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PUBLIC OPINION & U.S. FOREIGN POLICY:
INVESTIGATING THE IMPACT OF POLITICAL TELEVISION DRAMAS ON
AUDIENCE PERCEPTIONS OF CURRENT U.S. FOREIGN POLICY
ENGAGEMENT AND EFFECTIVENESS

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate School
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts

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Pittsburg, Kansas

May 2018

PUBLIC OPINION & U.S. FOREIGN POLICY:
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I dedicate this thesis research to my mom, who is my rock and my number one fan.

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An Abstract of the Thesis by
Lynzee Marie Flores

Political TV dramas have become increasingly popular with audiences as a source of entertainment after the 2016 presidential election, particularly programs depicting the functions of the executive branch of government (CenturyLink, 2017). This research investigates how political TV dramas, as compared to network news coverage of U.S. foreign policy events, influence the perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs of U.S. audience viewers. Using agenda-setting as the theoretical frame, this study employs a quantitative experimental design in order to measure participants' pre- and post- attitudes on two variables; perceived issue familiarity and perceived issue importance of U.S. foreign policy events and U.S. diplomacy tactics. Participants additionally reported the perceived source credibility towards media formats. Materials and measures received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Voluntary participants were recruited from introductory communication and political science classes from a Midwest university. Participants viewed one episode of the political TV drama, *Madam Secretary*, as well as a news story covering a similar, real life event. The presentations were systematically rotated to avoid ordering effects and a control group was included for research integrity.

A survey instrument was used to gather the data related to the hypothesis and research questions advanced in the study. The findings report how audience attitudes are impacted by dramatic depictions of U.S. foreign policy events compared to nightly network news. Limitations, discussion, and future directions will be addressed.

Key Terms: *Media Influence, U.S Foreign Policy, Political TV Dramas, Agenda Setting*

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Chapter I

Introduction

Research between the political science and the communication disciplines has been a steady relationship throughout the recent decades. With both fields being in the social sciences and dealing with human interaction, political scientists were making observations about the relationship between the mass media and the impact on policy and audience behavior towards political news throughout the 20th century (Lippman, 1922; Griffin, Ledbetter & Sparks, pg. 375 2015). Political science researchers frequently use communication theories such as agenda setting, framing, and cultivation theory to explain the political science phenomena regarding the relationship of media in the political process. As mass media has developed and changed, so has its influence on audiences. It is becoming more and more difficult to have accurate, timely, and relevant data on the media's influence on society due to the rapid and unceasing changes of these outlets. Some of these changes would be how news media is now available on multiple mediums that give consumers the ability to interact as well as the news cycle changing from a daily basis to a minute by minute update due to the technological advances of satellite and social media platforms. The following study seeks to 1) add to the body of knowledge in the political agenda setting research and political communication field by examining the impact of political television dramas on public opinion, 2) to understand first and second

order agenda-setting effects and 3) discuss areas in which this research can be further developed.

Using the agenda-setting theoretical frame, this research compares the influence of CBS's series *Madam Secretary* to cable news content commonly appearing on cable television news outlets such as: CNN, MSNBC, and FOX. This study examines the impact of television dramas and perceptions toward the diplomatic branch of the government and explores how specific types of media influence attitudes and behaviors towards U.S. government policy and support for foreign affairs initiatives. The foreign policy event examined in this study is the ongoing South China Sea conflict, where seven Asian countries are competing for island territories. Developing research in this academic area will help scholars understand how televised political dramas as a form of "soft news", rather than cable news programming, can shape perceptions toward actual U.S. government institutions and policy matters.

Review of Literature

Media Effects

Mass media and the impact it has on the human mind has been heavily studied in the past century. At first, researchers were wanting to know the effects of the mass media on voter behaviors and how it impacted the democratic system and then later focused on the presumed negative consequences on viewer's psychology and behaviors. This was especially a concern when the cable television became a common American household item in the Late 1940's and early 1950's. Between the years of 1946 and 1951, the number of American households who had a television set went from 6,000 to over 12

million families. A variety of programming was made available to audiences unlike ever before, exposing them to content and ideas through news programs, entertainment television, and advertising commercials. Cable programming took off in the early 1970's with over 80,000 viewers in New York City alone and by the end of the decade there were whole networks dedicated to cable television, many of which are still around today (Stevens, n.d.). With the majority of Americans consuming content in more of an abundance than ever before in history, researchers set out to find and explain if and what effects were caused by this mass media.

Within the decades of 1960 and 1970, several communication and sociology theories were developed to answer the question of 'how does television media impact audiences' attitudes and behaviors?' In 1961, psychologist Albert Bandura made observations of children imitating the behaviors of same sex models in what is known today as the Bobo Doll Experiment. Bandura noted that children who were exposed to models who demonstrated specific behaviors towards the bobo doll (aggressiveness, gentleness & neutrality) imitated these same behaviors. This experiment later became the foundation of his Social Learning Theory in 1977 which adds to the mass communication literature stating that models on television are influencers of audience behavior (Bandura, 1977). Bandura's social learning theory was not the only one to imply that media violence influences audiences. In 1976 scholars Gerbner and Gross developed the Cultivation theory. This theory suggests that attitudes about the world can be "cultivated" through the media, especially television. Cultivation theory focuses on the violence that is portrayed in television programs and already present in the attitudes of viewers. The theory proposes that heavy viewers of violent media are likely to perceive the world to be

a violent place, an effect known today as the mean world syndrome. Television and media possess a slight but significant influence over society's attitudes and behaviors towards itself (Gerbner & Gross, 1976).

Although these studies indicate there are negative affects the media can impose on society, research also indicates media can be a beneficial tool to help society learn and be informed about what was going on in the world as well as influence their attitudes to reflect these same ideologies. Agenda Setting will be the framework for this study and will be reviewed in more detail in the following section.

The Agenda Setting Theory

Agenda setting theory has had a long development throughout mass communication history. The initial theory was an idea that formed from the observations and experiences of the Pulitzer Prize-winning author and political analyst, Walter Lippmann (1922). In the first chapter of his groundbreaking book, *Public Opinion*, Lippmann believed that the media was the creator for the “outside world and the pictures in our heads.” (as cited in Griffin, Ledbetter, Sparks, 2015, p. 375). This notion implies that the interpretations and understandings of the world for each individual person is primarily based on what is learned from the media and how the media portrays the world. In other words, the individual worldview is influenced by the media that the individual consumes (McCombs, 2004). Building off of Lippmann's idea of media influence on public opinion, two more political scientists made significant observations that foreshadowed the agenda setting theory. In 1960 Theodore White, another political analyst, came to the following conclusion:

The power of the press in America is a primordial one. It sets the agenda of the public discussion; and this sweeping political power is unrestrained by any law. It determines what people will talk and think about – an authority that in other nations is reserved for tyrants, priests, parties and mandarins (Griffin et al., pg.376, 2015).

White was not alone in his observation, in 1963 Bernard Cohen, a Democrat from New York, stated the following: “The press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about,” (Griffin et al. , pg. 376, 2015). With the same observations about the media’s power over public influence, being made multiple times throughout the political community, two scholars by the names of Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw developed the theory that is known today as agenda setting. McCombs and Shaw (1972) originally titled agenda setting as the “agenda setting hypothesis.” Both theorists maintain: “mass media have the ability to transfer the salience of items on their news agendas to the public agenda.” (Griffin, et al., 2015 p. 375). The research on this theory tie together two assumptions, 1) the press and the media filter and shape reality rather than reflect it, and 2) only a few issues are focused on in the media, making them to be perceived as more important by the public. In short, this means that the news tells us not what to think, but what to think about.

The purpose of this theory helps explain how three agendas, the media agenda, the public agenda, and the policy agenda influence media consumer’s attitudes, opinions, and behaviors towards a variety of topics the media reports on. The three different “agendas,” media, public, and policy, can be influenced or be the influencer to shape

worldview, issue importance and perceived reality. The public agenda is defined as the most important public issues as measured by public opinion. The media agenda is the pattern and salience of news coverage across major print and broadcast media as measured by the prominence and length of stories (Griffin et al., 2015). The policy agenda are the domestic and international political issues and are often represented through the media and/or public agenda. Each of these agendas have influence over one another and can be influenced by outside forces. Below in Figure 1.0, you can see the agenda setting model and the cycle of influence of each agenda (Mass Media, 2017).

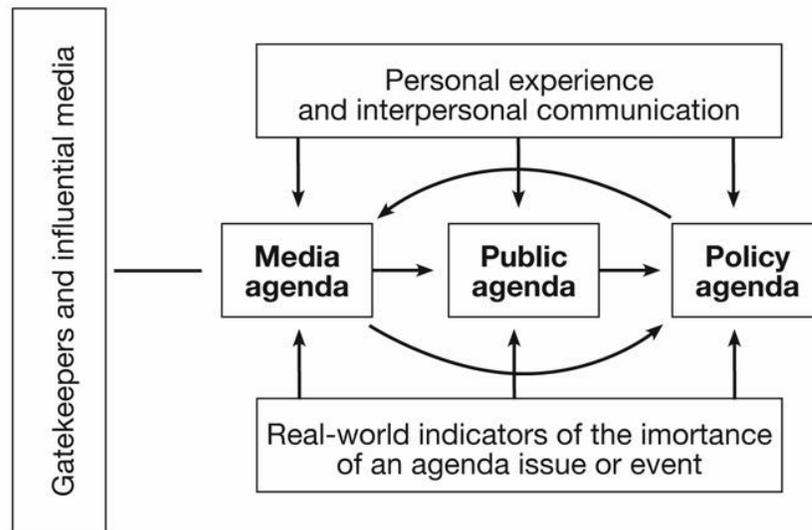


Figure 1. Agenda Setting model

Between the 1970's and 1980's McCombs used his theory initially to observe patterns between the media's political agenda and public opinion. Today dozens of research studies have investigated and provided evidence for the interrelationships of these variables. Initial studies were conducted by McCombs and Shaw in 1968 which sought to understand how the public agenda and media agenda develop over time. Later,

McCombs narrowed the foci to agenda setting effects in a presidential election, specifically the 1976 campaigns. Significant correlations were found between the two studies such that print media largely influenced public opinion by the strong, positive association between what respondents thought was the most important problem facing the country and the media they consumed (Griffin et al., 2015; Weaver, Graber, McCombs, & Eyal, 1981).

As more agenda setting research and studies were being conducted, McCombs added another layer to his theory called second level agenda setting, “the media may not only tell us what to think about, they also may tell us how and what to think about it, and perhaps even what to do about it,” said McCombs. McCombs (1997) argued that second level agenda setting goes beyond salience of stories, in an effort to better understand the reasons(s) as to why a particular news story or issue makes its way onto the public agenda by examining attributes. Weaver (2007) analyzes how McCombs suggests that these attributes were selectively and strategically chosen to frame the media agenda when a specific issue is discussed. It is then suggested by Weaver that second level agenda setting and framing hold similarities but are not the same process (Weaver, pg. 143, 2007). Weaver goes on to state that these two mass media analysis processes are more concerned with *how* issues or subjects are discussed in the media rather than which ones. It is further defined by Colman and Banning (2006) as, “The focus at this level is not on what media emphasize, but on how they describe it” (as cited in Freeland, 2012, p.3). These definitions indicate that second level agenda setting can not only influence audience worldview but our opinions and behaviors towards that worldview as well. How a news story/issue is emphasized is dependent upon the attributes and expectations that

the story is given by news reporters and the viewers' personal cognitive biases (Colman & Banning, p.321, 2006).

To help demonstrate how all three agendas work, the following example is provided. In 2016 a communicable disease called Zika emerged from South America and was causing serious and abnormal birth defects to newborns. The outbreak was located primarily in Brazil and other South American and Caribbean nations but later was transmitted into the United States. Cases were reported to the CDC by state, territorial and local health departments. Over 5,500 cases were reported in the continental United States spreading from travelers of affected areas, local mosquito-borne transmission, and other routes such as STDs. Due to first level agenda setting, Americans became hyper vigilant of the outbreak with reports coming from multiple major news outlets every day in the United States. The second level of agenda setting framed the situation as a serious women's health emergency and that extreme caution should be taken, especially for pregnant women resulting in changed audience behaviors such as canceling or postponing travel plans and outings in order to limit exposure to the disease because reports of the virus (Center for Disease Control, 2018; World Health Organization, 2016). Then in February of 2016, two states, Florida and Hawaii and one American territory, Puerto Rico, issued emergency declarations that contemplated the threats posed by the Zika virus through state executive powers. Despite the outbreak being mostly throughout the southern hemisphere of the Americas, the media influenced North Americans to take precautions due to framing the media reports with fear appeals and negative attitudes from local and national medias (Arif, 2017). This example demonstrates how the media's agenda influenced the public and policy agenda. The tone and perception of an issue,

such as emerging infectious disease, is equally important because of its focus on news framing and news attributes rather than salience. (Freeland, 2012).

Agenda setting theory has stood the test of time, and today communication researchers have expanded the scope and application into the new media platforms including the Internet and social media which indicates that it can be applied to future technological developments of media. The strengths of this theory are that 1) helps to explain the connection between certain topics in public affairs and public opinion and 2) is useful tool for analyzing and comparing sociological and media communication phenomena. Agenda setting offers interdisciplinary insight to sociology, psychology, political science and communication scholars. However, communication studies have not been the only field to apply these concepts. The field of political science has also advanced a similar concept to explain the relationship between the media and policy called the *CNN Effect*.

The CNN Effect

For centuries, mass audiences have been the senders and receivers of news media. First it was the spoken word, then written and visual communication and now, very recently, television. The use of mass media has spread ideas across all borders, both geographical and sociological. One of the largest developments of mass communication in political science was the development of the phenomena referred to as “The CNN Effect.” The CNN Effect is a concept that explains how the emergence of a 24/7 news cycle dramatically changes the dissemination of information to mass audiences.

Strobel (1996) describes the CNN Effect as a loss of policy and control on the part of policy makers because of the power of the media. The CNN Effect explains how U.S. foreign policy and other political agendas make it into the 24/7 news cycle and are used by commentators shape public perceptions toward government policies. In 1980, CNN was the first news channel of its kind reporting live broadcasts and real-time stories of events occurring not only in the United States but around the world. The once cultural hobby of sitting down for the six o'clock news was no longer required to receive the headlines of the day. CNN was only the beginning.

Today through the use of and access to digital media technology, information, ideas, and news are shared at an unquantifiable pace, forcing gatekeepers to be hyper-vigilant toward news content and keeping journalistic fact checkers working non-stop. The CNN Effect transformed the mass media landscape by providing viewers steady news stories and reports thus influencing audience worldviews multiple times a day. A wide array of network & cable programming have become part of the CNN Effect. This concept came to fruition in response to the humanitarian crises in Somalia, Iraq, Bosnia and Kosovo throughout the 90's (Mermin, 1997; Robinson, 2005; Strobel, 1996). U.S. foreign policy influence was shifted from the government agenda to the public agenda. Before 1980, CNN's first broadcast, a one way or "conveyor belt" model was used to guide the national news airing in evening broadcasts. Important information by the Office of the President was sent to the media outlets to disseminate to mass audiences. CNN's news model allowed journalists to develop a greater agency of determining what was "newsworthy" and reset the daily news cycle. Thus the one-way opinion leader changed from being unilateral to multilateral. Now all three players, audience, media, and the

government, are able to influence one another. In the context of diplomacy, if audiences are influenced by the media's stories, they may pressure government officials to create or act upon foreign policy matters. Additionally, if the audience influences the media, they may pressure the government for foreign policy matters (Mobley, 2017).

Figure 2.0 depicts the unilateral information flow and Figure 3.0 depicts the multilateral information flow which resembles the agenda setting theory model:



Figure 2. Unilateral Information flow.

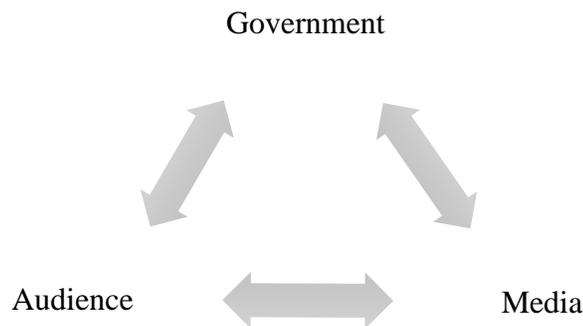


Figure 3. Multilateral Information flow.

With the development of the CNN Effect and the 24/7 news coverage of political headlines, reporting such events and the way in which they were delivered to mass audiences drastically changed. Communication theories such as framing and agenda-setting became key for analyzing the effects traditional news media has on audiences' opinions, behaviors, and attitudes.

Traditional News Sources

With the agenda setting theory explaining the media influence cycle, there have been numerous studies focusing on this phenomenon with traditional media sources in the public sphere. Traditional media is defined as news mediums that have characteristics of one-way conversation, is a closed system and opaque (i.e. newspaper, television news programs and radio broadcasts) (Hausman, 2012). It is also defined by Blakeman (pg. 85, 2014) that traditional media “uses vehicles directed at a mass audience such as print (newspaper and magazine) and broadcast (radio and television)”.

Studies from the Pew Research Center indicate that there is a trend curving toward the popularity of television, a traditional news source, as the primary news source for U.S. audiences with about six in ten Americans tuning into cable, local and network nightly news (Mitchell, Gottfried, Barthel, & Shearer, p.2, 2016). PR Week also reinforces these findings indicating that users of non-traditional media (social media and internet) are seeking out news sources which lead them back to the traditional sources of the cable and network news programs (Noble, 2014). Extant literature focusing on traditional media influence provides evidence as to how the mass media’s power is seen as more influential in symbolic agendas through newspapers, TV and radio broadcasts to Belgium members of parliament (MP’s) than influential power on the substantive agenda. *Symbolic agendas* do not have direct policy consequences (i.e. president visiting a city recently hit by a natural disaster, interacting with constituents, politicians performing community service, etc.) whereas *substantive agendas* do (i.e. voting on and passing legislation, political support or nominations, etc.) (Walgrave, Soroka, & Nuytemans, 2008; Vesa, Blomberg, & Kroll, 2015).

Belgium MP's report the news media had influential power over what agendas are discussed in the public sphere, but hardly any influence over the actual policy decisions that were being made in parliament (Vesa et al., 2015).

Within the traditional media of television broadcasting, there are a variety of programs in which cases of news reports have studied. Based on the literature mentioned above, it is notable that these studies have focused on hard news programs. The intent of this study is to explore agenda setting effects from the soft news programs, specifically the political television drama, *Madam Secretary*. Differences between hard and soft news will be described in more detail in the following section.

Hard News vs. Soft News

Traditional television news programs can be separated into two different categories, hard news and soft news. Hard news on broadcast television is considered to be programming presented in an educational and informational format which has themes of policies and public affairs, examples include *CNN*, *FOX*, *MSNBC*, etc. (Baum, 2007). Baum (2007) defined soft news as, "programs that look like traditional news shows yet, they focus primarily on entertainment and human-interest themes, rather than politics or public affairs." Examples of these types of programs include: *Entertainment Tonight*, *The Insider*, *Inside Edition*, *Access Hollywood*, and *Extra*. Soft news has also been referred to as a type of programming called infotainment. Infotainment are television or radio programs that treat factual material in an entertaining manner by including dramatic elements (i.e. NPR's *Wait, Wait, Don't Tell Me!*, *Late Night with Seth Meyers*, *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert*, etc.). With the majority of agenda setting research focusing

on hard news content across traditional mediums, Baum (2007) conducted research analyzing the reports of soft news outlets in television broadcasting. The hot topic at the time of this study was the cruise missile strikes against suspected Afghani and Sudan terrorist sites under the Clinton administration, as well as Clinton's testimony about his relationship with Monica Lewinsky. After an initial content analysis of 46 stories on 12 different soft news programs, Baum noticed that over 70% of the programs were reporting these events under the context of a "Wag the Dog" theme. "Wag the Dog" was a 1997 film that tells the story of a fictional president hiring a Hollywood film producer to "produce" a fictitious war with the hopes of directing the public's attention away from his headlining sex scandal. Baum also noticed that out of 69 network news stories featuring the missile strikes, only 16% mentioned the Monica Lewinsky or "Wag the Dog" (Baum, 2007). A post-attack opinion poll was released to gauge audience perceptions of the new stories. Roughly 40% of respondents reported that they believed one of President Clinton's intentions with the missile launch was to distract from his personal affairs with Lewinsky. The demographics that were most likely to hold this opinion were less-educated Americans, who also happen to be the primary consumers of soft news shows (Baum, 2007). A similar situation is being speculated of the current presidential administration. President Donald Trump has ordered a U.S. military airstrike on Syria in early April, 2018 while there were several domestic scandals also being reported on in the news. MSNBC's Rachel Maddow called attention to the convenient timing of the airstrikes while the special counsel Robert Mueller Russia investigation continues, a recent office raid of President Trump's personal attorney, Michael Cohen among other situations (Lincoln, 2018). Because of this research, Baum concluded mass

media and soft news have changed the way in which major political news stories such as foreign policy crisis, are covered.

Within the traditional television news medium, soft news programs have become a strong rival against hard news programs. Because of the changing media landscape and political climate, this study will explore how soft news programming in the form of political television dramas, could be influential in shaping the audiences attitudes, opinions, beliefs and behaviors toward the U.S. foreign policy, compared to hard news sources (e.g. CNN, FOX, MSNBC, etc.).

The Emergence of Political News Dramas

Numerous political television dramas have filled the primetime cable networks as a primary means for audience entertainment. Political dramas have become some of America's most popular television programs (CenturyLink, 2016); however, this is not a new television fad. TV series such as *M*A*S*H* (1972-1983) and *The West Wing* (1999-2006) were popular with audiences throughout late 20th and early 21st centuries. Both series focused on different parts of the executive branch, *M*A*S*H* depicted life as a soldier during the Vietnam war and *The West Wing* of the inner workings inside the White House. In some shape, foreign policy was depicted in each of these programs, but it was not the main focus. It wasn't until the premiere of *Madam Secretary* that the diplomatic side of the executive branch was represented as the main plot sequence of a primetime drama.

Currently, CBS's *Madam Secretary* is listed in the top five most watched political dramas of 2016 in 24 out of the 50 states (CenturyLink, 2016). As a result, *Madam*

Secretary has been chosen to represent the soft news, political drama because of its detailed portrayal of diplomatic policies and strategies used in the executive branch of the U.S. government and its popularity among American viewers. *Madam Secretary* is a popular primetime series that has a large audience base on a national scale. *Madam Secretary* first premiered in the fall of 2014 on the CBS network as a competitive alternative to other networks' political dramas such as Netflix's *House of Cards* (2013), ABC's *Scandal* (2012) and HBO's *Veep* (2012). With a new show featuring a strong female lead, a cast of characters that seem realistic and a storyline featuring the Department of State, CBS was hoping to bring audiences a unique program, like none before it. Writer Barbara Hall and executive producers Morgan Freeman and Lori McCreary were inspired to make this series during the Benghazi trials and wanted to demonstrate to audiences how highly sensitive situations are handled in D.C. (Ng, 2014).

To ensure that the program portrays a realistic image of the successes and challenges of the role of the Secretary of State, producers gained valuable insight from former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. Despite minor similarities and nuances with Téa Leoni's character, the show does not directly portray a former secretary of state, but rather an individual, faux character, Secretary Elizabeth McCord. Hall admits that one of the biggest challenges in the creation of this show was to find resolutions without depicting Secretary McCord as some kind of superwoman.

You're right. You can't resolve them [global issues]. They're ongoing.

Although more often than not, you can find moments of resolution within ongoing problems, and that's one of the things we will do. Trying to turn it into

someone who just is a superhero fixing international problems is not going to work for us, said Barbara Hall, Writer and Executive Producer (Ng, 2014).

The show's popularity is reflected in the viewership of the season 4 premiere. During the height of the Sunday Night Football season, *Madam Secretary* was the highest viewed season premiere that evening with 7.1 million viewers tuning in to the CBS political drama (Littleton, 2017). Because of the realistic, timely and dramatic depictions of U.S. foreign policy and diplomatic officials with dramatized events as well as the show's popularity, *Madam Secretary* was selected for experimentation.

The hard news media content chosen for this study is a collection of cable news broadcasts from FOX, MSNBC and CNN cable news networks about the South China Sea Conflict. These news outlets have strong reputations with American audiences as reliable and prominent news sources (Engel, 2016). In August of 2017, AdWeek rated these networks in the "Top Five Basic Cable Networks", a poll that surveyed the most watched prime time cable news channels and ranked each of these channels with daily viewership between 2.4 million and 961,000 within the month of June in 2017 (Katz, 2017). Given their historical and extensive coverage over the selected foreign policy event, these outlets were selected to represent hard news.

U.S. Foreign Policy

The U.S. foreign policy event chosen for this study is the South China Sea Conflict. The Council of Foreign Relations (2017) summarizes the issue below.

Six countries lay overlapping claims to the East and South China Seas, an area that is rich in hydrocarbons and natural gas and through which trillions of dollars

of global trade flow. As it seeks to expand its maritime presence, China has been met by growing assertiveness from regional claimants like Japan, Vietnam, and the Philippines. The increasingly frequent standoffs span from the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands, on China's eastern flank, to the long stretch of archipelagos in the South China Sea that comprise hundreds of islets. Under the Obama administration the U.S. pivot to Asia, involving renewed diplomatic activity and military redeployment, could signal Washington's heightened role in the disputes, which, if not managed wisely, could turn part of Asia's maritime regions from thriving trade channels into arenas of conflict. China's maritime disputes span centuries. The tug-of-war over sovereignty of the Diaoyu/Senkakus in the East China Sea can be traced to the Sino-Japanese War of 1894, while Japan's defeat in World War II and Cold War geopolitics added complexity to claims over the islands. The fight over overlapping exclusive economic zones in the South China Sea has an equally complex chronology of events steeped in the turmoil of Southeast Asian history. Globalization—including extensive free trade pacts between claimants—and recent developments like the U.S. "pivot" to Asia have further connected the two disputes. As China's economic ascent facilitates growing military capabilities and assertiveness in both seas, other regional players are also experiencing their own rise in nationalism and military capability and have exhibited greater willingness to stake territorial claims (Dingli, Economy, Haass, Kurlantzick, Smith & Tay, 2017).

Hypotheses

In a study by the Pew Research Center, findings show that viewers of hard news sources have had a stable rating of credibility among the different mediums over a period of ten years (Bailey, 2008). Due to this finding and given that agenda setting mainly focuses on issue salience from hard news outlets such as cable news reports, as well as the popularity of these programs nationwide, it is believed participants information seeking and sharing behaviors will be impacted differently. It is believed that participants will perceive news coming from political television dramas as less credible than the hard news programs resulting in differences in behavioral intention to verify information through seeking and sharing behaviors. As a result, the following is hypothesized;

H1) Participants who view the political television dramas video will report higher intentions to seek and share information about the South China Sea Conflict than participants who view cable news reports.

Diplomacy tactics are uniquely portrayed in soft news programs. Specifically, the political television drama, *Madam Secretary*. The content involves dramatic interpretations of the South China Sea conflict through actors and narratives. These narratives focus on the lived experiences of actors playing diplomatic officials interacting with each other to accomplish goals that advance diplomatic interests. Alternatively hard news typically engages informational foreign policy reports frequently presented in, cable news programs, *FOX*, *MSNBC*, and *CNN*. These reports are typically very dry, contain information dense monologues and conversations of news reporters, anchors, journalists and subject matter experts. According to second level agenda setting theory, with the

same information being presented in drastically different formats, it is expected that this study will find differences in issue familiarity (i.e. SCSC policy) and issue importance (i.e. U.S. diplomacy) between groups who view political television drama and those who watch cable news reports. Therefore, the following is hypothesized:

H2) Participants who view political television drama will report higher issue familiarity of U.S. diplomacy compared to those who received cable news reports. Inversely, participants who view the cable news reports will report higher issue familiarity of the U.S. foreign policy the South China Sea conflict, compared to those who view the political television drama.

The above hypothesis argues that political dramas will result in higher familiarity of U.S. diplomacy efforts due to a more focused emphasis of the characters' duties and roles in the political television drama than in cable news reports. It is also believed that this will additionally result in higher issue importance of U.S. diplomacy, compared to those who are exposed through hard news.

H3) Participants who view political television dramas will report higher issue importance of U.S. diplomacy compared to those who view cable news reports. Inversely, participants who viewed the cable news reports video will report higher issue importance of the U.S. foreign policy, the South China Sea conflict, compared to those who watched the political television drama.

The aforementioned hypotheses are predicted through agenda setting and the CNN effect because of these analytical tools' historical focus on hard news programs. This study's purpose is to juxtapose these theoretical and conceptual frameworks onto the

soft news program of *Madam Secretary* in order to see the differences (if any) in the media affects to viewer's behavioral patterns and familiarity and knowledge levels of the depicted U.S. foreign policy event.

As explained in the previous sections, agenda setting and the CNN effect have been indicators of voter behaviors as well as indicators of policy change and public opinion within a government system. Traditional hard news media has been proven to play a significant role in shaping these attitudes and behaviors. This research hopes to establish significance in the role traditional soft news media plays in influencing audiences as well, thus establishing the above hypotheses.

Chapter II

Methodology

This media effects study is designed to determine if there are measurable differences of attitudes and behaviors between viewers of, traditional hard news reports, and viewers of soft new in the form of political television dramas. A four-part survey was developed on the Qualtrics Experience Management[®] survey software in the Communication Research Lab for data collection. Before beginning the data collection process, a proposal, research materials and measures were submitted to the university Internal Review Board (IRB) for approval. Once IRB approval was granted the survey was officially launched over the period of 12 days from February 26, 2018 to March 9, 2018. Participants were recruited into a “Political Communication Survey” at a Midwest university in the state of Kansas within the U.S.. Four convenience sampling methods were used to recruit participants including, 1) e-mailing departmental faculty and staff encouraging student participation, 2) hanging approximately 20 flyers throughout the university campus advertising boards, 3) messaging departmental classes through the Canvas learning management system, and 4) posting messages on the primary investigator’s social media account. Participants were asked to voluntarily participate by following a URL link to the online survey system, which guided them to the study, and delivered the informed consent information. If the subject agreed to the informed consent

they moved forward with the experimental materials. Some participants were incentivized to participate with extra credit opportunities at the discretion of the professors. Of the 110 participants, $n=18$ were incomplete and removed from the study, resulting $n=92$ respondents were included in the quantitative analysis.

Procedures

A pre- post- design survey was divided into four sections: 1) demographic information, 2) perceived issue importance, issue familiarity and likelihood of sharing/seeking information, 3) viewing of an experimental video and 4) post-measurements of the same measured variables in section 2. In total, the survey asked 38 questions and included three experimental video conditions. On average the survey took approximately 20 minutes to complete. Participants under the age of 18 were excluded from the survey and the remaining were randomly and evenly divided by the Qualtrics program into one of three experimental conditions, (A) political news reports, (B) political television drama *Madam Secretary*, and (C) a control video titled *12 Ancient Giants (And 1 Modern Marvel):SkunkBear*.

Experimental Messages

Participants were not expected to be familiar with the South China Sea Conflict or *Madam Secretary*. Experimental videos were developed to provide participants context and elicit certain responses based on the framed attributes of each video. The elicitation videos for groups A and B were edited and cropped into 13-minute segments specifically covering information about the U.S. foreign policy of the South China Sea Conflict. Group A, the political news reports, consisted of short segments from MSNBC, CNN and

FOX news channels. The video clips selected for this video span from March of 2014 to July of 2017 with three clips from each network making a total of nine different reports. These clips range from brief explanations of the South China Sea Conflict to a detailed report of challenges U.S. and foreign officials face (CNN, 2016; CNN, 2017; Diaz-Balart, 2015; FOX, 2016; FOX, 2017; Harris-Perry, 2015; MSNBC, 2014). As for Group B, soft news, the political television drama *Madam Secretary*, one 40-minute episode from Season 3, episode 3, *South China Sea*, which first aired on October 23, 2016, was cropped to only include scenes in which the foreign policy and diplomacy tactics were specifically demonstrated (Hall, 2016). Both videos for group A and B were approximately 13 minutes in length. Group C, who served as the control, watched a five-minute National Public Radio *Skunkbear* video which discussed the evolution of dinosaurs and had no reference to content relating to U.S. foreign policy and diplomacy.

Measured Variables

Demographic Information. The survey gathered standard demographic information through multiple choice questions to help categorize participants based on year in school (if applicable), age, gender, ethnicity, registered political party affiliation, and how often they vote in local and national elections. This data was collected for additional future research in the differences between generations, genders, and voters, outside the scope of the current analysis.

Source Credibility. To gauge perceived credibility towards national news media outlets and political television dramas, a six item, seven-point semantic differential scale employing polar adjectives was used. Opposite-pair adjectives include: honest/dishonest,

untrustworthy/trustworthy, honorable/dishonorable, moral/immoral, unethical/ethical, and phony/genuine. A scale reliability test was ran on the *national news media* and *political television drama* measures to ensure that this method was accurate and valid. This scale has demonstrated good internal consistency in past research, as well as in the current study ($\alpha=.97$, 6; $\alpha=.40$, 5). Source credibility was only asked in Phase 1 of the survey and used as a manipulation check to determine attitudes prior to the exposure to experimental materials of the other measured variables.

Information Sharing To address *HI*, a 3-item series of 10-point Likert scale questions were developed to determine the likelihood of the participant sharing information about the South China Sea conflict and U.S. Diplomacy efforts. Variables included sharing information via, social media, word of mouth and written materials (such as an academic paper, newspaper article, blog post or letter). A textbox was also open for participants to report other ways in which they may share information about either the South China Sea Conflict and U.S. Diplomacy.

Information Seeking The next variable measured was information seeking about the South China Sea conflict to address *HI*. For this variable a 5-item, 0-10 point Likert scale was used to measure the likelihood of participants seeking information through social media, word of mouth, written materials, listening to news program or podcasts, and asking a subject matter expert.

Issue Familiarity Perceived issue familiarity of the South China Sea conflict and U.S. diplomacy was measured on a 5-item scale of multiple choice statements which vary increased from “I have never heard of it” to “I know what it is, could explain what the

conflict is about and have a well-informed discussion about it.” This scale was based off a well-tested model used in previous studies (Center, 2016).

Issue Importance A 6-item, 7-point semantic scale employing polar adjectives was used to determine issue importance for the foreign policy, the South China Sea, and U.S. diplomacy efforts. Adjectives included; unimportant/important, of no concern/of much concern, irrelevant/relevant, means nothing/means a lot, doesn’t matter/matters and insignificant/significant. This scale is modeled after an importance scale used in communication research and to ensure reliability a Cronbach’s alpha was measured for the South China Sea Conflict ($\alpha=.92$, 6-item) and U.S. Diplomacy ($\alpha=.97$, 6-item) (Rubin, Rubin, Graham, Perse, & Seibold, 2009).

After completing section 2 of the survey, participants moved on to the third section of the survey where they were randomly assigned into one of conditions. Elicitation videos B and C were embedded into the survey through a link to YouTube and elicitation video A was linked to a google drive account where participants would open a new internet window to watch the 13-minute clip and then return to the survey. Once participants finished the video they moved onto the fourth and final section of the survey where they responded to the Phase 2 variables of *issue familiarity*, *issue importance*, *information sharing* and *information seeking* following media exposure. Participants were also asked to report which video they viewed to test for accuracy. A copy of the survey tool can be viewed in Appendix B.

Chapter III

Results and Discussion

In order to answer each hypotheses advanced in the study a series of quantitative statistical tests were computed. The results are presented below in relation to each of the research hypotheses.

H1 sought to understand audience information seeking and sharing behavior following exposure to political dramas and cable news reports of the South China Sea dispute and U.S. foreign policy efforts, relative to control. A series of paired sample *t*-tests revealed no significant differences between pre- and post-exposure behavioral intentions of seeking information through social media $t(87)=-1.06$, $p=.11$, written materials $t(87)=-1.46$, $p=.15$, news programs/podcasts $t(84)=1.00$, $p=.32$, or subject matter experts $t(86)=-1.29$, $p=.20$; however, significant differences were found on the factor of word of mouth communication (WOMC) $t(87)=2.15$, $p<.05$.

Although the sample means did not significantly vary across all of the mediums further analysis using a univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) within the experimental conditions was computed with the experimental group as the fixed factor and information sharing channels as the dependent variables. Results indicated there were no significant differences within the group's pre-media exposure. Additionally no

significant differences were found in the post exposure condition on the mediums of social media $F(2, 87)=2.13, p=.12$, word of mouth $F(2,87)=2.42, p=.09$, or subject matter experts $F(2, 86)=2.65, p=.08$. The experimental group did significantly vary on the mediums of written materials $F(2,87)=9.94, p<.001, partial\ eta^2=.19$ and news programs/podcasts $F(2,84)=4.30, p<.05, partial\ eta^2=.08$. Further examination of the mean scores within the medium of written materials indicates that compared to control ($M=2.33, SD=2.67$) and political television dramas ($M=3.72, SD=3.32$) participants who were exposed to cable news reports about the South China Sea reported an increased intention to seek additional information ($M=5.67, SD=2.96$) through written materials (i.e. academic paper, newspaper article, blog post or a letter). Additional analysis shows, compared to control ($M=2.63, SD=2.49$) and political dramas ($M=2.96, SD= 2.8$), participants exposed to cable news reports about the South China Sea reported an increased intention to seek additional information via news programs and podcasts ($M=4.68, SD= 3.23$). Results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

<i>Table 1: Seeking Information about South China Sea Conflict Paired Sample t-test</i>										
	<i>Pre-Media Exposure</i>									
	<i>Social Media</i>		<i>Word of Mouth</i>		<i>Written Materials</i>		<i>News Program/ Podcast</i>		<i>SME</i>	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>Control</i>	2.56	2.94	2.12	2.26	2.48	2.84	3.24	2.72	2.27	2.88
<i>Political Drama</i>	2.52	2.80	2.79	2.99	3.86	3.33	3.29	2.76	3.36	3.23
<i>News Clips</i>	2.91	3.31	2.50	2.68	4.06	3.24	4.13	3.18	3.13	3.41

	<i>Post-Media Exposure</i>									
	<i>Social Media</i>		<i>Word of Mouth</i>		<i>Written Materials</i>		<i>News Program/ Podcast</i>		<i>SME</i>	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
<i>Control</i>	2.52	2.75	2.09	2.37	2.33	2.67	2.63	2.49	2.22	2.74
<i>Political Drama</i>	2.52	2.85	3.20	3.13	3.72	3.32	2.96	2.80	3.60	3.21
<i>News Clips</i>	3.90	3.28	3.6	2.99	5.67*	2.96	4.68*	3.23	3.97	3.45
<i>Notes: 5-item, 10 point Likert scale – Not at all Likely to Very Likely N=88</i>										

A series of t-tests revealed significant differences between pre- and post-exposure to the behavioral intentions of sharing information through social media $t(88)=-2.45$, $p=.02$, word of mouth, $t(86)=-2.07$, $p=.04$, and written materials $t(88)=-3.59$, $p=.001$. Sample means significantly varied across all of the mediums, further analysis was conducted using a series of univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) within the experimental conditions. No significant differences were found prior to exposure to the experimental messages. Additionally no significant differences were found in the post exposure condition on the intent to share information on the medium of social media $F(2, 87) = 2.13$, $p=.12$; however the experimental conditions did significantly vary on the mediums of word of mouth ($F(2, 87) = 5.63$, $p<.005$) *partial eta*²-.12 and written materials ($F(2, 87) = 3.69$, $p<.02$) *partial eta*² = .08. Further examination of the mean scores of word of mouth communication indicates that compared to control ($M=1.92$, $SD=2.28$), participants who were exposed to political television drama ($M=3.08$, $SD=3.16$) and cable news reports ($M=4.17$, $SD= 2.93$) about the South China Sea

reported increased intention to share this information with others. Scores also show that compared to control ($M=1.30$, $SD= 1.89$), participants exposed to political television dramas ($M=2.56$, $SD=2.70$) and cable news reports ($M=2.97$, $SD=2.95$) about the South China Sea report an increased intention to share information via written materials. Results reported in Table 2 present these findings.

Table 2

<i>Table 2: Sharing Information about the South China Sea Conflict Paired Sample t-test</i>						
	<i>Pre-Media Exposure</i>					
	<i>Social Media</i>		<i>Word of Mouth</i>		<i>Written Materials</i>	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>Control</i>	1.45	2.33	2.18	2.46	1.06	1.60
<i>Political Drama</i>	1.79	2.25	2.56	2.87	1.43	1.81
<i>News Clips</i>	1.81	2.89	2.48	2.96	2.03	3.11

	<i>Post-Media Exposure</i>					
	<i>Social Media</i>		<i>Word of Mouth</i>		<i>Written Materials</i>	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>Control</i>	1.45	2.32	1.92	2.28	1.30	1.89
<i>Political Drama</i>	2.48	3.09	3.08*	3.16	2.56	2.70
<i>News Clips</i>	2.73	2.90	4.17*	2.93	2.97	2.95
<i>Notes: 3-item, 10 point Likert scale – Not at all Likely to Very Likely</i>						
<i>N=88</i>						

$H2$ hypothesized participants who viewed political television dramas would report higher levels of familiarity of U.S. diplomacy efforts. In order to test this hypothesis a t-test was computed between pre- and post-exposure on the factor of familiarity with U.S. diplomacy. There was a significant statistical difference $t(87) = -3.30$, $p < .001$. To test for

differences within the group, an ANOVA was computed with experimental group as the fixed factor and issue familiarity of U.S. diplomacy as the dependent variable. There were no statistical significant differences found between the groups. Alternatively, *H2* also hypothesized that participants who viewed the cable news reports would report higher issue familiarity of the South China Sea Conflict. In order to test this hypothesis a t-test was computed between pre- and post-exposure to familiarity with the South China Sea Conflict indicating there was a significant statistical difference $t(87) = -7.19$, $p < .000$. To test for differences within the group an ANOVA was computed and results show that there was a significant statistical difference between groups on the factor of issue familiarity with the South China Sea Conflict $F(2, 86) = 21.74$, $p = .000$ *partial eta*² = .34. Upon further examination of the post- exposure mean scores of issue familiarity about the South China Sea Conflict, participants who viewed the political television drama ($M = 2.76$, $SD = 1.09$) and cable news reports ($M = 3.7$, $SD = .877$) indicated a higher level of issue familiarity compared to control ($M = 1.84$, $SD = 1.29$) Results reported in Table 3 below.

Table 3.

<i>Table 3: Issue Familiarity</i>								
	<i>Pre-Media Exposure</i>				<i>Post-Media Exposure</i>			
	<i>SCSC</i>		<i>Diplomacy</i>		<i>SCSC</i>		<i>Diplomacy</i>	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
<i>Control</i>	1.85	1.22	3.03	.95	1.84	1.29	3.03	.933
<i>Political Drama</i>	1.79	1.10	2.82	1.05	2.76*	1.09	3.04*	1.13
<i>News Clips</i>	1.88	.98	2.97	.97	3.70*	.88	3.20*	.89
<i>Note: 5-item scale of multiple choice statements which vary increased from "I have never heard of it" to "I know what it is, could explain what the conflict is about and have a well-informed discussion about it."</i>								
N= 87								

H3 hypothesized that participants who viewed political dramas would report higher levels of issue importance toward U.S. diplomacy efforts. In order to test this hypothesis a t-test was computed between pre- and post-exposure on the factor of issue importance and formed no significant differences found ($t(88) = -.55, p = .58$). An ANOVA was computed with the experimental groups as the categorical variable and U.S. diplomacy issue importance as the dependent variable. No significant differences were found in the experimental groups prior to message exposure $F(2, 91) = .28, p = .75$ or following $F(2, 87) = .19, p = .82$ message exposure. Alternatively *H3* also hypothesized that participants who viewed cable news reports would report increased issue importance of the South China Sea Conflict. In order to test this hypothesis a t-test was computed between pre- and post-exposure on the factor of importance with the South China Sea Conflict indicating there was a significant statistical difference $t(84) = -3.64, p < .001$. To test for differences between the experimental groups an ANOVA was computed and results show that prior to message exposure there were no significant differences between the experimental groups $F(2, 88) = 2.80, p = .06$; however following message exposure

significant differences were discovered $F(2,86)=3.40, p<.05, partial\ eta^2=.08$. Further examination of the mean scores shows that those who received cable news reports

($M=5.00, SD=1.39$) and participants who received a political drama portrayal ($M=4.87, SD=1.51$) reported increased issue importance compared to control ($M= 4.15, SD= 1.53$). Results presented on Table 4 as shown below.

Table 4

<i>Table 4: Issue Importance</i>								
	<i>Pre-Media Exposure</i>				<i>Post-Media Exposure</i>			
	<i>SCSC</i>		<i>Diplomacy</i>		<i>SCSC</i>		<i>Diplomacy</i>	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
<i>Control</i>	4.38	1.30	6.04	1.08	4.15	1.53	5.94	1.09
<i>Political Drama</i>	3.73	1.36	5.82	1.13	4.87*	1.51	5.83	1.12
<i>News Clips</i>	4.52	1.27	5.88	1.34	5.0*	1.39	6.01	1.03

Notes: 6-item, 7-point semantic scale unimportant/important, of no concern/of much concern, irrelevant/relevant, means nothing/means a lot, doesn't matter/matters and insignificant/significant
N=87

Discussion

Results from the t-test and ANOVA for *HI* did not fully support the hypothesized outcome that the participants who viewed the political drama elicitation video would report a higher likelihood of seeking information about the South China Sea than participants who viewed the cable news reports. Participants who viewed cable news reports reported a higher likelihood of seeking more information about the South China Sea conflict than participants who viewed the political news drama, particularly through mediums of written materials and news programs or podcasts. It may be that by having short clips of nine different news stories participants may feel they have a better general

understanding of the South China Sea conflict (which is supported in *H2*) but lack issue salience and resolution which causes increased intentions of behavioral changes to learn more about the U.S. foreign policy event and its outcome. In contrast, political television dramas may effectively stimulate the participant's interest in U.S. foreign policy events because of its narrative format which includes a beginning, middle and conclusion. Another inference of this outcome could be due to the recent rhetoric from the current white house administration which attacks the integrity and credibility of hard news sources. Findings for *H1* indicate that audiences found the hard news media credible however, these studies were before a new presidential administration came into power and began popularizing terms such as "fake news" and "alternative facts" which could now have diminished the credibility of hard news outlets.

As for the hypothesized outcome towards information sharing, this study found participants who viewed the cable news reports reported higher likelihood of sharing information about the South China Sea conflict, compared to participants who viewed political television drama. Each experimental condition reported a statistical difference between pre and post media exposure indicating that despite type of elicitation video participants viewed, there was increased intent to share information about the South China Sea conflict post-exposure. Between these groups it was reported that the word of mouth medium was the most likely medium that participants would use to share information about the South China Sea conflict. The findings support *H1* indicating that participants who viewed the cable news reports have a higher likelihood of sharing information about the South China Sea Conflict that participants who viewed the soft news source of the political drama program *Madam Secretary*. This could be due to the

historically perceived source credibility associated with anchors, reporters, journalists, and other characteristics of hard news.

Results for *H2* reported that strong statistical differences of issue familiarity were found between the groups for, the South China Sea conflict and U.S. diplomacy. When analyzing the within groups of the U.S. diplomacy variable no statistical differences were found. Thus, it is concluded that the expected outcome of political television drama resulting higher issue familiarity of U.S. diplomacy, in comparison to those who viewed cable news reports is not supported.

It was also reported for *H2* that when analyzing the within groups of the South China Sea conflict variable that there was a statistical difference following exposure to the experimental materials. The significance was incredibly strong ($p < .001$) within the group, approximately 34 percent. With such a strong report it is concluded that the hypothesized outcome of participants who viewed cable news reports will report a statistical significant increase of issue familiarity of the South China Sea Conflict compared to participants who viewed the political television drama is not supported but rather the null hypothesis is. This indicates that hard news sources such as cable news programs like *CNN*, *FOX* and *MSNBC* are more likely to increase foreign policy familiarity among audiences that political television dramas are. This finding may result from the amount of sources used in the cable news report elicitation video containing nine individual reports, compared to the political television drama which had 1 program with a single story line represented. It could be that due to the multiple reports contained within the cable news experimental condition, an effect on issue familiarity was artificially created by making it seem more widely researched than the singular source for

the political television drama thus making the U.S. foreign policy event seem more familiar to participants who viewed the cable news reports.

Results for *H3* concluded that there were no significant statistical differences on issue importance of U.S. diplomacy between the pre and post media exposure. Participants who viewed both political television dramas and cable news reports did not report increased issue importance of U.S. diplomacy. Significant differences were found between the pre and post media exposure groups and within the South China Sea conflict groups. Results show that participants who viewed the cable news reports perceived higher issue importance towards the South China Sea conflict than participants who viewed the political television drama when compared to control. Because cable news programs are generally informational and included multiple sources of information on their programs participants rated issue importance towards that foreign policy issue higher in comparison to the soft new programs such as political television dramas which primarily consists of dramatic interpretations without supporting source credibility outside from the main characters or presenting third party subject matter experts.

Chapter IV

Limitations and Future Research

Limitations of this study included the minimal experience the research has had with media affects studies. This impacted the development of the hypothesis and survey measures which had to be revised multiple times to properly measure media effects on audiences. Another limitation was the small sample size and location of this study. If there were more participants from a more diverse geographic and cultural background it is believed there would have been more variance between reported outcomes.

Furthermore, the degree of participant fandom/investment (or lack thereof) towards *Madam Secretary* was not taken into consideration. Participants who are regular viewers or aficionados of the series could have skewed perceptions of the programs depiction of issue importance and familiarity. The control elicitation video was significantly shorter and extremely off topic than the two elicitation videos which may have caused participant to become confused and exit the survey before completion. Finally, the reliability scale for source credibility was low when regarding political television dramas. The scale was designed to measure source credibility of hard new sources and the adaptation to the soft news medium of political television dramas, may no have been as effective in measuring credibility when compared to the hard new source of the cable news reports.

Future research is recommended to compare differences between demographic groups such as age populations, registered political parties and gender groups. By breaking down participants into these categories and finding potential differences within each group, data could be provided on how the attitudes and behaviors of viewers from different demographics are impacted.

Another area of future research would be to increase the number of political television dramas that the participants are exposed to determine if increase media variety results in stronger behavioral and attitude changes among participants. Because this was a limitation in the study, it would be beneficial for future research to determine if issue salience in soft news programs is an impacting factor among viewer attitudes and behaviors.

Comparing regular viewers of the political television dramas against non-viewers would also provide research on how these soft news programs have influenced audience perceptions and opinions over time. With televised soft news programs being so prominent in American culture, having data describing the potential differences between light and heavy viewership of these programs could lead to patterns of behavior and attitudes as well as other media effects.

It is recommended that other academic specialties provide further research into this study as well. It is encouraged that qualitative scholars study the recent rhetoric coming from an opinion leader such as the president as well as the symbolic and substantive messages being depicted in soft news programs. Connecting patterns and messages or observing the friction between the two mediums could provide insight to the

developing relationship that the media has with the government and public audiences. The finding that written materials as the most popular form of seeking information could also provide rhetoricians with materials to analyze content in which these relationships are being developed from.

Finally, it would be beneficial as a comparative study to use more well-known U.S. foreign policy event to see if familiarity is impacted because of preconceived bias. With both hard and soft news containing elements of real foreign policy events, determining if viewers attitudes and behaviors are more heavily influenced based on a more popularized/salient topic would help fill in missing data gaps in the political communication field as well as help researchers understand the relationship between the media, government policy and the public.

Conclusion

Overall, this study demonstrates that although political news dramas are not the main source of U.S. foreign policy and diplomacy news reports, they can be valuable tools in helping shape audiences' attitudes, and behaviors towards U.S. foreign policy and political communication. The results of this study demonstrate that hard news outlets such as cable news reports are more likely to engage audiences to perform behaviors of information seeking and sharing of content viewed in the report. Audience who view a soft news program are not as likely to have these types of behaviors. Results also concluded that word of mouth communication was the most likely vehicle in which these behaviors would be carried out. Future research will need to determine if this behavioral difference is due to lack of issue salience and resolution.

Another key finding was that issue familiarity of the South China Sea Conflict increased among viewers of both hard and soft news. However, hard news sources are more likely to increase foreign policy familiarity among audiences than soft news programs such as political television dramas. This indicates that both forms of traditional media can be an educational and informational source of foreign policy information to audiences.

The final key finding for this study concluded that issue importance of South China Sea Conflict increased among viewers of both hard and soft news. This result indicates that the coverage of a foreign policy event in both of these traditional media sources present information to viewers which adjusts their attitudes to perceive the South China Sea Conflict as an important foreign policy issue.

It will take further analysis and research in this niche field of media affects studies to determine if there are other areas in which political television dramas are influencing audiences. This study provides preliminary and exploratory research into the political communication and mass media fields and can be developed with further experiments and analysis. This research holds value in it's novel approach towards examining the effects of political television dramas and how viewership of these programs can change audience attitude and behaviors. With further exploration into this traditional media future generations of researchers will be able to understand if and how audiences are affected by this mass media category.

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APPENDIX

Pittsburg State University

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

This study explores media effects and attitude change and consists of a 25 item questionnaire and a short video.

You must be **18 years or older** to complete this survey.

It is estimated that it will take you approximately **20 minutes** to complete the entire survey.

The study has no foreseeable risks related to your involvement. There will be no collection of personally identifiable information that will later be tied to any participant's answers.

Participation in this study should offer no tangible short-term or long-term psychological risks, and there may or may not be a direct benefit to you if you take part. However, your participation may result in information that may help you or others in the future.

The records of this study will be kept private, there will be no information included that will make it possible to identify you as a research participant. Research records will be stored securely. Your name will not be linked to your responses. To ensure confidentiality, all findings will be presented in aggregate form with no identifying information.

Only the principle investigator will have access to the data stored in a password protected folder on the hard drive in the principle investigator's computer until completion of the study at which time all files will be destroyed. There will be no compensation or medical treatment if injury occurs.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not result in penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question or discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

If participating for extra credit for a course, the study must be fully completed.
Remember to print the last screen of the survey as evidence of your participation.

**IF YOU ARE TAKING THIS SURVEY ON A MOBILE DEVICE
PLEASE TURN HORIZONTALLY**

For questions about this survey contact Lynzee Flores P:417-291-1005 or E:
lflores@gus.pittstate.edu.

Section I: Demographic Information

First, we would like to know a little bit more about who you are. Select the options that below which best represents you.

What year of school are you in?

- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior
- Graduate Student
- x Not Applicable

How old are you?

- < 18 years old
- 18-24 years old
- 25-34 years old
- 35-44 years old
- 45+

Condition: **< 18 years old Is Selected**. Skip To: **End of Survey**. **Options**

To which gender identity do you most identify?

- Male
- Female
- Transgender

Gender Variant/Non-Conforming

Not Listed

Prefer not to answer

What is your ethnicity?

White/Caucasian

Hispanic or Latino/a

Black or African American

Asian/Pacific Islander

Native American/ American Indian

Multicultural

Other

What is your current registered political party affiliation?

Democrat

Republican

Independent

Other

Non-Affiliated

None at this time

How often do you vote in local elections?

Always

- Nearly Always
- Part of the Time
- Seldom
- Never

How often do you vote in national elections?

- Always
- Nearly Always
- Part of the Time
- Seldom
- Never

Section II: Television

Thank you for that helpful information. We will next ask you some questions about your attitudes toward network news and political television dramas. Take your time and remember there are no right or wrong answers.

Using the scales below, indicate your feelings toward

national news media

(i.e. CNN, FOX MSNBC, etc.).

Honest	<input type="radio"/>	Dishonest						
Untrustworthy	<input type="radio"/>	Trustworthy						
Honorable	<input type="radio"/>	Dishonorable						
Moral	<input type="radio"/>	Immoral						
Unethical	<input type="radio"/>	Ethical						
Phony	<input type="radio"/>	Genuine						

Using the scales below, indicate your feelings toward

political television dramas.

(i.e. Madam Secretary, House of Cards, The West Wing, etc.).

Honest	<input type="radio"/>	Dishonest						
Untrustworthy	<input type="radio"/>	Trustworthy						
Honorable	<input type="radio"/>	Dishonroable						
Moral	<input type="radio"/>	Immoral						
Unethical	<input type="radio"/>	Ethical						
Phony	<input type="radio"/>	Genuine						

Using the scales below, indicate your general attitudes toward **television news content**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
TV News presents things as they really are in life.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I see something on TV news, I can't be sure it really is that way.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
TV news lets me really see how other people live.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
TV news does not show life as it really is.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
TV news lets me see what happens in other	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Strongly Disagree Disagree Somewhat disagree Neither agree nor disagree Somewhat agree Agree Strongly agree

places as if I were really there.

Section III: U.S. Foreign Policy

This next section measures your current understanding of U.S. Diplomatic initiatives and a U.S. foreign policy. Answer the following items to the best of your ability, and remember there are no right or wrong answers.

How familiar are you with the South China Sea conflict?

- I have never heard of it
- I have some idea of what it is, but it's not very clear.
- I know what it is but am not sure of the details
- I know what it is and could explain what the conflict is about.
- I know what it is, could explain what the conflict is about and have a well informed discussion about it.

How important is it to you to have U.S. involvement in the South China Sea Conflict?

- | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| Unimportant | <input type="radio"/> | Important |
| Of no concern | <input type="radio"/> | Of much concern |

Irrelevant	<input type="radio"/>	Relevant						
Means nothing	<input type="radio"/>	Means a lot						
Doesn't Matter	<input type="radio"/>	Matters						
Insignificant	<input type="radio"/>	Significant						

How familiar are you with United States diplomacy?

- I have never heard of it.
- I have some idea of what it is, but it's not very clear.
- I know what it is but am not sure of the details
- I know what it is and could explain what the conflict is about
- I know what it is, could explain what the conflict is about and have a well informed discussion about it.

How important is it to you to have and maintain U.S. diplomacy?

Unimportant	<input type="radio"/>	Important						
Of no concern	<input type="radio"/>	Of much concern						
Irrelevant	<input type="radio"/>	Relevant						
Means nothing	<input type="radio"/>	Means a lot						
Doesn't Matter	<input type="radio"/>	Matters						
Insignificant	<input type="radio"/>	Significant						

Section IV: Information Seeking and Sharing

This section will measure the likelihood that you will share information about the South China Sea Conflict. Using the scale below, enter your

responses by indicating the likelihood you will share information with 0 representing ***not at all likely*** and 10 representing ***extremely likely***.

How likely are you to share information about the South China Sea Conflict on social media?

Not at all likely			Neutral				Extremely likely			
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="radio"/>										

How likely are you to share information about the South China Sea Conflict by word of mouth in conversation with another person?

Not at all likely			Neutral				Extremely likely			
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="radio"/>										

*How likely are you to share information about the South China Sea Conflict in written materials?
(i.e., an academic paper, newspaper article, blog post or a letter)*

Not at all likely			Neutral				Extremely likely			
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="radio"/>										

*Are there other ways you would share this type of information?
If so, please describe in the textbox below.*

Instructions: Using the scale below, answer the question to indicate your likelihood of seeking information, with 0 representing not at all likely and 10 representing extremely likely.

How likely are you to seek information about the South China Sea Conflict on social media?

Not at all likely

Neutral

Extremely likely

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="radio"/>										

How likely are you to seek information about the South China Sea Conflict by word of mouth in conversation with another person?

Not at all likely

Neutral

Extremely likely

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="radio"/>										

*How likely are you to seek information about the South China Sea Conflict in written materials?
(i.e., an academic paper, newspaper article, blog post or a letter)*

Not at all likely

Neutral

Extremely likely

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="radio"/>										

How likely are you to seek information about the South China Sea Conflict by listening to news programs or podcasts?

Not at all likely				Neutral						Extremely likely
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="radio"/>										

How likely are you to ask a subject matter expert about the South China Sea Conflict?

Not at all likely				Neutral						Extremely likely
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="radio"/>										

Section V: Elicitation Device

Now you will watch a short video which highlights information about the South China Sea Conflict. This video is approximately 13 minutes long. Wait until you have watched the entire clip before continuing to the rest of the survey. Once the clip has finished playing, click the continue button at the bottom of your screen to complete the survey.

Skunk Bear Video

Madam Secretary Video

PLEASE FOLLOW THE INSTURCTIONS BELOW

Instructions: When you click on the link below, a new window will open where a video will appear. Click the play button in the center of your screen and watch the video clip in the new window. Once you have finished the video, exit out of the window and return to this page of the survey to complete the study. Do not click the red continue button until you have watched the entire video.

[Click Here to watch the Video](#)

News Clips Video

Block Options

Video Selection

Which video did you just watch?

- Political TV drama Madam Secretary
- Montage of news clips about the South China Sea
- Skunk Bear video about dinosaurs

Section VI: U.S. Foreign Policy Post Elicitation Device

Thank you for your continued participation.

We will now ask you a series of questions. Some of the questions may be similar to or the same as previous questions you have responded to. Take your time and remember there are no right or wrong answers.

When you are ready click below to proceed.

How familiar are you with the South China Sea conflict?

- I have never heard of it
- I have some idea of what it is, but it's not very clear.
- I know what it is but am not sure of the details
- I know what it is and could explain what the conflict is about.

- I know what it is, could explain what the conflict is about and have a well informed discussion about it.

How important is it to you to have U.S. involvement in the South China Sea Conflict?

Unimportant	<input type="radio"/>	Important						
Of no concern	<input type="radio"/>	Of much concern						
Irrelevant	<input type="radio"/>	Relevant						
Means nothing	<input type="radio"/>	Means a lot						
Doesn't Matter	<input type="radio"/>	Matters						
Insignificant	<input type="radio"/>	Significant						

How familiar are you with United States Diplomacy?

- I have never heard of it.
- I have some idea of what it is, but it's not very clear.
- I know what it is but am not sure of the details
- I know what it is and could explain what the conflict is about
- I know what it is, could explain what the conflict is about and have a well informed discussion about it.

How important is it to you to have and maintain U.S. Diplomacy?

Unimportant	<input type="radio"/>	Important						
Of no concern	<input type="radio"/>	Of much concern						
Irrelevant	<input type="radio"/>	Relevant						
Means nothing	<input type="radio"/>	Means a lot						

Doesn't Matter	<input type="radio"/>	Matters						
Insignificant	<input type="radio"/>	Significant						

Section VII: Information Seeking and Sharing Post Elicitation Device

Instructions: Using the scale below, answer the question to indicate your likelihood to **share** information after viewing the video clip, with 0 representing not at all likely and 10 representing extremely likely.

How likely are you to share information about the South China Sea Conflict on social media?

Not at all likely	Neutral						Extremely likely			
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="radio"/>										

How likely are you to share information about the South China Sea Conflict by word of mouth in conversation with another person?

Not at all likely	Neutral						Extremely likely			
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="radio"/>										

*How likely are you to share information about the South China Sea Conflict in written materials?
(i.e., an academic paper, newspaper article, blog post or a letter)*

Not at all likely	Neutral						Extremely likely			
-------------------	---------	--	--	--	--	--	------------------	--	--	--

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Instructions: Using the scale below, answer the question below to indicate your likelihood to **seek** information after viewing the video clip, with 0 representing not at all likely and 10 representing extremely likely.

How likely are you to seek information about the South China Sea Conflict on social media?

Not at all likely Neutral Extremely likely

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

How likely are you to seek information about the South China Sea Conflict by word of mouth in conversation with another person?

Not at all likely Neutral Extremely likely

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

*How likely are you to seek information about the South China Sea Conflict in written materials ?
(i.e., academic paper, newspaper article, blog post or a letter)*

Not at all likely Neutral Extremely likely

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

How likely are you to seek information about the South China Sea Conflict by listening to news programs or podcasts?

Not at all likely

Neutral

Extremely likely

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="radio"/>										

How likely are you to ask a subject matter expert about the South China Sea Conflict?

Not at all likely

Neutral

Extremely likely

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<input type="radio"/>										