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Media Literacy and News Credibility: Does knowledge of media ownership increase skepticism in news consumers?

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Abstract

This study explores how increased knowledge of media ownership may affect judgments of credibility in responding to print news. An experiment was conducted with 80 undergraduate journalism students. Subjects were randomly exposed to either an informational article about the pros and cons of consolidation in media ownership or poetry. Then subjects read and analyzed four news stories, analyzing each using a credibility scale that includes judgments of truth, superficiality, general accuracy and completeness. Results show statistically significant differences in judgments of general accuracy and superficiality, suggesting that exposure to informational print about media ownership may promote modest increases in critical responses to news media.

Keywords: Media Ownership, Political Economy, Media Literacy, News Media, Journalism

As Marshall McLuhan famously pointed out, humans live in constructed media environments as unconsciously as fish in water. Therefore, it can be difficult to see that media constructions of reality sometimes offer incomplete or inaccurate portrayals of the world we live in. The growing field of media literacy aims to make media consumers aware of their media environments and increase critical thinking about media's constructions of reality.

Broadly, media literacy can be defined as the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and communicate a variety of media messages (Hobbs 2008). Christ and Potter (1998) conclude that media literacy is "more than just the development of certain skills, but also the acquisition of knowledge structures, especially about the media industries, general content patterns, and a broad view of effects" (8). Taken together, these two definitions inform our study, which hypothesizes that acquisition of knowledge structures about the media industry—specifically, media ownership—will mitigate the credibility of news messages and encourage skepticism on the part of the news consumer. Put more simply, as media literacy increases, news credibility decreases.

One aspect of media literacy focuses on structural characteristics of media industries, including media ownership and media economics. Some suggest that it is helpful for news consumers to know who owns the media companies that produce news (McChesney 1999, 2004; Silverblatt 2001; Potter 1998). This is because ownership, some believe, shapes the content of news and journalism. The incentive to maximize profit in the commercial media system is thought to limit the diversity of views presented. Ultimately, this is seen as a disservice to democracy, which is dependent on a free and independent press charged with the responsibility of supporting a well-informed citizenry. This is where we focus our attention, by designing a simple experiment that would attempt to gauge the impact of a quick lesson in media ownership on participants' views of the credibility of four news articles. Before discussing our methods and results, it is useful to review the relevant literature that helps to justify this approach.

Media Literacy, Citizenship and Social Change

Media literate individuals "can decode, evaluate, analyze and produce both print and electronic media" (Christ and Potter 1998, 7). Core concepts of media literacy include a set of knowledge, skills and at-

titudes, including these ideas: (1) Media are constructed and construct reality; (2) the media have commercial implications; (3) media have ideological and political implications; (4) form and content are related in each medium, each of which has a unique aesthetic, codes, and conventions; (5)receivers negotiate meaning in media (7-8, citing Aufderheide 1997, 80). Christ and Potter conclude that media literacy is "more than just the development of certain skills, but also the acquisition of knowledge structures, especially about the media industries, general content patterns, and a broad view of effects. … It is more than just cognitive. It also requires aesthetic, emotional and moral development" (8). Many of the questions asked in the media literacy debates have direct application to higher education and lifelong learning. The authors also discuss curriculum-building issues and address the problem of how to teach media literacy: "There is a sense that the very act of studying media can help democratize the teacher-student relationship because the act of critique is one of 'reflection and dialogue'" (10, citing Masterman 1997, 44).

Some scholars posit that the goal of media literacy is to help people become sophisticated citizens rather than just sophisticated consumers (Lewis and Jhally 1998). Media literacy, they say, is a way of extending democracy to the place where democracy is increasingly scripted and defined. Media education should teach students to engage media texts, some argue, but it should also teach them to engage and challenge media institutions. Media literacy education, in this view, is largely a defensive approach designed to counteract growing commercialism in the media. Some teachers and scholars may disagree with this perspective, which could be viewed as ideologically prescriptive. But the authors respond to this concern: "It is important to note that we are not advocating propagandizing in schools for a particular political perspective. We are advocating a view that recognizes that the world is always made by someone, and a decision to tolerate the status quo is as political as a more overtly radical act" (119).

This perspective echoes an argument developed by Masterman (1997) who states that media education will inevitably lead to improved citizenship and social change. He suggests that participatory democracy depends on citizen control of institutions and active involvement with the media. Stuart Ewen also agrees with the view that media literacy is instrumental in the facilitation of democracy, noting, "Media literacy cannot simply be seen as a vaccination against PR or other familiar strains of institutionalized guile. It must be understood as an education in techniques that can democratize the realm of public expression and will magnify the possibility of meaningful public interactions" (2000, 449). Dyson (1998) claims, "The real need is for a better understanding among adults of how media work—with more attention drawn to dated definitions of censorship and freedom of expression and how these are being exploited by corporate interests for the purpose of protecting unfettered freedom of enterprise, without any regard for the social and cultural fallout" (159).

In this study we hypothesize that learning about media ownership leads media consumers to offer lower credibility ratings of news stories. Because of their primary obligation to return value to shareholders, corporate media are not held accountable for their inattention to issues of citizenship and democratic participation. Most Americans are unaware of how the commercial media system shapes the news they receive. Greater awareness of media ownership might promote skepticism about news content by increasing knowledge about characteristics of the "authors" who construct news media messages.

Method

Design

To test this hypothesis, we designed a simple between-subjects experiment to determine the impact of increased knowledge on judgments of message credibility. The experiment tested a convenience sample of college students using one independent variable (exposure to a print article about media ownership) and four dependent variables representing judgments made after subjects read four print news stories, assessing truthfulness, superficiality, generate accuracy and completeness.

Sample

A convenience sample of 80 students from a Midwestern university was selected for the study. Participants were recruited from an undergraduate journalism course and told only that they would be reading some news stories and answering some questions in order to help contribute to knowledge and to receive class credit. Participants ranged in age from 19 to 31, with 71 percent of the sample being 19 to 20 years old. Eighty-three percent of the sample was female. Eighty-eight percent of the sample was Caucasian. Participants received class credit for their participation.

Procedure

The experiment was run in a large, relatively quiet meeting room in a new building on a public university campus. The room was well lit with several long tables arranged in four rows with two-dozen office chairs evenly dispersed. Every effort was made to ensure students were comfortable and able to focus on the reading and evaluation materials provided. Students were free to sign up and participate at their leisure during designated testing times, all occurring between 8 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. Upon arrival in the testing room, participants were asked to sign a consent form and given a test packet. Most often, several students participated at the same time. The task took approximately 30 minutes to complete.

Stimuli

Participants were randomly assigned to receive a test package or a control package. In the test package, there was an educational component titled "Media Consolidation & Ownership: Pros and Cons of the Corporate Media System." Included in each packet was a series of four news stories to read, followed by questions about each story's credibility. Participants in the control group were given a series of nature poems to read prior to evaluating the news articles. The poetry provided was the same length in word count (about 800) as the educational component and contained no references to modern media, technology or business.

The test package text offered two brief five-paragraph statements on the pros and cons of the corporate media system labeled "Arguments in Favor of the Corporate Media System" and "Arguments Against the Corporate Media System." (See Appendix A.) The educational material was adapted from an article written by Dr. Naomi Rockler-Gladen, who until recently was an assistant professor of media studies in the Department of Speech Communication at Colorado State University. She has published numerous scholarly articles about popular culture and critical media studies, and holds a Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota. The article was published in the independent online magazine Suite101.com. We chose this stimulus as our educational component because it offered a broad overview of what many scholars consider to be the most important benefits and concerns created by a commercial media system. Further, we wanted to offer a balanced analysis of the media system as opposed to a mere screed either for or against it.

We also controlled for recency effect by randomly alternating the statements about the positive and negative aspects of the corporate media system for each participant in the test group. Half of the students in the test group read arguments against the corporate media system before reading arguments in favor of it. The other half read arguments in favor of the corporate media system before reading arguments against it.

Stimulus Materials

The four news articles were chosen from the Web sites of four different mainstream news outlets (ABC, MSNBC, The Wall Street Journal, and The New York Times). Topics included the U.S. economic crisis, Iraqi defectors stating that Iraq was a haven for terrorists, indications that Democrats will move slowly on labor and regulatory goals in 2009, and difficulties facing President-elect Barack Obama in carrying out his campaign promises. The news stories were rotated in an effort to control for primacy effects and the effects of fatigue or sensitization, in case people became more or less critical of stories the longer they worked through the study.

These articles were selected for their apparent adherence to traditional journalistic norms of objectivity, balance and independence, and for their coverage of four separate subject areas. The outlets that produced the articles are subject to different ownership structures but all are owned by public corporations with multiple media holdings. The goal was to create a multiple-message design to limit the effects of a participant's feelings toward any one topic area. Further, the sources of the news articles were not identified in the experiment. Each news article appeared with only a headline and body text. This was done to avoid any associations the participants may have had with a particular media outlet. As a result, participants' evaluations of source credibility were not influenced by their bias against or in favor of a particular news organization.

Credibility Scale

The dependent variable was a series of judgments made in responding to an 18-item scale where readers rate credibility and "realness" of news articles, created by Weintraub and Dong (1994), which is shown in Appendix B. People's trust in the media is linked with perceptions of media being unbiased, accurate, fair, and able "to tell the whole story" (Meyer 1988; Iyengar and Kinder 1985; Weintraub and Dong 1994; Wanta and Hu 1994; Miller and Wanta 1996; Miller and Krosnick 2000; Johnson and Kaye 2002). After reading each news

story, participants answered a series of 18 questions. Responses were given on a seven-point Likert scale. We approached the 18 questions as a unidimensional scale. It was not until we conducted a factor analysis that we grouped certain questions into the four indices that became our four dependent variables: truth, superficiality, general accuracy and completeness. For ten of the 18 questions, the highest number on the scale indicated a more critical response. For eight of the questions, a higher response indicated less critical judgment. The response values for those eight were flipped using statistical software so that when means were found, higher averages always indicated a more critical response.

Results

In our hypothesis, we predicted that reading information about media ownership would increase an individual's skepticism of the news and the people and institutions who report it even in ways that might not be intuitively connected to media ownership. The issue of corporate media control is so broad that even a short article about it may create greater skepticism in responding to news stories, even when story content and sources of news are varied.

Overall, credibility between the four articles was significantly different. This is not surprising. Different story content is likely to produce different credibility ratings. The story about labor and regulatory goals was viewed least critically ($m = 3.52$, $sd = .78$, $p < .01$), the story about Obama was viewed slightly more critically ($m = 3.93$, $sd = 1.04$, $p < .01$), the story about Iraqi defectors was viewed even more critically ($m = 4.31$, $sd = .83$, $p < .01$), and the economic crisis story was viewed most critically ($m = 4.80$, $sd = .75$, $p < .01$).

Four dependent variables were identified using factor analysis. Table 1 shows four components (the "Truth Factor," "Superficiality Factor," "General Accuracy Factor," and "Completeness Factor") that emerged and shows which variables loaded on which component. Variables listed below are derived from the 18 questions in the source credibility scale. The 18 variables were, "Whole Story Accuracy," "Things as they Seem," "Source Truth," "Newspaper Truth," "Reporter Trustworthiness," "Informed Sources," "Story Completeness," "Reporter Access," "More to the Story," "Reporter Misled," "Reporter Expert," "Newspaper Facts Wrong," "Reporter Competency," "Story Bias," "Newspaper Sensationalism," "Newspaper Trivialism," "Subjects Portrayed Fairly," and "Reporter Bias."

Table 1: *Factor Analysis*

Variable	Truth	Superficiality	Accuracy	Completeness
Source Truth	**.67**	.13	.45	.18
Newspaper Truth	**.91**	.07	.12	.03
Reporter Trustworthiness	**.90**	.12	.13	.08
Reporter Competency	**.83**	.13	-.11	-.06
Reporter Misled	.08	**.73**	.27	.21
Newspaper Facts Wrong	-.03	**.54**	.49	.24
Story Bias	.09	**.81**	-.01	.35
Newspaper Sensationalism	.30	**.78**	.11	.18
Newspaper Trivialism	.34	**.70**	.13	.05
Reporter Bias	-.08	**.83**	.04	.25
Whole Story Accuracy	.50	.15	**.69**	.04
Things as they Seem	.49	.26	**.68**	.06
Informed Sources	.48	.01	**.56**	.34
Reporter Expert	-.15	.07	**.78**	.02
Story Completeness	.34	.12	.41	**.64**
Reporter Access	-.03	.42	-.03	**.72**
More to the Story	-.12	.28	.05	**.81**
Subjects Portrayed Fairly	.29	.41	.16	**.57**

Truth: $\alpha = .890$, Eigenvalue = 7.10
Superficiality: $\alpha = .858$, Eigenvalue = 3.06
General Accuracy: $\alpha = .854$, Eigenvalue = 1.56
Completeness: $\alpha = .728$, Eigenvalue = 1.09

The first index created was labeled "Truth Factor" (α = .890, Eigenvalue = 7.10, percent variance explained = 39%) and included the variables "Source Truth," "Newspaper Truth," and "Reporter Trustworthiness." Based on the original source credibility instrument, the questions about these three variables fit together as measurements of overall truth. The variable "Reporter Competency" also loaded with this index, but it was omitted because it did not fit logically with this index, and Cronbach's Alpha increased when it was left out.

The second index created was labeled "Superficiality Factor" (α = .858, Eigenvalue = 3.06, percent variance explained = 17%) and included the variables "Newspaper Facts Wrong," "Story Bias," "Newspaper Sensationalism," "Newspaper Trivialism," and "Reporter Bias." Together, these variables broadly represent superficiality in reporting. Bias, sensationalism and triviality signal a quality of reporting that fails to go beyond the surface of the content. Getting basic facts wrong is considered here as another indicator of facile reporting. The variable "Reporter Misled" loaded with this index but was left out because it does not fit logically with our conceptualization, and eliminating it from the index did not greatly affect Cronbach's Alpha. If sources mislead a reporter, that is not necessarily an indication that the reporter or news organization is willing to promote superficial news.

The third index created was labeled "General Accuracy Factor" (α = .854, Eigenvalue = 1.56, percent variance explained = 9%) and included the variables "Whole Story Accurate," "Things as they Seem," and "Informed Sources." These variables reflect overall perception that the story represented an accurate view of reality. The first two variables refer broadly to accuracy, and the "Informed Sources" variable is concerned with the sources' ability to give accurate information. "Reporter Expert" was left out of the index because doing so significantly increased Cronbach's Alpha, and this variable did not fit with our overall conceptualization of accuracy.

The fourth index was labeled "Completeness Factor" (α = .728, Eigenvalue = 1.09, percent variance explained = 6% and included the variables "Story Completeness," "Reporter Access," and "More to the Story." These variables fit together well as overall measures of completeness. The first variable addressed completeness generally, the second variable addressed whether the reporter had access to all the necessary information, and the third variable asked whether relevant information was left out. "Subjects Portrayed Fairly" was eliminated from the index because it did not logically fit with the category and doing so did not cause a large decrease in Cronbach's Alpha.

Table 2: *Credibility Judgements by Condition*

Factor	Test Group Mean (SD)	Control Group Mean (SD)
Truth	3.19 (.68)	3.09 (.71)
Superficiality	4.56 (.63)	4.22 (.74)*
General Accuracy	3.72 (.71)	3.36 (.69)*
Completeness	5.32 (.66)	5.13 (.77)

n = 80, df = 78, *p < .05

Two factors yielded significant findings that supported our hypothesis, and the other two factors did not. The results are summarized in Table 2. Based on the "General Accuracy Factor," our hypothesis was supported. An independent samples t test comparing the mean scores of the experimental and control groups found a significant difference between the means of the two groups for the "General Accuracy Factor" (t(78) = -2.29, p = .0125, one-tailed). The mean of the experimental group was significantly higher (m = 3.72, sd = .71) than the mean of the control group (m = 3.36, sd = .69). Based on this factor, Table 1 shows that subjects who read about media ownership rated the overall accuracy of news sources more critically than those who did not read about media ownership.

Based on the "Truth Factor," our hypothesis was not supported (t(78) = -.65, p = .259). No statistically significant differences were found in the means of the scores of the experimental group (m = 3.19, sd = .68) and the control group (m = 3.09, sd = .71).

Based on the "Superficiality Factor," our hypothesis was supported. An independent samples t test comparing the mean scores of the experimental and control groups found a significant difference between the means of the two groups for the "Superficiality Factor" (t(78) = -2.13, p =.018, one-tailed). The mean of the experimental group was significantly higher (m = 4.56, sd = .63) than the mean of the control group (m = 4.22, sd = .74). Again in this case, the higher mean indicated that people were more critical of the stories they read after having been exposed to information about media ownership. Here, the result indicates people in the test group were more critical of media for being superficial than those in the control condition.

Comprehensiveness of coverage was tested by the "Completeness Factor" (t(78) = -1.20, p = .117), and using this index, our hypothesis was not supported. No significant difference was found between the experimental group (m = 5.32, sd = .66) and the control group (m = 5.13, sd = .77). It cannot be stated that participants were skeptical of the thoroughness of news based on this factor.

Discussion

We found limited evidence that shows that learning about media ownership contributes to the lowering of credibility ratings in responding to print news stories. Media consumers may approach news content with a healthy skepticism when they know more about the authors' commercial motivations, where the news comes from, and who is ultimately behind the production of news content.

Our study offers some evidence that simply reading about media ownership may lower perceptions of the credibility of print news when credibility is defined as judgments about superficiality and general accuracy. Dimensions of truth and completeness do not seem to be affected by reading about media ownership. However, this study does suggest that educational approaches can affect judgments of credibility. This is a promising area of research that deserves greater consideration.

Critics will wonder whether media literacy education should increase or decrease people's confidence in print news. In our view, citizens should know the differences between the normative goals of journalism and the obstacles that may prevent these goals from being met. Unfortunately, knowledge of the economic realities and pressures surrounding mainstream, commercial news media should lead to reduced confidence in the news. However, the ultimate goal is not simply to generate distrust, cynicism or apathy. The goal is to teach critical thinking skills that will help citizens evaluate media content and make judgments based on a more complete understanding of how the news is produced. A media literate citizenry is better equipped to demand and appreciate quality journalism that truly adheres to the norms to which it aspires.

In this study, the "General Accuracy Factor" yielded our most significant findings, and this is useful because this factor reflects overall credibility. This suggests that news consumers may find the general accuracy of news content to be lower when they are aware of the corporate media system that controls and finances the media outlets that produce the news. However, differences between the means were modest, suggesting that simply reading about media ownership did not lead subjects to become overwhelmingly critical of print media. These modest differences we found may suggest that subjects were simply cued by their exposure to the informational article about media ownership to be more critical. This must be understood as distinct from real educational impact, which was not measured in this study.

Our "Superficiality Factor" also yielded significant results, suggesting that participants who learned about media ownership were more critical of the tendency to sensationalize or trivialize the news. In contrast to skepticism about accuracy, skepticism related to the "Superficial Factor" suggests people can be influenced not only to question if the facts are correct in their news but if the stories go into enough depth. This is an especially interesting finding given that one of the major criticisms of corporate media is its tendency to focus on shallow news or the shallow aspects of hard news stories. The fact that none of the stories in this study would likely be considered soft news pieces adds further strength to the argument that skepticism on behalf of the study participants was the result of exposure to informational article about media ownership. It should also be mentioned that the participants for this study were all undergraduate students at a reputable journalism school. It is likely that they already have some awareness or knowledge of media systems and structures, and this may have had an influence on our findings, though it is difficult to say whether this would have increased or decreased overall skepticism. Future studies should be conducted with students and others who are not involved or invested in the news media industry.

Exploration of media ownership provides an opportunity for people to examine the underlying commercial media system that dominates the media landscape in the United States. Future studies might examine the impact of ownership education on long-term attitudes and behaviors. Ultimately, this study was an attempt to address an area of research that has been considered in need of greater attention. While our results are modest, they do suggest that further study of this area of research is a worthwhile endeavor. Creating media literate consumers is increasingly important in our complex media universe and in our increasingly global culture. Knowing how to increase media literacy should be important for journalists and scholars alike because this is a way to foster the development of the field and the profession. More significantly, creating media literate consumers should be important to anyone with an interest in enhancing citizenship and bolstering our democracy.

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Appendix A: Education Component

Media Consolidation & Ownership
Pros and Cons of the Corporate Media System

Is a system where corporations control most of the media a hindrance to democracy, or a helper? Here are arguments for and against the corporate media system.

In the United States, five huge conglomerates control the vast majority of media in the United States: Time Warner, Disney, News Corp, Bertlesmann, and Viacom. This is the direct result of media deregulation that occurred during the Reagan and Clinton administrations, and especially as a result of the Telecommunications Act of 1996.

While older media regulations controlled the amount of media outlets that any one company could control, media deregulation lifted most of these restrictions. As a result, while 50 media corporations controlled most of the U.S. media in 1983, that number shrank to 23 corporations in 1990, and now is down to five.

Is corporate ownership of the media a good thing or a bad thing-- or both? Does it hinder democracy, or help it? Is it the best possible media system? Here is a summary of both sides of the argument.

Arguments in Favor of the Corporate Media System

1. The lack of government control argument. Regardless of any problems that exist in a corporate media system, many people see it as superior to a system that is controlled by the government.
2. The “eyeball democracy” argument. Because the corporate media system is one that is primarily interested in profit, it is based upon ratings. If something is popular, it will remain in the media, but if it is not popular, it’s gone. Because of this, consumers essentially get to vote for content with their eyeballs. If they watch it, it stays on the air. If they don’t watch it, it goes away. Although consumers don’t always get exactly what they want, that’s how democracy works: majority rules.
3. The quality programming argument. Because people “vote with their eyeballs,” quality media tends to stay in business, while poor quality media does not.
4. The synergy argument. Because media companies control so many related things, consumers can benefit through convenience. For example, thanks to media deregulation, a consumer can now purchase digital television, high speed Internet, and phone service from the same company, and pay a bundled price on one bill.
5. The media diversity argument. Because there are so many different outlets these days--thousands of television stations, radio stations, alternative newspapers, and, of course, the Internet-- it doesn’t matter so much if most of the media are owned by a few. Plenty of opportunity is out there for everyone to have a voice.

Arguments Against the Corporate Media System

1. The “market censorship” argument. Because the corporate media system is primarily concerned about profit and ratings, controversial ideas often do not get much or any media coverage. This is true of ideas that are far to the left, far to the right, or otherwise outside of mainstream conventions. In effect, the market “censors” these ideas.
2. The poor quality argument. Corporate media can hinder quality programming because it squelches innovation-- especially on media that are expensive to produce, like television. Someone may have a great idea for a television show, but because it hasn’t been tried before, it’s considered too risky-- so the network makes yet another batch of reality shows and sexy doctor shows instead.
3. The conflict of interest argument. Ideally, the media are supposed to be gatekeepers who keep tabs on the powerful people in society and prevent them from abusing their power. However, the media themselves have become the powerful people-- so how can they be expected to keep tabs of the abuse of power, especially when abuses of power relate to corporations?
4. The monopoly argument. When markets are unregulated and companies have a monopoly or near-monopoly on services, consumers can lose out because of higher prices and poor service. When a company controls a huge portion of the media in a given market, that’s a monopoly.
5. As a country, the United States has accepted the corporate media system as a whole, and hasn’t had a vigorous national debate about this issue since the days of radio in the 1920s and 1930s. The issue of who controls the brunt of a country’s information is a crucial one. Regardless of the results of a debate over the pros and cons of corporate media, this is an important but much neglected debate to consider.

Appendix B: Source Credibility Scale

Instructions: Please answer the following questions about the news article you just read. Circle a number on the scale to indicate your opinion.

On the whole, do you consider this story accurate?
Definitely Yes 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Definitely No

Do you think things are the way the story made them seem?
Completely 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Not at all

Do you think the sources quoted in this story are telling the truth?
Completely 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Not at all

Do you think the newspaper that published this story tells the truth?
Always 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Never

Do you think this reporter is trustworthy?
Definitely Yes 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Definitely No

Do you think the sources quoted in this story really know the truth about what happened?
Definitely 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Definitely Not

On the whole, do you consider this story complete (that is, you were told all you needed to know)?
Definitely Yes 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Definitely No

Do you think this reporter might not have had access to important facts that would change the story significantly?
Definitely Yes 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Definitely No

Do you think there may be more to this story than the news article made it appear?
Definitely Yes 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Definitely No

Do you think the reporter may have been misled by any of the sources?
Definitely Yes 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Definitely No

Do you think the reporter was an expert on this topic?
Definitely Yes 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Definitely No

Do you think this newspaper could have gotten some of the facts wrong on this story?
Definitely Yes 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Definitely No

Do you think the reporter was competent (capable of doing a good job)?
Definitely Yes 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Definitely No

On the whole, do you consider this story biased in any way?
Definitely Yes 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Definitely No

Do you think this newspaper sensationalized any aspects of the story?
Definitely Yes 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Definitely No

Do you think this newspaper trivialized any aspects of the story?
Definitely Yes 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Definitely No

Do you think the story portrays everyone involved fairly?
Definitely Yes 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Definitely No

Do you think the reporter may have been biased in any way?
Definitely Yes 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Definitely No