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The Collection of Media by U.S. Senators: A Preliminary Study

by

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The Collection of Media by U.S. Senators: A Preliminary Study

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This study explores the relationship between media and the U.S. Senate by examining how senators and staff collect, study, and use media. Senators and staff study media to find out how they are portrayed by media. Their collection of news articles for study is an indicator of mediatization, a theory of how media shape society. Political actors study media to understand how media frame news about politics. Mediatization of politics occurs when loosely regulated media evolve from being intermediaries who deliver political news, to become active shapers of the government. The U.S. political system is influenced by the demands of media and their coverage. Political actors must adapt to the form of media they wish to use. Mediatization forces political actors to adopt media rules. To a political actor an altered message presented by media can redefine a career. Political actors cannot ignore media and they must study media. For this study, U.S. senators' staffs were surveyed to understand why they collect media. The technology of radio, television, the Internet and social media allow media to be increasingly active in the governing process. Mediatization, a theory that describes media as playing a central, active role in society, is supported by this study. Allowing that senators collect media to understand, adapt to, and even counter news coverage illustrates how much influence media have in politics, and how the process of politics has become mediatized.

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Dedication Page

I am in a debt to all of those who helped me through the process.

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And of course, my wife Carol.

Introduction

A Preliminary Study of Media Collection by U.S. Senators

Perhaps the first senator noted for collecting media was Senator Preston B. Plumb of Kansas who served from 1877-1891. Plumb kept an estimated 800 daily and weekly papers stacked in baskets beside his office desk. Plumb remarked that he could best follow what Kansans were thinking by reading local papers (Ritchie, 1995).

Today, a senator's staff may be collecting news not to understand what the home constituents are thinking, but to understand how the senator is portrayed in media.

This study suggests mediatization of politics is a reason political actors follow media closely. The term mediatization was coined by Swedish media researcher Kent Asp (1986) and refers to media as shaping society rather than acting solely as mediators of information. Mediatized politics, therefore, are politics that media shape by deciding how political actors are portrayed in media to society. This study suggests senators and staff collect media in order to track mediatization.

Henry Romeike founded the first media-clipping agency, Romeike, in London as a clipping service for artists. Romeike opened a branch in New York in 1885. His *New York Times* obituary in 1903 read "Politicians, lawyers, and heads of great enterprises found it of great value to know what the newspapers had to say of themselves and of their adversaries" (New York City Signs 14th to 42nd Street, 2010).

In the U.S., political actors have always been interested in what the press was writing about them. In 1794 the Senate opened up its chambers to media. Six

years later, when the Capitol moved to Washington, D.C., from Philadelphia, reporters were assigned to sit in the visitors' gallery and recorded the proceedings verbatim. Later, media were moved closer to the dais because senators complained of the errors in those first published accounts of the Senate at work (Marbut, 1974).

The U.S. Senate was formed by the founders of the United States as a protection of the Republic against the whims of the populace (Caro, 2002). Because the people elect their U.S. representatives every two years, representatives move quickly to address the current mindset of their districts. Therefore, historically, legislation tends to move faster through the House of Representatives than the Senate, because of the people's pressure, at least in theory.

Typically, a senator has more time to overcome public uproar concerning a particular vote, making senators less vulnerable than their congressional counterparts to bad press.

It was James Madison, a collaborator in the framing of the U.S. Constitution, who wrote that a "necessary fence" needed to be constructed against whims of the citizens. Madison proposed the six-year terms for senators; for state legislators to elect senators; and for limiting election vulnerability to just one third of the Senate each election cycle (James Madison's notes on debates in the Federal Convention June 26, 1787 cited in Caro, 2002).

The 24-hour news cycle created a new dynamic. Reporting of daily Senate activities has increased the pressure upon senators.

(The role of the reporter in Washington, D.C.,) is not just the fellow standing on the sidelines, copybook in hand jotting down the “news” of what is going on. He is heavily involved in the business of government in America...The ceaseless interaction of the two is the most continuously unreported story in this heavily reported city (Cater, 1959, p. vii - viii).

Douglass Cater, a member of the Washington press corps in the 1940s and 1950s, described how mediatization affected politics in his 1959 study *The Fourth Branch of Government*, decades before the term ‘mediatization’ was coined. Cater wrote that if media accounts of the Senate were truly accurate the citizen would informed of the press’ role in governing the country:

The reporter is the recorder of government but he is also a participant. He operates in a system in which power is divided. He, as much as anyone, and more than a great many, helps to shape the course of government (Cater, 1959, p. 7).

Cater that media in Washington, D.C., are affected by their proximity to the power of the Senate and media continue to be part of the daily goings on of the Senate.

Those who have studied the history of media in the United States should not be surprised at the position of power media have assumed in the politics of the country, for media have always been allies or foes of political actors. The relationship of media and Congress is well documented by Senate Historian Don Ritchie, (1991, 2005) who chronicles the rise of media in stature in Washington, D.C., and the coziness between reporters and the members of Congress.

In its 237 years of history, the political process in the United States has been mediatized to some extent, which is to say, media had a role in the shaping of the country. Media had help from politicians in the development of the partisan press (Malone 1962, 1970). In its infancy, America's founders subsidized the press with their personal funds to have ready access to the public.

The first secretary of the treasury, Alexander Hamilton, founded *The Gazette of the United States* as a Federalist Party mouthpiece. Not to be outdone, secretary of state Thomas Jefferson helped finance *The National Gazette* and called upon fellow Republicans to buy subscriptions (Malone, 1962).

While pressured by partisan press, Senator James Grimes of Iowa was not influenced as he cast the vote that acquitted President Andrew Johnson of high treason for violation of the 1867 Tenure of Office Act. Johnson wanted to remove Secretary of War Edwin Stanton from his cabinet against the Republican senators' wishes. On his deathbed Grimes said:

I shall ever thank God that in the troubled hour of trial, when many privately confessed that they had sacrificed their judgment and their conscience at the behests of party newspapers and party hate, I had the courage to be true to my oath and my conscience (Caro, 2002, p. 26).

The Senate Press Gallery provides workspace adjacent to the Senate chamber for *bona fide* journalists who must apply to the Standing Committee of Correspondents to be approved for credentials to cover Congress. Additionally, Gallery staff answers phone calls and take messages for Gallery members. Gallery staff save seats for journalists at

press conferences and committee meetings while taking notes in the chamber to assist reporters in following the floor action (Cater, 1959).

The Gallery is also the preferred place for a senator to drop by and state his or her case on the issue of the day or for a senator's staff to drop off press releases - 50 copies is the recommended number - to help press the point for a particular piece of legislation.

While this relationship between media and the Senate may seem cozy, the process allows reporters to report on the business of the day and to track down the side stories and develop a depth and breadth to the news. The business of covering the Senate is competitive. According to the *Capitol Hill Reporters Update*, there are nearly nine credentialed newspaper and wire service reporters for every senator (2009 *Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism*).

Technology replaced the role of the 18th century stenographer. In the 1920s and 1930s radio brought news and breaking stories into the home. In 1948 the first national 15-minute telecasts were broadcast each night. Technological advances in the 1950s led *New York Times* Washington correspondent James Reston to predict chaos as televised press conference sound bites replaced in-depth reporting:

What everybody does not know is just how far this habit of casual or inaccurate official talk, inflated by the modern techniques of public relations, propaganda, and mass communications, has added to the political confusion of our time (Cater, 1959, pp. 42-43).

Technology evolved rapidly and today floor speeches and committee meetings are recorded by cameras and streamed to the Internet, allowing viewers to see speeches live. Many senators post their floor speeches on their official websites after the speech.

Senators can still edit the *Congressional Record* before it is published, but that issue is a moot point because their recordings of live speeches are archived on Internet sites.

Because of the noise from multiple news media platforms, even the most sophisticated consumer of news can't follow all the outlets. No matter how complex the issue, a reporter has to assign a value to key points that are then summarized in a form acceptable to multiple platforms. Oversimplifying the often-painstaking process, the reporter's job is to condense the facts to 500-750 words for the next morning's paper or 150 words for two minutes on air. These articles can be – and many are – published simultaneously to multiple news outlets. A negative mention of a senator in a news article may lead the senator to go to extraordinary lengths to respond to the article.

Senator Roger Jepsen of Iowa used many resources tracking down the source of a 1981 article in the *Des Moines Register*, which quoted a member of the administration saying: “We just beat his brains in, (Jepsen's) in order to get his vote for approval to sell the Airborne Warning and Control Systems to Egypt.”

Jepsen spent three months searching to find the source of the quote. The senator then presented a thirty-three page memo to the White House Chief of Staff James Baker, naming Ed Rollins, assistant to the president for political affairs, as the leaker. A reporter had been posing as a student in an off the record seminar Rollins taught at Georgetown University (Rollins, 1996, pp. 102-103).

Senators collect the news. In most senatorial website media rooms are links to news articles, broadcasts, and/or Web pages. Senators also use clippings to prepare for floor speeches. Senator Roger Wicker of Mississippi referred to a *New York Times* article during a floor speech on Sept. 20, 2012, repeating *New York Times*' reporter Jennifer

Steinhauer's claim that this Congress is the least productive Congress in history (CSPAN, September 20, 2012).

Senator Daniel Inouye of Hawaii quoted the *Washington Post* in his March 9, 2012, floor speech on the Budget Control Act (CSPAN, September 20, 2012).

Senator John McCain of Arizona referred to the *Washington Post* article about the Obama national security leaks in remarks to the floor on August 1, 2012 (*Senator John McCain Press Office*, 2012).

But how can they sift through all the articles they find? A search engine can return millions of results for each issue.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt used a government-run clipping service that monitored 350 newspapers and 43 magazines and had ready access to any story in the U.S. (Steele, 2011).

Obviously, politicians read newspapers (Linsky, 1986). He writes about Washington, D.C., politicians discussing their placement in the *Washington Post*:

When you go up on the Hill now, for the first time in the last couple years and you really hear the guys talk. They'll talk about did they make page one of *The Post* above or below the fold (Linsky, 1986, p. 62).

Anecdotal information leads us to believe senators clip and collect media, but no one has documented the act of senators collecting and clipping media, leaving those who study mediatization without quantifiable data about how political actors collect media content or use what they collect.

Articles cut out of daily or weekly newspaper, seconds snipped off digital broadcast files, or bits cut and pasted during an Internet search by Senate staff can be

studied by scholars. The media content that a political actor thought was important enough to collect should be studied as it relates to mediatization of politics. It is the purpose of this study to show that politicians' news consuming habits support the theory of mediatization.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

Mediatized politics are politics in which media help shape public policy by shaping media coverage. It was the 1980s expansion of the loosely regulated media in Europe after decades of government subsidization that led scholars there to question the effect media have on society overall and how media help us to understand how we relate to society. Asp (1986) described media as playing central, active roles in society.

Mediatized politics is the political process managed by media. Mediatized politics have become dependent in their central functions on mass media, being continuously shaped by interactions with mass media (Mazzoleni and Schulz, 1994).

Political autonomy is somewhat of a misnomer in the U.S. As mentioned above, political actors have worked closely with media since the founding of the Republic. However, media have evolved from the early printing press. Technology has enabled media and political actors to circumvent some aspects of the political processes, such as the political party, and appeal directly to society. Media have no obligation to follow party line but can shape opinion in society.

Mediatization of society refers to media as shaping society rather than acting solely as mediators of information. Mazzoleni and Schulz (1999) wrote that media are not passive:

The mass media are not mere passive channels for political communicators and political content. Rather the media are organizations with their own aims and rules that do not coincide with, and indeed often clash with, those of political communicators (p. 249).

Media scholars in Europe refer to the new direction media have taken in regard to politics as the reason for an Americanization of politics in Europe, even going so far as to call mediatization of politics “*coup d’etat mediatique*” (Mazzoleni and Schulz, 1999). Media and political scholars in Europe are more closely studying how media have come to penetrate politics (Schulz, Reimer Zen & Oliver Quiring, 2005).

Some journalists disagree with the proposition that media affect the electorate. Former editor of the *Wall Street Journal* Jude Wanniski (1998) wrote:

The electorate is wiser than any of its component parts. Civilization progresses in a political dimension through the ability of politicians to read the desires of the electorate. Neither the press corps nor other “opinion leaders” influence the electorate, except in the sense of broadcasting the political menu (Wanniski, 1998, p. 3).

Still others believe reporters’ personal experiences and upbringing play a roll in the shaping of news. Journalists write stories based on “the prism of their own value systems” (Plaisance and Deppa, 2008, p. 343).

Mediatization is based on the theory of media logic (Altheide and Snow, 1976). Media logic theory explains how media shape and deliver content to society. Lippmann (1922) understood the media logic construct decades earlier and wrote that news stories could be skewed to advance an agenda over the reporting of the facts:

The fact is obscured because the mass is constantly exposed to suggestion. It reads not the news, but the news with an aura of suggestion about it, indicating the line of action to be taken. It hears reports, not objective as the facts are, but already stereotyped to a certain pattern of behavior. Thus

the ostensible leader often finds that the real leader is a powerful newspaper proprietor (Lippmann, 1922, p. 243).

Media were warned to be wary of political actors' behaviors as well (Cater 1959). In the infancy of television, with the first 30-minute newscast still four years away, Cater wrote that Congress had a new breed of politician: "(H)e is a man versed in the subtleties of appealing beyond Congress directly to the mass audience. He knows the formula of the news release, the timing, the spoon-feeding necessities of the publicity drive" (Cater 1959, p. 65).

Denis McQuail (2008) wrote that media logic governs the use of time and resources during elections: "(T)here is an imperative to conduct affairs and stage events in ways that conform to the needs and routines of the mass media (in respect to timing and form)" (2008, p. 331).

During a political rally for U.S. President Barack Obama during the 2012 U.S. election cycle an event coordinator became upset with the photojournalists when they began filming the president's plane rolling on the tarmac. The event coordinator shouted at them to take a photo of the president rather than the plane. "That's not the shot," she yelled. "That's the (expletive) shot." (*Washington Post*, October 28, 2012).

Political actors today understand media and how to best use media to aid their own goals. One of the goals of this study is to explore how the collection of media helps senators to understand media in the ever-expanding media realm.

The Senate's preoccupation with media activities gives unprecedented power to media. While anecdotal information alludes to politicians universally reading and remarking about media coverage, there are no mentions in any study specifically

describing senators clipping media (Linsky, 1986; Kedrowski, 1996; Cohen, Tsfat, and Sheaffer, 2008; Kunelius and Reunanen, 2011).

Kepplinger (2007), citing more than 75 references, noted there are no quantitative studies that detail the information flow between media and the subjects of media reports:

(I)t is difficult to gain access to subjects of media reports, especially key decision makers. They rarely participate in surveys, and if they do, they will most likely avoid answering critical questions or will mitigate their susceptibility to be influenced by the media (Kepplinger, 2007, p. 4).

Linsky (1986) alludes to the prominence media play in the day-to-day activities of our federal representatives “Presumably, the process is the press tells the public what they need to know, the people then decide what they want, and the press helps communicate these decisions back to policymakers” (Linsky, 1986).

Linsky did not address the use of press clippings by politicians in making public policy. He wrote that the press has a role in shaping perspectives of the politician. While Linsky (1986) noted that each day Washington’s elite read the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* and discuss the coverage they receive, Linsky did not indicate whether those articles were saved or clipped.

Kedrowski (1996) mentioned the importance of local media to elected officials, as well. But as with Linsky (1986), Kedrowski did not discuss whether articles were saved or presented in any way other than in conversation.

The term “media-driven” links this study’s senatorial-clipping research to the broader concept of mediatization. Mazzoleni and Schulz (1999) wrote that critics worry about a “media-driven republic,” with media taking over the functions of the government:

The term mediatization denotes problematic concomitants or consequences of the development of the modern mass media. It is distinguished from mediation, which refers to a neutral sense to any acts of intervening, conveying, or reconciling between different actors, collectives, or institutions... Mediatized politics is politics that lost its autonomy, has become dependent in its central functions on mass media, and is continuously shaped by interventions with mass media (Mazzoleni and Schulz, 1999, pp. 249-50).

In the mediatization of politics scheme, media have become part of the political process willing to use their resources to press their own agendas rather than taking a neutral position.

Lippmann wrote that facts reported in media are mere representations of the truth: They are the artificial censorships, the limitations of social contact, the comparatively meager time available in each day for paying attention to public affairs, the distortion arising because events have to be compressed into very short messages, the difficulty of making a small vocabulary express a complicated world, and finally the fear of facing those facts which would seem to threaten the established routine of men's lives (Lippmann, 1922, p. 8).

Lippmann's writings support the rationale for senators' collection of media. As articles are written about political actors by a multitude of media, the actors must try to reconcile their sense of the facts compared to a sampling of the facts provided by media.

Mazzoleni and Schulz (1999) expand on Lippmann's work, noting the five major media processes contributing to mediatization in politics:

1. Mass media present a highly selected sample of events. News value criteria impose a systematic bias (Galtung and Ruge, 1965).
2. Mass media construct the public sphere of information and opinion and control the terms of their exchange.
3. Media becoming increasingly commercial, creating the frame of reference within stories through the use of media logic (Altheide and Snow, 1979).
4. Political actors fashion events and adapt their behavior to gain media attention.
5. Mass media have genuine, legitimate, political functions to perform.

Partisan journalism becomes problematic when political beliefs deviate substantially from beliefs of the news audience, and when mass media exaggerate their control functions (timing, formats, language, production logistics, and content) and focus on the negative aspects of politics (pp. 250-252).

The first four media processes can be explained by the use of media logic. Media control form, function, and content of the message. The political actor must adapt his message to suit media.

The fifth process is explained by the theory of mediatization. Media exaggerates the control functions (timing, formats, language, production logistics, and content) to create a product that appeals to their demographic.

Commercial and unsubsidized media in general terms need money to continue to deliver news. Media outlets try to attract certain demographics and charge advertisers to

deliver a consistent audience for each news program. Broadcast news delivers an audience based on a rating system. Print delivers an audience measured by circulation.

Frank Esser (2008) found in his study of U.S. campaign politics, the more strenuously a candidate tried to control news coverage, the more journalists resist covering them according to the wishes of the politicians, instead reporting something that gives expression to the journalistic voice.

By exploring the mediatization of politics, Mazzoleni and Schulz (2010) focused on political institutions becoming increasingly dependent on and being shaped by mass media, while continuing to remain in control of the political process and functions. As part of this process of mediatization, politicians adapt their behavior to the requirements of the news media in order to receive news coverage (Altheide and Snow, 1979; Ericson, Baranek, and Chan, 1989; Schulz, 2004).

They seek exposure for their ideas on television, in newsprint, on the Internet, and on the radio. In doing so, the political actors have invited the press to become part of the governing process (Elmelund-Praestekaer, Hopmann, & Norgaard, 2011).

Elmelund-Praestekaer, Hopmann, and Norgaard (2011) wrote that candidates use media professionals on staff rather than party officials “inviting carriers of media logic into their backyard” (p. 385). Also, commercial media companies are more likely to set the agenda and not merely reflect party and candidate agendas. This creates tension between the political actors and the media. The media consultants/staff media professionals want publicity about their platforms, but media have control of the technology that delivers the message.

If political actors want to find the opinion leaders, they depend on media mediating messages between themselves and the public (Schulz, Zeh, & Quiring, 2005; McQuail, 2005; Strömbäck, 2008). To be able to get the message out intact, the political actors have to be able to understand the process (Elmelund-Praesteker, Hopmann, & Norgaard, 2011).

To understand the process, the political actors have to study media logic.

Strömbäck (2008) wrote that strategizing may be no help in a media logic world as no one can predict how media will frame a message. Each message sent could be carried by countless news outlets in countless forms.

According to Blumler and Gurevitch (1995, 2001) mediatization takes hold in a political system that is characterized by weak party systems and weak party loyalties. A second indicator of mediatization is a media system characterized as having light state regulation. Blumler and Gurevitch (1995, 2001) add that public cynical attitudes toward political institutions help interventionist journalism thrive. Mediatization will continue to grow, they wrote, where political actors' statements are not considered newsworthy in and of themselves.

Van Aelst, et al., (2008) proposed that because of media exposure to which political actors submit themselves, the actors tend to be more sensitive to media. This would square with the difficulty for researchers, especially those with a journalistic bent, to be allowed access to the daily routines of senators and staff. In addition, political actors have negative attitudes toward journalists while journalists have negative views of political actors (Kunelius and Reunanen, 2011).

Furthermore, Kepplinger (2007) cited previous studies (Kepplinger and Glaab, 2005; Linsky, 1986; Cook, et al., 1983) in support of his conclusion that most media studies were focused on the public's reaction to media (media effect) rather than the decision maker's reaction to media (mediatization).

Unfortunately for political actors, media are ever-evolving (Strömbäck, 2009). He wrote that mediatization is a process and mediatization varies by time, across political boundaries and even within political institutions (p. 216).

Strömbäck (2008) posited four phases of mediatization to explain the connection between mediatization and political actors and political institutions:

- The First Phase of Mediatization is reached whenever the mass media in a particular setting constitute the most important source of information and the channel of communication between the citizenry and political institutions as actors.
- The Second Phase of Mediatization is when the media have become more independent of governmental and other political bodies.
- The Third Phase of Mediatization leads media to be the dominant source of information and channel of communication between different sections of society.
- The Fourth Phase of Mediatization is attained when political and other social actors not only adapt to the media logic and predominant news values, but also internalize these and, more or less consciously, allow the media logic and the standards of newsworthiness to become a built-in part of the governing process (pp. 236-241).

Mediatization of politics infers that media go beyond merely reporting – mediating – the news. Mediation is the relay and transfer function of the media. Relayed information, like a live feed of the U.S. Senate floor during a session, allows the public to witness events from far away without having to be present at the event. In this way the public can participate in social/political activities and take away their own impressions of the events as they unfold.

Media help society become more informed through the process of mediation of the news as long as they don't change the message. Mediatization of the message alters the meaning, content, form and purpose of the message. News and information that is packaged for distribution will be – necessarily – mediated products. But it is through the packaging that the product can become mediatized.

Why is this important to this study?

Political actors compete for space in media. So each snippet of information which is transmitted to the public is chosen by media from a multitude of other snippets. The public is more likely to see news and information media want to show them (Lippmann, 1922). Should a particular news outlet favor one political actor over another the outlet can frame the story to reflect favorably on the favored candidate?

The Senate daily media monitoring strategy focuses on the media exposure each political actor receives. In their study of elite Finnish decision makers, Kunelius and Reunanen (2012) wrote that media are essential resources and crucial factors in understanding how political actors function. The study expands Strömbäck's (2008) work but pointed out that Strömbäck's fourth phase of mediatization failed to take into account

media's influence on the actual decision making by political actors (Kunelius and Reunanen, 2011, p. 57).

Kunelius and Reunanen did not uncover physical acts of collecting media performed by senators that would show causal relationship between media coverage and ongoing activities. Legislation could be quashed by a legislator regardless of the amount or lack of media coverage. Kunelius and Reunan (2011) cited studies in which political actors did not acknowledge giving in to media pressure at all.

The Kunelius and Reunan (2011) study focused on the *impact of media* (author's emphasis) on political actors' decision-making and everyday actions. Kunelius and Reunan explored the actions of political actors and how media affected those actors in relationships with other political actors with a survey ranking personal perceptions of media power.

Are political actors the suppliers of the same news that is reported in the media? Yes and no. Media, in their role as mediators, pass messages back and forth between the political actor and the public (McQuail, 2008; Kepplinger, 2007; Schulz, 2004; Van Aelst, et al., 2008). As framers of the message however, media participate in selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration of messages (McCombs, 2004). Media, as controllers of the means of communication can "actively promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment for the item described" (McCombs, 2004, p. 87).

This relationship emphasizes that political actors must defer to media to get their message out to the broader public. Why do political actors seek out media when media use their own criteria to decide if the message is one they would deliver?

It is the pervasiveness of media, combined with an expanding audience, and more sophisticated technology, that leads political actors and institutions to use media to attempt to get the message out to the public (Hepp, 2009).

Technology is helping political actors to bypass the traditional media. Technology can help political actors get the message out unmediated. Social media, the Internet, automated telephone calls, and franking privileges allow delivery of messages unmediated by traditional mass media.

President Obama's political campaign network Obama for America has been hailed as the best political social network ever compiled with more than 13 million email addresses captured during Obama's two presidential campaigns.

In January of 2012 the network was renamed Organizing for Action with the objective of raising \$50 million. According to Jay Carney, White House press secretary, the money is to be used to promote President Obama's agenda.

The Internet is now a viable option for political actors to deliver their message, as shown by the example of Obama for America, but the public has to actively seek and find those messages. The model of using mainstream broadcast and print to capture millions of media consumers in a media buy is being replaced by the model that captures one consumer at a time, a veritable fragment of the media market.

Fragmentation of media creates confusion for political actors wanting to reach their constituency. Which technology do political actors use? There are many more steps to subscribe to emails/social media from political actors which compete with the 143,999,999,999 other emails sent each day. There are over 2.4 billion Internet users and close to 650 million websites in the world. There are 3.5 billion Wordpress (blogs) Web

pages viewed each month. There are more than 2.5 billion likes on Facebook each day. And there are more than 200 million users on Twitter (royal.pingdom.com, 2013).

However, the traditional means of transferring messages by traditional media outlets is still controlled by a handful of commercial organizations. There are six major news networks. CBS News reaches 7.02 million viewers, ABC reaches 8.15 million viewers, and NBC reaches 9.14 million viewers (TVNEWSER, 2013). Over 1.82 million people watch Fox News, 379,000 people watch CNN, and 687,000 people watch MSNBC (TV by the Numbers, 2013). Between cable news networks and broadcast news networks, in the 5 p.m. news slot, 27 million viewers are tuned to just six news distributors. All that is needed by the public to receive the news content from televised news is to choose a news station from the number of stations that are broadcasting.

Any mention of a political actor during the 5 p.m. news broadcast among these six media outlets would garner at least 379,000 impressions at little cost to a political actor. But, the actor must either be newsworthy, or adopt media rules to appear on the news in order to reach the audience. There is no guarantee that the message the political actor wants to reach the public will reach the public. In the U.S. researchers have studied how Congress as a whole gains publicity but has not as of yet studied how Congress views U.S. media (Kedrowsky, 1996; Linsky, 1986). Nor do studies contain information on how members of Congress make use of stories generated by media after the stories are printed, broadcast, or blogged.

If we don't ask political actors how or what media influences them we won't know the answer. There are no studies of which the primary focus is the physical acquisition of media. Media/social/political scholars seem to have underestimated the

value of studying why political actors collect media. Media clipping is solid evidence that could be used in support of the quantitative opinion surveys that many social scientists use researching media influence.

This study specifically focuses on how decision makers in the Senate select, collect, and use media reports in their daily routine by asking senators' present and former staff why and how they collect and use media. The answers support the theory of mediatization.

Chapter 2: Methodology

Research Question

What factors influence why and how U.S. senators collect and use stories from news media?

Hypothesis

While routine collection of news media stories is a staple for U.S. Senate office staff members, methods of acquiring media samples will vary greatly according to (1) a state's population, (2) a senator's subject areas of interest, and (3) senators will make ongoing use of the data that is collected.

Qualitative Inquiry

The study identifies media collecting habits and trends. This study used a focused qualitative inquiry of those who were responsible for the day-to-day collection of media for senators.

Survey questions explored how senators collected their data, why particular data was collected, and how staff determines what data was passed on to the senator and what wasn't. The study looked at staff's determination of the credibility of the sources of the information.

The interviews were approximately 25 minutes in length.

The study was also submitted to the Institutional Review Board at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, which requires all research conducted at the University which involves human subjects, whether funded or unfunded, to be reviewed through the IRB process. The review board found that the study did not fall under the human subjects'

research, as defined by the IRB as “research that involves living individuals and the investigator will obtain data or information about those individuals.”

Sample

There are 100 communications directors working for U.S. senators. Accordingly, this study targeted the communication directors and press secretaries who play a role in the collection of media for senators. The communications directors were targeted because they direct media efforts on behalf of the senators’ offices and are most likely to be the decision-makers in the media collection process. Six representatives of U.S. Senators whose job was to monitor media within their senator’s communications department were interviewed. More than 50 Senate staffers were contacted from a list of first through fourth term senators. The list was compiled from the United States Senate Periodical Press Gallery that lists Senate press secretaries and communications directors.

Participants were chosen from senators of both sexes and political parties with varying lengths of service in the Senate. They were contacted by email to request and interview. A phone call was made to each office a week after the email. Only one communications director returned the first email. He was the only one to decline to be interviewed. Most communications directors ignored emails and messages. Several communications directors initially reached by phone agreed to participate but did not accept or return any of follow-up calls or emails.

Only nine communications directors/press secretaries answered the phone when it was transferred from the receptionist. The sampling of potential candidates was from small and large state, urban and rural states.

For the first sampling, two communications directors per U.S. Census Geographical Region were contacted. Each solicitation thereafter included communications directors from each region until a sample group was complete. No senators' staff from the Northeast or East agreed to take part in the study.

The sample for the study was easily identifiable. The Senate Gallery for Press Secretaries is online. Kepplinger's (2008) assessment was correct in respect to the reticent nature of decision makers to participate in a study of their media habits to be made public. Perhaps, it is because of mediatization that journalists, or those who are connected to journalists, are considered *persona non grata* to Senate staff. The recruitment within that sample was not easily accomplished. A senior senatorial staff member visibly recoiled when told of the study during a political event.

"They will not speak with you," she said. "You are the enemy."

While the aide seemed wary, she said to write a letter to the communications director and perhaps something would come of it. Nothing ever did from that first letter of solicitation. (Sample Letter – Appendix A)

Nor did any response come from the next five letters to communications directors. Apart from making face-to-face appointments in Washington, D.C., receptionists in senators' offices explained that since the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and the ensuing mailed anthrax packages, email would be the best way to contact communications directors because the email goes directly to the communication director's smart phone. Posted letters can take more than six weeks to arrive at a senator's office.

Of the dozens of emails sent, there was only one response and that one was negative. Following up the emails with a phone call to the recipients generated a response

ten percent of the time. Ultimately, interviews were procured with five aides and one former aide to U.S. senators. The aides agreed to be interviewed and recorded.

Attributions for quotes in the study were to be referenced in terms of “aide to a Midwest senator,” or “aide,” for subjects to agree to do interviews. Staff members were given assurances that the object of the interviews was to write a thesis on media collection not to write an investigative piece about senators.

Survey Design

A survey (Appendix B) was created which could be used in telephone interviews. The survey was designed to be sent to subjects prior to the interview via email so they could review the questions beforehand. Even with questions in hand some communications directors who indicated they might participate, ultimately refused to return calls or emails. Some verbally agreed to participate during the initial phone call and then did not respond to calls and emails requesting a time to set up the interview. Following the interviews, I transcribed the recording and saved the transcripts to my hard drive where the transcripts will be kept for a minimum of five years.

Survey Questions

The survey questions for this preliminary study focused on basic information about media clipping by senators and staff. Essentially, basic principles of discovery were needed: Who, what, where, when, how, and why?

Who collects media for senators if senators desire to collect media in a consistent, willful, and purposeful way? What media are collected, if any? Where is the media stored? When do media become important to the senator? Why is media collected?

Follow-up questions also applied the same principles. Does a senator representing an urban area collect media in a different fashion than a counterpart representing a rural state? Does the number of media outlets clipped by senators' staff change from state to state, eliciting a different method of media collection? Do the senators play a role in choosing media that are collected or is that choice left up to Senate staff?

The survey questions were short to keep the boundaries of the study compact. With little or no scholarly research on the subject, answers to the study's questions yielded new, concrete, information to supplement the anecdotal or implied knowledge of media collection that is on the periphery of previous media studies that focused on the role of media in Congress.

Chapter 3: Results

Answers to Survey Questions

The survey included 15 questions asked in each of the five 25-minute telephone interviews. In answering the survey questions, respondents generally referred to collecting information from newspapers as clipping the news and collecting information from radio and television as monitoring broadcast media. Monitoring the Internet was referred to as Web searches. Content searches focused primarily on articles mentioning each senator. (See Survey Questionnaire Appendix A)

SQ1. How many newspapers does your office clip each day?

All five respondents interviewed said they clip articles from several newspapers daily (Figure 5.1, p. 32).

But the senator's staff doesn't just clip newspapers. The staff searches the Internet with key words and use Web-crawling programs known as "bots," to look for mentions of their senators. The staff combs through hundreds of national, state, daily, and weekly papers each week using office staff or media monitoring and clipping services. A senator's staff can find more than 150 articles to place on the senator's desk each morning, populated primarily with news reports, op-eds, and/or press releases that mention the senator.

"A lot of what we get is through Google Newspapers," an aide to a Western senator said. "It picks up a lot of papers we have, or a Lexis search brings us what we are looking for without delving into a newspaper."

On the high side, the aide said, the office goes through a half-dozen newspapers each day. All of the staff interviewed searched the Internet or had Internet alerts notify them when specifically selected key words were posted online. One communications director added *Politico*, an online journal, to the list of state and national newspapers read by the senator each morning. The two state papers read were the dailies from the two largest cities in the state. While the staff is searching for mentions of their senator online, the Web browser includes non-traditional media in the search results.

| Senators and Geographical Region | DC/National Newspapers Clipped Daily | State Newspapers Clipped Daily | Use Broadcast tracking service | Who clips in office |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|---|
| Senator West | 10 | 2 | Yes | Press assistant, Interns |
| Senator South | 5 | 10 | Yes | Interns/Deputy Press Secretary /State Staff |
| Senator West | 5 | 2 | Yes | Interns/State & DC Staff |
| Senator Midwest | 8 national/state | 8 national/state | Yes | Interns/State & DC Staff |
| Senator Midwest | 5 | 2 | Yes | Interns/State & DC Staff |

Figure 5.1: Clipping Statistics for U.S. Senators

A former aide who served both an urban-based Southern senator and a rural-based Western senator said both senators' staffs clipped news each morning. The difference in the number of clippings collected between the two offices was significant. The urban senator's office clipped significantly more media than that of the rural senator's office. The aide said the main reason for the difference in clippings was that the larger populated areas of the urban state had larger media centers.

SQ2. Who makes the decision as to the subject matter to be clipped?

All respondents said senior staff makes decisions on what must be clipped but state office staffs do have leeway to clip articles that may be of interest to the local office, legislative aides, or to the senator. A legislative aide's expertise in a particular aspect of legislation, may lead her or him to focus on one department of the federal government like the Internal Revenue Service or the Department of Energy, for example. According to the respondents, the legislative aides and constituent services staff, who work directly with constituent problems, would most likely only collect articles concerning their expertise.

SQ3. Do all of the Senator's locations copy, cut out or otherwise save media clippings? Do all of the Senator's offices collect media clippings?

All respondents indicated that Washington, D.C., offices and state offices of senators collected or clipped media every day.

SQ4. Which of the following methods are used to collect media clippings?

Permanent staff, temporary staff, interns, and clipping services including companies monitoring the Internet and broadcast?

According to the respondents, the only method not used in collecting media was temporary staff. While all the offices used interns to clip media, everyone in the office participated in the collection of news of interest to the senator or staff. Most used clipping services to supplement the office clipping.

In rural states that have fewer news outlets, at least one office did not use a clipping service. An aide who worked for rural and urban senators said office news collecting procedures were different in urban and rural senate offices.

“In (the rural state), I don’t remember having a clipping service, but I remember emailing stories out to staff quite frequently,” the aide said. “The (rural state media collection policy) was much, much, much less structured (than the urban state).”

An aide to a Southern senator said that his senator’s office used a clipping service that automatically sent clippings when stories mentioned the senator’s name. But interns also came in early to do clippings and all seven state offices had to have clippings in by 9:30 a.m. Those clippings were faxed to the Washington, D.C., office.

An aide to a Midwest senator said that his office combined two methods when clipping newspapers. The major market state newspapers were clipped each morning by state office staff. The office also used two kinds of newsgathering services that looked for the senator’s name in articles and provided the articles in a digital form.

While most of the aides interviewed focused first on state and local papers for clippings each morning, one communications director said that the Washington, D.C., papers were scanned first. A Western senator’s aide said a press assistant scanned the D.C., papers and put articles for the senator and staff to read in an email first thing each morning. The email was printed off for the senator.

“(The press assistant) will supplement those with op-eds from national columnists that are in all the papers and online and then he does clips for all the office staff whenever our boss’s name is mentioned,” the aide said.

Those interviewed agree with the aide to a Southern senator that the morning clips focus on each particular senator.

“Pretty much just the boss,” the aide to a Southern senator said. “Most of the clips you are providing are about the news that these (senators) are doing.”

The senators, according to aides, were also news gatherers and took responsibility for much of the Capitol Hill and legislative news.

“They have their own newspapers at home,” an aide to a Southern senator said. “At some point they have to be an individual consumer of news themselves.”

One aide to a Midwestern senator mentioned that his boss was rarely uninformed about an issue because of the senator’s personal awareness of the media.

“My boss is a consummate news consumer,” the aide said. “I sit across from him during the press call and someone will ask him about something that’s just happened and he’ll already know about it. I’ve been (on staff) for three and a half years and hardly ever has he looked at me and asked ‘What’s this about?’”

An aide to a Western senator said the senator always caught the overnight news prior to coming to the office.

“The senator is an avid reader, so he reads about 10 papers every morning,” the aide said. “He gets into the office at 6:30 a.m. every morning and reads *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *USA Today*, *Financial Times*, *the Hill*, *Politico*...”

The aide mentioned that the senator reads the two major dailies of his state each morning as well.

Just two of those interviewed mentioned that their senator watched the televised news channels during the day. One aide said the senator started each day by watching the news while on a treadmill in the morning.

“He watches the news all day long,” the aide said. “He watches a lot of Fox. He watches the Senate floor a lot. He’ll watch *MSNBC* and *The Morning Show* while he’s at the gym.”

There are also Internet news alerts that are set up to notify staff when a key phrase is published on the Web in a publication that is being monitored. Google Alerts is one popular Web crawling application that notifies subscribers when a result to a query is posted online.

For instance, a query on Keystone Pipeline, with a request to Google to notify “as it happens,” will send any mention of Keystone Pipeline immediately to the Google account holder. The default alert is “Everything,” and it uses Google Web Search, Google Blog Search, and Google News. Senate staff will also use Infodesk, a company which gathers media at the request of subscribers and sends the information immediately to subscriber’s email addresses.

SQ5. How many staff hours are utilized each day to compile clippings across all offices?

The average time spent in collecting media each day in Washington, D.C., offices was two hours, but since all staff in all offices also collected media, the average time spent each day would be multiplied by the number of offices. In the case of the rural Western state, the average would be lower due to the size of the media market.

According to press secretaries interviewed, most legislative aides also kept up on media in their specialty.

“We don’t typically (clip peripheral articles), we have on staff legislative experts on all these topics,” an aide to a Midwestern senator said. “For staff, each one has a set of issues that they do follow and keep track of. They follow what they think is important in the traditional media, social media, and trade media. If they think it’s something we need to know, they pass it around electronically to everybody.”

A Western senator's aide said her office uses *Metro-Monitor News Tracker*, so the legislative aides can closely track the issues in their expertise.

"They're looking for stories that come out regarding energy, defense, spending, health care..." the aide said. "They're watching those just by tracking websites. *Political Pro* is one I know they look at. *ENE Greenwire*; it depends on the legislative aide as to what they look at and forward on to D.C."

In all of the responses, interns helped clip media. The responses differed on the time spent in collecting media.

"At the most three, but probably two hours a day," said one aide, concerning the interns' time spent clipping articles. But the aide added that legislative staff in the home state also follow social media, and look for articles on the Internet concerning their specialty, which adds time each day for culling through media for information.

SQ6. How is the information disseminated to Senator?

All of the respondents said a daily packet of information was given to the senator.

SQ7. How much does your office spend monthly apart from payroll on clipping services (includes database systems like LexisNexis)?

Three of the five respondents said they use multiple media clipping services and would not share those costs associated with clipping news. Clipping service charges vary with the number of clippings made each month.

An interview with Dred Porter, Jr., vice president broadcast division of Magnolia Clipping Service and the third generation of Porters to run the company, provided background on some methods his agency uses to fulfill orders by political actors.

The purpose of clipping and collecting media is not based on newsworthiness, Porter said. He said the news clipping service helps provide a comprehensive report of how the press is covering a politician. The politician can then decide what to do with the information and if the information can be useful or even harmful.

“To them it’s really keeping an eye on the press so they can go about doing what they do,” Porter said, “which is writing bills, making speeches, talking to important people, and doing whatever senators do.”

Porter estimated that his company monitors about 1,430 daily newspapers, 3,000 weeklies, 350 magazines, and 210 media markets containing 114 million homes and 14,000 radio stations.

“We have roughly 15 people reading, clipping, scanning, editing, and marking all the clips,” Porter said. “Basically, it’s the same way we’ve been doing it for 85 years.”

Porter said his clients expect more from his clipping service than they do from the Senate college interns who comb through daily media. The client wants to know what the coverage means, Porter explained.

“In the past I would give them a stack of articles, essentially vomiting data at them,” Porter said. “Now we take this stack of clippings and we can try and mold and save it into the information that is useful so they can gain insight.”

Magnolia uses the clippings to interpret the coverage a political actor is receiving in media. Magnolia can analyze media value, media value by type, listing of all clippings, and include the total circulation of the clips. Magnolia can also compare customized categories, companies, advertisements, topics, issues, or candidates and other customized reports.

Porter mentioned that often a new communications director for a current client will often cancel service to move the clipping in-house.

“Time and time again we’ve had people say ‘We’re going to do this in-house,’” Porter said. “I tell them, ‘If you want to come back two months from now, we’ll start you up again.’”

Porter said by the time the communications directors compare the cost of subscriptions (there are 500 newspapers available for subscription in Alabama alone, according to Porter) and the time involved, to the cost of his service, most clients decide to continue the service. The article miss rate with interns, Porter said, is unacceptable to most offices.

Porter said he believes the intern sees the work of clipping newspapers or collecting media as drudgery. He said there is a two or three month learning curve to clipping, meaning missed articles, while his readers have decades of experience.

“Our readers (employees) are very smart, because they read the papers every day,” Porter said. “I have one lady who has been here for 35 years. Others have been here 40 years, 17 years, 20-something years. They have a computer run list and know what they are looking for. We have a very low missed clip ratio because we read every paper front to back.”

What Magnolia’s customers are looking for, according to Porter, are mentions of them in the news. But sometimes, a senator will want all the mentions of a breaking issue, like fracking (a new method of extracting oil and gas from shale formations) Porter said.

According to House of Representative records, expenses for clippings per month for congressional offices ranged from \$62 to \$227.85 for clipping services. The LexisNexis service costs about \$300 per month (Statement of Disbursements of the House as Compiled by the Chief Administrative Officer from April 1, 2012 to June 30, 2012, 2012).

SQ8. What items are most likely to be clipped?

Respondents said that news of the senator was the most likely reason to clip media. The top five ranked reasons for clipping each category listed below as well as comments relating to the category.

1. News of the senator

- “The most important is news of the senator.”
- “First would be scanned clips of the senator.”
- “He does clips for whenever the boss’s name is mentioned in print and on TV, we have a service for that, and he gets that into the senator.”
- “We are generally looking for our boss’s clips or political clips.”
- “Pretty much just clip the boss.”

2. Home-State Issues

- “Second would be home-state issues, whatever is the biggest issue of the day. Governor says, ‘I don’t want taxes’ we get those.”
- “State is most likely to be clipped.”
- “He is mostly interested in state news.”
- “State clipped first, then D.C., news.”

3. National Issues

- “We put three to five stories of national interest in. Whatever was getting press coverage.”
- “National issues, we put some of those in. In D.C., he’s up on all the national issues.”
- “If it’s a top story it’s definitely something we stay on top of.”

4. Editorials

- “We have one section for that (editorials) but not all editorials make it.”
- “Editorials, we don’t do that as a category.”
- “Editorials about proposed legislation are important.”
- “Not any municipality issues.”

5. Local News

- “Local news, mostly about his hometown.”
- “Local news about (the major cities) of the state.”
- “It’s the local staff’s job to know what’s going on. If he was told by an aide (while on a trip to the home state) that he needed to see Maggie, who was 103 years old, he’d say ‘Let’s go.’”

6. All others

- “We never clip anything about the president, ever.”
- “We never clip state senators, or representatives or state elected officials.”
- “Never municipal issues.”
- “Never sports.”
- “We never clip lifestyle.”

- “Sometimes things that are of personal interest to the senator.”

SQ9. For what purpose are the clippings most likely to be used?

Responses to the question about the purpose of clipping the articles varied, but the No. 1 reason was to find out how the senator was represented in media and disseminate that information to the senator. One aide put notes in the margins for the senator to provide context to an article. The aide also said that if his boss thought the information was incorrect in the article, one of the press office staff would be assigned to contact the reporter or editor. The aide said standard protocol was to call and offer the reporter more information or documentation on the issue.

“I’ll call and just say ‘Hey, if you need some extra information’ or ‘I don’t think you got this right,’ or ‘You didn’t understand what he was saying. I’d like you to think about this for the future,’” the aide said.

Another aide said that he made calls first to the reporter and then to the editor if the issue wasn’t resolved.

An aide to a Southern senator said he called editors and reporters about the context of an article written about his boss if he disagreed. To get a correction, however, he would have to specifically request it.

If a letter to the editor concerning the senator was negative, a press secretary might consider writing a Letter to the Editor in rebuttal.

An aide to a Midwestern senator said that he too, calls editors and reporters, but his boss does as well.

“It’s common for him to take his daily clips and tear off a story and write or pencil in a note ‘Please contact this person and share xyz,’ it’s really common,” the aide

said. “If he thinks (an article) is really good he may write a note to the reporter and say ‘I really liked that story. I don’t know how you got that information; that was neat.’”

SQ10. What is the preferred form to receive the clippings?

According to the respondents the main method of sending media clips to the Washington, D.C., offices each day is electronically. The state locations clipped the local newspapers and scanned them digitally even if the senator’s office used a clipping service. Staff then faxed the clippings digitally to the Washington, D.C., office. There the Washington, D.C., staff compiled the information sent in from the state offices and made a hardcopy file for the senator.

Each senator’s aide said each senator gets a hard copy file of the clips daily, including duplicates from the same source like the Associated Press, if the same story is printed in different papers. One Western senator makes his own copies and files those copies away.

“He files all the things he wants to keep,” the aide said. “He cuts out articles and then has a copy made of them on one sheet of paper and then keeps them in his notes. Everything is filed away perfectly.”

SQ11. Are there some media sources more believable than others?

While all respondents agreed in principle that some media sources are more believable than others, this was the only question to which each respondent paused significantly before answering.

“The legislative aide would look into any news we use,” an aide to a Western senator said. “They can say, ‘Wait, that doesn’t sound right.’”

Only one aide mentioned a specific publication in regard to believability.

“(News) from the *Wall Street Journal* will be taken more seriously than an obscure blog,” the aide said.

Another aide agreed that traditional media outlets were more believable, but only because the outlets had built-in credibility. The aide said social media outlets or Web-based outlets normally report from a particular perspective or bias.

An aide to a Southern senator said the issue for the office concerning believability of a particular media outlet was developing a perspective about the political affiliation of the outlet’s values.

SQ12. Once clipped, where are the media stored?

All offices stored daily clips on the shared computer drive (each Senate office has a specific secure digital storage accessible by all of that office’s national, state and local offices) where the clips remain. One senator’s aide said the office has every clip stored electronically since 2001. Other senators store the hard copies of clippings for some non-specific amount of time.

SQ13. Ranking the Order of Importance of News

Personal mentions of the senators were ranked first by all the aides in the order of importance of media monitoring. A former aide to a Southern senator said senatorial personal mentions were the first stories clipped each day. He made a point about clipping national vs. state news.

“The news back home is what’s most important, it’s actually what you need to clip the most,” he said. “Because you can get the D.C. papers up there, but you can’t get the local. So it’s much more useful to provide the state’s news.”

As to why state mentions may be clipped more often than national news, most aides mentioned the senator read the national papers while they are living in Washington, D.C.

“We don’t clip (D.C., local papers). We have all the Capitol Hill hard copies delivered to our building,” a Midwestern aide said. “*Politico, CQ Today, Roll Call, The Hill, National Journal Daily.*”

The aide said that the office would look through the papers but not clip them.

SQ14. How do the clippings influence decisions that are made?

An aide to a Southern senator said that while clippings were used at times to support an argument on the floor or augment policy research, generally, the clippings were only good for one day. The clippings were read, the senator briefed, and staff discussed how the articles affected the senator and what actions should be taken if any with regard to the articles.

“In our office every day the clippings impacted how the day played out,” the aide said. “But clips were used day of. We didn’t say ‘Let’s go back to last Tuesday’s clips and find if there’s something in there.’”

Some aides said the clippings could also be used to keep an eye on a growing story.

“It’s also to be aware of an issue that’s been percolating up that he may want to get involved in,” said an aide to a Midwestern senator. “He’ll read various accounts of development of the issue, read public hearings transcripts from the state legislature, and follow the news to see if he wants to get involved and in what way.”

The aide also mentioned that staff uses LexisNexis to research topics to be used in formulating legislation. The senator will also talk to local staff that holds on to clippings as a tickler file for when he is in the area.

“Clipping in the broadest sense is a method to keep in touch with everyone in the state,” the aide said. “The news media and the clipping service is a way to pay attention to all the people in the state.”

Self-preservation was another reason for keeping track of articles about the goings on in the Senate. An aide described it as a type of personal checks and balances of the press by senators.

“He pays close attention to how he’s being covered for what he’s doing,” an aide said. “He wants to see if (editors and reporters) are indeed representing the issues as what he thinks fairly.”

An aide to a Southern senator said every senator wanted to be on top of the issues that mattered to their constituents.

“You don’t want to be walking around the halls of Congress and get blindsided by a constituent on an issue back home,” the aide said. “One of the big things for my senator was to always know that the corrections were being requested if we knew (the story) was incorrect.”

An aide to a Southern senator said that press secretaries needed to be aware of media coverage and keep small controversies from becoming big ones.

“With the 24/7 news cycle, that’s another reason media coverage is so important,” he said. “You have to fight for it every day to make sure the words are being told honestly and your side is represented effectively.”

An aide mentioned press coverage of the “Cornhusker Kickback” concerning Senator Ben Nelson of Nebraska, and the media coverage of his vote on the Affordable Health Care Act. The aide said the coverage probably forced Nelson out of running for the Senate again.

“Just because you are not in a two-year election cycle doesn’t mean (news) happening now won’t hurt you,” the aide to a Western senator said about Nelson’s negative press. “All you need is a Lexis search and you can find old stories to provide fodder for opponents. Every day matters.”

Chapter 4: Discussion of Results

The collection and clipping of media by senators and staff suggests mediatization of politics. In this preliminary study all of the respondents clipped and collected media. The study explored the reasons why Senate offices collected media and documented how they did so.

Aides to senators said that the senators themselves started their days by reading the papers and watching the news. Senate offices assigned staff to monitor media each day, hired companies to monitor media worldwide, or used both to fulfill media monitoring duties. All the senators in this study received a packet of news clippings to study each morning on a deadline and planned responses to media based on the information found within those hardcopies. Interoffice media updates were sent via email during the day on breaking news stories. Senate staffers subscribed to Internet services that sent alerts to their smart phones the moment news of importance to them was posted to the Web.

The findings of this study indicate in-depth, sophisticated media collecting and tracking operations in Washington, D.C.

This study indicates that senators and staff collected media in a purposeful way and supports the study's hypothesis. More importantly, however, the data supports the study of mediatization of politics.

The collection of media is routine, a tenet of mediatization. Specifically, the daily physical act of Senate staff monitoring the media reinforces Strömbäck's (2008) Third Phase of Mediatization:

In the third phase of mediatization political actors still perceive the media as external, but they also recognize the necessity to adapt to the media logic and their notion of newsworthiness leading political actors to think about the media not only when campaigning, but also when governing and in the policy-making processes (Strömbäck, 2008, p. 233).

The daily collection of media could certainly be the physical manifestation of “thinking about media,” for senators and staff assign an importance to media by having the daily media monitoring routine (Strömbäck, 2008). Each senator’s office had specific and unique areas of interest. The offices searched media for published articles about those areas of interest each day. This established routine could mean media insert themselves between the public and the institutions involved in government and filter the messages from political actors or institutions to the public and back again by controlling the format, timing, and content that is delivered (Strömbäck, 2008, p. 228).

Perhaps a reason for the intense study of media is to try and understand the filters media use.

However, Strömbäck (2008) wrote that politics have not changed so much as the intensity of mediated experiences has increased. Porter (Magnolia Clipping Service) mentioned that there were many varied customized reports that could be created for political actors focusing on where, how, when and what articles appeared on any subject in any media. Strömbäck made the point that mediated politics refers to a situation in which media have become the most important source of information and vehicle of communication between the governors and the governed.

In such a situation, people depend on media for information about politics and society and politicians depend on media for information about peoples' opinions and trends in society, and for reaching out to people.

Structured, daily monitoring of media by senators and staff stretches beyond mediated politics to mediatization, because the political actor is responding to the need to study and monitor the extent to which the actor's message is framed by media. Were the message simply transmitted by media there would be no need to review the articles or broadcasts. Were collection of media an exercise of vanity, there would be no need for strategy sessions on how to respond to the coverage. If the media coverage was simply mediated, the strategy sessions would be on how to respond to the people's response to the news, rather than responding to media about the news coverage.

This is not to say popular opinion would always be favorable to a senator if media were simply acting as a conduit between the public and the senator. Were mediatization not a factor, the senator would know that the news reflected public opinion (through articles written of how people are affected by legislation or circumstance) and not the opinion of media.

As the data showed, each senator and staff focused on media content every day as it pertained to each particular senator. Again, this behavior goes beyond Asp's idea of the media as a mediator between citizens and political actors. This behavior by the senators means that media have extraordinary power. This power has increased from when the press printed Senate proceedings verbatim as mediators between the Senate and the public.

This is the first study that documents the process by which Senate offices collect media. In so doing, it may lead to an understanding of how the collecting and study of media influences political actors and the legislative process.

Senators collected media that concerned them on a daily basis. The data tells us that copious amounts of digital, print and broadcast media were clipped and saved because the senators and staff believed there could be a consequence of not clipping.

Media misrepresentation of an issue position, incorrect attribution of comments, staff lack of knowledge of a breaking issue, or the omission of key paragraphs in a press release could affect a senator negatively.

Do senators and their staff truly need to be aware of every mention of the senator in the news? Senators and staff apparently believe so, because all five staff who participated in this study's sampling clipped and collected media each day. Senators and staff are concerned enough with what media report about them and their activities that they don't miss a day of collecting media.

It appears senators and staffs need to be prepared for any media contingency. In this study, most aides spoke with admiration of their boss's awareness of the issues. One aide mentioned that a worst-case scenario was not having an answer about a particular media report if a constituent asked the senator about the report. Media reports of timely issues that are of importance to society are a vital function of the press, and in this way, shape the daily workings of Congress.

Mediatization of politics goes beyond the reporting of facts. The reports may reflect the position not just of a constituency, but of media. Clipping and collecting media is defense mechanism for senators, in which articles and broadcasts are collected, studied,

and reacted to in order to help Senate staff understand whose and what positions the articles reflect.

Media clipping is essentially the manifestation of mediatization in the offices of senators.

During the interviews some aides seemed less guarded about their jobs of collecting media. The clipping was less a secret and more just a part of the job. The rest had a more guarded tone and seemed wary of sharing too much information for this study as if media clipping was a closely held aspect of governing.

Of the roughly 10,000 words of transcripts generated from the surveys, one quote stood out.

“In our office every day the clippings impacted how the day played out.”

That’s a lot of power for media to have. The first official action of each Senate office each day was to focus on the media coverage of the previous day’s activity. Up to 150 news/media articles were placed in front a particular senator daily. According to the aide reaction to the articles generated the daily agenda for a senator’s office.

Political actors, more than any segment of the population, understand that “media do not serve only to mediate communication; they can also be used to control communication, to construct social relations, to earn money, and so on” (Krotz, 2009, p. 23).

Political actors use the act of collecting and clipping media as an attempt to understand the media. They analyze why media focus on a particular phrase uttered by a senator. They follow up with a reporter to ask why the reporter reported on or ignored a segment of a speech.

Media have evolved since the opening of the U.S. Senate Gallery to the press. In the U.S., media have always interpreted the proceedings based on a variety of variables, some of which are ideological. There has never been a Golden Age of media neutrality in the U.S. Today, though no longer fiscally beholden to political actors or patrons media are still somewhat dependent on political actors for political content. Media decide what will be distributed in traditional channels. To gain access to those traditional media channels and the public who utilize them for news political actors must adopt media logic and accept mediatization. The public must decide how much the reporting is ideologically – or factually – based.

Chapter 5: Future Ideas for Research

Mediatization, as a theory, has gained attention since the 1980s due to increasing commercialization of media in Europe. This preliminary study of the collection of media by senators supports the theory of mediatization.

It also raises new questions to answer.

Why do political actors feel the need for secrecy concerning the collection and clipping of media? If the collection of media is paid for with taxes, are the media collections stored on the hard drives the public's property? Further research is needed to study media collection.

What information could a senator miss, on any given day that would be important to the Senate's legislative role?

The question "How seriously do you take collection of media?" was not asked, although it should have been.

Mediatization theory proposes that political actors not only adapt to media logic for purposes of obtaining publicity, but also adopt media logic as the most likely way to communicate with the largest segment of the public (Strömbäck, 2008).

Why can't political actors bypass the media entirely and avoid media logic or mediatization? The public has virtually unlimited access to information via the Internet and most libraries or schools offer free Internet service. Both houses of Congress have limited franking privileges that provide direct mailings to constituents.

However, the majority of media viewers/readers still get news from traditional outlets for news and the coverage is free. However, politicians are beginning to try to bypass the traditional news media and are using their own channels for directly

communicating to the public or target groups. A study detailing attempts by Congress to bypass media in a mediatized political society is needed.

Insofar as senators publish material on their Senate websites and social media channels, an analysis of the content of senators' websites might be a fruitful area for further research.

Mediatization of politics is growing in societies with weak political parties and minimal restraint of media. Patterson (1993) wrote that the U.S. is the "prototype of a decaying system in which the candidates no longer need the parties to reach the voters but instead rely completely on the mass media" (cited by Mazzoleni and Schulz, 1999, p. 255).

If media wish they can bring the political process or candidate directly to the people, circumventing the political party. Candidates can ignore the political establishment and make the appeal to the people directly through media if media allow them to. In this way society experiences the "*coup d'état médiatique*" mentioned in the Mazzoleni and Schulz (1999) study.

Is the U.S. political party system decaying, and if so, is the decay to be blamed on mediatization of politics? Media have no obligation to work with political parties or any political actor. Nor are political actors under any obligation to interact with media. Political actors are developing news ways to circumvent media and the traditional party politics. Decay could allow the formation of a new, better political system. Further study is indicated.

This study of the collection of media by U.S. senators is a foray into finding new knowledge of how media is used by political actors and represents a first step toward documenting an element of the mediatization process.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Survey for U.S. Senator Communications Directors

Pilot Study on the Collection of Media by Sitting U.S. Senators

Conducted by Rick Willis, graduate student and supervised by faculty of the University of Nebraska College of Journalism and Mass Communications.

For the purpose of this survey, media clippings are considered any news, blog, Web, broadcast, that people can hear, read, see or touch, that can be recreated in a transcript form.

This interview will be recorded for the purpose of transcription.

Questions

How many newspapers does your office clip from each day?

Do all of the Senator's locations copy, cut out or otherwise save media clippings?

Do all of the Senator's offices collect media clippings?

Which of the following methods is used to collect media clippings?

Permanent staff, temporary staff, interns, clipping services including companies monitoring the Internet and broadcast. Friends or constituents....?

How many staff hours are utilized each day to compile clippings across all offices?

How is the information disseminated to Senator or does a staff member read it?

How much does your office spend monthly apart from payroll on clipping services (includes database systems like LexisNexis. Miss.-based Magnolia Clipping runs \$300 monthly for a basic service to clip from 125 state newspapers much less than even an intern's salary.)

What is the preferred form to receive the clippings?

Electronically

Original

Copied and mailed

Hard Copy (Printed)

Through a briefing

Fax

Once clipped, where are the media stored?

Shared Drive

Central location

Local offices

How long are the clipping routinely kept?

Who reads the clippings?

How often are clippings sent to the D.C., Office from clipping service or local office?

Who makes the decision as to the subject matter to be clipped?

For instance, Keystone Pipeline is an issue right now across the country. How does a subject make the list to be reviewed each day/week/month?

What news is most likely to be clipped? Examples are listed below.

- News of the Senator
- Home state issues
- National issues
- Friends of the Senator
- Sports Scores
- Home state municipality issues
- State senators
- State representatives
- State elected officials
- International issues
- Editorials about proposed legislation
- Local lifestyle articles
- Issues personally important to Senator
- U.S. Representatives from Home State
- U.S. President

From which media is information clipped from more often of state, local, international, and D.C.?

Are there some sources more believable than others?

For what purpose are the clippings most likely to be used? Examples below:

- Tracking home state events
- Following constituent issues
- Proposing legislative ideas
- Understanding/tracking state and local elected officials
- Understanding/tracking national issues
- Understanding/tracking international issues
- Preparing for a home state visit
- To prepare for press conferences

How do the clipping influence decisions that are made?

Has the office considered using a clipping service but did not do so because of cost?

APPENDIX B

Sample Letter to U.S. Senator Communication Directors

December 11, 2011

Rick Willis
University of Nebraska

Communications Director
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Communications Director:

My name is Rick Willis and I'm a graduate student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln College of Journalism and Mass Communications. I need your help.

I'm studying the methods of collection and use of media by sitting U.S. Senators for my master's thesis. Currently, there is no study about such use. To that end, I'm polling a group of 15 U.S. Senate communications directors. Others interviewed include regional clipping services owners and former senate staffers.

I myself became interested in the subject during my first job out of J-School as a traffic manager in an advertising agency. I spent hours each week combing newspapers and magazines for articles or mentions about a senatorial candidate. I was also an intern for a U.S. Senator where one of my jobs was to clip articles each day that might be of interest to the senator and staff.

The process if you choose to participate is simple on your part. I will schedule a time to call and speak with you about the collection, cost and use of media by your staff. I will send you a list of questions prior to the interview that I am asking all participants in the study.

Upon completion of the study, a copy of the thesis will be made available to you.

I will call you the week of December 18 to follow-up.

Thank you for your consideration,

Rick Willis