the basketball game in Ohio, and then the toasts at the State Dinner at the White House— I mean, it’s slightly embarrassing, he was falling over himself (T. Harnden, personal communication, February 27, 2013).

Harnden also said Obama was the “President Europe had dreamed of”, and MacAskill used similar language and said in Europe “Obama still gets some of that shine that he had when he was elected.” They both noted that the admiration for Obama that has worn off in the US has remained in the UK, and MacAskill said he sometimes found it difficult to convince his UK editors that the race was going to be close because Obama was still popular abroad but “there was real polarization in America…we would tell London, this race is going to be tighter than you think, Obama’s really unpopular” (personal communication, March 14, 2013).

2008 vs 2012 elections.

There were several topics within the 2008 and 2012 elections that were brought up in the interviews, which demonstrate some of the qualities of journalism we have been discussing. Although in the UK the public and even journalists themselves weren’t as interested in the 2012 elections, in the US just as many people, if not more, showed their interest through measures such as debate watching. Heilemann pointed out that this was partly because the outcome wasn’t
always clear, and because there was a lot on the line for both parties, including the fate of Obamacare.

Several stories in each year illustrated the effects of the framework we have described. In 2008, audiences around the world were captivated by the historic nature of the election, and once Sarah Palin was introduced she became a huge focal point. Heilemann discussed the Palin story, calling it “the perfect kind of story for an awful lot of people. Which was, glamorous, good looking, charismatic, comes out of nowhere, storybook kind of way, seizes everyone’s attention and puts the fear of God into Democrats, and then kind of melts down” (personal communication, March 18, 2013). He mentioned that her captivating personality and performance at the GOP convention before her eventual collapse were what made the story arc captivating. The other highlight of the 2008 election was the global financial crisis, a policy crisis and story that forced Obama and McCain to react in real-time.

Although the 2012 election wasn’t historic in the way 2008 was, the coverage of it, especially of the Republican primary race, demonstrates how the media often frame stories. John Heilemann discussed this, mentioning the entertaining qualities of candidates such as Herman Cain and Michelle Bachmann, and how gaffes such as Rick Perry’s “oops” debate moment made for great TV. Of this type of coverage and the story of the Republicans in 2012 he said: “It is a story that actually is a serious story about the Republican party in a state of existential crisis, but it’s also a story that in its manifestations has a kind of grotesque comic quality to it.” Despite the serious tone the story could have taken, it was instead treated by the media like a reality show, punctuated with the “comic book characters” that were the Republican primary candidates.
Content Analysis and Interview Discussion

The main hypotheses for this study related to the “entertainment frame” of political coverage and its prominence in the US compared to the UK. In Chapter 2, we defined the entertainment frame as having four components: personal issues and character stories, scandal coverage, soft news, and celebrity coverage. We compared the entertainment frame to other common frames in political coverage: the politics or horserace frame, election or media process frame, and ideas frame, which included stories focused on specific policy stories, ideology of candidates, and retrospective or prospective evaluations. Based on a review of previous literature, we hypothesized that the entertainment frame would be more prominent in UK coverage of the election than US coverage, due to the UK’s obsession with scandal, and the influence of the UK tabloids on all media. In contrast to this, we hypothesized that the US would focus more on policy stories than the UK, partly because the policy being debated in the election was more relevant to a US audience. We also thought that the UK would be less favorable towards Mitt Romney than the US, due to Obama’s worldwide celebrity status, and because the UK is more liberal as a whole than the US.

In the previous sections we went over the findings from the content analysis data and qualitative interviews. Interestingly, the information we were given in the interviews did not always match what we found when analyzing the content in detail. During the interviews we were able to ask experts in the field some of our hypotheses directly, and it was revealing that their perceptions of the press weren’t always in line with what we saw in the content. In this section we will attempt to explain why this was, and demonstrate both the perceived and actual prominence of the entertainment frame in both countries. We will also discuss the changes in the
media in the past 20 years, what has caused this shift, and how it affects content. In the next section we will reveal our survey findings to explore how entertainment stories impact the public’s perception of politicians.

**Framing and topics in the US and UK.**

“Round 1 to Mitt: Christie predicts debate rout” - *The New York Post*

“SPRINGSTEEN TO SING FOR OBAMA” - *The Daily Mail*

We discussed the entertainment frame and the proliferation of pop culture stories in all three interviews, and the participants expressed their views on not only entertainment and scandal stories, but also policy stories and their relevance to the public. Both Toby Harnden and Ewen MacAskill, the British journalists in this study, felt that entertainment stories are more prominent in the UK media, agreeing with our first hypothesis. Harnden emphasized that news about reality TV and pop culture is considered much more mainstream in the UK, which could be a result of the blurring lines between tabloid and quality papers. Previous studies have also noted that the distinction between papers is fading, and it is well known that the UK press is much more competitive than the US press (Sampson, 1996; Schlesinger, 2006).

The competition between papers in the UK seems to partly explain the scandal and pop culture stories in the UK: when papers are constantly competing for the same audience, they often resort to writing sensationalized and soft stories they know will get readers. Internet traffic is also a driver for shorter, easier to read pieces, and one downside of having to produce multiple regurgitated stories for the online audience each day is that reporters are left with less time for serious reporting.
Although these thoughts align with several of the previous studies on the UK media, our content analysis showed a slightly different picture. The differences between the four frames, politics, process, ideas, and entertainment, were not significant. In fact, both the US and UK had a very similar distribution of paragraphs over all four frames: about 16% politics, 27% process, 39% ideas, and 18% entertainment. The largest difference for these frames by country was less than 3%, and it is likely these differences occurred by chance. It is interesting that although interviewees agreed with our hypotheses about the prominence of the entertainment frame, it was not supported by newspaper content. As we will discuss later, this could be because the US has just as many entertainment stories in its coverage. We did not predict this, but is not altogether surprising based on the trend towards entertainment coverage in all outlets.

Despite these initial findings, when we broke down the data into the 12 specific frames by country, there were several interesting findings. The frame differences were significant when we examined country frames on this level, and gave us insight into the type of coverage each country leaned towards. The horserace frame, which discusses the election in terms of who is ahead or behind, was used frequently in both countries, but was not the most prominent frame, which is in contrast to several previous studies (Flowers et al., 2003; Graber, 2010; Miller, et al., 1998). Both countries framed paragraphs with policy information more than the horserace, and the political process frame, which included stories about campaign events and election mechanics, was most frequent for both countries.

The prominence of the political process frame is not unexpected, as many articles discuss voting mechanisms or describe the scene at campaign rallies. However, it is surprising that the policy frame was used so often. This may have been because this particular election included
several significant policy issues: the US economy is only just recovering from recession; Obama’s healthcare law was at risk; and the candidates had starkly different views on issues such as gay marriage. John Heilemann pointed out that it is impossible to group all policy stories together, because citizens only care about policy that has a direct effect on them. Indeed, when we examined topics covered in each country, the US devoted 10.8% of its paragraphs to the economy, while the financial situation was only a topic of 5.1% of UK paragraphs.

In addition, the UK had over double the amount of retrospective evaluation frames than the US, but about half the amount of prospective framed paragraphs than the US. Both countries used the retrospective frame more than the prospective frame, demonstrating that the media felt it was important to give overviews of both Obama and Romney’s past accomplishments in articles. One reason the UK used the retrospective frame more frequently could be because the UK public is not as familiar with Obama’s policy failures and accomplishments as the US public. On the other side of this, the US public would likely be more interested in hearing about future promises made by both candidates, as US policy would directly affect them. When we examined paragraphs by topic, we found that the US had a larger percentage of paragraphs for all policy stories except foreign policy, which the UK covered much more frequently from the US.

Our third hypothesis, that the US would have more policy stories than the UK, was only partly supported. Apart from foreign policy, the US covered policy topics more than the UK, but did not have more policy-framed paragraphs. Several studies have shown that international reporting has gone down in the UK over the past 60 years, while entertainment coverage has gone up (Brookes, 2000; McLachlan & Goulding, 2000). However, we found that when compared by topic, foreign policy topics took up more space in the UK than entertainment
topics. This may be because the UK has a particular interest in the US’ foreign policy, and also because US foreign policy reporting may not require as many resources as reporting in other, more dangerous, foreign countries.

Although the entertainment frame as a whole was not used more in one country than the other, when we break it down into the four sub-frames: personal, scandal, soft news, and celebrity, there are significant differences. In the US, the personality frame was used for 55.5% of its entertainment-framed paragraphs, while it was only used for 21.6% of the UK’s entertainment paragraphs. We felt that the UK would cover more of the candidates’ personalities because they would be less interested in the policy debate, but this did not seem to be the case. This could be due to several factors, including the influence technology has had on reporting, and the presence of a candidate (Mitt Romney) whose distant personality was of great interest to the public. John Heilemann said that one direct impact technology has had on reporting is the availability of basic information about candidates, which pushes journalists to delve into personal details. Scholars have noted this effect before, and some argue that this type of technological change has fundamentally altered political communication (Xenos & Foot, 2005). Based on our study, this seems to be supported, as the US had more personality-framed paragraphs than we would have expected.

Along with the above argument, another factor may have influenced the coverage of personal stories in the US in the 2012 election: Mitt Romney’s perceived out-of-touch personality and the related gaffes he made on the campaign trail. The journalists who were on the trail (Heilemann and MacAskill) both mentioned several “unforced errors” he made which exacerbated his image problem. In Chapter 2 we discussed the imperative for candidates to craft
a positive personal image, and the use of “spin doctors” in the current press-politics system (Schlesinger, 2006). These issues came to light during the 2012 campaign, as Romney struggled to manage his public image. This especially became a problem when the secret 47% video came out, which Heilemann called the “ultimate proof point” for the meme of Romney that already existed (personal communication, March 18, 2013). Given both this image of Romney, and an interest in his young running mate, Paul Ryan, it is not surprising that the US coverage focused more on personality than any other entertainment frame.

In the other entertainment sub-frames, the UK had slightly more scandal coverage, while the US had more soft news coverage, which in some cases could go hand-in-hand with personality coverage. Another notable finding was that the UK framed paragraphs with “celebrity” much more than the US. Harnden and MacAskill both mentioned the UK obsession with celebrity coverage, and how pop culture references can make policy stories accessible to a larger audience. Kellner (2009) studied the 2008 US election and mentioned high-profile celebrities who were involved in Obama’s campaign and their subsequent media coverage, including Will.i.am and Oprah. Celebrities were certainly not absent from the 2012 campaign trail, with stars such as Jay-Z and Kid Rock campaigning for Obama and Romney respectively. So, while the US did have some celebrity-framed paragraphs, it is telling that in our study the UK picked up on more of this type of coverage than the US.

**Difference between tabloid and quality papers.**

“Romney Strives to Stand Apart in Global Policy”- The New York Times

“POLL BLAST FOR OBAMA’S STARS: Celeb rallies under fire as NY suffers”- The Sun
As we discussed in the literature review, there are major differences in the press systems in the US and UK, one being the influence of the tabloid newspapers, which drive much more coverage in the UK. We asked our interviewees about their perceptions of tabloids in both countries, and also compared the types of stories that appeared in the tabloid, mid-market, and quality newspapers. As expected, there were large differences in coverage in the tabloids (The Sun and The New York Post) and quality newspapers (The Guardian and The New York Times). Both tabloids had the highest amount of entertainment-framed paragraphs in their country. In addition, The Guardian and The New York Times had the highest percentage of ideas-framed paragraphs. These findings confirm our hypothesis that the tabloids would have more entertainment coverage, and quality papers would have more policy coverage.

Interestingly, the UK tabloid and mid-market papers had more entertainment coverage than the other 4 papers, which is what we would expect based on our UK versus US entertainment frame hypothesis. However, The Guardian had significantly less entertainment coverage than The New York Times (only 5.9% in The Guardian vs 16.8% in The New York Times), which is one reason why that hypothesis was not supported when we combined the newspapers into their respective countries. This shows that although the tabloids in both countries have more relative entertainment stories, there are clear differences between the tabloids and mid-market papers in the US and UK. Although The Sun and New York Post have the same owner, The Sun had double the amount of entertainment-framed paragraphs. This could be because UK tabloids devote a great deal of space to scandal and sensationalized coverage. Our findings are in line with the increased tabloidization of newspapers, which in the past 10 years have increased their coverage of entertainment stories (Uribe & Gunter, 2004).
We should also point out that *The Sun* is the most-read newspaper in the UK, which may illustrate that they have deduced what type of stories their audience wants to read. This was a theme that came up a few times in our interviews: that due to financial pressures and competition between outlets, newspapers have had to be more aware of what content audiences enjoy. Harnden pointed out that the *Daily Mail*, where he worked for a year, would argue that they are more attuned to their audiences wants than most American newspapers. Heilemann also said that even *The New York Times* has had to adapt to a model where they give the audience more of what they want. This could be an explanation for the high percentage of entertainment stories in the *Times* compared to *The Guardian*.

The differences in frame in the *Daily Mail* and *USA Today* are also demonstrative of the more tabloidized market in the UK, where three tabloid or mid-market papers: *The Sun, The Daily Mail, The Daily Mirror*, have more online and print circulation than any quality newspaper. The *Daily Mail* had more entertainment-framed paragraphs than all papers except our UK tabloid, *The Sun*. The finding that *The Daily Mail* is more in line with tabloids than *USA Today* held up when we compared the lengths of articles in each paper. The mean lengths of articles went from shortest in *The Sun* to longest in *The New York Times*, and in each country the lengths went in order from tabloid to mid-market to quality.

There were significant differences between the two tabloids and the two quality newspapers, and the *Daily Mail* and the two quality papers. *USA Today* had significantly shorter articles than *The New York Times*, but not *The Guardian*. This also shows that, on the spectrum of tabloid to quality paper, *The Daily Mail* is closer to a tabloid than *USA Today*, which Harnden agreed with when he said “The Mail, it’s tabloid, but it’s what they call compact, middle market,
different from *The Sun.*” Although *USA Today* is thought of as more down-market than papers such as *The New York Times* or *The Wall Street Journal,* it is doubtful anyone would categorize it as a tabloid, as it doesn’t sensationalize coverage in the way *The Daily Mail* might. As an example, one *Daily Mail* headline stated “MITT TAUNTED ON TWITTER” in all capitals, whereas *USA Today* headlines were more subdued: “Romney digging for the coal votes; Four mining states are also tossups.” This can be partly attributed to the prevalence of tabloid coverage in the UK, versus the much less influential tabloids in the US. When Heilemann was asked about US tabloids, he mentioned that the down-market tabloid *The National Enquirer* is rarely taken seriously. As we have shown, both through the content analysis and the thoughts of our British interviewees, this is certainly not the case in the UK, where tabloid coverage often sets an agenda for the rest of the media.

**Tone in the US vs UK.**

“Romney’s equality claim prompts binder full of bile” - *The Guardian*

“With Bam’s Poor Record, Dems have to Mitt-Pick” - *The New York Post*

We hypothesized that the UK would be less favorable to Mitt Romney than Barack Obama, and that the US would be more balanced in its coverage. While the UK did have more reinforcing coverage towards Obama, and more deflating comments towards Romney, these differences were not significant when compared to the US, which had very similar coverage of Mitt Romney. In fact, both countries were significantly less favorable to Mitt Romney than Barack Obama, which does not support our prediction that the US would be more balanced overall. This is interesting given the feeling of disappointment towards Obama many Americans have, which was mentioned in all of our interviews. Harnden and MacAskill both stated that
there is a sense of adoration for Obama that remains in the UK despite having worn off in the US. While they both agreed that the UK would be more favorable to Obama than Romney, which was true, it is surprising that the US papers were also more favorable to Obama. Obama did have slightly more deflating comments in the US than the UK, but had almost equal reinforcing comments in both countries. However, the majority of comments towards both candidates were neutral, demonstrating that journalists were not injecting opinion into all paragraphs.

Romney’s rough reception in the UK partly had to do with a trip he took during the election season, when he criticized London’s Olympic preparation. However, we believe from our interviews it was more because of Obama’s popularity in the UK, and because Republicans in general do not travel well across the Atlantic. Harnden mentioned that Bush was always hated in the UK, whereas Clinton was very popular even when he was tangled up in a sex scandal. As we have mentioned, the political affiliations of papers in the UK is much more open, and papers openly endorse candidates. Because of this it is interesting that the US was equally imbalanced in their coverage towards candidates, when US papers strive for “objectivity”, a concept that MacAskill felt was impossible to achieve in journalism. The imbalance could be because, while the UK is more socially liberal than the US, American journalists are often more liberal than the rest of the country, which Heilemann pointed out.

Scholars have studied the effect of editorial endorsements on amount of coverage or tone towards a candidate, finding that while amount of coverage may not change, newspapers demonstrated a more positive slant to the candidates they endorsed (Druckman and Parkin, 2005). Although we did not compare endorsements to tone in our study, our findings are similar
in that Romney and Obama got very similar amounts of coverage overall, but markedly different
treatment from each other by country and by outlet. As would be expected, the two tabloids,
which are both conservative and owned by Rupert Murdoch, had the most reinforcing comments
towards Romney and deflating comments towards Obama. Interestingly, although The New York
Times and The Guardian had more than double the amount of reinforcing comments for Obama
than Romney, the differences were not as large when comparing the deflating comments for each
candidate.

Both quality outlets are more liberal than the tabloids, so it is not surprising they had
more favorable coverage of Obama, but it is notable that they still had deflating comments
towards Obama in over a quarter of their paragraphs. This may demonstrate that it is easier for a
newspaper to praise one candidate over the other, than to hold back deflating comments when
they are necessary in a story. Overall, The Guardian had the most deflating comments towards
Romney, also not surprising as MacAskill acknowledged unabashedly that they are a left-leaning
paper. Given that the British newspapers are more open in their political positions, it is surprising
that the US papers also demonstrated a difference in treatment towards the candidate, lining up
with what we would expect based on knowledge of the papers’ general slants. We matched the
papers by not only quality level but also political leaning, and the treatment towards candidates
in each pair, The Sun-The New York Post, The Daily Mail-USA Today, and The Guardian-The
New York Times, were very similar in most cases.

Influence of technology on media.

We have alluded to the influence of technology throughout this section, and many books
could be written on the various ways technological platforms have changed reporting and the
media system. Here we will briefly go over the impact of technology in relation to our findings on entertainment coverage. Our interviews revealed several areas of journalism that technology has altered; it has done away with the notion of a news cycle, allowed for more people with less experience to “report”, and increased availability of basic information (Margolis, et al., 1997; Xenos & Foot, 2005). These factors have led to a deterioration of the economics of the media, which has forced mainstream outlets to lay off journalists and reduce their reporting capacity. They have also created a more competitive environment where “traditional” outlets such as The New York Times are competing with newer outlets. This increase in competition and decrease in reporting resources has resulted in softer stories, more aggregation and more opinion. With such a wide range of media sources available to the public, the public now consumes media based on “what the audience wants” to read. This may be shorter, more entertainment-focused stories, or in the US especially, could mean turning to partisan outlets. Stroud (2007) argues that this is particularly the case with political coverage, finding that partisan beliefs are related to media exposure. Although the concept of selective exposure has been debated, partisan media has risen in the United States in the past 10 years, and people are moving away from newspapers towards the Internet, which provides a more varied range of viewpoints (Stroud, 2007; Rainie and Horrigan, 2007).

In addition to competitive factors increasing entertainment stories, the availability of basic political information to any citizen at any time has meant that journalists and candidates focus more on personal details, to provide the public with novel information. To distinguish their pieces from information that can be found on Google or Wikipedia, journalists must dig deeper and report on intimate, personal details of politicians that they would not have before.
This proliferation of personality and entertainment coverage, even in so-called “quality” outlets is demonstrated in our content analysis, where even *The New York Times* had over 16% entertainment-framed paragraphs, and almost one-in-ten paragraphs were framed “personal”.

This shift towards entertainment stories has been discussed in prior literature on media and politics, in studies such as McLachlan and Golding’s (2000), which found that human-interest stories have increased in both tabloids and broadsheet papers over time. The emergence of new technologies and their impact on political coverage has also been studied, and while there is debate from some scholars over the significance of these developments, this study reinforces the theory that new platforms do fundamentally change both the structure and content of political coverage (Margolis et al., 1997; Xenos & Foot, 2005).

**Impact on public.**

Since we have determined that all types of newspaper include at least some entertainment-framed coverage of politics, we will now turn to the impact of this coverage on the public. Studies before ours have found that, over time, the public has become more receptive to scandal and entertainment, and one UK study found that in the course of about 20 years, from 1973-1994, the number of people who thought a personal detail such as divorce should be held against a politician rose dramatically. In the US, the massive Watergate scandal has led to frenzied coverage of much less consequential scandals, leading to the impeachment of President Clinton for lying about a sexual affair. Scholars doubt that such a personal scandal would have amounted to such drastic action in the past (Fineman & Cooper, 1998; Miller, 1998), but politicians are now expected to have squeaky-clean records both politically and personally to run
for office. In order to test the US public’s current feelings towards different types of scandal we conducted a survey on media consumption and political effects, which we will discuss next.

Survey Analysis and Discussion

We conducted a national US survey that focused on media consumption habits of the public, and how the public evaluates politicians. Several questions in the survey related directly to this study and perceptions of entertainment-style coverage of politics. The online survey was released to US citizens over 18, and had a total of 1,115 respondents. As we discussed in Chapter 3, despite some limitations of online surveys these participants were quite representative of the US population. We asked specifically about consumption of several media outlets, including both print and online sources and TV shows, compared to participants’ attitudes and evaluations of politicians. For this study we were especially interested in entertainment outlets. Below are the results for consumption of various print sources that are most relevant to this study.
Figure 2.3. Consumption of print sources in the US. This figure indicates the percentage of participants who responded they either “Regularly” or “Sometimes” consume these sources versus “Hardly Ever” or “Never”.

As illustrated, consumption of newspapers goes down as the newspaper quality (from quality-tabloid) goes down; *The New York Times* had a higher number of national readers in this survey than *USA Today*, which in turn had more regular or occasional readers than *The New York Post*. A similar pattern emerged when comparing consumption of news magazines, such as *Time* or *Newsweek* versus entertainment magazines such as *People* or *US Weekly*. While 34.2% of participants indicated they read news magazines either regularly or sometimes, only 23.7% said the same of entertainment magazines.

The survey also asked participants if they had encountered coverage of politicians in entertainment-based outlets, which included examples *The View*, *People Magazine*, and *Entertainment Tonight*. 52% of respondents indicated they had encountered such coverage, but
only 29% claimed to enjoy coverage of politicians in entertainment outlets, and 19.4% strongly disagreed with the statement “I enjoy coverage of politicians in entertainment outlets.”

Another set of statements focused on how different types of scandals affect evaluations of politicians by the public. Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with the following statements on a 5-point Likert scale: “I would hold it against a politician if he/she had a [Personal or Sexual]/[Political]/[Financial] scandal discovered in his/her past.”

Figure 2.4. Evaluation of politicians based on scandals. Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with three statements: “I would hold it against a politician if he/she had a [Personal or Sexual]/[Political]/[Financial] scandal discovered in his/her past.”

Answers to the personal/sexual scandal statement were more spread out than those regarding political or financial scandals, but 47% of respondents still indicated they would hold it against a politician if a sexual or personal scandal was discovered in their past. 16.2% of participants strongly disagreed with this, which was much higher than the strong disagreement.
for the other scandals: only 1.6% and 1.9% strongly disagreed with evaluating a politician on political or financial scandals respectively. Political scandals had the most agreement, with 93.5% stating they would hold a political scandal against a politician. In addition, over half of those responses (47.4%) were in the strongly agree bracket, the highest for any type of scandal. It is not surprising that participants are most conflicted about judging politicians on personal or sexual scandals, as even though the public expects to be given more personal information about candidates, not everyone agrees that private lives of politicians should be a factor in evaluating them for office (Mortimore, 1995). However, what is unexpected is that almost half of participants would hold a personal or sexual scandal against a candidate, and 10% strongly agreed with this.

In order to examine the possible effects of news consumption habits with evaluations of politicians, we ran cross-tabulations of readership for each source with level of agreement on the statements about evaluating politicians based on scandals. We were especially interested in the personal/sexual scandal evaluations, as the answers to that category were the most varied, and because our main research questions for this study relate to entertainment themes. Out of the 7 print source categories (New York Times, USA Today, New York Post, national newspapers, tabloids, news magazines and entertainment magazines), results were significant for only one: entertainment magazines (p<.006), with tabloid readership approaching significance (p<.09). Table 2.1 shows the differences in entertainment magazine readership and evaluation of politicians based on personal/sexual scandals.
Table 2.1

*Personal/Sexual scandal evaluation and entertainment magazine readership*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Read entertainment magazines regularly/sometimes</th>
<th>Read entertainment magazines hardly ever/never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>30.1%</td>
<td>39.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>45.7%</td>
<td>34.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* The Pearson-chi square was significant (p<.006), n=790. Based on agreement with the statement “I would hold it against a politician if he/she had a personal or sexual scandal discovered in his/her past.”

As demonstrated, those who reported they hardly ever or never read entertainment magazines were more likely to report they strongly disagree with evaluating a politician based on a personal or sexual scandal (17.5% versus 11.8% for regular or occasional readers). In addition, the regular or occasional readers of entertainment magazines had higher percentages of agreement in both the agree and strongly agree category. 12.4% of regular or occasional readers reported they strongly agreed with the statement, while only 8.6% of those who rarely read entertainment magazines said the same thing. These findings support hypothesis 7, which states: H7: those who get their news primarily from tabloid or entertainment sources will evaluate politicians on personal or sexual scandals more than those who get news from non-entertainment sources. However, because the differences in agreement in other entertainment sources (*The New York Post* and other tabloids) were not significant, the hypothesis is not supported for entertainment sources as a whole.
The difference in evaluations for those who read or do not read entertainment sources is quite large, and indicates that entertainment sources encourage scandal and personal evaluations of politicians. Although this was not supported for tabloids, the tabloid figures were approaching significance more than the quality newspapers, which, as demonstrated by our content analysis, have more policy stories and less entertainment-framed stories than the tabloids. This shows that the effects we have been discussing—the change in technology that has impacted the economics of the media, and therefore altered the content produced by news sources—have a tangible impact on how the public views politicians.

**Discussion Conclusion**

Because of this increased scrutiny on private lives, candidates for office have to not only manage their image more carefully but also abstain in general from any behavior that could be considered “scandalous”. This affects not only current politicians and candidates, but also a future generation of politicians who must be aware of the consequences their youthful antics could bring in later years. Our content analysis, interviews, and survey data work together to bring us a more accurate picture of how and why political coverage is changing both in the US and overseas. While entertainment-style coverage of politics is not necessarily “good” or “bad”, we have demonstrated that it certainly has proliferated in recent years, due to factors that are often beyond the control of individual journalists or even individual outlets. It is hard to tell what started the chain of entertainment coverage of politics; whether it was the technology that pushed the outlets to report on personalities, the campaigns who put more effort into crafting candidates’ public image, or the audience who gave the impression that they will read more light stories than policy reporting. Either way, there is no question that journalism, and the
relationship between the press and politics, has changed greatly in the past 20 years, and it is now virtually impossible for us to go back to an older, less intrusive model of reporting.

The findings from this study also demonstrate the perceived and actual differences between the press systems in the US and UK, as well as some unexpected similarities. The fact that the US and UK had an almost equal amount of entertainment-framed stories in their coverage of the 2012 presidential elections shows that entertainment coverage has spread in not only the UK but the US as well. Although the UK has a longer history of sensationalized stories and scandal coverage, we found that in 2012 US newspapers focused just as much on entertainment issues as the UK. This is likely due to a larger change in political reporting, where new technological platforms have altered the media system in both the US and the UK, leading to more “soft” or entertaining coverage.

While the UK had more coverage of scandals or gaffes, as we would expect from UK journalists’ desire to expose indecencies, the US had more personality-based coverage than we would have predicted. It should be noted that the candidates in 2012 were not prone to particularly salacious scandals: both men are known to have quite stable family lives, and have run for office and been vetted by the press and public previously. Given this, that the UK still framed almost 5% of its paragraphs with scandal coverage is impressive. We also examined the affects of entertainment-style political reporting on the public, and found that those who read entertainment-magazines are more likely to hold personal or sexual scandals against politicians. Interestingly, the US had a large amount of personal-framed coverage in 2012, which may have worked against Mitt Romney, who was often referred to as distant or out-of-touch in the press. Although we cannot directly link Mitt Romney’s image problem to his ultimate loss, the fact that
a relatively minor issue such as a wooden personality could detract attention from one’s policy positions demonstrates the importance of image management, and the relevance of our study on personal versus policy based media coverage. In the next chapter, our conclusion, we will go over some limitations of our research and suggest possible areas of future research in this field.
CONCLUSION

In this final chapter, we will go over some limitations to our study and outline possible future research in the media and politics field based on our findings. As demonstrated in the past chapter, we had several significant findings and non-findings from our content analysis and survey data, and the interviews we conducted gave us insight into not only the current state of political coverage and the US and UK media, but also why it has changed over the past 20 years. In the final section of this chapter, we will sum up our most important findings and relate them to the future of both political coverage, and campaigns themselves.

Limitations and Future Research

Although we feel our data provided us with a comprehensive view of the content and effects of political coverage in the US and UK, it had some limitations. To keep the project manageable as a master’s thesis, we chose to examine content in newspapers, rather than online, in magazines, or on TV. Although newspapers have lost influence with the proliferation of other outlets, they still set the agenda to some extent in both countries, so we felt this was appropriate for our study. However, to examine framing and media coverage more thoroughly, it would be interesting to look at other print and television outlets, as well as newspaper websites and news blogs. In the future, we would like to see how the most popular websites frame political coverage, and if the issues they focus on differ from those highlighted in newspapers. We would also be interested to see how framing of stories varies across one outlet’s print and online presence, such as The New York Times and nytimes.com, which could indicate how print and online sources cater to different audiences.
The newspapers we chose for this study represented a range of reporting styles and traditions, but were not always perfectly matched across countries. Due to the different press systems in each country it would be impossible for a British newspaper to have an exact counterpart in the US, and this was particularly the case for the mid-market papers, *The Daily Mail* and *USA Today*, because, as we discussed in the findings section, *The Daily Mail* is much closer to a tabloid than *USA Today*. Our sample was drawn from articles in the chosen newspapers on specific dates, most of which were Mondays, and we only included articles that mentioned the primary campaign figures in the headline. These two factors may have impacted the type of article we analyzed for our content analysis, and future research could conduct a more thorough analysis of articles from the chosen time period.

In terms of coding, our intercoder reliability was quite high after we reconciled differences between coders, but there was some variation in opinion on coding topic, frame, and tone towards candidates. We feel that these questions on how to code certain types of paragraphs or tone would be resolved with a longer, more intensive training session for coders, which would also have allowed us to test the intercoder reliability on a larger sample.

Finally, we did not use all of the data that we collected, especially from the content analysis and survey. We wanted to focus on specific aspects of the 2012 election coverage, and so did not analyze several of the variables we coded. This was due largely to time constraints, and in the future we could analyze our data with other questions in mind. The survey data in particular might provide us with an even more detailed look at how media consumption varies by age or party ID, and how certain sources impact evaluations of politicians.
Media framing has been studied for decades, and we have no doubt scholars will continue to explore the field of framing in political coverage. We hope that in the future, more research will be conducted on the entertainment frame in particular, as we found that it encompasses a significant amount of political coverage in both the US and the UK. Future scholars might also look at the general differences in culture in the US and the UK, which we did not delve into in detail, to see how cultural differences affect the type of coverage audiences want. It would also be interesting to see how much the candidates themselves play into entertainment stories, and compare personal mentions on the campaign trail to policy issues. The 2012 general election season was not without its share of drama, but didn’t have any major scandals, and studies could use our framework to examine future elections to see if the 2012 political coverage is an indicator of the wider nature of political coverage, or if coverage varies significantly from year to year. Although we believe the prominence of the entertainment frame will not diminish in future elections, more scandal-prone or electrifying candidates could easily bring a shift in coverage to even more entertainment stories than demonstrated here.

Implications for the Media and Politics Field

This study demonstrated that the entertainment frame of political coverage was prevalent in both the United States and United Kingdom, and confirms past findings that political coverage is going away from hard news reporting and towards softer stories. However, we found some major differences between the two countries, notably that the tabloids in Britain are still much more influential than tabloids in the United States. We also found that individuals who read entertainment magazines are more likely to judge politicians based on personal or sexual scandals: while we can’t say that entertainment magazine readership causes personal evaluations
of politicians, this finding is significant, especially as quality outlets are struggling and online outlets, which often include some entertainment coverage, are blossoming. From this study it seems that even highly regarded papers such as *The New York Times* are including more entertainment stories than before, possibly to lure in a younger audience who usually get their news from outlets that provide shorter and more entertaining views of politics, such as Buzzfeed or Twitter.

While entertainment stories are inevitable in certain outlets, and might attract a new audience to political coverage, stories on personality, scandal, soft news, and celebrity should not replace more traditional political coverage. Scandal coverage has gotten out of hand in the past few years, especially with the increased use of platforms that can immediately spread rumors without fact-checking. In 2013, two formerly disgraced politicians, Mark Sanford and Anthony Weiner, are planning their comebacks to politics after being taken down by personal scandals. While actions of these men and other politicians may be immoral, they are not always illegal, and the public should not judge politicians based on such personal issues. Interestingly, the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee seems to agree with the results of this survey that show the public is more certain about holding political and financial scandals against politicians; an ad the DCCC released in April 2013 against Mark Sanford doesn’t explicitly mention his affair, but rather highlights the numerous ethics claims concerning the cover-up of the affair that were brought against him (Walker, 2013).

Prior studies on media and politics have found the horserace frame to be most common in political coverage, but we found that in the 2012 election, policy issues were discussed slightly more than election standings, and that the political process frame was used the most often. The
process frame included stories about campaign events, the debates, campaign finance, and other mechanisms by which candidates run for office. These types of stories are sometimes grouped in with the “horserace” frame, but we found that more often the content simply described events and the atmosphere surrounding them, rather than framing the events with which candidate was “ahead” or “behind”. This could be because, while the public can easily look up the latest poll numbers, it is harder to quickly find a detailed report on an event, including the mood of the audience and types of issues addressed, without a more detailed report. In these instances, the importance of reporters actually going to events cannot be understated: Ewen MacAskill gave one example of this when he went to a Romney event in a Detroit football stadium that was almost empty. Although sites such as Huffington Post, Buzzfeed, and Twitter can aggregate news and write opinion pieces, traditional reporters and mainstream outlets such as The New York Times and The Washington Post are still necessary to provide concrete, on-the-ground reporting.

The 2012 election would have looked very different 20 or 30 years ago, before the widespread use of the Internet and handheld recording devices that enable everyday citizens to quickly share information from campaign events or meetings with politicians. While we cannot speculate on exactly what would have been covered in the past, it is certain that stories such as the 47% video would not have come to light. Mitt Romney may not have struggled to be seen as relatable, as video from his events and evidence of his gaffes would not have been as accessible. This study shows that the way we evaluate politicians, and therefore how journalists cover politicians, is shifting towards more personal information. Political coverage is now dominated by not only entertainment stories, but also more opinion, aggregation, and partisan stories than
have been present in the past. This is partly because, as John Heilemann said, “when
ewsgathering is expensive, opinion is cheap. And whenever something is cheap it flourishes”
(personal communication, March 18, 2013). Political coverage has changed drastically in the
past few decades, and future studies in media and politics should take into account these changes
to provide a more accurate picture of campaign reporting.

Concluding Thoughts

The 2012 presidential election was significant for several reasons: it culminated in a
breakdown of the Republican Party, sealed the fate of high-profile policies, and illustrated that
four years in office significantly alters the public’s view of a president, no matter how historic
and adored he may be. On November 6th, 2012, Barack Obama was re-elected President of the
United States, in what turned out to be a rather uninteresting end to a campaign filled with
uncertainty on both sides. Although he won by a smaller margin than in 2008, 332 electoral
votes to Mitt Romney’s 206, the final tally showed that Obama won all but one of the swing
states the campaigns had fought ruthlessly over, North Carolina, and also won the popular vote
by a slim but clear margin. While many had predicted the results would drag on all night, the
election was called at 11:20pm, only 20 minutes later than it was decided in 2008. Mitt Romney
refused to concede the race until some 90 minutes later, when he appeared on stage in Boston
with his wife Ann, looking shell-shocked and somber (Zeleny & Rutenberg, 2012).

After the election, Obama returned to the White House, still facing a slow economy and a
nation that is deeply divided on key issues such as abortion, gun control, and gay marriage.
Romney was forced to retreat and lick his wounds, and the Republican Party has realized it needs
to change quickly to keep up with ever-shifting population, launching a “Growth and
Opportunity Project” that aims to be more inclusive to minorities and young people (Johnson, 2013). We will never know for sure why voters did not put Romney in office despite feelings of disappointment in Obama’s first term, but our research attempts to explain the prevailing types of political coverage and how coverage might affect attitudes towards politicians.

In this study, we compared political coverage in countries with different press histories: the United States and the United Kingdom, and found, surprisingly, that the US had just as much entertainment coverage of the 2012 elections as the UK, despite the longer history and larger influence of tabloids and sensational reporting in the UK. One reason for this is that the press worldwide has been influenced by the rise of technologies such as the Internet and mobile recording devices. These technological innovations have allowed more people to act as journalists, which has eroded the traditional press system and meant that mainstream outlets such as newspapers have fewer resources for on-the-ground reporting. This has led to an increase in not only short, easy-to-write entertainment stories, but also in opinion pieces, aggregation, and partisan media outlets (Stroud, 2007).

We thought that the US would have less coverage of candidates’ personalities, scandals, and gaffes than the UK, and focus more on horserace or policy coverage, but in fact the countries had almost equal amounts of coverage in the four major frame categories we studied: politics, process, ideas, and entertainment. Although the UK has a history of reporting on scandals and soft news, the US had over double the amount of coverage devoted to candidates’ personalities and personal lives than the UK. This demonstrates that, even in an election year filled with ideological debate and policy differences, stories as trivial as Mitt Romney strapping his dog to
the roof of a car will not go unnoticed. This is an important finding, as it confirms that for campaigns, image management is just as critical to a candidate’s success as policy messaging.

Mitt Romney struggled with his image throughout his campaign, trying to relate to the average American while boasting of his wife’s four Cadillac’s, and it showed in the media coverage. We felt that the US would be more balanced than the UK in its tone towards candidates, because UK newspapers are much more transparent about their political affiliations, and historically more brutal in their takedowns of politicians. In 2012, this was not the case, and the UK and US both had significantly more positive coverage of Obama than Romney. This was not necessarily only due to Romney’s personality, but the journalists we spoke to agreed that he was out-of-touch and found it difficult to express empathy with most Americans. This is particularly relevant given the results of our survey, which confirmed our expectations that individuals who read more entertainment coverage are more likely to judge politicians on scandals in their personal or sexual lives.

Although there is no doubt that future politicians will be taken down by scandals or judged as unlikable, this study demonstrates the importance of a relatable and wholesome image. It is impossible to predict what stories will be covered in another 20 years, or what technologies will arise and once again shake up the press system. However, the direction that the media and political coverage is headed in is clear, and that is towards a more competitive, decentralized press system, loaded with opinion and partisan posturing, that treats candidate personalities and gaffes as “news”, despite their irrelevance to the real policy problems facing many nations today.
APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1) What is your background and how long have you been involved in journalism?
2) Are you familiar with journalism in the US, the UK, or both?
3) Has coverage of politics changed in the past 10 years? In what way?
4) Do you see more entertainment and scandal stories in the press now than in the past?
5) Why do you think entertainment and scandal stories have become so prevalent?
6) The 2008 election seemed to have more entertainment and scandal stories- surrounding Palin, etc., than 2012, do you agree, and why do you think that was or was not?
7) What did you think about the 47% video and people's reaction to it? Was the coverage overblown?
8) Do you think a changing audience has influenced changes in coverage?
9) Is the US public interested in substantive policy stories?
10) Is the prominence of entertainment-type stories a temporary trend or a permanent shift in coverage?
11) Has the rise of digital media contributed to the changing coverage of presidential elections?
12) What would you say are the most influential newspapers in the US and UK respectively?
13) Do you think the US or UK has more "entertainment-style" coverage of politics?
APPENDIX B: FRAME CLASSIFICATIONS AND SPECIFIC FRAME DEFINITIONS

Frame Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame Classification</th>
<th>Specific Frames</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Politics</td>
<td>1) Horserace/strategy</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) Public Opinion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Process</td>
<td>3) Media Process</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4) Political Process</td>
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<tr>
<td>3) Ideas</td>
<td>5) Policy Issues</td>
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<td>6) Ideology</td>
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<td></td>
<td>7) Retrospective Evaluations</td>
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<td></td>
<td>8) Prospective Evaluations</td>
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<tr>
<td>4) Entertainment</td>
<td>9) Personal Character</td>
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<td>10) Scandal</td>
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<td>11) Soft News</td>
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<td>12) Celebrity</td>
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0) No frame present. Paragraph is a straight quote or statement that does not fit into any of the below frames, usually a very short paragraph. For example: “XX endorsed XX”, or “Convention will take place XX date”

1) Horserace/strategy frame: This frame includes any language or information that views the election as a contest. It could include polling numbers, battleground state strategy, candidate actions as political maneuvers, or reporting on who is “ahead” or “behind” in the campaign.

2) Public Opinion: An example of this frame would be the mass response to candidates and content, including public reaction to campaign speeches or promises. Usually done through polling data, focus group participants, or interviews with members of the public.

3) Media process: Self-referential articles on the experience of reporters, any news that mentions other news coverage. Stories framed in terms of how the press covers the election.

4) Political process: This emphasizes the procedures by which candidates run for office. This would include focus on the makeup of campaign organizations, how caucuses work, or how the electoral college works, political conventions such as debates, how to appeal to voters, campaign finance and ads.

5) Issues: Public policy matters, emphasizes the substantive exchange of ideas among political actors. This does not need to be linked to a broad agenda, and sometimes
reporters refer to issues without showing the audience how specific positions relate to broad policy objectives.

6) Ideology: More abstract than the issue frame, this frames the election as a choice between distinct sets of ideas and beliefs.

7) Retrospective evaluations: Emphasizes the record of the candidate and asks the audience to consider official performance as a standard for vote choice.

8) Prospective evaluations: Accentuates the particulars of campaign platforms as they relate to future actions and asks the audience to consider the viability and attractiveness of campaign promises as a standard for vote choice.

9) Personal character: Candidate characteristics and behavior, asks the audience to think about the makeup of the people running for office, may dwell on problematic aspects of candidate integrity.

10) Nonevents: About individuals rather than process or politics. These include candidate indiscretions, behavioral manifestations of character difficulties and instances where reporters direct the audience to think about a campaign in terms of scandalous or improper candidate behavior.

11) Soft news: Mentions of a candidate or political actor framed with soft news, such as trivial information about their favorite place to dine or discussion of their clothing choices.

12) Celebrity: The celebrity frame discusses the campaign or campaign events in relation to celebrity supporters or performances by celebrities at campaign events. This could also include discussion of campaign emails sent by celebrities, fundraising efforts including celebrities, or campaign-generated videos featuring celebrities.
REFERENCES


U.S. Census Bureau. (2011). *American Community Survey demographic and housing estimates* [Data file]. Retrieved from


