

newspaper circulation, crime statistics, voter registraton.

This kind of catalog will reveal the real quality of life in a neighborhood. Additionally, it has the advantages of what behavioral scientists call multiple operationism,² that is, multiple observations of the same general phenomenon, a kind of triangulation on reality. Any single observation is subject to bias and error. But when a large set of different observations corroborate each other, there is a more comfortable feeling about the validity of the descriptions and analyses.

In short, the use of scientific method in reporting begins with a *hypothesis* (a story idea) and the subsequent *systematic collection of a variety of evidence bearing on the hypothesis*. Since the emphasis here has been on the use of existing evidence, this is really only a small extension of the beat reporter's task of digging out the news.

Once reporters have gained this experience, they are in line for a tremendous windfall as computers become widespread in the processing and storage of government records.³ Computers mean quicker access to information and greatly increased feasibility for compiling records according to neighborhoods, types of people or types of businesses.

Beyond this is the use of the computer by newspapers to process and analyze social indicators collected directly by the news staff. The precedents are already there in the *Detroit Free Press'* survey of the Negro ghetto immediately after the 1967 summer riot and its one-year followup on the riot.⁴ Knight

² Eugene J. Webb, Donald T. Campbell, Richard D. Schwartz and Lee Sechrest, *Unobstrusive Measures: Nonreactive Research in the Social Sciences* (Chicago: Rand McNally & Company, 1966).

³ Maxwell E. McCombs, "New Sources of News: Exploiting Local Data," *American Newspaper Publishers Association News Research Bulletin*, No. 3, Feb. 5, 1969.

⁴ *The People Beyond 12th Street* (Detroit Free Press: 1967); *Return to 12th Street* (Detroit Free Press: 1968).

⁵ Philip Meyer, "Aftermath of Martyrdom: Negro Militancy and Martin Luther King," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 33:160-73 (Summer 1969).

Newspapers also did a significant study on Negro attitudes and militancy—and the effect of Martin Luther King's death on these attitudes—in Miami.⁵

Neither these studies nor the systematic analysis of existing government data are abstruse information. They are hard, reliable data on newsworthy social issues.

A Test of 'Loading': New Measure of Bias

By David B. Sachsman

News reports should be free from opinion or bias of any kind.

American Society of Newspaper Editors,
Canons of Journalism

► What is biased reporting? How can it be measured? Can we trust the experts' opinions as to what is "loaded," or is the general public the best and ultimate judge of bias?

To date, the determination of what constitutes biased reporting has been the subjective judgments of experts, either coders or judges in content analysis techniques. Because of the difficulties inherent in the design of prearranged criteria for content analysis of bias in the press, the research in the field has often depended on the judgments of experts, and bias has generally been defined as *what experts* (coders or judges) *think is bias*.

Biased reporting might also be defined in terms of *what the general public thinks is bias*. William L. Rivers and Wilbur Schramm, for example, have seen some value in the analysis of newspaper performance by members of the general public. The conception

► Mr. Sachsman is assistant professor of journalism at California State College, Hayward. This work was carried out at Stanford University in the Public Affairs Communication Ph.D. program. An earlier version was presented to the California Journalism Conference at Los Angeles in February 1970.

of a press council is based on such evaluation.¹

No systematic study of bias in the mass media has attempted to determine what the public thinks is biased reporting. No study has defined bias, or loading or slanting in terms of the conception of the general newspaper audience.

Such a study should first determine if the members of the general public are in agreement as to what is, and what is not, biased reporting. If members of the general population cannot agree as to the "loading" of news presentations, then their judgments are not useful as a measure of bias. But if there is agreement irrespective of differences in attitudes between judges, then the judgments of members of the general public are a useful measure of "loading" or bias.

Objectives

"Loading" is defined as what members of the general population see as loading. Thus loading=slanting=biasing.

Do members of the general public agree as to which headlines and news stories are neutral or "loaded" in favor, or against, the referent (a subject of head and story)?

This study attempts to rank-order newspapers in terms of the number of loaded reports, and attempts to rank-order the given issues (news events) in terms of the number of loaded presentations across newspapers.

This should be considered as a preliminary examination because the subjects (judges) were not drawn from a random selection of the general population. However, the subjects, though all students, exhibited backgrounds so varied (from secretaries to soldiers) that these results might be considered interesting.

Method

The 14 judges were students of an introductory course in mass communications at California State College, Hayward. The study was conducted

in the summer quarter of 1969 in the second week of class, well ahead of any discussion or reading of media ethics.

Only one of them had had any experience in journalism; two others had taken some journalism courses. The remaining eleven had had no mass media experience and none of the 14 could be considered expert in the analysis of press performance.

Members of the class had varied backgrounds. Only four had not held full-time employment for more than a year. The remaining ten had been or were currently clerks, soldiers, carpet installers, state parole agents, pharmacist's assistants, secretaries and key punch operators. Their ages varied from 19 to 36 years, with the median age 23. Although not a random sample, the subjects were far more varied than might be expected in an introductory college class.

The 14 judges were asked to rate 36 news headlines, connecting stories and combinations of headlines and stories using a seven-point scale ranging from *very pro* through *no loading* to *very con*. The question was: "Are the A. Headlines, B. Stories, C. Combinations of headlines and stories, loaded (slanted, biased) in favor of (pro), or against (con), the subjects; or free of loading-slanting evaluation (no loading)?"

No other instructions were given except that the subjects (referents) were defined for each of the six sets of news events:

- 1) Arabs Attack Israeli Airliner
- 2) President Nixon Opens European Tour
- 3) Santa Barbara Offshore Oil Leak
- 4) UC Berkeley Student Demonstration
- 5) State College Trustees' Decision on SF State Strike Settlement
- 6) Striking SF State Teachers End Strike

¹ *Responsibility in Mass Communication* Rev. ed., (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), pp. 246-7.

The subjects (referents) were defined as:

- 1) Arab Commandos
- 2) Nixon
- 3) Oil Companies
- 4) Demonstrators
- 5) State College Trustees
- 6) Striking Teachers

The stories (with headlines) were taken from six Bay Area newspapers (San Francisco *Examiner*, Oakland *Tribune*, Berkeley *Gazette*, San Francisco *Chronicle*, San Jose *Mercury*, Vallejo *Times*) on identical dates for each of the six news events so that the judges could evaluate how six different papers covered a particular news story on a particular day. The stories were presented to the judges randomly, and each judge rated all of them, but in a different order than any other judge. Names of papers were not given.

After the judges rated the headlines, stories and combinations for each of the 36 cases, they rated themselves. On a seven-point scale from *very pro* through *neutral* to *very con* they noted their own feelings about each of the six subjects.

Results

The 14 non-expert judges agreed as to whether headlines, stories and combinations were loaded in favor of, or against, or not loaded, concerning the referents, in 23 of the 36 headline-story combinations (68 of the 108 measures taken). In 33 of the 108 measures, the standard deviation was less than 0.40, and in no case was the standard deviation more than 1.74.

Of the 68 measures which showed high agreement among judges, 57 showed agreement as to the existence of loading (pro or con), and only 11 showed agreement as to neutrality.

All six newspapers on the average (averaging measures across issues) showed significant bias. It was not possible to rank-order the six papers in terms of the degree of biased reporting because the degree of loading was not

significantly different between newspapers.

In four of the six issues, the newspapers as a group showed unidirectional bias. The remaining two issues (Striking Teachers and State College Trustees) accounted for a great deal of the lack of agreement among judges. These last two issues and the stories about them were written locally and were very complicated, which may explain the lack of agreement among judges in as many as 25 measures.

Three of the four issues that showed unidirectional bias across newspapers appear to be a function of bias in wire service accounts.

Concerning Nixon, the *Examiner* and the *Tribune* used an AP story that was judged to be highly pro. The *Chronicle* and *Mercury* used a New York *Times* piece that was rated less pro, and the Berkeley and Vallejo papers used a UPI story that resulted in lack of agreement among judges.

Concerning Arab Commandos, AP and UPI were con Arabs. The two wire services were also con Offshore Oil Companies.

The UC Berkeley Demonstrators story was written locally by many different reporters, and while there was more disagreement among judges on this issue than on the wire service issues, the direction of the bias was definitely con.

It was not possible to rank-order the six issues in terms of the degree of biased reporting across newspapers because of lack of agreement among judges on two issues, and because three other issues were not significantly different across newspapers.

The results:

Pro loading—Nixon

Lack of agreement—State College Trustees, Striking Teachers

Con loading—Arab Commandos, Offshore Oil Companies, UC Berkeley Student Demonstrators

Generally, there was no significant difference between measures of head-

line, story and combination within each of the 36 head-story combinations.

The data on the judges' personal biases seem to indicate that personal bias was not an important factor in determining the judges' responses to the newspapers' presentations of the issues. Although the judges were clearly biased against offshore oil companies, their bias did not prevent them from judging that the papers were also biased against the companies. In the same way, the judges' bias against Arab commandos did not stop them from seeing that the wire service presentations were also biased against the commandos. The judges admitted to being con trustees, and yet could not agree as to whether or how the newspapers were loaded. The judges were slightly biased con Nixon and pro demonstrators. Because these biases were not significantly different from neutral, however, there is little evidence that these biases were an important factor in determining the judges' evaluation that the papers were pro Nixon and con demonstrators.

Conclusion

The 14 non-expert judges agreed in a substantial number of cases as to which headlines and news stories were neutral, or loaded in favor, or against, the six referents examined. This agreement lends support to the method proposed for the analysis of press performance. This procedure is not necessarily better than those that have been used in the past, but it is different, and, therefore, should prove useful in a multi-method approach to the analysis of press performance.

The next step in this line of inquiry would be to compare the judgments of non-experts, using this procedure, with the judgments of experts, using this and other procedures.

The Impact of the Editorial Page on a Municipal Referendum

By N. J. Spector

In a sense, the newspaper is the prime mover in setting the territorial agenda. It has a great part in determining what most people will be talking about, what most people will think the facts are, and what most people will regard as the way problems are to be dealt with. . . . To a large extent it sets the civic agenda.¹

► The city of Bridgeport, Connecticut, has a population of about 152,000. During the period April through October 1968, the editorial page of the Bridgeport *Post* bristled with editorials and letters to the editor concerning a proposed charter revision which would have changed the form of municipal government from a "weak" to a "strong" mayor.

The *Post* is the only evening daily newspaper in the city. The most recent figures available indicate that the circulation is 82,722.²

The editorial page of the *Post* served as a public policy forum for more than seven months. Municipal charter revision is usually (and was in this case), a controversial ballot measure. Because most citizens do not attend public hearings at city hall, and others are reluctant to read long descriptions of events in the news columns, the contents of the editorial page take on increased significance.

The Issue

The proposed new charter was drafted by a bipartisan commission after several months of study and after a series of hearings. The Common Council approved the charter proposals

► The author is associate professor of political science at the University of Bridgeport, Connecticut. He was both participant and observer in this attempt at municipal change.

¹ Norton E. Long, "The Local Community as an Ecology of Games," *American Journal of Sociology*, 64:3 (November 1958), pp. 259-60.

² Leonard Bray, ed., *N. W. Ayer and Son's Directory of Newspapers and Periodicals*, (Philadelphia: N. W. Ayer and Son, Inc.), 1969, p. 164.