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Manufacturing Legitimacy: A Critical Theory of Election News Coverage

Gabriel N. Elias
The University of Western Ontario

Supervisor
Dr. James Compton
The University of Western Ontario

Graduate Program in Media Studies

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Master of Arts

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MANUFACTURING LEGITIMACY:
A Critical Theory of Election News Coverage

(Thesis Format: Monograph)

by

Gabriel Elias

Graduate Program in Media Studies

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada

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Abstract

To what degree does instrumental reason influence election news coverage? Using Habermas's understanding of system/life-world as a heuristic, I map the rationalization process of political communication. This illuminates the institutional logics at play in the field of politics and the field of journalism, and the way the social dynamics between them enable the framing of political life as a strategic game. This understanding is then contextualized within an analysis of the media frames that informed the Canadian federal election of 2011. I find that news coverage does tend to focus on political strategy; but this is not wholly at the expense of issue coverage, rather news frequently represents issues as strategic resources deployed by party leaders to create political advantage within public opinion. Ultimately, this thesis provides a critique of the formal organization of electoral politics around the imperatives of news production.

Keywords

Habermas, Field Theory, Canadian Elections, Media Politics, Mass Media, Frames and Framing, Instrumental Rationality, Power, Critical Theory, Legitimation, Frame Analysis, Strategic Game Frame
Preface

I arrive at the study of political communication following the Great Recession of 2007. This event, I imagine, was something of an awakening for many people. No less so for me as I was running a small business and trying to do capitalism the way I thought it should be done. And yet all the ‘uncertainty’ from the fallout from the global slump only underscored serious problems in the way the self-professed experts on TV claimed to have any understanding of the scope and magnitude of the havoc being wreaked upon the lives of nearly everyone I knew. For all the news I would watch, and I really did like to keep current, answers were lacking – they left me wanting know why. In grad school, reading Habermas’s critique of the crisis tendencies of advanced capitalism was something of a moment of discovery. I realized that I had only scratched the surface of any understanding of social order. For me, this thesis represents an attempt to apply those concepts to make sense of what I tend to regard as the politics of inanity.
Acknowledgments

This thesis would never have been written were it not for the patience and perseverance of my supervisor, James Compton. Thank you for the encouragement and the insightful commentary that certainly helped steer my thinking throughout this process. I am immeasurably grateful for the measured advice and poignant suggestions that helped keep me on track and oriented towards completing this project.

Special thanks to Edward Comor whose commentary helped crystalize some of the more complicated ideas articulated in chapter 2. I would also like to thank many of the faculty of the FIMS, in particular Robert Babe and Jonathon Burston, whose teachings inform these pages. Thank you, as well to Charlie Keil, Anne Lancashire, Bart Testa, and Tim Blackmore who encouraged me to pursue graduate level study.

To my many friends within the program, especially Craig Butosi, Chuck Blazevic, and Atle Kjossen, thank you for all the collegial advice. I would also like to thank Mary Deminion for the proof read and suggestions as well as Brian Sutton-Quaid for the help with the statistics (it was not insignificant). Last, but certainly not least, thank you to Danielle Carr for all the writing sessions and the motivation they provided; your energy and enthusiasm are truly an inspiration.
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<td>SGF</td>
<td>Strategic Game Frame</td>
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<tr>
<td>CAE</td>
<td>Canada Elections Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CFE 2011</td>
<td>Canadian federal election of 2011</td>
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<tr>
<td>Globe</td>
<td>Globe and Mail</td>
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<tr>
<td>House</td>
<td>House of Commons</td>
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<td>PM</td>
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<td>CPC</td>
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Chapter 1 – Introduction

The Critique of Election News Coverage

Following the news of an election is akin to being a spectator at a professional sporting event. The narrative of an election is the story of star players (the party leaders) leading their team through a season of campaign events as news media updates the crowd with play-by-play analysis while pollsters tell us who is winning or losing. Electoral politics is thus represented as a kind of game politicians play – the so called horse race. At stake is power and prestige to be won by the first player across the finish line. And Election Day tends to be celebrated like it was the grand finale of a major sporting league.

Surely, elections are the hallmark of a free society; however such reportage is widely criticized for its nearly singular focus on political brinksmanship. People, researchers, and journalists often disparage the way news poorly covers the impact of real world problems on everyday people. In short, election news coverage is considered problematic for the way it excludes issues from public deliberation. As the critique goes, a healthy democracy requires an informed and engaged public, and yet news media primarily spreads the thinnest of information relating to political life – how well the politicians are playing the game of politics.

Manufacturing Legitimacy

This thesis examines the way news media tend to represent electoral politics as a kind of game. A large quantity of media scholarship has already identified this tendency (Cappella and Jamieson 1997; Patterson 1993; Trimble and Sampert 2004; Rosenstiel 2005; Patterson 2005; Entman 1989; Sigelman and Bullock 1991; De Vreese and Elenbaas 2008; Gan, Teo, and Detenber 2005; Miljan 2011; Andrew 2007; Farnsworth, Lichter, and Schatz 2009; Belt, Just, and Crigler 2012; Haynes 1998; Stevens 2006; Nadeau, Petry, and Belanger 2010; Aalberg, Stromback, and de Vreese 2012; Brookes
However few analyses have delved below the surface appearance of election news coverage to examine the underlying social processes that produce this form of reportage. Instead of reconfirming the critique that election news coverage lacks substance, this thesis provides a critical theory to explain why this is the case.

In what follows, I argue that the quality of election news coverage is undermined by forms of instrumental reason that mediate the social production of news. In everyday life, humans employ instrumental reason to achieve specific goals. This is commonly referred to as a means/end calculation: people tend to think of how to achieve a goal at the expense of considering why they are motivated to pursue said goal in the first place. In this sense, instrumental rationality describes the character of thought and action that treats objects as a means to an end. By examining the way people focus on the ‘how’ at the expense of the ‘why’ many critical theorists have sought to explain poor outcomes within social life.

In the context of election news coverage, instrumental rationality plays out within the logic of promoting political objectives through the symbolic resources of media. News of an election is produced through routine interactions between various professionals involved in political life – journalists, editors, publicists, political and economic elites, etc. Such interactions purport to efficiently deliver news of consistent quality and with regularity. This goal is achieved through news production routines that rely upon negotiated frameworks of rules that structure the way information is gathered and presented as news. These rules, however, belie fundamental tensions within the legitimizing role media play within socio-political life. Simply put, legitimation is “the act by which the right to be obeyed is conferred on a particular authority on the basis of its justifiability” (Pansardi 2013, 384). And in our society, the way media represent the structure of social power provides a logical place for powerful interests to gain legitimacy. Media, however, have their own need for legitimation, and this need does not necessarily coincide with the interests of dominant power. Media exist as a process of communication between public and private interests—they must work to preserve the relationships they maintain with both sources and audiences. This thesis examines this double bind as driving the representation of political life as a strategic game.
In effect, “the media are not the holders of power, but they constitute by and large the site where power is decided” (Castells 2007, 242). I explore the way the singular goal of publicizing an election is undermined to the extent that media represent the games politicians play as an end in and of itself. Research shows the abundance of cynicism within contemporary news discourse to be a primary reason why audiences find democratic processes less and less interesting (cf Cappella and Jamieson 1997). And this thesis delves into the social processes that make this the case. In short, I elaborate a model of election news coverage as the formal organization of politics around the imperatives of news production. This demonstrates how the media’s representation of the game of politics relates to the conflicting institutional logics that structure the way media and political actors interact as they produce a mediated version of electoral politics for public consumption. To some extent, these professional practices attempt to legitimate our democratic order, but they also work to legitimate the control these self-professed political experts maintain over the representation of public life. Accordingly, I have titled this project Manufacturing Legitimacy because I view the professional practice of promoting politics as becoming hollow to the extent that political life collapses into the strategic machinations of political and media elites as they seek to legitimate the roles they play within democratic politics. Ultimately, this thesis inquires into the ways instrumental rationality influences election news coverage. And I argue that a critique of instrumental reason can explain much about the contradictory way election news coverage supports democratic deliberation.

To make this argument, this thesis draws upon the critical theory of Jurgen Habermas (1971, 1991, 1984a, 1984b) because he has devoted extensive thought to the way instrumental rationality undermines the formation of political legitimacy. Scholars have long identified different concepts for political legitimacy as either a descriptive or normative quality that justifies the exercise of coercive power (Peter 2010). In short, action can be described as legitimate for the way it adheres to procedural codes; but for coercive action to feel legitimate it also must occur within the range of what people will believe to be acceptable behaviour – their norms and values. Habermas argues that both forms of legitimacy are ultimately founded in our ability to reason, which involves being able to independently validate claims through processes of dialogue unfettered by
structural imbalances. In effect, Habermas maintains people need to be able to understand the reasonability of authority for it to be seen as legitimate. And much of his work expresses concern for the way power in advanced capitalist society is increasingly legitimated through society’s dependence upon efficiency seeking systems that constrain opportunity for people to negotiate the terms of what is reasonable. In other words, Habermas argues that advanced capitalist society is undermining its very capacity for legitimation.

For the study of election news coverage, this understanding is crucial because it underscores fundamental contradictions that inform our mediated electoral politics: the increasing trend to seek legitimation through fidelity to formal processes impacts the capacity of a public to reaffirm shared meaning within democracy. In other words, the one-to-many promotion of democratic politics contradicts fundamental principles of free expression that are necessary for a public body of divergent and conflicting interests to be self-determining. Indeed, such a theme has long informed Habermas’s thinking on the role of communication within democratic life. Notably, his work on the refeudalization of the public sphere examined the infiltration of commercial interests into a discursive space where private individuals could engage in rational critical debate over matters of public concern (Habermas 1991). This structural transformation rendered a deliberative public as a managed resource from which political leaders could derive legitimacy through the use of marketing techniques that endow public authority with the prestige once conferred to royalty through the staging of feudal courts (Habermas 1991, paraphrased from Thompson 1995, 74). I employ Habermassian concepts in order to illustrate how democratic processes become fettered by strategic methods of marketing political authority.

Arguably, the crucial consequence of representing democratic power through strategic political communication, particularly during elections, may in fact be the systematic disenfranchisement of people from democratic life as their role in electoral politics is reduced to the group purchasing of a brand name government through the ballot box every few years. However, to better understand the effects of strategic communication upon a voting public, media research needs to take into account the underlying processes
that enable and constrain forms of political communication. And I suggest that Habermas’s critique of instrumental reason as applied to critical media sociology can help us account for the underlying processes that render elections as if they were some kind of game. To what extent, then, does instrumental rationality influence election news coverage?

Thesis Outline

To answer this question, I use Habermas’s categories of system and lifeworld to map the rationalization of political communication. This enables an understanding of the competing institutional logics that structure the way media practices relate to political life. In this, it is important to remember that the institution of journalism is not a neutral referee within the political process; it shapes and structures the character of public discourse. Arguably, politics is now largely media politics (Castells 2007); that is to say that the logic of media production comes to inform the logic of political practices. What many observe then as the strategic game of politics is the end result of a host of rationalized interactions between those involved in the production of electoral politics through the symbolic resources of media. Public discourse, as a crucial aspect of the contemporary political process, is then constrained by the rationalization of the political communication system. And this research ultimately aims to tease out the way instrumental rationality influences the production of strategic news frames.
Chapter 2 provides the groundwork for my analysis. I argue research can account for the way elections tend to appear as hollow, meaningless affairs through Habermas’s critique of instrumental reason (1984a, 1984b). I discuss how Habermas conceives of the means of system integration – money and power – to undermine the ends of social integration. I use this dialectic to analyze how systems of news production relate to audiences and sources. And I argue that current approaches in the study of frames and framing do not adequately take into account how this double bind effects the character of news discourses. I then suggest that frame analysis needs to reincorporate critical media sociology to contextualize framing processes within news production regimes. This shows how media frames mark the resolution of tension between stakeholders involved in the social production of news. And I elaborate this idea through a brief recounting of the contradictory tendencies that underwrite the social history of objectivity. Essentially, this chapter elaborates my theoretical framework.

I then provide a model of the professional interactions that mediate electoral politics in Chapter 3. Through field theory, I expand my Habermassian critique of the institutional logics that structure political communication. This clarifies the specific interactions of media and political professionals that create election news discourses. In doing so, I demonstrate that the framing of politics is a strategic game marking a struggle for political legitimacy between news media and political actors. This chapter relates the growing dependency between the fields of media and politics to the advancement of market forces that increasingly govern socio-political life.

Chapter 4 uses my critical theory to perform a case study of the frames found within the Globe and Mail’s coverage of the Canadian Federal Election of 2011. This election was largely informed by an issue relating to the legitimacy of coalition governments within parliamentary democracy. And the news discourse of the election serves as an example of the way political and media elites struggle over the principle of democratic legitimacy. By comparing the way journalistic and political actors represent issues over the course of the campaign, I find that election news coverage does represent substantive issues though they are subsumed into analyses of their use value within political campaigns.
Lastly, I conclude the thesis with a brief summary of some of my key findings contextualized within a discussion of some of the implications of this research.
Chapter 2 – Literature Review

Research, from communication related disciplines using a variety of methodological approaches, often finds that issues are displaced from public discourse by news coverage that focuses on the game-like elements of an electoral contest – the so-called horse-race, as measured through polls of public opinion as well as analyses of campaign strategy and resources. This finding is found again and again while the significance of the presence of strategy- or game-like elements is rarely explained beyond a normative critique. No doubt the displacement of issue coverage from election news coverage is problematic for democracy; but without a better accounting of the underlying social processes that produce this form of discourse, such a critique of election news coverage mistakes the part for the whole.

In this chapter, I argue the strategic framing of election news coverage can be explained through an accounting of the contradictory tendencies that underwrite the way media represent the structure of social power within a liberal society. I begin with a summary of the categories Habermas uses to critique instrumental reason – the system and the lifeworld (1984a, 1984b). This discussion will show the critical theory of Jurgen Habermas is particularly suited to the study of political communication precisely because he has devoted extensive thought to the way instrumental rationality undermines the formation of political legitimacy. Specifically, I unpack the way Habermas conceives systems of productive relations to have colonized everyday life thus leading people to objectify themselves and their relationships with each other. Habermas argues the increasing use of money and power in all social contexts undermines the capacity of society to generate legitimacy, and I will apply his theory to study the contradictory way election news coverage supports democratic elections.

After elaborating my theoretical framework, the discussion moves into an overview of current approaches to the study of media frames. I critique the way framing research theorizes power in narrow, positivistic terms that overemphasize the agency of individual actors, such as journalists and sources. I then suggest that a theory of framing power needs to incorporate the way critical media sociology understands news gathering.
routines as structural power relationships. Understanding the social production of news as such enables research to tease out the way journalism reproduces dominant frames to resolve the contradictory demands audiences and sources place upon media systems. To demonstrate this principle, I trace the way objectivity emerged in relationship to the commercialization of the press and the professionalization of journalism. This social history illustrates, in brief, the core contradiction elaborated throughout this thesis: how changes in the format of news were brought about by a combination of (a) new structural pressures and (b) changing cultural norms. Essentially, this chapter argues the character of political discourse was impacted by developments within the systems of money and power used by media institutions to gather and produce news.

**System/Lifeworld: Habermas’s Critique of Instrumental Rationality**

Habermas understands the contradictions of advanced capitalist society as rooted in the way “the rationality of science and technology has come to pervade the whole of our world” (Outhwaite 1994, 20). At the core of Habermas’s critical theory, is the idea that differing forms of reason have collapsed into a singularity – instrumental rationality (Ketchum 2004, 34). Reason, Habermas argues, has become analogous to a form of logic, which eliminates the “distinction between the practical and technical” (Habermas 1970, 113). And as society becomes increasingly rationalized there are stark consequences for the way social systems remain integrated.

For Habermas, the singular rationality of growing productive forces through technological progress threatens “the institutional framework [of society] and at the same time, set[s] the standard of legitimation for production relations” (Habermas 1970, 89). The issue, for Habermas, is that “controlled scientific technical progress” has become itself both a dominant productive force within society as well as the basis of legitimation for social power (Habermas 1970, 111). In effect, Habermas understands the rationality of science and technology as a kind of ideology that is “more irresistible and farther reaching”, though it does not express an idealized view of a “good life” in accordance
with a particular set of interests (Habermas 1970, 111–112; cf Held 1980, 264; cf Outhwaite 1994, 22). Habermas understands ideology as communication that is distorted by systems of money and power: “a discourse which has become a medium of domination, and which serves to legitimate relations of organized force” (Eagleton 1991, 128).

Central to this understanding (1984a; 1984b) is the idea that dialogue is fundamental to human interaction, and that dialogue is rooted in an “elementary structure” Habermas calls “universal pragmatics” – good faith principles of trust and reciprocity presupposed to arrive at a shared understanding of the world, or at least an understanding of the aspect of a shared world about which people can disagree (Hallin 1994, 35). And Habermas argues these principles are undermined as the rationality of science and technology pervades the way people tend to understand their shared world, their relationship to it, and their relationships with each other (Outhwaite 1994, 20). In short, Habermas conceives of power and money, the primary means of organization within advanced capitalist society, as distorting the primary, universal goal of pragmatic communication (the arrival at shared understanding) by steering interaction towards specific outcomes that are not necessarily contingent upon any form of understanding. Legitimacy – the sense that something is right and just – is a means to counter a deficit of understanding. And much of Habermas’s concerns about advanced capitalist society stem from the way he sees the integrative aspects of socio-political life being disrupted as people and institutions seek to legitimate relations of force through fundamentally illegitimate means. This relates to the way Habermas conceives of reason as having been transformed over the course of societal development.

Habermas sees our capacity to reason being colonized by instrumentality. As Dan Hallin notes, Habermas illustrates this by drawing on the Aristotelian distinction between techne – “the mastery of objectified tasks” – and praxis – “the realization of human potential” – to distinguish between technical and practical forms of knowledge (Hallin 1994, 19). For Habermas, these forms of knowledge correspond to two kinds of action, which are fundamental to social life: (1) strategic action, interaction with material existence predicated upon instrumental reason; and (2) communicative action, co-ordination of
human activity through negotiated frameworks of reciprocal expectation – moral/ethical reasons (Hallin 1994, 19). Habermas situates these forms of action within two aspects of modern life: (1) the system, relations of force predicated upon the instrumental control of external nature; and (2) the lifeworld, background knowledge oriented towards common understanding (Habermas 1984a; Habermas 1984b). Systems are rationalized. They are political, economic and social structures instrumentally organized to achieve specific objectives. Bureaucracies and corporations, especially news organizations, are examples of systems. Their organizational logic is characterized by efficiency, predictability, control, and continuity. According to Habermas, Strategic action within the system enables the attainment of goals with finite resources. Conversely, lifeworlds provide meaning for human existence. They enable the maintenance of social relationships through interaction. Lifeworlds are communicative. They represent culminations of communal experience that indicate standards of human conduct. This is accomplished through communicative action that enables common understanding of the different motivations that inform human activity.

Habermas regards both the system and lifeworld as crucial for healthy social evolution: the symbolic norms of the lifeworld regulate the material appropriations of the system; the system provides material sustenance to maintain the lifeworld (1984b, 154). A central problem that Habermas contends with, however, is the way the system and lifeworld are not only different from each other, but the tension between them as they further differentiate from each other as society develops increasing complexity (1984b, 153). Where Habermas locates multiple forms of rationality – aesthetic and moral – within the lifeworld, his concerns relate to the way instrumental reason has come to dominate the way people understand their daily lives and go about their various activities (Ketchum 2004, 34).

Habermas refers to the way instrumental rationality has come to inform the lifeworld as a process of colonization (1984b, 305). In this, Habermas identifies steering media, as symbolic and non-symbolic, and specific to the lifeworld and the system respectively. Symbolic media steer behaviour towards common understanding of how an individual relates to a group as well as how that relation informs an individual’s underlying
motivations – why someone would want to do something, or the affective response people have to the actions of others. This is what Habermas refers to as “value commitments” and “influence” (1984b, 257). The sharing of values, beliefs, and norms through communicative action influences behaviour of people in accordance to tacit standards of human conduct. Conversely, non-symbolic media – such as money – determine action for specific purposes. For example, if one purchases an item, the exchange between the customer and store clerk strictly relates to the payment of the marked price; any other discussion is unnecessary for the primary purpose of exchanging money for goods (cf 1984b, 264). Within the system world, money and power work to structure human action; their use is rationalized to produce specific outcomes.

For Habermas, the important distinction between symbolic and non-symbolic steering media is that the former is qualitative, the latter quantitative – one can count money or compare differing amounts of power; one can only describe values, norms, and beliefs (1984b, 272). As such, the symbolic, qualitative steering media of the lifeworld are in a contradictory relationship with the non-symbolic, quantitative steering media of the system. That advanced capitalism tends to replace the former with the latter helps us to account for the many problems endemic to modern society. Where communicative action enables integration through the fostering of a positive, affective dimension to social interactions, the substitution of money and power within the lifeworld makes possible a “a heightening of systemic complexity which becomes so hypertrophied that it unleashes system imperatives that burst the capacity of the lifeworld they instrumentalize” (Habermas 1984b, 155).

Such theory helps to explain how human activity is now oriented towards the perfection of techniques at the expense of consideration for standards of human conduct (Hallin 1994, 19). And Habermas regards this state of being as having stark consequences for the ongoing development of social life. In particular, system goals are prioritized over human needs – people are increasingly isolated from each other and unable to relate within what little remains of communal lifeworlds. In other words, humans become resources for systems that are increasingly self-sufficient. Any ability to arrive at mutual understanding is thus inhibited by systemic imperatives that dominate our daily lives. And our capacity
to create for communicative action is lost because colonizing systems logic impedes people’s ability to recognize mutual understanding as a worthwhile goal. As such, discourse primarily relates to practical considerations of the most effective means to attain *reasonable* goals (Hallin 1994, 19). This is what Ritzer (2004) refers to as the irrationality of rationality – systems creating order for the sake of order bereft of consideration for the meaning of human existence.

Following this brief overview of the Habermassian categories of system and lifeworld the discussion turns towards an analysis of how system world logics may affect the production of news and news frames. We begin with an introduction to the concept of strategic news frames and the historically contingent struggle for hegemonic control. We then move to a discussion of how journalistic work routines and the regime of objectivity are related to system world logics of money and power, while simultaneously providing the core legitimation for the journalistic profession and its service to the lifeworld.

**What are Strategic News Frames, and How Have They Been Studied?**

By way of introduction, “frames are principles of selection, emphasis and presentation composed of little tacit theory about what exists, what happens, and what matters” (Gitlin 1980, 6). People use frames to organize their experience of reality; frames are the idea through which information is rendered important (Goffman 1974). Put simply, frames are a “structure of expectation” (Tannen 1993, 13; cf Johnson-Cartee 2005). Frames operate as a schema, a rubric, a pattern, a formal structure that provides a necessary reduction of all the available information people receive so that they may be able to comprehend our perception of things. In short, frames influence the way people interpret reality. And many communication researchers have been interested in frames for the way they impact human decision making and thus human action.

Frames and framing thus share an inextricable relationship – even the term implies an “active process and result” (Reese 2001, 7). Frames are now considered a fundamental
aspect of human communication. And framing – the act of selecting an aspect of a perceived reality to make it more salient within a message (Entman 1993, 52) – is considered a strategic action undertaken by an actor seeking to manage expectations (Pan and Kosicki 2001). This has generated many implications for our understanding of news as a social practice. News is thought to be organized through media frames: “persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse” (Gitlin 1980, 7).

Many consider media frames to be the “imprint of power” that registers the relative ability of strategic actors to supply context for issues (Entman 1993; Tankard 2001). As Regina Lawrence (2010) remarks, “To study framing is to study power: the power to shape—and distort—public perceptions; the power to promote—or marginalize—competing perspectives on public problems; and the power, therefore to promote or inhibit the political goals of various societal groups” (P. 278). Vleugenthart and van Zoonen argue "that many authors fail to differentiate between content features of news (‘frames’) and process or contextual features of newsmaking and/or receiving” (Vleugenthart and van Zoonen 2011, 102). "Frames," in their view, "are part of a collective struggle over meaning that takes place through a multiplicity of media and interpersonal communication; draws from a range of resources, among which are news media and personal experience, and works out differently for particular individuals, groups and institutions” (Vleugenthart and van Zoonen 2012, 112). Put most simply, many consider a media frame to be “the idea through which political debate unfolds” (Pan and Kosicki 2001, 39-40).

The idea through which the debate of a contemporary election campaign unfolds is often described as a strategy and/or game frame. Such research draws heavily from two foundational works: Out of Order (Patterson 1993) and Spiral of Cynicism (Cappella and Jamieson 1997). Patterson (1993) identifies the tendency of election news coverage to use (1) strategy as a plot line; (2) polls as a scoreboard; and (3) candidates as performers vying for the attention of a spectating electorate as part of a “game schema” that renders “election news a less suitable basis for voter choice” (P. 60). Following Patterson (1993), many employ the game frame concept to study the ubiquity of polls use and/or the cult of
political personality within news reports. Similarly, Cappella and Jamieson (1997) critique what they regard as the “strategy structure of contemporary journalism”, which marks news reports with the following five features: (1) winning and losing as the central concern; (2) the language of wars, games, and competition; (3) a story with performers, critics, and audience; (4) the centrality of performance, style, and perception of the candidate; and (5) a heavy emphasis on polls, and the candidates standing within them (P. 33). Following Capella and Jamieson (1997), many employ a concept of strategy frame to analyze news that interprets the actions and motivations of candidates. Of course, many studies hybridize the two distinct concepts, and some have called for the standardized use of a “strategic game frame” concept (SGF) that synthesizes the most salient elements of strategy and game frames as two equal yet different dimensions of a larger macro-frame (Aalberg, Stromback, and de Vreese 2012). This is proposed as a way to improve cumulatively and comparability in quantitative research programs. I refer to this concept, here, for the way it clearly delineates the primary features of news coverage that focuses on the strategy- or game-like elements of an election. It should be noted, however, that such a conceptualization is problematic for the way it only considers the SGF within very narrow social contexts. Strategy is thus used in many contexts other than election news coverage, for example, military conflict, labour disputes, policy debates, and corporate competition.\(^1\) More problematic, however, is the way quantitative approaches tend to operationalize the SGF concept within a positivistic theory of power. Studies that have employed these kinds of concepts, such as Miljan (2011), tend to think of the frame as “the deliberate attempt of individuals or groups to structure public discourse in a way that privileges their goals and means of attaining them” (Hertog and McLeod 2001, 147). This idea of a message framer as a strategic actor representing a specific goal/interest is

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\(^1\) Arguably, strategy has always played a central role within political communication. Consider, for example, one of the oldest treatises on strategic political communication – *How to Win an Election* (Cicero 2012). This ancient guide for the politician is remarkable for the way it lays out the communication environment wherein political actors compete for political office, as well as strategies, both in the sense of oratory as well as identifying and recruiting the support of key power brokers within Roman society, which was composed of a stratified framework of conflicting classes, each with their own specific interests that often required conflicting promises. Communication to such publics required strong oratory skills as well as the strategic management of money and travel time to build a coalition of support within Roman democratic life.
common within much frames and framing research; however such a focus on agency discounts the way certain dominant frames, such as the SGF, appear as “relatively stable cultural structures” as they are “produced and shaped by the political economy of the society” (Hertog and McLeod 2001, 147).

The Power of Framing

As the SGF relates to the way power is represented within liberal-democracy, political communication research provides poor understanding of democratic processes if it does not do so from within a thoroughgoing understanding of power. Indeed, Vliegenthart and van Zoonen (2012) have recently called for future research into frames and framing to reincorporate sociologically grounded models of power. In doing so, however, they do not qualify how power has been operationalized within different traditions of media research. Here, I review the way critical media research theorizes power as structural relationships that prefigure the way action is enabled and constrained. This is in contrast to the pluralistic view of power as influence commonly employed by current frame analysis practitioners. Such an approach is certainly useful to operationalize the way power relationships influence (a) the production of news content and (b) its reception by audiences; however the turn to quantitative methods to analyze frame building and frame setting through studies of content and /or framing effects (Borah 2011), relies upon a theorization of power as observable forms of action. Power, as such, is understood as the capacity of A to influence the decision making of B through direct persuasion and/or indirectly constraining the available options of choice (Dahl 1957). Modeled around principles of coercion, such positivistic notions of power preclude the possibility that

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2 I am referencing Stuart Hall’s essay The Rediscovery of Ideology (1982) where he elaborates how the wide use of positivistic research methods regarded media as “largely reflective or expressive of an achieved consensus” (P. 61). Such an assumption amounted to a “moment of profound theoretical and political closure” that effectively installed “pluralism as the model of modern industrial social order” (Hall 1982, 60). Hall (1982) writes, “the democratic enfranchisement of all citizens within political society, and the economic enfranchisement of all consumers within the free-enterprise economy, would rapidly be paralleled by the cultural absorption of all groups into the culture of the centre (P. 61). In this model, media were thought of as largely functional for society for the way they underwrote a central value system; but such theory failed to take into account how media also tend to represent the resolution of complex socio-historic contradictions related to “class formations, economic processes, and sets of institutional power relations” (Hall 1982, 59).
power is also manifest within consensual norms and values that structure and thus constrain certain forms of action and/or thought.

Critical research identifies this consensual aspect of power. It understands power as the capacity of A to shape the “perceptions, cognitions, and preferences” of B in such a way that B “accept[s] their role in the existing order of things, either because they can see or imagine no alternative to it, or because they see it as natural or unchangeable, or because they value it as divinely ordained or beneficial (Lukes 1974, 24). In no small part, does this concept of structural power owe a debt to the way Gramsci (1971) theorized power as a dialectical relationship between consent and coercion. My understanding of how Gramsci defines hegemony is informed by Todd Gitlin, (1980) who writes, “hegemony is a ruling class’s (or alliance’s) domination of subordinate classes and groups through the elaboration and penetration of ideology (ideas and assumptions) into their common sense and everyday practice; it is the systematic (but not necessarily or even usually deliberate) engineering of mass consent to the established order (P. 253). And this “‘ideological’ model of power” (Hall 1982, 65) has been employed by critical media sociology to describe the social relationships that inform the process of news production.3

Critical researchers have paid a lot of attention to the way power informs the social relationships that ‘make the news’ – the routine interactions between journalists and their sources. Early work in this regard produced the primary/secondary definer model: the observation of Hall et al. (1978) that journalists and sources exist within a “hierarchy of credibility” where the opinion of powerful and privileged sources are structurally preferred for their assumed greater access to accurate and specialized information (P. 58; cf Becker 1967). Journalists thus play a crucial but “secondary role of reproducing the

3 The term ideology is fraught with difficulty, not in the least for the inconsistent way it has been used in scholarship to mean a combination of three things: “(i) a system of beliefs characteristic of a particular class or group; (ii) a system of illusory beliefs—false ideas or false consciousness—which can be contrasted with true or scientific knowledge; (iii) the general process of the production of meanings and ideas” (Williams 1977, 55). I use the term, here, for the way critical media scholarship has generally considered the “material social process of signification” as a link between the reproduction of “‘ideas’ and ‘theories’ and the ‘production of real life’” (Williams 1977, 70).
definitions” of their primary sources (Hall et al. 1978, 58). This model is often invoked to critique the way news reproduces the ideas, beliefs, and values of political economic elites as journalistic practice is constrained by production regimes instituted by corporate media organizations. Indeed, Gitlin (1980) concurs that such elite worldviews are imported into news as journalists seek practical strategies to mitigate the structural pressures of news production routines. Accepting the assumptions of editors and publishers and standardizing them as media frames satisfies, in part, the demand to publish quality news content in a timely manner. Elite worldviews are also further inculcated through the casual, social interaction of media and other elites who all “want to honor the political-economic system as a whole” as their “power and prestige deeply presuppose that [very] system” (P. 258-259). Through examining the relationships between journalists and their sources, critical media sociology has demonstrated that the perspective of “public, business and professional, upper-middle-class, middle-aged, and white male sectors of society” (Gans 1979, 61) tends to dominate the content of news media.

Critical media research often views the social organization of news work as an instrument in the production of social control. McNair (2003) refers to this as the “control paradigm” of media sociology (2003). From this perspective, news is considered to be a frame – a window to the world – constructed from the point of view of powerful and privileged interests (Tuchman 1978). This occurs as journalists systematically “over-access” elite opinion (Hall et al. 1978) through hegemonic news making routines that pull reporters “into the cognitive worlds of their sources” (Gitlin 1980, 270). Similarly to the way Gramsci (1971) described the production of common-sense, the control paradigm regards this preference for elite opinion as a vehicle whereby the ideas of the ruling class are propagated as the ruling ideas within society (cf Marx 1970). Critical media sociology explains that the characteristics of news—the dominant frame—is a by-product of the professional relationships involved in the news making process. Journalists reproduce the normative beliefs and assumptions of their often bureaucratic sources as they gather the information they need to report the news (Fishman 1980).
Critical media sociology has thus argued that the very process of news work tends to result in the exclusion of ideas inimical to the status quo. Journalists find relief from the structural pressures of news room production regimes by narrating official versions of the real (cf Compton 2004; cf Herman and Chomsky 2002). In studying how journalists cope with the rigours of providing an accurate account of events in advance of a deadline, Tuchman (1978) observes the way journalistic narration aims to produce a “web of facticity” from institutional/authoritative sources. This results in the objectification of social meanings so that they are “defined and redefined” as historical givens rooted in a particular way of doing things (Tuchman 1978, 196). Similarly, Fishman (1980) observes the way journalists orient their news gathering activities to be compatible with the “phase structure” of their source organizations. Through observation and discussion with their sources, journalists glean an understanding of not only the professional routines of their sources, but also the reasons professionals do certain things in particular ways. He relates this practice to the way news reports tend to represent and legitimate institutional priorities. Moreover, Ericson et al. (1987) observe the way journalistic measures of newsworthiness come to be informed by a normative understanding of the world gleaned from sources who are often located within bureaucratic institutions. Ericson et al. (1987) examine how journalists tend to visualize deviance from the normal order of things in terms of the common sense beliefs and assumption of their bureaucratic sources. They argue news upholds a normative understanding of existing power relations as journalists tend to focus upon singular instances of disorder, which consequently implies that recurring social problems may be prevented through better enforcement of the existing status quo.

This research is the foundation of the control paradigm. As it has theorized news to greatly impact our understanding of the world by reproducing the norms and values of organizational life (Tuchman 1980), the control paradigm has thus understood news to serve as an integral mechanism for the manufacture of consent to the social order (cf Marx 1970; cf Herman and Chomsky 2002). Such an understanding highlights how news represents fundamental contradictions within liberal society through the skillful use of media frames that, in the words of Gitlin (1980), do not violate
dominant hegemonic principles: the legitimacy of private control of commodity production; the legitimacy of the national security State; the legitimacy of technocratic experts; the right and ability of authorized agencies to manage conflict and make the necessary reforms; the legitimacy of the social order secured and defined by the dominant elites; and the value of individualism as the measure of social existence. (P. 270-271)

While retaining an understanding of the social practice of news production, critical media research has, however, moved away from the control paradigm as many now observe the challenges of maintaining top down control over the production of meaning. These challenges are indicated by the “the impact of real time news” and “the collapse of social deference towards elites”, which both relate to the “competitive pressures on media to deal in the new, the cutting edge, the transgressive, no matter who is involved, and no matter at what cost to public confidence in the institutions of traditional authority” (McNair 2003, 550). This suggests an information environment characterized by “unpredictability and instability rather than control and order” (McNair 2003, 549). This, Hallin refers to as the “anarchy of ideological production” – the idea that “[c]orporate control of the mass media does not guarantee that the media’s cultural products will consistently serve the interests of the capitalist system as a whole” (Hallin 1994, 31). In other words, the narrow economic interests of media corporations will not always be functional for the political interests of dominant power within society (Hallin 1994, 31). On the one hand, there are certainly moments when news media services the promotional needs of dominant power holders, but on the other hand there are also frenzied moments when news media comes into outright and open conflict with the goals of those same interests. 4 To understand the shifting way journalism represents power, Hallin argues that media researchers need a better understanding of the role and function of mass media within the structure of social power. And he suggests that media research can begin such an improvement by distinguishing between the production of legitimacy and the production of ideology. The key idea here being that “the ability of the media to support [the structure of social power] ideologically is limited by their need to maintain the

4 Consider, for example, the role of American mainstream media during the build up to the second Iraq war, as compared to the nearly contiguous exposure of the Abu Ghraib prisoner torture scandal.
integrity of the process of communication on which their own legitimacy depends” (Hallin 1994, 20). Indeed, Hallin argues that presenting news through strategic news frames resolves this underlying tension.

**Ideological Manipulation or the Pursuit of Legitimation?**

As discussed above, critical media studies often regards media as serving a legitimating function in liberal society by representing power through terms derived from dominant ideology. However, Hallin suggests research conceives of media’s legitimizing role as being pulled by two contradictory demands: On the one hand, news media gathers private information by maintaining sufficient mass appeal to be of promotional use to political interests; on the other, the ability of news media to widely disseminate information to a mass audience largely depends upon the degree to which journalism maintains credibility by appearing as independent from the interests of power holders. In essence, the promotional service media provide to dominant interests may, at times, be at odds with the public service journalism provides to a democratic society. And Hallin (1994) proposes that media research can understand this double bind as being mitigated, in part, by media’s “focus on questions of strategy, effectiveness and technique” (P. 25). By playing the role of a “disinterested professional”, the “detached realism” journalists use to describe events enables the appearance of providing professional analysis without “touch[ing] directly on conflicts of interest or clashes over the ends and values of political life” (Hallin 1994, 25 emphasis added).

This form of news presentation is what Hallin has termed the “technical angle” – the “tendency to frame and analyze events in terms of strategy and tactics, success and failure” (Hallin 1994, 21). He regards this tendency to be a distinctive characteristic of contemporary journalism as a form of political communication (Hallin 1994, 22). The wide use of a news angle that selects and emphasizes strategy as it describes socio-political life as a kind of game enables journalism to function within the structure of social power even as journalism is expected to make power more transparent on behalf of the public interest (Hallin 1994, 21). Where I have so far been discussing election news
coverage in relationship to the strategic game frame, Hallin would regard such a narrative structure as an example of the technical angle that does more than hollow issue coverage from election debate; it marks the resolution of a long standing tension that continues to structure journalistic output to this day. In what follows, here, I trace the emergence of this tension in the 1900s through the rise of commercial mass media and the development of the professional ideology of objective journalism.

Commercialization, Professionalization and the Rise of Objectivity

In its earliest incarnation, journalistic objectivity was simply the strict separation of fact from value. Objectivity developed as the commercial mass marketed press began to displace earlier forms of news printing characterized by the publishing of partisan viewpoints (Hallin 1994, 22-24). Where contemporary newspapers are expected to be unbiased in a political orientation, such partisan presses were hardly neutral as they were largely funded by private interests for the express purpose of supporting the policies of conflicting political parties. At the turn of the 20th century, however, new firms found commercial success by adopting a business model geared towards selling large quantities of cheaply priced newspapers to working class urban residents who were attracted to a diverse array of news topics, such as crime and vice as well as financial information (Spencer 2007, 73). Of course, the mass production of newspapers was to some degree spurred by advances in steam printing technology as well as the drastic drop in the price of news print – down to $36 per tonne in 1900 from $344 in 1866 (Spencer 2007, 72). Nevertheless, it was the attraction of new audiences that proved to be the most significant development for the nascent commercial press (often referred to as the penny press). Publishers realized their newfound audience attention could be sold to business interests through advertising (Schiller 1981). The penny press thus compensated for a loss of revenue from drastically reduced pricing of daily newspapers by selling access to their readership.

The commercialization of newspapers thus created new demands upon the press system. On the one hand, audiences expected the free press to safeguard against abuses of power. Indeed, yellow journalism – a mode of journalism that emerged in this era – tended to sensationalize scandals as a strategy to attract readership. However, such journalism
could alienate powerful political and economic interests that media outlets sought to develop for support in the form of advertising revenue and support in the form of information for its readership. As the penny press assumed a dual role as overseer of public life and profit seeking firm, the accuracy of a report developed as a key point of compromise between the stakeholders of commercial news publishing: journalists, as an occupational class; editors, as responsible for the credibility of the publication; publishers, as interested in the generation of profit from the enterprise of news making; sources, as interested in having their perspective promoted through news content; and audiences, as interested in learning of events taking place in the wider world. While objectivity purports to represent events as ‘truth’, its emergence as a news norm afforded two major advantages to a press system that was transitioning in its form and function: it provided a liability shield for journalists and publishers who exposed abuses of power within public life, even as it served as a standard of quality for both audiences and advertisers to distinguish between the news products of different media outlets (Schiller 1981). In effect, the advent of objectivity was a practical strategy to manage the new expectations and liabilities of commercial news publishing.

Objectivity thus came to be a technical standard of news presentation for the way it constrained the ability of journalists to make claims they could not prove. As a result, journalists have tended to stress the performative qualities of the quotes they gather. A report can misrepresent a fact providing it is factual about whose opinion is being represented. Moreover, journalists will often balance any such opinion with a conflicting viewpoint. This offers a means of hedging the accuracy of a report without having to guarantee any information as entirely factual. To be objective, rather, is to provide balanced and substantiated opinion that covers a reasonable range of versions of events.

The development of objectivity also responded to the limited resources journalists are provided to conduct their work. Media organizations have hierarchical structures that place constraints upon the resources allotted to news workers to gather, produce, and disseminate information as a finished news product – i.e., tight deadlines, but also space in terms of word counts. In response to the constant pressure to file accurate, balanced and quality reports, objectivity was adopted as a guiding principle within an emerging
professional ideology that helped news workers rationalize what is and what is not news, and how to present information as such. This development enabled journalism to assert autonomy within corporate bodies that were growing in size and complexity (Schudson 2001). Objective journalism has since established considerable purview over the newsworthiness of information—indeed the credibility and legitimacy of news is predicated upon the independent judgment of journalists even though this ability is bounded by the editorial dictates that establish standards of quality and the dictates of publishers that mandate efficiency. Objectivity is now a strategic ritual of formal procedures for news gathering and reporting that purports to reveal the real as truth; but it is not normal nor is it natural. It is a socially constructed system of seeing and describing the world, which developed in response to the institution of news production regimes brought about by the commercialization of the press (Tuchman 1972; cf Hackett and Zhao 1998, 82–106).

This brief history demonstrates how tension between the structural pressures and cultural norms of news publishing were to some degree resolved by the development of journalistic objectivity. This is important to understand because this underlying tension continues to inform the production of news to this day, especially news of elections. Of course, objectivity has continued to develop in relationship to both new cultural norms and new demands upon the institution of media. The more elaborate history of objective journalism is perhaps too much to detail in this thesis. Suffice it to say that where journalistic objectivity began in the 1930s as the strict separation of fact from value to then include the “separation … between fact and interpretation” during the 50s and 60s (“the heyday of ‘straight’ journalism”), objective journalism now involves an air of “detached realism” that analyses conflict in technical terms – what Hallin describes as the technical angle of modern journalism (Hallin 1994, 24). Nevertheless, the key point being made here is that the technical angle – the way contemporary, objective journalism frames political life as a strategic game – marks the resolution of contradictions that stem from the way the commercialization of the mass media and the professionalization of journalism “transformed not only the institutional structure of political communication but also the structure of discourse itself” by establishing new “standards of truth and of the writer’s proper relation to the audience” (Hallin 1994, 24).
The Scientization of Journalism

Many analysts agree that the ubiquity of objects such as the strategic game frame [SGF] is problematic for the way they undermine public knowledge of political life. However, with the exception of Hallin (1994), few have offered a holistic explanation as to why the SGF is so commonplace. As argued, here, this is because studies using a frames and framing approach rely upon a pluralistic theory of power that overemphasizes the agency of strategic actors. More attention needs to be directed at the underlying social forces that enable and constrain action towards certain predictable outcomes – such as the wide use of narrative devices that represent the complexity of democratic elections as a drama of winners and losers.

In drawing the links between the commercialization of the press, the professionalization of journalism, and the development of objectivity I have shown how the use of strategic news frames resolves a fundamental tension within the legitimizing role media play in socio-political life. Media exist as part of a network of social relationships between active human subjects who maintain different stakes in the outcomes of political communication (Hallin 1994, 32). In this sense, addressing political matters as a technical expert – a detached observer disinterested in the outcomes of political debate – enables media to preserve their social relationships with both audiences and sources as they bring transparency to political life. Similar to the concerns expressed by researchers who study the effects of the SGF, the consequence of this mode of news presentation may very well be the way journalism conveys “to the public a conception of politics and of their own political role that strongly discourages active political involvement” (Hallin 1994, 20). However, before this discussion can address the merits of this assertion, let alone its implications, a more comprehensive analysis of the process underwriting the development of the technical angle is needed.

As the preponderance of pluralist research into frames and framing has yet to offer a theoretical framework that can account for the way contradictions are resolved through the exercise of structural power, I have unpacked the Habermassian theoretical framework Hallin (1994) used to trace the tension stemming from the commercialization of the press and the professionalization of journalism—developments he sees as parallel
to the rise of “science as a cultural paradigm against which all forms of discourse came to be measured” (Hallin 1994, 25). Indeed, Hallin understands the technical angle to be representative of the “scientization of journalism” – a term he draws from the work of Jurgen Habermas to describe the way moral/practical concerns are transformed into technical problems (Hallin 1994, 33–34; cf Outhwaite 1994, 21; Habermas 1970). This is a function of the way capitalism tends to universalize “[strategic] action and the standards of discourse and knowledge that correspond to it” (Hallin 1994, 19). Such theory helps to explain how “questions come to be framed as essentially technical or strategic questions, questions of the most effective means by which a given end can be attained.” (Hallin 1994, 19). This understanding of how objectivity provides the core legitimation for contemporary journalism will inform later chapters, but first this chapter concludes with a review of key points from the above discussion.

Discussion

Habermas’s theory of communicative action has been widely criticized for the way he idealizes dialogical face-to-face communication. His theory of pragmatics provides little consideration of the way human interaction actually unfolds in historically contingent public milieus (Compton 2004, 147). It also provides scant consideration of the way technology enables quasi-interaction across space and time (Thompson 1995, 87–100). Moreover, Habermas’s notion of a singular and communal lifeworld, and the communicative action generated there, suggest a concept of an amorphous public of total involvement, which is problematic for the way publics are to some degree self-constructed as they operate within fields of power relations (McLean 2012, 40). Though Habermas rightly locates the act of communication as constitutive of a public, “individuals are not confined to membership in one public; they may choose to invest symbolically (and materially) in a plethora of publics, engaging each other to a greater or lesser extent” (Maclean 2012, 41). There are complex nuances to social reality that are problematic within Habermas’s ideal scenario of public interaction.

Nevertheless, on a macro-level of systems analysis, Habermas’s critique of instrumental reason provides insight into the contradictions of advanced capitalist societies. Where his treatment is problematic on the micro-level of actually existing interactions, field theory
can provide more specificity to the way systems logic steers the professional interactions between media and political actors. Such interactions are what ultimately drive the representation of political life as a strategic game. There are, however, a few key points that bear summarizing here before elaborating such a discussion in Chapter 3.

Firstly, Habermas’s critique of instrumental rationality demonstrates how systems lay claim to a form of rationality that subsumes other forms of reason. He postulates that human interaction is grounded in communication processes; but as these processes become rationalized, that is to say as they substitute goal attaining logic for the expression of shared values, the integrity of the communication process—good faith—is undermined. For Habermas, communication is essential for human action, not just in terms of coordinating things to do and how to do them better, but also in terms of establishing underlying reasons for doing, or not doing, such things in the first place. This relates to a second key point: Habermas argues that advanced capitalist society is undermining its need for legitimation. As the system colonizes the lifeworld, that is to say, as money and power (objectified relations of force) become the primary means of interaction, people lose the capacity to make independent assessments of social action. Legitimacy is a communicative value, and it is generated through dialogue as people understand why something is just and right – why it is reasonable. Money and power offer no such opportunity for shared understanding; they can only steer human behaviour towards predetermined outcomes. Moreover, no amount of money and power can make up for a deficit of legitimacy, which is essentially qualitative. For Habermas the impossibility of solving life-world problems using system world logic is “one of the principal contradictions in modern liberal democracies” (Outhwaite 1994, 177).

Ultimately, this inability to generate legitimacy reveals a third key point: the relationship between forms of action and forms of knowledge influence the discourse characteristics of society.

Capitalism tends to universalize strategic action thus leading human inquiry to focus on “questions of the most effective means by which a given end can be attained” (Hallin 1994, 19). Practical issues relating to standards of human conduct come to be framed as technical problems that have rational solutions to be found through science and
technology. The scientization of practical issues becomes crucial for systems that lack other means to affirm the moral or ethical reasons for their continued support. Governance within advanced capitalist societies thus tends to assume technocratic forms whose legitimacy depends upon the effectiveness of administrators to maintain or improve the capacity of the system to achieve its goals. Accordingly, discourse pertaining to matters of public concern comes to assume a “peculiarly negative character” as “it becomes oriented towards the avoidance of risks and the eradication of dangers to the system” (Held 1980, 264) while also conveying a tacit message about “the nature of politics and the citizen’s relation to it” (Hallin 1994, 20).

These points have many implications for understanding the way media relate to the structure of social power within advanced capitalist societies. Having earlier discussed the idea that a media frame is the imprint of power, Habermassian theory helps illustrate how a media frame is not simply the direct result of actors’ intentions for the form and substance of news content. Like other critical theorists, Habermas shows us how power comes to bear upon human practices as indirect relations of force, especially in the context of distinct fields of professional activity. His theorization of the way systems means rationalize lifeworld ends provides a unique perspective into the institutional logics that come to bear upon public communication. To some degree, framing public life as a strategic game resolves certain inherent tensions within the professional relationships of media and political actors. Thus, reporting on politics and government tends to appeal to the way systems logic supports the formal, descriptive aspects of political legitimacy even as the system impedes the lifeworld’s potential for generating a common understanding of what it means to be legitimate.
Chapter 3 – Mediated Politics

Having elaborated Habermas’s understanding of the system and lifeworld in chapter 2, this chapter explores how social actors in the journalistic and political fields negotiate system and lifeworld logics. This enables an understanding of the competing forms of systems logic that structure the social relationships between journalistic and political actors. While Habermassian theory is particularly useful to demonstrate the impact of instrumental rationality on a macro-level analysis of the development of a whole social system, his theorization does not serve as well for a micro-level analysis of the social interactions between the professionals who make the news. Accordingly, I employ field theory (Bourdieu 2005; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1996; Compton 2004; Couldry 2003; Champagne 2005; McLean 2012) to illustrate the rationalized interactions between media and political actors.

By conceiving of actors within fields – “distinct areas of social practice complete with their own hierarchies and rules” (McLean 2012, 30) – this chapter makes two interrelated points: (1) how the logics at play within each field relate to distinct bases of social power; and (2) how the differentiation between these forms of power results in a form of struggle as actors work to legitimate their specific professional activity. In this sense, the relationships between the fields of media and politics is (partly) constitutive of the field of power – a more, abstract field of fields wherein all actors compete for the ability to impose a legitimate vision of the social world (McLean 2011, 35). As elaborated, here, this struggle results in what some have come to describe as “mediated politics” (Compton 2004; cf Castells 2007). That is to say, the “workings of the political system are staged for the media so as to obtain the support, or at least the lesser hostility, of citizens who become the consumers in the political market” (Castells 2007, 240). Using Blumler and Gurevitch’s model of a political communication system (1995), one can describe mediated politics as the product of intense interactions between “political institutions in their communication aspects” and “media institutions in their political aspects”, which results in the “communication-relevant aspects of political culture” taking on a highly strategic character as the “audience orientation towards political communication” is assumed to be one of active engagement (P. 14). This assumption – that information
“automatically enhances democracy” – is functional for journalistic and political actors; they both rely upon an ‘ideal theory of democracy,’ which belies the self-serving aspects of mediated politics: the way “[p]owerful political organizations are good at depriving the citizenry—as well as journalists—of information that might reduce their own power,” and the way journalists assume “that the news they choose on commercial grounds is [itself] sufficient to create informed citizens” (Gans 2003, 60–61). Nevertheless, the term mediated politics describes the current state of political life as “political discourse is increasingly mediatized, while media discourse is predominantly marketized” (Chouliaraki 2000, 293). It is a “new kind of publicness” – what Thompson (1995) describes as “the non-localized, non-dialogical, open-ended space of the visible in which mediated symbolic forms can be expressed and received by a plurality of non-present others” (P. 245). And as elaborated in what follows, mediated politics is the rationalized interactions of journalistic and political actors as they play a strategic game “using the scarce resources of economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital to represent differentiated political and social interests” (Compton 2004, 142).

This model of mediated politics shows how political culture takes on a particularly insular quality where journalistic and political actors engage in a form of struggle over access to, and control over, information displayed for public consumption. Gilsdorf and Bernier (1991) summarize this problem well, “where once the site of the [electoral] contest might have been the mind of the voter, the first line of struggle has now shifted to the contest between the journalist and the candidate’s advisers for control of the campaign agenda and the interpretation of events and statements” (P. 1).

To introduce such a model, I provide a brief overview of field theory to describe how the fields of media and politics relate within the field of power. In doing so, I elaborate the rationalized interactions between journalistic and political actors as a form of struggle, which in the theatre of electoral politics is resolved through the dramatization of political life. This idea is then contextualized within a discussion of some of the social forces that are driving mediated politics. Just as Hallin proposes that media researchers understand the technical angle in relationship to commercialization and professionalization, I suggest that a nuanced understanding of the character of our contemporary mediated politics will
take into account the way neoliberalism\(^5\) is shaping the environment of political communication. Ultimately, this chapter elaborates the professional practices that produce strategic communication during elections.

**Fields of Power: The Cultural Production of Mediated Politics**

Media and political professionals are goal oriented actors who work within distinct social fields of interaction.\(^6\) Social fields, according to Bourdieu, are structured spaces of position, wherein the social position of actors can be determined statistically by the amounts of symbolic, cultural, and/or economic capital at their disposal as they “compete for legitimate appropriation of what is at stake in the field” (Bourdieu 2005, 44). Within a field, individual actors struggle to maintain or transform this balance of forces (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1996, 76). This struggle over capital is the “central motivator” for a “group of actors who have an arranged collective stake in setting and maintaining the specific rules that govern a field” (McLean 2012, 35).

For each actor within a field, action is predisposed, in part, by an individual sense of “how to act in any given social context or situation” (Compton 2004, 138). This sense – what is referred to as habitus – “is both structured by given social contexts and structuring, in the sense that it helps to reproduce and incrementally change the social order by giving social actors a practical sense of how to act—i.e., a feel for the game” (Compton 2004, 138). It is this feel – their shared stake in the ends of political life – that provides a basic framework of rules for media and political actors to play out differing

\(^5\) My understanding of neoliberalism is informed by David Harvey (2005). He views current forms of capitalism as largely informed by an “assumption that freedoms are guaranteed by freedom of the market and of trade” (Harvey 2005, 7). Such theory in practice has resulted in various states mounting political projects that curtail government programs and regulation while instituting reforms that enhance globalization, commodification, and financialization. At its core, neoliberalism views consumer choice within markets as the natural state of democratic governance.

\(^6\) As defined by Bourdieu (2005) “a field is a field of forces within which the agents occupy positions that statistically determine the positions they take with respect to the field, these position-takings being aimed either at conserving or transforming the structure of relations of forces that is constitutive of the field” (P. 30).
and potentially conflicting roles as they represent electoral politics within media discourses.

Such rules stem from distinct practical logics particular to different fields of action. In this, it is important to bear in mind that such logics are “more than strategies or logics of action as they are sources of legitimacy and provide a sense of order and ontological security” (Thornton and Ocasio 2008, 108). Nevertheless, the systems logic employed within the fields of politics and media are geared towards the accumulation and deployment of distinct forms of power (what Bourdieu theorizes as forms of capital), which require differing species of legitimation. Blumler and Gurevitch (1995) provide the following distinction: “whereas politicians derive legitimacy from the authority of the causes they espouse, the degree of consensus among the interests they articulate and public acceptance of the procedures by which they have been chosen to represent such interest, media personnel are legitimated chiefly by their fidelity to professional codes” (P. 18). To some extent, this distinction is conditioned by the differing power bases of the fields of media and politics. On the one hand, political organizations approach media as a venue to promote claims to represent the universal interest of the public. On the other hand, media organizations engage politics through a claim to be the neutral arbiter of truth on behalf of the public. Where political power stems from the ability to articulate interest and mobilize “social power for purposes of political action”, media power springs from the capacity to interpose “between politicians and the audience and to ‘intervene’ in other political processes” (Blumler and Gurevitch 1995, 12-13). And as the fields of media and politics share a capacity to influence the public, interaction between the two has greatly intensified because what is at stake is the very means to legitimate a vision of social reality (McLean, 2011, 35). This results in a tension—a kind of struggle—over the legitimacy of information, which is to some degree resolved through media discourses that focus on the strategic and game like aspects of political life. To elaborate this point, however, the analysis needs to examine more closely, and separately, the specifics of each field that constitute mediated politics.
The Field of Politics

The primary goal of the political field is to win a claim about the nature of the social world (Bourdieu 2005, 39). Compton argues that this goal is met by a promotional logic that renders political practice as a strategic performance (Compton 2004, 137-165). This performance is “constitutively connected to struggles over the definition of reality” and the dramatic narratives so deployed involve “the exercise of power and the attempt to legitimate that power” (Compton 240, 150). This performance is most obvious in the context of election campaigns, which provide a means to legitimate democratic governance (Edelman 1964). And this primary goal can be seen in the way “elite groups are as concerned to use the news media in order to manage communication with other rival elites as they are keen to manage public opinion through the mass media” (Davis 2007, 73). In effect, the political communication strategies of political actors are often designed to compete against claims made by political opponents. There is, therefore, a tension between political legitimation and the communication strategies used by political actors to exert control over the representation of political narratives and information.

The Field of Media

In the field of media, the logic of practice “obeys a political function on the one hand – the creation of a societal consensus – and on the other, a market function, which subordinates public information to entertainment” (Chouliakari 2000, 305). This is what Champagne refers to as a “double dependency”, and it stretches the legitimacy of the field of media around two poles: (1) standards of moral and intellectual rigour as established by the field of media to generate symbolic profits, what he refers to as internal legitimacy, and (2) mass appeal/recognition – external legitimacy, the ability to influence public opinion – that enables media to convert its symbolic capital into economic capital (Champagne 2005, 58–59). This double dependency contributes to “a production logic characterized principally by intense competition and speed” (Champagne 2005, 53).

At the most basic level, the strategic interest of journalists is to publish a report that will maintain or increase their capital within the journalistic field. In a simple sense,
journalistic actors compete to ‘break’ news because such attention consolidates their position within the field thus further enabling continued success. Consider, as well, that sources seeking promotion are more likely to divulge information to journalistic actors who have parlayed such internal legitimacy into employment with respected media institutions. The constant demand to publish fresh, quality news, however, may conflict with the strategic interests of their sources depending upon the activities they wish to promote through mass communication (Compton 2004). In this respect, objectivity provides a set of rules of impartiality that enable journalists to investigate stories without antagonizing their sources, and in response, being denied access to information. Objectivity thus informs the logic of journalistic practice within the field of media, as well as the field’s relationship to a broader system of social relations, including the public. It is a framework journalists use to negotiate with their sources for access and control over information intended for public consumption (Ericson, Baranek, and Chan 1989). In this sense, objectivity is a kind of pre-emptive strategy for journalists to counter the information management strategies employed by their sources even as it enables the retention of credibility with their audience.

The Field of Power

The relationship between the field of politics and the field of media belies a tension between the political realm’s need for publicity, and the media’s need to avoid being construed as an instrument of public manipulation. Because both fields are able to derive forms of legitimation through interacting with each other, there is a growing dependency between them: media recognition confers a form of legitimacy upon political activity even as news media can garner legitimacy through exercising an independent ability to provide nonpartisan transparency to the operation of power. Nevertheless, the distinct bases of social power available to both fields results in a “struggle over the legitimate principle of legitimation and the legitimate mode of reproduction” (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1996, 76).

Such conflict between fields can be fierce because of what is at stake: the ability to produce and impose “a legitimate vision of the social world” (Bourdieu 1990, 120, qtd in Maclean 2011, 35 italics in original). And Bourdieu sees this competition as playing out
within a more abstract field—the field of power—“a system of positions occupied by the holders of the diverse forms of capital which circulate in the relatively autonomous fields which make up an advanced society” (Bourdieu interviewed by Wacquant 1993, 20). In this field of fields, a competition for legitimacy plays out in which, following Couldry, media power may be viewed as a form of meta-capital that social actors use to legitimate their competing claims on social life (Couldry 2003, 667). Thus, within the field of power, the strategic game of mediated politics provides a framework of heightened success for its players. Access into the game depends in part on their accumulated capital within their respective fields, but it also depends upon their readiness to play – their ability to perform predictably, “with consistency and without arousing surprise or disappointing people’s expectations, the role assigned to them by the structure of the space of the game” (Bourdieu 1991, 179 cited in Compton 2004 138-139). In many ways, then, mediated politics is constituted by strategic performances that “produce the appearance of political authority by controlling the representation of political power” (Compton 2004 139). This dynamic has “produced an enduring tension between political performance and public opinion,” which is resolved, in part, through the dramatization of political life (Compton 2004, 139).

Mediated Politics: Neoliberalism and the Modern Media Campaign

Field theory illustrates the strategic game of mediated politics as a complex web of relationships between actors operating according to the logic of practice distinct to their respective fields. Within the field of power, this results in intense struggle between the fields of politics and media over the legitimate vision of the social world. To the extent that this struggle is insulated from the public they both claim to represent, neither can generate legitimacy through communicative action in the lifeworld. As a form of interaction between the fields of media and politics, mediated politics is instead structured by a promotional logic that represents a convergence of “economic and symbolic synergies” that increasingly subject news to “rational organization and control”
(Compton 2004, 5). And to elaborate this process I will contextualize this analysis within a discussion of some of the forces driving the production of mediated politics.

The promotional logic of mediated politics results from “a long and complex historical process involving the development of new technology, the process of capital accumulation, state regulation, and competing social interests” (Compton 2004, 143). Bourdieu writes, “[t]he process we are witnessing at the present time is one in which the forces of commercial heteronomy, incarnated by the most commercial television, are progressively gaining ground to such an extent that all fields … are governed by what could be called an ‘audience rating mentality’” (Bourdieu 2005, 43). This caters to the way neoliberalism conditions our experience of the socio-political world by transforming the contemporary media environment through deregulation and convergence. Similarly to the way chapter 2 elaborates the emergence of objectivity in relationship to the commercialization of the press and the professionalization, I use the remainder of this chapter to tease out some of the forces of “commercial heteronomy” that drive mediated politics. These are not the only major forces shaping the mediated landscape of contemporary politics; however they are some of the most salient and hence crucial to understand for the way they intensify the structural pressures impacting the political communication environment. In essence, the modern media campaign is an event that is in many ways characterized by speed – a relentless pace of planned messaging combined with rapid responses of counter information. Just as the technical angle responded to a contradiction between the structural pressures and cultural norms of news production, this dynamic can be seen to continue to play out in the struggle between the modern media campaign and the contemporary newsroom as both vie for control over the public’s opinion of an election – a tension that is ultimately resolved in the way journalism focuses on the drama of the strategic game of mediated politics.

**Technology, Speed, and Virtualization**

Advancements in media technology enable our experience of social life in dislocated space and discontinuous time. New technologies have sharply increased the “speed and frequency of these symbolic experiences” (Compton 2004, 144). And this changes the language of mediated politics. It is now largely built through images that personalize
politics “around leaders that can be adequately sold in the political market … [by] a message of trust around a person, around the character of the person, and then in terms of the image projection of this character” (Castells 2007, 242). This emphasis on performing personality fits in well within the 24/7 media environment of advanced capitalist societies. As there is increased pressure on journalists and politicians to make use of communication technologies, “to be more cost-efficient and produce quantitatively more with less,” political communication becomes more “virtualized” – that is to say, “more ‘symbolic’ than ‘substantive’ based on ‘thin’ rather than ‘thick’ communicative links, built on ‘flexibility’ and ‘abstraction’ in place of ‘craftsmanship’ and ‘specialist knowledge’ (Davis 2010, 121–122). The public personality of political actors thus “becomes a prime resource to be contested and struggled over”, especially “where there are fewer and fewer ideological differences between political parties” (Compton 2004, 141).

Political life is increasingly “mediated through marketing and promotional strategies” so that it may be subject to rational forms of control “by political, social and commercial interests” (Compton 2004, 141). In short, by focusing on the visual aspects of political life, political and journalistic actors are able to quickly invoke visceral responses to political narratives.

Convergence, Deregulation, and Media Production

Concomitant to the advancement of communication technology is a wave of convergence and deregulation. “Media firms press to get larger” to eliminate risk and generate vast profits within concentrated and controlled media markets (McChesney 1999, 16). This enables the harmonization of activity for “once-distinct news organizations … in both the journalistic and business realms, in different media markets, [and] even across distinct media (especially newspapers, TV and Internet),” while public governance over media concerns is, at the same time, increasingly relegated to “market forces that transcend regional and national boundaries” (Skinner, Compton, and Gasher 2005, 8). This transformation incentivizes the institution of new flexible labour regimes that use temporary labour pools of news-workers. This, in turn, alters the news gathering capacities of newsrooms and results in a decreasing emphasis on investigative journalism.
As news organizations close news bureaus and reduce staff overall, newspapers become increasingly reliant upon reports from newswires (Edge 2011). This, moreover, contributes to shifts in the format of news presentation. Punditry costs less than reporting. As a result it has become more commonplace. And this trend is most evident in cable news presentation formats, which are organized around on-screen reporters who are supported by smaller production crews anchored by a news center staffed with regular commentators (Blumler and Gurevitch 1995, 122–138). Combined with the rising popularity of on-line news, which multiplies media choice and thus intensifies the pressure upon news workers to file reports, these developments can be understood as primary drivers within the contemporary media environment that gives rise to the 24/7 news cycle (Prior 2007).

Neoliberalization of State Regulation

Underwriting this trend of convergence and deregulation is the growing impact of neoliberal capitalism. This consolidation of economic power has prompted many changes in state regulation, especially the governance of elections. In the United States, the 2010 Supreme Court ruling on Citizen’s United v. Federal Election Commission effectively equates media purchasing power with free speech. Although it should be noted that American jurisprudence has long equivocated constitutionally mandated free speech protections within the doctrine of corporate personhood (Ruggles 1994). Canada differs from this emphasis on ‘free speech at all costs,’ in that Canadian election law maintains a “principle of political equality [as] central to the concept of democratic government” (Stanbury 1991, 6). Accordingly, as Stanbury notes, Canadian regulation of political expenditures has historically been mandated to “make more equitable the competition for political office by ensuring that the ability to raise money does not play too great a role in electoral outcomes, and by seeing that there is a substantial degree of equality among

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7 Stanbury (1991) remarks further: “Political equality is more than the right to vote; it necessarily includes the right of all adults to stand for election. It is almost immediately obvious that those with more economic resources will have an advantage over candidates not so well endowed, other thing being equal” (P. 6).
candidates and parties in respect to their ability to communicate with and persuade voters during election campaigns by limiting campaign expenditures” (Stanbury 1991, 7).

Where the *Election Expenses Act* of 1974 embodied notions of equity, openness, and participation (Stanbury 1991, 7), the *Canada Elections Act* of 2000 (CAE) has since moved towards a regulatory framework that mandates equitable access in terms of rates charged for a “certain amount of prime time air space available during federal election campaigns for purchase by registered and new political parties” (Gidengil 2008, 60). While the CAE attempts to maintain the Canadian tradition of political equality by binding political parties to specific election spending limits, broadcasters are “free to sell extra time to a party, provided they do not refuse to sell it to others” (Gidengil 2008, 60).

These changes in Canadian electoral regulation mark a significant shift away from the historic Canadian policy objective of ensuring equality by limiting the role of money in electoral politics, towards the more American model that emphasizes fundraising because it mandates equal access to paid advertising. Perhaps the most prominent example of such a shift is reflected in the way the CAE now allows third party spending to promote political viewpoints. Of course, this shift is only a matter of kind if not (yet) degree: third party contributions are restricted to three thousand dollars, even after the constitutionality of this limit was challenged by Stephen Harper in 2004 while using arguments not dissimilar from those made in support of Citizens United. Nevertheless, the regulatory framework of the CAE does now reflect the growing importance of money in the mediated politics of Canada.

**The Modern Media Campaign**

As outlined by Bennett, this confluence of money, power, and technology enables new developments for political campaigning. Firstly, campaign financing gradually moves “parties out of line with the majority of voters”. Such money helps fund the importation of scientific techniques to “compensate for content deficiencies by targeting key groups of voters who respond to manufactured, test-marketed images in sufficient numbers to tilt the electoral balance.” Ultimately, these developments enable the crucial objective of media management – a key goal for “campaigns already mortgaged to financial backers
and image makers” (Bennett 1992, 6). This convergence of money, marketing methods, and techniques of media control has transformed the modern election campaign into, essentially, a campaign of media management.

In the modern media campaign, there is “an array of communication vehicles” at the disposal of “political actors engaged in an election campaign” (Maclean 2012, 47). Advertising techniques are often employed to provide strategic information directly to the public. To some degree television advertising is the hallmark of contemporary forms of mass political communication, however communication in the form of flyers and email are often used to target specific audience segments (Pfau et al. 1990; Basen 2009).

Advertising is, of course, expensive; but there are also significant costs from employing consulting firms and media professionals to craft their message (Jamieson 1992). As the modern media campaign costs considerable amounts of money, political parties have compensated by integrating fundraising efforts with strategic communication practices. Message campaigns, now, solicit financial support even as they inform party members of issues. Indeed, there is a new level of integration within the messaging of a campaign as messages are also used to drive traffic to branded and themed online information resources – “internet sites that outline virtually every aspect of a party’s campaign position” (Maclean 2012, 47) – that also serve to collect donations and membership fees as well as sell memorabilia to party supporters.

The modern media campaign thus requires a new level of co-ordination. It is now standard practice for political parties to manage such a vast array of strategic communication methods from within political war-rooms. They monitor the whole of an election campaign, and are oriented towards the rapid deployment of information and counter-information in response to the issues that arise on any given day (McLean 2012). On top of being a central monitoring point for all the media, they also co-ordinate a calendar of events that structure the modern media campaign – door knocking campaigns, public meet and greets (McLean 2012, 47), and especially the pseudo-events of a campaign designed explicitly to earn media by plugging into the routines and procedures of news gathering (cf Boorstin 1964). Such free coverage is “the most coveted channel
for campaign communication” as it is “perceived to carry much more weight than many full blown advertising campaigns” (McLean 2012, 47).

Political war rooms are now the nerve centres of the modern media campaign. They work to earn positive media attention (and mitigate potential communication disasters), while also negatively influencing the credibility of political opponents (McLean 2012, 47). In short, the modern media campaign is explicitly designed to appropriate the resources of media. The strategic game of mediated politics begins in the war rooms of political parties “with the attempt to slip partisan positions into the public debate by developing journalists as surrogates” (Maclean 2012, 48). Indeed, “operatives who practice strategic political communication regard journalists as resources for partisan use” precisely for the way it conserves campaign resources for other uses (Maclean 2012, 47). This changes the dynamics of the political field: political strategy is now predicated upon plugging into news making routines.

In summary, the pre-packaged nature of the modern media campaign is designed to fit into the rhythm of the 24/7 news cycle. This makes it easy for news rooms to produce their news packages with a minimum of resources. However, this dynamic is not without its own response from the field of media.

**Covering the Modern Media Campaign**

News organizations adapt to the modern election campaign by adjusting their news coverage to call attention to political strategy. While elections are lauded as events that legitimate democratic governance, they also provide news organizations with an opportunity to promote themselves as key players in that legitimation process. Accordingly, news organizations will often embed a reporter to cover the movements of a campaign. This greatly improves consistency in campaign coverage as journalists are able to report on the goals of a campaign through close observation and interaction with campaign staff. However, such intimate involvement with campaign machinery can create a tension as political operatives establish boundaries around the information they will provide to a journalist in an attempt to control the narrative of a campaign. And as
campaigns provide less information for journalistic actors to draw upon, there is a tendency for journalists to focus explicitly on such strategies of message control.

In short, a journalist’s experience of a campaign tour is greatly dependent upon the decisions of political strategists. By analyzing the way they are subjected to forms of rational control, journalists are able to differentiate their campaign reporting in terms of their relative capacity to interpret the motivations of political actors. This prompts journalists to investigate alternate angles on the stories being provided to them by their sources. And this prompts political actors to feed journalists counter information to disrupt the messaging of rival campaigns. Journalists are thus provided an experience that lies bare the ends and means of political strategy. As a result, journalistic discussion of issues becomes increasingly cynical as they are construed by political parties as managed resources.

Indeed, all this is reflected in the way media commentary on election campaigns often analyze a candidate’s war chest – not only in terms of its relative size, but also in terms of the relative success of a campaign’s fundraising strategy, and the way a campaign chooses to deploy its financial resources in terms of where it is buying advertising and where campaign events are being held. And as the pace of the campaign combines with the pressure to meet deadlines, the technical angle provides a simple rubric to structure news reports. News coverage of a campaign thus tends to be couched in a question of how effective political strategy is at winning the ground game fought over public opinion.

**Discussion: The Dramatization of Political Life**

The modern media campaign and news coverage of it results in the dramatization of “a political world beyond the everyday experiences of people while simultaneously offering explanations, admonitions, and reassurances for social problems” (Compton 2004, 148). Drama, as Compton notes, “is constitutive of the process by which cognitive maps are constructed and used by individuals and social groups to assess social life and to make sense of the seeming chaos of the modern world” (Compton 2004, 149). In the theatre of mediated politics, actors are “characterized using a binary code of the sacred and profane” – as either “democratic/antidemocratic, trustworthy/deceitful, or populist/elitist,
ally/enemy, etc. (Compton 2004, 149). Thus, certain narratives of political life are favoured over others. Such emphasis on deviance satisfies both a political actor’s need to find a means to mobilize public support, and a journalistic actor’s need to “demarcate the boundaries of acceptable behaviour through entertaining narratives” (Compton 2004, 150). This principle of deviance helps to explain the way actors are characterized within mediated politics.

As discussed above, this tendency is driven by professional struggle situated within particular socio-historic circumstances. Mediated politics is, in this respect, a function of the way political and journalistic actors influence the way they each go about doing their work, which creates friction at the boundary of each class of profession. Such conflict is then manifest in the way the fields of media and politics vie for control over the legitimate range of political controversy, especially during elections. Accordingly, political discourse tends to focus upon the ‘insider’ aspects of the games political and media actors play.

In a Habermassian sense, such practices have no real legitimacy as the public is systematically excluded from public discussion and decision making processes. The one-to-many flow of mass communication disables the deliberative function of the public sphere, which collapses into a petty world of image creation and opinion management. To some degree, framing politics as a game provides a colloquial device that is more familiar than the complex, formal procedures of the political process. However, the use of this device assumes audience members are interested in relating their experience of everyday life to this kind of professional activity. Moreover, the consequence of describing politics as such is that it conveys to the public a conception of their role in the game of politics, and that is one of a spectator excluded from playing any role beyond casting a ballot. The fields of media and politics thus engage in a hollow performance of democratic discourse that the public observes as the strategic game of mediated politics.
Chapter 4 – Frame Analysis of the Canadian Federal Election of 2011

This thesis argues that instrumental rationality is at the core of a tension between the normative and structural roots of media-political power. And, moreover, the resolution of such tendencies results in what many observe to be the displacement of issues from election news coverage through the use of media frames that emphasize the strategic-and/or game-like elements of an election – what some analysts have come to refer to as the “strategic game frame” (Aalberg, Stromback, and de Vreese 2012). This chapter tests this proposition through an analysis of the Globe and Mail coverage of the Canadian federal election of 2011. We begin with a brief review of the critical theory elaborated through chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis.

Review of Concepts

Where pluralist framing theory conceives of frames as registering the success of strategic actors to structure discourse in ways that privilege their primary definitions (cf Entman 1993; cf Vliegenthart and van Zoonen 2011; cf Pan and Kosicki 2001), I have, in chapter 2, argued that such understanding places undue emphasis on the agency of the individual in a framing contest by situating the production of frames within very narrow social contexts. Such theory does not adequately explain the way strategic media frames (cf Gitlin 1980; cf Hallin 1994) appear as frequently as they do, and as relatively static discursive objects over time. This can be corrected by the synthesis of critical theory with framing theory. And this thesis argues a critique of instrumental reason can explain much about the interests that maintain stakes in the ends and means of political life.

Accordingly, I have elaborated Habermas’s conceptualization of system and lifeworld (Habermas 1984a; Habermas 1984b) to illustrate the contradiction between the means of material reproduction (money and power) and the ends of symbolic reproduction (social cohesion). Systems are founded upon goal attaining logics predicated upon maximizing predetermined outcomes through strategic action; lifeworlds are shared spaces where people arrive at common understanding through day to day interactions (what Habermas refers to as communicative action). As the former “colonize” the latter, that is to say as
the accumulation of money and power becomes the primary goal of social life, society loses its capacity to foster shared norms and values.

This results in a contradiction in the way society forms political legitimacy. Systems lay claim to legitimacy to the extent that their procedures create predetermined outcomes; however, to the extent that systems colonize the capacity for communicative action—the ability to reason why something is right/just—lifeworlds are unable to generate a sense that the output of such systems are legitimate. In other words, the value of social systems is systematically distorted by the wide use of money and power throughout the contexts of social life. To compensate for this deficit of legitimacy, social actors working within the system logic of a specific social field tend to emphasize fidelity to procedural codes as a strategy of legitimation. Instrumental rationality thus results in a tendency for public discourse relating to standards of human conduct to be framed in terms of the most effective means by which a ‘rational’ solution can be applied to technical problems (Hallin 1994, 18–20).

Such rational solutions, moreover, are increasingly represented in the form of elite opinion, which belies an internal competition for the ability to “impose a legitimate vision of the social world” (McLean 2012, 35). Chapter 3 uses field theory (Bourdieu 2005; Champagne 2005; Wacquant 1993) to elaborate the dynamics of this struggle within a system of political communication: a framework of media and political institutions whereby information relating to matters of public concern is made available for public consideration (Blumler and Gurevitch 1995, 12). Briefly summarized, here, I view institutional actors to be structured in fields of social relationships and predisposed towards performing certain roles in accordance with logics of action geared towards increasing one’s capital within their given professional context (Compton 2004, 137–139). In certain instances, especially that of election news coverage, political and journalistic actors can accumulate such capital through strategic actions that make use of the resources available to each other’s field (Maclean 2012). In a very simple sense, the institutional logics of each field become increasingly homologous: political actors make use of a journalistic actor’s capacity to reach a mass audience; journalistic actors make use of the information available to political actors to attract an audience.
In conjunction with the development of neoliberal capitalism (see above pages 37-40), the professionalization of such instrumental interactions results in an increasing dependency – what some have come to refer to as mediated politics (Compton 2004, 142–146; cf Castells 2007, 240): an intensified arrangement of relationships between elite actors from the fields of media and politics. This shared capacity to influence public opinion is conditioned by a confluence of power: political power stems from the ability to articulate public interests to mobilize popular support, whereas media power draws upon the ability to interpose between the powerful and the public (Blumler and Gurevitch 1995, 12-13). However, as media increasingly becomes the space where political power is represented, conflict ensues as the fields of media and politics maintain an interest in legitimating their distinct fields of professional activity. Stemming from certain enlightenment values (cf Thompson 1995), such legitimation occurs in differing ways in liberal democratic society: political power is legitimated to the extent that it appears to represent public sentiment, whereas media power is legitimated to the extent that it appears to be independent from power holders. Accordingly, political and journalistic actors struggle over the “legitimate principle of legitimation” within a structure of relationships across social fields – what field theorists refer to as the field of power (Wacquant 1993; Couldry 2003; McLean 2012).

The social production of election news coverage is thus conceived as a struggle between strategic actors each seeking to obtain disparate goals from political communication. In short, mediated politics is largely a function of two distinct logics of action: (1) the deployment of strategic communications purported to preserve a political actor’s intended effect upon an audience as it is relayed through the symbolic resources of media; and (2) the reliance upon journalistic codes of news gathering and presentation that select and emphasize certain information so as to retain credibility with both sources and audiences. What many then observe as the strategic game of mediated politics is the interplay between conflicting-yet-homologous logics of action that both stem from the rationalization of the political communication system.

In sum, such theory posits instrumental rationality to engender forms of professional interaction that undermine the ends of democratic life (free choice in matters of public
governance) as elites vie for control over election news coverage (the means of
democratic deliberation). In essence, issues appear as displaced from election news
coverage as the professional practice of producing electoral politics through the symbolic
resources of media belies a struggle between distinct fields of professional actors that
stems from the contradictory roots of media-political power. On the one hand there is a
normative basis to publicizing issues. In our liberal society, the power of media is in
many ways predicated upon the valorization of public discourse – the idea that in a liberal
society the free discussion of issues enables democratic deliberation over the moral
direction of social development. In Habermassian theory, such moral reasoning is
affirmed through communicative action (symbolic reproduction) within the lifeworld. On
the other hand, there is also a structural basis to media power in that media provide
opportunity to access a mass audience. Within a system of political communication, the
strategic use of money and power is geared towards publicizing information purported to
procure specific material outcomes. As these contradictory tendencies collide within the
public sphere – the point of intersection between the system and lifeworld – one can
observe their resolution in a tendency for electoral politics to be framed as a strategic
game. Such a trope fulfills the normative tenets of journalism (as rooted within the
lifeworld), even as it enables the functioning of journalistic practice within the
organizational structures of media corporations and the networks of source relationships
they maintain (as rooted in the system).

For what follows, two key points are important to bear in mind. Firstly, issue coverage is
not seen so much as displaced from election news coverage but rather that coverage of
issues, when they are represented, is seen as structured according to the logic of political
and media systems. For journalists, the representation of issues, especially those not
handled in the strategic communications of their sources, is a means of maintaining their
interests in electoral politics; for political actors, the representation of issues, or rather the
presentation of solutions for issues they choose to represent, is a means of mobilizing
public support for the interest they maintain in the outcome of an election. As these
interests come into conflict, struggle ensues over the agenda of democratic debate. This
relates to a second key point: competition for the ability to impose a “legitimate vision of
the social world” is most fierce at the outset of the campaign, and remains so for as long
as the “legitimate principle of legitimation” remains undefined (McLean 2012, 35–36). Thus in theory, one would expect to see a greater diversity of media frames at the beginning of the campaign; however, as the symbolic terrain of an election becomes more fixed as the campaign wears on, the tendency of news coverage to “frame and analyze events in terms of strategy and tactics, success and failure” (Hallin 1994, 21) becomes more pronounced.

Given all of this, one would expect to see a number of things within election news coverage: (a) an emphasis on strategy over issues; (b) issues being represented in terms of their use values for various social interests; and (c) a greater diversity of issue frames at the outset of the campaign, as compared to more focus on who is winning/losing as the ‘game’ comes to a close. With this in mind, how then do strategic media frames obtain in the Globe and Mail coverage of the Canadian Federal Election of 2011?

**Why coverage from the Globe and Mail?**

My study focuses on the Globe and Mail’s coverage of the Canadian federal election of 2011. The Globe and Mail (referred to hereafter as the Globe) is Canada’s “self-declared national newspaper” (Klaehn 2002, 302). It is also a major agenda setting publication in Canada. Magder writes, “[f]or better or worse, the Globe and Mail is Canada’s newspaper of record … it is the one newspaper read and (clipped) by most of the country’s top political officials” (Magder 1997, 343). Moreover, after having been the subject of a merger with Bell Canada Enterprises in 2001 and then subsequent acquisition by Woodbridge Company Ltd in 2010 (Edge 2011), the Globe exemplifies certain trends (as outlined in chapter 3) within the contemporary media landscape of Canada. For such reasons, the Globe was chosen as a representative newspaper that purports to cover issues of national interest. This is similar to the rationale used by Hermann and Chomsky (cf 2002) in their study of the *New York Times*.

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8 The slogan of the Globe and Mail is “Canada’s National Newspaper”. 
Why the Canadian federal election of 2011?

At the root of the Canadian federal election of 2011 (referred to hereafter as CFE 2011) was a question of political leadership, which informed a debate about the nature of parliamentary democracy. A primary issue in this regard was the legitimacy of a potential coalition within Canada’s system of government. Please note, this study is not concerned with the way people perceived a potential coalition, or an issue about a coalition to be legitimate; but rather, how the actors made claims about the legitimacy of coalitions. For the way various social interests made use of various ‘controversies’, this study focuses on this election as an exemplar to demonstrate the tendencies outlined above.

Still, without survey research, it is impossible to know the exact motivations behind the claims being made in the context of this election. Nevertheless, those claims represented within the discourse can be unpacked and compared with the historical context that did in fact inform this election. To begin, one needs to understand Canada’s system of government and how it relates to political struggle in the immediate run-up to the election. Accordingly, the next section digresses briefly to illustrate the backdrop for what informed the CFE 2011 before moving into a discussion of my methodology, which is then followed by an analysis of news content.

Background to the Election: Canada’s System of Government

As a democratic constitutional monarchy, “the Canadian parliamentary system is based on the British prototype” (Franks 1987, 4), namely a “Westminster-style” model of parliament (cf Russell 2008, 120–128). In practice, this means that Canadians elect representatives to a portion of the legislative branch of government: the House of Commons (typically referred to as the House in common parlance). The party leader most likely to command the confidence of the House is then called on by the Queen’s representative, the Governor General to serve as Prime Minister (PM). By matter of

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9 Senators are appointed to the senate by the Governor General – the Queen’s representative – upon the Prime Minister’s recommendation. Traditionally, the Senate serves “as a so-called ‘chamber of sober second thought’” for legislation passed in the House (Russell 2008, 113).
historical convention this is typically the leader of the most dominant political party (Brooks 2007, 234). The PM then appoints a Cabinet of ministers from the legislature to execute the legal powers of government. This Cabinet constitutes the executive branch of Canadian government, with the PM being the chairperson of Cabinet. As the traditional head of government, the PM is responsible and accountable for the discharge of executive privilege in accordance with the Constitution of Canada (Brooks 2007, 233–235). Under the doctrine of responsible government – the safeguard against the abuse of executive powers – Cabinet is ultimately “responsible and accountable to parliament” and therefore “must have the support of a majority in parliament” (Bonga 2010, 8 quoting Franks 1987). This means that “Parliament, and particularly the House of Commons is consequently the highest source of legitimacy and authority of (Canadian) government” (Bonga 2010, 8, quoting Franks 1987). In other words, both Parliament and Cabinet require the express confidence of a majority of representatives sitting in the House to function in accordance with the constitution of Canada.

Immediately prior to the election of 2011, the House of Commons of Canada’s 40th Parliament was composed of 143 members of the Conservative Party of Canada (CPC) led by Stephen Harper, 77 members of the Liberal Party of Canada (LPC) led by Michael Ignatieff, 47 members of the Bloc Quebecois (BQ) led by Gilles Duceppe, 36 members of the New Democratic Party (NDP) led by Jack Layton, 2 representatives who were independent of any party affiliation, and 3 vacant seats. As is consistent with parliamentary tradition in Canada in situations where no party has a majority of seats in the House (in this case 155), the CPC, being the largest caucus of representatives, were afforded royal assent to form the executive branch. In theory, this minority government would maintain confidence “by winning support for its program from enough opposition members in the House to avoid defeat on measures important to it” (Russell 2008, 7). In practice, any loss of confidence would result in one of two consequences: “Either the Prime Minister may request that the governor general dissolve Parliament or the governor

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general can under certain conditions call upon the official opposition to govern if it demonstrates viable support of the House” (Bonga 2010, 8-9).

Such viable support would need to be informed by an agreement between two or more parties to form a coalition of support for a Cabinet composed of multiple parties. These “are usually formed when a large party that has a plurality in the legislature but not a majority offers cabinet positions to members of one or more smaller parties whose support will give the coalition government an overall majority” (Russell 2008, 7). Such agreements are generally the exception in Canada - there has been only one coalition government in the parliament's 146 year history (Russell 2008, 9-10). However, coalitions are far more common in other countries that employ a parliamentary system of government. Indeed, through a survey of “several independent studies”, Strom (1990) observes that “in a large sample of the world’s parliamentary democracies, minority cabinets account for about one-third of all postwar governments” (P. 8). To some degree, this is because the very process of forming a parliamentary government “requires coalition building of some sort” (Strom 1990, 24). Thus the duration of minority cabinets in many ways depends upon how parties choose to deal with each other, and the character of such governments – historically speaking – tend to be “defined by the relationship between the legislative and executive branches in parliamentary democracies” (Strom 1990, 2).

In this instance, the relationship between the legislature and the executive branch was openly hostile and antagonistic. Within two weeks of the House being seated on November 18th, 2008, the NDP, LPC, and BQ produced an accord to form a coalition. The plan was to form a government following a defeat of the Conservative government through a vote of non-confidence scheduled for December 5th 2008 (cf Bonga 2010; cf Miljan 2011, 569). This vote, however, was frustrated by the prorogation of parliament – the first of many controversies to mark the Stephen Harper led government. Such controversies include a second prorogation, the opaque dismantling of the long-form census, ministerial interference into access-to-information requests, amongst many other scandals and allegations of impropriety. Eventually, this culminated in a majority vote finding the Prime Minister in contempt of parliament – an unprecedented event in the
history of Canadian parliament. Subsequently, the CPC lost a confidence vote on March 25th when they could not pass a budget bill in the House of Commons. On March 26th 2011, the governor general called for new elections thus bringing to a close Canada’s longest running minority government.

From the very outset of the CFE 2011, the parties had framed the election as a contest over the legitimate exercise of government’s executive authority. The name of the game would be who is to be the Prime Minister of Canada. And the strategic communications of the main political actors – the party leaders – would relate to their claims about why they should be the most powerful elected representative in the country, and/or why the other leaders shouldn’t. Accordingly, this election can be viewed as a framing contest between political leaders over the legitimate principle of leadership, even though it is important to bear in mind that such claims were heavily scrutinized by the journalists covering the campaign who would, in a secondary capacity, call into question the legitimacy of any such claims.

Method

To begin this research, I read though the entire Globe’s coverage of the CFE 2011 on microfilm to gain a preliminary understanding of the news content as well as the news layout. The idea here was twofold: (a) to approximate how a reader would learn of the election through the printed version of the Globe; and (b) to observe which news frames structured the reports over the course of the campaign.

To measure media frames, eight consecutive days from the first and last portion of the election were chosen for coding to provide a data set of manageable-yet-sufficient size that would be representative of the election coverage as a whole. This would create two samples I could use to compare frequencies of different types of frames between the beginning and ending of the campaign. Eight days were chosen to provide a full week’s worth of the Globe’s coverage in each of the two sample sets as well as one day on either side of the election period to include the day prior to the election writ being issued and the day after voting. Such a breadth would include important aspects of the election news
coverage within the overall sample: the set-up of the stakes of the election, and the final results of each campaign.

To populate the sample, news reports were identified as part of the campaign coverage by searching for the keyword “election” within the Thomson Gale periodical database. Results of the search were then read carefully to filter out articles that covered happenings in municipal, provincial, and foreign politics, as well as other forms of governance that involve elections and voting (i.e. shareholder meetings) that did not in some way come to bear on the CFE 2011. Only articles that made overt reference to the campaign would be included in the data set. These were typically marked by a headline or sub headline that referenced the election, a political party, candidate, or riding; reading the first paragraph would provide further clarity as to the article’s primary focus. Articles were excluded if they only made a passing reference to the campaign as part of a backdrop for another story. Put another way, only articles that clearly attempted to elaborate the significance of an event within the overall campaign were included in the study. The primary measure being whether there was a device that would key the reader into associating the article with the overall election coverage. A bibliography of the news articles examined by this study is provided in Appendix 3.

To delineate between news frames, articles were coded according to the “strategic game frame” rubric used by Aalberg, Stromback and de Vreese (2012). As discussed in Chapter 2, they have proposed their coding instructions as a standard model to improve consistency in the way research measures media frames in election news coverage. They posit the strategy frame, as identified by Cappella and Jamieson (1997), and the game frame, as identified by Patterson (1993) as “two equal but separate dimensions of an overall macro frame” (Aalberg, Stromback and de Vreese 2012, 178). The strategy frame is observed when news content is organized around the strategies and tactics employed by political actors to obtain goals within an electoral (or other political) contest, which may include interpretation of their motives for “actions, positions, or behaviours” (Aalberg, Stromback, and de Vreese 2012, 178). The game frame is observed when news content is organized around the narrative of winning or losing, and may be marked by sports/war analogies within discourse pertaining to polls of public opinion, speculation on
elections outcomes, and/or episodes won or lost within the overall campaign (i.e. debates) (178).

Specifically, Aalberg, Stromback, and de Vreese (2012) observe two sets of four indicators to measure the extent to which framing pertains to game-like elements – references to “opinion polls, election outcomes, winners and losers, and the language of sports and war” – and/or strategy-like elements – references to “campaign strategies and tactic, motivations and instrumental actions, personality and style, and the role of media in the political process” (P. 173). Such distinction, Aalberg, Stromback, and de Vreese argue, mitigates a subjective approach employed by many frame analysis practitioners (cf Tankard 2001; cf Hertog and McLeod 2001; cf Reese 2001), which can lead to poor intercoder reliability when trying to identify which frame “dominates in a news story” (Aalberg, Stromback, and de Vreese 2011, 178, italics in original). As their rubric provides clear points of demarcation between the strategy- and game-like elements of election news coverage, it is used here as a “standard model” of dominant news frames. Strategic game frames were counted in 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” (Aalberg, Stromback, and de Vreese 2012, 178). Issue frames were counted in stories focused “on issues and issue positions, on real-life conditions with relevance for issue positions, and on what has happened or what someone has said and done to the extent that it deals with or is depicted as relevant for the political issues” (Aalberg, Stromback, and de Vreese 2012, 178). In short, the data was coded for the presence or absence of 8 indicators to provide a basis for assessing the dominant frame of an article as either strategy or issue. The full coding rubric is included as Appendix 1.

Articles were also classified as either news reports or editorial/commentary. Editorials and commentary provide opportunity for the explicit representation of journalistic point

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11 Letters to the editor were systematically excluded from the study.
of view, which isn’t immediately apparent in news reports that tend to focus on the facticity of information provided by primary sources.

Summary

I have elaborated a theory that views election news coverage as a struggle between the fields of media and politics over the “legitimate principle of legitimation”; correlating types of frames with types of articles will provide insight into how journalists work to influence the agenda of a campaign as secondary definers: i.e., those who provide comment and opinion on current events. News reports are thus considered to cover events in relationship to the campaign, especially the strategic communication efforts of primary sources (typically provided by political actors in the context of campaign events). Editorials and commentaries are considered as a journalistic, secondary definition; they offer opinion on the state of current events. The distinction between reports and editorial/commentary resides in whose opinion is privileged within the text – sources or journalists.

By applying this method to test the above theory, I expect to find the following in the Globe’s coverage of the 2011 Canadian Federal Election: (a) more strategic game frames than issue frames throughout all the campaign coverage; (b) a tendency for issues frames to be more frequent in editorial and commentary more game as compared to news reports; and (c) more issue frames in the first week of the campaign coverage as compared to the second week of coverage.

Statistical Overview and Frame Analysis

In all, I coded 216 articles. The full table of coded results is included as Appendix 2. The following summarizes the findings and elaborates their significance. As quantitative measures only illustrate broad tendencies abstracted from any social context, the analysis of these measures will be augmented by discussion on the actual topics that informed the Globe’s coverage.
Frequency of Strategic Game Frames Compared to Issue Frames

Table 1: Dominant Frames in GM Coverage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dominant Frames in GM Coverage</th>
<th>Distribution of Framing Indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frame Type</td>
<td>Indicators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SGF</td>
<td>polls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue</td>
<td>outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>win/lose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>war/sports terms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>strategies/tactic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>personal motivations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>personality/style</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>role of media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>479</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As expected, the strategic game frame (referred to hereafter as the SGF) was the most frequent framing device; it was the dominant frame for 70.37% of the Globe’s coverage analyzed by this study.12 Interestingly, strategic elements were more common than game-like elements, as much of the Globe’s coverage focused on the public personae of the party leaders. This related to the way journalists tended to interpret the strategic actions of the party leaders through a reading of their personality, which resulted in speculation as to the outcome of the election based on a journalistic assessment of the quality of the party leader’s public performance. Indeed, throughout much of the Globe’s coverage, there was a tendency to regard the public personae of the party leaders as campaign resources that could influence public opinion depending on how effective a candidate was at conveying their point of view. I demonstrate this through a series of brief synopses of the way the Globe profiled the party leaders of the major, national parties of English Canada.13

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12 It was not possible to test the reliability of this finding by comparing results between differing coders as this was only an MA thesis.

13 While the GM did provide coverage of the BQ and Green party, this coverage was not as extensive as that provided to the major, national parties of English Canada. For the purpose of brevity, they are thus omitted from this analysis.
Harper: Command and Control from Inside the Bubble

The Globe’s coverage portrayed Stephen Harper as relentless in his pursuit of a majority. He is described as willing to say anything to achieve this goal. For example, Barrie McKenna’s report of March 28th, “Dominance of Coalition Chatter Betrays an Embarrassing Truth”, described Harper’s use of “the word ‘coalition’ 21 times” at a campaign event as part of a strategy to present the election “as a choice between the stability of the Conservatives and a dangerous coalition” (McKenna 2011a). This was but one prominent example of a kind of message discipline Harper is seen to practice in his campaigning efforts – what is referred to as the “bubble campaign”, which involved a series of rules established by the CPC that restricted media and public involvement at various campaign events. Such tactics were seen by Globe reporters to insulate Harper from any unscripted moments with the press, which enabled the CPC’s campaign to speak about the issues it wanted to talk about at the times it wanted to talk about them (cf Chase, Baluja, and Taber 2011).

Journalists, however, tended to react against such attempts to control the narrative of the campaign by reporting directly on the strategy (cf McKenna 2011b; Ibbitson and Chase 2011). Indeed, and as will be discussed in the next two sections, journalists contested Harper’s claims about coalition governments by publishing articles that directly contradicted Harper’s claims. They would also report on episodes in the campaign that demonstrated the unsavoury aspects of his campaign tactics. The negative coverage of the profiling and ejection of a student from a campaign event in London, Ontario (Chase 2011) is one example of how the Globe called attention to CPC campaign tactics. Such reporting on the so-called bubble campaign related to the way Globe reporters found Harper to be widely disliked by Canadians. Indeed, early on in the Globe’s coverage, there is reference to a poll that represents the way “many people trust Harper less than they did a year ago,” which is attributed to a general issue relating to numerous episodes of questionable parliamentary ethics (Ibbitson 2011a). Nevertheless, Harper is found to be effective in his attempt to frame a “coalition of losers” as “reckless” as part of a strategy to transform the issue into a “wedge” between “two camps, with one party (the CPC) on one side and the other parties on the other (Chase et al. 2011).
As much as the bubble campaign strategy was disliked by Globe reporters, they nevertheless interpreted the tactics in relationship to his “calm demeanour” and disciplined approach to electioneering” (Ibbitson 2011c). Despite the untrustworthy quotient, these qualities were regarded by the Globe as political acumen. And Harper was afforded a peculiar form of credibility as he made campaign promises that “voters want to hear” even if “it is not what they need” (Carrick 2011). Within an “unremarkable and disappointing election campaign,” this ultimately resulted in an endorsement for Harper and the Conservative Party of Canada as the “best positioned to guide Canada” (“Facing up to Our Challenges” Globe and Mail 2011d).

Ignatieff: A team effort going nowhere.

From the very outset of the election, Michael Ignatieff’s campaign was represented in the Globe’s coverage as confused about the degree to which the LPC would use the leader to ‘sell’ the party to Canadians. This resulted in a strategy that was read as a “team approach” – one that would emphasize the party and de-emphasize the party leader. Indeed, this was seen to inform the way Ignatieff’s campaign bus was branded; in contrast to the campaign busses of other parties that featured the likeness of the party leader, this bus was only branded with the party logo (Taber 2011a). In essence, the Globe stories suggest the party's decision to frame their campaign around the trope of the Liberal Party team underscores a primary problem for Ignatieff and the LPC – that Ignatieff is less popular than the party he leads (Taber 2011a). And reporters for the Globe picked up on this lack of confidence in Ignatieff as they assessed his performance on a national stage.

Indeed, Ignatieff is often seen to flounder at campaign events; there is a lot of discussion about his need to pivot and do ‘damage control.’ In particular, Ignatieff was highly criticized for being forced “to explain himself on the thorny issue of entering into a coalition with the BQ and the NDP” (Perreaux et al. 2011). His lack of a clear concise explanation on whether he would rule out a coalition is seen as a crucial and grave mistake (Radwanski 2011b). This leads one commentator to assess the campaign as “unscripted and unpredictable”, which is considered to be a surprising way of challenging “the campaign model that Mr. Harper and his strategists have turned into modern
orthodoxy” (Radwanski 2011a). Where this willingness to respond to a wide range of questions could, hypothetically speaking, be construed as a sign of a confident, open leader, Globe reporters instead reported on this characteristic as a failing that tended to produce gaffes.

Ignatieff’s early mistakes are however downplayed by the LPC as it manages to roll out the “planks” of its campaign platform in concert with “operation fast start” – a television ad campaign (Taber and Houpt 2011). In this deployment, the LPC is said to be trying to claim the centre of Canadian values by making pocketbook campaign promises designed to provide “immediate help for the middle class rather than thorny long-term issues like erasing Canada’s deficit” (Ibbitson 2011b). Many Globe stories suggest these policy initiatives are designed to address middle class issues; they are also viewed as attempts to mark out strategic terrain that will enable the LPC to emphasize Harper’s agenda in direct contrast to its own campaign platform. Curiously, the Globe’s coverage views this tactic as similar in approach to the campaign tactics used by the CPC – program offerings with clear discrete goals designed to appeal to popular sentiment in key swing ridings. Nevertheless, the Globe’s coverage does not view this tactic as sufficient to counteract the confusion stemming from the moments when Ignatieff engages the press.

Ultimately, Ignatieff’s poor communication discipline is seen to be causing the LPC to bleed support. According to Adam Radwanski, “[i]n stark contrast to Mr. Harper, whose strategy has mostly been to stay out of trouble while micro-targeting enough seats to put him over the top, the Liberal leader has run an old-fashioned, freewheeling sort of campaign” (Radwanski 2011c). This is compounded by a poor campaign decision to “venture into opposition-held territory” as Globe reporters see the campaign as needing more focus on “ridings that the Liberals have a chance of holding onto” (Ibbitson 2011d). In the final analysis, the Globe suggests a combination of having an unpopular leader trying to sell unspectacular policies, compounded by poor strategic decisions and confused communications failed to make the “Liberals a true national party again”, for which “Ignatieff only has himself to blame” (Mason 2011).
Layton: A smiling crusader with a cane.

Throughout the Globe’s coverage, Jack Layton’s campaign is assessed in terms of Layton’s ability to campaign. Early coverage of Layton focuses on his health: “Mr. Layton has been undergoing cancer treatments and recently had hip surgery that has left him walking with a cane” (Chase, Taber, and Galloway 2011). Though a cane can be taken as a sign of fragility, this symbol would become something of a “trademark” (Allemang 2011) for a party leader who defied expectations through force of character.

The NDP's campaign start was more tentative, with Layton making a joke about how his “hip is so strong now it will outlive [him]” (Taber 2011b), even as reporters were inquiring into his “lighter travel schedule” as compared to his past election races (Chase, Taber, and Galloway 2011). At the beginning of the campaign the question was whether “the 60 year old” Layton was “ready for the fray” (Taber 2011b), when at 16%, the NDP was a distant third in the polls (Ibbitson 2011a). While Layton’s health was certainly a concern, the key challenge for the NDP was overcoming attempts to transform the election into a “two-man race” between Harper and Ignatieff (Ibbitson and Galloway 2011). On the one hand, the CPC’s strategy to demonize a potential coalition between the NDP, LPC and the BQ was thought to weaken support for the NDP, while on the other hand the LPC’s strategy to marginalize the NDP's participation in the televised debate attempted to undermine the credibility of Layton as a national contender. Arguably, these two strategies were effective at marginalizing the NDP early on in the campaign as little attention is afforded to Jack Layton’s campaign events beyond questions relating to his health. And the NDP as a whole is given scant attention save for unexpected successes in ridings that don’t typically receive national attention – for example Jack Hick’s campaign in Nunavut which earned attention for a novel strategy that marshaled very limited resources across a riding with vast “geographical” challenges (Ladurantaye 2011).14

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14 Interestingly, this riding was featured in a full feature article that elaborated in great detail the social issues that impact Northern life within this vast region, while only making tangential reference to the Jack Hicks campaign. If this article was prompted by this campaign’s strategic communication efforts, then it is a remarkable instance of earned media because the focus of the article was squarely on raising awareness of the issues.
This all changed, however, after the national televised debate, which was in many ways a watershed moment for Jack Layton – the beginning of the so-called NDP Surge. Though much of the Globe’s coverage focused on the “debate within the debate” between Harper and Ignatieff (Brethour 2011a), Layton earned acclaim for a strong performance, “as the NDP Leader cheerily skewered both of the major party leaders, mixing folksy charm with sharp attacks” (Ibbitson 2011c). Indeed, it was reported that Layton’s charismatic display in the French language debate had earned him the moniker of “bon Jack” within Quebec media – a francophone idiom for “a good guy” (Perreux 2011). In a campaign where the other candidates each had an “inspirational deficit”, Layton’s media persona was seen as attractive to voters (Martin 2011b). And these performances were interpreted as a main reason for the NDP to be “challenging the Liberals in the polls” even as the CPC was in “majority territory” (Brethour 2011b).

As Layton’s “multi-stage ascent” was described as the triumph of a sunny disposition, the cane would come to be regarded as “a subtle but constant reminder of his perseverance and a validation of his stump speech that he is a fighter” (Brethour 2011c). This blend of “personal populism and pocketbook promises” (Brethour 2011c) is seen as part of a winning strategy that has enabled the NDP to “capture ‘Layton’s Liberals’” – traditional supporters of the LPC that “didn’t like Mr. Ignatieff” but “did like Mr. Layton” (Galloway and Campbell 2011). As one commentator remarks, “[Layton’s] folksiness might have been calculated and as richly manipulative as any other political marketing tactic, but there was a key element that was clearly authentic - the man's recovery from illness and his fortitude as he went about ceaselessly, using that cane.” (Doyle 2011)

**Issue Coverage.**

The above three synopses demonstrate how the Globe’s coverage tended to report on the political strategy of the party leaders’ campaigns through narrative frames that emphasized the way they would present themselves to the public. This enabled an interpretation of the party leader’s strategic choices that established much of the agenda of the overall campaign. Accordingly, a lot of the strategic coverage only provides passing reference to issues in terms of their use-value to political parties to gain public
support. The Globe tended to focus on the way a party leader’s public personality would lend appeal to a party’s campaign platform. Issue coverage in this context was rather thin.

Nevertheless, 29.63% of the Globe’s coverage provided substantive treatments of issues as separate from what was being reported on in relationship to the campaigns of the political parties. Some of this coverage would elaborate issue areas already staked out in the campaign coverage; for example the Globe published five articles that provided historical and legal context about the matter of the coalition beyond the claims being made by the party leaders. And other such issue coverage would delve into issues that weren’t being discussed in the context of the campaign. This issue coverage related to the way the Globe’s reportage regarded the election itself as the issue from the outset of the campaign. Indeed, the whole election was generally disparaged by the Globe’s coverage as unnecessary and costly (Mickelburgh 2011; Paperny 2011). And this kind of assessment keyed into a main theme that connected much of the Globe’s coverage of issues, namely that the system of electoral politics wasn’t working properly because the election was called to serve the strategic interests of the political parties. This argument was a running theme throughout much of Globe’s coverage, and can be more clearly demonstrated by comparing the framing of news reports and editorials.
Frequency of Media Frames by Type of Article

Table 2: Frequency of Dominant Frames by Article Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>News Reports</th>
<th>Editorial/Commentary</th>
<th>Campaign Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SGF</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>78.26%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issues</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>21.74%</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ \chi^2 = 34.576, \text{df} = 1, p = 4.099 \times 10^{-9} \]

As shown by the quantitative data, there was a strong tendency for issues to be represented by the editorials and commentary of the Globe’s coverage: 75% of such articles dealt with issues as compared to the 21.74% of news reports that did the same. It is highly unlikely that such a distribution is due to chance as a Chi Square test demonstrates significance at the level of \( p=0.001 \).\(^{15} \) No doubt editorials and commentary would inevitably represent issues, but what is remarkable here is the way the Globe’s coverage presented an issue out of the way political parties went about representing issues.

This view is perhaps best exemplified by the March 26\(^{th} \) editorial titled “Coalition of Four”, which argues: “All four political parties in the house of commons did their bit to bring about an unwelcome election”(Globe and Mail 2011a). This notion – that the election was itself the problem – was repeated through much of the issue coverage. For

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\(^{15} \) A chi-square test demonstrates the goodness of fit (the variance) between (a) the observed distribution of a sample and (b) its theoretical distribution. This is calculated by the sum of the squares of a set (a chi-square distribution) of what may be random variables. By measuring the difference between the two distributions and positing the chi-square distribution as the null hypothesis, one can make conclusions about the significance of observed findings at a certain level of confidence.
example, the election contributed to “another failed bid at copyright reform” (McKenna 2011c), it delayed an important decision by the Bank of Canada on interest rates (McKenna and Torobin 2011), it evaporated a “$4.2-million” pledge to combat social ills in Nunavut (White 2011), and left a bill to protect against human smuggling dying on the floor (Dhillon 2011). All of this was part of a general sense in the opinion pages of the Globe’s coverage that the election wasn’t really about anything, though there were plenty of issues calling for attention.

In this regard, one editorial comment is particularly telling: “Some issues are indeed too serious to be left to the politicians alone” (Globe and Mail 2011c). Such a sentiment relates to the Globe’s editorial viewpoint that the current state of Canadian politics tended to overstate the importance of partisan issues while neglecting other issues that do not benefit the strategic interests of the two largest political parties – the LPC and the CPC. This is most evident in the way the Globe would run paired commentaries on the progress of Harper’s and Ignatieff’s campaigns. For example, on March 29th, Lawrence Martin and Margarette Wente each wrote commentaries that expressed disappointment with the prospects being offered during this election. Martin criticized Harper for using “smoke and mirror” tactics to create a “fictional universe” of issues that are highly proficient at convincing Canadians that a majority is the only way to ensure Canada’s “economic recovery” (Martin 2011a). Conversely, Wente speculates that the LPC will lose seats because of Ignatieff’s poor ability to inspire “confidence and hope”, which is enabling the “contest of ideas” to be a battle over the word that “triggers a more visceral response – ‘coalition’ or ‘contempt’” (Wente 2011). While this kind of pairing satisfies the news norm of providing balance, both of these examples are consistent with the editorial of that same day that viewed the coalition issue as a “charade”, and declared in no uncertain terms,

A coalition is not a coup. The party that wins the most seats has first call on forming a government. If that party loses the confidence of the House, the other parties are entitled, in the parliamentary system, to ask the Governor-General for permission to govern. Britain has a coalition government. Many democracies with a system of proportional representation have coalition governments. (Globe and Mail 2011b)
To read the opinion pages of the Globe throughout the campaign, one would get the sense that journalists were dissatisfied with an electoral system that had become broken by partisan interests.

Consider, for example, a comment by Jeffrey Simpson:

We have an electoral system designed to produce majority governments but that hasn't done so since the Chretien years. After each election, both major parties think that maybe, just maybe, they'll get a majority the next time. So they conduct themselves as though they're in a majority Parliament, rather than displaying the compromises and accommodations that are necessary, or at least useful, in a minority one. Put another way, parties have the wrong assumptions for the kinds of Parliament we're now electing. So either we again elect majority governments in which parliamentarians can carry on as before with one side proposing and the other opposing, or we change the electoral system to a proportional one that will always produce minorities and thus force changes in the habits of parliamentarians. (Simpson 2011)

Such a view is shared by Norman Spector who expresses concern with the way the election campaign “began as a contest over who is to govern” and turned into a “debate over how we are to be governed” (Spector 2011). Though Spector acknowledges the legality of coalition, he argues that as Canadians are led to believe they are voting for a Prime Minister then the political parties should show some restraint in procedural maneuverings especially in areas where there is a lack of historical precedents. The point he tries to make is that the main reason why minority governments fail in short order stems from parties seeking to improve their position in the house, and should therefore always return to the public for an elected mandate. Though the moral argument he makes about political legitimacy contradicts the legal argument he presents about potential coalitions, he is nevertheless clear in an attempt to correct the unsupported claims being made by party leaders.

This attempt to furnish readers with such factual information ultimately culminates with a commentary written by constitutional scholar Peter Russell. He outlines three “constitutionally legitimate” options that all involve convening the house is short order so that the representatives may determine “who has its confidence – and commanding the confidence of the House is the license to govern in our system of parliamentary
government” (Russell 2011). As Russell writes, “let’s hope our political leaders have the good sense to work together to avoid a Byng-King constitutional crisis” (Russell 2011), he concurs with much of the journalistic opinion represented within the Globe that views the primary issue of the election to be the way political interests are choosing to construct issues in relationship to the campaign. To some degree, these articles were an attempt by the Globe to shift the overall frame of the campaign; however to see this more clearly one needs to compare the frequencies of different types of frames between the beginning and the end of the campaign coverage.

Frequency of Media Frames Compared Between the Beginning and Ending of the Campaign

Table 3: Frequency of Dominant Frames by Period within Campaign Coverage

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Start of Campaign</th>
<th>End of Campaign</th>
<th>Campaign Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SGF</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>55.13%</td>
<td>109</td>
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<tr>
<td>Issues</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>44.87%</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>138</td>
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χ² = 12.4832, df = 1, p = .0004016

When comparing the start and end of the Globe’s campaign coverage I observed a significant increase in the use of SGFs – from 55.13% to 78.99%. This distribution is likely not due to chance as a Chi Square test demonstrates significance at the level of p =0.001. Moreover, much of the issue coverage that was present in the Globe appeared as distinct from the campaigns being mounted by the political parties. Specifically, the Globe ran a series of articles throughout the entirety of the campaign under the “Folio” sub-headline; these took an “in-depth look at the issues that will affect how Canadians vote” (Agrell, Perreaux, et al. 2011). This series covered issues, such as the decay of
Canadian cities, health care, aboriginal relations, and civic engagement. These articles did not necessarily have anything to do with the election save for being labeled by the Globe as things that should be given more consideration. And a careful reading of such articles reveals that the content was sourced from many social interests seeking to influence the agenda of the election. For example, one such report is prompted by “big-city mayors and transit experts call[ing] on all federal parties to address the issue [of poor urban transportation] in the election” (Agrell, Perreaux, et al. 2011). Indeed, one source is quoted as saying, “We need to make this a significant election issue and it’s critical that parties develop a response” (Agrell, Perreaux, et al. 2011).

Largely, such articles related to various beats of coverage that were part of the Globe’s regular news gathering activities. For example, Siri Agell, the Globe’s “Urban Affairs Reporter” was a major contributor to the aforementioned folio series “Winning the Cities” (Agrell, Perreaux, et al. 2011; Agrell 2011a; Agrell, Ebner, et al. 2011; Agrell 2011b). We can see, moreover, another example in the way the Globe announced the hiring of a global food reporter, Jessica Leeder, by publishing a number of articles she wrote about the absence of food policy as a campaign issue (Leeder 2011a; Leeder 2011b). In this respect, one article, written by the Globe’s health reporter, Andre Picard, exemplifies this trend (Picard 2011); the column it is critical of the way party leaders claim to represent universal health care yet do not address specific details of how their potential governments would deal with the issue of transfer payments to the province. As Picard expresses concern about the “the political leaders’ fundamental philosophy about medicare”, he argues that the absence of debate on this matter precludes the public from knowing “minimally, if the party leaders believe in the five principles in the Canada Health Act – public administration, comprehensiveness, universality, portability, and accessibility” (Picard 2011). Nevertheless, throughout the entire Globe’s coverage, such issue coverage is secondary compared to the primary focus on covering campaign events. Even so, what is remarkable is the way this kind of broad attention to a variety of issues tapers off towards the end of the campaign.
Discussion

Through an analysis of the Globe’s coverage of the Canada’s federal election of 2011, I have illustrated a tension between strategy and issues as they are linked together through media narratives that examine politics in terms of persona, policy, and popularity. In this coverage, issues tend to be subsumed for their use value in the strategic game of mediated politics. Indeed, issues tend to be represented within media discourses when a social interest stakes a moral position relative to the outcome of an organizational system. Electoral issues thus tend to relate to the administration of social power within liberal democratic societies rather than examining the moral or ethical basis for a social power structure. In summary, it is not that issues are displaced from election news coverage, per se, but rather that those issues that are represented within electoral discourses are constructed through forms of technical knowledge that have colonized our understanding of what is right and just in the world.

This analysis illustrates the way instrumental rationality may influence the production of election news coverage by engendering a form of struggle between distinct fields of social relationships over the legitimate range of public debate in the context of an election. Bear in mind, the study does not definitively prove this to be the precise process that produces strategic media frames, but as the study has been constructed to tease out the effects of rationalized media-political production processes upon news discourses, one can reasonably co-relate instrumental rationality to the production of strategic news frames. In the concluding section, I elaborate some of the implications this study has for understanding democracy in Canada, and suggest possible avenues for future research.
Chapter 5 – Conclusion

This thesis has examined the ways instrumental rationality mediates the professional interactions of media and political actors. By linking Habermas’s critique of instrumental reason (1971, 1984a, 1984b) to news production regimes (Gitlin 1980; Hall et al., 1978; Fishman 1980; Tuchman 1978; Ericson et al., 1978; Hackett and Zhao, 1998) I have argued that the employ of systems logic within news production processes results in the emphasis of the strategic- and/or game-like aspects of contemporary electoral politics. And I have used my analysis to highlight how the production of this dominant frame marks the resolution of fundamental tensions that inform the social production of news. This chapter concludes the thesis by summarizing key findings and teasing out some of their implications for future research.

Thesis Summary

The primary argument of chapter 2 is that research into political communication needs to attend more to the way news media represent dominant power relations. Indeed, this argument echoes recent calls within framing research (cf Vliegenthart and van Zoonen, 2011); however by contrasting pluralistic and critical theories of power, I have argued current approaches need to take into account the indirect, structural power relationships that enable and constrain the way information is gathered, produced and disseminated as news. In particular, I have used the work of Hallin (1994) to show how such processes relate to fundamental tensions between the cultural role media is expected to play within democratic society and the structural pressures of producing news through capitalist firms. In this respect, I have employed Habermas’s critique of instrumental reason (1984a; 1984b) to show how common understanding of social life becomes colonized by system logic. This illustrates the contradictory way media work to legitimate structures of social power within advanced capitalist society.

Chapter 3 extends this critical theory into an analysis of the professional practices involved in the production of mediated politics. This discussion elaborates a model of the instrumental interactions of journalistic and political actors as they produce election news
discourses (cf McLean, 2012; Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995). I have argued the intensification of these interactions results in a form of struggle between the professional fields of media and politics (cf Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1996; cf Couldry, 2003). In brief, both fields seek legitimation through each other’s resources – politics seeks legitimation through media recognition, whereas news media seek legitimation by making power more transparent. As these disparate goals collide within the public sphere, conflict ensues because competing classes of professionals struggle to maintain the distinctiveness of their respective fields. At stake in this confluence of media political power is the ability to impose a legitimate vision of the social world. The system of political communication takes on an insular quality because political actors adopt promotional strategies geared towards preserving the intended effect of their message while media actors rely upon news norms such as objectivity to preserve their professional integrity. The end result of these rationalized interactions is the dramatization of political life within narratives that portray elections as strategic games. In sum, this chapter theorizes a tension between the fields of media and politics as they share in the systems logic of professionally promoting politics to a consuming public.

Chapter 4 then provides a case study of my critical theory through a frame analysis of the Globe and Mail’s coverage of the Canadian federal election of 2011. The analysis is conducted using standard model of the SGF proposed by Aalberg, Stromback, and de Vreese (2012); however the research is designed to detect the above theorized struggle by measuring the salience of the SGF within different types of news articles during different periods of the campaign. My study illustrates how the framing of politics as a strategic game is not necessarily constant throughout the news coverage of a specific campaign. And this finding suggests the struggle engendered through the instrumental interactions of media and political actors plays out as conflict over the legitimacy of claims made in relationship to the election campaign. Specifically, my research illustrates how the issue of a coalition within a minority parliament was distorted by the system world claims about representative democracy in Canada. And this distortion was a function of the promotional logic of media and political actors as they competed to impose a vision of Canadian politics upon the discursive agenda of the election campaign. Thus, a reader of the Globe’s coverage would glean an understanding of democratic politics that privileges
the role of party leadership within Canada’s system of government. Such a representation of politics distorts the essence of parliamentary procedure as it subsumes democracy into narratives that emphasize the players of the strategic game of politics.

Limitations, Implications, and Suggestions

While my study demonstrates strong tendencies within a major agenda setting publication in Canada, the generalizability of these findings are to some degree limited as strategic media frames may not be found to the same degree in other Canadian news publications or in other elections. Further research could duplicate my method within a survey of major Canadian news outlets, both in print and other widely consumed media. Moreover, it would also be interesting to use such a method to view trends in the dominant framing of Canadian politics over the course of multiple elections. In short, by increasing the sample set to include more data from across the changing media landscape in Canada, media research would be able to better account for the forces that enable and constrain Canadian political communication.

As well, the methodological approach of the study could be further refined. I have largely examined the dominant framing of politics through the presence or absence of indicators of the strategic- and/or game-like aspects of electoral politics. More specific attention to the way issues are framed within election news coverage is still warranted. Hypothetically, this would require a more advanced research design that would take into account the qualitative features of issue/substantive frames before performing a quantitative analysis that measures the dominant framing of politics. Such an approach would provide greater nuance to the historical context that ultimately informs political life.

Finally, there are some theoretical issues that need redressing. These concern the nature of media political power in advanced capitalist societies. In this thesis I have explored concepts of power ranging from influence, capital, and steering media. To some degree, each of these concepts understands power as a differential in the capacity of an actor to determine their activities. However, the singular term—power—can confuse fundamental differences in the way research conceives of forces that enable and constrain human
action. While I have linked such a problem to past debate about the ideological role of the media, I would like to suggest media research needs to expand its understanding of power relationships through further study and debate. In particular, this study has employed a theory of structural power relations to critique the legitimizing role media play within advanced capitalist society. Expanding this approach into a comparative analysis of the structural features of different media systems, and the kinds of dominant media frames they produce, would provide a better accounting of the role media play in relationship to historically contingent structures of social power. This would help media research shed light into the effects of social, political, and economic forces upon democratic processes.

Concluding Remarks

My study demonstrates that the deliberative role media is expected to play within Canadian democracy is being constrained by structural, productive forces. And this has stark implications for democratic decisions being based upon news coverage that frames electoral politics as a strategic game played by party leaders. In effect, this news focus on political elites presents a choice to Canadians between party leaders and not parliamentary representatives. While this may very well work to legitimate a political party’s administration of our government, it may also be leading Canadians to choose to concentrate executive power thus ultimately undermining the ability of Canadians to have their voices represented in parliament. No doubt news provides a vital service to members of the public wishing to learn more about current events in Canadian politics. However, to merely critique election news coverage for poorly representing issues misses the larger problem of media supporting technocratic forms of government that disenfranchise people from democratic life. In this respect, I echo Habermas’s concern that people’s common understanding of human existence is systematically distorted through media systems that manufacture legitimacy for the means of our ruling order as opposed to facilitating shared debate about the ends of social life.
Bibliography


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and Canada Communications Group, Supply and Services Canada; Dundurn Press.


Mickelburgh, Rod. 2011. “Well, Here We Go Again ...” Globe & Mail (Toronto, Canada), March 25.


Appendices

Appendix 1: Coding Instructions

The following coding instructions are quoted from Aalberg, Stromback, and de Vreese (2012, 177-178):

1. Does the story deal with opinion polls and politicians’ or parties’ standing in the polls?

   This variable has two codes: 0 = no, 1 = yes. Coders should type 1 if the news story at least once mentions opinion polls and the standing of political parties or individual candidates in these. Coders should also type 1 if the news story includes references to generic ‘polls’ or ‘the opinion’ and the standing of political parties or candidates according to ‘polls’ or ‘the opinion’. Otherwise coders should type 0.

2. Does the story deal with politicians, parties or other actors in relation to potential election outcomes and/or coalitions/government formation?

   This variable has two codes: 0 = no, 1 = yes. Coders should type 1 if the news story reports or speculates about election results or government/coalition formations. Otherwise coders should type 0.

3. Does the story deal with politicians, parties or other actors winning or losing (elections, debates or in general)?

   This variable has two codes: 0 = no, 1 = yes. Coders should type 1 if the news story at least once refers to whether politicians, parties or other actors are winning or losing with respect to elections, debates or in general. Otherwise coders should type 0.

4. Does the story make use of a language of sports or war?

   This variable has two codes: 0 = no, 1 = yes. Coders should type 1 if the news story at least once makes use of a language of sports and war, such as battle, competition, winning, or fight. Only exempted expression is ‘campaign’. Otherwise coders should type 0.
5. Does the story deal with politicians’ or parties’ strategies or tactics for winning elections, legislative debates, governing negotiations, favorable news coverage, or for achieving other forms of political success?

This variable has two codes: 0 = no, 1 = yes. Coders should type 1 if the news story at least once refers to politicians’ or parties’ strategies or tactics for winning elections, legislative debates, governing negotiations, favorable news coverage, or for achieving other forms of political success. Otherwise coders should type 0.

6. Does the story deal with politicians’ or parties’ motives for actions, positions, or behaviours?

This variable has two codes: 0 = no, 1 = yes. Coders should type 1 if the news story at least once refers to politicians’ or parties’ motives for actions, positions, or behaviors with reference to other aspects than their sincere belief in the policies. Otherwise coders should type 0.

7. Does the story deal with party, candidate or campaign style or performance?

This variable has two codes: 0 = no, 1 = yes. Coders should type 1 if the news story at least once refers to party, candidate or campaign style or performance, or how they campaign. Otherwise coders should type 0.

8. Does the story deal with the media’s role in politics or campaigning and/or the relationship between political actors and the media?

This variable has two codes: 0 = no, 1 = yes. Coders should type 1 if the news story at least once refers to the media’s role in politics or campaigning and/or the relationship between political actors and the media. Otherwise coders should type 0.

9. What is the dominant framing of politics?

Coders should type 1 for ‘Strategic game frame’ and 2 for ‘Issue 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.

‘Issue frame’ includes news stories that focus on issues and issue positions, on real-life conditions with relevance for issue positions, and on what has happened or what someone has said and done to the extent that it deals with or is depicted as relevant for the political issues. Coders should select the frame that dominates in the news story. Usually, dominance is decided by space in which the respective frames are applied, but the headline and lead should be given extra weight in the judgment of what frame dominates the news story.
## Appendix 2: Coding Table

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<tr>
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<th>Article Type</th>
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<th>Indicators for Strategy Frame</th>
<th>Dominant frame</th>
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<td>speculation</td>
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Appendix 3: List of Coded Articles


Carrick, Rob. 2011. “A Wish List for All Investors in This Year’s Election.” Globe & Mail (Toronto, Canada), March 29.

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Milner, Brian. 2011. “Key Indicators to Watch in Runup to the Vote.” Globe & Mail (Toronto, Canada), March 29.


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2011b. “Is This Ignatieff’s Kim Campbell Moment?” Globe & Mail (Toronto, Canada), April 30.


Curriculum Vitae

Name: Gabriel Elias

Post-secondary Education and Degrees:
- University of Toronto
  Toronto, Ontario, Canada
  1997-2001 B.A.
- The University of Western Ontario (UWO)
  London, Ontario, Canada
  2010-2013 M.A.

Honours and Awards:
- UWO Faculty Dependent Tuition Scholarship
- University of Toronto
  Graduated with Distinction
  2001

Related Work Experience
- Teaching Assistant
  The University of Western Ontario
  2010-2012
- Treasurer
  PSAC Local 610
  The Teaching Assistant’s Union of UWO
  2011-2012
- President
  PSAC Local 610
  The Teaching Assistant’s Union of UWO
  2012-2013