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CREDIBILITY AND INVOLVEMENT IN SOCIO-POLITICAL ISSUES
BROADCASTED THROUGH PUERTO RICAN MEDIA

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CREDIBILITY AND INVOLVEMENT IN SOCIO-POLITICAL ISSUES
BROADCASTED THROUGH PUERTO RICAN MEDIA

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Marjorie Melendez
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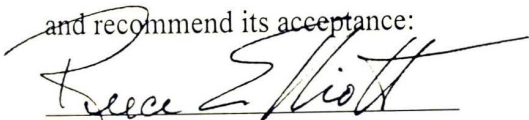
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ABSTRACT

This study examined Puerto Rican students' credibility in local media and their involvement with four socio-political issues debated during 1996. The objective of the study was to determine whether there is a correlation between the variables, credibility and involvement. A questionnaire was administered to 125 students attending Caribbean University, Bayamon, Puerto Rico.

The research conducted was based on the following assumptions: individuals with low involvement in important issues would perceive television news programs as more trustful than newspaper news; individuals with high involvement would perceive newspapers as a more reliable medium in comparison with television; and subjects would trust newspaper news coverage over television news programs when dealing with complex issues. However, analysis of responses indicated no statistically significant relationship between credibility and involvement. To further explore the data a t-test was run, but the outcomes did not support any of the hypotheses.

Regardless that the study did not confirm the hypotheses, further studies should be conducted between other populations to better understand the scientific process, and also how people evaluate media and how the issues debated could influence their perceptions.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research project is to find out what people think about how the media deal with social, political and economic issues, whether they view the credibility of broadcast or print media differently, and whether the complexity of the topic covered affects the believability of the coverage. This thesis investigates the level of involvement or interest Puerto Rican university students have about current issues, and how much credibility they give the medium that brings the information.

The main objective of this thesis is to determine whether there is a correlation between students' perceived credibility of local television and newspaper news coverage and their concern with four current issues under investigation: Section 936 of the IRS code, Crime, Education Reform, and Health Care Reform.

The impact of media credibility on the audience has undoubtedly developed many theoretical and conceptual approaches since the introduction of television in Puerto Rico in the early 1950s. Its television viewership grew steadily, while newspaper readership declined during the 1970s. Also to be considered are the enormous technological developments within Puerto Rican society and how these changes have affected the transmission of images, messages, and information to the masses.

This thesis analyzes the interviewed students' perceptions and their involvement with the selected issues exposed. The involvement variable emerges from the Social Judgment Involvement Theory developed by Sherif, Sherif, and Nebergall (1965). The theory relates to an individual's own experiences and it may help in understanding the process of persuasion via the messages inducted or information received through direct

sources. According to the theory, these experiences can be affected from information received from external stimuli, from their own frame of references after interpretation, and/or from their own judgment or conclusion about how information has been perceived, interpreted, and memorized.

The importance of the students' personal opinion will design a frame of reference concerning credibility evaluations, depending on the source, or on the medium from which they are receiving the messages. The involvement level may indicate if the participants are judging the information as credible, considering their latitude of acceptance, rejection, or non-commitment.

This thesis is divided into chapters and by topics. Various chapters discuss the variables, describe the sample of the population studied, their personal opinion about the issues, and the results of the survey. To clarify the use of the terms "credibility" and "involvement," credibility is defined as the power of the media to encourage the belief or confidence of the audience; and involvement is the strength of individuals' attitudes toward an issue or a conflict. These attitudes are commitment or interest in what is going on. Part of this interest helps expose personal opinions about issues directly affecting individuals' lives or their communities.

Overview of the Puerto Rican media industry

Today, the three most important local newspapers in Puerto Rico are El Nuevo Dia, El Vocero, which is cataloged as yellow press, and The San Juan Star, the most prominent English language newspaper (Rosario-Quiles, 1991). There are also a variety

of local weekly papers and magazines.

Concerning the Puerto Rican television industry, there are three major commercial stations, WKAQ-TV, WAPA-TV, WLII-TV; and one government-owned station, WIPR-TV Channel 6, and affiliate WIPM-TV Channel 3. These local channels are reinforced by cable and satellite television that brings in CNN, Headline News, ABC News, CBS News, etc.

The two local newscasts aired by WKAQ Channel 2, Telenoticias, are broadcast during prime time from 5:00 to 6:00 p.m. and from 10:00 to 10:30 p.m. They cover political, social and cultural issues, art, entertainment, sports, and weather, as well as national and international news. During the day, programming is interrupted to present the headline news. This television station also has scheduled Ocurrio Asi, a news program produced by the Telemundo network from 10:30 to 11:30 p.m. following the local newscast.

WAPA Channel 4 also broadcasts two news programs produced locally, Noticentro, from 5:00 to 6:00 p.m. and from 10:00 to 10:30 p.m. These newscasts cover national, international, medical, business and financial news, sports, weather, and also an analysis of important events. As a strategy to maintain the audience through the local newscast, the news program Primer Impacto is scheduled from 4:00 to 5:00 p.m. This program is produced by the Univision network in the United States. Primer Impacto is also scheduled from 9:00 to 10:00 p.m. This channel also presents its local news program during weekends.

In contrast, WLII Channel 11 has scheduled three newscasts from 12:00 to 1:00

p.m., 6:00 to 7:00 p.m., 11:00 to 11:30 p.m., as well as the magazine news program Tu manana, in morning prime time from 6:00 to 8:00 a.m. Moreover, WLII broadcasts two newscasts on weekends, 6:00 to 6:30 p.m. and from 11:00 to 11:30 p.m. Since August, 1996, they have presented a monthly one-hour long investigative program, Las noticias extra, which analyzes the news that cannot be fully covered on the daily newscasts.

Although this study did not consider the radio news programs to evaluate their credibility, it is important to mention the two major commercial stations that air 24-hour news programming: WKAQ-AM and WUNO-AM.

After this examination of the local media, the reader should have a better perspective of the proliferation of an industry that has focused on governmental elements such as competence, high operation costs, tight management and maintenance budgets, plus the state of the local economy (Rosario-Quiles, 1991). This situation reveals the large amount of news information to which the Puerto Rican consumer is exposed. Moreover, 98 % of the Puerto Rican population has at least one television set (Census Bureau, 1980). The U.S. mainland has a similar percentage (Carroll & Davis, 1993).

With the advent of new technology, journalism (television and print) is more dynamic, widespread, and commercialized (Rosario-Quiles, 1991). The technological impact is the emergence of the television culture. That is why this research inserts the elements of credibility to determine whether the media have been effective in the transmission of information. In addition, this thesis investigates whether the audience have been active participants in the issues affecting them, and whether they believe the media are biased.

This study utilizes government and political affairs because, according to the investigations of Adams (1980) and Smith (1979), these were the prominent topics within news reports in television and newspapers. Moreover, according to Canino and Huston (1986) the content of news programs in Puerto Rico was similar to the content broadcast on newscasts in the United States. Thus, the researcher must assume that Puerto Ricans are receiving information related to the issues selected for examination in this research: Section 936 of the IRS code, Crime, Education, and Health Care Reform. These topics are also more frequently discussed by candidates and the press during an election year. Even though Schulberg (1996) has pointed out that people are not likely to hear about the national political scene in their favorite late news program (cited in Grossman, 1997), and Grossman (1997) has stated, local television news concentrates on crime, scandal, heartwarming features, and local sports, and weather, because these topics will attract a large audience, political and governmental issues are always reviewed during political campaigns.

It is important to discuss the topics that the Puerto Rican press is debating, even though they are complex. The most controversial issue, for many years, has been Section 936 of the IRS code, which was prominently debated during the 1996 political campaign. Section 936 is an income incentive for American companies to establish their business in Puerto Rico, in order to help the local economy and create employment. Under this disposition the profits made are exempt from local and federal taxes. This section has been derogated by the US Congress in a 10-year period beginning on August, 1996, when President Clinton signed the new minimum wage law. This issue is the most complex

because there is a plethora of elements and political interests involved. The elimination of this section would affect not only the Puerto Rican economy but would also affect the economy of other Caribbean countries. Its elimination would represent an economic and political crisis in the United States (Vazquez-Quintana, 1996).

Crime is one of the social problems Puerto Ricans are facing. The government in order to fight against criminality has developed the action plan “Mano dura contra el crimen”; this formula is similar to the “Zero Tolerance” instituted in the United States by the Bush Administration. However, Vazquez-Quintana (1996) pointed out that in Puerto Rico the way the government is utilizing the National Guard and the Police Department to fight crime could constitute a violation of civil rights.

Regarding education reform, the government has designed a program to create community schools and to fight illiteracy. However, the problem is that most communities do not understand why and how they have to take the responsibility to administer the schools. The communities believe this should be a government’s major responsibility.

The development of health care reform is principally designed to offer the low income population an opportunity to have public health insurance and to minimize medical costs. Nevertheless, complaints have rapidly emerged because this insurance does not guarantee their rights to choose the hospital or the physician they prefer. In contrast, this reform presented high cost and a lack of quality in medical services. Citizens have not been beneficiaries with this system; the beneficiaries have tended to be the insurance companies, government and physicians (Vazquez-Quintana, 1996).

According to Vazquez-Quintana (1996) health reform has not been successful in either the United States or in Puerto Rico. Moreover, scientific studies have indicated that Puerto Rico does not need health reform; in contrast, the necessity is for an economic reform to educate this population because these studies have revealed a relationship between literacy and mortality among this population (Vazquez-Quintana, 1996).

Democracy works by exposing and discussing controversial issues in order to create a balance. The electronic and print media are supposed “to be the great equalizing and elevating force in our democratic society” (Grossman, 1990, p. 88). As Isaacson (1996) has pointed out, “Good journalism is a part of the democratic system because democracy depends on having a common body of credible information” (p. 4).

When the press has presented multiple sides of an issue, the public may enjoy its right to be a participant and take direct action in the affairs relevant to the community, or to themselves. If the community has had the opportunity to evaluate the issues exposed on news reports, the relationship between media and the audience has been effective. Thus the press has been an invaluable instrument within society and has earned the public’s trust. In contrast, if the public fails to comprehend an issue, then the media attempt to persuade has not been effective. Petty and Priester (1994) have stated that, “An important goal of any persuasion strategy aimed at enduring change will be to increase people’s motivation to think about the messages by increasing the perceived personal relevance of the communications or employing other techniques to enhance processing (e.g., ending arguments with questions rather than statements; using multiple sources)” (p. 116).

Statement of the problem

The problem tested by this thesis is whether there is a correlation between the effects of subjects' credibility evaluations on news of, and their involvement level with, four socio-political issues presented on local television news and delineated in newspapers. The sample consisted of 125 university students, 60 males and 65 females, ages 18 to 48, with access to information communicated by media about the issues affecting contemporary Puerto Rican society. The selected participants were attending Caribbean University, Bayamon, Puerto Rico during Spring semester, 1996.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate and analyze the relationship, if any, between credibility and involvement with an issue. The information gained from this study could help the general audience understand the attributes of media affecting their points of view about a specific issue. It might also be a reference for social scientists who could be interested in examining Puerto Rican students' perceptions of news. In addition, this thesis may help the media know how much university students trust television and newspaper news coverage.

Justification for the study

This study was conducted in Puerto Rico for the following reasons: First, there is little research on this matter; most of the literature found is based on informal evidence (social analysts' personal interpretation and critical views) rather than empirical research.

Second, it sought to determine whether participants trust media coverage of important issues in an election year and whether their level of involvement with the issues affected this trust. Finally, this country has a democratic system which grants a free press, supports a complete media framework, and is socio-economically and politically developed. As Canino and Huston (1996) have pointed out, “Puerto Rico is a good location for testing generalizations derived from studies in the United States” (p. 151).

Interest in media credibility research emerged after the results of five surveys conducted between 1959 and 1961 in the United States showed that television was the most credible medium as a source of information (Gaziano, 1988). According to Gaziano (1988) the tendency to trust broadcast messages more has evolved since that time because during the early 1960s television was becoming the mass medium in which audiences expressed more confidence.

Gunther and Lasorsa (1986) have suggested that skepticism of media is increasing among audiences. According to Mike Wallace, skepticism about the press has always existed, but recently this distrust has emerged with a different quality: “There seems to be a genuine anger toward the press that I have not seen previously” (cited in Jenkins, 1997, p. 38).

As Gaziano (1988) has suggested, important events such as a lawsuit against the media (for instance, General William Westmoreland vs CBS), the exclusion of the press during the American invasion of Grenada and the 1990 Gulf War, the scandal which involved The Washington Post and the Pulitzer Prize fabrications were noteworthy media issues. These matters held the interest of the public but created concern and serious

implications about the credibility of the media.

MacNeil (1985) reported that after Janet Cooke, The Washington Post reporter, confessed to inventing part of her story which allowed her to win the Pulitzer Prize in 1981, a Gallup survey indicated that 61 % of Americans said they believed very little or only some of the news reported in newspapers and on television. Only 33 % of respondents said they believed most news reports.

Recently, several reporting events have impacted the public's credibility on media (Tallent, 1997). As Tallent (1997) has pointed out, reporters and editors need to regain their trust and credibility because without these elements, the news media have nothing. Isaacson (1996) has stated that the loss of credibility and power is because reporters are not analyzing issues seriously. Cronkite (1997) has asserted that one key factor hurting the media industry's credibility is when mainstream media use the same storytelling techniques as tabloids (cited in McClellan, 1997). Conscious of the importance of public trust and some ethical problems, the RTNDA (Radio-Television News Directors Association) has been discussing these topics in order to find out how to solve the crisis (McClellan, 1997). In the same regard, the ASNE (American Society of Newspaper Editors) has been debating how to restore the public's respect, trust, and confidence. The latter organization has proposed to the McCormick Tribune Foundation to support a project to study and execute action plans in order to regain credibility of the audience, and to rebuild excellence in media (Restoring trust, 1997).

Media leaders have stated that the decline in newspaper readership is a direct consequence of the growth in the use of television (Reeves, 1984 cited in Gaziano, 1988).

This decrease forces members of the media to be aware of the public's opinion about the media industry (Meyer, 1988). Leonard has stated that the problem of that notorious decline is based on poor marketing strategies adopted in newspapers (cited in Boylan, 1996).

The credibility and involvement variables are equally important because these evaluations play an integral role within a democratic system. Gaziano (1988) has suggested that the public's attitude toward media could affect democracy if people do not perceive what they are watching, hearing, or reading as credible. This tendency could prevent "the nation's ability to inform the public, to monitor leaders and to govern" (Gaziano, 1988, p. 267). The researcher has also stated that the freedom of the press could be seriously and negatively affected; furthermore, the communication industry could suffer an economic threat should people mistrust the media. Isaacson (1996) has asserted, "I think as we do that we gain a little bit of our credibility and a little bit of our authority back, and perhaps play the role in democracy that journalism has been expected to play" (p. 4).

Assumptions

This research is based on the following assumptions:

- 1) Involvement influences perceptions of media effects.
- 2) News coverage could influence individuals' attitudes toward a controversial issue.
- 3) Audience members who trust the news media will become more reliant

on the media for information and will increase their exposure to media messages.

Hypotheses

This thesis tests the following hypotheses:

H 1) Individuals with low involvement will rate television news as more credible.

H 2) Individuals with high involvement on issues affecting the community will trust the newspaper as the more credible source of information.

H 3) Newspaper news coverage will be perceived by the respondents as more credible and trustworthy than television news items when dealing with controversial or complex issues.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Newspaper evaluations

The newspaper industry has been largely criticized by social analysts and the public. On one hand, critics have argued that the medium is a business seeking maximization of profit. On the other hand, daily newspapers attempt to achieve the functional process of democracy because they inform the public at a low price about everything that affects the community (Johnson, 1977).

According to Johnson (1977) a difference between newspapers and television is that information received from papers can be examined and analyzed more critically because the treatment of the content is extensive. This is not true for television because of its peculiar characteristics. However, McCombs (1994) has stated that over 75 % of news is rejected because there is not enough space in the newspapers. According to McCombs this is the routine gatekeeping practice within the industry, and that practice does not allow equal treatment to the issues. He has pointed out, "Newspapers, for example, clearly state the journalistic salience of an item through its page, placement, headline, and length" (p. 4).

As Lo (1994) has stated, "Television news is usually too brief and fleeting for viewers to scrutinize and evaluate incoming information" (p. 45). Lo (1994) has argued that the informative effects of newspapers and television may be related to involvement, and that newspapers are a main contributor to knowledge because they provide more detailed information about complex topics that can be controlled by news consumers at their own pace.

The attention demanded by newspaper readership is different, and although this activity is also considered leisure time, newspapers serve many purposes. The daily newspaper displays advertising, an employment section, obituaries, the classified ads, and other sections that are very important for the consumer (Diamond, 1978).

Reviewing the history of newspaper assessments McKenna and Feingold (1993) found an argument posited by Thomas Jefferson concerning his complaints of unfair news coverage in his time: “The man who never looks into a newspaper is better informed than he who reads them, inasmuch as he who knows nothing is nearer to truth than he whose mind is filled with falsehoods and errors” (p. 58). Nevertheless, McKenna and Feingold established two major differences between the press today and the press of the eighteenth century. On one hand, the stories reported in newspapers during those times were local and decentralized, and today this industry has nationwide circulation and affects the socio-political agenda. On the other hand, objectivity had little importance in the past, “Newspapers were frankly partisan sheets, full of nasty barbs at the politicians and parties the editors did not like; they made no distinction between news and editorial” (p. 59). Today, objectivity has been promoted by journalists and journalism schools to exert a better image in the public (Rosario-Quiles, 1991).

From time to time journalism has changed simultaneously with social, political, cultural, and technological trends in society, affecting the audience and also the way social critics study the masses. Rosario-Quiles (1991) has described the tendencies of the new journalism developed during the 1930s, and how it affected public opinion. On the new style, issues were deeply investigated and analyzed, but technology has since altered

the method of news coverage. All these elements have made this practice more schematic, commercial, ample, and diverse, driving to the creation, sophistication, and implementation of new techniques to find out audiences' behavior and preferences.

Cremedas (1992) pointed out that even though the public has held media in high esteem, questions concerning journalism's accuracy have risen. According to Cremedas, Roper poll results revealed that over the past years, credibility of newspapers reports increased, whereas credibility of television news declined substantially despite the latter being cataloged as more truthful and acceptable in other research.

To improve and enhance credibility, newspapers have published correction notices and have used accuracy checks as techniques to better serve the news reader. This could be a reason for the rise of newspapers' believability. This tendency permits improvement of relations with readers and reinforces news ethics. However, television stations do not use this method to look up corrections because of the time pressures characteristic of this medium (Cremedas, 1992).

However, in the last two decades, people within the newspaper industry are more aware of the public's views and preferences about the industry. A major cause of this is the marked decline in readership (Meyer, 1988). Reeves (1984) suggested that the readership crisis represented an increase in the use of television (cited in Gaziano, 1988). According to Meyer (1988) newspaper editors looked for a main cause of the weaker penetration of newspapers and the popular opinion which emerged in the 1980s, "was that diminished credibility was a source, or at least related to, the relative loss in readership" (p. 567). As Meyer suggested, the problem of testing this hypothesis consists in the

definition and operationalization or application of the credibility concept because studies are designed for different purposes and the methods used are not equivalent. On the other hand, Leonard (1995) has contended that the notorious decline in newspaper circulations is, in part, because the marketing strategies are not aggressive in comparison with those used in magazines (cited in Boylan, 1996).

A number of polls have presented consistent descriptions of how the public perceives media (MacNeil, 1985). According to MacNeil (1985) they think media are often inaccurate, unfair, biased, intrusive of privacy, unethical, arrogant, and preoccupied with bad news. MacNeil (1985) has stated that there is plenty of evidence that media relations with the public are perplexing, and that public trust is decreasing.

Poindexter (1979) analyzed non-readers' complaints about newspapers. According to her investigation, the main reasons to avoid use of this medium were lack of time, use of other news media to be informed (television, radio, or magazines), cost, and lack of interest in the content. Among other elements were dislike of reading, amount of advertising, bias, poor eyesight, not wanting bad news, disagreement with editorials, unavailability of home delivery, and distrust. Poindexter's findings were consistent with McCombs, Mullins and Weaver's (1974) investigation of consumer newspaper avoidance.

Research conducted by Atkins and Elwood (1978) with high school students revealed some dissatisfaction with newspapers, including insignificant or boring content, too much space devoted to scandals, violence, and battles between politicians, repetition of news in each town paper, unattractive appearance, and news seen previously on

television. However, lack of time was the most frequent justification given by the students for not reading newspapers.

Nevertheless, Atkins and Elwood (1978) indicated that the participants who selected newspapers as their preferred choice for news source acknowledged that dailies presented more detailed coverage of local, national, and international news. The students interviewed suggested some changes that newspapers should consider to improve their image with young readers: more and better pictures including color, more entertainment articles such as music and reviews, and more news about young people.

A 1976 survey conducted by the Yankelovich organization indicated that young people do not read papers because the news stories outlined on newspapers were old as they had already been seen in television newscasts (cited in Shelton, 1978). However, Shelton (1978) pointed out that newspapers have the advantage of carrying more news stories than time-constrained television news programs. Shelton stated, "But even if locally produced television news shows beat the papers on every story they carried, the newspapers would still be more timely simply because of their ability to carry more stories" (p. 349).

The following are some of the main conclusions that Shelton (1978) formulated from her research of timeliness in media.

- a) Local television news programs can claim timeliness over newspapers only on a relatively few stories, and then usually only in the morning paper.
- b) A viewer of local television news cannot say accurately that everything he or she sees in newspapers has already been transmitted by the small screen, at least

in local news because of the great number of stories in newspapers.

c) Perhaps a few of the major headlines have been on television first, but not many (p. 350).

However, 15 years later, Gunther, Hong, and Rodriguez (1994) were making similar logical arguments that newspapers have advantages over television in transmitting useful information and were finding similar empirical evidence that respondents preferred television to newspapers as a source of information. Gunther, Hong, and Rodriguez examined a Taiwanese sample population during a time of political and social change, to compare credibility on broadcast news versus print media, and between trust in media and trust in government. The researchers proposed that the public could trust newspapers more than electronic media because since 1990 government had no severe control over the information outlined in latest papers, as it did on the messages transmitted through radio and television. However, this study revealed that 74 % of the respondents replied they would believe television, and only 17 % said they would believe newspapers if they received conflicting reports about general news.

On political issues, 54 % answered they would trust television news while 35 % said newspapers. Television news programs continually lead other media even when it is controlled by the government entity. Gunther et al. (1994) concluded that "The higher credibility of television news, at least as measured by the traditional 'conflicting reports' question, has been a persistent and apparently deeply rooted response from the United States public, and that appeared to be true for Taiwan's urban population as well" (p. 634).

Marshall (1977) analyzed two competing papers in Tucson to measure accuracy, finding that both dailies showed similarity in the types of errors noted by participants: spelling errors, wrong quotations, incorrect names, titles, errors in time, locations, inaccurate headlines, and overemphasis, among others. Marshall stated that this parallelism showed that the staffs handled news in a similar manner, and used the same news sources, including the use of each other as a source. Moreover, Marshall concluded that accuracy was greater when the reporter was at the scene of the event. Face to face interviews also tended to be more factual than phone interviews. The Tucson survey supported data from previous investigations regarding when an acquaintance of someone on the staff upon finding an error did not take it seriously.

Cremadas (1992) has suggested that the audience might increase their trust in television news if news directors designed and used a correction policy more frequently to correct mistakes made during broadcasts. According to his survey, the news directors interviewed responded that corrections can be good for the station, but at the same time, they believed that this practice could cause their stations to drop in credibility. About 97 % of respondents saw benefits in no such work, 40 % replied that the practice will improve or build the news department's credibility in the eyes of the audience, whereas 9 % answered they would make corrections only for ethical considerations. Likewise, Rosario-Quiles (1991) pointed out that even though media executives broadcast the rectifications because the public deserves them, for any reason, the industry's policy avoids the controversy that could reduce credibility in this social institution. Grossman (1997) also states that news organizations are reluctant to correct mistakes, even though

it is a simple and inexpensive way to improve their image on the public and their credibility.

Contradictory findings in judging newspapers' credibility have been argued in many investigations. Evidence has indicated that newspapers exert more believability regarding local news (Stempel, 1973). Other studies have related credibility to other variables, such as age, income, education level, and gender (Self, 1988; Carter and Greenberg, 1965; Westley and Severin, 1964). Westley and Severin (1964) found men considered newspapers a more believable medium than women; however, youth rated dailies less credible than the middle-age group. Regarding the age factor Prisuta's (1979) study of adolescents found that the television news consumer tended to be male, white, older, and of higher socioeconomic standing. These results were similar to those found in prior studies about adult news audiences. He also found that youngsters interested in news viewing and public affairs were inclined to be involved with people of similar interests. He concluded that media people need to pay more attention to this particular population in order to reinforce their tendency to take news and public affairs seriously, because this kind of pattern could be adopted throughout their adulthood. In Westley and Severin's research, both younger and middle-aged groups responded that television exerted more credibility, and the educational variable showed that audiences with more education viewed newspapers as more credible.

Self (1988) found that education and income variables have the power to predict which medium the audience will believe more. Education predicted which medium would be believed, trusted, and used to get informed about political issues, and

income predicted which medium would be believed, enjoyed, and trusted. This study also confirmed that the influence on age and sex variables in chosen media is declining. According to Self (1988) another important finding is that task perceptions can predict which medium the audience will believe, trust, use, and enjoy.

In contrast, Carter and Greenberg (1965) found that audiences, no matter the level of education, rated television as a trustworthy medium, and peoples' perceptions of the medium and its use was positively correlated. They argued that audiences who depended on television increased its use and believed in the most used medium and people who used newspapers as a source for information rated newspapers as the more credible source.

Thirty years later, Wanta and Hu (1994) argued the opposite causal flow: they suggested credibility leads to reliance on news media. Determining which element, reliance or credibility, comes first will require more precise data than the cross-sectional survey data used in both of these studies, but Wanta and Hu showed a clear correlation between these variables. A third variable, community involvement, does seem to affect reliance on a given medium. Emig (1995) found that as people moved from low community involvement to high, they relied progressively on neither medium, television mainly, newspapers mainly and finally on both media. Lo (1994) also found that strength of involvement with issues covered in the mass media was related to choice of medium.

The investigations of Gunther and Lasorsa (1986) found that the public's skepticism of all media grew from the '60s to the '80s. Obviously media are facing a credibility gap, and the tendency is equal for television and newspapers. At the same

time, the researchers have asserted that despite the audience's criticisms toward media, "its use is a highly stable behavior" (p. 844), even for newspaper readership. MacNeil (1985) pointed out that surveys have indicated that the public love their local newspaper or news program, but hate dailies and television in the abstract.

The reliability of newspapers has been studied from another perspective.

Becker, Martino and Towers (1976) conducted a study focused on the dissemination of advertising content through media. They found that the newspaper was the most credible medium for carrying advertising messages. "Despite the findings of television dominance in news credibility, newspapers tend to be the medium selected as likely to carry the most believable ads" (p. 218). According to Becker et al. (1976) the dominant evaluation for newspapers on advertising information agreed with earlier findings: "Newspapers are chosen by more than 40 % of respondents; radio, given the next highest percentage, received only 10 % of the choices" (p. 218).

The survey conducted by Lee (1978) revealed that television news was favored as a credible source over newspaper news. His findings were consistent with prior investigations in this matter, and he has reported four conclusions:

- 1) the factors of media credibility and their structures varied according to the different concepts rated, while some factors appeared to overlap among the news concepts or sample groups,
- 2) college students, in general, appeared to perceive television news as more trustworthy, authentic, dynamic, expert, objective, intimate, convenient, and easy, than newspaper news,

3) the differences in credibility elements between newspaper and television news varied in part according to the different sample groups, and

4) further research should be undertaken to study the nature and effects of intimacy and bias factors of newspaper and television news credibility (p. 287).

Reagan and Zenaty (1979) also agreed that television is the most credible, trusted, and important source of local news in comparison to daily newspapers. Their research also indicated that television and newspapers were rated high on believability and importance. Regarding these findings, the researchers concluded that further investigations need to explore the real purposes and criteria in judging them.

In fact, Greenberg and Roloff (1974) suggested that the public has different reasons to use media. They have pointed out that the television news audience uses the medium for entertainment and readers use the newspaper as a reliable information source.

Similarly, Abel and Wirth (1977) found that respondents considered television news to be more believable (43 %) than newspaper news (23 %) concerning local news. According to the researchers their findings were also similar to earlier investigations.

Clark, Martire, and Bartolomeo (1995) conducted a study in the newspaper market in Puerto Rico, and revealed that of readers interviewed, 62 % chose El Nuevo Dia as the best source to obtain publicity information; 20 % responded El Vocero; 13 % answered television; 2 % rated radio; 2 % chose other weekly papers, and 1 % of the respondents selected The San Juan Star. In fact, the survey also revealed that 85 % of participants used the newspaper for their consumer decisions.

Newscast criticism

Flores (1993) criticized the way in which the Puerto Rican television stations have presented sensationalism on news programs just to obtain better ratings and capture the audience. He stated that the local newscasts are portraying the model of the Roman circus in which the audience can enjoy violence in details, and even the reaction of the family victims. Similarly, Senator Charlie Rodriguez, president of the Senate of the commonwealth of Puerto Rico since 1996, has pointed out that the main objective of the commercial television station is to gain ratings, no matter what they have to do to accomplish this goal. Senator Rodriguez has also emphasized that the newscasts should inform without being boastful (cited in Rosaly, 1994). Carroll and Davis (1993) noted, "News programming is one of the most important aspects of a TV station's operation, because it is a key to positioning the station's rating in its market and makes a considerable contribution to profits" (p. 401). Flores (1993) has also pointed out that newscasts in Puerto Rico are the main income source for television stations. It is difficult to keep a station ranked first in the ratings because of the great competition among the major television stations: channels 2, 4, and 11.

Flores (1993) wrote that these stories prevent the privacy right of the family involved in a tragedy; and at the same time, morbidity does not allow solutions to crime. He has alerted the media people to be more sensible, to cover events more responsibly, and to be more ethical. According to Flores (1992) the solution could be to use television as a vehicle to contribute to the enrichment of the Puerto Rican culture. In fact, the four issues which have aroused critical views toward television are violence, sex,

racial stereotypes, and commercialism (Microsoft Encarta, 1994). However, MacNeil (1985) has asserted that television, to some extent, could represent a release or catharsis for family victims when they can expose their grief to the rest of the community.

According to this finding many families involved in a tragedy feel that the coverage gives some meaning to their misfortune, although many people think that television crews sometimes intrude on the privacy of these families.

Television is a legitimate, reliable source for information, entertainment, and education (Oliver-Padilla, 1977), and even a transmitter of ideas and positive values if it is used in the right way (Rosaly, 1994). According to Gonzalez-Irrizarry (1994) newscasts three decades ago were prohibited from presenting crime scenes, invading privacy, and covering the reaction of victims' families because human pain was considered sacred. The news program production was simple. There were no scenography, films, symbols, or remote transmissions, and competition between media did not exist. The newscasts were considered serious and respectful programs, which the audience could trust (cited in Torres-Torres, 1994).

A review of research on the effects of television over the audience (Oliver-Padilla, 1977) concluded that news programs were more hazardous for children than other violent programming because violence and crime on news shows are real and violence in other programs are fantasy. However, Cantor (1994) has stated that "there is evidence that younger children are less responsive than older children and adults to the distinction between real events and fictional portrayals" (cited in Bryant and Zillmann, 1994, p. 228). Moreover, Gans (1980) concluded that reality and fantasy are relative concepts because

one viewer's reality may be another's fantasy. As Cantor (1994) has asserted if viewers are exposed to media to acquire information, "it would seem that the viewer would pay particular attention to whether or not the events portrayed are real or fictional" (cited in Bryant and Zillmann, 1994, p. 227).

Some studies conducted in Puerto Rico have revealed that local newscasts presented limited, general, and superficial information, and also that newscasters presented too little news analysis (Sanchez-Betances, 1976). Moreover, television programming content was very poor in educating audiences, and the medium was not enhancing its function of serving the public's interest (Nieves-Falcon, 1972). Other research conducted in Puerto Rico dealt with the implications of the social effects that television content could have over childhood (Canino, Bravo, Rodriguez and Rubio, 1985; Department of Public Instruction, 1976; Garcia-Ramis, 1973). A number of studies have demonstrated that the information transmitted by high technology has altered audiences' social and cultural patterns. This mediated information may also have changed attitudes and behavior regarding the content programming (Winn, 1987; Canino et al., 1985). Petty and Priester (1994) suggested, "Media influence is a complex, though explicable process" (p. 116). However, Petty and Priester asserted, even though extensive research on media effects has indicated that information presented by the mass media can change the knowledge or facts audiences already have about an issue or a person, this knowledge gain does not necessarily result in attitude and behavior change. Petty and Priester stated, "Information will only be successful in producing enduring changes in attitudes and behavior if people are motivated and able to process information,

and if this processing results in favorable thoughts and ideas”(p. 115). Nevertheless, Petty and Priester indicated that even if individuals change attitudes, the process becomes more complex because they may learn new skills and perceptions of self-efficacy.

Graber (1979) analyzed the amount of coverage on television and newspapers about crime themes because of the complaints of the public and scholars. She found that crime topics, even though they received broad attention, did not displace coverage of other important issues. She concluded, “There is substantial similarity in the types of news presented by various newspapers and television sources, and substantial stability in the frequency with which these news areas are covered” (p. 91). However, Grossman (1997) has pointed out that a study of 100 local television news programs conducted in 56 cities across the United States found that newscasts are focusing on crime news; “crime occupied 30 % of what little time was actually devoted to the news, 40 %” (p. 23). As Haag has confirmed “covering crime is the easiest, fastest, cheapest, most efficient kind of news coverage for television stations; news directors and station owners love crime” (cited in Grossman, 1997, p. 23).

According to Smith (1979) television news presents a structured narrative in which government is the main participant within the news items, men who occupy positions in government are the primary actors, and women in any role are rarely portrayed. Smith formulated his approach after conducting an analysis of 20 newscasts from the major networks in the United States, in an attempt to describe if certain narratives are more reported or emphasized than others. Smith concluded, “It is a medium for the communication of myths, can be understood, in this sense, as a narrative

that explains or renders in fictive terms perceptions of our social environment” (p. 80).

Media and government have a cooperative relationship because media have the need for a flow of news and they cannot afford reporters or camera crews in every place where important events, planned or unplanned, are taking place. According to Herman and Chomsky (1988) media people prefer to use several information sources such as the White House, the Pentagon, the State Department, or the Police Department because the information which comes from these agencies is deemed to be accurate. Another reason for using these bureaucracies as a reliable source of information is because media can reduce the risk of lawsuit and protect themselves from criticism of bias (Herman and Chomsky, 1988). Iyengar and Kinder (1987) confirmed that the reason to use information from these governmental agencies is because it is cheap and easy.

According to Herman and Chomsky (1988) the problem with this kind of relationship between media and government is that “The media may feel obligated to carry extremely dubious stories, or to mute criticism, to avoid offending sources and disturbing a close relationship” (p. 70). Critics have stated that media function as a propaganda mill to serve the powerful and wealthy, being manipulated for their best interests.

MacNeil (1985) asserted that journalists have a problem dealing with facts in news because it is very difficult to share the medium which also serves as a vehicle for politicking, advertising, marketing, and entertainment. He pointed out that the line dividing news from entertainment is blurred. Similarly, Diamond (1978) predicted that the line separating news and entertainment would be unclear. He stated that

"Already we can see the development of a kind of news-as-entertainment and entertainment-as-news in the latest prime-time programming" (p. 13).

Postman (1985) argued that everything presented through television is considered entertainment, even the news programs are not to be taken seriously. He wrote, "A news show, to put it plainly, is a format for entertainment, not for education, reflection, or catharsis" (p. 6). According to Postman, this tendency is the nature of the medium because what is presented by television is just to be seen. Television has little room for thinking or complex talk. Postman strongly argued that the way television presents facts, tells the truth to the audience, and presents a rational public discourse is inferior in comparison to print media. He also concluded that this practice of show business is dangerous for the American culture.

Credibility and involvement in media coverage

A survey conducted by the Times Mirror Center for People and the Press in 1993 found Americans trusted television news reports more than newspapers, religious leaders, the President and Congress (Stern, 1994). According to Stern (1994) the poll indicated that 73 % of North American respondents believed more on television news programs; 68 % responded daily newspapers; 60 % rated the church as more believable, and only 49 % answered the nation's leader.

Regarding television newscasts, respondents indicated that news programs violate privacy (63 %); television news tends to benefit one side when discussing political or social issues (63 %); news covers politicians' personal and ethical behavior in a very

responsible way (10 %); the news items are presented in a fairly responsible way (52 %); and network news is a good influence (71 %), whereas people who think the Congress is a good influence only represented 39 % (Stern, 1994).

Wanta and Hu (1994) have suggested that credibility leads to reliance. First, the relative believability and community affiliation of media are the elements considered by the audience to form their opinions. According to Wanta and Hu, based on the public's opinions concerning credibility of media, they develop a reliance level on this institution. The more the audience perceive the news media to be highly credible, the more they would become dependent on media as a source for information. The work of Wanta and Hu (1994) also found that the public will give credence to media, that the issues exposed are important and in the best interest of the community without the need to develop reliance on the media, nor to be more exposed to information.

Stamm and Dube (1994) have reported that the involvement variable provided few significant relationships with credibility, similar to other components analyzed. The evidence found in their research did not provide support for the idea that credibility scores should be lower among individuals with extreme attitudes because of their higher involvement, as suggested by Gunther and Lasorsa (1986). According to Stamm and Dube (1994) their study also revealed that "In those cases where credibility and involvement were related, the relationship was positive, with the highest credibility scores occurring at the highest level of involvement" (p. 122). In this research, Stamm and Dube criticized the Social Judgment theory proposed by Sherif et al. (1965) and the Cognitive Response theory advanced by Petty and Cacioppo (1981), used by Gunther and

Lasorsa (1986) because these approaches have presented contradictory predictions regarding the relationship between the two variables, credibility and involvement.

However, Gunther (1988) noted, "Interestingly, the two theoretical approaches predict contrary results; but both support the usefulness of attitude extremity as a predictor of trust in media messages" (p. 280). The main explanation for this contradiction, according to Gunther (1988) is that the high involvement level on Petty and Cacioppo's model represents the low involvement level on the Sherif et al. theory. Gunther stated that the two models would be complementary given three levels of involvement: low, moderate, and high.

Lo (1994) investigated how involvement could be related to media use and knowledge. The study focused on the Gulf War because the conflict provided readers and viewers the opportunity to become involved with an important event that received extensive media coverage in Taiwan. This research indicated that involvement appears to mediate the correlation between media use and knowledge, but the findings varied dramatically depending on how involvement is defined and measured. Roser (1990) has also stated that conflicting outcomes have arisen from the different treatment of the involvement definition and operationalization; the concept has caused disagreement between scholars.

Lo (1994) found that for people highly involved in historical events, newspaper use was related more strongly to knowledge than television use. In contrast, newspaper use by participants with low involvement was not related more strongly to knowledge than television. These approaches suggest that people with low involvement are not

motivated to search and process messages carefully; they will turn the paper's pages and scan quickly and as a result they will miss a lot of important information. However, when the audience has low involvement with news information or advertising messages, they will increase their knowledge and will recall news items or advertising messages because of the repeated exposure through the small screen.

The research conducted by Roser (1990) found that attention evidently has an impact on learning but has no direct effects on attitudes or behavior. He has suggested to researchers interested in studying the cognitive effects of the media to focus their investigations on cognitive components of involvement such as attentiveness. However, if theorists feel interested in attitudinal and behavioral effects, they should measure more affective forms such as the perceived relevance of the message.

Roser (1990) concluded that watching the news while doing other things may lead to attitudinal or behavioral effects without the viewer fully grasping the information. On the other hand, a viewer who is attentive to the messages but is not interested in what he or she is watching or hearing may learn the content but will not translate the experience into value or behavior change.

Izard (1985) suggested the American public's attitude toward media improved slightly during the early 1980s: "Their trust of the media is related to their evaluation of how well the news media live up to their expectations" (p. 247). His investigation concluded that respondents saw the news media institution and the journalistic profession as a respected one. Participants indicated that journalists were not more arrogant than other people performing other professions. Izard also concluded that the public

appreciated the role the media played within society, and that they disagreed that journalists were controlled by government officials.

Nevertheless, Izard (1985) pointed out that his findings also presented contradictions. The survey showed that the audience thought that journalists invaded individual's privacy, they suppressed a lot of information, expressed their own opinions in the news stories, and asked difficult questions to people with which they disagree. They also thought that reporters presented stories which attract audiences rather than contribute to social needs. Izard asserted that "If the public becomes convinced that such excesses and sins represent the exception to the rule of American journalism, journalists will have taken a great stride toward that credibility they worry about so much" (p. 255).

Chapter 3 will discuss the method used in this study to assess media credibility among Puerto Rican college students.

METHODOLOGY

One hundred twenty-five undergraduate students enrolled in marketing and communication classes from Caribbean University, Bayamon campus, Puerto Rico, were selected as participants, using a convenience sample method.

The respondents were requested to fill out an Informed Consent Statement in accordance with requirement for conducting the research. They also were requested to complete a demographic information questionnaire to enable the researcher to describe the sample. Subjects understood that their participation was voluntary and they could terminate participation at any time.

After filling out the questionnaires, participants received an incentive of five points for the final exam; they also were thanked for their participation. The completed questionnaires were under the professor's supervision to preserve subjects' rights to keep their responses confidential.

University students from different majors were chosen because the researcher speculated that this population will be professionals in different fields and, therefore, they will address the future political situation of Puerto Rico and will make important decisions concerning social and economic aspects of Puerto Rican society. Regarding that, 1996 was an election year; the topics discussed in this investigation were spread by media because they were consistently debated in the local political campaign.

This research used a questionnaire to measure the students' level of credibility in newspapers and television news stories. To rate the respondents' trust in television news and newspaper coverage, the study used a 1 to 10 point scale, where 1 means "no trust at

all” and 10 means “high trust” (adapted from Gunther, 1988). The question items read as follows: How much do you trust newspaper/television coverage of (Section 936 of the IRS code, Crime, Education, and Public Health Insurance Act) issues? Respondents were also asked about their opinions of the issues at hand presented on eight attitude statement items, using the Likert scale (strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree or strongly disagree) also adapted from Gunther (1988).

To measure the students’ level of involvement, the questionnaire instructed them to select from a 1 to 5 point scale how much they were thinking about each issue, where 1 meant “nothing,” and 5 meant “very much,” adapted from Stamm and Dube (1994).

To analyze the data, this study used the software program, the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). This program allowed an application for the statistical analysis using Pearson correlations to evaluate the relationships between perceptions of media credibility and interest in election issues.

Participants ranged from 18 to 48 years old; slightly more than half those interviewed, 52 %, were females and 48 % were males. About 49 % of the students ranged in age from 18 to 23. Eighty-six percent of respondents answered they will end their bachelor’s degree between 1997 and 2000. Only 13.6 % will pursue an associate degree. Overall participants’ marital status was distributed from the highest to the lowest percentages as follows: single, 59.2 %, married, 32 %, divorced, 8 %, and widowed, .8 %. Respondents’ annual income ranged from \$0 to \$70,000. Thirty-four percent of the students had an income between \$10,601 to \$18,700.

Chapter 4

RESULTS

The Pearson Moment Correlations and the T-tests showed no significant relationship between the variables studied, credibility and involvement.

Hypothesis 1 was designed to determine whether individuals with low involvement would rate television news coverage as more credible. To test this hypothesis, correlations were calculated between respondents' belief in television's credibility as it covered the IRS bill, the crime bill, the education bill, and the health bill and their level of involvement with each of these issues. As shown in Table 1 the level of credibility of television news dealing with Section 936 of the IRS code had a correlation of .0971 ($p=.289$) with involvement level with the issue of Section 936. Credibility level on television news programs covering crime had a correlation of .1135 ($p=.209$) with respondents' involvement level on the crime topic. Credibility on television for the educational issue and subjects' involvement in that issue had a correlation of .0908 ($p=.314$). To determine the relationship between credibility on television reporting about the Health Insurance Act and participants' involvement with the issue, the variables showed a correlation of .0578 ($p=.525$). None of these correlations is statistically significant.

TABLE 1

Correlations between credibility and involvement in television news

<u>Television news</u>	<u>Credibility/Involvement</u>
Section 936 of the IRS	.0971
Crime	.1135

TABLE 1 (CONT.)

Education Reform	.0908
Health Insurance Act	.0578

As a further test of this hypothesis, the subjects were divided into two groups: those expressing low involvement in the four issues of IRS, crime, education, and health and those expressing high involvement. The mean value for television credibility was calculated for each group and then two means were compared using a t-test to see whether the low involvement group would rate television credibility significantly higher than the high involvement group did. As shown in Table 2 the mean television credibility score for the low involvement group was 20.1 and for the high involvement group it was 19.3. While the low involvement group did rate television as more credible than did the high involvement group, the difference was not statistically significant ($t\text{-value} = -.75$; $p = .46$). Therefore, the data did not support Hypothesis 1.

TABLE 2

Comparison of subjects with low involvement and subjects with high involvement on their credibility rating of television news

<u>Low involvement group</u>	<u>High involvement group</u>
20.1	19.3

Hypothesis 2 was designed to assess whether individuals with high involvement will rate newspaper news coverage more credible than those with low involvement. As shown in Table 3 the level of credibility of newspaper coverage of Section 936 of the IRS code had a correlation of .1048 ($p = .252$) with participants' involvement level on the IRS

issue. Respondents' assessment of newspaper credibility level related with crime correlated .0812 ($p = .368$) with respondents' involvement on the crime issue. Credibility of newspaper coverage of the Education Reform and students' involvement with this topic showed a correlation of .0010 ($p = .992$). In the same way, the issue of the Health Insurance Act covered in newspapers and the involvement level with the problem indicated a correlation of .0178 ($p = .845$).

TABLE 3

Correlations between credibility and involvement in newspaper news

<u>Newspaper news</u>	<u>Credibility/Involvement</u>
Section 936 of the IRS	.1048
Crime	.0812
Education Reform	.0010
Health Insurance Act	.0178

In addition to the correlations, a t-test was run to see whether the newspaper credibility mean score for those with low involvement in policy issues was significantly different from the newspaper credibility score for those with high involvement. Those with low involvement had a mean newspaper credibility score of 19.32 and those with high involvement had a mean score of 19.12. The difference between these means was not statistically significant ($t\text{-value} = -.19$; $p = .846$). Therefore, the data do not support Hypothesis 2.

TABLE 4

Comparison of subjects with low involvement and subjects with high involvement
on their credibility rating of newspaper news

<u>Low involvement group</u>	<u>High involvement group</u>
19.32	19.12

Hypothesis 3 was designed to test whether subjects will perceive newspaper news coverage more credible than television newscasts when covering a complex issue. Section 936 of the IRS code was judged to be the most complex of the four policy issues studied. When a t-test was run to see whether the credibility level of newspaper IRS coverage was significantly different from the credibility level of television IRS coverage, the t-value was $-.77$; $p=.443$. In fact, the mean score for newspaper credibility in covering the IRS was 6.20, slightly lower than the mean credibility level for television coverage of Section 936 of the IRS code. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was not supported by the data.

Chapter 5

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

Results from this research were incongruent with the hypotheses. Stamm and Dube (1994) found that the involvement variable provided few significant relationships with the credibility variable. Some possibilities for these non-relationship findings could be how the variables were defined, measured, and operationalized (Lo, 1994; Roser, 1990). Even though this study did not confirm the hypotheses, the results should not be generalized because the sample does not necessarily represent an accurate assessment of other populations. Furthermore, this sample should not be considered representative of the total student population of Caribbean University, Bayamon, Puerto Rico. Similar studies with a larger population and a variation in the questions are recommended to retest these hypotheses. Asking participants which was the most and the less important issue affecting Puerto Rican society, from which media they were receiving information about the issues selected, and their knowledge about these issues may be useful in determining whether they believe a medium is credible. Whether or not subjects believe mass media have any importance along with whether they would be involved or not on the issues and why would also be important issues to look at when trying to determine media credibility.

In regard to many elements surrounding media credibility and the public's involvement, scholars have studied the phenomena and the reasons for the serious problem thus implied. Nevertheless, one important factor to consider is that perceptions of media credibility are only one element of the interaction between media coverage and citizen involvement with public policy. Future research should also examine the level of

knowledge about government policy citizens gain from the mass media. Evidently, credibility and involvement are complex issues and contradictory findings have arisen from the many studies reviewed. The conflicting outcomes depend principally in the treatment studies have in defining and measuring the variables. Every study deals with different and distinct approaches; each is designed under different objectives depending on what the researcher wants to examine. Consequently, there are differences in the findings and data collection.

It is very difficult to solve the scientific puzzle. How to define and measure variables is a problem that social scientists have experienced for many years. In order to remedy the problem of differences among studies, first, there have to be standard definitions and, second, a standard of measurement for the variables. These approaches are unrealistic based on each researcher's experimentation terms, and also on people's perceptions and knowledge. Standardization cannot be adopted because there are some elements which have to be taken into account, and can differ greatly in terms of studying the approaches. However, the recommendation is to continue seeking for the best method to deal with scientific research, and to understand the complexity and variability of such methods. An alternative approach to find out an audience's perceptions might be to ask individuals their own definitions for the variables examined to help understand the different outcomes.

In conclusion, the information people receive from the major mass media, newspapers, television, and radio, might have deep roots in their behavior and cultural understanding of a changing society. As Petty and Priester have pointed out, "Although

considerable research on mass media effects has shown that it is possible for media messages to change the knowledge or facts that people have about some object, issue, or person, we have argued that knowledge reception does not invariably result in attitude and behavior change" (cited in Bryant and Zillmann, 1994, p. 115). Moreover, mass media have been demonstrated to be an integral part of the popular culture, especially on developing civilizations like ours. McCombs has suggested that, "Part of this new look at mass communication has been the discovery that the audience not only learns some facts from exposure to the news media, but that it also learns about the importance of topics in the news from the emphasis placed on them by the news media. Considerable evidence has accumulated that journalists play a key role in shaping our pictures of the world as they go about their daily task of selecting and reporting the news" (Bryant and Zillmann, 1994, p. 3).

As many researchers have indicated, society has selected television as the more credible medium, preferred over newspapers and radio. However, recent investigations have shown that credibility in television is decreasing while credibility in newspaper reports increases (Cremedias, 1992). Therefore, it is important to determine what are the purposes and criteria of the audience in judging electronic and print media. According to Greenberg and Roloff (1974) the audience's latent attitude toward television is as an entertainment function and the attitude toward newspapers is more as a news information function.

On one hand, the media have been accused of dispatching a liberal bias (Herman and Chomsky, 1988), that journalists are common people who judge according to their

own personal views and experiences because they do not separate facts from personal opinion. Moreover, they have also been criticized for causing damage to people in different ways during the performance of their work. They have been criticized as well, for the symbiotic relationship with government and other private organizations; and for their mass profit gain orientation. These and many factors like economic giants controlling media have raised questions on accurate reporting, credibility, and trust. On the other hand, the mass media represent an important component within our pluralistic society; their reputations have drawn their highest ratings in comparison to other social institutions (Stern, 1994). Some people believe that journalists are trustworthy professionals and their work helps the community in which they live, that they try to be objective, accurate, and fair, and that they still are the watchdogs that guard us over the government's official machinery.

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INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

The following study is intended to find out your opinion and level of credibility in regard to the communication media in Puerto Rico (especially news coming through television and newspaper coverage) including four relevant issues presently debated in Puerto Rico; Section 936 of the IRS code, Crime, Education reform, and Health insurance act.

This investigation is being conducted under the supervision of a faculty member of the Department of Speech, Communication, and Theatre at Austin Peay State University, Clarksville, TN.

We want to emphasize that your participation is wholeheartedly voluntary, and you are free to terminate your participation at any time without any penalty. All your answers will be handled in strict confidentiality. At no time will you be identified nor will anyone other than the investigator (s) have access to your responses. Remember, your answers will not be counted as correct or incorrect because they are of general opinion.

Please, we will appreciate if you took a few minutes of your valuable time to complete this questionnaire. Returning the questionnaire will constitute informed consent.

Thank you very much for your kind cooperation and participation.

QUESTIONNAIRE

CREDIBILITY AND INVOLVEMENT IN SOCIO-POLITICAL ISSUES BROADCASTED THROUGH PUERTO RICAN MEDIA

1. General instructions: Please, circle the number that better represents your perception of credibility of the news that are broadcast through television and/or printed on local newspapers. Remember, number 1 means “no credibility at all” and number 10 means “a lot of credibility.”

1. How much do you trust television newscasts when they cover the issue of Section 936 of the IRS code affecting the economy of Puerto Rico?

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

2. How much do you trust newspaper news coverage related to Section 936 of the IRS code affecting the economy of Puerto Rico?

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

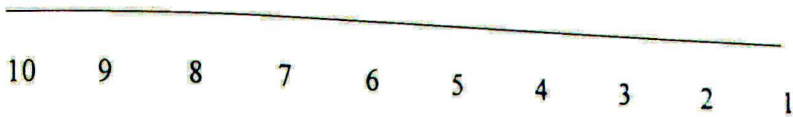
3. How much do you trust television newscasts when they cover the issue of Crime in Puerto Rico?

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

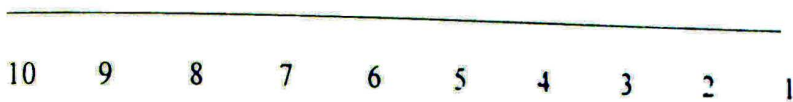
4. How much do you trust newspaper news coverage related to Crime in Puerto Rico?

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

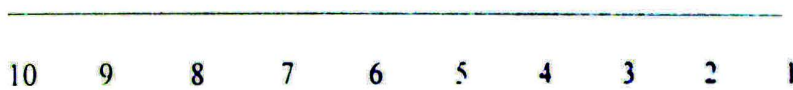
5. How much do you trust television newscasts when they cover the issue of Education in Puerto Rico?



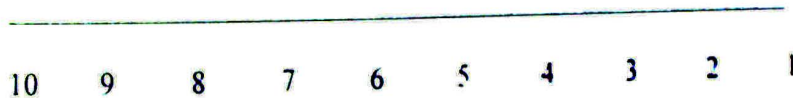
6. How much do you trust newspaper news coverage related to Education in Puerto Rico?



7. How much do you trust television newscasts when they cover the issue Health Insurance Reform in Puerto Rico?

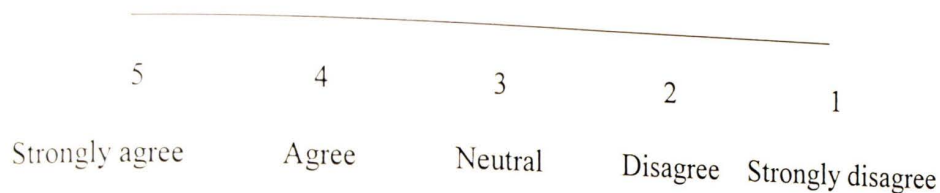


8. How much do you trust newspaper news coverage related to Health Insurance Reform in Puerto Rico?

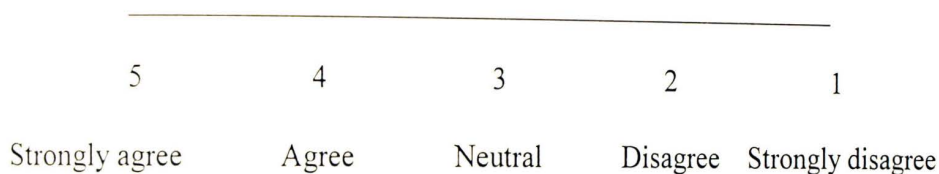


II. Instructions: On the scale from 5 to 1, circle the number that better represents your opinion on the issues selected.

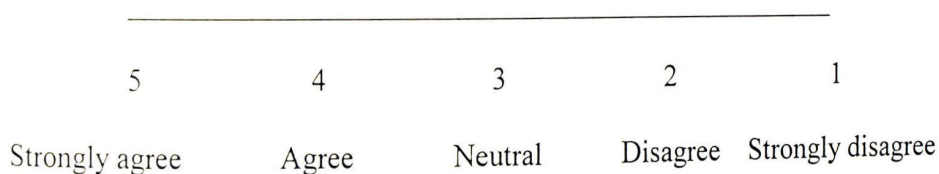
9. The government of Puerto Rico should support the Congressional bill that eliminates the Section 936 of the IRS code.



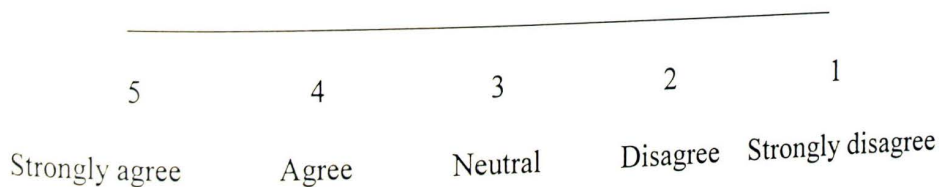
10. The elimination of Section 936 of the IRS code will be critical disaster for the Puerto Rican economy.



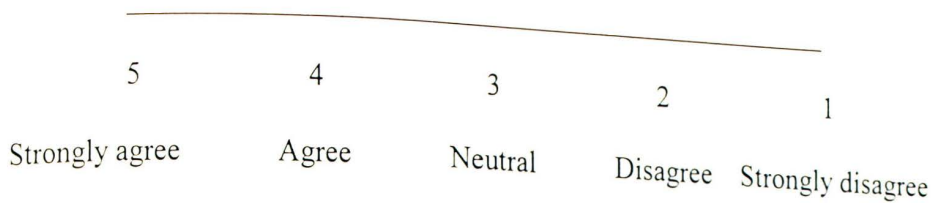
11. The government of Puerto Rico should legalize drugs in an effort to terminate Crime.



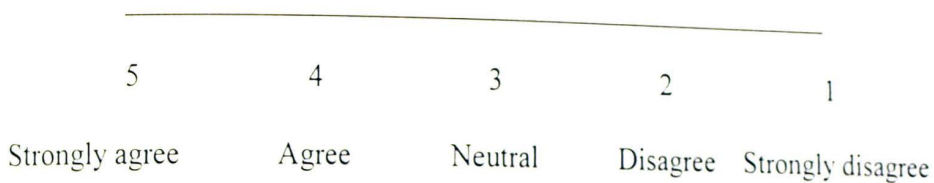
12. The Puerto Rican Police Department is rigorously fighting Crime.



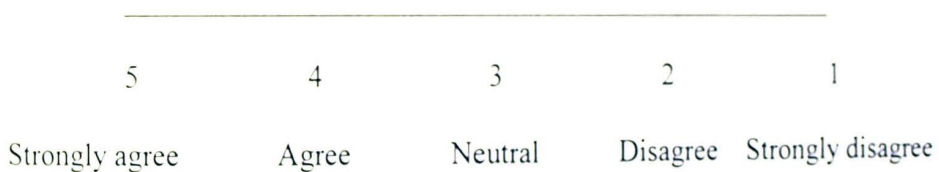
13. Parents should be the only party responsible for school administration.



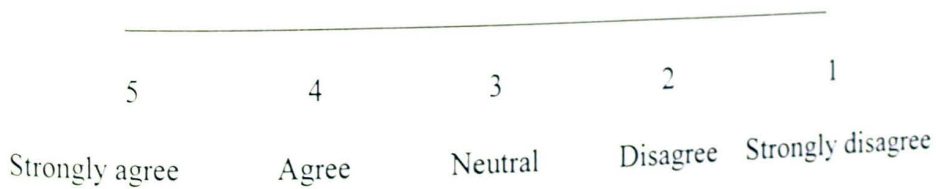
14. The state should be the only party responsible for school education of children and youngsters in Puerto Rico.



15. Under the new proposal made by the government of Puerto Rico, in regard to the Health ID card, needy people will enjoy better medical services.



16. Local government is solely responsible for providing excellent medical services to the needy people of Puerto Rico.



III. Students' level of involvement. Instructions: On the scale from 5 to 1 circle the number that better represents your level of involvement in the issues discussed in the news broadcasted through local television and newspapers.

17. How much have you been thinking about the Section 936 of the IRS code lately?

5	4	3	2	1
Very much	Much	Fair	Little	Nothing

18. How much have you been thinking about crime lately?

5	4	3	2	1
Very much	Much	Fair	Little	Nothing

19. How much have you been thinking about the Education Reform in Puerto Rico lately?

5	4	3	2	1
Very much	Much	Fair	Little	Nothing

20. How much have you been thinking about the Health Insurance Act lately?

5	4	3	2	1
Very much	Much	Fair	Little	Nothing

IV. Interviewed students' demographic information. We remind respondents that the information in this section is strictly confidential and only for purpose of analysis.

21. Age: ☐ 18-23 ☐ 24-29 ☐ 30-35 ☐ 36-42 ☐ 43-48 ☐ Ove

22. Sex: ☐ Male ☐ Female

23. Status: ☐ Single ☐ Married ☐ Divorced ☐ Widower/widow

24. Faculty: (Major) _____

25. Degree: ☐ Associate ☐ Bachelor

26. Year of graduation: _____

27. Household annual income:

☐ \$0-1,800 ☐ \$1,801-\$5,000 ☐ \$5,001-10,600

☐ \$10,601-18,700 ☐ \$18,701-25,500 ☐ \$25,501-39,700

☐ \$39,701-45,800 ☐ \$45,801-60,000 ☐ \$60,001-70,000

Thank you again for your cooperation.

VITA

Marjorie Melendez was born in Ponce, Puerto Rico on December 21, 1963. She attended public schools in Miraflores, Bayamon and graduated from Rexville High School, Bayamon, Puerto Rico in May, 1981. The next fall she attended Universidad del Sagrado Corazon, San Juan, Puerto Rico and in May, 1986 received a Bachelor Degree in Communication.

In January 1987, she started working as an editor of headlines and incoming news for WUNO-AM, San Juan, Puerto Rico. The following year started as assistant comptroller for WUNO-AM and WFID-FM. She has also worked as a Press and Public Relations Officer for the Carolina Municipal Administration, Carolina, Puerto Rico.

In the fall 1993, Melendez entered graduate school at Austin Peay State University, Clarksville, Tennessee and in August, 1999 received a Master of Arts degree. She is presently working for BellSouth Mobility in Jackson, Mississippi.