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**Declaration**

I declare that this assignment is my own work and does not involve plagiarism or collusion. The sources of other people's work have been appropriately referenced, failing which I am willing to accept the necessary disciplinary action(s) to be taken against me.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Toh En Yu Dylan', written over a light blue horizontal line.

Toh En Yu Dylan (Aug 6, 2019)

Student's Signature :

Date of Submission: 6/8/19

## **Chapter 1: Introductory Chapter**

### 1.1 Background

The media plays an important role in politics as it shapes the way our political leaders are perceived by the public and it shapes the way we view our leaders. The media has come a long way from hardcopy issues of daily newspapers which originated in the early 1700s to the daily news on our devices which is accessible at a fingertip away. The media plays an integral part of our political lives even as citizens; as it provides us with information, arguments, and opinions, which is more than capable of swinging public opinion. (Meyer, 2002; Spring, 2003; Trend, 1997) With the increasing accessibility of news on our devices, readers are more prone to it shaping our ideologies and our view of political leaders.

Political Leaders enjoy a symbiotic relationship with the media, in which both parties actively interact and feed off of each other, and they both exist in tandem. The public receives most of its political information through news media (Dautrich & Hartley 1999; Owen 1991), therefore, a voter's knowledge regarding a politician is limited to that of a writer and journalist from major news networks. This means that the impression of a politician is created through the media's portrayal of him as normal citizens do not get to interact with him. A citizen's impression of a political leader is made through the media.

The relationship between a political leader and the press is extremely important as he depends on that relationship to relate to the public. The nation gains news about their political leader and what he is doing and forms impressions of him and his policies through news media. (Cornwell, E.; 1976) The news also has outreach which stretches beyond the national sphere, news media can also influence global politics and minds of millions of readers abroad on key domestic and global issues.

### 1.2 Rationale

This paper aims to allow for readers to understand the impact the media has on their impressions of Political Leaders. Trump has often been said to be in an estranged relationship with the press, an anomaly when compared to previous US presidents, and ultimately a political leader who strays from the traditional and normative actions of present-day political leaders.

However, as much as Trump is said to be an anomaly, how much of an anomaly is he exactly, and what causes us to even coin him as an anomaly. This paper shall attempt to uncover, closely-analyse and study the subtle differences between the portrayal of Trump compared to Obama to see how (if any) the differences in coverage, plays a part in our impression of Trump.

Trump, who has had a skewed relationship with the media the moment his run for office, ultimately got elected despite him being against the odds of the media being strongly against him as compared to his Democratic opponent, Hilary Clinton. Trump assumes the mantle of leadership with a Clintonian combination of extraversion and self-confidence. He is outgoing, with poor impulse control, subjecting him to rapid fluctuation and is narcissistic, with knee-jerk responses to criticism. Though he appears free, his Achilles' heel is responding reflectively and petulantly to personal slights or criticism. Coupled with a dominant aggressive pattern, he is a strong leader but fails to own empathy. He is a “high-dominance charismatic” and is practically devoid of Barack Obama’s accommodating disposition. (Immelman; 2017) This juxtaposition of personalities will show the difference between how a political leader’s treatment of the press affects their relationship with the press.

Trump’s election to the Oval Office in 2017, is marked by a troubling relationship with the press. (Kalb; 2017) Citing President Trump,

The press, overall, he says, is a “disgrace,...false, horrible, fake reporting.” It is “out of control...fantastic.” Reporters are “very dishonest people,” their coverage he describes as “an outrage.” The New York Times—a “failing” newspaper. CNN—“terrible.” BuzzFeed—“Garbage.”

With headlines of ‘Trump’s Troubling Relationship with the Press’ (Kalb; 2017), it is easy to see how Trump’s symbiotic relationship with the press is now in Jeopardy, especially after much provocations of Trump on the press. With such a skewed relationship, we can see how this places Trump in a place of much scrutiny. How does a political leader who owns such an estranged relationship with the press, the only link to the people whom he serves, still get elected, and receive comparable approval ratings to past presidents?

### 1.3 Research Questions

1. To what extent does the media use Trump's unfamiliarity with the United States political scene to present him as a new President who is a Political Anomaly in terms of his relationships with various stakeholders when compared to other Presidents?
2. How do the differences in media coverage of Obama and Trump affect the way in which Trump’s image is that of an anomalous president?

#### 1.4 Thesis Statement

Trump has often been dubbed an anomaly by critics due to his perplexing relationship with the press as well as dynamics as a president. However, a voter and readers main source of contact with the President is the press, and using the Media Bias Theory, it can be said that the press has sensationalized the coverage of Trump's lack of familiarity with the political scene to imply varying extents of his performance as the President, and thereby influencing the voter's impression of him as a President.

#### 1.5 Scope of Research

I would be studying 3 main issues of contention for U.S presidents, namely, the coverage of their views on

- i. Abortion in the United States
- ii. Taxation Rates of United States Citizens; as well as
- iii. The Rights Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (LGBTQIA+) citizens residing in the United States

## 1.6 Significance of Research

This paper aims to allow the public to better understand the role of the media in influencing our perception of politics and not to be beguiled by everyday news. The news media has the power to sway public opinion as established in the background, however, is the public aware of the extent of this influence and can it differentiate between real and biased accounts of news. I also hope to allow for a better understanding of the workings of a political leader and their real intent, it would therefore require us to compare multiple news sources to paint a complete image.

## 1.7 Limitations

This paper plans to study the extent of Media Portrayal of Trump as compared to Obama to see how coverage differs and its differences and techniques on promoting Trump as an anomaly. The Media Bias Theory which is used to study this issue may not be exhaustive in uncovering the various other factors which may be at play to explain the differences in coverage over the year, however, it is sufficient to explain the possible impacts and extent of how such subtle difference in coverage accounts for the promotion of the image of Trump as an anomaly. Trump is still in office as of the time of writing, articles used would be limited to the 1st Year of his presidency and issues discussed would be limited to key events of the year 2017. Articles of other presidents chosen for juxtaposing against the coverage of Trump would similarly be chosen from the timeframe when he was in the first year of his office.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### 2.1 Mass Media Theories

This section would be used to explain the Media Bias Theory which would be used to analyse if bias is present in the news reports based on the coverage of the President .

#### 2.1.1 Media Bias Theory

In my literature review, the Media Bias theory would be split into 3 main sub-sections, firstly, the motivation behind Media Bias by News Sources, next, the Perceived Media Bias by consumers, and lastly, how bias can occur in a news report.

##### 2.1.1 Motivations for Media Bias

“Any company has to sell the credibility of its product, but a media company has nothing else to sell” (Kirkpatrick and Fabrikant 2003, B9) A media company counts on its accuracy and credibility to consumers so as to increase sales and ensure profits. According to Jesse M. Shapiro, a consumer infers that a source is of higher quality when its reports conform to that of his/her prior expectations, he therefore hypothesizes that media firms would want to build up a reputation as a provider of accurate information so as to sell their content to consumers. Media firms therefore have the incentive to distort information to conform to a consumers’ prior beliefs. Hence, a firms’ motivation for bias may not be to intentionally distort information but rather, it arises as a natural consequence of firms’ desires on the quest of a reputation for accuracy.

Another factor of motivation for political bias as postulated by Tim Groseclose and Jeffery Milyo states that a reason for biased reporting is not intended to mislead, but rather quite the opposite. Bias

in reporting may arise from a reporter's own personal stance and his attempt in compensating for it. That means, a reporter may be cognizant of his own liberal stance and in the name of factual reporting, he may compensate for his own bias, by going out of his way to be 'fair'. Reporters may often feel guilty for siding with a particular candidate or ideology, this results in him beginning to compensate for his own personal beliefs. The more he likes and agrees with a particular candidate, the more he judges him professionally. For example, as explained by (Crouse 1973),

“It is an unwritten law of current political journalism that conservative Republican Presidential candidates usually receive gentler treatment from the press than do liberal Democrats. Reporters sense a social barrier between themselves and most conservative candidates; their relations are formal and meticulously polite. But reporters tend to loosen up around liberal candidates and campaign staff;”

However, the theory above is argued against as seen by the paper of Simon P. Anderson and John McLaren. (Anderson & John 2012) argues that Media Bias still can take place and can be motivated by not only profits but also political motives provided that they have the backing of political figures or are owned by wingists. In this case, firms would deliberately distort information to manipulate political outcomes.

With the 3 opposing motivations of Media Bias as written by 3 different authors of the same time period, it can be argued that in the world today, most Media Bias by the press stems from one of three proposed motivations, to build a reputation for an accurate firm through reporting expected information to gratify the people of a particular political ideology, to compensate for the reporters own personal bias, or simply to manipulate political outcomes.

### 2.1.2 Perceived Media Bias



Jonathan S. Morris argues in his paper that Media Bias can be perceived instead of being real. He states that perceived media bias is prone in individuals who believe that the direction of bias is counter to his own political beliefs. Democrats believing that news favours the Republics, and vice versa. (Eveland & Shah 2003) He ascertains that when there is more positive media coverage in one direction over the other, it is simply not evidence of bias but rather reality. (Hofstetter 1976, Nivon 2002)

“Candidates and events do not always exist in a vacuum, therefore, more positive or negative coverage may reflect more reality than bias”

Eveland & Shah argue that media bias is affected by the direction of attitudes and intensity of attitudes. That being said, it simply means one's political ideology and the extent to which he believes in that ideology would determine the extent and direction of perceived media bias. They also state that one's perceptions of media bias is shaped indirectly through the interactions he has with others. If one's friends are liberals, his interactions with them would likely centre around the discussion of liberal rights and policies which follow that of liberal beliefs, this contributes to his own political ideologies and plays a part in his perception of media bias.

### 2.1.3 Formation of Biases

Matthew Gentzkow and Jesse M. Shapiro argue that bias comes in the form of selective omission, choice of words, and varying credibility ascribed to the said primary source.

Selective omission and choice of words can function as bias as lack prior knowledge on the pre-existing information a news firm has. Media bias can be perpetuated in the form by intentionally not reporting on a part of the story and painting an incomplete picture for consumers to absorb, resulting in consumers making misinformed decisions as a result of the influence by news reports. Such tweaks in the presentation of information can convey drastically different messages and cause readers to form radically diverging impressions on events. As readers often spend little time on the processing

of news information, any report consumed by readers are taken for fact and therefore, news providers can slant the news to attract audiences with preferences towards certain informatory content.

As mentioned by Gentzkow and Shapiro (2010) in their paper, they distinguish between “Slant” which points to how coverage is skewed towards one political agenda, and “bias” which shows how a newspaper’s slant differs from its profit-maximising slant. Profit-Maximising slant refers to what the readers want to see in a particular news story and what they are paying money for. An account of biased reporting is forgoing profits for their own beliefs. (Anderson and McLaren) Groseclose and Milyo (2005), state that bias can occur in political issues of news coverage in the form of coverage. If one person or groups of person receive more or less favourable coverage than others.

### **Chapter 3: Research Methodology**

This paper will focus on the 12 articles that has been chosen from the year 2017, where Trump, was elected as well as year 2009, when Obama was elected into his first office of Presidency. I would apply the Media Bias theory on all 12 articles to understudy the juxtaposition between how over the years, Cable News Network (CNN) and Fox News conservative and liberal Sources, have changed their way of writing to promote the image of Trump as a president who is foriegn to the political scene. By bringing Obama, to contrast the news coverage to that of Trump, it would establish a context for me to compare against how the coverage of Presidents may have changed.

Of the 12 pieces of news articles chosen, they revolved around 3 main issues of contention which most Presidents address when they first embark on their Presidency to make clear their stances. They are that of, Abortion Rights, Taxation Rates as well as LGBTQ Rights. The 12 articles were derived from CNN and Fox namely, and they were chosen while ensuring that they were time-specific such that they were written in the first year of each president's office.

Ultimately, I would be studying the language use and tone as well as major components of the Media Bias theory to identify if bias was indeed present in the articles, and to what extent they were present, so as to determine if the differences in writings of the Presidents over the years played a part in contributing to the image of Trump as an anomaly.

#### **Chapter 4: Discussion and Analysis:**

In the previous chapter of Literature Review this paper has identified 3 main factors of the Media Bias Theory, namely that of the motivations for Media Bias, Perceptions of Media Bias, as well as the 3 main features of the Perpetuation of Media Bias. The following chapter on the discussion and analysis would be focused on highlighting the presence of the defining features of Media Bias through the motivations, perceptions, and perpetuations of Media Bias. The main bulk of this chapter, however, would be focused on uncovering the 3 main features of the formation of Media Bias and seeks to find if they are indeed present in articles as time progresses over the course of 2 Presidents.

With reference to the issue of contention, Trump is said to be an anomaly, while that is debatable and subjective, what is not is Trump's rise to power in the 2016 Presidential Elections. It is only morally just for news agencies to report Trump's rise to office, from a successful businessman, real estate tycoon, and multi millionaire, who was known for his role on the reality TV Show, "The Apprentice", to the Republican Nominee for the Presidential Elections.

However, what has contributed to the sustained image of Trump being an anomaly?

Trump has been dubbed an anomaly as this paper has previously established the need for a political leader to have a sustainable and healthy relationship with the press, to increase the odds of building an amicable one with his people, as the press are the only contact point between a political leader and the people, hence they hold immense power in their hands to influence and to change public opinion. But it is no secret that Trump shares an estranged relationship with the press, from the moment he announced his bid for office, right up to his current day in office, yet, it is perplexing how despite the odds of his relationship with multiple stakeholders, he still managed to secure the Republican Nomination, get voted into office, and rightfully earned his place there. This, in part contributes to the explanation of how Trump was coined an anomaly.

However, on a separate note, Trump could have also been coined an anomaly due to him being unfamiliar to the office yet despite coming up with radical, and out-of-the-box policies, still remain in

office with less-than-ideal ratings. While it is true his ratings fall short of previous president, it also is undeniable that Trump has held his ground as President and despite his emotional outbursts on Social Media Platforms, still receive a reasonable amount of support from industry leaders and certain foreign allies. Hence, an anomalous Trump may also be the case due to his radical policies but unaffected supporters.

This chapter aims to uncover if bias was indeed present through systematically checking the presence of motivations, perceptions and perpetuation of media bias in articles written for Trump when compared against that of Obama.

#### **4.1: Perpetuation of Bias**

Bias can be perpetuated in the media through 3 main features, the selective omission of words, choice of words used to describe sources, as well as ascribing variable credibility to different sources. All 3 features of biased reporting aim to promote the connotation of desired emotions about pieces of writing used when reporting on a particular source so as to allow readers to feel for a certain political field and backing.

#### **4.1.1 Selective Omission**

The selective omission of words in reporting refers to the intention of not reporting the full picture for readers to form an incomplete view of the macro-situation resulting in them forming varying extents of views and impressions of political leaders and groups.

Based on the finding across 12 articles, Selective Omission is concluded to be the least reliable factor in determining the presence of biased accounts due to the fact that there is no true contextual knowledge existing to fully comprehend the true state of situations. With news media being our main contact point with political leaders, it is difficult and inaccurate to predict and state how much of the article was the full picture as readers were not factually at the scene of political functions with press corps.

However, that being said, selective omission can come into play and be used when 2 coverages of the identical event is published by 2 news networks to provide a limited view of what extent of information was left out by each news source to further their own agendas. However in this case, noting that most articles sourced were from at least 2 years ago, it was difficult to source for articles pertaining to the coverage of the same exact event, therefore, with qualitative analysis in mind, this sub- chapter would not be filled.

#### **4.1.2: Choice of Words**

Across all 12 articles, there has been a noticeable spike in words used to describe Trump both by CNN and Fox which connote varying extents of Trump's unfamiliarity with office and ill-fittedness in politics to prompt the cause of Trump being an anomaly. Such an observation is juxtaposed and can be seen through the comparison between the coverage of Trump and Obama when reporting on the same issues.

On the issue of abortion, Trump has been subject to much doubt on his political will and his ability to hold public office. This is in stark contrast to the coverage on Obama. For instance, when Fox News covered Obama's "Science Czar", his Chief Science Advisor, allegations of publishing books which considers forced abortions as well as Mandatory Sterilisation for population control, words such as 'Scrutinized' and 'Advocacy for Totalitarianism' were used to describe the advisor. Such words do not undermine Obama's presidency and are objective and precise, with no hints towards the President and his abilities to carry out his task. Instead, such words directly target the issue at hand which is the Senate committee electing such a publisher, and the advisor himself. At no point in time did this issue tie in with Obama's leadership capabilities.

However, as for Trump, on the issue of abortion and him signing a legislation for funding of the 'Planned Parenthood Law' he was subject to much scrutiny from both CNN and Fox regarding his familiarity to the political scene. CNN reported on his daughter, Ivanka Trump's influence on her father's decision to sign such a bill which restricts funding for abortions, and also quoted Trump in saying "Ivanka would be my guide for woman's health issues" Such a quote and coverage by CNN is subtle in hinting how Trump has entwined his private life into his public life and has failed to keep private affairs from public affairs. Such an act of 'blurring the lines' connotes how Trump is a president who is deeply unfamiliar to the works of politics, where trust is earned through one's own actions, and by entwining private with public, it only goes to show how he is unable to separate affairs and connotes an unorganised and unsound President.

Trump is also not free of such coverage by Fox, who covered his Tax plans the moment he stepped into office. While Fox News covered his tax plans and described it as “Ambitious”, whereby such a word connotes Trump to be an individual with high aspirations, which may not necessarily be in reach, CNN adopted a much more direct approach in mentioning “His Plans were met with skepticism”. The choice of words used by both firms in describing his Tax Bills despite being of drastically different severities and tone, drive at the same point, of how Trump’s plan is unrealistic and an anomaly when compared to other US Presidents. Obama, on the other hand, had his coverage of Tax Bills was free of such comments by the news media, with little to no words found hinting at how Obama may not be the most- experienced political leader with the most realistic plans.

Hence, this goes to show that when juxtaposed against Obama, it becomes clear that the media has made their points clear through subtle hints and connotations that Trump’s familiarity with office and political will is much less of that as compared to Obama, and this in turned contributed to the image of Trump being an anomalous president.



### 4.1.3: Ascribing Variable Credibility

The act of ascribing a variable level of credibility of trust to sources and leaders in a news report perpetuates the formation of bias as this can result in a piece of information being interpreted differently due to the different extents of trust ascribed to it.

Across the 12 articles studied, it is noted that the ascription of varying credibility was carried out by both CNN and FOX News and were especially prevalent in counter-directional coverage, meaning, that lower levels of trust were often ascribed to sources which counter the political direction of the firm and its associated political leader. For example, Fox News, when covering Obama's expected presence at a fundraising Gala Dinner for a human rights campaign with a focus on LGBTQ rights, mentioned that "Although Obama was recently given the [Nobel Peace Prize](#), he has done nothing to advance peace in this nation or abroad ... Domestically, Obama promotes a culture war. He is not a symbol of peace" Such a statement proves to reduce the credibility ascribed to Obama's Nobel Peace Prize and him as a symbol of peace, by mentioning that he has failed to discharge his duties as a President, and showing to readers that this award which has been presented to him is unreflective of him as a leader who promotes sufficient human rights. This goes to show that news firms' have written counter-directionally in an attempt to disprove the opposing sides' works and arguments. However, Trump is also similarly subject such acts of ascribing variable credibility to sources by news firms. For example, CNN when covering Trump's tax bills in his first year as president mentioned that Trump's Bills "It's not tax reform, not even close" Such a statement pushes the argument that Trump's tax reforms are barely politically sound and cannot be considered a reform plan which can be put into place. Such a connotation highlights to readers how Trump's policies would fail to work by ascribing an extremely low credibility to it in the form of undermining his proposals and not granting them the right to be deemed a reform plan.

Across both quotes which has been picked out from 2 networks across 2 presidents, it can be seen that while bias is indeed present, yet there is no substantial difference in the coverage to undermine each president's political abilities or connote the political familiarity of both presidents. The coverage

technique used on Obama in his first year of presidency is consistent with that of Trump's, and the language used between both are objective and clear in this instance.

Ultimately, through the use of ascribing variable levels of credibility, it can be established that while it is true that the act of biased reporting was present, there is insufficient difference between the coverages to deem the media has intentionally used this feature to present Trump as an anomaly as there has been no conclusive findings in differences between the covers of Obama and Trump where instances of biased accounts were present through this feature.

## **4.2: Motivations for Media Bias**

In accordance to the Media Bias Theory, news firms are motivated to produce bias sources of articles so as to increase their credibility as well as sales & profit, both of which takes place when news derived from firms conform to the prior expectations of readers.

It can be assumed that both news sources CNN and Fox News, Liberal and Conservative firms respectively have their own agenda to further. The sensationalization of Trump's unfamiliarity to office could be used as a springboard to push the argument that Trump is inexperienced as a political leader and therefore, depending on their arguments and perspectives on issues, push for Trump as either an effective or ineffective leader.

CNN has now adopted an extremely liberalist coverage on most issues which is reflective with the way they cover stories (Elaborated in Chapter 4.3). To conform to their readers expectations, CNN may try to engage in bias while covering stories to highlight Trump's unfamiliarity in office so as to show how he is an increasingly radical, unstable and unreliable president. This can be in the form of doubting his decisions and questioning the motives of acts, for example, "Trump Privately Signs Anti-Planned Parenthood law" such a title engages liberal readers. The word 'Privately' connotes secrecy, unreliability and instability due to the word signalling that Trump has failed to communicate with his advisors, or the press, and also did not want such an incident to reach the people. By inserting such subtle words which point readers in the direction of Trump's inability to openly lead his government, conforms to the reader's expectations that he is an ineffective president, for he has overlooked a major component of holding a political appointment, transparency, which is what voters look for when casting their vote, to know that their leader is trustworthy. Such tactics which have subtle connotations seek to distort information in a way in which they conform to a reader's prior expectations of Trump being unreliable and therefore a bad president.

This is also prevalent in Fox News. Fox News could be motivated to engage in biased accounts of reports due to the ability to portray Trump as a new political leader with the ability to innovate and

think out of the box without the constraints of a political mind. Fox as a conservative source who similarly has to promote their own agenda in a 'Pro-Trump' stance, can be seen through their depiction of their coverage with the title "Trump offers Planned Parenthood funds if it halts abortions" The use of words such as "offers [...] funds" shines light on Trump as a leader who is unstingy and open to funding causes which benefits woman and parents. In line with conservative stances, they have conformed to reader's pre-existing notions of conservacy, with information on how this increase in fuding comes at the condition of cutting funding for abortion. Yet in the article, it included an interview of a stakeholder who mentioned that "Trump has always been sympathetic for a womans' rights until it became politically unpopular for him" Such a statement included in the article undermines Trump's political ability as a President due to the portrayal of him constantly seemingly switching stances to better his political popularity.

#### **4.4: Evaluation: Did the Media's Coverage of Trump cause an anomalous impression of him**

From the above chapter, this paper has firstly defined the possible causes of Trump being dubbed an anomaly, and thereafter dweled into the features of the Media Bias Theory to understand if bias was indeed present in the articles. The juxtaposition between the coverage of Obama and Trump also provided a contextual baseline for comparison between the 2 leaders so as to see if the coverage of Trump specifically hinted at his lack of political familiarity to promote his anomalous image.

Noting that the motivations for media bias was present across both news firms studied, and there was indeed bias news accounts published of both Obama and Trump where instances of bias occurred inn counter-directional fashion, it can be concluded that while bias was present, only though the feature of "Choice of Words" under the perpetuation of bias, did sufficient evidence surface of Trump's political inexperience being highlighted to portray him as a president who was anomalous when compared to past US Presidents.

## **Chapter 5.0: Conclusion**

Hence, this paper thereby concludes that the media engaged in biased reporting to a small extent so as to use Trump's unfamiliarity in the political scene to present him as a political anomaly due to his relationship with various stakeholders, when compared to other US Presidents. This can be said as the media had only used their "Choice of Words" to promote the idea of Trump's inexperience in office, and through studying the differences between the coverage of Obama and Trump, it can be seen that there is little to no difference in coverage across the years to promote the anomalous image of Trump.



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