

Exploring the Intermedia Agenda-Setting Relationships and
Frames in the High-Choice Media Environment

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Dedication

To my loving Grandma who had brought me up and always believed in me. You are missed.

ABSTRACT

This study seeks to better understand the role of intermedia agenda setting in the current “high choice” media environment. Going beyond traditional news providers, it examines agenda-setting influences during the 2016 presidential campaign across three distinct types of media: mainstream news media consisting of national newspapers, digital native news sites, and late-night comedy programs. Quantitative and qualitative content analyses were conducted to examine the issue agendas and the specific news frames used by the three media types. Spearman rank-order correlations revealed that the three issue agendas converged. Findings also showed an association between media types and frames used. Therefore, this study suggests that mainstream news media still play a dominant agenda-setting role despite the fragmenting of audiences. By ignoring the usual distinction between news and entertainment and focusing instead on what Williams and Delli Carpini refer to as *politically relevant media*, this study seeks to extend agenda-setting theory in the digital age.

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Introduction

For decades, politicians have used entertainment media as a way to engage the average citizen or voter. From Dwight Eisenhower's stint on *Colgate Comedy Hour* through Richard Nixon's "sock it to me" joke on *Laugh In* and Barrack Obama's recent appearance on the web program *Between Two Ferns*, U.S. presidents and presidential candidates have routinely turned to entertainment-based shows to connect with hard-to-reach constituents. Obama's stint on *Between Two Ferns* was particularly successful in this regard. The White House reported that high viewership among the show's youthful audience translated into a forty percent surge in web traffic on HealthCare.gov (McGuinness, 2014). These guest appearances on popular comedy shows were designed to reach individuals who did not consume traditional news. The phenomenon has grown dramatically in the past decade because of radical changes in the nation's media landscape.

With the advent of digital technology, the media marketplace has evolved from scarcity to abundance – from an environment that offered few media options to one with a seemingly infinite number of outlets. In this "high-choice" marketplace, audiences have fragmented, with legacy media outlets – particularly news providers – suffering large declines in readers, viewers, and listeners (Prior, 2005, 2007). For some observers, this shift in media use raises serious concerns about political learning and political knowledge. If increased media choice now gives consumers the option of avoiding news outlets entirely, how will they obtain the political knowledge necessary to carry out their obligations as citizens in a democracy?

Recent studies (Baum, 2005; Bennett, 2007; Young & Tisinger, 2006) suggest these concerns could be overstated. Despite the move away from traditional news sources, consumers continue to be exposed to news and political information, both purposefully and inadvertently, through new media outlets that have emerged in the digital age. For example, politically inattentive citizens can now obtain political information from non-traditional news media such as digital native online news sites and late-night comedy programs. According to a study conducted by the Pew Research Center, of the 78 percent of U.S. adults who obtained information about the presidential election from TV-based sources, 25 percent used late-night comedy shows (Pew Research Center, 2016). Furthermore, out of the 65 percent who used digital sources, 48 percent used news sites and apps and 44 percent used social networking sites. This contrasts with the 2012 presidential election when only 36 percent of adults used digital resources for information (Pew Research Center, 2016).

To advance the field of mass communication research, Bennett and Iyengar (2008) urged scholars to reassess the realities of the social and media phenomena and include “transformations of society and technology … explicitly in communication models in order to avoid a repetition of earlier unproductive debates over minimal effects, agenda setting and other findings driven controversies in political communication” (p. 709). In essence, the changing media landscape and dynamics of social, political, and media structures affect the interplay among political actors, political institutions, and citizens and also, the shaping of public opinion through news content.

Political candidates are growing less dependent on traditional news media and instead are adapting their communication strategy to the ways in which individuals

actually engage in political learning. Scholars who study political messaging must do the same. As Curran (2005), Holbert (2005), Williams and Delli Carpini (2011) have observed, it is of paramount importance that the boundaries of political media be expanded such that the concepts of enjoyment and entertainment can be assimilated into the study of political communication. In particular, it is important to consider the continuous blurring distinction between entertainment and news in this changing information environment (Baym, 2010; Delli Carpini & Williams, 2001; Williams & Delli Carpini, 2011).

This study seeks to extend agenda-setting theory in the digital age by exploring the intermedia agenda-setting relationship among mainstream news media, digital native online news media and late-night comedy programs. In particular, the research seeks to examine the issue agendas among the three distinct media types (first-level agenda setting) in the context of the 2016 presidential elections. Although the goal is not to determine and establish any causal relationships, this paper serves as an exploratory study in testing the intermedia agenda-setting influence among them. Once a strong relationship among the issue agendas is demonstrated, the study will include an in-depth qualitative analysis to consider how the media types influence each other by illustrating the similarities and differences in how they package specific topics in the issue agenda. In addition, this paper aims to contribute to the understanding of framing in the context of political and election media coverage across the various media outlets.

Literature Review

Agenda Setting

The theoretical foundation of agenda setting can be traced back to Bernard Cohen's argument (1963) that the media "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" (p. 13). This argument was further developed and supported in Lang and Lang's (1966) observation that "the mass media force attention to certain issues. They build up public images of political figures. They are constantly presenting objects suggesting what individuals in the mass should think about, know about, have feelings about" (p. 468).

The Chapel Hill study conducted by McCombs and Shaw (1972) later provided empirical evidence demonstrating that the mass media set the public agenda during political campaigns by "influencing the salience of attitudes toward the political issues" (p. 177). In their seminal piece, they found a strong correlation between issues emphasized in the media and issues perceived as the campaign's most important topics among the public. Therefore, the most important element in the agenda-setting theory is *salience*, which is essentially the degree to which one issue is considered more important than others. Iyengar and Kinder (1987) posited that audience dependence on the media for political information can give journalists the power to shape opinions, and hence the ability to successfully percolate ideas into public thinking. In essence, the media's role in selecting and covering certain issues more than others make them more salient, thereby building a consensus about the top-of-mind issues of the day (McCombs, 2004;

McCombs, 2014). Therefore, McCombs (1997) stated, “achievement of consensus among the members of a public is the focal point of agenda-setting theory” (p. 433).

Agenda setting has been observed as a political process. Dearing and Rogers (1996) defined the agenda-setting process as “an ongoing competition among issue proponents to gain the attention of media professionals, the public and policy elites” (p. 1). The traditional agenda setting research has mostly focused on an *object* as the unit of analysis, which is usually a public affairs issue (McCombs & Reynolds, 2002). Hence the agenda-setting theory attempts to offer an explanation as to why the public has access to more information on certain issues relative to others. It also attempts to explain why certain issues are given more attention in public policy debates (Dearing & Rogers, 1996).

According to Cobb and Elder (1972), there are two different types of agendas: *systematic agenda* and *institutional agenda*. Systematic agenda is defined as “all issues that are commonly perceived by members of the political community as meriting public attention and as involving matters within the legitimate jurisdiction of existing governmental authority” (p. 85). Institutional agenda is the “set of items explicitly up for the active and serious consideration of authoritative decision-makers” (p. 86). Therefore, from the definitions, we can see that the development of an agenda is a dynamic process. Cobb and Elder (1972) defined an issue as “a conflict between two or more identifiable groups over procedural or substantive matters relating to the distribution of positions or resources” (p. 82). In addition to the conflicting nature of issues, Dearing and Rogers (1996) posited that there is another dimension to the term. They explained that there are “many social problems that never become issues even though proponents and opponents exist” (p. 2). In order to encompass this aspect, they defined an issue as “a social problem,

often conflictual, that has received mass media coverage” (p. 3). Therefore, according to the definitions of agenda and issue, it can be inferred that agenda setting is a political process, consisting of an interplay among the political elites, media and the public. In essence, the competing and conflicting nature of what issues should be made more important than others prompt us toward conceptualizing agenda setting as a political process in which it is a “zero-sum game” due to the scarcity of resources (Zhu, 1992) and competition for attention among the public (McCombs, 2014).

Media Centered vs. Transactional Model

The “media-centered” approach states that the mass media is primarily responsible for shaping the agenda for politicians and the public (Dalton, Beck, Huckfeldt, & Koetzle, 1998). Journalists paint an excerpted view of the world by selecting specific events and presenting them to the public. However, some scholars (for e.g. Bauer, 1964) proposed an alternative model. Rather than using the mass media as an independent variable to draw correlations between media coverage and public interests, they focused on an ongoing transactional relationship among political elites, the mass media, and the public. On the other end of the spectrum is the “transaction” model, which states that these social actors are constantly influenced and constrained by one another’s actions (Altschuler, 1982; Salmore & Salmore, 1989) and political events (Funkhouser, 1973; MacKuen & Coombs, 1981) that ultimately shapes the public discourse (Dalton et al., 1998).

Agenda Building

The agenda-building process considers the range of public influences on government public-policy decision making, thereby pointing to the importance of the “environing social processes in determining what occurs at the decision-making stage,” resulting in the implementation of public policies (Cobb & Elder, 1971, p. 911). Agenda-building research examines influences on media agendas such as influential news sources, other media, journalistic norms and traditions, unexpected events and media audiences.

In *Mediating the Message: Theories of Influences on Mass Media Content* (1991, 1996) Shoemaker and Reese adopted a sociological approach toward understanding media influences. Their Hierarchical Influences Model rejects the notion that media practitioners are fully autonomous and independent arbiters of mass-mediated content. According to Reese (2001) the journalist operates “within a web of organizational and ideological constraints” (p. 174). The model consists of five layers of influences on news media content: 1) prevailing social ideologies of the community 2) extramedia forces that attempt to shape media content 3) organizational and ownership influences 4) the routines of media workers, and 5) the individual psychological traits of the journalists. The innermost layer – the traits of journalists – focuses on the political and religious attitudes and beliefs and suggests these characteristics have an intrinsic impact on media content. Orientations toward their professional role as journalists also determine what they think is worth reporting to the audience. Such media routines such as balanced reporting and dependence on other professional colleagues for story ideas influence the production of *symbolic content* (Reese & Shoemaker, p. 112). News organizations face economic constraints, which influence the content production. The growth of media conglomerates

means that journalists have to exercise more caution concerning journalistic decisions to avoid conflicts of interest. Outside the media, public relations campaigns and government regulations and laws are among the range of factors that affect media content. Lastly, social ideologies – assumptions of inherent community support for free markets, for example – shape news values and hence inevitably impact the previous layers of influences. These five layers interact to constrain each other, with the outer layers highly influenced by the layers closer to the core (Shoemaker & Reese, 1991, 1996; also see Reese, 2001).

Although today's media ecosystem has changed with the emergence of digital technology, Reese and Shoemaker (2016) posited that the model can still be used to understand the larger framework of media practices by adapting it to the digital networked media environment. Specifically, technology can be “integrated into practice” (p. 18) and be theorized using Latour’s (2011) actor network theory, which observes the relationship among nodes. In the context of media, nodes can be defined as individuals, news sources and news content (Reese & Shoemaker, 2016). Chawick’s (2011) “hybrid news system” which adopts the key idea of *assemblages* can also be used to understand the relationship among variables such as media practitioners, technology (Internet) and political actors. In his article, Chadwick (2011) posited that “the combination of news professionals’ dominance and the integration of non-elite actors in the construction and contestation of news at multiple points in the political information cycle’s life span are important characteristics of contemporary political communication” (p. 3).

Indexing

As a theoretical framework, the indexing hypothesis helps to better understand the balance between democracy and capitalism and the resulting forces that shape “institutions and practices,” thereby explaining how the public information system is constituted (Bennett, 1990, p. 112). Hence indexing allows researchers to examine the extent to which journalists present a range of voices in news reports. The hypothesis states that journalists tend to “index” a spectrum of voices, including official and non-official figures, in their news accounts. But non-official views are only included if they correspond with the opinions of some percentage of political elites. Therefore, evidence in support of the indexing hypothesis suggests that the mainstream news media frequently abandons its democratic watchdog role and constructs news in accordance with elite and official opinion. In the seminal piece, Bennett (1990) posited that there are some general properties of the framework: (a) events must qualify as news; and (b) indexing is more than an *individual-level variable* such that it includes norms that are found in social structures and actors within these structures such that they are established in *collective action* and emerge in interactions among individuals.

Evolution of Agenda-Setting Theory

The agenda-setting theory has been used to explain the transfer of salience from the media to the public in different time periods and evolving media landscape. In a meta-analysis conducted on mass communication theories, Bryant and Miron (2004) reported that agenda setting is one of the most widely used theoretical frameworks in the field. Following McComb and Shaw’s (1972) seminal piece, a series of studies have focused on

the agenda setting relationship between print newspaper and the issue interest of the public. Funkhouser (1973) conducted an exploratory study using weekly news magazines published between 1960-1970 to demonstrate how the media shaped public opinion. Empirical evidence showed that there is a positive correlation between an issue's coverage in the media and the amount of public concern given to that specific issue. However, Funkhouser (1973) noted that the extent of media coverage does not influence the public's attitudes toward an issue. Benton and Frazier (1976) used news media consumption, which consists of print newspapers, local and national TV news, and news magazines to investigate the public awareness on general issues, their awareness of proposed resolutions, and their knowledge of recommendations. They found that newspapers have the strongest agenda-setting effect whereas TV has a weak effect on setting the public agenda. In narrowing the media's agenda-setting influence to one narrow group within the public, Pritchard (1986) used the agenda-setting theory to examine the relationship between newspaper crime coverage and its influence on prosecutors. Findings of the study showed that the level of attention given by newspapers to crime stories affected the willingness of Milwaukee prosecutors to plea bargain in homicide cases. In an attempt to establish the causal relationship between the news media agenda and salience of issues among public, Wanta (1988) used an experimental design involving newspaper photos. Students were randomly assigned to one of the three experimental groups with each of them receiving a news story (one different issue per day) accompanied by a dominant photograph, a "balanced" photograph or no photograph. Wanta (1988) defined "balanced art design" as "a number of photographs, none of which is noticeably dominant," on a page of the newspaper (p. 108). Results showed that news

editors could influence reader's salience of issues by manipulating the size of accompanying photographs.

While many studies have attempted to investigate the direct relationship between news media coverage and the public's awareness of general issues, some scholars have posited that there might be other forces influencing the public's salience of issues. Erbring, Goldenberg, and Hiller (1980) posited that real-world cues could influence an individual's perception of issue salience and attempted to control for this unique effect using audience perceptions at the individual level. In measuring the relationship between newspaper consumption and the participant's communal environment, they found that an individual's "pre-existing sensitivities" determined the corresponding level of issue concerns. Specifically, they said, "media effects are contingent on issue-specific audience characteristics ... issue convergence in the media serves as a trigger stimulus to salience perceptions" (p. 45). Extending Erbring et al.'s (1980) earlier study to focus on environmental issues and real-world conditions, Ader (1995) used print newspapers to examine the relationships among traditional news media, real-world cues and the public's perception of salient issues. She found that real-world cues and the public agenda have no correlation, but results showed that there was a positive relationship between media coverage and real-world cues for one pollution category. Dalton et al. (1998) presented empirical evidence from national newspapers showing that the media's role in setting the public agenda has been overstated. They concluded that agenda setting follows a transactional model in which the interplay among social actors reach a consensus on salient issues that define a political campaign.

With the advent of the Internet and new dimensions for communication, scholars turned their attention toward investigating the agenda-setting effects online. As Armstrong and Zuniga (2006) demonstrated that independent political blogs have attracted high levels of readership comparable to that of traditional news media, they posited that studies have focused on the agenda-setting function of independent political blogs to accommodate the changing nature of news consumption. Using a variety of news media which consists of newspapers, news wires, news magazines, and TV news, Roberts, Wanta, and Dzwo (2002) examined the role of traditional news media in setting the agenda of discussions found on electronic bulletin boards. In general, they found that news coverage on immigration, health care, and taxes provided participants with the quintessential information needed to engage in conversations on the Internet. Woody (2008) argued that blogs have changed the “structure of political communication” (p. 109) as loyal readers showed that they have acquired political information to successfully engage in political conversations. Furthermore, as the pace at which blogs report new information is faster than traditional news media, Woody (2008) argued that blogs have a greater capacity to shape public opinion.

Obama’s 2008 campaign and its successful use of digital media and social media as campaign tools have garnered the attention of political communication scholars. To track the possible shift in mainstream media’s traditional agenda-setting role, Sayre, Bode, Shah, Wilcox, and Shah (2010) examined the relationship among *YouTube* videos, daily newspapers and *Google* news. Findings showed that there is an underlying relationship among the three news sources and their relationships are somehow determined by public events. Specifically, the study illustrated how social media provides

a voice for marginalized opinions and essentially brings an issue to the attention of mainstream media.

Scholars identified two “countervailing trends” in modern agenda-setting studies. The *centrifugal trend* expands the theory into various settings “beyond the original focus on public affairs” and the *centripetal trend* sees researchers further explicating key foundational concepts in the theory (McCombs, 2014, p. 86; McCombs, Shaw, & Weaver, 2014, p. 783). McCombs and colleagues (2014) found that it has evolved into a “broad theory,” consisting of seven different features and elaborations: (a) basic transfer of salience (objects) from the media agenda to the public agenda, otherwise known as the *first-level agenda setting*; (b) transfer of salience of the attributes of these objects from the media to the public, otherwise known as *second-level agenda setting*; (c) the influence of *networked media agenda* comprising of objects or attributes on the *networked public agenda*, which is *network agenda setting* or *third-level agenda setting*; (d) psychological mechanisms that are critical in understanding the strength of agenda setting effects such as the need for orientation (Tolman, 1932; McCombs, 2014); (e) the outcomes of agenda setting on attitudes, opinions and behavior; (f) influences on media agendas such as influential news sources, other media, journalistic norms and traditions, unexpected events and media audiences (also see Weaver & Choi, 2014); and (g) *agendamelding* as coined by McCombs et al. (2014) to describe the “intimate, often unconscious process by which we borrow from a variety of agendas to find, or create, the personal communities in which we choose to live” (p. 782).

However, there seemed to be inconsistency in the agenda-setting literature (Armstrong & Zuniga, 2006; McClure & Patterson, 1976; Strömbäck & Kiousis, 2010;

Wanta, 1997; Woodly, 2008) concerning which medium has the highest predictive issue and attribute salience effect. Therefore, the proliferation of media outlets in this digital age and the changing media environment present an imminent need for more research to be conducted on the different types of media. In doing so, scholars can then better understand the different issue and attribute salience brought forward by different types of media.

Intermedia Agenda Setting

In examining *who sets the media agenda*, news media outlets are also capable of influencing one another's news agendas. Journalists tend to observe what stories their professional counterparts are covering and in turn select similar stories to help validate their news choices, which is known as intermedia agenda setting (Hirsch, 1977; McCombs & Shaw, 1976; Snider, 1967; White, 1950). Intermedia agenda-setting research has traditionally focused on the relationship among news wires, newspapers, and television news. In cross-examining 24 Iowa daily newspapers and the Associated Press, Gold and Simmons (1965) found that there was very little variation in media content between the news sources. The types of stories covered in one newspaper were also frequently printed in other newspapers with a similarity index of 0.915. Empirical evidence also showed that there was a high rank order correlation between topics reported in the newspapers and the AP file. For example, "crime and vice" was the fifth most reported topic in the AP file and it was the seventh most printed topic in the average frequency of newspapers. In a re-analysis of the famous "Mr. Gates" study (1950), Snider (1976) found a high correlation coefficient of +0.80 between news wire content and the

newspaper content. *The New York Times* has also been demonstrated to exert a strong influence on the agendas of other news media outlets (Gilberg, Eyal, McCombs, & Nicholas, 1980) where a particular story's appearance on the front page (A1) warrants the topic as newsworthy (Denham, 2014; McCombs, 2014; Meraz, 2009).

On the other hand, elite newspapers have been found to set the media agenda for broadcast media. In one study, Trumbo (1995) found that global warming news coverage in traditional print news media including *The New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *Washington Post*, influenced the agenda of national broadcast media. Using cross-lag analysis, Roberts and McCombs (1994) found that there is a strong correlation between newspaper agenda (at time 1) and television agenda (at time 2) in the context of the 1990 Texas gubernatorial campaign. Another important finding was that televised political advertising set the news media agenda for both newspapers and television news.

To observe the homogeneity of news agendas in the digital age, Yu (2005) examined the online news subsidiaries of elite newspapers, online subsidiaries of TV news programs, and online news sites. He found that there was a high level of information “redundancy” when comparing all three types of issue agendas as they contained considerably similar information. A later study conducted by Lee (2007) on the 2004 presidential election reached the same conclusion. He stated that blogs essentially shared similar information as mainstream news media, and voters were exposed to the same agendas across political media outlets. In particular, Messner and Garrison (2011) found that although mainstream news media frequently used blogs as sources, blogs are also starting to exert an influence on the news media agenda. Blogs served as a common opinion source and have since assumed the role of “commentators” and “investigative

resources” (p. 122). Using the context of Austria’s multimedia news environment, Vonbun and colleagues (2016) posited that the agenda of online news media has become more influential on traditional news media agenda. This finding hence suggested that the agenda-setting role is gradually reversing for the two media types in which print media used to be the dominant agenda setter.

However, a recent study conducted by the Pew Research Center (2010) on the media ecosystem in Baltimore, Maryland found that 95 percent of news reporting originated from traditional news media, in particular newspapers, which showed that traditional news media serve as the agenda setter for other news media outlets. Despite the expanding sphere of media outlets contributed by blogs, news sites, and social media, there was little evidence of original reporting where Pew (2010) observed that 83 percent of stories contained repetitive information. The remaining 17 percent of stories, which contained new information mostly, came from traditional media outlets either in their *legacy platforms* or in digital formats.

Scholars have since expanded the universe of media outlets in their continued examination of the intermedia agenda-setting framework to include non-news media. Studies have shown that non-news media such as political advertisements (Boyle, 2001; Lopez-Escobar, Llamas, McCombs, & Lennon, 1998), candidates’ social media accounts (Conway, Kenski, & Wang, 2015) and campaign blogs (Sweetser, Golan, & Wanta, 2008), social networking sites (Groshek & Groshek, 2013), political campaign news releases (Heim, 2013) and political blogs (Meraz, 2011; Messner & Garrison, 2011) do exert some level of influence on mainstream news media agenda. McCombs (2014) noted that entertainment media may at times be the agenda setter for traditional news media

outlets as can be illustrated using the example of Canadian news coverage of the Holocaust from 1982 to 1996. In the study, Soroka (2000) found that the motion picture, *Schindler's List* influenced the number of Holocaust-related news articles published and that there was an increase in ratio of *issue-oriented* vs. *event-oriented* articles published in Canadian newspapers (p. 226).

Studies have also shown that late-night comedy shows are seen as a “gateway” to mainstream news (Feldman & Young, 2008) as “they exist not as isolated objects within a context of comedy programs but comingle with *New York Times* articles, blog posts and peer commentary,” which would “make sense for mainstream news sources to treat them as rival news organizations capable of ‘breaking’ stories rather than simply curiosities with little intrinsic news value” (Abel & Barthel, 2013, p. 5). Using the 2008 presidential election involving Tina Fey’s portrayal of Sarah Palin, Abel and Barthel (2013), found that *Saturday Night Live (SNL)* skits had an impact on how traditional news media covered Palin in the elections. Specifically, they observed that some broadcast programs used footage directly obtained from *SNL* as a lead-in to question her credentials, thereby giving the late-night comedy “equal footing to a column in the *Washington Post*” (p. 13). This was concurred by Young’s (2011) study where she found that Fey’s portrayal of Palin gave traditional media a convenient narrative to report on as journalists had limited access to the vice-presidential candidate. Therefore, the emergence of new political media outlets and entertainment gives rise to opportunities for more a comprehensive investigation on the intermedia agenda-setting hypothesis and theory building on agenda setting. Although some studies (for e.g. Ragas & Kiousis, 2010) have incorporated online news media in existing intermedia agenda-setting studies, there is a lack of literature on

late-night comedy programs and its intermedia relationship with traditional news media or *hard news*.

Therefore, although much empirical evidence has shown that traditional news media plays a significant role in the agenda-setting function of the media, non-news media are gaining prominence in setting the news agenda in this new media landscape.

Analysis of Media Content in the New Media Environment

With the changing media environment, Stroud (2011) noted that media content is more diverse today than before. Therefore, there is an imminent need to examine the media agenda at an individual-level analysis instead of aggregating different media outlets as McCombs and Shaw's (1972) seminal piece did. Specifically, they focused on the aggregate level of agenda setting by summing all media outlets as one unit of media representation. Chaffee and Metzger (2001) noted that in the original study, a premise of the theory lies in the fact that individuals acquire news from a few media outlets. Hence, they posited that the media agenda should be “uniform” across different media outlets. Bennett and Iyengar (2008) also observed that “In the era of ‘old media’ … The offerings of all news organizations were sufficiently homogeneous and standardized to represent an ‘information commons’” (p. 717). Therefore, aggregating media content across various types of media outlets would not drastically influence the outcome of any agenda-setting study. In the context of acquiring political information, citizens could only turn to traditional news media outlets. However, in this “high-choice” environment and new media landscape, different media outlets might offer different agendas.

Framing

Framing has been studied extensively and is one of the more popular theoretical frameworks seen across mass communication literature (Bryant & Miron, 2004). However, there are varying definitions of framing in existing literature stemming from psychology and sociology, which leads to conceptualization and operationalization issues. Gitlin (1980) defined framing as “principles of selection, emphasis and presentation composed of tacit little theories about what exists, what happens and what matters” (p. 6). Gamson and Modigliani (1987) defined it as “a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events,” (p. 143) helping to “organize everyday reality” (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989, p. 3; also see Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, & Sasson, 1992). In a later piece, Gamson and colleagues (1992) explained framing as an individual-level *social construction of reality*, which “leaves open a bewildering array of messages that are produced in many voices and many modes and that can be read in many different ways” (p. 380). On the other hand, psychologists Tversky and Kahneman (1981) defined framing using the notion of equivalence and stated that framing is concerned with *how* a given issue with *equivalent information* is being presented or framed in variations.

Entman’s (1993) definition of framing is one of the most commonly cited across research articles. He stated that “to frame is to select some aspects of perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text” (p. 52). This definition explicitly drew parallels between agenda setting and framing based on the mechanism of salience, and therefore spurred some ongoing controversies concerning whether they are different theoretical frameworks. In particular, McCombs and Shaw (1993) posited that “agenda

setting is a process that can affect both *what* to think about and *how* to think about it" (p. 63). Furthermore, McCombs, Llamas, Lopez-Escobar, and Rey (1997) cited Entman's salience-based definition of framing to argue that both theoretical frameworks have converged (p. 704; also see McCombs & Ghanem, 2001; McCombs & Reynolds, 2002). They argued that research on agenda setting has found that not only do the mass media tell us *what to think about*, it also tells us *how to think about* some objects. In essence, agenda setting also sought to explain the transfer of salience of object attribute from the media to the public. Hence this theoretical extension goes beyond Cohen's (1963) initial conceptualization of the agenda-setting function as "characteristics and properties" (McCombs & Reynolds, 2002, p. 10) expressed in the news. It can possess an evaluative function and can potentially influence what people "call to mind when they think of issues, topics, events and people" (Comstock & Scharrer, 2005, p. 175).

Theoretical Distinctions Between Agenda Setting and Framing

Agenda setting and framing are distinct theoretical frameworks, which is also evident from the perspective of media message construction and level of analysis used. In the 1972 agenda-setting study, McCombs and Shaw (1972) measured salience as a cumulative phenomenon, meaning that a media message has to be placed in the context of other media messages in order to have an agenda. An agenda requires the *accumulation* (repetition) of media messages in order to be made salient and be successfully transferred to the public. Therefore, how individuals interpret media messages stem from the aggregation of similar messages across media outlets, which is dependent on high exposure or *accessibility* (Edy & Meirick, 2007; Iyengar, 1990). On

the other hand, framing can be measured on an individual level where each media message can have a dominant, conflicting or multiple frames depending on the *contextual forces and individual attributes* (Druckman, 2004).

How individuals frame messages depend on the process of *applicability* and the existing *schemata*, which is evident in Kinder and Sanders' (1990) conceptualization of frames. Graber (1988) defined schemata as “categories, scripts or stereotypes” stored in our memories that guides the cognitive processing of information (Entman, 1993, p. 53). Along these lines, Chong and Druckman (2007) described framing as a “process by which people develop a particular conceptualization of an issue or reorient their thinking about an issue (p. 104), which is based on an individual’s attitude toward a subject.

Entman (1993) stated that frames “define problems – determine what a causal agent is doing with what costs and benefits, usually measured in terms of common cultural values; diagnose causes – identify the forces creating the problem; make moral judgments – evaluate causal agents and their effects; and suggest remedies – offer and justify treatments for the problems and predict their likely effects” (p.52). In essence, he suggested that agenda setting and framing are two distinct theoretical frameworks as framing relies on existing schemata rather than repetition of themes in media content (also see Edy & Meirick, 2007). In other words, framing is based on a *conventional expectancy value model of an individual’s attitude* (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980), which is dependent on a set of unique beliefs that an individual holds concerning a subject. The variance of framing effects – strength and applicability – are dependent on (a) the mediational processes that is essentially the underlying psychological mechanisms behind frames; (b) moderators including personal values and priorities, levels of knowledge,

source credibility and alternative information; and (c) the relationship between competing frames, recency of issues in debate, individual's levels of knowledge, personal values, and partisanship (Chong & Druckman, 2007).

In terms of the level of analysis, Kinder and Sanders (1990) posited that frames consist of “devices embedded in political discourse” and “internal structures of the mind,” which means that there is an individual frame and a media frame (p. 74). Furthermore, this conceptualization was also implicitly supported by McCombs (2014) where he posited that “the agenda-setting effects that are frequently the outcome of this process are shaped to a considerable degree by characteristics of the media’s messages and to a far lesser degree by the characteristics of the recipients of those messages” (p. 95).

Tying the concepts of *accessibility* vs. *applicability* and the levels of analysis, scholars should keep agenda setting and framing distinct and stay close to the original agenda setting study in terms of conceptualizing the theory. For the purpose of this study, the sociological definition of framing will be adopted, as it is more representative of a media analysis approach rather than the definition derived from psychology that focuses on selection problems (Iyengar, 1991).

Evolution of Framing

Framing has been used differently across studies in political communication and mass communication, both conceptually and operationally. In their original study, Kahneman and Tversky (1981) focused on the equivalence design and examined how people perceived risk based on identical information but different phrasings of the problem. In the experimental study, participants were asked to choose between a positive

vs. negative framing of risk. For example, one of the questions asked participants to choose between “winning” or “losing” some money. Although the eventual outcome was the same, participants favored “winning” and hence displayed “risk aversion” behavior. Therefore, Kahneman and Tversky (1981) posited that individuals did not make their decisions based on the concept of rational choice theory. The authors replicated this study design across several issues (Kahneman & Tversky, 1984), and findings consistently showed that individuals relied on how problems were phrased instead of evaluating choices based on utility.

However following the work of Kahneman and Tversky (1981), later studies started to operationalize framing differently. Instead of focusing on *how* a given issue with equivalent information is being presented or framed in variations, studies commonly focus on *what* is being communicated differently (Scheufele & Iyengar, 2014). Therefore, Cacciato, Scheufele, and Iyengar (2016) posited that framing studies have advanced toward a “territory where the selection of one set of facts or arguments over another can be deemed a frame” (p. 10). Zaller (1992) later adopted the theoretical framework to investigate how voters acquire political information from the mass media and political elites and hence shape public opinion. He posited that the framing of issues play a significant role in democracy and can hence determine public opinion. Other scholars (Entman, 1993; Kahneman & Tversky, 1984; Zaller, 1992) also posited that true public opinion may be hidden if political elites can manipulate frames such that each different frame would produce changes in public opinion (Chong & Druckman, 2007).

In a study, de Vreese (2005) used two wave panel studies and content analyses of mainstream news media in Netherlands and Denmark to examine the relationship

between news media, political cynicism, and political participation. Specifically, the study challenges the perspective that strategic news reporting about politics leads to political cynicism and distrust, which drives low-levels of civic engagement and voter turnout. He used five frames – candidate presentation, actions to garner public support, strategy frame, public opinion polls, and language use – that generated different information to examine strategic news coverage. Findings showed that strategic news reporting led to an increase in political cynicism in the Netherlands but led to a decrease in political cynicism in Denmark. Furthermore, there is also scant empirical evidence to show that cynicism is associated with voter turnout. In order to examine the relationship between media frames and public deliberation, Simon and Xenos (2000) used a content analysis of newspaper articles across elite media to generate six working frames that capture overall themes in the news coverage of U.S. national labor strike against United Parcel Service. Findings showed that newspaper coverage of the issue met general standards of public deliberation. In another study adopting *emphasis frames* and the concept of *issue salience*, Kim, Carvalho, Davis, and Mullins (2011) used newspapers and television news to explore how illegal immigration has been framed in mainstream media. In addition, a comparison was made between border and state newspapers to examine if news coverage was similar across different media outlets. Findings showed that real-world conditions such as opinions expressed by prominent public figures on the adversity of immigration defined the issue as a *social problem*. Hence the authors posited that it was not the intensity of the issue that led to heightened news coverage.

Edy and Meirick (2007) posited that there exists a gap to void in the existing framing and frame-setting research by moving laboratory-controlled experiments to

natural settings. They examined how Tennessee viewers adopt competing frames in the televised national nightly news coverage of September 11 and how these adopted frames could influence public support for U.S military efforts in Afghanistan. Findings demonstrated that framing seemed to be a much more complex phenomenon than what laboratory experiments have presented as respondents actually built individual narratives when faced with competing frames rather than adopt media frames. As social locations seem to be significant in influencing what frames respondents choose, the authors posited that other experimental framing studies might have failed to acquire the “complexity of what it is people are actually doing when they process political information” (p. 136). Therefore, with the complexity of framing being exhibited in natural media environment, Edy and Meirick (2007) urged scholars to develop better measures to investigate how audiences discern media frames.

With the changing media landscape, Holbert et al. (2005) posited that there is a need to look into entertainment-based media and examine how it plays a role in political communication. Therefore, they used framing to assess how the President of the United States is portrayed on NBC’s political serial drama, *The West Wing*. Using deductive quantitative content analysis, coders were asked to identify a dominant presentation of the presidency in a single scene and categorize it into *chief executive*, *political candidate*, or *private citizen*. After which, coders were asked to determine the personality trait of the role. The *chief executive role* was coded the most frequently and the character was depicted as most *engaging* when acting as a *private citizen*. In another study, Zukas (2012) attempted to extend framing research to political satire to examine how news coverage and frames differ between *The Daily Show* and *ABC World News with Charles*

Gibson. Results showed that televised news contained more strategy frames than *The Daily Show*, and the latter contained more responsibility and morality frames than *ABC World News*. Although these two programs reported on similar top stories each day, they were presented or framed differently. On the other hand, Peifer (2013) focused on political parody and examined how *Saturday Night Life* (SNL) framed Sarah Palin's vice-president candidacy. Using qualitative content analysis, he identified four frames: *female beauty, faith, competence, and folksy*. Peifer (2013) posited that this preliminary study sets the stage for further analysis on how televised caricatures can help shape political opinions and hence influence the political realm.

New Media Landscape and Political Learning

Prior (2007) posited that individuals who are less educated and informed would possess weakly held political ideologies and exhibit the behaviors of floating voters. These citizens move between political parties and base their voting decisions on "candidate images or the controversy of the day" (Prior, 2007, p. 7). Because their political views are so malleable, changes in the media environment could affect individuals' exposure and acquisition of political information and alter their vote choice. Although previous studies have asserted that print newspapers are the traditional and primary way in which individuals get information on presidential elections, the changing media landscape and proliferation of media outlets have inevitably changed the way people engage in political learning during these high-stimulus times. With a variety of media choices, people who are not politically engaged can easily opt for entertainment as opposed to political news coverage (Prior, 2005, 2007).

According to the State of the News Media Report 2016 released by the Pew Research Center, 91 percent of surveyed individuals gathered election news (one week from 12 January 2016) from at least one of the sources ranging from cable TV news, social media, local TV, news website/app, radio, network nightly news, late-night comedy, local newspapers in print, national newspapers in print, issue-based group websites and communication, and candidate-or-campaign websites and communication. Findings showed that 24 percent of those surveyed said cable TV news was the most helpful, whereas news websites and apps gathered 13 percent of responses and only 3 percent said late-night comedy was the most helpful, which was as useful as local newspapers in print (3 percent). Out of the 65 percent of U.S. adults who obtained information about the presidential election from digital sources, 48 percent saying that they did so using news sites and apps and 44 percent said they used social networking sites. With the advancement of technology and the growth of mobile technology, this statistic is certainly more prominent as compared to the 2012 presidential election where only 36 percent of adults used digital resources for information.

With technological advancements, Downs (1957) posited that one's accessibility to different media types changes. This shift in media use routines can yield different levels of incidental political information. Incidental or by-product learning is conceptualized as the idea that individuals acquire politically relevant information while performing nonpolitical activities, which can be obtained through entertainment or the making of consumption decisions (Downs, 1957; also see Prior, 2007). Hence the emergence of digital technologies gives rise to more opportunities for by-product learning in the new media environment as individuals can gain access to more online

social/entertainment news media such as *Buzzfeed*, *Mic*, *Vox*, and *Mashable*. Amidst other news content such as national news, business news, health news, entertainment news, and sports news, these online news outlets contain political news content that is covered in a lighter way. Furthermore, these digital native news platforms consist of more human interest stories than traditional news media and seem to be more reader-friendly.

The rampant use of social media for acquiring political information as observed in Pew's (2016) study has also increased opportunities for by-product learning. For example, the scrolling of a newsfeed on Facebook increases a person's exposure to political news. In a recent study, Bode (2016) attempted to investigate the relationship between social media, exposure to political information and knowledge gain. She found that social media users exhibit signs of passive learning in a low-choice media environment, which have important implications for understanding political information acquisition on social media platforms toward "theories of accidental exposure and passive learning more than selective exposure and media choice" (p. 43).

By-product learning can also occur during entertainment-based shows. As a result of media outlet expansion, politically apathetic citizens are no longer forced to settle for traditional news. Instead, they have a broader choice of program genres and can now tune in to entertainment-based programs at any time. Some of these entertainment-based shows feature a hybrid of humor, entertainment news, and political news. According to Pew's (2016) media-use statistics, late-night comedy shows are also of importance in the political environment as out of the 78 percent of U.S. adults who obtained information from TV-based sources, late-night comedy programs reached 25 percent. As could be

seen in previous election campaigns, presidential candidates have adapted well to the changing media and political learning environment by changing their campaign strategies and making appearances on entertainment-based programs in order to reach citizens who are politically apathetic (Baum, 2005). When candidates appear on these entertainment-based shows to make announcements and engage in small talks with the hosts frequently, it often resulted in higher exposure and higher popularity. Aside from guest appearances, late-night comedy shows are also successful in presenting some type of political information such as candidates' characteristics in the form of skits. A recent example is *SNL*'s portrayal of Sarah Palin who ran alongside John McCain as the vice-presidential candidate in the 2008 elections. Tina Fey's portrayal of Palin managed to capture the attention of voters and they acquired much information about her through the skits. Young (2006) specifically showed that the salience of candidates' *caricatured traits* was especially prevalent among citizens who possess lower levels of political knowledge. Furthermore, as these popular late-night comedy shows have a strong social media presence, voters may also potentially engage in by-product learning when checking their social media accounts. In this way, politically apathetic voters could still learn a thing or two through such programs.

Humor and Political Learning

Late-night comedy has received increasing attention from political communication and mass communication scholars where studies have investigated how humor/satire embedded in these programs are potentially influencing the political information environment. In general, scholars (for e.g. Zillman, 2000) believe that humor

helps political learning because of its ability to remove negativity contained in serious issues. Hence humor is a relatively good way to ease tension, which is commonly seen in political conflicts and discussions. In particular, Zillman (2000) argued that entertainment contains persuasive effects that might potentially influence people more easily than aversive content. Holbert, Tchernev, Walther, Esralew, and Benski (2013) concurred with the statement and posited that there exists *persuasive intent* in the construction of political satire among younger voters as they were able to remember messages of weak strength.

Baum (2005) posited that entertainment-based talk shows often focus on the *personality* traits of political candidates instead of their issue positions on policies, in order to make “political information more accessible” (p. 216), which result in attracting viewers who are *relatively apolitical*. In particular, Baum argued in his book, *Soft News Goes to War* that the *incidental by-product model of information consumption* can be used to explain how individuals who are not actively seeking political information can sometimes be receptive to such intensive topics as explained by the *expected utility model* developed by Riker and Ordeshook (1968). On the other hand, although Jon Stewart’s use of cynicism as a way to offer insights into the political process is seen as unacceptable in traditional news media, Bennett (2007) stated that comedy can be seen as a *resource* for helping citizens decode political performances and political corruption. Furthermore, compared to traditional news media which often use game frames, Baum (2005) posited that entertainment-based talk shows tend to use “softer, personality-oriented topics and themes,” (p. 216) which is likely to prime viewers into believing that the candidates are likeable (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). Therefore, as most people are

heavily dependent on “information shortcuts, or heuristic cues,” (Baum, 2005, p. 216) straightforward cues such as a candidate’s “likeability” or partisanship would help the politically uninformed decide on who to vote for (Sniderman, Brody, & Tetlock, 1991).

In his study, Baum (2005) found that audiences of entertainment-based talk shows who are politically inattentive are more likely to find the opposition candidate “likeable” and would be more willing to vote for them than those who are politically engaged and do not watch similar programs. Many studies have demonstrated that late-night comedy shows are perceived as informative while having an impact on political learning, political participation, political engagement, political efficacy and are able to influence attitudes and evaluations of politicians (Baumgartner & Morris, 2006; Beavers, 2009; Becker, 2012; Cao 2006; Dorman, 2007; Kwak, Wang, & Guggenheim, 2004; Moy, Xenos, & Hess, 2006). Furthermore, scholars found that political entertainment can be an antecedent for political influence (Esralew & Young, 2013; Flower & Young, 2010), as there no longer exists a clear distinction drawn between news and entertainment (Esralew & Young, 2013). Peifer (2013) posited that comedy skits and parody shape public perceptions of political figures where they can consciously “select” and make “salient” critical topics by means of impersonations (p. 164).

Convergence of Entertainment and News

Delli Carpini (2014) posited that scholarship has been impeded by the “constrictive definitions” of *news*, *entertainment*, *politics*, *political engagement* and *political effects*, and this inadvertently affects how researchers examine the political influence of entertainment media. Williams and Delli Carpini (2011) also noted that

different terms have been used over the years – *public affairs* vs. *popular culture*, *hard news* vs. *features* – and scholars need to understand the “historical specificity of these distinctions” in order to understand the “political significance of the changes occurring in the media environment” (p. 12). Although Lippmann (1922) attempted to define news as a function “to signalize an event,” (p. 358) scholars (Delli Carpini & Williams, 2001; Fiske, 1996) have argued that entertainment media have, too, undertaken the role of highlighting issues of “social and political” importance (Williams & Delli Carpini, 2011, p. 11). Furthermore, Fiske (1996) argued that “the term media event is an indication that in a postmodern world we can no longer rely on a stable relationship or clear distinction between a ‘real’ event and its mediated representation” (p. 2). Therefore, the concept of “hyperreality” can be used to understand the underlying public discourse, which is shaped by “media event[s]” rather than the truth.

Since it is increasingly challenging to distinguish news from entertainment (Williams & Delli Carpini, 2011) and classify them according to mutually exclusive traits, Delli Carpini (2014) argued that they should not be treated as conceptually distinct. As a result of this blurring distinction, Delli Carpini therefore urged political communication scholars to move beyond distinguishing news and entertainment by expanding their conceptual definitions and thereby use a “more useful and integrated notion of *politically relevant media*” (Delli Carpini, 2014, p. 8). As such, scholars can only conduct more comprehensive research on the political influences of media to reflect the mediated information environment and the different ways people engage in politics when the notions above are expanded. Therefore, Delli Carpini (2014) urged scholars to build upon

existing literature by using existing theories, which are traditionally used to study public affairs media to examine the political effects of entertainment media.

In recent years, communications scholars have argued that soft news programs play an increasingly significant role in disseminating political information (Beavers, 2011; Brewer & Cao 2006; Hollander, 2005; Kwak, Wang, & Guggenheim, 2004). Baum (2011) defined soft news as a class of “entertainment-oriented, quasi-news and information programs,” which includes entertainment talk shows, entertainment news shows, morning shows and political comedy (p. 5). However, Reinemann, Stanyer, Scherr, and Legnante (2011) proposed that soft news should be defined as “the more a news item is not politically relevant, the more it reports in an episodic way, focuses on individual consequences of events, is personal and emotional in style, the more it can be regarded as soft news” (p. 233). Therefore, Reinemann et al.’s definition contradicts the essence of soft-news programming in which political information is often presented in non-traditional media forms (Baym, 2005). Baumgartner and Morris (2006) also argued that soft-news programs such as entertainment-based talk shows are of a less penetrating nature than hard news, and hosts are often able to engage viewers by converting onerous political questions into “friendly small talk and entertaining anecdotes” (p. 342).

With the expansion in media choice and an observed convergence between news and entertainment (e.g. Baym, 2010), Esralew and Young (2012) posited that it is important to study the political implications of entertainment-based shows; Holbert (2005) noted that it is of increasingly importance to apply political communication theories to study the effects of such shows.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

This study seeks to contribute to existing literature on agenda setting and framing beyond traditional news content by examining mainstream news media, digital native online news, and late-night comedy shows in the context of the 2016 presidential election. The first three research questions explore what political topics are deemed as salient by the various media types.

RQ1: What are the most salient topics in traditional news media during the 2016 presidential elections media coverage?

RQ2: What are the most salient topics in digital native online news media during the 2016 presidential elections media coverage?

RQ3: What are the most salient topics in late-night comedy shows during the 2016 presidential elections media coverage?

Although previous intermedia agenda-setting studies have predicted the dominant role of traditional news media in setting the agenda for other media types, there have been mixed findings in existing literature about the role of new media outlets in setting the agenda for traditional news media. In particular, recent studies (Messner and Garrison, 2011; Vonbun, Königslöw, and Schoenbach, 2016) have shown that the agenda-setting role is gradually reversing for traditional news media, blogs and online news media. Furthermore, scholars (Abel & Barthel, 2013; Esralew & Young, 2012; Flower & Young, 2010; Soroka, 2000; Young, 2011) have also demonstrated that entertainment-based programs are able to influence the agenda of traditional news media. Therefore, the

emergence of new forms of politically relevant media presents an opportunity to investigate the relationship among the media types:

RQ4: How does the rank order of issues in the mainstream news media agenda, digital native online news media agenda, and late-night comedy show agenda compare with one another in the coverage of the 2016 presidential elections?

Neuman, Just, and Crigler (1992) found that there were five commonly used frames in American news coverage: *human impact, conflict, economic consequences, conflict, and morality frames*. However, Patterson (1993) later demonstrated in his book that U.S. politics is moving away from a focus on political speeches toward an approach that focuses on the candidates themselves. In particular, he noted that the changing political structure and campaigning styles contribute to this increasing use of strategy frames in political news coverage. Furthermore, Cappella and Jamieson (1997) posited that journalists frequently use strategy frames in political campaign coverage to emphasize “who is ahead and behind, and the strategies and tactics of campaigning necessary” (p. 33).

The strategy frame is also commonly presented as conflict frames (Patterson, 1993), game frames or “horse race.” Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) defined it as a frame that “emphasizes conflict between individuals, groups or institutions as a means of capturing audience interest” (p. 95). However, scholars such as de Vreese (2005) argued that there are conceptual and operational confusions between game frames and strategy frames as scholars tend to “use the terms interchangeably” (p. 285) as can be observed in Lawrence’s (2000) study of public policy issues in different political contexts. Therefore,

Aalberg, Strömbäck, and de Vreese (2011) proposed the following conceptualizations for game frames and strategy frames as described below:

- (a) The game frame refers to news stories that portray politics as a game and are centered around: who is winning or losing elections, in the battle for public opinion, in legislative debates, or in politics in general; expressions of public opinion (polls, vox pops); approval or disapproval from interest groups or particular constituencies or publics; or that speculate about electoral or policy outcomes or potential coalitions. (p. 172)
- (b) The strategy frame refers to news stories that are centered around interpretations of candidates' or parties' motives for actions and positions; their strategies and tactics for achieving political or policy goals; how they campaign; and choices regarding leadership and integrity, including personal traits. It also involves different types of media strategies, including news coverage of press behavior. (p. 172)

However, this narrow conceptualization and operationalization of strategy or game frame might pose a challenge in the process of coding. For example, an article might contain elements from both frames. Hence the study will adopt the synthesized characteristics of both frames, otherwise known as the *macro strategic game frame*. This study will adopt Aalberg and colleagues' (2011) operationalization of the *macro strategic game frame*:

'Strategic game frame' includes news stories that frame politics as a game, personality contest, as strategy, and as personal relationships between political actors not related to issue positions. News stories that focus on the tactics or strategy of political campaigning, how they campaign, on the images of politicians, on political power as a

goal in itself, and on politicians as individuals rather than as spokespersons for certain policies, should count as ‘Strategic game frame’. The same applies for horse race coverage. (p. 178)

On the other hand, previous studies have shown that entertainment-based programs adopt more human-interest frames and focus more on the characteristics of politicians (Patterson, 2005). Specifically, Zukas (2012) posited that soft news programs such as *The Daily Show* are centered around “political embarrassments, speech mishaps, and the frustration of the public with politicians” (p. 403). The human-interest frame refers to emotional elements in news stories that give a human touch to the presentation of issues. Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) stated that this frame “refers to an effort to personalize the news, dramatize or “emotionalize” the news, in order to capture and retain audience interest” (p. 96). Therefore, the human-interest frame will be used to code for stories that mainly focus on the personal qualities of candidates, which includes voters’ opinions of them. For this study, Semetko and Valkenburg’s operationalization of the human-interest frame will be adopted:

Story provides a “human face” on the issue; employ adjectives or personal vignettes that generate feelings of outrage, empathy-caring, sympathy or compassion; emphasize how individuals and groups are affected by the issue/problem; story goes into the private and personal lives of the actors; story contains visual information that might generate feelings of outrage, empathy-caring, sympathy or compassion. (p. 100)

As the 2016 presidential election cycle has been seen to be largely “abnormal” and that media coverage tend to revolve around the personal traits of candidates in addition to the usual bitter race of who is ahead, this study has chosen to adopt both

frames to examine the election news coverage across different media types. In addition, since they are considered generic frames (de Vreese, 2009), Aalberg and colleagues (2011) posited that they are appropriate for use “in relation to different issues” in “political contexts and media systems” (p. 172) Aalberg et al. emphasized that frames are “inherent to the work routines of journalism” (p. 172).

As this study primarily explores the intermedia agenda-setting relationship among mainstream news media, digital native online news media and late-night comedy shows, it would be appropriate to do an exploratory examination on how frequently these two frames are used across the media types:

H1: Late-night comedy shows will contain more human-interest frames and fewer macro strategic game frames than traditional news media in the media coverage of the 2016 presidential elections.

As no studies have examined the frames used in digital native online news media, this study aims to explore the more prevalent frame used in the media coverage of the presidential elections on this media platform:

RQ5: Which frame – macro strategic game vs. human interest – is used most often in digital native online news media’s coverage of the 2016 presidential elections?

RQ6: Is there an association between media types and media frames used?

Methods

Content Analysis

The study will use content analysis of the 2016 presidential election news coverage to determine the issue agendas and intermedia agenda-setting influence of newspaper coverage, digital native online news, and late-night comedy shows. The study will further cross-examine the frames used in election news coverage. A total of 720 articles and 115 video clips will be content analyzed and only stories related to the presidential election will be selected. The unit of analysis is a news story or video clip.

In determining the time frame of this study, the author considered previous studies that focused on presidential elections. Existing literature showed that scholars have used a variety of time frames with some using the primary season (Zukas, 2012) and some using the period from post-labor day leading up to Election Day (see Dalton et al. 1998; Druckman, 2005; Kahn & Kenney, 2002; Kioussis & Shields, 2008). Although Winter and Eyal (1981) suggested that the optimal time for observing intermedia agenda-setting influences is at least 4 to 6 weeks, recent literature has suggested otherwise. Vonbun and colleagues (2016) posited that such effects can be observed within a short time lag of one day as scholars (Lee, Lancendorfer, & Lee, 2005) argued that digital technology has brought about the hastened speed of news production. As the fall campaign after Labor Day is concentrated within a 9-week span, nine time periods, each consisting of 7 days will be constructed for the purpose of the study. The weeks consist of the following: 5 September – 11 September (T₁); 12 September – 18 September (T₂); 19 September – 25 September (T₃); 26 September – 2 October (T₄); 3 October – 9

October (T₅); 10 October – 16 October (T₆); 17 October – 23 October (T₇); 24 October – 30 October (T₈); and 31 October – 6 November (T₉).

Data Collection and Sampling Procedures

Mainstream News Media

The mainstream news media used for analysis are *The New York Times* and *Washington Post*. The two newspapers are considered part of the *recognized elite press* often used in other research studies analyzing the content of newspapers (Dalton et al., 1998). Hence the news coverage in these publications would be a good indicator of national media coverage (Winter & Eyal, 1981). Studies have also shown that these two newspapers represent the traditional news media agenda because they influence the agenda of other print and broadcast media outlets. They are consistently ranked among the top seven nationally distributed daily and Sunday newspapers, as measured by average circulation (Cision, 2016). The two newspapers are also ranked among the top six in terms of digital traffic according to data provided by comScore.

The author used a keyword search of the ProQuest Newsstand database to identify news articles for analysis. As one of the study's aims is to measure issue salience, only articles from the A section were selected from the database. Opinion, entertainment, and sports articles were excluded from the sample. Using the keywords “Donald Trump” and “Hillary Clinton,” the search terms generated the following number of newspaper articles from the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*: 64 articles (T₁); 73 articles (T₂); 65 articles (T₃); 95 articles (T₄); 79 articles (T₅); 98 articles (T₆); 80 articles (T₇); 87 articles (T₈); and 97 articles (T₉).

In order to make the study more manageable in terms of the amount of data analyzed and to maintain meaningfulness of the data, samples of the articles were randomly selected using a random number generator. Forty newspaper articles were selected for each week, totaling 360 articles.

Digital Native Online News Media

The two digital native news sites selected were *Buzzfeed* and *Mic*, which are broad/general interest sites that are not tied to a legacy platform. *Buzzfeed* and *Mic* are considered social/entertainment-based websites, which is distinctive from a traditional news website like *The Huffington Post* (a more serious tone). Both news sites adopt the approach of a social news company targeting the information needs of millennials with a broad range of topics. They include arts, policy, food, music, science style, tech, travel, money, identities, and news. The two digital native news organizations also practice independent and original reporting without the use of news wires. Furthermore, they also possess a strong social media presence on *Twitter*, *Facebook*, and *YouTube*. According to Pew, 40 out of the 40 digital news publishers surveyed own *Twitter*, *Facebook*, and *YouTube* accounts. Hence this statistic showed that digital native news content publishers are moving beyond their homepages in order to reach a wider audience.

In order to capture the entire collection of articles published during the time frames, articles related to the election were manually identified from *Buzzfeed's* and *Mic's* archives according to dates. As digital native news is highly interactive in nature, almost all articles had hyperlinks embedded and some articles contained videos from other sources such as C-SPAN. Therefore, in order to keep the amount of materials

manageable, only the text will be content analyzed. Articles that consist of only a headline and video or mostly illustrations will be discarded. The search from *Buzzfeed* and *Mic* generated the following: 84 articles (T_1); 148 articles (T_2); 117 articles (T_3); 198 articles (T_4); 227 articles (T_5); 278 articles (T_6); 227 articles (T_7); 153 articles (T_8); and 183 articles (T_9). Similar to the sampling method for traditional news media, a random number generator was used to select 40 articles for each week, totaling 360 articles.

Late-Night Comedy Programs

The two late-night comedy programs selected are *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon* and *Jimmy Kimmel Live!*, which appear on the NBC and ABC broadcast networks and are hence expected to reach larger audiences. These networks are also distributed on cable and satellite channels. According to TV ratings (TV by the Numbers), both programs are consistently ranked among the top three late-night comedy shows under broadcast networks. Another reason why these two programs are selected is because audiences do not watch them to acquire news. Instead, the primary goal of these programs is to entertain. Compared to news satire like *The Daily Show* or *The Colbert Report*, the episodes presented are also not topical in nature, but they occasionally touch on political issues. It is politics infused with humor, which can lead to by-product learning (Baum, 2011; Brewer & Cao, 2006; Cao, 2010). Furthermore, the two programs also have robust social media efforts where snippets of selected content are posted on social media platforms.

Content relevant to the presidential election will be retrieved using the search engine on *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon* website by using similar search

terms that was used in traditional news media. However, as content is already categorized on the *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* website, videos from categories such as “2016 election coverage,” “president barack obama on kimmel,” “drunk donald trump,” and “jimmy kimmel for vice president” will be retrieved. The other categories were also manually checked to make sure that all relevant videos were retrieved. In addition, as both shows archive some of their videos on *YouTube*, *Facebook*, and the respective hosts’ *Twitter* accounts, the author also combed these sources to make sure every video is captured in the sample. The video clips found for both shows were divided into separate stories based on the topic of discussion. For example, an interview with Clinton could be divided into two clips with one topic on her rivals and the other on her health. Commentary from the shows’ guests on the presidential election and relevant skits will also be included in the sample. As political satire or parody is not the only content covered in these shows, only samples related to the election will be analyzed. The search from *The Tonight Show and Jimmy Kimmel Live!* generated the following: 1 video clip (T_1); 13 video clips (T_2); 14 video clips (T_3); 14 video clips (T_4); 17 video clips (T_5); 14 video clips (T_6); 16 video clips (T_7); 16 video clips (T_8); and 10 video clips (T_9). As the size of the sample is relatively small compared to that of mainstream news media and digital native news media, all 115 video clips will be content analyzed.

Coding

Emergent Topics and Qualitative Coding of Issue Salience

As this study involves different media types with varied target audiences, the ways in which the topics are approached might be different as well. Therefore, to capture all these differences, the author sought to identify the issues in the public agenda by engaging in data immersion and emergent coding instead of adopting the existing issues found in polling data such as Gallup and Pew Research Center. The author manually went through all the late-night comedy video clips ($n = 115$), 38 percent ($n = 135$) of the existing samples from mainstream news media and 25 percent ($n = 90$) of the existing samples from digital native online news media in order to be familiarized with the content. The emergent coding process came to a halt when no new issues were found among the existing samples (Heim, 2013).

In the first phase of coding, the author used descriptive coding, which “summarizes in a word or short phrase – most often as a noun – the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data” (Saldana, 2013, p. 88). Specifically, descriptive coding was adopted as Saldana stated that it is useful for a variety of data such as “documents, transcripts and videos” (p. 88). This study allowed for multiple coding of topics in each unit of analysis as media coverage of the election might consist of more than one topic per article. To enhance data analysis, the author also engaged in in vivo coding, which means “verbatim coding,” “literal coding,” “inductive coding,” and “emic coding,” to give voice to the journalistic reports directly. As the data set consists of video clips, in vivo coding honors the voice of the late-night comedy show hosts.

After the first cycle of coding, the author engaged in iterative coding where the existing codes were collapsed into categories. The process resulted in 36 initial categories of codes, which is illustrated in Appendix A. In the next iteration of eclectic coding, the initial categories were subsumed under bigger categories and 11 main issue categories emerged. A table illustrating the codes and categories is constructed in Appendix A.

Frames

A deductive approach to quantitative content analysis was adopted where two pre-defined frames, the macro strategic game frame (Aalberg et al., 2011) and the human-interest frame (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000) were used. For the purpose of this content analysis, coders will be asked to identify the dominant frame using the headline and lead or “nut graph” (Aalberg et al., 2011) of each news article. To be consistent across the different media types, coders were asked to identify the dominant frame of each video clip based on the title of the clip and the opening remarks using the coding instructions provided (Aalberg et al.’s, 2011; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000).

Quantitative Coding and Coding Instrument

A code book containing the descriptions of issue categories and frames was constructed to prepare for the second phase of quantitative coding. The election news coverage from newspapers, digital native online news, and late-night comedy shows will be manually coded for the presence or absence of the constructed issues with 1 as present and 0 as absent. Similarly, the content was coded for the presence or absence of the

above-mentioned frames with 1 as present and 0 as absent. The definition of each issue category and the code book are found in Appendix B and Appendix C respectively.

Intercoder Reliability

A second coder coded 20 percent of the existing sample for mainstream news media ($n = 72$ articles), digital native online news media ($n = 72$ articles), and late-night comedy shows ($n = 24$ clips). The articles were selected using probability sampling and 2 out of every 10 were double coded for each week across the 9 weeks. For late-night comedy video clips, 24 were randomly selected and at least one clip was coded for each week. Discrepancies in the coding were discussed and an agreement was made before coding the rest of the samples. Reliability was calculated using Krippendorff's Alpha (Krippendorff, 2011), which accounts for the relatively small sample size. The Alpha scores for mainstream news media ranged from 0.90 to 1, digital native online news media from 0.86 to 1, and late-night comedy shows from 0.91 to 1.

Qualitative Analysis of Media Coverage

Most intermedia agenda-setting studies have adopted quantitative methodologies to examine issue and attribute associations (for example, Conway et al., 2015; Heim, 2013; Golan, 2006). This study will adopt a mixed-method approach to examine the intermedia agenda-setting influence and hence describe both similarities and differences in which the same topic is presented among the three media types to enhance the understanding of how issue salience differ among media coverage and media agendas.

Data Analysis

The data collected met the two assumptions required for the use of the Spearman's rho correlation to compare issue salience between media types: (1) The data demonstrated that there exists a monotonic relationship between any two selected media types, and (2) the variables (issues) were ordinal. Although using a correlation statistical method does not demonstrate any causality, inferences on the findings can demonstrate the strength and direction of the association between media agendas. Hence any significant findings will warrant the need to further explore the intermedia agenda-setting relationship among media agendas. Furthermore, as this is considered an exploratory study examining the intermedia agenda-setting relationship among newer and older media types in this new media landscape, this approach will be useful (Ragas & Kiousis, 2010).

Research Findings

The first three research questions examine the topics that are the most salient in each media type: mainstream news media, digital native online news media, and late-night comedy shows. Findings showed that topics concerning *candidates' fitness to serve* and *campaign trail and related issues* were consistently ranked as the top two salient issues across the three media types. All issues were ranked from 1 to 11 with 1 receiving the most attention from each media type in a particular week.

TABLE 1.1

Frequency and Rank Order of Salient Issues in Mainstream News Media During the Coverage of the 2016 Presidential Elections

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8	Week 9
Candidates' fitness to serve	27 (1)	22 (2)	21 (2)	27 (2)	28 (1)	31 (1)	28 (1)	25 (1)	24 (1)
Foreign policy	13 (4)	9 (7)	8 (7)	10 (6)	9 (6)	5 (8)	2 (8)	2 (9)	1 (9)
Social policy	15 (3)	16 (3)	16 (3)	11 (5)	11 (5)	16 (3)	16 (3)	19 (3)	15 (4)
Race and ethnic discrimination	9 (7)	12 (6)	9 (6)	10 (6)	9 (6)	8 (6)	6 (7)	8 (5)	7 (6)
Immigration	11 (5)	5 (9)	13 (4)	7 (9)	7 (8)	5 (8)	9 (5)	5 (7)	7 (6)
Homeland and national security	21 (2)	13 (5)	12 (5)	20 (3)	13 (4)	11 (5)	12 (4)	8 (5)	17 (3)
Employment and related issues	9 (7)	6 (8)	7 (8)	9 (7)	7 (8)	6 (7)	6 (7)	7 (6)	8 (5)
Foreign trade	6 (8)	2 (10)	2 (10)	8 (8)	5 (9)	1 (9)	2 (8)	4 (8)	2 (8)
Other macroeconomic issues	10 (6)	5 (9)	6 (9)	10 (6)	8 (7)	12 (4)	7 (6)	11 (4)	3 (7)
Campaign trail and related issues	27 (1)	24 (1)	26 (1)	28 (1)	23 (2)	26 (2)	24 (2)	22 (2)	22 (2)
Personal or non-political issues	6 (8)	14 (4)	13 (4)	18 (4)	17 (3)	16 (3)	9 (5)	5 (7)	8 (5)

Note: Numbers in parentheses indicate rank orders of issues.

Table 1.1 shows the salience of issues for mainstream news media across the nine weeks of study as well as the salience of issues for the combined nine weeks. From the table, it shows that the rank order of issues for mainstream news media did not change much from week to week. Specifically, the rank orders of salient issues such as *foreign policy*, *immigration*, *employment and related issues*, *other macroeconomic issues*, and *foreign trade* were consistently ranked at the bottom. As shown in Table 1.4, the top five most salient issues on the mainstream media agenda as tabulated over the nine weeks are

candidates' fitness to serve, campaign trail and related issues, social policy, homeland and national security, and personal or non-political issues.

TABLE 1.2

**Frequency and Rank Order of Salient Issues in Digital Native Online News Media
During the Coverage of the 2016 Presidential Elections**

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8	Week 9
Candidates' fitness to serve	20 (2)	22 (2)	22 (2)	22 (2)	28 (1)	32 (1)	35 (1)	25 (1)	25 (1)
Foreign policy	5 (7)	1 (10)	5 (8)	5 (7)	2 (10)	2 (9)	2 (9)	4 (5)	4 (8)
Social policy	11 (4)	14 (4)	17 (3)	16 (3)	13 (3)	7 (4)	14 (3)	15 (3)	10 (3)
Race and ethnic discrimination	4 (8)	12 (5)	14 (4)	7 (6)	5 (7)	7 (4)	8 (5)	4 (5)	8 (4)
Immigration	7 (6)	4 (7)	6 (7)	3 (8)	3 (9)	4 (6)	8 (5)	4 (5)	5 (7)
Homeland and national security	12 (3)	4 (7)	11 (5)	8 (4)	7 (6)	4 (6)	7 (8)	8 (4)	8 (4)
Employment and related issues	2 (10)	2 (9)	3 (9)	3 (8)	4 (8)	1 (10)	2 (9)	2 (10)	4 (8)
Foreign trade	1 (11)	1 (10)	0 (11)	0 (11)	2 (10)	1 (10)	2 (9)	3 (9)	1 (11)
Other macroeconomic issues	3 (9)	5 (6)	1 (10)	1 (10)	10 (5)	3 (8)	8 (5)	2 (10)	2 (10)
Campaign trail and related issues	29 (1)	26 (1)	23 (1)	28 (1)	23 (2)	28 (2)	22 (2)	21 (2)	18 (2)
Personal or non-political issues	9 (5)	19 (3)	8 (6)	18 (4)	12 (4)	12 (3)	10 (4)	4 (5)	7 (6)

Note: Numbers in parentheses indicate rank orders of issues.

Table 1.2 shows the rank order of salient issues as observed in digital native online news media across the nine weeks. Similar to the rank order of salient issues as observed in mainstream news media, issues such as *foreign policy, immigration, employment and related issues, other macroeconomic issues, and foreign trade* were

consistently ranked at the bottom. The discussion of foreign trade was absent entirely in the online articles. In particular, articles sampled in week three and four have no mention of *foreign trade*. The top five most salient issues on the digital native online news agenda as tabulated over the nine weeks are *candidates' fitness to serve, campaign trail and related issues, social policy, personal or non-political issues, homeland and national security, and race and ethnic discrimination* with the last two issues having the same rank (Table 1.4).

TABLE 1.3

Frequency and Rank Order of Salient Issues in Late-night Comedy Shows During the Coverage of the 2016 Presidential Elections

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8	Week 9
Candidates' fitness to serve	1 (1)	7 (1)	10 (1)	8 (2)	8 (2)	8 (2)	6 (2)	5 (2)	8 (1)
Foreign policy	0 (3)	3 (4)	1 (6)	1 (7)	2 (7)	0 (8)	3 (5)	1 (5)	1 (5)
Social policy	0 (3)	0 (8)	4 (4)	6 (3)	5 (4)	3 (5)	6 (2)	2 (4)	2 (4)
Race and ethnic discrimination	0 (3)	0 (8)	4 (4)	1 (7)	0 (10)	0 (8)	1 (9)	0 (6)	0 (8)
Immigration	0 (3)	1 (5)	0 (9)	1 (7)	5 (4)	0 (8)	1 (9)	0 (6)	1 (5)
Homeland and national security	0 (3)	0 (8)	1 (6)	3 (4)	3 (6)	5 (3)	2 (7)	0 (6)	0 (8)
Employment and related issues	0 (3)	1 (5)	0 (9)	1 (7)	1 (8)	1 (6)	2 (7)	0 (6)	1 (5)
Foreign trade	0 (3)	0 (8)	1 (6)	0 (11)	0 (10)	0 (8)	0 (11)	0 (6)	0 (8)
Other macroeconomic issues	0 (3)	1 (5)	0 (9)	3 (4)	1 (8)	1 (6)	3 (5)	0 (6)	0 (8)
Campaign trail and related issues	1 (1)	7 (1)	7 (3)	10 (1)	14 (1)	10 (1)	13 (1)	12 (1)	4 (2)
Personal or non-political issues	0 (3)	7 (1)	8 (2)	3 (4)	7 (3)	5 (3)	5 (4)	4 (3)	4 (2)

Note: Numbers in parentheses indicate rank orders of issues.

As shown in Table 1.3, late-night comedy shows tend to avoid the mention of serious issues such as *foreign policy, foreign trade, employment and related issues, other macroeconomic issues, and race and ethnic discrimination*. In contrast to the rank orders of issue salience found in mainstream and digital native online news media, the genre of late-night comedy avoided the discussion of *race and ethnic discrimination*. As shown in Table 1.4, the top five most salient issues on the late-night comedy shows agenda as tabulated over the nine weeks are *campaign trail and related issues, candidates' fitness to serve, personal or non-political issues, social policy, and homeland and national security*.

TABLE 1.4

Comparing the Rank Order of Salient Issues Among Three Media Agendas Over 9 Weeks During the Coverage of the 2016 Presidential Elections

	Mainstream News Media	Digital Native Online News Media	Late-Night Comedy Shows
Candidates' fitness to serve	182 (1)	231 (1)	44 (2)
Foreign policy	42 (10)	30 (9)	6 (8)
Social policy	99 (3)	117 (3)	21 (4)
Race and ethnic discrimination	65 (6)	69 (5)	4 (10)
Immigration	51 (8)	44 (7)	8 (6)
Homeland and national security	93 (4)	69 (5)	11 (5)
Employment and related issues	50 (9)	23 (10)	6 (8)
Foreign trade	25 (11)	11 (11)	0 (11)
Other macroeconomic issues	52 (7)	35 (8)	8 (6)
Campaign trail and related issues	172 (2)	215 (2)	58 (1)
Personal or non-political issues	85 (5)	89 (4)	35 (3)

Note: Numbers in parentheses indicate rank orders of issues.

Shifting to the potential intermedia agenda setting relationship among the three media agendas, **RQ4** asked how the rank order of issue agendas on each media outlet influenced each other. Spearman's rho was used as a statistical test to examine this relationship. Tables 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 report the Spearman rank-order correlations between mainstream news media, digital native online news media and late-night comedy shows agendas.

TABLE 2.1

Correlations of Issue Salience Between Mainstream News Media and Digital Native Online News Media Agendas During the Coverage of the 2016 Presidential Elections

Media Agendas		Correlation
Mainstream Week 1	Digital Week 1	0.810**
Mainstream Week 2	Digital Week 2	0.822**
Mainstream Week 3	Digital Week 3	0.916**
Mainstream Week 4	Digital Week 4	0.889**
Mainstream Week 5	Digital Week 5	0.831**
Mainstream Week 6	Digital Week 6	0.851**
Mainstream Week 7	Digital Week 7	0.867**
Mainstream Week 8	Digital Week 8	0.593
Mainstream Week 9	Digital Week 9	0.862**

Note: ** p<0.01 * p<0.05

As shown in Table 2.1, there's a strong and positive association between the mainstream news media agenda and digital native online news media agenda for eight of the nine weeks. There is no significant relationship between the two media agendas for week eight ($r_s = 0.593, p > 0.05$). Overall, findings in table 2.4 show that the issue

salience in mainstream news media is positively associated with the issue salience in digital native online news media ($r_s = 0.966, p < 0.05$).

TABLE 2.2

Correlations of Issue Salience Between Mainstream News Media and Late-night Comedy Show Agendas During the Coverage of the 2016 Presidential Elections

Media Agendas		Correlation
Mainstream Week 1	Late-night Week 1	0.675*
Mainstream Week 2	Late-night Week 2	0.433
Mainstream Week 3	Late-night Week 3	0.679*
Mainstream Week 4	Late-night Week 4	0.882**
Mainstream Week 5	Late-night Week 5	0.775**
Mainstream Week 6	Late-night Week 6	0.890**
Mainstream Week 7	Late-night Week 7	0.707*
Mainstream Week 8	Late-night Week 8	0.446
Mainstream Week 9	Late-night Week 9	0.605*

Note: ** p<0.01 * p<0.05

Findings in Table 2.2 show that there exists a strong to moderate positive relationship between the issue salience of mainstream news media and late-night comedy shows. However, there is no significant relationship between the issue agendas of both media types in weeks two ($r_s = 0.433$) and eight ($r_s = 0.446$). Overall, the issue salience in mainstream news media is positively associated with the issue salience in late-night comedy shows ($r_s = 0.868, p < 0.05$) as shown in Table 2.4.

TABLE 2.3

Correlations of Issue Salience Between Digital Native Online News Media and Late-night Comedy Show Agendas During the Coverage of the 2016 Presidential Elections

Media Agendas		Correlation
Digital Week 1	Late-night Week 1	0.671*
Digital Week 2	Late-night Week 2	0.472
Digital Week 3	Late-night Week 3	0.747**
Digital Week 4	Late-night Week 4	0.840**
Digital Week 5	Late-night Week 5	0.713*
Digital Week 6	Late-night Week 6	0.694*
Digital Week 7	Late-night Week 7	0.738**
Digital Week 8	Late-night Week 8	0.727*
Digital Week 9	Late-night Week 9	0.624*

Note: ** p<0.01 * p<0.05

Table 2.3 shows the correlations of issue salience between digital native online news media and late-night show agendas over the nine weeks. Results show a strong to moderate positive relationship between the two media types. Only week two ($r_s = 0.472$) does not show a significant relationship between the two media agendas. Overall, findings in Table 2.4 show that the issue salience in digital native online news media is positively associated with late-night comedy shows ($r_s = 0.865, p < 0.05$).

TABLE 2.4

Comparing the Correlations of Issue Salience Among Three Media Agendas During the Coverage of the 2016 Presidential Elections

	Mainstream News Media	Digital Native Online News Media	Late-night Comedy Shows
Mainstream News Media	1.00		
Digital Native Online News Media	0.966**	1.00	0.865**
Late-night Comedy Shows	0.868**		1.00

Note: ** p<0.01 * p<0.05

Shifting to the comparison of media frames used in the three media agendas during the nine-week period, **H1** predicted that late-night comedy shows will contain more human-interest frames and fewer macro-strategic game frames than mainstream news media in the presidential elections coverage. This hypothesis was supported ($\chi^2 (1, N = 475) = 8.36, p = 0.0038$). Most articles found in mainstream media coverage frame the elections as a “game” and headlines usually make references to election polls or campaign strategies, indicating which candidate is ahead of the race (Table 3.4).

TABLE 3.1

Week-for-Week Percentages of Macro Strategic Game Frames and Human-Interest Frames Adopted for Mainstream News Media

	Macro Strategic Game Frame	Human-Interest Frame	Total
Week 1	55.0% (22)	45.0% (18)	100% (40)
Week 2	57.5% (23)	42.5% (17)	100% (40)
Week 3	62.5% (25)	37.5% (15)	100% (40)
Week 4	60.0% (24)	40.0% (16)	100% (40)
Week 5	42.5% (17)	57.5% (23)	100% (40)
Week 6	70.0% (28)	30.0% (12)	100% (40)
Week 7	65.0% (26)	35.0% (14)	100% (40)
Week 8	57.5% (23)	42.5% (17)	100% (40)
Week 9	67.5% (27)	32.5% (13)	100% (40)

TABLE 3.2

Week-for-Week Percentages of Macro Strategic Game Frames and Human-Interest Frames Adopted for Digital Native Online News Media

	Macro Strategic Game Frame	Human-Interest Frame	Total
Week 1	57.5% (23)	42.5% (17)	100% (40)
Week 2	60.0% (24)	40.0% (16)	100% (40)
Week 3	50.0% (20)	50.0% (20)	100% (40)
Week 4	52.5% (21)	47.5% (19)	100% (40)
Week 5	30.0% (12)	70.0% (28)	100% (40)
Week 6	55.0% (22)	45.0% (18)	100% (40)
Week 7	45.0% (18)	55.0% (22)	100% (40)
Week 8	45.0% (18)	55.0% (22)	100% (40)
Week 9	60.0% (24)	40.0% (16)	100% (40)

TABLE 3.3

Week-for-Week Percentages of Macro Strategic Game Frames and Human-Interest Frames Adopted for Late-night Comedy Shows

	Macro Strategic Game Frame	Human-Interest Frame	Total
Week 1	100.00% (1)	0% (0)	100% (1)
Week 2	53.85% (7)	46.15% (6)	100% (13)
Week 3	50.00% (7)	50.00% (7)	100% (14)
Week 4	42.86% (6)	57.14% (8)	100% (14)
Week 5	35.29% (6)	64.71% (11)	100% (17)
Week 6	50.00% (7)	50.00% (7)	100% (14)
Week 7	43.75% (7)	56.25% (9)	100% (16)
Week 8	31.25% (5)	68.75% (11)	100% (16)
Week 9	50.00% (5)	50.00% (5)	100% (10)

Note: Percentages are rounded off to the nearest two decimal places.

TABLE 3.4

Overall Percentages of Macro Strategic Game Frames and Human-Interest Frames Adopted Among the Three Media Agendas Across 9 Weeks

	Macro Strategic Game Frame	Human-Interest Frame	Total
Mainstream Media	59.72% (215)	40.28% (145)	100% (360)
Digital Native Online News Media	50.56% (182)	49.44% (178)	100% (360)
Late-night Comedy Shows	44.35% (51)	55.65% (64)	100% (115)

Note: Percentages are rounded off to the nearest two decimal places.

RQ5 asks which frame is used more frequently in digital native online news media coverage of the presidential election. Findings in Table 3.4 show that 54.2 percent of articles adopt human-interest frames whereas 45.8 percent of articles adopt macro-strategic game frames. **RQ6** asks if there is an association between media types and media frames used in the coverage. To answer the research question, a chi-square test was used. Findings showed that there is an association between the two variables ($\chi^2 (2, N = 835) = 10.73, p = 0.0047$).

Qualitative Findings

This study added another level of analysis to the quantitative results by using a qualitative method to examine the intermedia agenda-setting influence among the mainstream news media, digital native online news media, and late-night comedy shows. This approach allowed for an in depth and open-ended examination of the way in which the three media types presented similar topics to the audience. Findings are presented according to salient issues.

Candidates' Fitness to Serve

Access Hollywood Video Leak

On 7 October 2016, the *Washington Post* revealed a decade-old behind-the-scenes video of Trump chatting with then host Billy Bush of the television show *Access Hollywood*. The video revealed Trump using lewd language to talk about women. He described a time when he tried to have sex with married women, specifically saying that, “when you’re a star, they let you do it” (Fahrenthold, 2016). This episode drew

widespread media attention, and it surfaced repeatedly in various media reports throughout the remainder of the campaign. Overall, the mainstream news media frequently adopted human-interest frames that raised the “fitness to serve” issue in their reports concerning the *Access Hollywood* video leak. Angles of these stories included Trump’s history with women (marital history), how the public reacted to this video, and serious discussions about sexual assault. For example, four days after the leak, *The New York Times* reported that this incident had triggered serious public discussions about sexual assault and women’s rights. The article said Trump’s banter had given rise to a social media protest movement and had “become a rallying cry for survivors of sexual assault, harassment and other forms of abuse” (Mahler, 2016, p. A1). This human-interest story also directly cited Tweets of individuals who shared their harrowing experiences in various contexts. Another article published on 23 October 2016 focused on how Trump’s lewd speech about assaulting women “revealed a generational divide in the way many Americans understand sexual assault and consent” (Taub, 2016, p. A4). Therefore, this incident sparked a national dialogue on sexual assault and renewed discussions about the need for women to speak up and identify perpetrators. This incident also inevitably led to discussions on how society typically views women, how society judges women by their looks, and how men treat women as “sexual objects” (Goodnough & Hu, 2016, p. A29).

Another angle widely adopted in newspaper reports concerned Trump’s personal life before he run for presidency, detailing his “long record of degrading women” as the headline of an article suggested (Winter, 2016). The article delved into Trump’s inappropriate conduct toward women backstage at his beauty pageants, at his home, and in the workplace. The article also weaved in his well-reported feud with ex-Fox News

anchor Megyn Kelly whom he accused of questioning him harshly during a Republican debate early in the campaign “because she was menstruating” (Winter, 2016, p. A30).

Articles also adopted the macro-strategic game frame to illustrate how Trump’s image was ruined and how polls showed he was losing support from fellow Republican party officials and voters following the video leak. For example, the *Times* published the article “Lewd Trump Tape is Breaking Point for Many in G.O.P” on its front page on 9 October 2016 following the video leak (Martin, Haberman, & Burns, 2016). In the nut graph, the journalists described how Republican party officials had decided to abandon their support for the candidate since the release of the tape and how this caused “a punishing blow to his campaign and plunging the party into crisis a month before the election” (Martin et al., 2016, p. A1). As political parties were also running to secure seats in the Senate and House, news articles also attempted to illustrate the wider implications of Trump’s misdemeanor on the reputation and morality of the party. For example, the *Post* reported on how Republicans were denouncing Trump’s comments and how Democrats can seize this as an opportunity and turn it into a campaign strategy to get elected (Weigel, 2016a). Some articles attempted to reiterate this point by using polls to demonstrate how Trump was slipping in the race. One week after the video leak, Michelle Obama gave a retaliatory speech against Trump while campaigning for Clinton and, although the intention was to encourage women to speak up against sexual assault and harassment, the mainstream news media adopted a macro-strategic game frame, labeling this move as Clinton’s newest campaigning strategy (Davis, 2016).

Late-night comedy show producers tended to adopt a different approach in presenting the video leak to their audiences. Following the release of the tape, Kimmel

used footage from the second presidential debate on CNN to show Trump defending his lewd speech about women as “locker room talk” or “locker room banter” (Kimmel & Leiderman, 2003). He then attempted to inform audiences of what the phrase “locker room talk” meant exactly using the form of a skit to show what men do and talk about in a locker room. The same evening, Fallon also discussed Trump’s defense in his monologue and mentioned how congressional election polls showed that the Democrats are leading (Michaels, 1954). He made a joke out of the current dilemma that the Republican party was facing and described how Trump would blame former *Access Hollywood* host Billy Bush for the tape that landed him in hot water. At the end of the segment, he also stated how athletes were speaking out against Trump’s behavior and clarified that this is not how one would behave in a locker room. The discussion of this misdemeanor continued into the next day on *The Tonight Show*, and Fallon impersonated Trump as he attempted to imitate how the latter would describe women contestants on *The Apprentice* by their appearances instead of learning their names.

When reporting on this video leak, digital native online news media tended to use more human-interest frames and the articles were much shorter in length due to the nature and target audience of this medium. For example, on the day that the *Post* released the interview, *Mic* did an instantaneous report on Billy Bush, the TV host who was the other party involved in the tape (O’Keeffe, 2016a). The article provided a basic professional biography of Bush, accompanied by Tweets from the public slamming his behavior and a link to his public apology. Another article published on the same day focused on Arianne Zucker, a cast member from *Days of Our Lives* who was mentioned in the tape (O’Keeffe, 2016b). On 8 October 2016, *Mic* published another human-interest article on Robert De

Niro's video in which he described his contempt for Trump's speech in the leaked tape (Provenzano, 2016).

Following the public outrage, Melania Trump defended her husband's speech on tape during an interview conducted with CNN's Anderson Cooper. Mainstream news media picked up the story and most articles adopted a human-interest frame to report on the extensive interview. For example, the *Times* quoted Melania's statements in defense of Trump stating that there is some sort of "conspiracy between news media and the Clinton campaign" (Haberman & Parker, 2016). Similarly, *Mic* adopted a human-interest frame detailing Melania's interview and her statements that the leak was an "orchestrated media conspiracy" to get Trump out of the race (McKay, 2016). Furthermore, another article published on *Mic* featured *The Daily Show*'s host, Trevor Noah's response to Melania's defense of Trump (O'Keeffe, 2016c). On the other hand, *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* showed a segment of the CNN interview in which Melania deemed that the tape content did not accurately reflect the Trump she knew. In an attempt to substantiate his point that "every time (Trump) says something controversial, there is a little army of people who have to go on cable news to say that's not the Donald they know," Kimmel showed clips from Trump's political supporters stating so in various cable news interviews (Kimmel & Leiderman, 2003).

Gary Johnson, the Third-Party Candidate

Although Johnson was the Libertarian Party presidential nominee, he and other third-party nominees never received much coverage on mainstream news media and most voters were not familiar with him. Most articles found in the *Times* and the *Post* only

made mention of their names when reporting on the election polls (Clement, 2016). However, after Johnson's tumultuous performance on MSNBC'S *Morning Joe* (8 September 2016) and CBS 60 Minutes (23 Sept 2016), some media outlets took interest in the candidate – and raised doubts about his competence to assume the world's highest office. In particular, late-night comedy shows seized this opportunity to turn Johnson's interviews into humorous segments on the programs. For example, Kimmel had a segment on his show “Who is Gary Johnson?” and staffers conducted a poll on the streets asking pedestrians if they know who the candidate was. The outcome of the street poll painted a bleak picture of Johnson's candidacy as not many people knew him to take him seriously as a candidate and only one person knew who he was (Kimmel & Leiderman, 2003). Following the segment, Kimmel showed another commercial-like video of Johnson in “Are you smarter than Gary Johnson?” presenting the libertarian candidate as a contestant in a game show (Kimmel & Leiderman, 2003). In the short clip, portions of Johnson's interview flops were amalgamated: what is Aleppo, failure to name a single foreign leader he admires and failure to name North Korea's leader.

Candidates' Performance at the Presidential Debate

The presidential debates during the unusual campaign received the highest television ratings in the history of televised presidential debates. The debates received extensive coverage from all three media types, with each of them using unique approaches. The mainstream news media adopted macro-strategic game frames in most of their reports and described the debates as if they were some sort of a game show. For example, in an article published on 20 October 2016, the *Post* focused on the traits of

Trump instead of policy positions and stated that “ ...it was the story of Trump in Campaign 2016 in microcosm, a series of angry exchanges, interruptions, insults that served to undercut the good he might have accomplished earlier (Balz, 2016, p. A1).

On the other hand, late-night comedy shows adopted a combination of macro-strategic game frames and human-interest frames in the debate coverage. For example, in order to demonstrate Trump’s incompetency and poor performance during the debates, *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* had the Troompas Loompas sing about how Trump did not prepare for the debate and how he was “making things up, playing loose with the facts” in an attempt to address the issue of fact-checking (Kimmel & Leiderman, 2003). Furthermore, instead of commenting on the candidates’ performances himself, Kimmel conducted a mini focus group with three children and asked them to reflect on the debate (Kimmel & Leiderman, 2003). All three participants agreed that the candidates were arguing a lot on stage, interrupting each others’ speeches, which is frowned upon in school. Specifically, Raniya summed up the essence of the debate saying that “they were arguing about who should be president and they were just saying you’re no good at this, but he’s no good at that; she’s not good at this” (Kimmel & Leiderman, 2003). On 20 October 2016, Kimmel had another segment on his show where he focused on the hot topic of the day: Trump’s willingness to accept the results of the election. While mainstream news media was filled with articles of politicians berating Trump for statements that they claimed were undermining the democratic system, Kimmel produced a segment consisting of contradictory statements and issue positions from Trump and Mike Pence (Kimmel & Leiderman, 2003). Therefore, in an attempt to sum up this confusion, he made a parody clip featuring the “first ever debate between a presidential candidate and his own running

mate” and included various interview footage of Trump and Pence offering contrasting viewpoints (Kimmel & Leiderman, 2003).

Homeland and National Security

Russian Intervention in the U.S. Elections

Cybersecurity was one of the most salient issues throughout the 2016 presidential elections after emails from the Democratic National Committee and Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta were stolen and leaked into the public domain. Therefore, all three types of media attempted to use various angles and media frames to report on the subject matter. The mainstream news media mostly adopted human-interest frames in their reports and articles often cited Trump’s skepticism about Russian involvement. On 8 October 2016, the *Times* published a front-page article announcing the Obama administration’s latest public statement that Russia was intervening in the elections (Sanger & Savage, 2016). The journalists also cited Trump’s speech defending the Russians during the first presidential debate that “there was no evidence Russia was responsible” (Sanger & Savage, 2016, p. A1). This attempt presumably demonstrated Trump’s on-going “bro-mance” with President Vladimir Putin, as Clinton had previously suggested on Fallon’s show (Michaels, 1954). Another article, “Russian Hacking an Issue of Revenge and Respect,” presented another angle to the topic by providing a list of plausible reasons to Russia’s cyber hacking activities on U.S. officials’ emails (Roth and Priest, 2016). In that article, the journalists framed the activity as part of a plot for “revenge” and Putin’s desire to seek “respect” in the international and political sphere (Roth and Priest, 2016, p. A1).

Articles found on digital native online news media were very much similar to those found in mainstream news media. However, a few of them focused on the private emails of Colin Powell who is the former secretary of state. For example, *BuzzFeed's* report described some of Powell's email content such as his views of Trump and labeling of the latter as a “national disgrace” and an ‘international pariah’ (Kaczynski, Ansari, & McDermott, 2016a). In another *BuzzFeed* article, journalists referenced an earlier *New York Times* report in which Clinton claimed Powell recommended she use a private email server while in office (Kaczynski, Ansari, & McDermott, 2016b).

On the other hand, late-night comedy shows adopted more human-interest frames to address the issue of cyber attack. For example, in a segment of the show on 12 October 2016, Kimmel commented on WikiLeaks' new release of hacked emails and Trump's response that he “loves” the website (Kimmel & Leiderman, 2003). As Kimmel continued to talk about WikiLeaks and Russia, the production studio suddenly went dark and his fictional complaint email to Hometown Buffet was hacked by WikiLeaks. At the end of the video, it was revealed that a teenager was behind the deed, and hence Kimmel attempted to invoke the idea that hackers could be anyone and that cybersecurity should be a topic of concern.

Integrity of the Vote

Amidst talk about the “rigged” election and Russian intervention in the election, voters were concerned about the integrity of their votes. Hence the *Times* published a human-interest article to warn people that a Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attack could potentially disrupt the voting process in states with Internet voting (Perlroth, 2016).

Following the report, *BuzzFeed* wrote an article to refute this misconception by using the National Conference of State Legislatures as a source to argue that voters do not cast their votes online but instead, they email or fax their ballots (McLeod & Meyersohn, 2016). The writers also used interviews with John Arnold, State Elections Director for North Dakota and John Bennette, spokesperson for Alabama Secretary for State to justify their point.

Personal or Non-Political Topics

Hillary Clinton's Birthday

As Clinton's birthday occurred during the campaign, media outlets also reported on the human-interest story. Mainstream news media adopted a narrative approach in which articles described how Clinton spent her birthday: how campaign staffers surprised the candidate with a cake, how Clinton shared it with reporters on her plane, and how Stevie Wonder sang her a birthday song on *Power 105.1's Breakfast Club* morning show (Flegenheimer, 2016). In contrast to this narrative reporting, late-night comedy shows adopted a more interactive and humorous approach in covering Clinton's birthday. For example, Kimmel's staffers went onto the streets to ask anti-Clinton supporters to "say something nice" for her birthday. Some of the more humorous birthday wishes included "Happy Birthday, Hillary. I hope you get arrested;" "I think you are a liar and a murderer, and I like your hair" (Kimmel & Leiderman, 2003). On the other hand, Fallon poked fun at Clinton's surprised face when campaign staffers presented her with a cake and attempted to impersonate her reaction. He also created faux birthday messages from

Trump, Obama and Bill Clinton on her Facebook page, with Trump's message saying, "I got you a birthday present: Every swing state. Enjoy" (Michaels, 1954).

Discussion

This study aimed to examine the intermedia agenda-setting relationships among politically relevant media (Delli Carpini & Williams, 2001; Delli Carpini, 2014; Williams & Delli Carpini; 2011), mainstream news media, and digital native online news media. Specifically, this study analyzed the first-level intermedia agenda-setting influence and frames among digital native online news, late-night comedy shows, and mainstream news media in the context of the 2016 presidential election. This was part of an effort to expand the study of how individuals acquire political information in this "high-choice" environment and to consider the role of by-product learning is important in this new media landscape. Using the media coverage of the election across *The New York Times*, *the Washington Post*, *Mic*, *BuzzFeed*, *The Tonight Show*, and *Jimmy Kimmel Live!*, this study found that there is a positive week-for-week correlation (moderate to strong) in the rank-orders of salient issues among the three media agendas.

First-level Intermedia Agenda-Setting Relationships

The issues that are consistently ranked among the top five across the three media agendas are *candidates' fitness to serve, campaign trail and related topics, social policy, personal or non-political issues, and homeland and national security*. This finding is consistent with earlier studies that found similarities between political entertainment and

mainstream news media agendas (Soroka, 2000; Feldman and Young, 2008; Young, 2011; Abel and Barthel, 2013).

Qualitative analyses of the findings show that the differences in target audiences and platforms drove the different delivery of a similar topic. Late-night comedies are observed to be mostly gathering news and information from traditional news media and re-packaging it, thereby giving it a new interpretation, before presenting the easily digestible information to a different set of audiences. This observation is especially pertinent in *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* as compared to *The Tonight Show*. In this election cycle, executive producers on the Kimmel show tend to be more expressive in their political views and the host was vocal in his political dissent toward Trump's fitness to serve. Kimmel also kept his audiences up-to-date about election news, e.g., when and where to watch the debates, what the polls are saying, and candidates' positions on social policy issues. On the other hand, Jimmy Fallon merely poked fun at the candidates and stayed away from expressing his political views. After Trump's guest appearance on *The Tonight Show* in September, Fallon was harshly criticized by viewers for "humanizing" a candidate whom critics saw as unfit for presidency. Audience members were unhappy with Fallon's non-confrontational approach and his refusal to challenge Trump's alleged demagoguery during the campaign. Instead, Fallon tousled Trump's hair and even made a joke out of his good relationship with Putin, naming the "bro-mance" "Vlump" (Michaels, 1954).

Findings showed that late-night comedies are highly selective in the types of topics they present to their audiences. They tend to avoid more intensive topics such as *foreign trade* that require stronger motivation to consider and process. According to

Baum (2011), this is a necessary step taken to “make certain types of news appealing to viewers who are uninterested in politics,” thereby “reduce[ing] the perceived costs for many individuals of attending to select varieties of news and information” (p. 8). Therefore, this phenomenon contributes to the continuous blurring distinction between entertainment and news in this changing information environment (Baym, 2010; Delli Carpini & Williams, 2001; Williams & Delli Carpini, 2011).

Analyses of digital native online news media show that journalists often turn to other media outlets for story ideas and sources of information. Although *Mic* and *BuzzFeed* journalists do some original reporting, articles often quote information from other media outlets, which are gathered as sources and cited in the text. Sources can include traditional print media (*The New York Times*, *Washington Post*), broadcast media (*CNN*, *MSNBC* and radio programs), blogs and online sites (*The Huffington Post*, *Politico* and *FiveThirtyEight*) and even late-night comedies (*SNL*, *The Daily Show*, *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee* and *Late Night with Seth Meyers*). It is observed that some articles, especially those found in *Mic*, are short summaries of the news retrieved from elite print and broadcast news media. For example, the nut graph of some articles would describe what was reported in the mainstream news media and the following paragraphs would consist of a brief summary of the topic. It is also observed that Tweets from the average voter, celebrities or candidates are often quoted in the text in order to make the article more appealing and engaging for the target demographic. However, in contrast to late-night comedy programs in which executive producers do their own interpretation of political news and information, digital native online journalists remain close to the facts. Therefore, in their attempt to retain readers, reporters will include articles that feature

how late-night comedies report on the campaign. For example, a *BuzzFeed* article featured Samantha Bee's response to Trump's lewd language about women after the *Access Hollywood* video leak (La Rosa, 2016). In the article, the journalist included screen shots of the show, which was found on the Twitter page of the late-night comedy program.

Prior (2005, 2007) posited that we are living in a "high-choice" media environment where individuals who are politically disengaged can easily opt out of political news altogether and choose only entertainment media. But findings in this study suggest that may be more difficult than he suggests. As shown in the results section, all three distinct media types – including late-night comedy shows – have similar issue agendas over the course of the study although they have very different delivery styles and target audiences. In other words, no matter what media outlets audiences choose to consume during the course of the general election, they will receive some political information and interpretation. Hence this finding contradicts Prior's concerns and demonstrates that both politically engaged and disengaged individuals – those who at least watch some late-night comedy – will be exposed to similar political issues. In essence, a "high-choice" media environment is essentially a "no-choice" for individuals as they were unable to avoid the election coverage entirely even if they were not active political information seekers. Some individuals might have even sought out coverage from other media outlets to learn more about the elections if the delivery of content during late-night comedy shows got them interested. In such situations, it would be difficult for researchers to distinguish if audiences are in fact apolitical or not.

Furthermore, although Baum (2005) posited that the personality traits of political candidates are the focus of entertainment-based talk shows, this election cycle illustrated otherwise. *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* seemed to be able to balance the seriousness of the election with humor and focused on the candidates' positions on policies. Third-party candidates were seldom mentioned in the mainstream news media and most citizens had never heard of them. However, Kimmel made mentions of them from time to time and invited Gary Johnson on the show to discuss his issue positions. Therefore, the producers were inherently getting at the same issues as mainstream and digital native online news media, but in order to make “political information more accessible” (p. 216), they often used skits and street interviews to deliver this important information. However, a more recent incident showed Kimmel to be ostensibly political as he made an emotional plea on health care coverage during air-time, drawing widespread criticisms from the public. This political move also drew headlines and coverage on mainstream news media outlets. Hence this incident directly raises the question of whether late-night comedy shows promote incidental learning (Baum, 2005, 2011) or whether it propagates the spread of political news and information.

Although there is a significant relationship among the issue agendas for most weeks, findings showed that there was no significant relationship between the agendas for (a) mainstream news media and digital native news media and (b) mainstream news media and late-night comedy shows during week eight. Mainstream news media coverage during week eight gave more attention to topics such as employment and other macroeconomic issues, which is distinctly different from the content observed in the other two media agendas. In comparison to earlier weeks, candidates seemed to put more

emphasis on serious topics such as job creation and tax reforms, attempting to convince voters why they are worthy of their votes. However, these topics did not get similar attention from entertainment media as such content is seemingly difficult for late-night comedy producers and digital native media writers whose main target audience is apolitical individuals to re-package into human-interest stories. Instead late-night comedies focused on the usual topics including candidates' fitness to serve and campaign trail and related issues, and avoided topics such as race and ethnic discrimination, immigration, homeland and national security, employment and foreign trade. One of the highlights for *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* during week eight was having President Barrack Obama as a guest, and the conversation largely revolved around the call to vote and why Clinton would make a better candidate than Trump. Similarly, Fallon reported on Trump's list of *Twitter* attacks published in the *Times* one day later, which can be easily infused with humor to capture the attention of audiences.

On the other hand, there was a strong and positive correlation between digital native online news agenda and late-night comedy agenda during week eight. Although digital native online articles diligently reported on the election by having a dedicated group of journalists cover the political beat, the angles they used to report the stories are still largely human-interest based. Since digital native online news articles hardly provide interpretations of stories, which is what late-night comedies commonly do, editors selected engaging content from mainstream news media coverage and transformed it into condensed and succinct reports.

Qualitative analyses of articles during that particular week showed that many articles were concerned with the topic of voting: who (celebrities, politicians, millennials

and specific ethnic groups and races) was voting for which candidate, where the candidates were campaigning, voter fraud, and FBI's probe into Clinton's emails. Similarly, for late-night comedies, Kimmel had a segment, "Can Indians understand Trump speaking Hindi," to investigate if Trump had successfully persuaded Indian-Americans to cast their votes for him. Specifically, it was an attempt to examine if Trump's campaign advertisement targeting Indian-Americans was successfully in reaching out to the population.

Macro Strategic Game vs. Human-Interest Frames

As shown in Tables 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3, after the *Washington Post* reported on the *Access Hollywood* video leak, mainstream news media and digital native online news media used more macro strategic game frames than human-interest frames to report on the developing story of Trump's history with degrading women during week 6. Most of the articles reporting on this topic adopted the frame to paint the image of Trump as a candidate who was unfit for presidency, and many focused on how the polls were changing to reflect Trump's losing case against Clinton. Similarly, late-night comedies adopted an equal number of macro strategic game frame and human-interest frame during week six. Immediately following the leak, the producers on *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* incorporated some segments on the show illustrating Trump's video leak and his defense. This included a skit about "locker-room talk" and a Flintstones cartoon dubbed with Trump's conversation with Bush in the video leak (Kimmel & Leiderman, 2003). On the other hand, Fallon chose to address the sensational topic in the form of a monologue in which he attempted to impersonate Trump's voice on how he would describe women on

The Apprentice based on their appearances (Michaels, 1954). In the same segment, he also addressed Chris Christie's contempt for Trump's comments in the video leak and Mike Huckabee's support for the candidate in an interview on *Fox News*. Therefore, both programs have very distinct ways of presenting the same piece of information to its audiences.

In the homestretch of the presidential election, more than half of the articles in mainstream news media and digital native online news media adopted macro strategic game frames to illustrate the intensity of the race between the candidates. The stories covered in both types of media are similar as they included articles illustrating campaign strategies (Noman, 2016) and/or electoral map (Burns & Martin, 2016), prediction of voter turnout at the polls (Tumulty & Balz, 2016; Weigel, 2016b) and latest polling figures (Swartz, 2016; Lampen, 2016). In comparison to the two media types, late-night comedies used more human-interest frames, focusing on the images and personalities of candidates, which is consistent with previous framing studies on entertainment-based media (Patterson, 2005; Zukas, 2012).

Limitations and Future Research

There are several limitations in this study. As this study only looked at a few media outlets, future research should include a variety – include partisan media outlets – to test if the intermedia agenda-setting relationships still hold. Furthermore, future studies should also consider examining various types of entertainment media to test if there is a systematic difference between the various types of politically relevant media. As this study considered late-night comedy programs targeted at audiences who are not avid

seekers of political news, future research could potentially look at the intermedia agenda-setting influence of programs such as *Late Night with Seth Meyers*, which is considered another type of entertainment-based talk show similar to that of news satires.

Future studies should also consider examining the intermedia agenda-setting influence in other contexts such as the primary season as media coverage might differ before and after Labor Day. Specifically, during weeks eight and nine of the study, most articles across mainstream news media tend to include polls to show which candidate is leading in the race. Therefore, future research should consider how the rank-order of the issue agendas change throughout the campaign. Furthermore, as this study has already demonstrated that there exists a correlation among the three distinct media agendas, future research should consider including a cross-lagged panel analysis to determine the direction of the relationship.

As this is an exploratory study to examine the relationships among politically relevant media, digital native online news media and mainstream news media, future studies can incorporate the use of public opinion polls to examine how individuals actually learn about the election through various types of media coverage. This would be a useful study for political communication scholars to understand the extent to which individuals acquire political information and examine their receptivity to such information during high-stimulus times.

One other limitation in this study is the ability to generalize the findings to other election cycles. Critics deemed that the 2016 presidential election was unique as Trump's status as a celebrity and social nonconformity as a candidate painted the election in the light of a reality TV show. When he won the elections, some news outlets labeled him as

America's first "reality TV" president (Cassidy, 2017; Yahr, 2017). Therefore, Trump's character traits and his fitness to serve the presidency naturally lend themselves as convenient topics to producers of late-night comedy shows.

Conclusion

The "high-choice" media environment (Prior, 2005, 2007) has offered individuals a myriad of ways to acquire political information even if one avoids the traditional news media. Although earlier studies posited that the diversity of media content (Stroud, 2011) and fragmentation of media environment can potentially lead to different agendas (Muddiman, Stroud, & McCombs, 2014), this study suggests otherwise. Findings showed that the agendas converged for the three distinct media types. Qualitative analyses of the coverage showed that the two *politically relevant media* types relied heavily on mainstream news media for news and information. Therefore, this study concludes that mainstream news media still play a dominant agenda-setting role in the "high-choice" media environment.

It is worth noting here the distinctions between various forms of televised comedy programs that include news and public affairs information. Most studies of late-night entertainment programs have focused on news satires, such as *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* (Baumgartner & Morris, 2006, 2008; Baym, 2010; Cao, 2010; Zukas, 2012) and have posited that political knowledge is required to understand the jokes (e.g. Young, 2004). Specifically, studies have shown that most people who watch news satires are also avid news consumers (Young, 2004). However, it should be noted that there is a

distinction between how political information is presented on news satires and on late-night comedy shows such as *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* and *The Tonight Show*. Scholars have attempted to parse the different effects among various types of humor (Hoffman & Young, 2011; Holbert et al., 2013). Satire has been defined as a “number of different balances of rhetorical argumentation and narrative storytelling” (Holbert et al., 2013, p. 172). Holbert and colleagues (2013) labeled news satires as *juvenalian satire* – “tone that is decidedly bitter and harsh” – and other political satirical programs as *horatian satire*, which are “seen as more light and witty” (Holbert et al., 2013, p. 172). For an individual who is attempting to avoid traditional news media based on the concept of selective exposure, the inevitable encounter with such horatian satire could thereby increase the probability of by-product learning (Holbert et al., 2013, p. 172).

Future studies in this changing media landscape should enhance the understanding of how different media types facilitate the spread of political news and information across a politically disconnected population. As Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996) argued, “a broadly and equitably informed citizenry helps assure a democracy that is both responsive and responsible” (p. 1).

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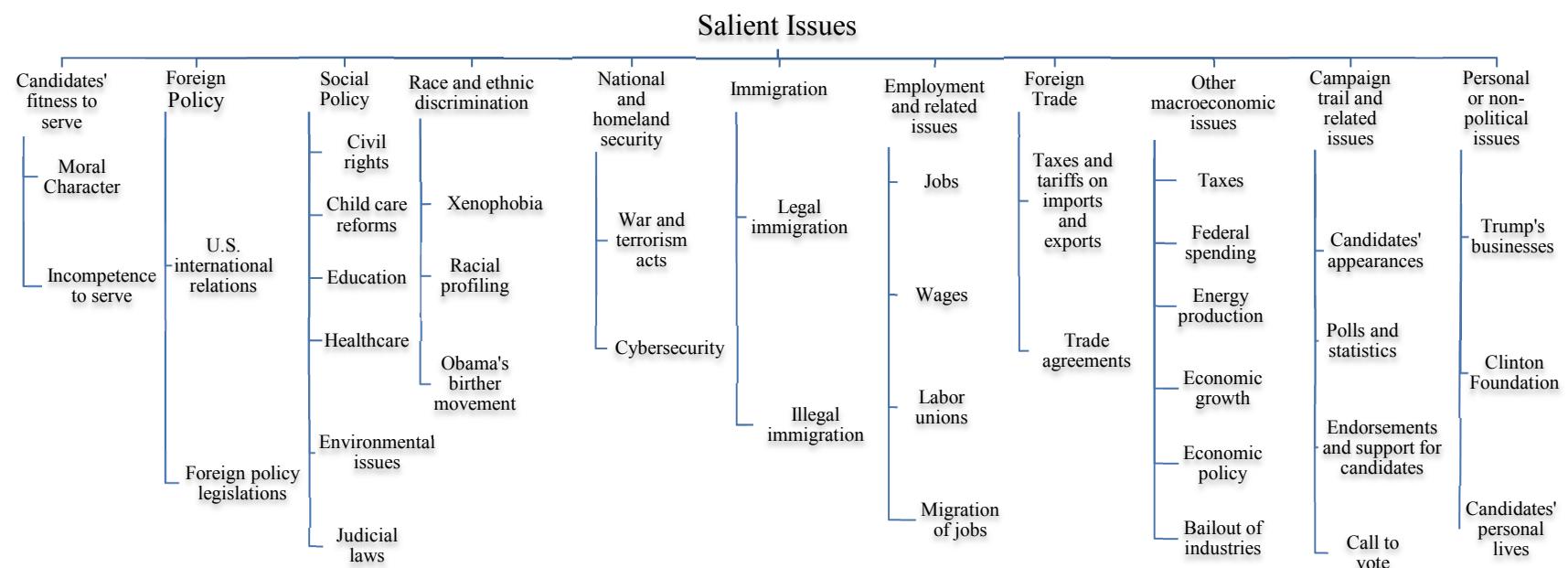
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Appendix A

Tree Diagram of the Emergent Categories and Subcategories after Iterative Coding



Appendix B

Coding Instructions

- Consider the meaning of the entire sentence and context in which the issue was discussed rather than just the noun (e.g., “criminal justice” – focus on whether it was mentioned in reference to race; if so, code for “race and ethnic discrimination” rather than social policy).
- When coding for frames in mainstream news media and digital native online news media, use the headlines and lead paragraphs to decide the dominant frame for each story. Similarly, for late-night comedy shows use the titles of the videos and opening remarks to decide the dominant frame.
- Code (1) for presence and (0) for absence of issues and frames.

Salient issues and Frames: Definitions and constituents

Issues

1. Candidates' fitness to serve (negative valence):

- Describes the moral character of candidates and their incompetence to serve as president of the United States.
- Includes any references to candidates' unconstitutional demands and proposal of policies.
- Excludes any positive valence or support for the candidates.
- Examples: Includes moral character; Trump's bigotry and misogyny; Trump evading taxes/refusal to release tax returns; Trump University fraud; Trump's inexperience; Trump's attacks on women, veterans, people with disabilities; Trump's body shaming comments; Trump's lewd comments on women, sexual assault allegations (cheating on spouse); Trump's inappropriate donation to a group supporting Pam Bondi, which was seen as a form of bribery; Trump's threat of putting political opponents in jail – seen as unconstitutional; Trump-Putin relation and his praises for dictators – seen as a national security threat and unconstitutional; Incite violence and voter suppression efforts; Trump's refusal to accept election results (dangerous rhetoric undermining the institution); Trump's lies and exaggerations; Trump's Twitter meltdown; Trump using money from charity to pay for his legal disputes; Clinton Foundation scandal; Unconstitutional demands (extreme vetting of immigrants, complete ban on Muslim immigrants, monitoring of mosques, monitoring of voting centers); Clinton's email scandal/use of private email server; Clinton's health (made in reference to fitness to serve); Clinton's paid speeches when serving as secretary of state; Clinton's ties to Wall Street; Clinton's shaming of women who accused Bill Clinton of sexual assault.

2. Foreign policy:

- Describes U.S. international relations and foreign policy legislations, which are enacted when the political actors are in office.
- The code does not include any personal relationships between Trump and Putin.
- Examples: Foreign relations; Military alliances; Iran nuclear deal; North Korea nuclear threats; Foreign aid to war-torn countries; NATO.

3. Social policy:

- Describes domestic policies concerning the welfare and wellbeing of U.S. citizens.
- Includes judicial laws and criminal justice system.
- Examples: Abortion; LGBT rights; Women's rights (gender pay gap); Civil rights; Child care reforms; Maternity leave; Elder care policy; Student loans and tuition; Legalizing marijuana; Health care (premiums, medical devices and pharmaceutical price controls); Climate change pact; Supreme Court nomination; Judicial laws and criminal justice; Gun control.

4. Race and ethnic discrimination:

- Specific mentions of how certain races and ethnic groups have been discriminated against by the political system.
- Examples: Includes discrimination against ethnic groups (anti-Semitism); Stop-and-frisk policy; Racial profiling; Criminal justice (if made reference to race; if not, code for other non-economic issues); Ku Klux Klan; Xenophobia; Obama's birther movement.

5. National and homeland security:

- Describes how the safety of U.S. citizens is jeopardized through war and terrorism acts committed domestically and internationally.
- This includes acts of terror against U.S. military bases outside of the country.
- Includes breach of cyber security threatening the political independence of the country.
- Examples: Mention of war on terror; Terrorism acts; ISIS (Islamic State); Benghazi attack; Invasion of Iraq; Russian intervention of US elections; Cyber security (hacking of DNC and Clinton's emails, WikiLeaks).

6. Immigration:

- Describes the act of migrating into the U.S for permanent stay.
- Includes acts of legal and illegal migration into the U.S.
- Examples: Acceptance of Syrian refugees; Undocumented and illegal residents; Mexico border wall.

7. Employment and related issues:

- References to job creation, wages, labor unions and migration of jobs to other countries.
- If there is a reference made to gender when discussing income inequality (gender pay gap), code for (3) under women's rights.
- Examples: Minimum wage; Income equality (no reference made to gender); Wage gap; Labor union; Job migration overseas/closing of manufacturing industries.

8. Foreign trade:

- Words that reflect the process of buying and selling of goods with other countries.
- Includes names of trade agreements.
- Includes the taxes or tariffs on imports and exports.
- Examples: TPP; NAFTA; Trade agreements; Tariffs/taxes on imports or exports.

9. Other macroeconomic issues:

- Words that reflect on the set of government regulations, including fiscal and monetary policies to stimulate U.S. economic growth.
- Examples: Federal spending/budget/deficit/debt; Reducing the size of government; Taxes (if made in reference to child care reforms, for example, reducing the amount of taxes for families with student debt, code under (3) social policy); Energy production; Economic growth; GDP; Economic policy (general mention, free market policy); Bailout of industries.

10. Campaign trail and related issues:

- Describes campaign rallies, events and candidates' appearances to garner votes and support.
- Reference to polls or statistics describing candidates' statuses in the election.
- Reference to endorsement and support for candidates from public figures such as public officials or celebrities. Includes support from social groups, organizations and institutions: "Clinton has the backing of Wall Street."
- Reference to early voting and the call to vote.
- Examples: Campaign spending; Campaign ads; Debates; Candidates' appearances; Polls; Call to vote; Early voting; Endorsement and support from public figures.

11. Personal or non-political issues:

- Reference to the personal lives of candidates including stories about their family members.
- Includes the career of Trump before running for the presidential elections.
- Excludes Clinton's health issues.
- Examples: Includes candidates' family members; Trump's marriages; Trump's businesses; Ivanka Trump's clothing line; Bill Clinton's extramarital affairs; personal faith.

Frames

12. Macro strategic game frame (Aalberg et al., 2011, p. 178):

- Includes news stories that frame politics as a game, personality contest, as strategy, and as personal relationships between political actors not related to issue positions.
- News stories that focus on the tactics or strategy of political campaigning, how they campaign, on the images of politicians, on political power as a goal in itself, and on politicians as individuals rather than as spokespersons for certain policies, should count as 'Strategic game frame'.
- The same applies for horse race coverage.

13. Human-interest frame (Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000, p. 100):

- Story provides a “human face” on the issue.
- Employ adjectives or personal vignettes that generate feelings of outrage, empathy-caring, sympathy or compassion.
- Emphasize how individuals and groups are affected by the issue/problem.
- Story goes into the private and personal lives of the actors.
- Story contains visual information that might generate feelings of outrage, empathy-caring, sympathy or compassion.

Appendix C

Codebook

Var	Definitions	Coding
1	Case – unique number identifying each story	File
2	Coder initials - coders should include their initials	
3	Type of source	1. Newspaper article 2. Digital native online news article 3. Late-night comedy clips
4	Date (Month)	MM
5	Date (Day)	DD
6	Salient issues – (code for multiple issues in each story): Indicate either 0: absent or 1: present for EACH ISSUE	NON-ECONOMIC ISSUES a. Candidates' fitness to serve – (0: absent 1: present) b. Foreign policy – (0: absent 1: present) c. Social policy – (0: absent 1: present) d. Race and ethnic discrimination – (0: absent 1: present) e. Homeland and national security – (0: absent 1: present) f. Immigration – (0: absent 1: present)

		<p>ECONOMIC ISSUES</p> <p>g. Employment and related issues – (0: absent 1: present)</p> <p>h. Foreign trade – (0: absent 1: present)</p> <p>i. Other macroeconomic issues – (0: absent 1: present)</p> <p>CAMPAIGN ISSUES</p> <p>j. Campaign trail and related issues – (0: absent 1: present)</p> <p>NON-POLITICAL</p> <p>k. Personal or non-political issues – (0: absent 1: present)</p>
7	<p>Frames – (code for dominant frame in each story using headline and lead paragraph):</p> <p>Indicate either 0: absent or 1: present for EACH FRAME</p>	<p>a. MACRO STRATEGIC GAME FRAME (adapted from Aalberg, Strömbäck and de Vreese, 2011, p. 178; code for presence if any of the following characteristics are identified) – (0: absent 1: present)</p> <p>‘Strategic game frame’ includes news stories that frame politics as a game, personality contest, as strategy, and as personal relationships between political actors not related to issue positions. News stories that focus on the tactics or strategy of political campaigning, how they campaign, on the images of politicians, on political power as a goal in itself, and on politicians as individuals rather than as spokespersons for certain policies, should count as</p>

	<p>‘Strategic game frame’. The same applies for horse race coverage.</p> <p>b. HUMAN INTEREST FRAME (adapted from Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000, p. 100; code for presence if any of the following characteristics are identified) – (0: absent 1: present)</p> <p>Story provides a “human face” on the issue; employ adjectives or personal vignettes that generate feelings of outrage, empathy-caring, sympathy or compassion; emphasize how individuals and groups are affected by the issue/problem; story goes into the private and personal lives of the actors; story contains visual information that might generate feelings of outrage, empathy-caring, sympathy or compassion.</p>
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