Compliance with AAPOR Standards and Horse-Race Coverage during the 2008 Presidential Campaign: A Content Analysis of Polling Stories in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, Associated Press, and Reuters, January 1 through November 4, 2008

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This thesis titled

Compliance with AAPOR Standards and Horse-Race Coverage during the 2008 Presidential Campaign: A Content Analysis of Polling Stories in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, Associated Press, and Reuters, January 1 through November 4, 2008

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ABSTRACT

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<u>Compliance with AAPOR Standards and Horse-Race Coverage during the 2008</u> <u>Presidential Campaign: A Content Analysis of Polling Stories in the *New York Times*, <u>Washington Post</u>, Associated Press, and Reuters, January 1 through November 4, 2008 (96 pp.)</u>

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This study investigated two aspects of polling reports: conformity to AAPOR standards and horse-race coverage. Through a content analysis of 143 polling stories from two newspapers – the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* – and two news agencies – Associated Press and Reuters – in the 2008 presidential campaign, six research questions and three research hypotheses were addressed. Overall, the 4 news media insufficiently reported information about polls conducted during 2008 presidential campaign and substantially covered the horse-race elements of public support, figures, and subcategories of population. What the main focus of polling stories was and who sponsored the polls were found as the chief elements when polling reports were examined. This study suggested that the journalists should seriously report on polls in their news stories and that there should be a continued research about polling news and representative democracy.

Approved: _____

Joseph P. Bernt

Professor of Journalism

To my lovely parents, Hyung-Man Kim and Sung-Sook Ahn

사랑하는 나의 부모님께 바칩니다.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	. iii
Dedication	. iv
Acknowledgements	v
List of Tables	viii
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: Literature Review	7
2.1 Polls, the Public, and Democracy	7
2.2 Polls in the Media: Focusing on Election Reports	14
2.3 Research Questions and Hypotheses	21
Chapter 3: Method	26
3.1 Sampling	26
3.2 Coding Categories	27
3.3 Coding Procedure and Inter-coder Reliability	31
Chapter 4: Findings	32
4.1 Conformity to AAPOR Standards in the News Media	34
4.2 Conformity to AAPOR Standards between Newspapers and News Agencies	38
4.3 Conformity to AAPOR according to Main Focus of Poll Reports	40
4.4 Conformity to AAPOR Standards between Traditional and Online Polls	43
4.5 Conformity to AAPOR Standards between In-house and Other Sponsors	45
4.6 Horse-race Coverage across the News Media	48
4.7 Horse-race Coverage between Newspapers and News Agencies	57
4.8 Horse-race Coverage across the Main Focus of Poll Reports	59
Chapter 5: Discussion & Conclusion	62
5.1 Study Summary	62
5.2 Discussion	64
5.3 Limitations and Suggestions	73
References	75

Appendix A: Coding Sheet	81
Appendix B: Coding Book	83
Appendix C: Percentage Of Agreement For Inter-coder Reliability	88

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Main Focus and Source in the New York Times, the Washington Post, Associated
Press, and Reuters Coverage of Presidential Election Polls, January 1 to
November 4, 2008
Table 2: Conformity to AAPOR Standards in the New York Times, the Washington Post,
Associated Press, and Reuters Coverage of Presidential Election Polls, January 1
to November 4, 2008
Table 3: Conformity to AAPOR Standards in Poll Reports in Newspapers, (New York
Times and Washington Post) and News Agencies (AP and Reuters), January 1 to
November 4, 200840
Table 4: Conformity to AAPOR Standards in News Stories Reporting Poll Results and
Referencing Polls in the New York Times, the Washington Post, Associated
Press, and Reuters, January 1 to November 4, 200842
Table 5: Conformity to AAPOR Standards in News Stories Reporting Traditional and
Online Polls in the New York Times, the Washington Post, Associated Press, and
Reuters, January 1 to November 4, 200844
Table 6: Conformity to AAPOR Standards in New Stories Reporting on Polls Conducted
by In-house Sponsors and Those by Other Sponsors in the New York Times, the
Washington Post, Associated Press, and Reuters, January 1 to November 4, 2008
Table 7: Horse-race Coverage in the New York Times, the Washington Post, Associated
Press, and Reuters Coverage of Presidential Election Polls, January 1 to
November 4, 2008
Table 8: Horse-race Coverage in Poll Stories in Newspapers (New York Times and
Washington Post) and News Agencies (AP and Reuters), January 1 to November
4, 2008
Table 9: Horse-race Coverage in Poll Reports Presenting Poll Results and those
Referencing Polls in the New York Times, the Washington Post, Associated
Press, and Reuters, January 1 to November 4, 200860
Table 10: Percentage of Agreement for Inter-coder Reliability

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

People live together with others and continue to have relations with them. Basically, we communicate with others so that we can satisfy our curiosity about family, neighbors, and friends. In addition, we can easily know a lot about social affairs as well as others' attitudes and perceptions thanks to mass media. Particularly we learn much about social thoughts or attitudes of our fellow citizens through public opinion polls. During the election seasons, we can encounter citizens' support for candidates or their policies with ease. Public opinion polling is now a growth industry (Asher, 2007), and the results of public opinion polls are as familiar to us as is the Dow Jones Industrial Average (Salmon & Glasser, 1995).

Today political polls are among the most important news items. They are news themselves and represent public opinion. Although polls do not substitute for news, they can facilitate it (Mann & Orren, 1992). Now the media are making news by investing and conducting their own polls (Hoffman, 1980; Holley, 1991). Political leaders or candidates usually make use of polling data in order to explore public opinion. Depending on polling results, they often change or reconsider their policies. Through public opinion polls, statesmen can respond to the public opinion and the citizens also can have an influence on decision makers. These are the kinds of democratic functions of polls that Frankovic (1998) pointed out. He argued, "As a democratic institution, news polls freely provide the image of the public's desires through opinion news. Not only do decision makers have the information, but the public has equal access" (Frankovic, 1998, p. 167). Jacobs and Shapiro (2005, p. 635) also pointed out that polls are essentially important in

representative democracy because they can identify "the greatest concerns of voters that candidates should address and the policies that voters most want candidates to support."

However, can we regard polls results as public opinion? Asher (2007, p. 3) argued that public opinion polls have played a greater part in political discussions owing to "the widespread assumption that polls are the best way to measure public opinion, and the belief that public opinion polls are instruments of democracy because they allow everyone's views to be represented." Yet, Noelle-Neumann (1993) criticized the general view that polls could simply represent public opinion. Instead, she suggested that the concept of public opinion as social control was better for three reasons: empirical testing, explanatory power, and a higher level of complexity (Noelle-Neumann, 1993, pp.231-232). Allport (1940) also discussed two problems of polling: the polls ignore important dimensions of opinion measurement and frame questions based not on the individual's experience and expectations but collective words and phrases.

Asher (2007) warned that public opinion is not synonymous with the results of polls. Nevertheless, many scholars seem to admit that political polls are the most effective method to canvass public opinion (Kim & Weaver, 2001; Ladd, 1980; Salwen, 1985; Sonck & Loosveldt, 2008). Asher (2007, p. 26) also indicated that today public opinion and polls "are treated as though they were identical." Bradshaw (2006, p. 198) mentioned that George Gallup's first syndicated public opinion poll, "America Speaks," "helped to secure the mainstream definition of public opinion as an aggregate of individual opinions expressed privately." Since Gallup's first poll, many survey results have predicted the elections pretty well despite some notorious failures such as Truman's

2

election, and today not a few citizens tend to consider political polls as public opinion per se.

Above all, conducting their own polls can allow the news organizations to check the accountability of political leaders (Mann & Orren, 1992). Incumbents can easily know what voters expect, which means that polls can enhance democratic responsiveness (Jacobs & Shapiro, 2005). This is one of the most essential strengths that the press can have thanks to reporting polls. Also polls can protect political leaders from the pressures of interest groups (Meyer, 1940, cited in Asher, 2007). As Noelle-Neumann (1993) pointed out, polls are important for the citizens because they can compare their attitudes or beliefs with those of their fellows (Asher, 2007). Polls have provided a lot of information that the public wants to know, which also can enhance political concerns of the citizens. Polls have become an information source and been used as a source of journalistic power and readership (Frankovic, 1998).

As Meyer (2002) put it, journalists can accurately report what people are thinking from poll results. In particular, Meyer (2002) advocated "precision journalism" in his classic book. He maintained that this new journalism should be treated as a science so that "scientific methods, scientific objectivity, and scientific ideals" ought to be adopted in the whole process of journalism (Meyer, 2002, p. 5). Because of its basis in science, polling historically has been accepted as the proof of accuracy (Frankovic, 2005). "Saturation polling can also protect journalists from exaggerating the significance of small change in voter preference" (Patterson, 2005, p. 719). Reporting of polls, however, can be objectively disguised as a scientific survey because they make use of statistics, namely numbers. Miller and Hurd (1982, p. 243) maintained, "the public might accept "scientific" survey results without asking if the questions were loaded or the samples biased." Of course, usually journalists have used public opinion polls in the straight news, not on the editorial page and in columns, because they have believed news should be objective and factual according to American journalistic values (Crespi, 1980).

Automatic acceptance of polling data, however, can be a double-edged sword. Many people tend to think of numbered data as objective. The numbers in poll stories can acquire legitimacy; however, readers should take the greatest possible care regarding poll reports because of many sources of error in polls (Cantril, 1976). Herbst (1993) also indicated that the numbers used in expressing public opinion are an excellent tool thanks to their seemingly "objective" nature. In addition, as Frankovic (1998, p. 168) put it, in the early 19th century the press used opinion polls in favor of partisans and "nearly 200 years later, polls in the news are still vulnerable to partisan interpretation." Kenney and Simpson (1993) found that the *Washington Times*' coverage favored the Republicans while the *Washington Post*'s coverage was balanced in the 1988 presidential campaign. They concluded that news content could be influenced by ownership. In other words, the press and its news can be factional depending on management. Thus, voters should carefully read political news, including public opinion polls. Also citizens need to "be aware of the gamut of polls and be able to evaluate them" (Asher, 2007, p. 16). Another major issue in the election reports is horse-race journalism. The news media concentrate too much attention on who is ahead or behind in the election campaign (Holley, 1991). Broh (1980) indicated that the horse-race metaphor is a good analytic frame for journalists and it can attract voters' interest. However, he also argued that horse-race journalism can prevent voters from noticing important issues of public policy. In addition, political polls contribute to horse-race reporting. Without real judgments, some candidates are dropped from the race due to low ratings even in the early campaigns (Kovach, 1980). Thus, the excessive horse-race journalism can be a threat to a democracy because the function of election – that the proper candidate should be elected – can not be achieved.

This study focused on polling reports in the 2008 election campaign. It is important to better understand how the news media report public opinion polls because polls play a pivotal role in reporting election campaigns (Welch, 2002). As is generally known, the 2008 election received a lot of attention in terms of candidates' personalities, issues of race and gender, and contrast between progressive and conservative ideology. In "Obama Elected President as Racial Barrier Falls," the *New York Times* (November 5, 2008) commented on the 2008 election as follows: "But it was just as much a strikingly symbolic moment in the evolution of the nation's fraught racial history, a breakthrough that would have seemed unthinkable just two years ago." In other words, this election was a historic event as it resulted in the first African American President in the United States.

5

The purpose of this study was twofold. First, based on the aspect of adequate information and transparency, this study examined how newspapers and news agencies reported polls in the 2008 presidential campaign. Second, it investigated how newspapers and news agencies covered the horse race – one of the most criticized problems in election reports – during the 2008 campaign. However, since previous studies separately examined conformity to AAPOR standards and horse-race coverage, the whole understanding of polling stories was not enough. Horse-race journalism needs to be studied in terms of polls. Journalists cannot report who is ahead or behind without reliable sources. Poll data are a good source for reporters who want to use the horse-race metaphor.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Polls, the Public, and Democracy

The Origin and Growth of Modern Polls and Public Opinion

Late in the 19th century, James Bryce maintained that in a democracy "the opinion of the common man would carry the same weight as that of the elite" (Salmon & Glasser, 1995, p. 439). Bryce believed that the common people could judge public affairs as well as could the elites (Salmon & Glasser, 1995). His idea was considered as the initial concept for modern public opinion research. Although he wrote, "the obvious weakness of government by public opinion is the difficulty in ascertaining it" (Bryce, 1895, cited in Salmon & Glasser, 1995, p. 440), his ideal could be achieved thanks to scientific surveys, that is, a poll.

When did the first poll in the U.S. occur? Frankovic (1998) mentioned the tabulated opinion published in *Nile's Weekly Register* in 1824. Smith (1990) studied the origins of election polls through this proto-straw poll in 1824. He argued that the proto-straw polls of 1824 was a meaningful development in the measurement of public opinion and judged that those were historic events in election polling. Smith (1990, p. 32) concluded, "the straw polls of 1824 originated out of three major trends in American history: democratization, centralization, and quantification."

In 1896 newspapers commonly reported straw polls, and after 1900 many newspapers conducted straw polls (Frankovic, 1998). However, in 1935, George Gallup initially conducted so-called scientific news polls, which used sampling method. In November 1936, Gallup successfully predicted Franklin D. Roosevelt would win the election, but the *Literary Digest* did not (Bradshaw, 2006). In fact, the *Literary Digest* had accurately predicted the election results by straw polls in the 1920s and 1930s. However, in 1936 the limitation of straw polls was revealed. The *Digest* failed to forecast the winner because it oversampled Republican voters (Herbst, 1993). After this historic fiasco, the straw polls gradually disappeared and scientific polling – using a sampling method – has widely been accepted.

Gallup established the American Institute of Public Opinion (AIPO) in 1935, and he distributed the poll results – "American Speaks" – for purchase by newspapers (Bradshaw, 2006). After Gallup's success, many newspapers rode a boom of election polls. In 1940, more than one hundred newspapers subscribed to the Gallup Poll (Frankovic, 1998). Regarding Gallup's works for a poll, Bradshaw (2006, p. 203) argued, "the publication of America Speaks ... suggests that papers played an important role in developing a consensus for the now mainstream definition of public opinion as poll results."

Despite Gallup's failure to predict the 1948 presidential election, the scientific polling methods that he introduced are increasingly pervasive and developing in other countries as well as in the U.S. For example, only two organizations conducted three polls in 1972, but eight conducted 259 in 1988 (Ladd & Benson, 1992). Today major TV networks and newspapers jointly sponsor polls: CBS News with the *New York Times*, ABC News with the *Washington Post*, NBC News with the *Wall Street Journal*, and

CNN with *USA Today* and the Gallup Organization (Asher, 2007). Also, the phrase such as "polls say" can be found in news stories. For instance, the number of stories that used the "polls say" or "polls show" in election years dramatically increased: from 3,227 instances in 1992 to 8,726 in 2004 in the U.S. newspapers and from 881 cases in 1992 to 1,920 in 2004 in television transcripts (Frankovic, 2005).

In response to the growth of public opinion polls, Kagay (1992) discussed costs and benefits of the proliferation. He noted the increase of confusing results, the decrease of the impact of any one polling organization, and the potential threat against credibility as serious costs. However, he argued the increased opportunity to get more information, various poll results used different methodology, and the possibility of learning new issues or candidates as a boon of increased polling. He maintained that the proliferation of polls "allows the self-correcting tendencies of the survey profession to assert themselves faster than they would without such pluralism" (Kagay, 1992, p. 121).

With regard to quantitative measurement of public opinion, Salmon and Glasser (1995) discussed the four important ways that are helpful to both pollsters and journalists. First, the quantification of public opinion endows the polling with scientific prestige. Second, numbered opinion changes subjective opinion into objective fact. Third, thanks to polling data, reporters can avoid the difficulty of accessing the quality of public opinion. Finally, polling reports depend on "journalists' faith in a free and enlightened electorate" (Salmon & Glasser, 1995, pp. 443-444). Public opinion is the property of each individual in the marketplace, but it is also the consequence of public debate and deliberation in the public sphere (Salmon & Glasser, 1995).

How Polls Affect Voters and the Public

The assumption that polls have an influence on voters has been widespread and debated (Asher, 2007). In the election campaign, bandwagon effect and underdog effect¹ has not appeared consistently (Asher, 2007). Moreover, it is difficult to measure the impact of polls on voters because many effects are indirect (Traugott, 1992). Nonetheless, not a few scholars have paid attention to the effects of polls, and already "there is a wide range of documented effects of media polls on the public, some more indirect than others" (Traugott, 1992).

For example, Harold de Bock (1976) examined the influence of poll reports through an experimental study. He found that in a one-sided election "the trailing candidate may suffer a loss in preference intensity and turnout motivation after his supporters have been exposed to certain in-state election poll reports" (de Bock, 1976, p. 462). However, Asher (2007) suggested that such results seemed to be affected by the experimental design.

Still, many people are likely to think that poll results can have an influence. About 20 years ago, responding to the question about the influence of polls, 58 percent of respondents said poll results had some influence and 21 percent said they had quite substantial influence (Roper, 1986).

¹ "If persons are more likely to vote for a candidate when they expect him to win than when they expect him to lose, we have a "bandwagon effect; if the opposite holds, we have an "underdog" effect" (Simon, 1954).

Lang and Lang (1984, p. 130) discussed three ways that polls can influence public opinion: "(1) the direct effect of polling on polled opinion, that is, the effect of being interviewed on the opinions of those chosen to represent the opinions of the many; (2) the direct effect of published poll findings on the mass public; (3) the indirect and cumulative effects of poll findings in conveying a climate of opinion." Intentionally some candidates have used polls to affect public support in the elections: so-called "push polls" to push voters away from one candidate (Asher, 2007).

The hypothesis of "spiral of silence" offers a good explanation for why polls can affect voters' attitudes. Noelle-Neumann (1993) suggested that the fear of isolation could change the opinion of individuals when their opinions were not perceived as those of the majority. Voters can identify majority opinion through polling information that the news media frequently provide. Thus, polls could have a significant influence on the public.

Elections are one of the most important social events because who should be elected is the substance of modern representative democracy. Thus, most newspapers and networks heavily report on elections during the campaigns. This is related to the agendasetting function of the press (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Focused on agenda setting theory, Ratzan (1989) examined the poll reports on the front pages in the 1988 presidential campaign. The percent of front page stories that mentioned polls (poll related stories) was 47.6% in the *New York Times* and 42.1% in the *Washington Post*. The *New York Times* carried about one third poll-mentioned stories (35.5 percent) during the last month of the campaign while the *Washington Post* released poll information in about two-thirds of stories (67.7 percent). Ratzan (1989) concluded that polls dominated the agenda in 1988. Based on agenda setting and priming theory, Hardy and Jamieson (2005) found that the poll reports changed voters' perceptions. The reports of the *Los Angeles Times* poll "produced a small, detectable change in the public's assessment of both Bush's stubbornness and his steady leadership" (Hardy & Jamieson, 2005, p. 740).

In short, the effects of polls vary depending on different situations, and it is difficult to demonstrate these influences because the design for such research is favorable for experiments, not surveys (Traugott, 1992). Thus, it is important for citizens to better understand not only the democratic viewpoint but also the disguised aspect of poll reports.

Polling and Democracy

Although public opinion polls have contributed to democratic representation and accountability to citizens, many critics have worried that released polls could mislead or deceive the public (Asher, 2007; Broh, 1980; Crespi, 1980; Johnson, 1993; Patterson, 2005; Salwen, 1985). Polls can offer a general sense of public opinion, but they often ignore crucial differences in priorities among various subgroups (Asher, 2007). Jacobs and Shapiro (2005, p. 636) claimed, "polls encourage elected officials to abandon their responsibility for independent leadership, and they distribute flawed and biased information that fuels partisan fires." Also, continuous polling could threaten the appropriate balance between the direct and indirect dimensions of democracy in a contemporary society because polling can be a menace to representative democracy (Ladd, 1980). In other words, sometimes representatives cannot keep their words or

policies because of critical polling results, and polls could lead to populism. More importantly, polls can provide citizens with "a false sense of being influential, when in reality political power is held and exercised by elites who may or may not act in the public interest" (Asher, 2007, p. 26).

Dionne (1992) discussed two criticisms regarding polls and democracy. Because people cannot think fully about various issues, polls can invent opinion "out of whole cloth" (Dionne, 1992, p. 164). In addition, polls are an expression of individual prejudice invested with public standing. Conclusively, he suggested, "polls can be the servants of journalism and democracy. But only if they are viewed that way" (Dionner, 1992, p. 166).

Although there are some criticisms regarding public opinion polls, still polls remain very essential in a democracy. Above all, polls give "an opportunity for citizens to participate in democracy," and they permit "quick repeated assessments of public opinion" (Asher, 2007, p. 23). Of course, political leaders can get the systematic information of public opinion with ease.

Lavrakas and Traugott (2000, p. 10) strongly maintained that "election polls *can and do* aid democratic processes." Their summary about the democratic functions and roles of election polls are as follows:

• Sending a continuous symbolic message that the opinions of "everyone" matter, not simply those of elites and other special interests

• Empowering the media to serve as an independent watchdog on politicians and resisting other would-be spokespersons for the public or for so-called election mandates

• Empowering the media to speak on behalf of the public and thereby helping to fulfill their responsibilities as the Fourth Estate

• Empowering politicians and their supporters, interest groups, journalists, and the public alike with information about candidate viability so that each group can make more informed judgments about how this knowledge might affect their respective future behaviors

Raising the public's interest in political campaigns, although this has a potential downside if too much horse-race reporting occurs (Lavrakas & Traugott, 2000, p. 10).

2.2 Polls in the Media: Focusing on Election Reports

Reporting of Polls

Many researchers have studied the accuracy of polling coverage in the election seasons, particularly for example, the degree of the conformity to the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) disclosure standards (e.g., Kim & Weaver, 2001; Miller & Hurd, 1982; Paletz et al., 1980; Rollberg et al., 1990; Salwen, 1985; Weaver & Kim, 2002; Welch, 2002; Wu & Weaver, 1997). AAPOR standards consist of codes of disclosure standards that AAPOR recommend to include when any polling stories are reported.² AAPOR standards are a good guide for poll consumers as well as pollsters. "Disclosure standards have the effect of shifting the responsibility for adequate measurement from the pollster to the data user" (Miller et al., 1991).

Paletz and his associates (1980) studied the poll coverage of the NBC and CBS evening news programs and the *New York Times* during the years 1973, 1975, and 1977. They found that the *New York Times* was better than both TV networks in reporting polls. For instance, 67% of the *New York Times* stories included the sample size while only 26% of the TV programs did. The *New York Times* and both TV networks identified reliably the names of the conductors (97% and 90%), but they didn't give the names of the sponsors. When it comes to credibility of polls, Paletz and his associates (1980, p. 511) concluded, "the flawed public opinion polls presently purveyed by the media are inappropriate guides for public policy."

Miller and Hurd (1982) examined the poll reports of three newspapers – the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Atlanta Constitution* – for the years of 1972 to 1979. They found that election reports were better than nonelection reports in their conformity with AAPOR standards. Also, polls by newspapers were better than polls by external sources such as syndicates or wire services. Salwen (1985) also found that in-house polls were better than wire and syndicated polls in conforming to the AAPOR standards when he examined the poll reports of two newspapers in Detroit during the presidential election years from 1968 to 1984. He concluded that newspapers

² AAPOR explains its standards as "questions to ask when writing about polls." See this URL: http://www.aapor.org/Questions_to_Ask_When_Writing_About_Polls1/1505.htm

exerted every effort in their own polls because "in-house polls frequently concern local elections and issues that are likely to receive more prominent coverage and space in the front sections than national poll stories" (Salwen, 1985, p. 276).

Rollberg and her colleagues (1990) studied the poll reports of six newspapers during the 1988 presidential campaign. They found that an average of 36% of poll reports conformed to the AAPOR standards, and stories by in-house and wire services were better than stories by syndicated and other sources in conforming to the AAPOR standards. The quality of poll stories appearing on the front page was better than of those appearing on inside pages. As they concluded that the number of poll reports was increasing whereas the thoroughness of reporting was decreasing, they suggested, "newspapers should exercise greater news judgment in determining what polls to report and how to report them" (Rollerg et al., 1990, p. 92). Based on the research of 4 national daily newspapers and 4 locally oriented newspapers in the 2000 presidential election, Welch (2002) found that the major newspapers provided more information about polls they sponsored and that the quality of polling reports between national and local newspapers was not much different. He claimed that only two items about polls – the sponsor of the poll and the actual results – were coherently reported while other crucial items were excluded.

Weaver and Kim (2002) examined the poll news of three major TV networks (ABC, CBS, and NBC) and two leading U.S. newspapers (The *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*) from 1996 to 1998. They found that only sponsorship, among AAPOR

standards, was reported at a high rate (75%) and the average conformity of both newspapers and television networks was low – the average of newspapers was 29.4% and that of television was 17.5%. Thus, they concluded that both prominent newspapers and major TV networks in the U.S. failed to "provide the 'essential information' about public opinion... This information would be valuable not only for policy makers, but also for citizens, scholars, and journalists as well, especially those who want to better understand public opinion" (Weaver & Kim, 2002, p. 210).

In short, the news media still have not furnished enough data regarding the polls even though a lot of researchers consistently criticized the failure of accurate polling reports through not a few studies about their conformity to the AAPOR standards. As Miller and his colleagues (1991) put it, of course, there is a debate regarding how enough polling information should be presented because the space of news media is limited. Thus, they suggested that journalists must become polling experts in order to better "understand the technical details intimately, because they are not merely details but journalism" (Miller et al., 1991).

Horse Race Coverage

Along with the critique about accuracy, many scholars have criticized the horserace journalism in reporting the election and the polls. As Asher (2007) pointed out, dependence on horse-race journalism is the most common criticism of reporting election polls. Mann and Orren (1992, p. 13) maintained, "the damaging effects of media polls are most visible in the frenzy of reporters demanding that candidates react to the latest published results of the horse race." Patterson (2005) also claimed that American elections have become negative events full of horse-race comments. However, Ladd and Benson (1992) noted that news media conducted a lot of issues polling as well as horse-race polling.

Based on a study of the *New York Times*, TV evening news, and two major newsmagazines (*Time* and *Newsweek*) in the 1976 presidential election, Broh (1980) examined how reporting polls conformed to the horse-race framework. He found that forecasting of results was not high – 6% for the *New York Times* and 16% for TV news – and reporting the figures occurred only in 15% of stories on the *New York Times* and 25% in the TV news. Conclusively, he discussed three valuable functions and two problems of horse-race journalism. The horse-race metaphor enhances the public's interest in the campaign, makes journalists focus on polls that reflect interest for special groups, and prevents reporters from turning the election into a self-fulfilling prophecy. The horse-race image, however, may distort polls inadvertently and urge the electorate to concentrate on irrelevant sides of an election (Broh, 1980, pp. 527-528).

Sigelman and Bullock (1991) analyzed every front-page story of five major newspapers regarding presidential campaigns at twenty-year intervals corresponding to the three media epochs of the past century – 1888 and 1908 during the newspaper era, 1928 and 1948 during the radio era, and 1968 and 1988 during television era. They found that horse-race reporting has surged dramatically during the television era. And then they argued that the expansion of the horse-race coverage could be explained by the new technology of polling. Conclusively, they discussed three intersecting forces of the upsurge of horse-race coverage during the television era: "the age-old journalistic conception of campaigns as horse-races, the twentieth-century diffusion of the norms of objective reporting, and the ready availability of survey data occasioned by advances in opinion polling during the last two decades" (Sigelman & Bullock, 1991, p. 25).

Johnson (1993) examined how the media reported the horse-race coverage in the 1988 presidential campaign through a content analysis of the *New York Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, and the three television networks (ABC, CBS, and NBC). He found that the media initially did not focus on performance, contrary to results of past studies. And television networks broadcast more public opinion polls than did newspapers because the networks, as the author explained, invested more in co-sponsoring polls. He concluded that horse-race coverage could have an influence on the process of the nominating campaigns and so "more attention needs to be focused on how the media cover the horse race to fully understand the influence of the media on the election process" (Johnson, 1993, p. 307).

In addition, McDermott and Frankovic (2003) found that the horse-race polling results could be influenced by the survey methods such as question order, response order, and question format. Evatt (1999) examined election coverage according to three types of newspapers – traditional, quasi-public, and public³ – in the 1996 campaign. He found that regardless of types, all newspapers focused on stories about political consequences and

³ According to advocates of public journalism, public journalism is defined in terms of a dialogue. That is, journalists should actively provide public space for discussing public affairs (Evatt, 1999, p. 134).

outcomes, namely horse race reports. Based on the market hypothesis, Iyengar and his associates (2004) observed that sizable numbers of voters sought to read horse-race reports, and suggested that "there should be a market for one particular genre of hard news. ... it should be possible to increase the share of news that focuses on the candidates without substantially diminishing market share" (p. 174).

Polls in the Internet Age: On-line Surveys

Owing to the advent of the Internet, people can read online news and participate in online surveys. Online polling is inexpensive and prompt in comparison with traditional polls, such as telephone and mail surveys, and has become more popular (Kim & Weaver, 2001). Although the online survey is criticized for its unscientific aspects, socalled pseudo-polls, it should be discussed because of a growth in online polling in the U.S. (Asher, 2007).

Wu and Weaver (1997) examined online poll reports at 57 websites from 1992 to 1996. They found that the number of online polls has increased markedly and a great part of online polls could be categorized as horse-race polls. Reporting of online polls conformed less to AAPOR standards than did that of traditional polls. They concluded that online polls can be a way to engage Internet users and build their interest in social issues but "on-line polls cannot measure general public opinion or preference in any reliable or valid manner" (p. 82). Regarding the on-line sampling and population, Rosenblatt (1999) pointed out methodological limitations of online polls and maintained that such problems could erode important rules of a democratic society. Kim and Weaver (2001) examined news coverage of traditional and online polls from the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* from 1996 to 1998. About 62% of traditional polls were conducted by non-media organizations while about 72% of online polls were conducted by media organizations. Regarding conformity to AAPOR standards, overall, the news reports of traditional polls were better than were the reports of online polls. However, both the political poll reports and the poll reports conducted by media organizations conformed less to AAPOR standards in the case of traditional polls. They argued that the increase of online opinion polls in traditional media could make it more difficult to differentiate traditional polling from online polling. "Presumably nonrepresentative online polls mostly conducted by media organizations themselves can provide people with inaccurate information of what the general public thinks about a certain issue. This is why the reporting of online polls by news media matters" (Kim & Weaver, 2001, p. 83).

2.3 Research Questions and Hypotheses

As stated above, the purpose of this study was to investigate how newspapers and news agencies reported polls and covered the "horse-race" in the 2008 presidential campaign. This study examined two overriding considerations in the election polls coverage: the degree of adequate information and horse-race journalism. Most past studies investigated separately two themes: conformity to AAPOR standards and horserace coverage. Since polls show generally the key items of horse-race coverage such as public support or reporting of figures, this study included horse-race journalism as the subject of research.

Unlike previous studies of election polls and horse-race reports, this study attempted to include polling stories of news agencies in relation to current journalism surroundings or online journalism. Today everyone can read the poll results as well as the campaign news online with ease. About 55% of all adults visited online to participate in or read news and information about the 2008 campaign (Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2009). While the percentage of Americans who used the television and newspapers for political news is decreasing, that of Americans who used the Internet is notably increasing since 1992 (Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2007). Also, more than half (60%) of those who went online to get campaign news and information visited news portals such as Google News or Yahoo! News and TV network websites such as CNN.com or ABCNews.com (Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2007). Major news agencies (e.g. AP, AFP, and Reuters) provide their news stories to local newspapers, Yahoo! News, MSNBC.com, and so on.

Reports of news agencies are also important as news sources in the online journalism age. Therefore, this thesis included poll reports from major news agencies in order to reflect current journalism surroundings. Yet, there were few studies that examined news agencies' stories about polls. If there is any difference between newspapers and news agencies reports, such findings will be crucial because not a few people are gradually reading news from news agencies as well as newspapers. Thus, in this study, research hypotheses about news agencies polling stories cannot be drawn, and instead, as a preliminary study, research questions are presented.

Anderson (2000) examined reporting in terms of the technical details of polls. He discriminated between two types according to main focus of poll reports. That is, one is reports in which poll results are the main focus, and another is all reports mentioning poll results. Anderson (2000) found that reports in which poll results are the main focus were better than all reports mentioning poll results concerning conformity to AAPOR standards. Although there was no horse-race coverage research with a central focus on polling reports, this study also attempted to study this as exploratory research. Based on previous research, the following research questions were posed.

- RQ1-a: How well did the news media conform to AAPOR standards in reporting polls in the 2008 presidential campaign?
- RQ1-b: Is there a difference in the degree of conformity to AAPOR standards between reports in newspapers and news agencies?
- RQ1-c: Is there a difference in the degree of conformity to AAPOR standards when poll results are the main focus of a story?
- RQ2-a: How did the news media cover the horse race in the 2008 presidential campaign?

- RQ2-b: Is there a difference in the degree of horse-race coverage between newspapers and news agencies?
- RQ2-c: Is there a difference in the degree of horse-race coverage when poll results are the main focus of a story?

In addition to these research questions, the present study proposed three hypotheses based on previous studies about conformity to AAPOR standards. Generally, three hypotheses have been verified with regard to conformity to AAPOR standards: the political poll reports conform to standards better than do the non-political poll reports (Miller & Hurd, 1982; Salwen, 1985); the poll reports conducted by media conform to standards better than do those conducted by non-media (Rolberg et al, 1990; Salwen, 1985; Welch, 2002); the traditional poll reports conform to standards better than do the online poll reports (Kim & Weaver, 2001; Wu & Weaver, 1997).

As discussed above, a first hypothesis was posed from Anderson's (2000) findings. Next, as Kim and Weaver (2001) noted, many online polls are released in the newspapers and television networks. An experimental study showed that the credibility of traditional and online poll reports was not very different (Kim et al., 1999, cited in Kim & Weaver, 2001). Voters thought of both online and traditional polls in almost the same way, although such findings came from experimental research (Kim et al., 1999). Thus, news about online polls is significant and should be carefully conveyed by journalists. The present study also sought to compare the news stories about traditional and online polls.

In this study, in-house poll refers to one conducted by media organizations means in-house poll regardless of newspapers or news agencies. For example, if AP reported the poll conducted by itself, it means the poll reports conducted by in-house sponsors. Thus, the poll reports conducted by in-house sponsors mean the poll reports conducted by media. From the results of past studies (Rolberg et al, 1990; Salwen, 1985; Welch, 2002), a third hypothesis was posed. Three research hypotheses are presented as below:

- H1: The reports in which poll results are the main focus will be more likely to conform to AAPOR standards than those which make reference to polls.
- H2: The reports on traditional polls will be more likely to conform to AAPOR standards than those on online polls.
- H3: The poll reports conducted by in-house sponsors will be more likely to conform to AAPOR standards than will those conducted by other sponsors.

CHAPTER 3: METHOD

To examine how newspapers and news agencies reported polls and covered the horse race, this study analyzed the news stories of two newspapers and two news agencies that reported polls in the 2008 presidential campaign.

3.1 Sampling

The sample of newspapers was selected from the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* using the Lexis-Nexis data service. Regarding the topic of this study, the coverage of two leading U.S. newspapers – especially the *New York Times* – have already been examined in many other studies (Broh, 1980; Johnson, 1993; Kim & Weaver, 2001; Paletz et al., 1980; Rollberg et al., 1990; Sigelman & Bullock, 1991; Weaver & Kim, 2002; Welch, 2002). The sample of reports by news agencies also was drawn for AP from the Lexis-Nexis database. However, Lexis-Nexis does not provide the database for Reuters. The sample for Reuters was drawn from Factiva, which furnishes a variety of news sources mainly including business news and information.⁴

With the key terms "poll" and "election" and the topics "U.S. presidential candidates 2008," the Lexis-Nexis Academic data base found 325 news stories. "HLEAD(poll)" and "HLEAD(election)" were used in order to select the stories better related to poll reports. HLEAD means to search for the key terms only in headline and lead paragraph. The search range was restricted within "U.S. presidential candidates 2008" for the proper survey. Without such limitation, 717 stories were found. By exclusion of

⁴ Factiva URL: http://global.factiva.com/sb/default.aspx?NAPC=S&fcpil=en

letters, the irrelevant stories – for example, the stories that reported the operation of exit polls or pollsters' news, and opinion sections, such as the editorial or op-ed pages – a total 241 poll reports were collected: 53 stories from the *New York Times*, 54 stories from the *Washington Post*, and 134 stories from the AP. With the free text "poll" and "election" and the subject "National/Presidential Elections," Factiva retrieved 48 Reuters news stories. Searching for free-text terms was also run for headline and lead paragraph. The searching condition was limited to the subject "National/Presidential Elections," After the same filtering, 43 polling stories were collected for Reuters. Using systematic sampling, a 50% sample of the identified stories was randomly selected from the available polling stories: 27 stories from the *New York Times*, 27 stories from the *Washington Post*, 67 stories from the AP, and 22 stories from the Reuters.

The time period for the analysis was January 1 to November 4, 2008. Although many studies (e.g., Rollberg et al., 1990; Welch, 2002) used a shorter period: generally from Labor Day to Election Day, this study explored the early primaries or caucuses as well as general election campaign. Two reasons were considered for selecting this period: first, to select enough samples; and, second, to include reports on the Democratic primaries because they involved the race between a female candidate, Hillary Rodham Clinton, and an African American, Barack Obama, a race that was extremely competitive.

3.2 Coding Categories

The unit of analysis was the news article reporting public opinion polls. Above all, it was coded for whether the results of the polls were definitely presented or only

referenced. Generally, the polling stories were reported to proclaim the polling results or to refer to previous or recent polls. The following mention was an example of reference to poll: "They will, however, be here, in little Connecticut, where polls show the two Democrats in a statistical dead heat (*New York Times*, Feb. 4)." This classification allowed better analysis of poll reports.

To examine the degree of accuracy and adequate information in a polling story, nine coding categories were derived from the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) disclosure standards and previous studies (Kim & Weaver, 2001; Miller & Hurd, 1982; Rollberg et al., 1990; Weaver & Kim, 2002; Welch, 2002). The coding categories for the present study were:

- 1. Sponsor: the organization that funded the survey done;
- 2. Sample Size: the total number of people questioned;
- Selection Procedure: a description of the selected sample (e.g., randomlyselected, self-selected, etc.);
- 4. Question Wording: complete wording of all the questions on which results were reported in the news items;
- 5. Sampling Error: percentage of error at some statistical level of confidence;
- Definition of Population: information about who is actually sampled (e.g., adults 20 or older, registered voters, etc);
- 7. Timing: the specific date when the poll was conducted;
- 8. Response Rate: proportion of respondents contacted who actually responded;
- 9. Method of Survey: method of contacting respondents to obtain interviews.

A tenth category of "Extra Information" in addition to the AAPOR standards was used because not a few stories give extra information such as the URL address about poll results because the space is limited and most stories are provided through the Internet.

To test research hypothesis 3, "Source" was added for identifying which organizations actually conducted the polls. In other words, this variabe was used to code whether or not the polls were conducted by in-house sponsors.

Next, to explore horse-race coverage related to polls, this study made use of the five categories discussed from previous studies (Broh, 1980; Johnson, 1993; Sigelman & Bullock, 1991):

- Public Support: Public support coverage is related to who is ahead and who is behind, mainly according to released poll results. This category is a typical measurement of horse-race coverage. Public support also includes forecasting the outcome in the campaign race. Public opinion polls help the news media classify candidates into the front-runner or straggler (Johnson, 1993).
- 2. Reporting the Figures: As Broh (1980) put it, discriminating use of the figures on presidential trial-heats is a technical factor that overheats campaigns. This

category means reporting about figures for each candidate in the presidential campaign. Figures mean any numerical data such as numbers and percentages.

- 3. Subcategories of the Population: In this case, five subcategories were used: "a regional, state, county, or city sample; a national poll of issue preferences; a national poll of preferences on candidate style; a social grouping in the population; and uncertain voters" (Broh, 1980, p. 518).
- 4. Shifts in Polls Reported: Comparing present and earlier poll data is a good technique that enhances public interest. Here four categories were used: "comparing with pre-Labor Day, comparing with post-Labor Day, comparing with previous election, and comparing with unspecified time" (Broh, 1980, p. 517). However, this coverage is criticized because it can produce some problems such as the interpretation of sampling error, the variation in undecided voters, different images of the race and the like (Broh, 1980, pp. 522-523).
- 5. Report Campaign Events: Another journalistic technique used for excitement is to accentuate particular events in the campaign (Broh, 1980). For example, the news media always evaluate candidates' strength by reporting polls right after the presidential debates. "By emphasizing these events reporters focus on the volatility of public opinion, the unpredictability of the race, and the significance of campaign statements rather than actual behavior" (Broh, 1980, pp. 524-525).

In this study, two coding categories were added for studying how horse-race coverage appeared in the headline. Ratzan (1989) also studied front-page articles with polls mentioned in headline. Headlines are important because readers generally take notice of them before they read news articles. So, headlines were coded whether or not there were public support and reporting figures in the newsheadlines.

The coding sheet and coding book, which offer more explicit definition of coding terms and methods, are provided in the Appendix A and B at the end of this thesis.

3.3 Coding Procedure and Inter-coder Reliability

Excluding the researcher, two coders were selected and trained; both were graduate students who study journalism at a Midwest university. Before the actual coding and analysis, inter-coder reliability was calculated on 16 stories randomly selected from the entire sample: 3 each from the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and the Reuters; 7 from the AP. The researcher also took part in testing inter-coder reliability. The 16 stories for a reliability test represented 11.19% of the 143 stories in the sample. Inter-coder reliability, based on percentage of agreement, ranged from a low of 85.4% for Main Focus to a high of 100% for Sample Size, Sampling Error, and Response Rate – resulting in an overall percentage of agreement of 93.3% across 27 coded categories. For further details, consult the Appendix C.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Of the 143 polling reports analyzed from the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, AP, and Reuters, 63 (44.1%) were published during the pre-Labor Day period and 80 (55.9%) during the post-Labor Day. Table 1 shows how main focus and source appeared in polling stories in the pre- and post-Labor Day periods. Of the 4 media analyzed, only the Associated Press published fewer stories during the shorter post-Labor Day period than during the preceding 8 months.⁵ After Labor Day, the two major parties' candidates were decided and began campaigning in full force. Thus, it was assumed that more reports on election polls were released during that period. However, this study examined polling reports during the earlier presidential primaries because articles from the pre-Labor Day period made up more than two-fifths (44.1%) of the overall sample.

Overall, reports in which poll results were the main focus of the articles were similar in amount to reports making reference to polls. Of the 63 polling reports coded as primarily presentation of results, 33 (52.4%) were published during the pre-Labor Day period and 30 (47.6%) during the post-Labor Day period. Of another 66 stories that made references to polls, 27 (40.9%) were reported during the pre-Labor Day period and 39 (59.1%) during the post-Labor period. The ratio of reports, however, that focused primarily on poll results was lower than that of a previous study (Anderson, 2000).⁶

⁵ During the pre-Labor Day period, the AP reported 35 polling articles (52.2%), and during the post-Labor Day period, the AP did 32 stories (47.8%).

⁶ In Anderson's study (2000), the ratio of reports in which poll results were the main focus was much higher than that of this study. In the newspapers Anderson examined, the number of reports in which poll results were the main focus was 691, while the number of all reports mentioning poll results was 1,136. This likely was the result of two factors: The sample size for this study was smaller, and Anderson's study did not include news agency articles.

Table 1

Main Focus and Source in the New York Times, the Washington Post, Associated Press, and Reuters Coverage of Presidential

Election Polls, January 1 to November 4, 2008

	Pre-Labor Day (N = 63)			Post-Labor Day (N = 80)				
	NYT	WP	AP	Reuters	NYT	WP	AP	Reuters
Focus $(N = 143)^{a}$								
Poll Results Presentation	5 (55.6%)	4 (36.4%)	18 (51.4%)	6 (75.0%)	3 (16.7%)	8 (50.0%)	10 (31.3%)	9 (64.3%)
Poll References	4 (44.4%)	7 (63.6%)	14 (40.0%)	2 (25.0%)	11 (61.1%)	6 (37.5%)	17 (53.1%)	5 (35.7%)
Other	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (8.6%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (22.2%)	2 (12.5%)	5 (15.6%)	0 (0.0%)
TOTAL	9	11	35	8	18	16	32	14
<i>Source</i> $(N = 94)^{b}$								
In-House Poll	4 (66.7%)	4 (57.1%)	16 (66.7%)	5 (71.4%)	4 (80.0%)	10 (83.3%)	12 (50.0%)	6 (66.7%)
Other-Sponsors Poll	2 (33.3%)	3 (42.9%)	8 (33.3%)	2 (28.6%)	1 (20.0%)	2 (16.7%)	12 (50.0%)	3 (33.3%)
TOTAL	6	7	24	7	5	12	24	9

^a $X^2 = 20.104$, df = 14, P ≤ 0.127 (ns) ^b $X^2 = 4.998$, df = 7, P ≤ 0.660 (ns)

Of the 143 polling stories, 94 (65.7 %) reported what campaign, group, or organization sponsored the poll. All 4 news media covered reports by in-house sponsors more than those by other sponsors. During the post-Labor period, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and Reuters mainly published the reports conducted in-house, while the Associated Press equally covered reports conducted in-house and by other sponsors.

4.1 Conformity to AAPOR Standards in the News Media

In regards to research question 1-a – "How well did the news media conform to AAPOR standards in reporting polls in the 2008 presidential campaign?" – this study found the news media did not conform to the AAPOR Standards in the 2008 presidential campaign. Table 2 shows how conformity to AAPOR standards appeared in polling stories in the pre- and post-Labor Day periods. Compliance was highest for reporting sponsors of polls, an average of 65.7% across all 4 media and both time periods, with a range of 27.8% (*NYT* post-Labor Day) to 75.0% (AP and *Washington Post* post-Labor Day). In the categories of sample size, sampling error, population, and timing, the degree of conformity averaged 40%. The lowest frequency was for response rate (0.0%) and full question wording (0.0%) which were never reported in the 4 news media. Nineteen polling articles (13.3%) reported extra information aside from the AAPOR standards.

Table 2

Conformity to AAPOR Standards in the New York Times, the Washington Post, Associated Press, and Reuters Coverage of

	Pre-Labor Day (N = 63)				Post-Labor Day (N = 80)			
	NYT	WP	AP	Reuters	NYT	WP	AP	Reuters
AAPOR Standards								
(N = 143)								
Sponsor ^a	3 (66.7%)	7 (63.6%)	24 (68.6%)	7 (87.5%)	5 (27.8%)	12 (75.0%)	24 (75.0%)	9 (64.3%)
Sample Size	4 (44.4%)	4 (36.4%)	18 (51.4%)	6 (75.0%)	3 (16.7%)	4 (25.0%)	12 (37.5%)	8 (57.1%)
Selection Procedure	1 (11.1%)	4 (36.4%)	5 (14.3%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (25.0%)	6 (18.8%)	0 (0.0%)
Question Wording ^b	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (5.7%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (16.7%)	4 (25.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)

Table 2 (*Continued*)

Sampling Error	3 (33.3%)	4 (36.4%)	18 (51.4%)	6 (75.0%)	3 (16.7%)	4 (25.0%)	12 (37.5%)	7 (50.0%)
Definition of Population	4 (44.4%)	4 (36.4%)	18 (51.4%)	5 (62.5%)	3 (16.7%)	4 (25.0%)	11 (34.4%)	8 (57.1%)
Timing	5 (55.6%)	3 (27.3%)	16 (45.7%)	6 (75.0%)	3 (16.7%)	9 (37.5%)	8 (28.1%)	8 (57.1%)
Response Rate	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Method of Survey ^c	4 (44.4%)	3 (27.3%)	18 (51.4%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (11.1%)	4 (25.0%)	12 (37.5%)	6 (42.9%)
Extra Information ^d	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	7 (20.0%)	6 (75.0%)	1 (5.6%)	0 (0.0%)	5 (15.6%)	0 (0.0%)

 $\label{eq:constraint} \begin{array}{l} {}^{a}X^{2} = 15.188, \, df = 7, \, p \leq 0.034 \\ {}^{b}X^{2} = 17.767, \, df = 7, \, p \leq 0.013 \\ {}^{c}X^{2} = 14.902, \, df = 7, \, p \leq 0.037 \\ {}^{d}X^{2} = 36.561, \, df = 7, \, p \leq 0.000 \end{array}$

Reuters showed better disclosure in the six categories of sponsor, sample size, sampling error, population, timing, and extra information. The *Washington Post* reported better in the two categories of selection procedure and question wording, and the Associated Press did better in reporting on the method of survey. Overall, Reuters' conformity to AAPOR standards was better than that of other news media, but they never reported selection procedure, question wording, and response rate.

Response rate was not reported in any news stories analyzed in this study. The disclosure of question wording was very poor as well (6.3%). Moreover, this percentage would be zero if only complete wording were used. No articles reported full questions, only partial wording. Such as the examples below:

When voters were asked whether they supported the tax increase to help provide health insurance for those who are not covered, 62 percent said it was a "good idea" and 33 percent said it was a "bad idea" (*New York Time*, Oct. 24).

Palin's addition on the GOP ticket initially helped McCain narrow the gap with Obama on the question of which presidential hopeful "better understands the problems of people like you," but at 18 percentage points, the Democrat's margin on that question is now as big as it has been all fall (*Washington Post*, Oct. 25).

Some open questions about how much these findings matter: How many of the whites who are uncomfortable with Obama's race would vote against a Democrat anyway for other reasons? How many of them live in states like those in the South where Democrats seldom win? And on the other side of the ledger, how many additional blacks and liberal whites will vote who otherwise may not? (AP, June 16).

Disclosure of selection procedure was also poor in most news stories. The *New York Times* reported selection procedure in only one article, and Reuters did not report it at all.

And there were several reports that did not include the method of interviewing. During the pre-Labor Day period, Reuters did not report method of survey, and during the post-Labor Day period, the *New York Times* wrote method of survey only in 2 polling stories (11.1%). The *Washington Post*, however, offered an excellent example of proper reporting of both survey method and selection procedure: "The poll was conducted by conventional and cellular telephone June 18 to July 7, among a random national sample of low-wage workers" (*Washington Post*, Aug. 4).

On the whole, even though several studies and researchers have warned about poor conformity to AAPOR standards for polling reports, it can be said that journalists still reported the polls without some important disclosure standards. In short, the news media did not fully report polls in the 2008 presidential campaign.

4.2 Conformity to AAPOR Standards between Newspapers and News Agencies

News agencies are providers of news for newspapers and networks. They also produce a lot of polling news during the election campaign. As mentioned before, there are few studies including polling stories of news agencies. Yet, many local newspapers as well as Internet news portals provide news articles from news agencies. This study included such news because their readership should not be neglected. Research Question 2-b was, "Is there a difference in the degree of conformity to AAPOR standards between reports in newspapers and news agencies?" Table 3 shows a difference of conformity to AAPOR standards between newspapers and news agencies. Overall, the two news agencies reported polls better than did the two newspapers in the 2008 presidential campaign. News agencies' conformity to AAPOR standards was higher than newspapers' in the categories of sponsor, sample size, sampling error, population, timing, method, and extra information.

In terms of statistical significance, the degree of conformity to 5 standards – sponsor, selection procedure, timing, and response rate, method of survey – was similar between newspapers and news agencies. Yet, except question wording, the degree of conformity to 3 standards of news agencies was significantly higher than that of newspapers. Thus, there was a difference in the degree of conformity to AAPOR standards between the two media. It can be said that news agencies reported polling news better than did newspapers in the coverage of the 2008 presidential campaign.

Table 3

Conformity to AAPOR Standards in Poll Reports in Newspapers, (New York Times and Washington Post) and News Agencies (AP and Reuters), January 1 to November 4, 2008

	Pre-Labor I	Day (N = 63)	Post-Labor 1			
	Newspapers	News	Newspapers	News	Total	
	(N=20)	Agencies	(N=34)	Agencies	(N=143)	
		(N=43)		(N=46)		
Sponsor	13 (65.0%)	31 (72.1%)	17 (50.0%)	33 (71.7%)	94 (65.7%)	
Sample Size ª	8 (40.0%)	24 (55.8%)	7 (20.6%)	20 (43.5%)	59 (41.3%)	
Selection Procedure	5 (25.0%)	5 (11.6%)	4 (11.8%)	6 (13.0%)	20 (14.0%)	
Question Wording ^b	0 (0.0%)	2 (4.7%)	7 (20.6%)	0 (0.0%)	9 (6.3%)	
Sampling Error ^c	7 (35.0%)	24 (55.8%)	7 (20.6%)	19 (41.3%)	57 (39.9%)	
Population ^d	8 (40.0%)	23 (53.5%)	7 (20.6%)	19 (41.3%)	57 (39.9%)	
Timing	8 (40.0%)	22 (51.2%)	9 (26.5%)	17 (37.0%)	56 (39.2%)	
Response Rate	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	
Method of Survey	7 (35.0%)	18 (41.9%)	6 (17.6%)	18 (39.1%)	49 (34.3%)	
Extra Information ^e	0 (0.0%)	13 (30.2%)	1 (2.9%)	5 (10.9%)	19 (13.3%)	
${}^{a}X^{2} = 9.859, df = 3,$ ${}^{b}X^{2} = 16409 df = 3$	$p \le 0.020$ $p \le 0.001$	${}^{d}X^{2} = 8.640, df = 3, p \le 0.034$ ${}^{e}X^{2} = 17.174, df = 3, p \le 0.001$				

 $^{\circ}X^{2} = 10.409$, df = 3, $p \le 0.001$ $^{\circ}X^{2} = 10.070$, df = 3, $p \le 0.018$

/4, ai · >, p ≥ 0.001

4.3 Conformity to AAPOR according to Main Focus of Poll Reports

Most research that studied polling reports did not include only reports in which results were the main focus. That is, if the reports mentioned polls or their results, researchers have included those. However, what if the articles did not report chiefly poll results? Most often, such news articles would simply refer to polls' results without specific information about the polls. With such questions and the past study (Anderson, 2000), as guides, Research Question 3-c and Hypothesis 1 were posed.

Research Question 3-c was, "Is there a difference in the degree of conformity to AAPOR standards when poll results are the main focus of a story?" and Hypothesis 1 was, "The reports in which poll results are the main focus will be more likely to conform to AAPOR standards than those which make reference to polls."

Table 4 shows conformity to AAPOR standards of presentation of poll results and references to poll. There was a clear difference in the degree of conformity to AAPOR standards depending on the main focus of poll reports. As hypothesis1 predicted, the reports in which poll results were the main focus conformed to AAPOR standards better than those that simply referred to a poll. Other than response rate, standards indicated a statistically significant difference. This was because there were no polling stories that reported response rate. Thus, Research Hypothesis 1 was partly supported.

Of the polling reports that primarily presented results, the degree of conformity to 6 standards – sponsor, sample size, selection procedure, sampling error, population, timing, and method of survey – was very high. During the post-Labor Day period, all the reports coded as presentation of poll results included identification of sponsor. Of the polling stories that simply referred to polls, only one or two articles showed AAPOR standards other than sponsor. Some standards were never met in coverage. In other words, the news articles that reported polls as a reference revealed just the sponsor. Therefore,

from these findings, it can be said that the main focus of polling reports is a very important factor for predicting conformity to AAPOR standards.

Table 4

Conformity to AAPOR Standards in News Stories Reporting Poll Results and Referencing Polls in the New York Times, the Washington Post, Associated Press, and Reuters, January 1 to November 4, 2008

	Pre-Labor Day	v (N = 60)	Post-Labor I	Dow Total	
	Presentation	Reference	Presentation	Reference	(N = 129)
	(N = 33)	(N = 27)	(N = 30)	(N = 39)	(1) - 1=>)
Sponsor ^a	32 (97.0%)	10 (37.0%)	30 (100.0%)	17 (43.6%)	89 (69.0%)
Sample Size ^b	30 (90.9%)	0 (0.0%)	23 (76.7%)	2 (5.1%)	55 (42.6%)
Selection					16(10 40/)
Procedure ^c	8 (24.2%)	0 (0.0%)	8 (26.7%)	0 (0.0%)	16 (12.4%)
Question	0 (6 10()				
Wording ^d	2 (6.1%)	0 (0.0%)	6 (20.0%)	1 (2.6%)	9 (7.0%)
Sampling Error ^e	29 (87.9%)	0 (0.0%)	23 (76.7%)	1 (2.6%)	53 (41.1%)
Population ^f	28 (84.8%)	1 (3.7%)	23 (76.6%)	1 (2.6%)	53 (41.1%)
Timing ^g	27 (81.8%)	1 (3.7%)	24 (80.0%)	0 (0.0%)	52 (40.3%)
Response Rate	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Method of			21 (70,00)	1 (0 (0))	45 (24.00())
Survey ^h	23 (69.7%)	0 (0.0%)	21 (70.0%)	1 (2.6%)	43 (34.9%)
Extra	10 (30.3%)	1 (3.7%)	4 (13.3%)	0 (0.0%)	15 (11.6%)

Information ⁱ

^a $X^2 = 50.209$, df = 3, p ≤ 0.000
^b $X^2 = 88.148$, df = 3, p ≤ 0.000
^c $X^2 = 19.220$, df = 3, p ≤ 0.000
^d $X^2 = 11.078$, df = 3, p ≤ 0.011
e X ² = 88.281, df = 3, p \leq 0.000

4.4 Conformity to AAPOR Standards between Traditional and Online Polls

Research Hypothesis 2 was, "The reports on traditional polls will be more likely to conform to AAPOR standards than those on online polls." Table 5 shows conformity to AAPOR standards between the reports on traditional and online polls. Overall, both traditional and online poll reports conformed well to AAPOR standards other than response rate, question wording, and selection procedure. AAPOR standards were statistically significant different for selection procedure and question wording. The rest were not statistically different. Contrary to hypothesis 1, the reports on online polls conformed to the selection procedure standard better than those on traditional polls. Therefore, hypothesis 1 was rejected.

In the case of extra information, the stories on online polls were reported better than those on traditional polls. The disclosure of response rate and question wording was very poor for traditional polls. Of the reports about online polls, more than 70% provided selection procedure; but of the reports about traditional polls, less than 30% did so.

Online polls are growing and becoming more noticeable. Even the news media sponsored many online polls (Asher, 2007). For example, CNN regularly uses public

opinion polls on its Web site, and the network regularly reports poll results. Such polling, however, used self-selected samples. Thus, results cannot be reported as scientific

research because they did not use probability sampling (Merritt & McCombs, 2004).

Table 5

Conformity to AAPOR Standards in News Stories Reporting Traditional and Online Polls in the New York Times, the Washington Post, Associated Press, and Reuters, January 1 to *November 4, 2008*

	Pre-Labor D	ay (N = 25)	Post-Labor D		
	Traditional (N = 18)	Online (N = 7)	Traditional (N = 17)	Online (N = 6)	Total (N = 48)
Sponsor	17 (94.4%)	7 (100.0%)	17 (100.0%)	6 (100.0%)	47 (97.9%)
Sample Size	18 (100.0%)	6 (85.7%)	16 (94.1%)	5 (83.3%)	45 (93.8%)
Selection Procedure ^a	4 (22.2%)	5 (71.4%)	5 (29.4%)	5 (83.3%)	19 (39.6%)
Question Wording ^b	0 (0.0%)	1 (14.3%)	5 (29.4%)	0 (0.0%)	6 (12.5%)
Sampling Error	17 (94.4%)	6 (85.7%)	17 (100.0%)	6 (100.0%)	46 (95.8%)
Population	18 (100.0%)	6 (85.7%)	16 (94.1%)	5 (83.3%)	45 (93.8%)
Timing	17 (94.4%)	6 (85.7%)	16 (94.1%)	5 (83.3%)	44 (91.7%)
Response Rate	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Extra Information ^c	3 (16.7%)	4 (57.1%)	1 (5.9%)	4 (66.7%)	12 (25.0%)

 $\label{eq:constraint} \begin{array}{l} ^{a} X^{2} = 10.775, \, df = 3, \, p \leq 0.013 \\ ^{b} X^{2} = 7.894, \, df = 3, \, p \leq 0.048 \\ ^{c} X^{2} = 13.393, \, df = 3, \, p \leq 0.004 \end{array}$

This study examined online polls from this critical point. Yet, sampled news stories, which reported online polling results, did not use self-selected procedures. Of the polling reports analyzed in this study, all the online polls were conducted by Knowledge Networks sponsored by the AP-Yahoo News Poll. That is, except polls by the AP-Yahoo News Poll, there were no online polls that used self-selected procedures. The following excerpt provides an example:

The AP-Yahoo News Poll is a unique study that has been tracking a group of about 2,000 people from across the country throughout the presidential campaign, starting last November. This sixth wave of the study included interviews with 2,227 adults between Aug. 27 and Sept. 5. ... The interviews were conducted online. The original sample was drawn from a panel of respondents Knowledge Networks recruited via random sampling of landline telephone households with listed and unlisted numbers. The company provides Web access to panel recruits who don't already have it (AP, Sept. 22).

4.5 Conformity to AAPOR Standards between In-house and Other Sponsors

Research Hypothesis 3 was, "The poll reports conducted by in-house sponsors will be more likely to conform to AAPOR standards than will those conducted by other sponsors." Table 6 shows conformity to AAPOR standards between the reports conducted by in-house sponsors and those by other sponsors. As Hypothesis 3 expected, AAPOR conformity of the poll reports conducted by in-house sponsors was better than that of those conducted by other sponsors.

More than 60% of the reports on polls by in-house sponsors complied with 5 standards – sponsor, sample size, sampling error, population, and timing. Any AAPOR standards noted in the reports on polls conducted by other sponsors did not exceed 50%. In terms of a statistical significance, the reports conducted by in-house sponsors conformed to AAPOR standards better than those by other sponsors in all categories except sponsor, response rate, and method of survey. Therefore, Research Hypothesis 3 was partially supported.

Table 6

Conformity to AAPOR Standards in New Stories Reporting on Polls Conducted by Inhouse Sponsors and Those by Other Sponsors in the New York Times, the Washington Post, Associated Press, and Reuters, January 1 to November 4, 2008

	Pre-Labor D	ay (N = 44)	Post-Labor I			
	In-house	Other	In-house	Other	Total (N - 94)	
	(N = 29)	(N = 15)	(N = 32)	(N = 18)	(11 - 24)	
Sponsor	29 (100.0%)	15 (100.0%)	32 (100.0%)	18 (100.0%)	94 (100.0%)	
Sample Size ^a	24 (82.8%)	7 (46.7%)	20 (62.5%)	7 (38.9%)	58 (61.7%)	
Selection						
Procedure ^b	9 (31.0%)	1 (6.7%)	10 (31.3%)	0 (0.0%)	20 (21.3%)	
Question Wording ^c	2 (6.9%)	0 (0.0%)	7 (21.9%)	0 (0.0%)	9 (9.6%)	
Sampling Error ^d	23 (79.3%)	7 (46.7%)	20 (62.5%)	6 (33.3%)	56 (59.6%)	
Population ^e	23 (79.3%)	6 (40.0%)	20 (62.5%)	6 (33.3%)	55 (58.5%)	
Timing ^f	23 (79.3%)	7 (46.7%)	22 (68.8%)	4 (22.2%)	56 (59.6%)	
Response Rate	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	
Method of Survey	19 (65.5%)	5 (33.3%)	18 (56.3%)	6 (33.3%)	48 (51.1%)	
Extra Information ^g	11 (37.9%)	1 (6.7%)	6 (18.8%)	0 (0.0%)	18 (19.1%)	
$a_{\rm h} X^2 = 10.849, df =$	= 3, p <u><</u> 0.013		$e_{f} X_{2}^{2} = 12.195,$	$df = 3, p \le 0.$	007	
6 X ² = 10.325, df =	= 3, p <u><</u> 0.016	$f^{f}X^{2} = 17.274, df = 3, p \le 0.001$				
$X^2 = 9.327, df = 1$	$3, p \le 0.025$		$^{\text{s}}$ X ² = 13.384,	$df = 3, p \le 0.$	006	
$\tilde{X} = 10.988, df =$	= 3, p <u><</u> 0.012					

4.6 Horse-race Coverage across the News Media

Research Question 2-a was, "How did the news media cover the horse race in the 2008 presidential campaign?" The news media covered horse-race reports concerning public support, figures, and subcategories of population in the 2008 presidential campaign. As Broh (1980, p. 516) pointed out, "Above all else, public opinion polls show who is currently ahead." Table 7 indicates this trend. Of the 143 polling reports, 127 (88.8%) presented who was ahead and who was behind, and 47 (32.9%) covered public support even in the headline. During the pre-Labor-Day period, all the polling stories covered from the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* reported public support. Of the polling reports of the *Washington Post*, 3 (27.3%) published public support in the headline during the pre-Labor Day period, and 8 (50.0%) during the post-Labor-Day period. More than the half of Reuters' reports noted public support in the headline.

The *New York Times* reported figures in 9 stories (100.0%) before Labor Day, but did so only in 6 (33.3%) stories after Labor Day. Reuters did not report figures in the headline before Labor Day, while it did in 7 (50.0%) articles after Labor Day. The *New York Times* mainly reported campaign events during the pre-Labor-Day period (55.6% v. 16.7%) while the *Washington Post* mostly did so during the post-Labor-Day period (18.2% v. 43.8%). All 4 news media reported more information about social grouping and uncertain voters during the pre-Labor-Day period. The news media mainly compared their polls with previous election polls during the post-Labor-Day period.

Table 7

Horse-race Coverage in the New York Times, the Washington Post, Associated Press, and Reuters Coverage of Presidential Election

	Pre-Labor Day (N = 63)				Post-Labor Day (N = 80)			
	NYT	WP	AP	Reuters	NYT	WP	AP	Reuters
Horse-race Coverage								
(N = 143)								
Public Support	9 (100.0%)	11 (100.0%)	29 (82.9%)	7 (87.5%)	14 (77.8%)	14 (87.5%)	30 (93.8%)	13 (92.9%)
Support in the Headline	3 (33.3%)	3 (27.3%)	8 (22.9%)	4 (50.0%)	3 (16.7%)	8 (50.0%)	10 (31.3%)	8 (57.1%)
Figures Reported ^a	9 (100.0%)	7 (63.6%)	27 (77.1%)	8 (100.0%)	6 (33.3%)	14 (87.5%)	24 (75.0%)	14 (100.0%)
Figures in the Headline ^b	0 (0.0%)	1 (9.1%)	1 (2.9%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (12.5%)	1 (3.1%)	7 (50.0%)
Subcategories	7 (77.8%)	11 (100.0%)	29 (82.9%)	8 (100.0%)	13 (72.2%)	13 (81.3%)	24 (75.0%)	12 (85.7%)
Regional Polls	4 (44.4%)	6 (54.5%)	16 (45.7%)	4 (50.0%)	5 (27.8%)	8 (50.0%)	10 (31.3%)	7 (50.0%)
Issue Preference	1 (11.1%)	4 (36.4%)	5 (14.3%)	2 (25.0%)	7 (38.9%)	5 (31.3%)	5 (15.6%)	1 (7.1%)

Polls, January 1 to November 4, 2008

Table 7: (Continued)

Candidate Style	2 (22.2%)	5 (45.5%)	8 (22.9%)	3 (37.5%)	5 (27.8%)	6 (37.5%)	5 (15.6%)	1 (7.1%)
Social Group °	6 (66.7%)	10 (90.9%)	17 (48.6%)	6 (75.0%)	3 (16.7%)	9 (56.3%)	13 (40.6%)	+6 (42.9%)
Uncertain Voters ^d	3 (33.3%)	3 (27.3%)	7 (20.0%)	7 (87.5%)	1 (5.6%)	3 (18.8%)	5 (15.6%)	6 (42.9%)
Shifts in Polls °	2 (22.2%)	4 (36.4%)	9 (25.7%)	4 (50.0%)	4 (22.2%)	11 (68.8%)	7 (21.9%)	7 (50.0%)
Pre-Labor ^f	1 (11.1%)	3 (27.3%)	8 (22.9%)	4 (50.0%)	2 (11.1%)	3 (18.8%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (7.1%)
Post-Labor ^g	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (11.1%)	8 (50.0%)	7 (21.9%)	6 (42.9%)
Previous Election ^h	1 (11.1%)	3 (27.3%)	1 (2.9%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (16.7%)	6 (37.5%)	1 (3.1%)	0 (0.0%)
Unspecified Time	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (2.9%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Reporting Campaign Events i	5 (55.6%)	2 (18.2%)	8 (22.9%)	1 (12.5%)	3 (16.7%)	7 (43.8%)	4 (12.5%)	1 (7.1%)

$a_{\rm a} X^2 = 30.068, df = 7, P \le 0.000$	1 X ² =
${}^{b}_{b}X^{2} = 37.643, df = 7, P \le 0.000$.g X² =
$c X^2 = 19.999, df = 7, P \le 0.006$	h X ² =
$d^{d}X^{2} = 25.683, df = 7, P \le 0.001$	i X ² =
e X ² = 16.072, df = 7, P \leq 0.024	

Typical examples of public support in the headline were as follows: "Clinton beats Obama handily in West Virginia" (*New York Times*, May 14); "AP EXCLUSIVE: Obama ahead or tied in 8 key states" (AP, Oct. 29); "POLL – Obama leads in 5 key states, McCain in 2" (Reuters, Oct. 27).

Reporting the figures is a useful technique in horse-race coverage. Of the 143 polling reports, 109 (76.2%) presented the figures such as the numbers or percentages. All the 22 Reuters stories reported the figures. Yet, of the 18 *New York Times* stories, only 6 (33.3%) reported the figures during the post-Labor Day period. Although the figures in the headline were not many, 7 (50.0%) Reuters' articles reported the figures in the headline during the post-Labor Day period. Some examples of figures in the headline were as follows; "Poll gives Obama 8-point Va. Lead; McCain's image still linked to Bush" (*Washington Post*, Oct. 27): "POLL – Obama has 3-point national lead on McCain" (Reuters, Oct. 7).

Of the 143 polling stories, 117 (81.8%) reported subcategories of the population at least once. Of the 5 subcategories, regional polls and social group were published more than others. In the 2008 presidential election, regional polls were repeatedly reported because Democratic primaries were competitive and the poll results of so-called swing states often aroused voters' interest. Social group also was covered many times since the social grouping of supporters was definitely distributed across the major candidates.⁷ An example that reported regional polls and social group is as follows: "According to the

⁷ For example, supporters of Hillary Clinton were white Democrats, Hispanics, and Catholics, while supporters of Barrack Obama were whites under age 30, male college graduates, white men, and whites earning at least \$100,000 a year (AP, June 9).

West Virginia surveys, 95 percent of the Democratic primary voters were white, 70 percent did not graduate from college, and 54 percent had household incomes less than \$50,000" (*New York Times*, May 14).

Policy issues help the electorate decide how to vote. Major parties and candidates concentrate on informing their issues during the campaign. One of the main issues was the economy, which was a controversial issue in this election. In addition to the economic issue, journalists reported a racial contest. The 7 (38.9%) stories of the *New York Times* and the 5 (31.3%) articles of the *Washington Post* reported issue preferences during the post-Labor Day period. Some examples of reports concerning issue preference are as follows:

Economists said the drop in economic activity – with the gross domestic product shrinking at a 0.3 percent annual rate – presages more bad news in the months ahead. ... With the economy the dominant issue in the presidential election, the latest batch of dismal data offered no comfort to the Republican nominee, Senator John McCain of Arizona, who has been running behind the Democratic nominee, Senator Barack Obama of Illinois, in polls (*New York Times*, Oct. 31).

But so far it hasn't turned out that way, even though voters by a wide margin name the economy as the most important issue in the campaign. ... That battle should be even tougher because McCain is seen by many political analysts as weak on the economy. ... the tight race has led some economic forecasters, political scientists and frustrated Democrats to conclude that factors other than the economy must be weighing more heavily than they have in the past (*Washington Post*, Aug. 31).

Pollsters debate 'Bradley Effect'; election seen as test of theory that black candidates' leads in polls aren't real (*Washington Post*, Oct 12).

Deep-seated racial misgivings could cost Barack Obama the White House if the election is close, according to an AP-Yahoo News poll that found one-third of white Democrats harbor negative views toward blacks many calling them "lazy," "violent" or responsible for their own troubles (AP, Sept 20).

In the 2008 election, diverse and strong candidates ran for the presidency: female, African-American, White-conservative, and so on. Of the 143 polling reports, 35 (24.5%) conveyed preferences on candidate style. Of the *Washington Post* polling reports, 5 (45.5%), for instance, covered candidate style during the pre-Labor Day period, and 6 (37.5%) during the post-Labor Day period. Typical examples of candidate style reports are as follows:

McCain's efforts to portray Obama as a risky choice do not appear to have worked, either. ... He reclaimed ground on the question of who is more honest and trustworthy, nearly matching Obama on that question after trailing by 11 points three weeks ago. And he cut into Obama's lead on the issue of standing up to lobbyists and special interest groups (*Washington Post*, Oct. 13).

Ask people what they think of Hillary Rodham Clinton and they say female and feminist. For Barack Obama, it's inexperience. Mitt Romney is known as a Mormon, John McCain for his military service. And oh, yes, he's old (AP, Feb. 1).

Old guy vs change: McCain, Obama images take shape. ... Obama is seen as warmer and more empathetic, McCain stronger and tougher (AP, July 7).

Ten stories (90.9%) of the *Washington Post* reported on social groups during the pre-Labor-Day period while only 3 reports (16.7%) did so in the *New York Times* during the post-Labor-Day period. Examples of poll stories about social groups are as follows:

Mr. Obama has made substantial gains across most major demographic groups in the Democratic Party, including men and women, liberals and moderates, higher and lower income voters, and those with and without college degrees (*New York Times*, Feb. 26).

African Americans are much more optimistic than whites on this score: Sixty percent said Obama's candidacy will do more to help race relations, compared with 38 percent of whites (*Washington Post*, June 22).

Much of the movement has come among college-educated whites. Whites without college degrees favor McCain by 17 points, while those with college degrees support Obama by 9 points. No Democrat has carried white, college-educated voters in presidential elections dating back 1980, but they were a key part of Obama's coalition in the primaries (*Washington Post*, Sept. 24).

Of the polling reports, 35 (24.5%) covered uncertain voters. Reuters mentioned

them more than other news media (87.5% and 42.9%). Journalists reported uncertain

voters as follows:

Independent voters can participate in the primary, and Ace Smith, state director for the Clinton campaign, predicted Mrs. Clinton and Mr. Obama would spilt those votes evenly (*New York Times*, May 3).

Independents, key swing voters, now break for Obama, 53 percent to 39 percent, reversing a small lead for McCain after the Republican convention (*Washington Post*, Sept. 24).

The ranks of unaffiliated voters have grown steadily since the 1960s. Experts estimate that about one in five eligible voters nationally are independents (AP, Jan. 27).

With a week left, Stevens said the 15 volunteers working the phones would grow to "hundreds" and that the fight was for undecided voters – totaling 12 percent in the latest poll (Reuters, Jan. 2).

Since public opinion polls were frequently conducted and reported during the election campaign, many journalists compared the surveys with previous poll results. Of the polling reports, 48 (33.6%) compared the results with other poll data. The articles compared with pre-and post-Labor Day poll data were similarly reported to around 15%, while the articles compared with unspecified time were seldom reported (0.7%). Among news media, the *Washington Post* often used shifts in the polls in its results. The news media reported shifts in popularity as follows:

She has 53 percent compared with Obama's 41 percent. On Feb. 27, the same survey showed her leading Obama 49 percent to 43 percent (AP, Mar. 19).

The poll found that, among likely voters, Obama now leads McCain by 52 percent to 43 percent. Two weeks ago, in the days immediately following the Republican National Convention, the race was essentially even, with McCain at 49 percent and Obama at 47 percent (*Washington Post*, Sept 240).

Just 14 percent said the country is heading in the right direction, equaling the record low on the question in polls dating back to 1973 (*Washington Post*, Sept 24).

As a point of comparison, neither of the last two Democratic nominees – John F. Kerry in 2004 or Al Gore in 2000 – recorded support above 50 percent in a preelection poll by the Post and ABC News (*Washington Post*, Sept 24).

This election, available exit polls show Clinton with a 61-35 percent edge over Obama among Catholic voters. A recent Quinnipiac University poll showed her leading Obama 70-24 percent among Pennsylvania Catholic (AP, Mar 26).

Lastly, reporting campaign events was examined. There were many events such

as primaries, fund-raising, debates, etc. during the election campaign, and the journalists

highlighted such special political events (See Table 7). The 4 news media reported this in about 20% of their poll articles. The *Washington Post* covered election events most (43.8%) during the post-Labor Day period, while Reuters reported them in only 7.1% of the sample coverage after Labor Day. Reporters covered campaign events as below:

But at the state Democratic Party's Jefferson-Jackson dinner here, the cavernous room exploded with energy when Mr. Obama walked onto the stage after Mrs. Clinton, who received a rousing, yet far more tepid, reception. ... At Mr. Obama's first stop in the state on Friday, a rally in Charlotte, most seats in the Cricket Arena were filled with black supporters. Yet many of the seats directly behind Mr. Obama – in the view of news cameras – were filled by white supporters (*New York Times*, May 3).

Candidates spoke on the morning talk shows before a final round of campaigning as Iowans prepared to put their stamp on the wide-open presidential race. ... Caucuses begin at 7 p.m. 8 p.m. EST and with that evening curtain-raiser, most candidates filled their Thursday calendar with still more speeches and events. ... Clinton, feet firmly planted in Iowa, spoke by tape with David Letterman, whose New York-based show settled with striking writers. Huckabee flew to Burbank, Calif., to sit with Jay Leno in the final crucial hours of the Iowa campaign... (AP, Jan. 3).

Clinton returned to Texas on Thursday night after announcing she had raised \$35 million in February, her biggest month of fundraising. That gives her the resources to continue the nominating fight if she can pull out wins on Tuesday (Reuters, Feb. 29).

On the whole, in the 2008 presidential campaign, the 4 major news media covered

horse-race reports about public support (88.8%), reporting the figures (76.2%), and

subcategories of population (81.8%). Two categories – shifts in polls (33.6%) and

campaign events (21.7%) - were covered at a relatively low level. Nonetheless, it can be

said that horse-race coverage of polling reports was considerable in the 2008 presidential election.

4.7 Horse-race Coverage between Newspapers and News Agencies

Research Question 2-b was, "Is there a difference in the degree of horse-race coverage between newspapers and news agencies?" Table 8 shows some differences of horse-race coverage between newspapers and news agencies polling reports in the 2008 election campaign. There was a statistically significant difference when they reported social group. Of the newspapers stories, 16 (80.0%) reported social group before Labor Day, and 12 (35.3%) after Labor Day. Of the news agencies' reports, 23 (53.5%) covered social group during the pre-Labor-Day period, and 19 (41.3%) during the post-Labor-Day period.

Newspapers more frequently compared their results with previous election polls during the pre-Labor-Day period. Of the newspapers articles, 4 (20.0%) reported previous election polls before Labor Day, and 9 (26.5%) after Labor Day. However, of the news agencies stories, 1 (2.3%) covered previous election polls before Labor Day and 1 (2.2%) after Labor Day. Also, there were statistically significant differences across the reports that compared their stories with pre- and post-Labor-Day polls.

Table 8

Horse-race Coverage in Poll Stories in Newspapers (New York Times and Washington Post) and News Agencies (AP and Reuters), January 1 to November 4, 2008

	Pre-Labor Day (N = 63)		Post-Labor Day (N = 80)		Total	
	Newspapers (N = 20)	News Agencies (N = 43)	Newspapers $(N = 34)$	News Agencies (N = 46)	(N = 143)	
Public Support	20 (100.0%)	36 (83.7%)	28 (82.4%)	43 (93.5%)	127 (88.8%)	
Headline Support	6 (30.0%)	12 (27.9%)	11 (32.4%)	18 (39.1%)	47 (32.9%)	
Figures Reported	16 (80.0%)	35 (81.4%)	20 (58.8%)	38 (82.6%)	109 (76.2%)	
Headline Figures	1 (5.0%)	1 (2.3%)	2 (5.9%)	8 (17.4%)	12 (8.4%)	
Subcategories	18 (90.0%)	37 (86.0%)	26 (76.5%)	36 (78.3%)	117 (81.8%)	
Regional Polls	10 (50.0%)	20 (46.5%)	13 (38.2%)	17 (37.0%)	60 (42.0%)	
Issue Preference	5 (25.0%)	7 (16.3%)	12 (35.3%)	6 (13.0%)	30 (21.0%)	
Candidate Style	7 (35.0%)	11 (25.6%)	11 (32.4%)	6 (13.0%)	35 (24.5%)	
Social Group ^a	16 (80.0%)	23 (53.5%)	12 (35.3%)	19 (41.3%)	70 (49.0%)	
Uncertain Voters	6 (30.0%)	14 (32.6%)	4 (11.8%)	11 (23.9%)	35 (24.5%)	
Shifts in Polls	6 (30.0%)	13 (30.2%)	15 (44.1%)	14 (30.4%)	48 (33.6%)	
Pre-Labor Day ^b	4 (20.0%)	12 (27.9%)	5 (14.7%)	1 (2.2%)	22 (15.4%)	
Post-Labor Day ^c	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	10 (29.4%)	13 (28.3%)	23 (16.1%)	
Previous Election ^d	4 (20.0%)	1 (2.3%)	9 (26.5%)	1 (2.2%)	15 (10.5%)	
Unspecified Time	0 (0.0%)	1 (2.3%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.7%)	
Reporting Events	7 (35.0%)	9 (20.9%)	10 (29.4%)	5 (10.9%)	31 (21.7%)	
^a $X^2 = 11.684$, df = 3, p ≤ 0.009		$^{c}X^{2} = 21.603, df = 3, p \le 0.000$				

 $X^2 = 11.686, df = 3, p \le 0.009$

 $X^2 = 17.615, df = 3, p \le 0.001$

Overall, the news agencies focused on the numbers with reference to polls after Labor Day, whereas newspapers highlighted campaign issues and events. Public support, one of the most typical horse-race items, was reported similarly regardless of news media. From these findings, it is assumed that news agencies mainly reported key items of horserace coverage such as public support and numbers because they – especially Reuters – reported their poll results as a main focus of their coverage (See Table 7). Also, it can be said that newspapers took notice of more diverse news subjects as well as key items of horse-race reports.

4.8 Horse-race Coverage across the Main Focus of Poll Reports

Research Question 3-c was, "Is there a difference in the degree of horse-race coverage when poll results are the main focus of a story?" Table 9 shows some differences in horse-race coverage when poll results were the main focus of reports during the 2008 presidential campaign. Considering statistically significant differences, the reports in which poll results were the main focus showed more horse-race coverage through 10 categories regardless of pre- or post-Labor-Day time periods. Before Labor Day, however, the reports that referred to polls covered more campaign events.

Table 9

Horse-race Coverage in Poll Reports Presenting Poll Results and those Referencing Polls in the New York Times, the Washington Post, Associated Press, and Reuters, January 1 to November 4, 2008

	Pre-Labor Day (N = 60)		Post-Labor Day (N = 69)		Row Total
	Presentation $(N = 33)$	Reference $(N = 27)$	Presentation $(N = 30)$	Reference $(N = 39)$	(N = 129)
Public Support	31 (93.9%)	24 (88.9%)	29 (96.7%)	37 (94.9%)	121 (93.8%)
Headline Support ^a	16 (48.5%)	2 (7.4%)	26 (86.7%)	3 (7.7%)	47 (36.4%)
Figures Reported ^b	33 (100.0%)	18 (66.7%)	30 (100.0%)	24 (61.5%)	105 (81.4%)
Headline Figures ^c	1 (3.0%)	1 (3.7%)	10 (33.3%)	0 (0.0%)	12 (9.3%)
Subcategories	29 (87.9%)	25 (92.6%)	27 (90.0%)	30 (76.9%)	111 (86.0%)
Regional Polls	13 (39.4%)	16 (59.3%)	8 (26.7%)	20 (51.3%)	57 (44.2%)
Issue Preference ^d	11 (33.3%)	1 (3.7%)	8 (26.7%)	8 (20.5%)	28 (21.7%)
Candidate Style ^e	14 (42.4%)	4 (14.8%)	11 (36.7%)	5 (12.8%)	34 (26.4%)
Social Group ^f	26 (78.8%)	12 (44.4%)	24 (80.0%)	6 (15.4%)	68 (52.7%)
Uncertain Voters ^g	14 (42.4%)	6 (22.2%)	12 (40.0%)	3 (7.7%)	35 (27.1%)
Shifts in Polls ^h	14 (42.4%)	5 (18.5%)	21 (70.0%)	8 (20.5%)	48 (37.2%)
Pre-Labor Day ⁱ	12 (36.4%)	4 (14.8%)	3 (10.0%)	3 (7.7%)	22 (17.1%)
Post-Labor Day ^j	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	18 (60.0%)	5 (12.8%)	23 (17.8%)
Previous Election	4 (12.1%)	1 (3.7%)	6 (20.0%)	4 (10.3%)	15 (11.6%)

Unspecified Time	0 (0.0%)	1 (3.7%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.8%)
Reporting Events ^k	5 (15.2%)	11 (40.7%)	6 (20.0%)	5 (12.8%)	27 (20.9%)

Table 9: (Continued)

Almost all reports – ranging from 88.9% to 96.7% – covered public support, and particularly after Labor Day, the reports in which poll results were the main focus indicated public support more frequently in the headline (86.7%). As a natural outcome, all the reports in which poll results were the main focus provided figures (100.0%); and, after Labor Day, one third of those put figures in the headline (33.3%). Except regional polls, other subcategories of population were covered more frequently in the reports in which poll results were the main focus.

Overall, the reports in which poll results were the main focus showed horse-race journalism included to a large degree. Although they well conformed to AAPOR standards (See Table 4), it can be said that they also reported polls as an element of horse-race journalism.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

5.1 Study Summary

This study investigated two aspects of polling reports: conformity to AAPOR standards and horse-race coverage. Through a content analysis of polling stories from two newspapers – the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* – and two news agencies – AP and Reuters – in the 2008 presidential campaign, six Research Questions and three Research Hypotheses were addressed.

First of all, the 4 news media insufficiently reported information about polls conducted during the 2008 presidential campaign (Research Question 1-a, See Table 2). Reporters and editors wrote about the polls without providing some crucial information that AAPOR recommended. In particular, the frequency of reporting on the three categories of response rate (0.0%), question wording (6.3%), and selection procedure (14.0%) indicated poor conformity with AAPOR standards.

News agencies reported polls better than did newspapers by AAPOR disclosure standards (Research Question 1-b, See Table 3), and the reports in which poll results are the main focus conformed to AAPOR standards better than did those that simply referred to polls (Research Question 1-c, See Table 4). All standards indicated a statistically significant difference except response rate, which was not reported in any articles. Thus, Hypothesis1 was partially supported.

The reports on both traditional and online polls conformed well to AAPOR standards except in the case of three categories – selection procedure, question wording, and response rate (See Table 5). The reports on online polls conformed to AAPOR standards better than did those on traditional polls (See Table 5), and Hypothesis 2 was rejected. However, these findings should be carefully discussed because sampled articles did not include online poll surveys that used a self-selected procedure, which is a typical online polling method.

The reports on polls conducted by in-house sponsors conformed to AAPOR standards better than did those by other sponsors except for one category, response rate (See Table 6). However, three standards – sponsor, response rate, and method of survey – did not show a statistically significant difference. Thus, Hypothesis 3 was partly supported.

Horse-race coverage of polling stories was examined. The news media substantially covered the horse-race elements of public support, figures, and subcategories of population in the 2008 presidential campaign (Research Question 2-a, See Table 7). In particular, public support, a key item of horse-race journalism, was covered most frequently in polling articles (88.8%). These findings, however, should be reviewed cautiously since the selected sample and coding methods were slightly different from past studies.

News agencies mainly reported figures on polling stories, while newspapers highlighted campaign issues and events (Research Question 2-b, See Table 8). Also, horse-race coverage appeared more frequently in the reports in which poll results were the main focus than in reports that simply referred to polls (Research Question 2-c, See Table 9).

5.2 Discussion

This study examined polling reports of major newspapers and new agencies that are considered leading news media in the U.S. their poll stories, however, fell short of expectations. From the results of the present study, it can be concluded that the degree of conformity to AAPOR standards was low for some important disclosure standards.⁸Overall, the news media still focused on horse-race coverage. From the examined findings, some conclusions can be drawn.

Above all, why did the news agencies report polls better than newspapers? Three clues can be considered. One is a difference of reports in which poll results are the main focus (See Table 1). Another is a difference of reports by in-house sponsors (See also Table 1). News agencies reported poll results as the main focus slightly more than did newspapers. Also, reports by in-house sponsors were published by news agencies more than by newspapers.⁹ Yet, two categories did not show a significant difference. The reason may be because the sample was small. In addition, past studies did not pay attention to news agencies when poll reports were investigated. Last is the difference of audience between newspapers and news agencies. The audience of news agencies is generally the news media and news agencies' reports are likely to be more credible. However, the findings of this preliminary study obviously are not conclusive. Thus, further studies should consider these three points.

⁸ Response rate was never reported in all sampled stories, and question wording was covered just at 6.3% of poll articles (See Table 3).

⁹ Reports by sources did not cover the total sample because those without sponsor were excluded. Thus, percentage was not considered. Instead, the number of reports by in-house was compared (39 v. 21).
When polling reports are examined, the main focus of polling stories and who sponsored the polls should be observed. The stories that reported polls by in-house sponsors or in which the results of polls were the main focus conformed well to AAPOR standards.

Yet, are people conscious of such conditions when they read polling reports? If readers are not aware of them, journalists should make a greater effort to write cautiously about polls. Of course, limited space can lead to poll stories with less information. One alternative is to provide extra information such as a URL address at which readers can access the specific results, actual question wording, etc. Some news media actually present such information at the end of articles. Some articles actually acknowledged the pollsters as follows: "Polling director Jon Cohen and staff researcher Alice Crites contributed to this report (*Washington Post*, Nov. 2)"; "AP Director of Surveys Trevor Tompson and AP News Survey Specialist Dennis Junius contributed to this report. (AP, July 18)."

In this study, Research Hypothesis 1 was rejected. This is likely because the reports on online polls were different from those examined by previous studies (Kim & Weaver, 2001; Wu & Weaver, 1997). Although no articles were coded in this study that reported the online polls by self-selected procedure, reports on online polls need further study. As Asher (2007) pointed out, online polls are unscientific surveys, which are pseudo-polls. They do not use probability sampling, so sampling error is unknowable. Reporters and editors should pay attention to reporting unscientific surveys, and make clear that such numbers are not scientific results. If non-scientific surveys were abused by

fact-based journalists, the ills of such news can be fatal in terms of accurate information influencing public opinion. The following news story offers a good example of proper representation:

In Abington Township, a Philadelphia suburb that is regarded as a political bellwether in battleground Pennsylvania, about 160 voters gathered for a "Debate the Debate" program at Penn State University's Abington campus, watching the candidates, then registering their opinions via hand-held electronic survey devices. ... After the debate, McCain was virtually unchanged at 26 percent in the non-scientific survey, while Obama improved his standing to 70 percent, with only 3 percent undecided (AP, Oct. 16).

As Research Hypothesis 3 predicted, AAPOR conformity of stories reporting on polls conducted by in-house sponsors was better than that of those conducted by other sponsors. These findings mirrored those of previous studies (Rollberg, et al., 1990; Salwen, 1985; Welch, 2000). As Rollberg and her associates (1990) pointed out, newspapers generally provided more space for reports on polls conducted by in-house sponsors. Since they spent their own money on the survey, this was to be expected. It is assumed that reporters and editors paid more attention to in-house polls. Thus, it is natural that the in-house polling reports are more likely to satisfy AAPOR standards than other sponsors' reports.

However, the journalists still reported several polling stories sponsored by other organizations. Of course, more reports about polls by in-house sponsors generally are

published than those about polls by other sponsors¹⁰ (See Table 6). The problem is that people read the polling reports without considering who sponsored the polls. Thus, when media report the polls not sponsored by their own organization, journalists also should make an effort to conform to AAPOR standards.

It is important to provide correct interpretation of poll results for readers. As Merritt and McCombs (2004, p. 139) indicated, "Most polls are simply a snapshot of a moment in time." In other words, the poll has meaning only at that time. Thus, reporters should cautiously compare results with those of earlier polls. Also, since poll surveys are statistical numbers, careful interpretation is required. In particular, journalists should write precisely the meaning of the numbers within the margins of error for the sample polled. Good examples of statistical interpretation are as below:

It is the first time Mr. Obama has held a statistically significant lead over Mr. McCain this year in polls conducted by CBS or joint polls by CBS and The Times (*New York Times*, Oct. 2).

Obama's 8-percentage-pont lead in this Gallup Poll is the Illinois senator's first statistically significant lead in surveys by this organization since the controversy arose over sermons by the candidate's former pastor, the Rev. Jeremiah Wright (AP, Mar. 28).

In Ohio, Clinton has a statistically insignificant 1-point edge on Obama, 47 percent to 46 percent, after the two were dead even on Saturday (Reuters, Mar. 2).

¹⁰ The data from the previous studies (Rollberg, et al., 1990; Salwen, 1985; Welch, 2000) also indicate the same as this study. That is, the polling articles sponsored in-house were more frequent than the polling articles not sponsored by their own.

In spite of similar time periods, some polls often show different results. One article explained the reason why some polls differ. Such attempts to help understand polls should be encouraged for readers.

The new AP-GfK head-to-head result is a departure from some, but not all, recent national polls. ... Obama and McCain were essentially tied among likely voters in the latest George Washington University Battleground Poll, conducted by Republican strategist Ed Goeas and Democratic pollster Celinda Lake. In other surveys focusing on likely voters, a Washington Post-ABC News poll and a Wall Street Journal-NBC News survey have Obama up by 11 points, and a poll by the nonpartisan Pew Research Center has him leading by 14. ... Polls are snapshots of highly fluid campaigns. In this case, there is a margin of error of plus or minus 3.5 percentage points; that means Obama could be ahead by as many as 8 points or down by as many as 6. There are many reasons why polls differ, including methods of estimating likely voters and the wording of questions (AP, Oct. 23).

Response rate is the ratio of the number of respondents who answered the survey divided by the number of people who were asked to take the survey. Asher (2007) criticized journalists as well as pollsters for neglecting to give information about response rate. Previous studies also indicated that newspapers rarely reported response rate on polling reports (Rollberg, et al, 1990; Salwen, 1985). If there was no information about response rate, readers could not know how many people were contacted for the survey. Response rates suggest the potential accuracy of the poll. The lower the response rate the more likely it is that poll results could be skewed. Moreover, low response rates can cause particular problems for overnight polls, which are generally used in the election reporting (Asher, 2007).

Readers could know the survey questions only from indirect and partial wordings, which did not provide enough information for them to decide whether the wording was fair and impartial. If the newspapers and news agencies omitted and edited such information for lack of space, they could have given extra information such as a URL address,¹¹ in which specific poll results, questions, response rate, etc. can be viewed. Yet, two major newspapers scarcely reported such information (2.9% post-Labor Day), while news agencies only sometimes did (30.2% pre-Labor Day, 10.9% post-Labor Day).

Selection procedure refers to a description of the selected sample, for example, randomly-selected or self-selected. If the sample was not randomly selected, a survey cannot be said to be scientific. Random sampling is essential in probability sampling; and it enables researchers to measure margin of error (Merritt & McCombs, 2004). Nonetheless, most polling reports did not explain whether the sample was randomly selected. Probably, those surveys conducted by reputable institutes were assumed to have used probability sampling because some of them reported sampling errors. Yet, if there were definite mentions about any sampling procedure, readers would be able to judge whether the surveys were scientific.

It is assumed that most polls were conducted by telephone interview. However, without reporting the method, readers were forced to guess. Moreover, the new method of online polling is increasing and pervasive, and the assumption about telephone surveys may no longer be true.

¹¹ For instance, "The questions and results for this poll will be available at http://news.yahoo.com/polls and at http://surveys.ap.org" (AP, June 26).

Nonetheless, it is important that major newspapers and news agencies did not report online poll results by self-selected procedures during the 2008 election campaign. It can be assumed that the news media understood such polling would not be scientific. However, it may be a hasty conclusion because the number of news articles analyzed in this study was small; and sample selection was different.

This study also found the news media excessively focused on horse-race coverage. Of course, since they are reporting polls, it is not easy for journalists to avoid proclaiming who is ahead or behind or not offering any numbers. Broh (1980) mentioned the valuable functions of horse-race coverage. However, he also warned that the horse-race metaphor had two problems: unintended distortion and the disappearance of significant but complex issues (Broh, 1980). The two newspapers examined reported issue preference just 25.0% and 35.3%; and in particular, news agencies covered issues in less than 20.0% of the stories with sample (See Table 8). It can be said that news agencies were negligent in not including election issues when reporting on polls. That is, it can be said that the news media were not faithful to their professional duty. When they report on crucial public affairs such as the election campaign, journalists should try to avoid coverage intended merely to arouse the interest of readers.

As Gollin (1980, p. 453) criticized, journalists have mainly used polls to "emphasize superficial aspects of public opinion" by focusing on horse-race coverage during elections. That is, polling reports can have an influence on voters by distorting political coverage of elections and issues. Also, because of this study's findings, Gollin's argument can be explored. The polling reports mainly covered public support and the figures, while they treated important election issues sparsely. These findings are consistent with a previous study¹² that examined the 1988 presidential primaries (Johnson, 1993). Broh (1980) found that only 15% of the *New York Times* articles reported figures in the 1976 presidential trial-heat. Yet, a simple comparison cannot be made because he examined only the *New York Times* from September 1 to November 2, 1976. Besides, coded methods for this study were different from those of his study.¹³ However, it cannot be denied that there were many stories that reported figures in the 2008 presidential campaign. Although public support or the numbers are the key items for the polls, the journalists should make an attempt to interpret election issues as well as polling results.

Subcategories of the population as a major element of horse-race coverage were reported frequently in the 2008 election (See Table 7). Yet, the previous study indicated that 61% reported them (Broh, 1980). As Broh (1980, p. 518) mentioned, journalists often reported polls in order to show "the preferences of a subcategory of the population," and the findings of this study supported his research.

Since there is a difference of favoring candidates among social groups, journalists and pollsters have paid attention to them. By reporting favors of specific groups, the news media can attract the interest of voters belonging to such groups. For example, if the news reported that Whites overwhelmingly supported a certain candidate, other racial groups could favor more rival candidates, and this can accelerate the horse race. The last subcategory of the population is uncertain voters. Traditionally, many voters can be identified with the Democratic or the Republic parties in the U.S. since a two-party

¹² The percentage of public support was around 30% in his study (Johnson, 1993, p. 303). But the results of his study were different with those of this study because his study focused on the presidential preprimaries and primaries and included news stories of three commercial networks.

¹³ Broh (1980, p. 518) did not code figures such as "the difference between the candidates, percentages for a portion of the population, etc." But, this study coded any figures concerning election polls.

system has been established. However, voters who do not belong to or support either party are not a small group. They are very important in the election because major candidates make a great effort to attract independents.

Comparing current and earlier data is a good technique for horse-race coverage to foster voters' interest (Broh, 1980). In this study, 48 polling reports (33.6%) compared the results with other poll data. This was higher than the result (12%) of Broh's study.¹⁴

Compared with past studies (Broh, 1980; Johnson, 1993; Sigelman & Bullock, 1991), public support and reporting the figures were much more covered.¹⁵ Of course, these findings cannot be generalized because sample selection was different. Broh (1980) studied horse-race journalism by looking only at polling reports, while other studies examined horse-race coverage within overall election reports regardless of polling stories. Of course, these findings should be explained carefully. This was the first study about horse-race coverage between newspapers and news agencies, and the number of qualifying samples was too low for generalization. Nonetheless, the preliminary study indicated that these findings indicated a need for the further studies. This study can serve as a useful guide for others.

In the 2008 presidential campaign, the polling stories of four major news media should not receive good grades in terms of conformity to AAPOR standards and dependence on horse-race coverage. As Herbst (1993) pointed out, the poll is a good technique for measuring public opinion and attractive because it is considered objective.

¹⁴ If compared with the *New York Times* that Broh (1980) studied, since 22.2% reported shifts in polls, the result of the present study was still higher than that of the previous study.

¹⁵ On public support, Johnson (1993) indicated less than 30%. On reporting the figures, Broh (1980) wrote only 15%. And Sigelman and Bullock (1991) discussed that less than 40% of five sampled newspapers articles covered the horse race theme.

Therefore, most of all, the journalists who report on such polls in their news stories should not think of polls as simple news sources. The importance of the public role of reporters, who are able to actually express "numbered voices," cannot be overemphasized.

5.3 Limitations and Suggestions

Although this study examined polling reports adherence to AAPOR standards and dependence on horse-race coverage, some limitations should be noted. Above all, there are methodological limitations. First, studied samples were small, and the filtering for sampling was very restrictive. Of course, this was an inevitable result in order to find appropriate news articles about polls. But, if more newspapers and news agencies were examined, a larger number might modify results. Further studies should include more samples than those (143 articles) which this study examined from only four media.

Another methodological limitation was coding for a few categories. Since there were no articles that reported response rate, no statistics could be computed. If there were some cases that included response rate, Research Hypothesis 1 and 3 might have been fully supported. Also, there were no reports that provided complete wording of questions and this study examined samples coded as partial question wording. Thus, the findings about question wording were restricted.

In addition to method problems, there were some limitations because this study was the first to examine poll coverage from news stories from news agencies such as the Associated Press and Reuters. Since there were no past studies, comparison with other research results was not possible. Although it was found that news agencies conformed to AAPOR standards better than did newspapers, it was difficult to explain the reason for this difference. In other words, this study failed to determine whether these findings result from a difference between media or from other variables influencing difference. Further studies should investigate whether there is really a difference across media.

This study set out to investigate reporting of online polls in which non-probability sampling was used. As Rosenblatt (1999) pointed out, online polling can be an obstacle for electronic democracy. However, there were no online polls by self-selected procedure included in the study's sample. Since this study failed to examine stories about online polls that did not use probability sampling, the findings about online polls should be cautiously interpreted. That is, the results of this study should not be generalized. In addition, this study sampled only polling reports. Thus, other major campaign news might not be covered, which can be a limitation of the study.

Nonetheless, this study presents two important contributions; first, news agencies' reports were examined; and, second, conformity to AAPOR standards and horse-race journalism were studied together.

Lastly, it is hoped that there will be continued interest in research about polling news in terms of representative democracy. Again, it is important to stress the implication of "numbered voices," as Herbst (1993) pointed out. As Merritt and McCombs (2004) noted, polling data that was accepted as reliable can impede other important voices. We should bear in mind that the numbers, which wear a mask of objectivity and science, can influence public opinion regarding an election as well as public policies.

74

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APPENDIX A: CODING SHEET

* Coder	1) Ed	2) Arman	3) Kim							
1. Case Number										
2. Date (MM-DD)				/						
3. Media										
1) New York Times										
2) Washington Post										
3) AP										
4) Reuter										
4. The main focus of poll in the news										
1) The presentation of poll results										
2) The reference of p	poll									
3) Other										
Disclosure standards	2) 1 /									
5-a. Sponsor 1) No	2) Yes	5								
J-D. Source										
1) In-House Newspar	bers									
2) In-House wire 2) Syndicated										
4) Other										
4) Oulei 6 Sample size	1) No	2) Ves								
7 Selection procedure	1) No	$2) \operatorname{Tes}_{2}$								
8 Question wording	1) No	2) Complete	3) Part							
9 Sampling error	1) No	2) Yes	<i>5)</i> 1 <i>a</i> 1 <i>t</i>							
10. Definition of population	1) No	2) Yes								
11. Timing	1) No	2) Yes								
12. Response rate	1) No	2) Yes								
13-a. Method of survey	1) No	2) Yes								
13-b. Method of survey	,	<i>,</i>								
1) Traditional poll										
2) Online (Web-based) poll										
3) Other	· •									
14. Extra information	1) No	2) Yes								

Horse-race					
15-a. Public support		1) No		2) Yes	
15-b. Public support on the headline		1) No		2) Yes	
16-a. Reporting the figures		1) No		2) Yes	
16-b. Figures on the headline	1) No		2) Yes		
17. Subcategories					
17-a. Regional polls	1) No		2) Yes		
17-b. Issue preferences	1) No 2)		2) Yes	2) Yes	
17-c. Preferences on candidate style	1) No		2) Yes		
17-d. Social grouping		1) No 2)			
17-e. Uncertain voters	1) No		2) Yes		
18. Shifts in polls					
18-a. Comparing with pre-Labor Day		1) No		2) Yes	
18-b. Comparing with post-Labor Day		1) No		2) Yes	
18-c. Comparing with previous election		1) No		2) Yes	
18-d. Comparing with unspecified time		1) No		2) Yes	
19. Reporting events	1) No		2) Yes		

APPENDIX B: CODING BOOK

1. Case Number

2. Date (MM-DD)

3. Media

Code 1 for the *New York Times*, code 2 for the *Washington Post*, code 3 for the AP, and code 4 for the Reuters.

4. The main focus of poll in the news

It is coded how the poll was mainly reported in the news stories. Code 1 if the poll was chiefly cited for proclaiming its result. Code 2 for the reference of poll as it is used to refer simply to previous or recent polls. Code 3 for other cases.

Disclosure standards (AAPOR)

5-a. Sponsor

Sponsor is the organization that had the survey done. Code 1 if the sponsor was not reported in the news articles and code 2 if reported.

5-b. Source

Source is the company that actually conducted the polls. If more than two sources were reported, consider mainly cited source in the news articles. In this coding, in-house polls were conducted by two newspapers, the *New York Time* and the *Washington Post*. In-house wire polls were conducted by two news agencies, the AP and the Reuters. Syndicated polls were conducted by the polling organization (e.g., Gallup Poll). Other means all polls conducted by other newspapers, networks, news agencies, etc. Code 1 for in-house newspapers, code 2 for in-house wire, code 3 for syndicated, and code 4 for other. Let it blank if any source was not reported.

6. Sample size

Sample size is the total number of people questioned for the survey. Code 1 if the sample size was not reported in the news articles and code 2 if reported.

7. Selection procedure

Selection procedure is to describe how the sample was selected. For example, there are procedures such as randomly-selected, self-selected, etc. Code 1 if the selection procedure was not reported in the news articles and code 2 if reported.

8. Question wording

Question wording is the actual wording used in the survey. Code 1 if the question wording was not reported in the news articles, code 2 if the question wording of all the questions was completely reported, and code 3 if the question wording was partly reported. Also, code 3 even though at least one of all the questions was reported.

9. Sampling error

Sampling error is the percentage of error at some statistical level of confidence. For example, "it had an overall margin of sampling error of plus or minus 3.1 percentage points." Code 1 if the sampling error was not reported in the news articles and code 2 if reported.

<u>10. Definition of population</u>

Definition of population is the information of respondents who are actually sampled. For instance, adults 20 or older, registered voters, etc. Code 1 if the definition of population was not reported in the news articles and code 2 if reported.

<u>11. Timing</u>

Timing is the specific date when the poll was conducted. Code 1 if the timing was not reported in the news articles and code 2 if reported.

12. Response rate

Response rate is the proportion of respondents contracted who actually responded. Code 1 if the response rate was not reported in the news articles and code 2 if did.

<u>13-a. Method of survey</u>

Method of survey is the method of contacting respondents to obtain interviews. Code 1 if the method of survey was not reported in the news articles and code 2 if reported.

13-b. Method of survey

Traditional method means traditional polls such as telephone and mail surveys. Online method means the polls conducted on the web-based surveys. Therefore, selection procedure of online method is usually self-selected. Code 1 for the traditional method, code 2 for the online method, and code 3 for other cases. Let it blank if the specific method of survey was not reported.

14. Extra information

Extra information, in this study, means the reference of URL address on which the specific or whole results of polls were presented. Code 1 if the extra information was not reported in the news articles and code 2 if reported.

Horse-race coverage

15-a. Public support

Public support is the typical horse-race coverage to report who is ahead and who is behind. For example, words such as, lead, beat, trail, etc. are used for public support. Code 1 if the public support was not reported in the news articles and code 2 if reported. <u>15-b. Public support in the headline</u>

Code 1 if any public support was not reported in the headline and code 2 if reported.

16-a. Reporting the figures

This means reporting about figures of each candidate in the presidential campaign. Figures include any numbers, percentages, and fractional numbers about poll results. Code 1 if the figures were not reported in the news articles and code 2 if reported. <u>16-b. Figures in the headline</u>

Code 1 if any figures were not reported in the headline and code 2 if reported. 17. *Subcategories*

This is for explaining whether information about a subcategory of the population in polls was reported or not.

17-a. Regional polls

Regional polls mean polls conducted in small geographic areas. Code 1 if any regional, state, county, or city samples were not reported in the news articles and code 2 if reported.

17-b. Issue preferences

Issue preferences are the focusing on particular issues. For example, the news story focused on economic issue such as unemployment, inflation, restructuring, etc. Code 1 if the issue preferences were not reported in the news articles and code 2 if reported.

<u>17-c. Preferences on candidate style</u>

For example, a certain poll showed McCain leading among voters who saw him as a conservative. Code 1 if the preferences on candidate style was not reported in the news articles and code 2 if reported.

17-d. Social grouping

Social grouping is to classify people according to religions, occupations, races, regions, ages, etc. Code 1 if the social grouping in the population was not reported in the news articles and code 2 if reported.

17-e. Uncertain voters

Uncertain voters are those who identify with neither the Democratic nor the Republican party, that is, who are unpredictable. For example, "Independents, key swing voters, now break for Obama, 53 percent to 39 percent, reversing a small lead for McCain after the Republican convention." Code 1 if the uncertain voters were not reported in the news articles and code 2 if reported.

18. Shifts in polls

Shifts in polls mean comparing with previous and other poll data. In this study, four categories are used as below.

18-a. Comparing with pre-Labor Day

Here, shifts in polls are comparing with pre-Labor Day polls data in the 2008 election. Code 1 if the comparing with pre-Labor Day polls data was not reported in the news articles and code 2 if reported.

<u>18-b. Comparing with post-Labor Day</u>

Here, shifts in polls are comparing with post-Labor Day polls data in the 2008 election. Code 1 if the comparing with post-Labor Day polls data was not reported in the news articles and code 2 if reported.

18-c. Comparing with previous election

Here, shifts in polls are comparing with polls data in previous elections except the 2008 election. Code 1 if the comparing with previous polls data was not reported in the news articles and code 2 if reported.

18-d. Comparing with unspecified time

Here, shifts in polls are comparing with unspecified polls data. Code 1 if the comparing with unspecified polls data was not reported in the news articles and code 2 if reported.

19. Reporting events

Reporting events are to accentuate particular events in the campaign such as fundraising, the primaries, the presidential debates, an interview with *Playboy* magazine, etc. These events are generally focusing on voters' interest. Code 1 if the particular events were not reported in the news articles and code 2 if reported.

APPENDIX C: PERCENTAGE OF AGREEMENT FOR INTER-CODER

RELIABILITY

Table 10

Percentage of Agreement for Inter-coder Reliability

Category	Reliability	Category	Reliability
Overall	93.3%	Public Support	91.7%
Main Focus	85.4%	Headline Support	91.7%
Sponsor	95.8%	Figures Reported	93.8%
Source	89.6%	Headline Figures	97.9%
Sample Size	100.0%	Regional Polls	93.8%
Selection Procedure	87.5%	Issue Preference	89.6%
Question Wording	91.7%	Candidate Style	89.6%
Sampling Error	100.0%	Social Group	95.8%
Def. of Population	89.6%	Uncertain Voters	91.7%
Timing	95.8%	Comparing with Pre-Labor	91.7%
Response Rate	100.0%	Comparing with Post-Labor	91.7%
Method 1	95.8%	Comparing with Previous Election	89.6%
Method 2	96.7%	Comparing with Unspecified Time	97.9%
Extra Information	93.8%	Reporting Campaign Events	95.8%