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Evangelical Christians in Canadian National Television News, 1994-2004: A Frame Analysis

David M. Haskell

Recent surveys have shown that most evangelical Christians in Canada believe that the news media treat them unfairly. This study empirically tested the validity of the evangelicals' charge against the media by examining the frames used in the nightly, national news reports of Global, CBC and CTV television networks. An analysis of all reports featuring evangelicals showed that neutral and positive frames, together, were almost equal in strength and number to negative frames used; this resulted in an overall rating of "balanced" for the coverage.

*While overall the coverage was balanced, the frequency and exclusivity of certain negative frames elevated their saliency considerably. For example, the "evangelicals as intolerant" frame alone appeared in one quarter of all reports. Regarding topic of the news reports, evangelicals most often received coverage for involvement in politics followed closely by involvement in criminal or immoral actions. Implications of these results are discussed. **Keywords:** Television, Media/Mass Media, Frame Analysis, Evangelicals*

Introduction

Canadian evangelical Christians have a long history of social activism. The establishment of public education, female suffrage, universal health care, and a host of charity and volunteer organizations in Canada can all be traced to evangelicals and their involvement in the public square (Clarke, 1996; Murphy, 1996; Noll, 1992; Stackhouse, 2005). The most recent example of this faith group's dogma inspired doggedness has been their political and legal battle against changes to Canada's definition of marriage.

Now, as in the past, evangelicals' proclivity for social activism has ensured they garner media attention. And while the media, keen for stories of conflict and controversy, are likely to consider their relationship with evangelicals "a match made in heaven," most evangelicals have come to characterize it as somewhat "hellish." A 2003 survey found 74% of Canadian evangelicals felt the media were biased against them (Ipsos-Reid, 2003). The divergent beliefs and values of these two communities may be the source of their tension—an idea that is pursued in the Discussion portion of this paper.

Purpose of this Study

This study was designed to provide a glimpse into the relationship that exists between the news media and evangelicals in Canada while accomplishing the more specific goal of validating or negating evangelicals' claim of journalistic prejudice¹. All reports featuring evangelical Christians and airing between January 1, 1994 and December 31, 2004, on the nightly, national television news programs of Global, CBC, and CTV television networks² were examined. Key questions in this study were the following: To what extent were evangelicals covered over this period? What were the reasons evangelicals made the news; that is, what types of issues or events received coverage? Most importantly, what frames were used in the television news reports about evangelical Christians, how often were they used, and were they negative, positive or neutral in their portrayal of this faith group?

I begin with a synopsis of the beliefs and values of Canadian evangelicals followed by an overview of the literature on media framing and an explanation as to how framing intersects with news coverage of religion. Next are the results of a detailed textual analysis, the main component of which was an examination of the frames used in national television news coverage of evangelical Christians. I conclude with a discussion of the implications of such coverage.

Canadian Evangelicals

Evangelical Christians comprise 12% of Canada's population but they are not a coherent or unified religious group (Van Ginkel, 2003). While there are certain Protestant denominations known for their large evangelical populations—Adventist; Baptist; Christian and Missionary Alliance; Christian Reformed; Church of Christ; Church of God; Free Methodists; Mennonite; Nazarenes; Pentecostal; Salvation Army; Quaker and Vineyard; as well as an array of independent community churches (Bibby, 1993; Bibby, 1987; Reimer, 2003)—almost all of Canada's Protestant denominations have evangelical members (Rawlyk, 1996; Redekop, 2003). Evangelicals can also be found outside formal religious institutions for, indeed, it is what one believes, and not where one worships, that makes one an evangelical Christian (Rawlyk, 1996; Reimer, 2003; Schultze, 1996).

Religious Beliefs and Practices

Put most simply, evangelicals believe in the main historical doctrines of the Christian church; they practice a very traditional or conservative form of Christianity. In fact, the moniker “conservative Protestants” can be used interchangeably with the term evangelicals (Bibby, 1987; Robinson, 2003a, 2003b; Schultze, 1996). The five defining beliefs of modern evangelicals in North America are: Biblicism, conversionism, crucicentrism, activism, and a belief in the “End Times” or Christ's imminent second coming (Rawlyk, 1996; Reimer, 2003).

Biblicism, the literal or pre-dominantly literal interpretation of scripture, is the core evangelical belief from which others generate. Evangelicals hold that the authors of the Bible were inspired or directed by the Holy Spirit as they wrote. As such, the instructive edicts of the Bible are viewed as authoritative in determining what is good and right for one's own life and for society (Rawlyk, 1996; Reimer, 2003; Schultze, 1996). How much or which parts of scripture are to be taken literally depends on the level of conservatism within a specific evangelical faith community. When surveyed, about 60% of Canadian evangelicals

agree with the statement: "I feel the Bible is God's word and is to be taken literally word for word" (Rawlyk, 1996, p. 95); that percentage increases to 100% when the statement is rephrased to read: "I believe the Bible to be the Word of God and is reliable and trustworthy" (Ipsos-Reid, 2003, p. 16).

Conversionism refers to the belief that a person must make a conscious decision to follow Christ; the decision made, one can be said to be "born-again." The born-again moniker references the fact that one is now "a new person in Christ." Activism describes evangelicals' penchant for spreading their faith and crucicentrism alludes to evangelicals' literal belief that Christ died on the cross, rose physically from the dead and that the enactment of that process enabled Him to miraculously expunge the sins of the world. Finally, more so than any other Christian faith group, evangelicals believe that Christ will return to the earth and his arrival will be sooner—many believe the next 100 years—as opposed to later (Rawlyk, 1996; Reimer, 2003).

The religious practices of evangelicals also distinguish them from the rest of Canadians. As a group they tend to be more fervent in their church attendance, reading of the Bible, and dedication to prayer (Bibby, 1987; Redekop, 2003; Reimer, 2003). Evangelicals are also more likely to attend religiously oriented meetings like Bible studies, prayer groups, and spiritual retreats and seminars than other Christians or the population at large (Reimer, 2003).

Often evangelicals are linked to boisterous forms of worship—hand clapping and raising of hands in church, shouts of "Amen" and "Hallelujah"—and ecstatic religious behaviors such as speaking in tongues, prophesizing, faith healing and other miracles. While some evangelical groups and denominations enjoy these elements of religious practice, many do not. In Canada, ecstatic or charismatic religious expression is most often found in Pentecostal, Vineyard, Apostolic, and other non-denominational or "Full Gospel" churches (Robinson, 1998; cf. Reimer, 2003, pp. 65-6)

Social Values

Because evangelicals use the lessons and edicts of the Bible to gauge what is good and right for their own life and for society, their personal morals and social values tend to be more conservative and absolute than those of most Canadians. For evangelicals, fidelity in relationships, honesty, and charity tend to be categorical imperatives and not situational options. While these personal attributes are generally esteemed by the rest of society, on several issues Canada's evangelicals find themselves at odds with majority opinion. Evangelicals tend to be opposed to: homosexual lifestyle and gay marriage; abortion; sexual promiscuity and adultery; pornography; gambling; the use of illegal drugs and the abuse or overuse of alcohol. Some evangelical communities are opposed to women taking on the highest leadership roles in the church; others go farther and say that women should be the submissive partner in a married relationship. Some evangelicals also support the use of corporal punishment—primarily spanking—as a means of disciplining children (Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, 2004; Reimer, 2003).

Evangelicals feel compelled to export their values and beliefs into the public square because they see them as medicine for a society suffering from various social ills; to deny society the benefits of that medicine would be negligent. Again, it is adherence to specific scripture that results in this attitude and its associated behaviors. For example, in the Gospel of Matthew 28:19, Jesus commissions his followers to go into “all the world” and preach His ideas; he also warns them in Matthew 5:15 not to “put their light [i.e. their Christian faith] under a basket” but to let it radiate out into society.

Evangelicals enact their values in two main ways: through volunteer and charity work and through social activism. Even with their church-related volunteering and charity excluded, evangelicals devote more time to volunteer organizations and money to charities than other Canadians (Van Ginkel, 2003). Over the last decade evangelicals in Canada have focused their social activism on two broad targets: sexual morality and church-state matters (though these battlefields sometimes overlap). In

their war on sexual morality, battles have been fought against abortion, extramarital sex, and homosexuality. In their war against the state, battles have been waged for government funding of faith-based schools; inclusion of prayer, religious education and religious activities in public schools; and greater use of Christian symbols, references and practices in the buildings and processes of government. Battles have been fought against school curriculum that runs contrary to scripture (e.g., that which promotes premarital sex or homosexual lifestyles) and government interference in the operation of faith-based schools (Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, 2004). In their efforts to bring about societal changes, evangelicals have employed demonstrations, petitions, political lobbying, and the courts.

News Media Framing

When a reporter covers an event that lasts hours or even days it is impossible for him/her to convey everything that happened in a two minute television news story or a 500 word print article. Similarly, when a reporter covers an issue that pits several individuals or groups against each other it is impossible for him/her to give voice to every point each stakeholder raised. When they create a news story journalists must use interpretive judgment; that is, they must select and emphasize some facts and leave others out.

Information selection is part of the framing process. Entman (1993, p. 52) writes that in order to define what the issue is, frames “select some aspects of aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text.” Obviously, if information is included in a news report it becomes more salient, for that which is left out remains unknown to the audience. However, the language of a news report also increases the saliency of certain facts in so far as it is used to emphasize and elaborate certain aspects of an issue (Entman, 1993; Severin & Tankard, 2001). When constructing a frame the reporter will use metaphors, exemplars, stereotypes, catchphrases, and other audio and visual symbols. The connotations of these keywords and symbols—which can be positive, negative or neutral—influ-

ence how the audience feels about the issue or event (Entman, 1993; Gamson, 1989).

The process of framing is necessary to the production and consumption of news. As news consumers we want journalists to go to events, as our proxy, and tell us “just the important information” from that experience; we want the “irrelevant information” left out. However, reporters run into trouble with regard to framing when they allow their personal biases to skew what should be their neutral relaying of an event or issue.

In cases where a hard-news reporter frames an issue so that it reflects his/her own personal worldview, he/she takes away the audience’s right to decide how they feel about the information (Kuypers, 2005). Conversely, a neutral or objective frame would relay to the audience the ideas that the subjects—that is, the people the story is about—are putting forward as *they intend* those ideas to be understood; the ideas of the subjects are not interpreted or filtered by the reporter according to his/her personal worldview. An objective news frame will also place events in perspective by providing relevant background and will allow those who are criticized in the body of the report to respond fully to the accusations of their critics. Finally, in cases where opinion, and not fact, is relayed, an objective frame clearly distinguishes it as opinion (Kuypers, 2005).

Entman (1991, p. 7) states that the influence of a particular frame increases through “repetition, placement, and reinforcing [cultural] associations” (cf. Entman, 1993). The influence of a frame is also increased when it goes unopposed by another frame with a competing message; that is, when it enjoys “exclusion of interpretation” (Entman, 1993, p. 53). Thus, in so far as a news frame presents one version of reality, the more often it is used exclusively in relation to a specific situation the more natural or normal its version of reality becomes: used again and again to the exclusion of all others it conditions the audience as to *how* they should think about an issue.

News Media Framing of Religion

Stout and Buddenbaum (2003, p. 1) observe, frame analysis “has not been adequately applied to the study of media and religion.” A literature search I conducted in the fall of 2005 gives support to Stout and Buddenbaum’s observation. Going back to 1990 and searching an inventory of over 750 journals (contained in the Communication and Mass Media Complete database, the Humanities Full Text and Social Science Full Text database, and the ATLA Religion Database respectively) just eight studies were found that used frame analysis in any of its forms to analyze news coverage of religion.

In the United States, when religion coverage has been the subject of academic exploration, the research method of choice has tended to be traditional content analysis the goal of which has been to count which religious groups got coverage and how often (cf. Buddenbaum, 1990; Garrett-Medill, 2000; Graham, 2004; Graham & Kaminski, 1993; Lichter, Lichter, & Amundson, 2000). Studies of religion coverage in Canada have used content analysis exclusively (cf. Cornies, 1984; Murray, 1996; Religious character of Canada not represented in TV reports, 1996; Smith 1999). Severin and Tankard (2001, p. 278) say that compared to frame analysis, traditional content analysis is too “narrow and simplistic” and cannot provide the “sophisticated analysis of news coverage” that a frame analysis can provide.

Of the eight US studies in the last 15 years to employ frame analysis as a methodology, six focused on the frames reporters have employed when covering an event with religious overtones or implications (cf. Paxton, 2004; McCune, 2003). However, two of the eight studies—one by Kerr and Moy (2002) and the other by Kerr (2003)—took a broader approach and examined the frames reporters have used to depict a specific faith group in relation to numerous issues and situations over an extended period of time. Specifically, Kerr and Moy (2002) examined newspaper coverage of fundamentalist Christians (a subgroup of evangelicals defined by their extreme religious conservatism and biblical literalism) between 1980 and 2000. Independent of

Moy, Kerr (2003) conducted a nearly identical study to determine how fundamentalist Christians were framed in the news reports of America's national television networks between 1980 and 2000. These two American studies were influential in shaping the methodology of this current study and will be discussed further in the method section of this paper.

Method

This study examined how evangelical Christians were covered in the nightly, national television news reports of Canada's three largest networks, CBC TV, CTV and Global TV between January 1, 1994 and December 31, 2004. National nightly news from these three networks was chosen because it is the most influential. Combined, privately held CTV and Global and publicly funded CBC TV have over 60% of the market share (Statistics Canada, 2005; Viessing, 2001). Over three quarters (77 %) of Canadians regularly watch nightly national news programs on CBC, CTV or Global to keep abreast of current events compared to 70% who read a daily newspaper, 58 % who listen to radio news, and 27% who regularly look to the internet for news (Mazzuca, 2001). Of the news shows available to Canadians, those that air nationally on CBC TV, CTV, and Global TV reach the largest audiences with ratings averaging between 700,000 and 1 million viewers per night (Bureau of Broadcast Measurement, 2006; Nielsen Media Research, 2006). Conversely, news programs on other smaller Canadian networks such as CityTV, A-Channel, and the CH affiliation of stations—which tend to focus on local and regional issues—glean significantly smaller audiences (Bureau of Broadcast Measurement, 2006; Nielsen Media Research, 2006).

It is not sheer audience size alone that makes the national news casts of CBC, CTV and Global influential. Research by Stempel (1985) determined that elite national news outlets set the news agenda (both what will be covered and how it will be covered) for smaller news outlets in the rest of the country.

Miljan and Cooper (2003) agree with Stempel but go further arguing that national television news, specifically, sets the agenda that other *national media* will follow. Citing examples

from business and politics, they explain individuals or organizations that secure TV coverage for their cause “are more likely to obtain the outcome they desire because television attention is usually followed by newspaper, radio and magazine play” (Miljan & Cooper, 2003, p.31).

Full-text print transcripts of the television news reports were the artifacts examined for this study³. The transcripts from CTV’s news reports were obtained through the Proquest CBCA Current Events Database. Full-text transcripts from Global and CBC TV were obtained from the news archivists-librarians at those networks.

To be selected for inclusion in this study, the script of a news report had to contain one of the following key words (or its close variant): evangelical, fundamentalist Christian, conservative Christian, Christian right, Baptist, Pentecostal, or born-again. Christian fundamentalist and its variants were searched because, as noted previously, fundamentalists Christians are a subgroup of evangelicals. The Baptist and Pentecostal denominations house the country’s largest number of evangelical members (Bibby, 1987; Reimer, 2003; cf. Statistics Canada, 2003). Conservative Christian, Christian right, and born-again were searched because all are commonly used to describe evangelical Christians (Rawlyk, 1996; Reimer, 2003). However, if a report described an individual or group as Conservative Christian, Christian right, or born-again and also as Catholic that script was not included in the sample.

The entire population of scripts was analyzed by two coders. The coders trained for about six hours. The training session focused on frame theory and understanding the categories and definitions employed by the coding instrument. During the training process, coders practiced analyzing sample reports until they achieved a high level of consistency in their coding decisions. When performing the actual analysis, the coders worked independently without consultation or guidance. Intercoder reliability was 88% using Holsti’s formula (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken, 2002). Inconsistencies between coders were resolved through discussion, yielding one set of data.

Coding and Levels of Analysis

This study used two levels of analysis: the overall news report and the individual news frames. All the news reports were coded for several variables at the first stage of analysis. These included the following nominal variables: the date the report aired, the network that aired it, the number of words in the news report, and the overall topic or main focus of the news report as it related to evangelicals.

Regarding topic of news reports, both Lichter, Lichter and Amundson (2000) and Kerr (2003) note that religion coverage in general, and of evangelicals specifically, tends to focus on a handful of subject areas. By adapting and combining the ideas of these researchers a list of possible topics was created. They were:

- 1) Evangelicals involved in religious observance/theological discussion
- 2) Evangelicals involved in internal church business/church governance (not involving doctrine or theology)
- 3) Evangelicals involved in charity work/volunteer work/mission work
- 4) Evangelicals involved in proselytizing/ "witnessing"
- 5) Evangelicals involved in social actions/protest (but not in the courts, not related to education and not with an overtly political focus)
- 6) Evangelicals involved in political action/issues (but not related to education and not enacted through the courts)
- 7) Evangelicals involved in legal actions/issues (but not related to criminal activity and not related to education)
- 8) Evangelicals involved in educational actions/issues
- 9) Evangelicals involved in criminal or immoral actions/issues
- 10) The life or exploits of a famous evangelical (i.e., TV evangelist, entertainer or big business owner)

If a coder felt that none of the topics on the list applied to his/her story, a final category, "other", could have been chosen.

The second stage of analysis focused on news frames, using frames as the unit of analysis. It has been observed that the weakness of many framing studies is that they do not explain “which mechanisms were used to arrive at particular frames and, how [the frames] have been measured empirically” (Koenig, 2004, para. 2). To combat the charge of imprecise or capricious identification of frames it has been suggested that coders be presented with a list of identifiable frame attributes which serve as “manifest indicators for the identification of frames” (Koenig, 2004, para. 7; cf. de Vreese, Claes, Jochen, & Semetko, 2001; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000; Tankard, 2001).

To combat the charge of ill-defined measurement, it has been suggested that researchers employ a rating scale to evaluate the negative, neutral or positive qualities of those frames that are identified (Koenig, 2004; cf. Kerr, 2003; Kerr & Moy, 2002). Kerr (2003) and Kerr and Moy (2002) in their respective studies of fundamentalist Christians in the news, employed both an inventory of potential frames and a rating scale. High intercoder reliabilities in their studies (81 and 82 % respectively) suggested that this method is reliable. With a mind to achieving similar success, the frame analysis portion of this study was modeled on the coding instruments used by these two American researchers.

Specifically, coders for this study were given a pre-made list that categorized the numerous ways evangelicals *could be* framed in a news report. The coders' guidebook outlined in detail keywords, situations, and various other devices that could indicate the presence of specific frames. Tankard (2001) states that a list of frames with their attributes may be derived ahead of time based on theoretical or research literature about a topic; the frames on this study's list were arrived at based on historical analysis (Clarke, 1996; Murphy, 1996; Noll, 1997; Noll, 1992; Stackhouse, 2000; Stackhouse, 1993), similar academic exploration done in the US (Buddenbaum, 1990; Garrett-Medill, 2000; Graham, 2004; Graham & Kaminski, 1993; Kerr, 2003; Kerr & Moy, 2002; Lichter, Lichter, & Amundson, 2000), sociological research done in Canada (Adams, 2003; Adams, 1997; Beyer, 2000; Bibby, 1993; Bibby, 1987; Grenville, 2000; Hoover, 2000;

Katerberg, 2000; Rawlyk, 1996; Reimer, 2003; Reimer, 2000a; Reimer, 2000b; Simpson, 2000), interviews with prominent Canadian evangelicals (Emmanuel, Tristan. Personal Communication, May 12, 2004; Epp-Buckingham, Janet. Personal Communication, March 13, 2003; Mainse, Ron. Personal Communication, October 12, 2004; Van Ginkel, Aileen. Personal Communication, March 12, 2004) and a pilot study done on Canadian news reports.

Twenty-four frames were presented in 12 pairs as opposites⁴. Specifically, coders were to determine if a news report framed evangelicals as:

- 1) Intolerant or Tolerant. To identify frames from this category, coders looked for evangelicals being portrayed as able to sympathize (or not) with beliefs or values contrary to their own.
- 2) Insincere or Sincere. For this category, coders analyzed portrayals of evangelicals involved in preaching, decorous or controlled worship, proselytizing, charity work or community outreach paying particular attention to the implicit and explicit references made regarding the motivation behind the evangelicals' words and deeds.
- 3) Unintelligent or Intelligent. Here, coders looked for evangelicals being portrayed in terms of their intellectual ability or education level.
- 4) Neglectful or Responsible. Here, coders looked for evangelicals being portrayed in terms of their obligations or duties to themselves, their jobs, their families, and society.
- 5) Pushy imposing social views or Respectful advocating social views. Here, coders looked for evangelicals being portrayed as activists (e.g. involved in marches, petitions, protests) with the goal of advancing their own social views and values.
- 6) Threatening politically or Reassuring politically. Here, coders analyzed portrayals of evangelicals involved in politics or politicians who were evangelicals.

- 7) Criminally-minded or Law abiding. Here, coders analyzed portrayals of evangelicals involved in ethical dilemmas, courts, criminal activities, or situations where the law or legal matters were the focus.
- 8) Superstitious or Spiritual. Here, coders analyzed portrayals of evangelicals involved in, or talking about, the supernatural (e.g. ecstatic or boisterous worship, emotional prayer, spontaneous healings, speaking in tongues, prophecy, or being “slain in the spirit”).
- 9) Vengeful or Forgiving. Here, coders looked for situations where evangelicals were wronged or perceived that they had been wronged and analyzed how the evangelicals were portrayed as responding to the offending party.
- 10) Un-Canadian or Canadian. Here, coders looked for evangelicals being portrayed as “fitting in” or “not fitting in” with the rest of Canadian society. In particular, they looked for Canadian evangelicals being portrayed as more culturally “American” than Canadian.
- 11) Deserving of Media and Societal Bias or Undeserving of Media and Societal Bias. Here, coders analyzed situations where evangelicals were portrayed as being subjected to societal or media bias (specific references to societal or media bias would be made).
- 12) Holding Outdated Values and Beliefs or Holding Contemporary Values and Beliefs. For this category, coders looked for evangelicals being portrayed in terms of the current relevance of their values and beliefs.

A brief example illustrates how theoretical material could translate into a frame on a list. Several researchers (Clarke, 1996; Murphy, 1996; Hoover, 2000; Noll, 1992; Reimer, 2003; Stackhouse, 1993) observed that Canadian evangelicals—in the past and the present—have been characterized by the media, mainline churches, or by the population at large as being “too American”. Specifically, it is Canadian evangelicals open (and sometimes boisterous) proclamation of their faith, and their willingness to let their faith inform their social and political

activism, that is viewed as distinctly un-Canadian behavior. It is popular convention in Canada that faith is best when quiet, decorous and left out of the public square (Clarke, 1996; Hoover, 2000; Reimer, 2003). The observations of these researchers lead to the inclusion of the “Un-Canadian/Canadian” frames on the coders’ list of possible frames.

To facilitate measurement, each pair of frames was placed on an ordinal scale. The frame from the pair that expressed the negative quality (e.g., intolerant) was stationed on the left of the scale where it was subdivided into its very negative and somewhat negative manifestations (e.g. very intolerant; somewhat intolerant). Similarly, the frame that expressed the positive quality was stationed on the right side of the scale and subdivided into its somewhat positive and very positive manifestations (e.g. somewhat tolerant; very tolerant). A rating of balanced was positioned at mid-scale. Each position on the scale was given a value starting at 1 on the far left and moving through to 5 on the right. For example, the opposites Intolerant and Tolerant appeared on the code sheet as:

Very Intolerant	Somewhat Intolerant	Balanced	Somewhat Tolerant	Very Tolerant	DID NOT MENTION
1	2	3	4	5	

To increase the validity of their ratings choice, coders were required to justify their decisions by providing textual evidence and, when necessary, explanatory notes.

Results

Number of Reports

From 1994 to 2004 evangelicals were featured in a total of 119 national television news reports. Divided according to their respective network, CTV covered evangelicals most often, featuring them in 58 stories; Global had 33 stories in which evangelicals were featured and CBC had 28. However, for CBC, running fewer stories did not equate to less airtime devoted to evangelicals. In fact, because CBC’s news stories tended to be longer than those of CTV or Global, the number of words (and

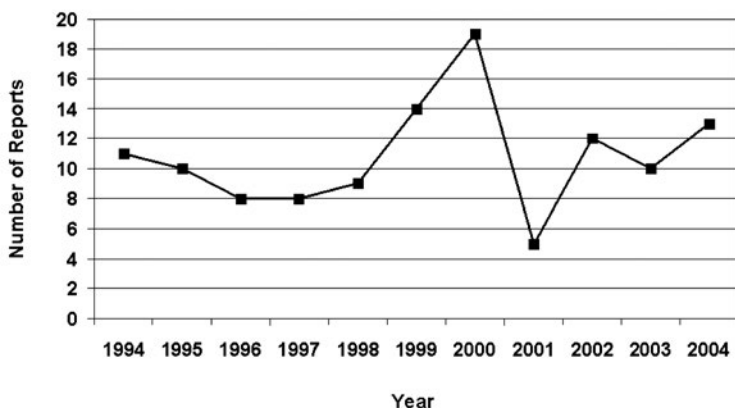
therefore the total amount of airtime) that network dedicated to coverage of evangelicals was greatest of all. Combined, CBC's 28 stories contained 38,133 words while CTV's 58 stories had a total word count of 24,741. At about 12,622 words Global devoted the fewest words to the coverage of evangelicals.

For the most part, the reports were fairly evenly distributed; ten reports per year was the median and 11 was the mean. However, in the year 2000 the number of reports took a sharp rise, increasing to 19; that was the year evangelical politician Stockwell Day took over the leadership of the Canadian Alliance Party—at the time, the party of Canada's official opposition—and campaigned to become Prime Minister. Seventeen of the 19 “evangelical” stories in 2000 focused on Day and his performance in the federal election campaign. At five reports, 2001 saw the fewest number of news stories featuring evangelicals. (See Figure 1.)

Reports By Main Focus/Topic

Reports featuring evangelicals involved in political actions or issues dominated coverage; 29.4% focused on this topic. These stories showed evangelical politicians or evangelical citizens involved in politics mostly at the federal level. A story was not coded as evangelicals involved in politics if the political issue related to education or was connected to a court action; there were more specific categories for stories of that nature.

Figure 1—Number of Reports Per Year



After politics, evangelicals were most often featured in stories involving criminal or immoral activity: 16.8% fell into this category. These stories focused primarily on evangelicals perpetrating sexual or physical abuse or engaged in sexual or financial impropriety. However, 4 of the 20 crime related stories showed evangelicals as victims of crime.

Next, 14.2% of reports showed evangelicals involved in social action or protest. These stories were about demonstrations, marches, petitions, sit-ins, letter writing campaigns or other actions. If the social actions were exercised through the courts, were related to education or had an overtly political focus the report was not placed in this category but in another more attuned to the specific content.

At 14.2%, reports featuring evangelicals involved in religious observance or theological discussion tied those about social protest. Many of these stories were about special church services, though stories about conferences or seminars by evangelical leaders for an evangelical audience also appeared. Reports focusing on evangelicals involved in legal actions or issues comprised 8.4% of the population of scripts. Evangelicals were shown using the courts to stop or challenge decisions made by government, regulatory bodies, businesses, or community organizations. If the court action was related to educational matters, the story was placed in the education category. If the court action was related to an evangelical having committed a crime, the story was placed in the crime category.

Evangelicals involved in educational issues made up 6.7% of reports. Stories focused on all levels of education including university and showed evangelicals trying to implement or change school curriculum or practices, or implement or change selection processes involving students or staff. Evangelicals involved in proselytizing comprised 4.2% of reports. Reports in this category showed evangelicals actively trying to influence the religious lives/religious beliefs of people locally and abroad. Stories were about missionaries working aboard or about large local concerts held with the specific goal of teaching non-Christians/non-evangelicals about Jesus and Christianity.

Evangelicals involved in church business or governance made up 2.5% of reports. The non-theological discussions and decisions of a church or denomination were the focus of coverage. Stories were about new building construction, hiring or firing of a minister, or two churches or denominations amalgamating. Similarly, just 2.5% of reports focused on evangelicals involved in charity or volunteer work. Stories in this category showed evangelicals helping others locally or abroad to live a better *material life*. One report (.8 %) focused on a celebrity evangelical. To qualify for this category a report had to highlight biographical information about a famous evangelical over any overt Christian message they were relaying. If an evangelical was famous due to political activity the report was placed in the political story category.

Frames Employed, 1994-2004

In the total population of news reports, evangelicals were framed as being somewhat intolerant ($M = 2.17$, $SD = 1.19$), somewhat politically threatening ($M = 2.29$, $SD = 1.16$), somewhat criminally-minded ($M = 1.75$, $SD = 1.01$), somewhat un-Canadian ($M = 2.08$, $SD = 1.08$), and slightly unintelligent ($M = 2.44$, $SD = 1.23$). They were framed in a balanced or neutral fashion between superstitious and spiritual ($M = 2.69$, $SD = 1.18$), as balanced between vengeful and forgiving ($M = 2.81$, $SD = 1.25$), balanced between pushy and respectful when presenting social views ($M = 3.09$, $SD = 1.50$), balanced between having outdated values and beliefs and contemporary ones ($M = 3.22$, $SD = 1.71$), balanced between insincere and sincere ($M = 3.24$, $SD = 1.59$), and balanced between neglectful and responsible ($M = 3.37$, $SD = 1.31$). The one specifically positive frame depicted evangelicals as being somewhat undeserving of media and societal bias ($M = 4.21$, $SD = 1.05$).

An average of the scores for all frames produced a mean of 2.83 or an overall rating of balanced. In terms of actual number of frames used in the 119 reports, 241 frames were identified of which 128 were negative (65 somewhat; 63 very), 30 were balanced, and 83 were positive (45 somewhat; 38 very).

On a network by network basis, the news reports that aired on CBC TV employed the most negative frames; collectively, they generated a mean of 2.42 or an overall rating of slightly negative. An average of the scores for all frames used in the reports of CTV produced a mean of 2.93 or an overall rating of balanced, and the frames used in the reports of Global TV produced a mean of 3.14 or an overall rating of balanced.

As was explained previously in this paper, when a frame's frequency (i.e., how often it is used) and exclusivity (i.e., not being opposed by a contradicting or competing frame) are high, it becomes more salient and, therefore, more influential in terms of *how* an audience thinks about an issue (Entman 1993; Entman 1991). By those criteria, it can be said that the "intolerant," "criminally-minded," "undeserving of media and societal bias," and the "un-Canadian" frames were more likely to influence audience opinion than others that appeared in the news reports about evangelicals. (See Figure 2.)

The "evangelicals as intolerant" frame appeared in one quarter, or 24.3%, of all reports (10.1% somewhat intolerant; 14.2% very intolerant) while 7.5% of news reports framed evangelicals in a balanced fashion in relation to tolerance and 5.8% framed them as tolerant (4.2% somewhat tolerant; 1.6% very tolerant). An example of a news report that coders determined framed evangelicals as "very intolerant" was a profile piece about evangelical politician, Stockwell Day (Hunter, 2000).

At the time, Day was leader of Canada's official opposition and the report, which ran during the federal election campaign of 2000, referred to Day as racist, sexist and homophobic. One source in the piece accused Day of having a hidden agenda of intolerance, stating:

I don't think that the Stockwell Day that Canadians are seeing on the hustings is the true Stockwell Day, as to what his reaction will be, if he is ever Prime Minister of this country and [has] to make decisions about matters relating to women, about matters relating to ethnic groups, particularly religious minority

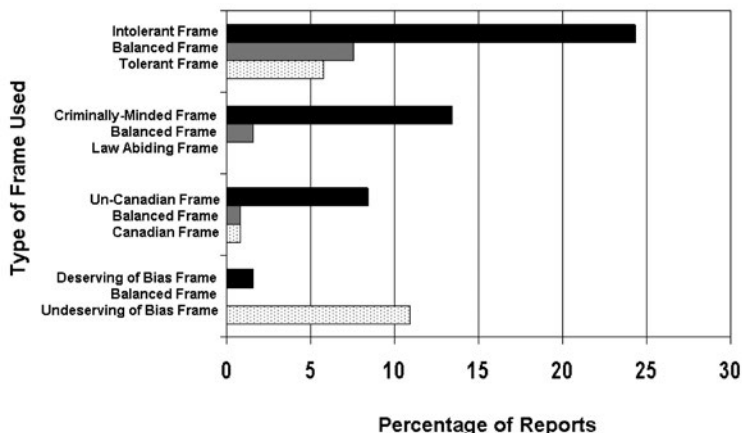
groups, about how he would react in matters clearly related to homosexuality. (Hunter, 2000)

Another source attacked Day for opposing a government grant earmarked to fund research into the history of gays and lesbians in Day’s home province of Alberta. She said his decision was “inconsistent with an agenda of tolerance” (Hunter, 2000). Coders noted that Day was not interviewed for the report and was therefore not given the opportunity to respond to his accusers and give his version of events.

Elsewhere, during the voiceover narration of the report, the reporter pointed out that before entering politics Day had worked at a Christian school that was situated just 30 kilometers down the road from a known holocaust denier (Hunter, 2000). Coders saw the reporter’s segue from the holocaust denier to Day as further evidence of negative framing—a type of guilt by association. They noted that the report gave no examples of anti-Semitism on the part of Day, his only connection to the holocaust denier was that they shared the same geographic location.

The frame of “criminally-minded” was used in 13.4% of reports (5.8% somewhat criminally-minded; 7.5% very criminally-minded). Regarding neutral and opposing frames, just 1.6% of reports employed a balanced frame and .8% framed evangelicals as somewhat law-abiding. No report framed evangelicals as very

Figure 2—Frames with Greatest Frequency and Exclusivity



law-abiding. One news report that coders determined employed the frame of “very criminally-minded” featured evangelicals visiting the Holy Land at the turn of the millennium. Specifically, the piece focused on members of the faith who wanted to see the Jewish temple rebuilt on Mt. Moriah where a major Muslim mosque stands. The building of this new temple would, they believed, hasten the second coming of Christ (MacDonald, 1999). The evangelicals in the report were portrayed as willing to use illegal means to bring about the destruction of the mosque so as to make way for the temple. Although the reporter, at one point in his voiceover narration stated that: “It must be said that the vast majority of evangelicals, including Hal Lindsey [an evangelical featured in the report], say they believe that any human efforts to clear the Mount right now would be futile, destructive and wrong” (MacDonald, 1999), he went on to contradict his own ameliorating comment. For example, he warned that evangelicals were prepared to do “[s]tupid violent things that will lead to the chaos that will, in turn, [in their minds] lead to paradise” (MacDonald, 1999). He also noted that the evangelicals’ clandestine machinations were making “Israeli police and intelligence services terribly nervous. They have in fact begun using the blunt tool of expulsion rather than risk the presence of a Christian who wants to nudge the Apocalypse along” (MacDonald, 1999). The reporter did not, however, provide any examples of evangelicals found plotting or committing illegal acts against the mosque.

Evangelicals were framed positively as undeserving of media and societal bias in 10.9% of reports (1.6% somewhat undeserving of media and societal bias; 9.2% very undeserving of media and societal bias). Just 1.6% of reports framed evangelicals as deserving of media and societal bias (1.6% somewhat deserving; 0 very deserving). No report employed the “balanced” frame. A report deemed to employ the “undeserving of media and societal bias” aired during the election of 2000 and like the previous example of a story from the federal campaign trail, it too focused on evangelical politician Stockwell Day. However, this second report defended Day’s religious beliefs (Oliver & Robertson, 2000). The reporter in the piece stated:

Our last five Prime Ministers were all Catholics, Trudeau in particular very devout, trained by Jesuits, Tommy Douglas was a devout minister. No one asked them for a moral accounting. So why are we doing the same in a case of an Evangelical Christian[?] Why are his beliefs so suspect and the beliefs of others not[?]
(Oliver & Robertson, 2000)

Apart from the frames listed above, no other single frame possessed high exclusivity while also appearing in 10% or more of reports⁵. Of those frames appearing in fewer than 10% of reports, only the “un-Canadian” frame stood out for its high exclusivity.

Specifically, evangelicals were framed as un-Canadian in 8.4% of reports (5.8% somewhat un-Canadian; 2.5% very un-Canadian) while they were framed neutrally in just .8% of reports and as very Canadian in .8%. No frames appeared for “somewhat Canadian.”

By way of example, a report about Canada’s first evangelical television station was coded as employing the “un-Canadian” frame. Rather than focusing on the station’s predominantly Canadian content, the piece portrayed the station and its operators as purveyors of American culture. Just before cutting to a clip of the scandal-prone American televangelist Jimmy Swaggart loudly opining about money, the reporter stated: “The channel joins a host of American stations already beaming up over the border. The station will air many U.S. programs, providing the stars of the right-wing religious world with a Canadian platform” (Gray, 1995).

Discussion and Conclusions

Evangelicals in Canada have claimed that the news media are biased against them and, as stated at the outset, the primary goal of this research was to empirically test the validity of that charge. It would have been more dramatic if the results of this study provided singular and unequivocal evidence to support or refute the evangelicals’ claim, but they do not. In fact, the results tell two divergent tales.

Evangelicals were, in terms of overall mean rating for frames, portrayed in a neutral fashion in nightly, national television news reports between 1994 and 2004. This finding suggests that Canada's national television journalists, in the main, strive to provide coverage that is balanced. However, the frequent use of the intolerant, criminally-minded, and un-Canadian frames—usually without significant competition from opposing frames—and the high number of negative frames used overall, suggests that there is still room for improvement in their coverage of evangelicals.

Canadian journalists' concentrated framing of evangelicals as intolerant, criminally-minded and un-Canadian may stem from specific differences in the value systems of these two groups. As explained early in this paper, Canada's evangelicals hold tight to socially conservative beliefs and values that find their origins in scripture and Christian tradition (Reimer, 2003). Conversely, research by Miljan and Cooper (2003) has shown that this country's elite journalists⁶, far more so than Canadians in general, embrace the ideologies of secularism, pluralism and liberalism⁷. Furthermore, the researchers determined that the causes and ideals Canada's elite journalists favor—such as gay rights and feminism—are championed in the news stories they create. For example, in court cases where women's rights or the rights of homosexuals were the focus, Miljan and Cooper (2003) found that coverage favored the position of the women's groups and gays; conversely, the position and opinions of opposing groups were subjected to criticism or excluded completely. Similarly, in this study, journalists most often framed evangelicals as "very intolerant" in those reports where they were pitted against feminist or gay rights activists. It would seem when evangelicals' beliefs and values directly contradict their own, most heart-felt convictions, journalists find it difficult to play the role of dispassionate, neutral observer.

While it is true that the results of this study tell two tales, the tales may not be of completely equal significance. That is to say, in terms of audience perceptions it could be suggested that the concentrated negative frames (because of their increased

saliency) wield more influence over viewers' attitudes than a numerically significant, yet thematically disparate, collection of positive and balanced frames. Research has shown that a correlation exists between repetitive viewing of specific, similar content on television and the holding of specific perceptions or beliefs about the world. Rubin, Perse and Taylor (1988) determined that regular viewers of daytime soap operas (which often feature villains with hidden agendas and ulterior motives) tend to score lower in perception of altruism and trust in others. Similarly, McLeod, Daily, Eveland, Guo, Culver, Kurpius, Moy, Horowitz, and Zhong (1995, as cited in Severin and Tankard, 2001), found that regular exposure to crime-saturated local television news was likely to promote the perception that the crime rate was rising even when it was actually going down (cf. McCombs & Ghanem, 2001). Similarly, concentrated depictions of evangelicals as intolerant, criminally-minded, and un-Canadian might lead to viewers' acceptance of these messages as valid⁸.

If reports of Canada's elite journalists tend to favor groups that hold values similar to their own and disfavor those that do not, how does one account for the fact that 10.9% of their reports framed evangelicals positively as undeserving of media and societal bias? The explanation for that phenomenon may be tied to Nelson, Clawson and Oxley's (1997) observation that frames can originate outside the news organization. They suggest that there are times when a source's interpretation of an event or issue is so persuasive that the reporter adopts it as the "right" interpretation. It may be that in 10.9% of reports evangelicals stayed on message and argued vociferously that the treatment they were receiving in the media and from others in society was prejudicial. In the end they were so convincing that their "version of reality" was adopted, or favored, in the news reports.

It could also be that journalists employed this positive frame in a concentrated fashion as a means of placating evangelicals and others disgruntled by previously negative coverage. Interestingly, over half of the reports in which the "undeserving of societal and media bias" frame aired near the end, or shortly after, the Canadian federal election of 2000—an election that many defined in

terms of its hostility toward evangelicals (Hoover, 2000). After his party's defeat, Stockwell Day himself publicly accused the media of an anti-evangelical bias (Hoover, 2000). Regarding journalists' occasional "change of heart", Herman and Chomsky (1988) argue it is not uncommon for media personnel to sporadically criticize the very ideas and ideals that they themselves have propagated; doing so creates the illusion of diversity and debate and enables the news media to discount claims of imbalance and bias while allowing them to proceed unencumbered in their promotion of values and ideologies they esteem.

Variations among the networks with regard to how each framed evangelicals deserves some attention. Of the three networks, the CBC was the only one to register an overall rating below the balanced territory in the "slightly negative" range. CBC's lower rating may be attributable to that network's culture ethos; that is, the attitudes and values held by CBC journalists may be most at odds with the attitudes and values of evangelicals. Survey data has suggested that journalists working for the CBC—Canada's publicly funded broadcaster—are socially, politically, and economically more left-leaning than journalists working for private networks (Miljan & Cooper, 2003; Barber & Rauhala, 2005). This attitudinal uniformity among CBC employees has been linked to owners and managers with strong ideologies hiring and promoting front-line journalists who demonstrate similar ideologies (Fulford, 2006; Miljan & Cooper, 2003). While this greater negativity may be a case of the personal attitudes of the CBC journalists influencing how they cover stories about evangelicals, additional research would be needed to confirm this effect.

Finally, a comment about the main focus or topic of the news reports collected for this study. Evangelicals were more apt to receive coverage for their involvement in non-religious situations that were rife with conflict (e.g., politics and crime), than for their involvement in distinctly religious situations where harmony was exemplified (e.g., charity and volunteer work). Distinct from how they were framed in these situations, the situations themselves were primarily negative. The media's preference for covering evangelicals in non-religious, controversial situations may be linked

to biased attitudes toward this faith group; however, the media's preference for covering stories of this nature is probably more a case of established precedent than prejudice. That is to say, journalistic convention holds that certain types of events and issues are simply more worthy of coverage than others. Four decades ago, Galtung and Ruge (1965) determined that the presence of certain elements, or news values, cause journalists to deem one situation more worthy of coverage than another. They determined that, among other factors, events that are negative, unambiguous (easy to grasp), unexpected, involve elite personalities, and that can be depicted as a battle between individuals are far more likely to receive coverage (1965). We should not be surprised, then, that most of the television news stories about evangelicals possess these particular news values given that most news stories, regardless of subject, do as well.

Paraphrasing the findings of Galtung and Ruge (1965) and setting them in a decidedly Christian context, Maus (1990) explains:

Millions worship each week... proclaim the Gospel and serve humanity by feeding the hungry... These are not the kinds of events journalists define as news. It is news, though when a popular minister gets caught in greed or lust. The secular media report the unusual; they seldom deal with the usual, and the more usual something is, the less attention it gets. (Maus, 1990, p. 245)

It should be noted that driving what the news media consider worthy of coverage is a financial imperative. The news media, like all media, exist to make money and money is made by selling advertising. Because advertising rates are tied to market penetration, the more people watching or reading a company's news product, the more that company can charge for advertising. To ensure the greatest audience, news content is adjusted accordingly; it is fashioned to appeal to the largest number of people. Media professionals know that easy to understand, sensational, negative news has greater mass appeal

than complicated or positive news and thus it is more profitable (Fleras, 2003; Messner, Duncan & Wachs, 1996).

To conclude, this research should be viewed as a first step in a long progression to illuminate the relationship between evangelicals and the media in Canada. It must be conceded that this study's greatest weakness is that it focuses primarily on what is happening while doing little to explain why. To convincingly determine if this faith groups' concerns over media bias are justified, further research is warranted. Specifically, the depiction of evangelicals in Canadian newspapers, magazines, and even entertainment media should be subjected to analysis and the attitudes of journalists toward specific religious traditions should be probed more thoroughly. In addition, it would be beneficial if the relationship between other faith groups and the Canadian media were to be examined using a methodology comparable to that used in this study. Similarly focused research on "stand-alone" faith communities could allow for comparison of data between religious groups and, as Kerr suggests (2003), in the end provide a clearer and more complete understanding of the news media's overall treatment of religion. In particular, similar research examining the media's treatment of conservative Catholics and conservative Muslims would be invaluable for evaluative purposes. An examination of media coverage of conservative Catholics—who, over the last few decades, have become increasingly similar doctrinally and ideologically to evangelicals (Beverly, 2002; Shea, 2004)—might allow researchers to determine whether conservative Christian faith groups, in general, share a common media profile. Conversely, a similarly conducted study of coverage of Muslims might allow researchers to determine if journalists—known for their support of the underdog—are more sympathetic in their treatment of non-dominant (i.e., non-Christian) conservative faith groups.

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Endnotes

1. All measures were taken to ensure that this study was performed in the most objective fashion; however, in the interests of complete openness I feel that as researcher I should disclose my affiliations. I am a former television reporter and many of my close friends are working television journalists. I am also a practicing Christian (following the Anglican tradition); however, my willingness to accept a large percentage of scripture as figurative disqualifies me for the title of evangelical. That said, I support evangelicals' right to freely practice and express their beliefs.

2. For the purposes of this study nightly, national news is that which has typically been aired at 6:30 on Global, 10:00 p.m. on CBC TV, 11:00 pm on CTV. Briefly, during the mid-1990s CBC TV changed the time of its national news program from 10:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. Former Global News producer Carmen Harvey (personal communication, October 17, 2005) states that prior to 2001, Global's national newscast was not available in the provinces of Alberta and British Columbia.

3. For several reasons, a researcher conducting a longitudinal study of Canadian TV news stories must use transcripts of the stories and not video dubs. Unlike in the United States where dubs of news reports are available from the Vanderbilt Video Archive, Canada has no independent body or group that records and stores TV newscasts. While the networks themselves archive many of their news reports in video form, some stories—deemed to be of “lesser” interest—are not saved indefinitely on video. Even when a story is saved on video it is difficult to access as the TV networks do not make their archives open to the public—not even for academic research purposes. Dubs of specific stories can be obtained (if they survive) for a fee of about \$50; however, a request for dubs of numerous stories that have aired over a 10-year period would not be approved. Such a request would not be granted because it would prove “too daunting a task for tape library personnel who are already busy with other duties” (Noseworthy, Kelly [Archivist Global TV]. Personal Communication, April 11, 2005).

Some researchers (Miljan & Cooper, 2003) argue that visuals need not be included in an analysis of TV news stories because the focus, themes and intent of a TV news report will come out clearly in the anchor's lead, reporter's voice over and interview clips—all of which are transcribed in the text of the script. They note that the influence of visuals is minimal given that the greatest number of images in TV news reports are “talking-head” shots (Miljan & Cooper, 2003, p. 33). This opinion finds support in the research of Pride and Wamsley (1972) and Kerr (2003); their respective studies found visuals did not significantly effect whether a news story was perceived to be positive or negative in its portrayal of an issue or group.

4. Those interested in examining the complete operational definitions of these frames, as they appeared in the coders' guidebook, are welcome to e-mail me for a copy.

5. The "sincere" frame and the "politically threatening" frame both appeared in 17.6% of reports. Despite their significant frequency, the influence of the two aforementioned frames was muted by competition from their respective oppositional frames. The competing "insincere" frame was used in 13.4% of all reports (5.8% somewhat insincere; 7.5% very insincere) and the "balanced" frame was used in 2.5% resulting in an overall rating of balanced in this frame category ($M = 3.24$). Regarding the political activity frames, 6.7% of reports framed evangelicals in a balanced fashion in relation to their political activity and 5% framed them as politically reassuring (4.2% somewhat politically reassuring; .8 very politically reassuring). These numbers were not sufficient to move the overall rating from negative to balanced.

6. Miljan and Cooper (2003) categorize elite news media as those journalists who work for Canada's largest circulation daily newspapers and national broadcast news organizations.

7. Miljan and Cooper (2003, pp. 56-58) use a specific term to describe the ultra liberal values of Canadian journalists—they call their values "post-materialist". Postmaterialists (those who possess postmaterialist values) tend to be skeptical of hierarchical authority, better educated and far less religious than the average person. The rights of the individual, especially the right to individual self-expression, are most important to postmaterialists.

8. The influence of the negative frames could be lessened or heightened depending on different circumstances. Because reports featuring evangelicals air far less often than soap operas or crime stories on local TV news, the effect of negative frames in those reports on viewers' perceptions maybe somewhat muted. Conversely, the frames' influence on audience perceptions' would be increased for those viewers who have no first hand knowledge of the individual or group of evangelicals represented; it has been shown that having formed no previous opinion, viewers are more apt to adopt the frame's version of reality as their own (Fujioka, 1999; McCombs, 1997). Finally, the negativity of the frames themselves makes them more readily accepted by a wider audience. Negative information has been shown to more greatly affect observers' formation of impressions than positive information (Fiske, 1980; Hamilton & Zanna, 1972; Reeder & Coovert, 1986).

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