Alex Williamson – Senior Thesis Outline

**Is the presence and growth of online news polarizing news sources? Evidence from previously existing newspapers**

*All of the following paragraph will be supported by the existing literature on the subjects described:* It is well known (and will be well-written about in the intro of this paper) that the news industry has been offering increasingly customized news sources to fit the ideologies of any individual. This has been attributed to the ease of entry into the news market place brought about by the shift to the Internet, boosted by the advent of 24-hour news. One researcher finds the effects of the “googlization of everything” to be widespread and overwhelmingly negative: several researchers have found that the availability of personally catered news has made the electorate less informed. This has primarily been attributed to people shifting from traditional news sources to more polarizing channels, suggesting that a possible solution to the perceived polarization problem may be to promote the health of previously existing, more central-leaning news agencies, such as long-established newspapers; if a given newspaper has shifted its ideology to accommodate the polarization of the marketplace, however, then this may no longer be an option.

1. Has the shift to Internet news politically polarized previously existing newspapers? How is the shift related to advertising revenue?
   1. Main reference: “What drives media slant” (http://faculty.chicagobooth.edu/jesse.shapiro/research/biasmeas.pdf)
   2. Measure slant during X of Y Subset of newspapers as in “What Drives Media Slant?”
      1. X will be determined as the year before internet news started growing, as confirmed by academic research.
      2. Y will be a subset of newspapers
   3. Measure again in 2012
      1. Again, search print articles.
      2. Confirm that print articles use the same terminology as online articles, i.e. that for a given newspaper, the online articles aren’t more politically charged
   4. Measure the change: regression with “change in media slant” as dependent variable, and independent variables:
      1. Time dummy
      2. Constituency shift
      3. Measure of operations shifted to online news
         1. This needs to be derived – how do I measure much of a companies operations have shifted to the internet?
         2. It may be possible to use a proxy like website traffic, number of articles posted, or even number of tweets.
         3. If no suitable proxy is found, it isn’t vital to include this in the regression; it is enough to measure the overall effect on the industry
      4. Advertising revenue
         1. Gentzkow 2012 finds that the incentive to differentiate ideologically decreases with an increase in advertising revenue.
         2. Need a proxy for advertising revenue
         3. Again – not essential, but would be nice to have.

Procedure to measure slant:

1. Take the congressional record from year of interest: <http://thomas.loc.gov/home/thomas.php>
2. Create a parsing program that searches for two-word and three-word phrases used by each candidate, excluding trivial ones.
3. Take ProQuest Headlines, Access, and LexusNexus and restrict attention to phrases appearing a sufficient number of times in headlines.
4. Select the 500 phrases in each set with the highest Pearson chi-squared statistic
5. Measure how conservative or liberal the congressperson is by the percentage of popular votes in the congressperson’s district in the presidential election went to the conservative candidate. The main reference justifies this as a suitable measure of how conservative the candidate is.
6. Regress relative frequency of each phrase by congressperson on ideology
7. Use Newslibrary.com and ProQuest Newstand to measure how many times each Newspaper in subsample uses the each phrase.
8. Regress the number of times a newspaper uses each phrase (over the alpha from previous regression) on slope coefficient from previous regression
9. The coefficient from the regression in step 8. is the slant of the news organization.