Things left unsaid: Source disclosure, the Video News Release and perceptions of credibility

by

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# Abstract

The video news release (VNR) has been a source of controversy since its first inclusion into newscasts in the early 1980s. This third-party (not produced by a news station) public relations and marketing-friendly content, when included alongside normally produced news stories, can make it difficult for the public to discern what is news and what is not. Problems specifically arise when news operations fail to disclose to their audience the source or provider of VNR content, and prevent news consumers from evaluating the legitimacy or intent of a VNR.

A 4 (source disclosure cue: audio, video, combination of the two, and none) x 2 (source agent type: biased or neutral) experiment was implemented within this study to better understand audience evaluations, post exposure to a source disclosure cue, of the credibility of a news operation that implements VNRs within their broadcast. Disclosure cues were also evaluated for their effectiveness in raising awareness to the persuasive aspects of a VNR, and the impact of differing source agent types on participants' credibility assessment of a news operation.

Results demonstrated 75% of participants (*n*=238) failed to correctly identify the source of the VNR when a disclosure cue was given. However, the audio and video combination condition was found to instigate the most awareness to the use of VNR. Overall, disclosure of a VNR's source could not be linked to changes in participants' evaluation of a news operation's credibility, with results demonstrating uniformly average means throughout. In addition, source disclosure could not be associated to a change in participants' awareness to the persuasive context of the VNR, with similar means exhibited. Because of the lack of an overall effect concerning credibility or knowledge of persuasive content within the study, greater media transparency is needed as are more media literacy opportunities for the public to best understand and navigate today's complicated broadcast media reality.

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# Chapter 1 - Introduction

For millions of news-watching Americans, the thought of where a news story comes from would seem to be obvious. Viewers watch their local news stations and expect the content seen to be created by their stations, and to cover topics important to their community. An element of trust exists between news producer and audience (Pauwels & Picone, 2012), and for news consumers, a basic and implicit expectation is that the stories seen have been scrutinized for accuracy and are presented in the basic public interest according to best practices of journalistic excellence (Liebes, 2000). Credibility, Bob Salsberg, former president of the Radio Television Digital News Association (RTDNA) said in 2003 "is the most valuable asset a station has with its community" (Cochran, 2003, pg.18), and stations, it would seem, should endeavor to preserve that understanding of credibility with their audience.

However, in a 2015 Quinnipiac University poll, 48 percent of those surveyed found network TV news to be less trustworthy than during the times of legendary news anchor Walter Cronkite, who anchored the CBS evening news from 1962 until his retirement in 1981. In the same poll, thirty-five percent found it to be "about" as trustworthy, while only seven percent found today's news media to be "more trustworthy" than during that golden age of broadcasting. A 2011 survey by the Pew Research Center looked at data from 1985 to 2011 to gain a public snapshot of trust in news media. Their findings painted a gloomy picture of perceptions of news in general, with 66 percent of participants stating that news stories in 2011 were often inaccurate to only 34 percent in 1985. The same poll found in 2011 that 77 percent of people thought news to be politically biased versus 53 percent in 1985. In addition, 80 percent of those surveyed also stated that news entities were influenced by outside, powerful organizations, a change from 53 percent in 1985.

Recent decades have seen the television news industry, especially local and smaller markets undergo significant industry changes, including decreasing budgets, shorter available production times, decreased staff, more competition, and the need to fill content for a 24-hour news cycle (Lewis, Williams, & Franklin, 2008; Nelson & Park, 2014). In this new media reality, a progressively strained news industry has had to do much more with much less while keeping up with industry and consumer expectations (Green & Shapiro, 2011; Pavlik, 2006). To accomplish this feat producers have, out of necessity, become more creative and flexible in how they gather news, potentially at the expense of journalistic standards and story accuracy (Lewis et al., 2008; Voorhees & Keith, 2015).

This struggle is not limited to only news of the local variety, but also to nationwide entities as well. In 2013 CNN was forced to correct an inaccurate report during coverage of the Boston Marathon bombing. In the confusion and rush to understand the story, it falsely reported that an arrest had been made. CNN retracted this statement minutes later. Post the event, President Obama said, "In this age of instant reporting and tweets and blogs, there's a temptation to latch on to any bit of information, sometimes to jump to conclusions. But when a tragedy like this happens…it's important that we do this right (Obama, 2013)."

Similarly, in 2012, CNN, Fox News, and other news outlets had to issue retractions. In the media's dash to understand a Supreme Court ruling regarding the Affordable Care Act and to be first to report on the story, these outlets wrongly stated that Justices had struck down a key provision within the health care legislation, only minutes later, to report the opposite was true. In this particular instance, social media compounded the inaccurate reporting by almost

instantaneously delivering the erroneous news report to the public and to other news agencies, and thus compounding the initial cycle of misinformation (Voorhees & Keith, 2015).

While inaccuracies in reporting during live or breaking news events have always been a struggle, in today's media climate TV news producers, starved for new and convenient content to fill their newscasts, can compound the issue (Lordan & Saint John, 2009). Filling the void are hosts of third-party, or made-outside-the-news-station, material that carry potential concerns regarding integrity and journalistic accuracy. These outside resources come in a variety of shapes and include platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and other social media applications that disseminate news faster than ever before. Other content includes more citizen-oriented and non-journalist reporting and blogging that is rewriting the rules for who is considered to be a reporter. Finally, other content includes public relation pieces that are provided as free resources for news operations to use. These are known as video news releases, and while convenient for the increasingly overwhelmed news operation, they carry with them potential problems for the industry including issues of credibility, accuracy and remaining free of biases (Nelson, Wood, & Paek, 2009).

**An Overview of VNRs**

Beginning in the 1980's, and coming into prominence in the mid-1990's (Aiello & Proffitt, 2008), the video news release, or VNR, has evolved from a one-time, mostly dismissed public relations anomaly, to an effective public relations tool for non-profits, corporations, and other industries. A VNR producer creates specifically crafted messages to be delivered to a wide audience through the medium of broadcast news (Pavlik, 2006). VNRs remain a largely inconspicuous part of a broadcast, mimicking the visual and written style of a typically produced news story (see Appendix D). In addition, without classification differentiating the content as

third-party produced, a VNR is relatively indistinguishable from other in-house created news segments (Broaddus, Harmon, & Mounts, 2011).

Problems can arise when VNRs are not identified to the public as produced by a third-party. A 2006 report from the Center for Media and Democracy followed 77 news stations for 10 months. Out of 87 specific video news releases tracked in their report, none was disclosed as a VNR when broadcast (Farsetta and Price, 2006). Additionally, the report found that many stations aired VNR content or used provided scripts without any alteration or updates, and that many news operations repackaged the given news story with their own station's branding, effectively disguising the content as station-produced, at a time when credibility is of the utmost importance (Farsetta and Price, 2006).

## Problem Statement

The use and dissemination of the video news release is far reaching within the media landscape, and while these stories may not be overtly persuasive, they have been found to operate, in terms of persuasion, as a soft-sell, subtly influencing the viewer of the product, position, or idea the VNR manufacturer desires their audience to perceive (Wood, Nelson, Atkinson, & Lane, 2008). Viewers that experience these stories in their local newscasts may not be cognizant of their creation, especially when their sourcing is not clear. News organizations, which use VNRs without full transparency, risk losing credibility of their audience.

**Justification of study**. For the news industry to survive and to thrive, credibility of the broadcast news industry must be maintained, and if possible, increased. Transparency is important to the livelihood of the industry and to the relationship between broadcaster and viewer, and while video news releases are not "inherently deceptive" on first glimpse, if a clear understanding of their sourcing is not provided to viewers, they become so (Aiello & Proffitt,

2008). A more complete and better understanding of how an audience perceives and evaluates video news releases based on their integrity, journalistic value, and ultimately the credibility of the news organizations that implement them, is needed.

Ultimately, the goal for broadcasters should be full disclosure of VNRs when used, but how to get to this point in today's media world has not been realized and many questions remain unanswered. Can full disclosure take place so viewers truly understand what they are experiencing when viewing a VNR, and in such a way that the credibility of the broadcaster remains intact? As of yet, these questions have not been fully answered and little progress has been made in the industry on the issues of source disclosure with the video news release. This study will look to aide in resolving the problem surrounding the lack of identification of video news releases in newscasts, and attempt to bridge a gap that calls for full transparency and disclosure of VNRs on one side, and another wanting to preserve the credibility of news organizations that find value in using VNR content. Based upon previous research, including studies of the ethical dilemmas surrounding VNR use in the absence of source disclosure, what credibility of media is understood to mean, and the persuasive nature of VNR news content, this study will show how broadcasters might approach these problems both theoretically and practically.

# Chapter 2 - Literature Review

**Concerns with VNR use**

Since their inception, VNRs have raised questions about ethics from both industry practitioners and media activists. Scrutiny came to a boil in 2004 when the public learned that the Bush administration had released a VNR in support of the 2003 Medicare Act (Aiello & Proffitt, 2008). Over 40 news stations ran the content within their news broadcasts without proper source identification, exposing 22 million unwitting Americans to a government-sponsored public relations piece, packaged as news (John, 2008). This specific video news release, assembled by a Washington D.C. based public relations firm and voiced by PR practitioner Karen Ryan, outlined changes to Medicare as part of the 2003 Medicare Drug Improvement and Modernization Act. Realizing the source of the VNR was the federal government led the New York Times in 2005 to an investigation that revealed the creation and distribution of hundreds of pro-administration or administration-sponsored news releases from 20 different agencies that were carried in the media.

In response, the FCC issued a reminder to all news organizations of their obligations under the Sponsorship Identification Rule, a part of the 1934 Communications Act. In this statute the government set requirements for news operations "fully and fairly" to disclose the identity of any outside entity providing content of public importance or of a political or controversial nature (47 CFR 73.1212, d), and to provide a source's identity, especially in the case of any monetary transaction that might encourage the broadcast of materials (47 CFR 73.1212, a). The issue that stems from this policy is in the interpretation of when disclosure must occur. The 1934 Communications Act and the Sponsorship Identification rule do not specify what constitutes content as "important to the public" or "political", and this lack of a defined terminology has left

interpretation to broadcasters to decide whether or not an audience should be notified of video news release use and source (Aiello & Proffitt, 2008).

A 2005 public notice (FCC 05-84) from the FCC stated, "Whenever broadcast stations and cable operators air VNRs, licensees and operators *generally* [*sic*] must clearly disclose to members of their audience the nature, source and sponsorship of the material that they are viewing" (Cochran, 2003). The commission also set stiff penalties for failure to abide by the law that included a fine of $32,500 per instance and license revocation, but a general understanding exists in broadcasting that unless money is exchanged for airtime, it does not fall within the sponsorship identification rule and is not enforceable by the FCC (White, 2012).

Consequently, the frequent use of VNRs without source identification by broadcasters creates a credibility problem for the news industry. In essence, the video news release practice has become a mutually beneficial and quiet arrangement between both source and news operation. A news producer's newscast is more conveniently and easily filled with free and broadcast-ready news content, and the PR practitioner's and VNR producer's message is delivered to a much more extensive audience. But what price is paid for such convenience, and some would say, deception? News entities need to be competitive to survive in today's strenuous media setting, but they also have an ethical responsibility to their viewers to be fully transparent regarding VNR use, a factor that may weigh on the opinions, attitudes, and perceptions of credibility for broadcast media in general.

**The Debate over VNR Labeling and Disclosure**

Within today's debate, the question of whether to disclose VNR content is one that has been argued by media critics, news organizations and policy makers alike (Wood et al., 2008). From a philosophical sense, the lack of disclosure constitutes a basic violation of a consumer's

right to be informed, and perhaps more importantly, the right of consumers to make accurate judgments concerning the credibility of content (Nelson & Park, 2014). In other words, can viewers evaluate the trustworthiness and reliability of the news received if they don't know where it comes from and who has made it? Plaisance (2007) expands on this thought, stating that withholding information regarding potentially persuasive content "takes away the rational capacity and free will to exercise that capacity" (Plaisance, 2007, pg. 193). Aiello & Proffitt (2008) further expand on this reasoning by asking when the source of video news release content is not available, how can viewers truly make an informed assessment about what is viewed?

Current FCC policy specifies the need for labeling news produced outside the station's control under certain conditions (Aiello & Proffitt, 2008), but with recent estimates of only 5 percent of video news releases being identified to the public as a VNR (Nelson & Park, 2014; Wood et al., 2008), it would seem that much of VNR content would either not fall into these categories or the categories themselves do not fit within today's media landscape. In addition to laws mandating VNR disclosure, many broadcast societies such as the Radio-Television Digital News Association's (RTDNA) have codes of ethics; stating journalists should, "clearly disclose the origin of information and label all material provided by outsiders" (RTDNA, 2000). More recently they state, " Transparency provides the public with the means to assess credibility and to determine who deserves trust" (RTDNA, 2015). In addition, the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) recommends that the source for VNRs should be "fully disclosed" when used in a broadcast (PRSA, 2009).

Given both the governmental requirements, and professional society ethical standards, what prevents the majority of news organizations from providing source information for video news releases to their public? If trust and credibility, as Miller writes, "are the core of American

journalism…nothing is more sacred" (Miller & Kurpius, 2010), how can news organizations move forward with issues of VNR source disclosure and preserve the sacred bond between news consumer and news provider? A look at what constitutes media credibility helps.

**Media Credibility**

What is media credibility and especially news credibility? Is it the person or reporter reading the news that makes a story credible? Does the look of the graphics or slickness of the evening newscast contribute to credibility? How does the accuracy of the story, making sure all the facts and details are correct, influence credibility? How does the venue in which news is experienced, whether an online blog, social media platform, or radio or TV news broadcast, influence credibility? A review of previous studies offers insight into these questions.

**Previous studies**. In past studies, credibility has been thought of as judgments pertaining to the believability of the source or communicator (Tewksbury, Jensen, & Coe, 2011), (Wilson and Sherrell, 1993). In the mid-1950s work conducted by Hovland and Weiss defined two factors of credibility, trustworthiness and expertise of the person speaking (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). The authors describe "trustworthiness", as whether media will reveal the truth, and "expertise" as whether media know the truth or have the capacity to share the truth. These two concepts still have significant influence on researchers studying credibility of media. But other researchers have criticized this study for lacking a definition of what is meant by source (Berlo, Lemert, & Mertz, 1969), (Kiousis, 2001). For Hovland and Weiss, source credibility was a receiver-or audience-based construct, and credibility depended on acceptance of the source and its message (Metzger, Flanagin, Eyal, Lemus, & Mccann, 2003).

As studies on credibility expanded in the 1960s, researchers began to question whether concepts of credibility, trustworthiness, and expertise were predictors of credibility or the actual

dimensions of credibility (Kohring & Matthes, 2007), (Newhagen & Nass, 1989). Using factor analysis, further research began to expand upon the idea of what might constitute credibility, unearthing new factors such as safety, dynamism and qualification of the presenter (Berlo et al., 1969). Other traits such as competency and objectivity also emerged (Whitehead, 1968). In 1971, Triandias found five factors that constituted credibility with regards to the presenter, including competence, proximity, similarity, attractiveness, perceived hostility and perceived power (Singletary, 1976). Five years later, a larger study found 16 potential traits of credibility that ranged from an author's ability to present, perceived expertise on the subject, sense of trustworthiness sensed by an audience, and many others. This led the author and other researchers to speculate that the idea of credibility was much more complex than previously considered (Newhagen & Nass, 1989), (Singletary, 1976).

**Beyond the speaker**. As credibility studies continued, researchers began to move from being source-focused to an examination of the message, its content, and other communication channels for a better picture of media credibility. In studying the message and dynamics of the message itself, Slater and Rouner found that message qualities such as aesthetics and presentation had a noticeable impact on credibility. News content perceived of higher quality was also deemed more credible (Slater & Rouner, 1996). Researchers found that a media message may also more heavily influence perceptions of credibility when the recipient has little information to evaluate a source (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Slater & Rouner, 1996). The message itself may also have more of an influence on credibility when there are high levels of issue involvement, relevance to the audience, or an audience had a greater knowledge of the news subject. These studies shift the emphasis from source to the message because of heightened audience awareness (Metzger et al., 2003). Metzger also outlines several components of a

message that effect credibility perceptions including message structure, with unorganized content not being deemed as credible (Gass & Seiter, 1999, Metzger et al., 2003). Interestingly, this perspective comes only in using expert or mainstream sources, not sources deemed as unprofessional such as blogs or social media postings. Finally, the intensity of the language used and any language deemed opinion rather than fact were also regarded as less credible by an audience (Metzger et al., 2003).

**Looking at the channel**. Thus far, credibility studies have focused on the trustworthiness or expertise of the presenter and the clarity and organization of the message being generally understood as factors of credibility. Researchers, though, recognized the need for even more diversified research and began to conduct comparative studies looking at differing media channels to gauge how credibility was understood (Tewksbury et al., 2011). Initially, the majority of these studies were thought of in simple terms, such as that of print versus television (Golan, 2010).

One of the earliest (and still-continuing) study series is the "Roper Study". Begun in 1947, the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research compared the public's perception of credibility among broadcast television, newspapers, magazines, and radio (Gaziano & McGrath, 1986). The survey asked a simple question: Given an occurrence of a conflicting news report, which entity would you trust the most (Roper, 1985)? Initially, the study found newspapers to be more credible than TV, but as television emerged into a more developed medium, television overtook newspapers in credibility ratings in 1961 (Roper, 1989). But, researchers asked if comparisons between newspapers and television, or other media channels are fair? Newhagen (1989) in his analysis of newspaper versus television credibility found that people evaluate and use newspapers much differently than TV. He found television to be assessed cumulatively, with

an audience evaluating the newscaster on a nightly basis and coming to a judgment about him or her over time. Newspapers tended to be an assessment of the an organization as a whole and judged much more quickly (Newhagen & Nass, 1989). In essence, credibility assessments can be summed up as an evaluation of a channel (the newspaper industry) for newspapers, and the source reading the news story (the TV news anchor) for television. If this is the case, can a true comparison be made?

**Moving past a single dimension.** One answer to this question was the creation of multidimensional scales to better evaluate credibility of media by not focusing on one factor, i.e. credibility of the speaker (Gantz, 1981). Instead, these scales built on earlier factor analysis research conducted into source credibility and assessed many different factors that might play a role in shaping credible evaluations of the media. One of the best known scales is Gaziano and Mcgrath's 12-point item index scale (Gaziano & McGrath, 1986; Meyer, 1988). In this study researchers found several possible factors of credibility including respect of public interest and privacy, concern for a community's well-being, quality of the organization's staff and perception of that medium's level of fairness, degree of perceived bias, extensiveness of reporting, trustworthiness, accuracy, amount of opinion language used, and if profit might have been a motive for presenting a story (Metzger et al., 2003). In this way, evaluations of the source, the message, and the channel could be made when researching media entities for credibility.

Further studies worked to evaluate the validity and usefulness of the scale. Meyer (1988) refined Gaziano and Mcgrath's 12-point scale, trimming it to a five-item scale for credibility and a four-item scale for affiliation. Credibility items were factors such as fairness, levels of bias, completeness of story presentation, accuracy and trustworthiness. Affiliation items were "watches out for your interest", "concerned for the community well-being", "patriotism", and

"concern for the public interest". West (1994) further tested Meyer's scale and found it to be methodologically more accurate than scales that had come before, but conceptually flawed as the dimensions for credibility analyzed were not theoretically driven or backed by research (Kohring & Matthes, 2007). Kiousis (2001) also conducted a study using items from West and Myer's scales and found the levels of reliability of variables used from both scales not as accurate as their initial reports (Kiousis, 2001). Although much research was conducted to improve studies of media credibility, a one-size-fits-all approach may not be the cure for assessment. Cronkhite and Liska (1976) noted, the search for a unified theory on credibility is "likely to be as costly and fruitless as the search for the Holy Grail" (Cronkhite & Liska, 1976). Along the way, Metzger concluded the more important work of establishing and defining clear conceptual arguments as to what credibility of the media constitutes may have been overlooked (Metzger et al., 2003).

From the earliest studies on source credibility, researchers have not agree upon the core concepts for determining credibility (McCroskey, 1966) and, depending on the medium used, an understanding that people may have different credibility assessments for different media has been posited (Greenberg & Roloff, 1974, Singletary, 1976 and Kiousis, 2001). Going forward, a study that looks at media credibility should consider it as an audience derived concept in which individuals bring their own experiences and judgments to bare. Assessments of credibility should seek to have a wide platform and variety of potential factors in its analysis, and give room for an audience to decide for themselves what credibility means.

**Labeling Impacts on News**

While FCC stipulations and journalistic ethics convey a need for broadcasters to label VNRs, the reality of implementation has sometimes fallen short for fear that identification on-screen of sources for VNR content could lead to increased confusion for viewers unable to

process the extra information (Aiello & Proffitt, 2008). Research into this specific area of visual overload in VNRs is limited. Studies by Wood (2008) and Tewksbury (2011) have the most recent analyses of potential confusion. A question remains: Would VNR labeling inhibit the news viewing process by interfering in the understanding of story content or by affecting perceptions of story credibility?

Current VNR studies have looked at the labeling debate through the lens of information recall and processing theories to better understand how people might use and interact with source labels during news broadcasts (Wood et al., 2008). To understand how viewers process television and news, researchers have found that television is thought to be processed at a lower level than other media, especially newspapers (Lang, 1989). Part of this perception is the quick presentation of the newscast, with one story just behind the other, leaving little time for reflection by its audience, television's more entertainment-like feel and presentation, and an emphasis by the viewer on the medium's visual elements (Miyo, 1983). Indeed, in a potential hierarchical order of broadcast elements, the visual aspects of broadcast news appear to reinforce and support a newscast's audio components (Graber, 1990).

Though visuals may support the audio and would suggest clarity of understanding when watching news, viewers are not immune to confusion during a newscast. Misunderstanding can occur when drastic differences between the audio and video elements take place (Lang, 2003). When the contrast is jarring, research shows that a negative effect on levels of information recall for stories can occur (Crigler, Just & Neuman, 1994). Lang (2003) states that broadcast news consumers have a limited capacity to process media and TV news can overwhelm this capacity (Lang, Potter & Grabe, 2003). In her outline for the proper creation of news stories, Lang recommends concrete words to help viewers better retain and recall the details of a news story.

In addition, visual graphical elements, such as photos, may help a viewer's overall general memory of the story when coordinated with the verbal (Lang, et al., 2003). Though not specifically used for VNR disclosure, the study of subtitles and their influence may be helpful in understanding the effect that added onscreen elements (both audio and visual) might have on media comprehension. Wood explained in 2008, "captioning that focuses on contextual details of a news story or on the main point can help facilitate understanding and recall (Wood et al., 2008).

     **Subtitles**. Subtitles have been examined in information processing studies, especially in the realm of language acquisition and comprehension. A study by Hayati and Mohamedi (2011) found that English as a second language students tested considerably higher on comprehension tests post exposure to English-language subtitled clips, when compared to clips in their native language. Markham (1989) also found that a group of beginning, intermediate and advanced ESL students tested higher on listening comprehension exams when presented with educational video clips containing English subtitles. Additionally, a study by Garza (1991) demonstrated that Russian ESL students performed markedly better on English listening comprehension exams when exposed to English subtitled science videos, compared to that of their non-subtitled counterparts.

     In sum, many studies show that the visual elements of on-screen graphics, particularly subtitles, aid the overall understanding of story. Audio-visuals, argues Graber (1990), provide greater context allowing the viewer to better capture reality, learn from it and to draw better inferences from scenes. It should be noted, though, audience motive for viewing subtitles may drastically differ from other on-screen graphics, particularly within television news. Subtitles can be thought of as a voluntary addition to the screen, or perhaps in the case of the hearing

impaired, needed to understand the content being viewed. News graphics, however, are outside the control of the viewer. These differences in intentionality and control may significantly affect the processing ability or motivation of an audience to analyze a message, and the degree of processing that occurs while experiencing a message, can influence the ability to recall details of that message (Tewksbury, 1999).

**Previous VNR visual studies**. Beyond subtitles, researchers have looked to other visual examples to better understand the effect of on-screen graphics in information processing. One study by Slattery and Tiedge (1992) examined news reenactments, or staged news clips produced by news organizations to aid in storytelling. The study was conducted to gauge an audience's response to the perceptions of perceived credibility of a news operation when identified on screen. The authors found that labeling alone was not enough to elicit a change in the perceptions of credibility assessed by participants (Slattery and Tiedge 1992, Aiello & Profit, 2008).

Newhagen (1994) examined classified visual materials that were declared as "cleared by government censors" as a part of an experiment that gauged the impact on levels of story recall when exposed to this particular labeling cue. The subject for the news stories was the first Gulf War and experiment designers used b-roll, or supplemental video footage, taken in the battlefields of Iraq, and news anchor narration to manufacture a news story. Researchers found no evidence that labeling news clips had any effect on an audience's ability to remember the information accurately or influence audience perceptions of credibility (Newhagen & Nass, 1989). Interestingly, only 30 percent of the people surveyed after the experiment remembered seeing any label on the screen at all.

Wood (2008) found partial support for labeling and its ability to not interfere with a broadcast and to help in communicating source information. This study hypothesized that

viewers would recall the source of VNRs more effectively in a labeled condition. This claim was partially validated as participants were moderately more aware of a VNR's source in the labeled condition versus the unlabeled control group. However, viewers in the two-step condition, that of both an onscreen label and the additional reading prompt (seen before the clip and describing what a VNR is), were significantly more aware than either the label-only condition or in the control group that saw no labeling (Wood et al., 2008).

A more recent study conducted by Tewksbury (2011) found similar results to these previous studies. In this study one of four news stories was randomly presented to participants. The stories contained two different types of labels. One label, a *communicator* label, advised that content was provided by an outside source, i.e. "provided by this *organization*." The second label, the *moderator* label, communicated that the station "wanted viewers to know content was provided by this *organization*". In both cases, labeling alone was found not to significantly affect the ability of the viewer to understand the story or recall story elements (Tewksbury et al., 2011). In addition, of the participants surveyed, 41% in the control group successfully identified the source of the news story without a label, while participants in the *communicator* and *moderator* label conditions identified the source of the VNR 64% and 71% of the time respectively (Tewksbury, 2011, pg. 339). Tewksbury noted that on-screen graphic elements that are simple and relevant to a news story have the potential to inform viewers, as they do not require any more processing capacity than audiences would normally give to watching news (Tewksbury, 2011, pg. 341). Tewksbury also looked at credibility in this study and found that even with the source of a story prominently displayed, labels alone were not enough for viewers to really understand what was happening. In addition, participants did not use the increased knowledge to make evaluations regarding credibility. He concluded, "audience recognition of the content and

intent of labels identifying VNR content in television news might not influence how they evaluate the news" (Tewksbury, 2011 pg. 16). This conclusion is similar to other studies that point to source labels not having an effect on credibility for VNRs (see Aiello, 2008, Slattery and Tiedge, 1992 and Tuggle and Ferguson, 1994)

Another study of VNRs found 60 percent of the respondents to a survey rarely, if ever, thought about the source of a story in a newscast, and incorrectly guessed a story's attribution nearly 50 percent of the time (Broaddus et al., 2011). When labeling of VNRs is implemented within a broadcast, the question remains, "Is it enough to help news consumers to be fully cognizant of what exactly is taking place when they watch a video news release?" There is evidence to suggest there is not (Craft, Maksl & Ashley, 2013).

These studies identified a limitation and dilemma concerning video news releases and credibility: If viewers lack a basic understanding of the news making process, as researchers have found (Nelson & Park, 2014), then labels alone identifying outside content may not might be enough for source disclosure to fully take place. By this definition, "full-disclosure" is an increased understanding that the content viewers see has a persuasive intent or element to it (Boush, Friestad & Rose, 1994). For research to be conducted that accurately gauges how an audience interacts and judges VNR content, the way people evaluate and interpret persuasive content also needs to be examined.

**VNR Studies and Persuasion**

  **Elements of persuasion knowledge**. From Hovland to McGuire's foundational work in the 1950s and 1960s that explored attitude change through propaganda and then the mass media, to more recent studies looking at the likelihood of strong or weak persuasive arguments eliciting elaboration on a topic, researchers have attempted to understand how persuasive messages

change attitudes. Building on these earlier works of persuasion, the Persuasion Knowledge Model is implemented in this study to analyze how viewers negotiate and deal with persuasive content within news.

The Persuasion Knowledge Model, or PKM, posits that people process messages differently when they suspect an attempt at persuasion is taking place (Friestad & Wright, 1994; Wood et al., 2008). When disclosure is effective, a news-watching audience should differentiate VNR content as having a persuasive intent and move this content into a specific schema, such as advertising or PR rather than categories deemed non-persuasive, such as news (Nelson, Wood, & Paek, 2009). Wood (2008) describes this process in relation to the VNR as viewers, "altering their perceptions…from purely news to somewhat greater commercial content" (Wood et al., 2008, p. 234).

Based, then, on PKM, using disclosure to increase the awareness and knowledge of persuasion within a video news release should cause viewers to more closely analyze the source and meaning of a message (Friestad & Wright, 1994; Nelson, Wood, & Paek, 2009). This in turn, should increase the overall skepticism of the viewer, potentially affecting the credibility of the news organization, the news story, and provider of the video news release (Nelson & Park, 2014). This moment, according to Friestad and Wright (1994), is identified as one of *coping* for viewers, and "encompasses not only their cognitive and physical actions during any one persuasion episode, but also any thinking they do about an agent's persuasion behavior in anticipation of a persuasion attempt, as well as between and after episodes in a campaign" (Friestad & Wright, 1994).

The Persuasion Knowledge Model (see Figure 1) outlines three general knowledge structures for the targets of persuasion: agent knowledge, topic knowledge, and persuasion

knowledge. These three categories of knowledge interact together and assist viewers in recognizing the persuasive content, then analyzing the content, and finally implementing an appropriate response to the persuasive materials (Ham, Nelson & Das, 2015). Agent knowledge is an understanding of the traits and goals of the persuasive source. Topic knowledge is the comprehension about the subject presented in the message, and persuasion knowledge is a general awareness and knowledge that one is being persuaded. This awareness reflects the sum total of one's history of persuasive experiences (Friestad & Wright, 1994).
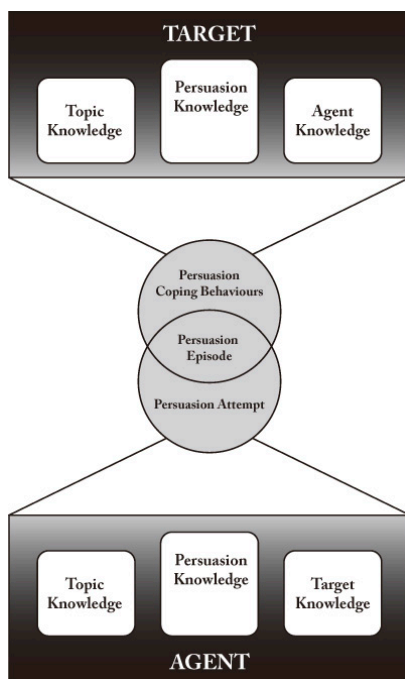


*Figure 1*. The Persuasion Knowledge Model. Adapted from "The Persuasion Knowledge Model: How people Cope with Persuasion Attempts," by Friestad & Wright, 1994, *Journal of Consumer Research*, *21*(1), p. 2. Copyright 1994 by the Journal of Consumer Research, Inc.

The authors hypothesize that people may develop, over time, heuristics for judging the appropriateness and effectiveness of persuasive content, and an overall general recognition of persuasive tactics. Some specific elements within these areas include: (a) beliefs regarding the importance of the psychological elements that persuaders are looking to influence (i.e. patriotism, fear, happiness, etc.), (b) beliefs concerning the tactics of the agent (i.e. exploiting

patriotism, fear, or happiness for persuasive gains), (c) beliefs about one's ability to cope with persuasion, and (d) beliefs regarding the appropriateness and effectiveness of the persuasive tactic implemented (Friestad & Wright, 1994; Ham, Nelson, Das, Ham, & Das, 2015).

**Current PKM studies**. Nelson (2014) found results that alluded to persuasion having an effect on news credibility within a VNR. She conducted two experiments in her work. One used a VNR, produced by the Hershey's company on the subject of Halloween candy safety, while the second used a more explicitly product-centered VNR for John Deere. Both VNR types were disclosed to participants through on-screen labeling. In addition, both experiments contained a reading condition in which viewers were exposed to a news article that gave an overview of how VNRs worked before exposure to either news story. This process raised awareness to the persuasive elements of a VNR, before exposure to the stimulus. Implementing a pre and post survey, researchers found that credibility levels for the story and source dropped significantly after exposure to information in the article about VNRs. In the label condition alone and without the assistance of the reading condition, changes in credibility levels were not significant.

Wood (2008) found similar results in her study. Using a video news release concerning LASIK surgery that was produced by LCA-Vision, participants in the reading condition of the study were asked to look through an article from *Consumer Reports* that described what a video news release is and how they are used in media. This raised awareness to construct of the VNR. After reading through the article and after exposure to the news clip in the experiment, viewers took a survey to gauge their perceptions regarding the credibility of the newscast and the story. In both cases credibility dropped upon knowledge of VNR use, but only in a combination to exposure to an onscreen label and reading prompt.

While these studies point to a decrease in overall credibility levels of a VNR, and specifically to an increase in viewers' knowledge about attempts at persuasion occurring, the practicality of such studies should be called into question. In both cases (Wood, 2008 & Nelson, 2014), the participants in the study were exposed to a priming element that informed and educated them on the processes of VNR production and distribution. This process, combined with on screen labeling, then had a measurable effect on the assessment of that news operation's level of credibility. In the real world of broadcasting, though, the question arises: is this type of disclosure possible?

**Making Disclosure a Reality**

The need for VNR labeling is apparent, as is the need to persevere credibility of the newscaster, but labeling alone may not educate viewers and fulfill broadcasters' obligation of true disclosure and full transparency. What is lacking in research for the video news release is an in-depth examination of how news stations might practically implement higher standards of disclosure to raise awareness of persuasive elements within VNRs.

Disclosure must also acknowledge the current media environment of limited time and resources of broadcasters. Given these constraints, disclosure that makes the most use of the resources that broadcasters have would be the most effective. As research on subtitles and studies about information processing show, the visual elements of a broadcast support and augment its audio elements (Hayati & Mohamedi, 2011; Markham, 1989; Garza, 1991). In the quest for full disclosure to the viewer, an emphasis on both audio and visual elements might best assist in raising knowledge of VNR use. Thus, this study posits the following hypothesis:

$H_1$: *Audio disclosure combined with video disclosure will lead to the greatest instances of awareness to the source of a video news release.*

In the Persuasion Knowledge Model, agent knowledge plays an important role in shaping how viewers assess and cope with persuasive content (Friestad & Wright, 1994). Within VNRs, the agent and reasons for presenting a subject can shift tremendously from one story to the next. A better understanding of how viewers evaluate sources when faced with differing levels of agents is needed to fully understand how credibility assessments might be affected by VNR use.

> $H_2$: *Video news release stories with agents perceived as biased will have the most negative effect on credibility assessments for a news entity (news anchor, news station, story, expert interviewed or VNR provider).*

Similar to $H_1$ an understanding of how agent knowledge is used within judgments of a news source, post VNR disclosure, should aid in understanding how viewers overall evaluate persuasive news content.

> $H_3$: *A biased source agent will incite greater levels of awareness to persuasive content than a neutral source agent.*

Disclosure also needs to preserve the credibility of the news operation so stations around the country will voluntarily reveal video news release sources. To better motivate broadcasters to engage in source disclosure, a greater understanding is needed of how audiences' judge the credibility of a news station that airs VNRs. This raises questions of what is being evaluated – the anchor, the news station as a whole, the story covered, the person interviewed in the broadcast, or the source of the VNR itself? Given these unanswered questions, this study seeks to understand the following:

> $RQ_1$: *Does awareness of a video news release source negatively affect the credibility of any part of a news entity (news anchor, news station, story, expert interviewed or VNR provider)?*

Previous work on source disclosure has explored how viewers become aware of VNR's persuasive content. Studies so far have utilized a priming agent, such as additional reading materials before the experiment, to make viewers aware of how VNRs are developed. However, given the need for disclosure and the real-world limitations on VNR literacy outside of the broadcast realm, the following is asked:

*RQ₂: Does awareness of a VNR's source instigate greater recognition of the persuasive elements of any part of the news entity (news anchor, news station, story, expert interviewed or VNR provider)?*

Finally, in addition to source disclosure's effect, the link between persuasion knowledge and credibility needs to be fully understood. Does an increase in the knowledge of the persuasive elements of a VNR correspond to a decrease in the credibility of a news source?

*RQ₃: How is credibility of the news entity (news anchor, news station, story, expert interviewed or VNR provider) affected by an increase in persuasion knowledge?*

# Chapter 3 - Methods

This study employed an online survey to quantitatively measure participants' perceptions of media credibility and levels of persuasion knowledge, post the viewing of manufactured broadcast news story on the topic of pool safety for children (See Appendix A).

## Participants

Students from a large, Midwest university (N=238) were surveyed for this project. Participants in the study were recruited on a volunteer basis and offered extra credit for their involvement. The students were part of a survey pool, housed within public speaking courses and managed by the Department of Communication Studies. Because the university required all students to take public speaking, student participants represented a variety of majors and backgrounds. Overall, 47% of the participants were male and 52% were female. The majority of students surveyed were white (75%), followed by other (8%), Asian (5%) and African American (3.8%). The median age of the group was 20, the lowest age being 18, and the highest 47 (SD = 2.957). Freshmen were also the most surveyed class of students (65%), followed by sophomores at 21%, juniors at 9%, and seniors at 5%.

## Study Design

The testing instrument was designed and delivered through Qualtrics, an online survey creation and distribution platform. Participants first read a general summary of the intent for the research, a better understanding of how college students evaluate news media. Once consent was given, participants were randomly assigned to one of eight conditions (4 source disclosure conditions x 2 source agent conditions). The stimuli were videos produced to simulate the look of a local newscast and students randomly viewed one of eight produced videos (Table 1).

Table 1
*Distribution of Participants into Conditions*

|  | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| Biased Video | 29 | 12 |
| Biased Audio | 30 | 13 |
| Biased Combo | 25 | 10 |
| Neutral Audio | 26 | 11 |
| Neutral Video | 29 | 12 |
| Neutral Combo | 31 | 13 |
| No Disclosure_Biased | 35 | 15 |
| No Disclosure_Neutral | 33 | 14 |
| Total | 238 | 100 |

After completing the video, students participated in a short survey where they were asked to disclose the source of the news release content, method in which it was communicated to them (audio, video or combination of the two), and then to evaluate the newscast in a series of five item word pair scales. One scale type evaluated the dependent variable of credibility and the other measured levels of persuasion knowledge.

**Stimulus**

Producing content for broadcast news stations is a complicated endeavor and includes many talented individuals such as news producers who write news scripts, videographers who shoot and capture the video for the story, and editors who assemble the footage into news stories. For this experiment, eight videos were produced that simulated an actual news broadcast. The content was similar to what might be seen on any news station. To heighten the realism of the manipulation, the videos were recorded on the set of a student-produced university newscast. This set closely matched the feel and look of a professional news station. The student facility used professional broadcast quality studio cameras, stage lighting, sound equipment and furniture that conveyed the attributes and atmosphere of any typical local news station.

The news videos created for this experiment contained a brief opening animation that presented the station's call letters of KWCT, an identification manufactured for the purpose of this experiment. After the animation, a news anchor appeared on screen, welcoming back the audience to the broadcast. An alphanumeric graphic of her name appeared on the lower third of the screen as she read the prepared script provided to her on a prompter. The news anchor chosen was a female in her 30's, who had professional marketing and public relations experience. She was chosen to limit any identification bias that students participating in this study might experience when seeing a student of a similar age as an anchor, or potentially an instructor known from class.

The topic of the videos for the experiment was pool safety, with a specific emphasis paid to that of the safety of children while swimming. The selection of this topic was due to the availability of a video news release, produced in June of 2016, which stations across the country had used numerous times. The origin of the video news release was a Midwest university and the expert interviewed a professor who studied childhood cognitive development and safety. The video was also manipulated to test this study's hypotheses.

**Independent Variables**

**Source agent**. The first independent variable was a variation on the provider or the source of the VNR to the news station. In the Persuasion Knowledge Model, awareness of this type of information is known as agent knowledge (Friestad & Wright, 1994) and is part of the overall evaluative process that people do when determining the validity of persuasive content. This part of the experiment tested the effect of biased agents versus neutral agents on participant perceptions and evaluations of broadcast media.

The name of the biased agent was the Pool Equipment Suppliers Association. The neutral agent was labeled as the National Coalition for Hazard Assessment. A manipulation check of four questions was conducted to test the two constructs using a five-item Likert scale, (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. Participants evaluated the two sources with the following statements: "I believe the National Coalition for Hazard Assessment / the Pool Equipment Suppliers Association: has an ulterior motive", "was trying to sell me something", and "had a hidden agenda". Participants were also prompted, "I am skeptical of the National Coalition for Hazard Assessment's / the Pool Equipment Suppliers Association: intent for the story."

The scale was combined (M = 2.6, SD = 1.04) into one variable and proved reliable with an inter-item correlation of, $p$ = .85. When results were analyzed, the Pool Equipment Suppliers Association (M = 2.8, SD = 1.07) was assessed as the more biased source, compared to that of the National Coalition of Hazard Assessment (M = 2.4, SD = 0.97). A significant difference was found between the two at $F(1, 236)$ = 10.2, $p$ = .002

**Source disclosure**. In addition to the source agent types, the second independent variable examined in the study was source disclosure. Participants were exposed to disclosure that was manipulated in one of three ways: audio only, video only, or a combination of the audio and video source disclosure cues together. A control condition with no disclosure cues was also produced.

For the audio condition, the news anchor disclosed to the audience the name of the VNR source provider, adding that the group provided the story and video content to KWCT. For the video only condition, an on-screen graphic disclosed that the story and video content were provided by one of the sources. It remained on the screen for approximately 15 seconds. For the combination condition, the same audio and video disclosure methods were merged into one,

replicating the exact same audio and visual methods previously discussed. The control condition withheld disclosure of the source of the VNR to viewers.

**Dependent Variables**

**Persuasion knowledge**. For meaningful source disclosure to occur, a news viewing audience needs to not only know the source of the VNR but also to have a better understanding if the content they are viewing has some persuasive element to it. To test for knowledge of persuasion, a 7-point binary word pair scale was used and implemented using methods from Hossain & Saini (2014). Students evaluated between the terms, "deceptive/not deceptive", "not believable/believable", "not sincere/sincere", "manipulative/not manipulative", "honest/not honest". The last word pairing was a check on user accuracy and was reverse coded when evaluated. The scale was demonstrated as reliable with at an inter-correlation of $p = .913$.

For the study, the scale was replicated and used to test five areas within the newscast for levels of persuasion knowledge, including the news station, the news anchor, the news story, the VNR source, and the expert interviewed. Evaluations of the news station, anchor and news source specifically tested the agent knowledge construct from the Persuasion Knowledge Model, and the news story and expert interviewed evaluated topic knowledge. A higher overall mean score indicated a negative perception for any of the tested areas of the newscast, while a lower mean score indicated a favorable evaluation. The pairings followed statements participants were given: " I believe the news station, KWCT (is)", "I believe the news story on pool safety (is)", "I believe the National Coalition for Hazard Assessment / Pool Equipment Suppliers Association (is)", " I believe Ashley Brooks, the news anchor presenting the video (is)", and " I believe Bradford Evans, the person interviewed in the video (is)".

**Credibility of media**. The final dependent variable assessed was credibility. Using a scale from Newhagen and Nass's (1989) study, and reflecting the methods in Tewksbury's (2011) work, the paired terms used were "fair/unfair," "biased/unbiased," "trusted/can not be trusted," "accurate/inaccurate", and "tells the whole story/doesn't tell the whole story". Each binary word pair was evaluated on a seven-point Liker scale for each section of the newscast (the news station, news anchor, the news story, VNR source provider, and expert interviewed). The statement prompts for each section were identical to the ones used for evaluation persuasion knowledge (i.e., "I believe the news station KWCT is…). A higher overall mean score indicated perceptions of bias within the tested areas of the newscast while a lower score indicated a more favorable view. The last word pair was again a check on user accuracy and was reverse coded when evaluated. The scale was demonstrated as reliable with at an inter-correlation of $p = .833$.

**Frequency of media use**.  In addition to credibility and persuasion knowledge, participants were asked to provide feedback on the amount of time per day spent accessing news. News outlet options included local television news, national television news, print newspapers, online editions of newspapers, news magazines, the Internet, social media, and radio stations. Students specified their use of news entities on a five-item scale ranging from, 1 hour or less, to five hours or more.

Demographic data was also gathered including age, class year, race, and gender. They were also given an opportunity to provide feedback on the overall survey.

# Chapter 4 - Results

**Hypotheses**

$H_1$ posited that a combination of audio and video source disclosure conditions would lead to the greatest number of instances of source awareness compared to the audio and video only conditions, and the no-disclosure control group. Awareness in all experiments conducted was calculated by the correct selection of the VNR provider by participants when prompted in the survey. All other responses were not included, as awareness of the VNR source could not be clearly determined. Out of the 238 total respondents, 70 correctly identified the source and 168 answered incorrectly. Of the 70 accurate responses, the combination condition had the most correct answers associated as $H_1$ postulated ($n$=28).

Based on an alpha level of .05, a chi-square test was run between the source disclosure conditions and number of correct responses, and, showed a significant difference for the combination source disclosure condition $X^2$ (df=3) = 2.46, $p$ = .02. The negative residuals for control condition reinforced the effect of the absence of source disclosure demonstrating a pull in the opposite direction of -7.5 or fewer overall expected correct answers. In reflection of the residuals, the combination condition demonstrated a positive residual push of 10.5, providing more than the expected correct answers (see Table 2). Though participants in this study chose more overall incorrect answers, $H_1$ is supported.

Table 2
*Correct Responses to Source Disclosure Conditions*

| Condition | Observed N | Expected N | Residual | Percent |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Visual only | 16 | 17.5 | -1.5 | 27.6 |
| Audio only | 16 | 17.5 | -1.5 | 28.6 |
| Combo | 28 | 17.5 | 10.5 | 50.0 |
| None | 10 | 17.5 | -7.5 | 14.7 |
| Total ($n$=70) | | | | 100 |

The impact of VNR source disclosure on the evaluations of broadcast media credibility was further evaluated in $H_2$. As in the previous questions, awareness of the source was counted by a correct answer only. The hypothesis theorized that a biased persuasive agent, in this case the VNR provider, the Pool Equipment Suppliers of America, would see a larger negative response on evaluations of credibility when disclosed to an audience, versus that of the neutral source, the National Coalition for Hazard Assessment.

An independent *t*-test was run comparing the dependent variable of credibility for all areas of the newscast and the independent variables of a biased and neutral VNR source (Table 4). Results demonstrated no significant difference between any conditions (disclosure vs. non-disclosure) or agent types (biased vs. neutral). Means for credibility were consistently high throughout (see Table 3), indicating an overall favorable evaluation of credibility for the broadcast, no matter the type of VNR source or specific area of the broadcast evaluated. Levene's test for equality of error variances was also run and was not significant. Overall, $H_2$ is not supported.

Table 3
*Credibility compared with Biased & Neutral Agents*

| Agent Type | *n* | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|
| KWCT Biased | 36 | 5.24 | 1.05 |
| KWCT Neutral | 24 | 5.20 | 1.03 |
| Story Biased | 36 | 5.47 | 1.11 |
| Story Neutral | 24 | 5.52 | 0.90 |
| Source Biased | 36 | 5.04 | 1.19 |
| Source Neutral | 24 | 5.35 | 0.85 |
| Anchor Biased | 36 | 5.41 | 1.06 |
| Anchor Neutral | 24 | 5.50 | 0.98 |
| Expert Biased | 36 | 5.25 | 1.20 |
| Expert Neutral | 24 | 5.25 | 1.97 |

$H_3$ posited that a biased VNR source would have a greater negative impact on persuasion knowledge levels than a neutral source. An independent $t$-test was run between the independent variables (VNR sources) and persuasion knowledge. Awareness of a VNR was again qualified by a correct response to the identity of the source of the VNR (see Table 4). Levene's test for equality of error variances was also run and was not significant. $H_3$ is not supported as no significant results were found and means maintained consistent results throughout.

Table 4
*Persuasion compared with Biased or Neutral Agents*

| Agent Type | $n$ | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|
| KWCT Biased | 36 | 5.65 | 1.05 |
| KWCT Neutral | 24 | 5.74 | 1.03 |
| Story Biased | 36 | 5.37 | 1.11 |
| Story Neutral | 24 | 5.56 | 0.90 |
| Source Biased | 36 | 5.63 | 1.19 |
| Source Neutral | 24 | 5.77 | 0.85 |
| Anchor Biased | 36 | 5.19 | 1.06 |
| Anchor Neutral | 24 | 5.53 | 0.98 |
| Expert Biased | 36 | 5.49 | 1.20 |
| Expert Neutral | 24 | 5.57 | 1.97 |

**Research Questions**

$RQ_1$ asked whether participants' awareness of a VNR's source would have a negative effect on the credibility of a broadcast news entity. Within the news broadcast, five items or areas were separated and evaluated and include the news station as a whole, news anchor, news story, expert interviewed, and the provider or source of the VNR. To test for the dependent variable of credibility, an independent $t$-test was run between the control and disclosure groups within the five broadcast areas. Levene's test for equality of error variances was also run with no significant results.

Overall, no significant differences were found between the differing areas of the newscast and the control group (no prompt for source disclosure). The results throughout (see Table 5) show consistent and relatively high means between all groups and indicate an overall favorable evaluation of credibility from all participants. In this case, knowing the source of the VNR had little effect, overall, on participants' judgments of credibility.

Table 5
*Credibility Assessments, Post Disclosure*

| Broadcast Element | n | M | SD |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| KWCT | 60 | 5.23 | 1.03 |
| KWCT Control | 10 | 5.32 | 0.97 |
| Story | 60 | 5.49 | 1.03 |
| Story Control | 10 | 5.24 | 1.03 |
| Source | 60 | 5.17 | 1.07 |
| Source Control | 10 | 4.96 | 0.92 |
| Anchor | 60 | 5.44 | 1.02 |
| Anchor Control | 10 | 5.40 | 0.97 |
| Expert | 60 | 5.25 | 1.10 |
| Expert Control | 10 | 4.82 | 1.04 |

RQ$_2$ questioned whether awareness, qualified by correct identification of the source, would prompt greater levels of persuasion knowledge (PKM) about the broadcast by participants. According to the theory of persuasion knowledge, greater awareness of a persuasive agent should activate increased skepticism to the content seen, or instill a feeling in viewers that the news viewed may have an ulterior motive beyond serving the public interest (Friestad & Wright, 1994). A *t*-test was run between the control and disclosure groups, comparing levels of persuasion knowledge among the five areas of the broadcast, and comparing those to correct and incorrect answer responses.

Results pointed to a slight significant difference in one portion of the broadcast, the anchor: $t (168) = 2.063$, $p = .041$. The mean difference between the significant groups, correct

versus incorrect answer selections, was 0.383, exhibiting a result in an unexpected direction. Instead of increased skepticism toward the anchor, post source disclosure, participants more positively evaluated the anchor of the station, compared with those who did not choose the right VNR source (see Table 6).

Table 6
*Persuasion Knowledge of Anchor, Post Disclosure*

|  | Answer | N | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Persuasion_Anchor | Incorrect | 110 | 5.307 | 1.216 |
|  | Correct | 60 | 5.690 | 1.037* |
| Persuasion_Anchor_Ctrl. | Incorrect | 58 | 5.438 | 1.432 |
|  | Correct | 10 | 5.340 | 1.120 |

*significant at .05*

However, the number of pairwise comparisons when comparing the mean average of the anchor with the other four areas of the newscast increases the likelihood of a Type 1 error, or the false detection of an effect that is not actually present. To correct for this possibility, a Bonferoni alpha adjustment was made to .005. Because of this modification, the significance in Table 6 is lost and mean averages exhibited are consistent results throughout the five news broadcast items. Levene's test for equality of error variances was also run with no significant results. For $RQ_2$, participant awareness of the source of the VNR had little overall effect on persuasion knowledge levels (see Table 7).

Table 7
*Persuasion Knowledge Assessments, Post Disclosure, with Correct Responses*

| Broadcast Element | N | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|
| KWCT | 60 | 5.44 | 1.05 |
| KWCT Control | 10 | 5.40 | 1.17 |
| Story | 60 | 5.69 | 1.09 |
| Story Control | 10 | 5.54 | 1.05 |
| Source | 60 | 5.33 | 1.09 |
| Source Control | 10 | 5.36 | 1.00 |
| Anchor | 60 | 5.69 | 1.04 |
| Anchor Control | 10 | 5.34 | 1.12 |
| Expert | 60 | 5.69 | 1.03 |
| Expert Control | 10 | 5.52 | 1.09 |

RQ$_3$ posed a question about whether an increase in persuasion knowledge would have a negative effect on the credibility assessments of the five tested areas of the news broadcast. In theory, higher levels of the former could cause a negative impact on the latter. Correlation tests were first run to see how strongly the two scales for the dependent variables, credibility and persuasion knowledge, were related. Strong associations were found for like areas of the news broadcast: news station, $r = .81$, $n=70$, $p < .001$, news story, $r = .89$, $n=70$, $p < .001$, news source, $r = .83$, $n=70$, $p < .001$, news anchor, $r = .87$, $n=70$, $p < .001$ and expert, $r = .88$, $n=70$, $p < .001$.

Following this, an independent *t*-test was run for all five areas of the broadcast and the dependent variables of credibility and persuasion knowledge (see Table 8). Levene's test for equality of error variances was also run with no significant results. Awareness of a VNR was again qualified by a correct response to the identity of the source of the VNR, and incorrect answers were not included. Overall, there were no significant differences between any of the mean averages, consistent results held throughout. For RQ$_3$, a direct or causal link between an increase in persuasion knowledge and an increase in credibility cannot be identified.

Table 8

*Credibility and Persuasion Assessments, Post Exposure*

| | $n$ | Mean | SD | SE |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Credibility_KWCT | 70 | 5.243 | 1.020 | 0.12 |
| Persuasion_KWCT | 70 | 5.440 | 1.065 | 0.12 |
| Credibility_Source | 70 | 5.140 | 1.051 | 0.12 |
| Persuasion_Source | 70 | 5.334 | 1.078 | 0.13 |
| Credibility_Anchor | 70 | 5.440 | 1.014 | 0.12 |
| Persuasion_Anchor | 70 | 5.640 | 1.048 | 0.12 |
| Credibility_Expert | 70 | 5.191 | 1.101 | 0.13 |
| Persuasion_Expert | 70 | 5.469 | 1.111 | 0.13 |
| Credibility_Story | 70 | 5.457 | 1.029 | 0.12 |
| Persuasion_Story | 70 | 5.669 | 1.085 | 0.13 |

# Chapter 5 - Discussion

Source disclosure remains an ethical problem for broadcast media, with failure to divulge the use of VNR content within a newscast, a serious roadblock in the ability of news viewers to better evaluate the news they are receiving (Aiello & Proffitt, 2008). In previous studies, the means to discern what is station-produced and what is externally produced has fallen along a binary line of recognition of a source disclosure label (Connolly-Ahern, Grantham, & Cabrera-Baukus, 2010; Tewksbury et al., 2011; Wood et al., 2008). This study adds to previous literature by elaborating on the conditions in which source disclosure may prove to be the most effective, for both station and viewer, and on some level challenges viewers face when discerning the reliability of news sources.

**Effectiveness of Source Disclosure Labels**

In the experiment, disclosure was manifest through three labeling conditions, an audio condition, video condition, and the combination of the two. Overall, participants in general had difficulty recognizing source disclosure cues (see Table 9). Those provided with source disclosure correctly responded to the question of who provided the VNR 25% of the time, those without disclosure, only 5%. This corresponds to findings by Newhagen (1994) that demonstrated that the source labeling of news clips had little effect on participants' ability to remember news information more accurately and Wood (2008) and Nelson (2009), which found little evidence that labeling alone instigated a greater awareness to VNR content.

Table 9
*Disclosure Condition and Correct vs. Incorrect Answers*

|  | Incorrect | Correct | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Biased Video | 21 | 8 | 29 |
| Biased Audio | 20 | 10 | 30 |
| Biased Combo | 7 | 18 | 25 |
| Neutral Video | 21 | 8 | 29 |
| Neutral Audio | 20 | 6 | 26 |
| Neutral Combo | 21 | 10 | 31 |
| Biased Control | 28 | 5 | 33 |
| Neutral Control | 30 | 5 | 35 |
| Total | 168 | 70 | 238 |

Out of the 238 total participants, 170 were placed within the three disclosure conditions. Of those in the disclosure conditions, 60 responded with a correct response to the source, the rest of the students incorrectly attributed the source (35 percent correct). Of these 110 incorrect answers, 77 mistakenly attributed the source to the news station itself, 12 guessed the wrong source, and another 21 respondents responded they were unsure of the origin of the VNR. Given these participants were provided with some method of disclosure, these results are important and raise questions as to the ability of news viewers in general to recognize disclosure cues within the format of the newscast.

However, the combination condition of audio and video together did provide the most correct responses to the survey (see Table 2), and a significant result ($n = 28$, $p = .02$), compared to audio only (16), video only (16), and the control group (10). This demonstrates that the reinforcement of a source disclosure cue, through both audio and video means, was the most effective at a 12% success rate for this study. Whether this is the result of a repeated exposure to a disclosure message or because of the combination of the different sensory formats is unknown. Taken in isolation though, the audio and video conditions prompted 16 correct answers each, or a

6% rate of overall effectiveness, and were not significantly different from either the control group, or from each other.

In current media practices, when stations disclose VNR use, a visual-only reference is the predominate method, usually in the form of a graphic stating "courtesy of" (Aiello et al., 2008, pg. 223). This study amplified these elements in order to more efficiently test for an effect. It also heightened in the audio disclosure condition, clearly identifying the story and video content as supplied by a third party. Still, even with these considerations, the results did not demonstrate a high number of correct responses and indicates the difficulty of getting viewers to recognize labels. Given the problematic nature of eliciting recognition of labels within newscasts, the combination condition from $H_1$ should be implemented if disclosure is to be communicated with any rate of success.

**Comprehension of sources**. Beyond the difficulty of recognizing source disclosure labels, there seemed to be little differentiation by participants between the neutral and biased source agents, respectively the National Coalition for Hazard Assessment and the Pool Equipment Suppliers Association. Both sources tested significantly different in the manipulation check post the main experiment, with the Pool Equipment Suppliers Association accurately evaluated as the more biased source. However, within the experiment itself, attitudes to both organizations seemed to deviate from this understanding as results from the survey consistently showed little difference in either perceptions of credibility or levels of persuasion knowledge between the two sources. This aberration was also demonstrated in the moderately and consistently favorable evaluations for all parts of the broadcast when evaluated for both persuasion knowledge and credibility assessments.

**Absence of Dependent Variable Effects**

      **Persuasion knowledge**. In the Persuasion Knowledge Model, the process of navigating and dealing with a moment of persuasion is defined as "coping" (Friestad and Wright, 1994). It is a period of evaluation regarding the persuasive agents and the topics seen, and in this study, the variables of the news broadcast and the pool safety news story. In this experiment, participants displayed little evidence that evaluation of these factors took place. Overall, for assessments of persuasion knowledge among the five tested areas of the broadcast, no significant difference was found. Mean scores consistently ran above average and were similar to one another. This result runs contrary to the notion that disclosure of a source, especially a biased source, will raise suspicion to the content being viewed (see Wood, 2008). This finding is also demonstrated by Nelson (2009), which found that an increase in persuasion knowledge caused greater skepticism by participants and a belief that news was more "commercialized".

      There are several possibilities for this outcome. First, participants may not have been invested in the topic of pool safety for children. Or, they may have generally agreed with the concept of pool safety, with nothing to incite a more critical reading of the materials. Perhaps another issue related to the specific geographic locale of the study would have raised participants overall attention level to the news piece. However, it should be noted, that within the real world of broadcast news, not every single story resonates with every viewer. In an ideal world, the goal of disclosure should go beyond the particular self-interests of the individual and be consistent and attainable no matter the subject matter or importance to the viewer.

      Secondly, the sources themselves may not have been as explicitly understood or self-evident to the viewer to work effectively within the experiment. None of the sources was a real organization, and perhaps a governmental body such as the Centers for Disease Control, which

reports on adolescent pool injuries, would have aided assessment in establishing a more neutral source. The same argument could also be given for the biased source, the Pool Equipment Suppliers Association, for using an established company. An actual firm might have provided greater context for study respondents. Again, sources within real newscasts are not always high profile or very well known. Using a high profile company in this area of the experiment may have separated it from the day-to-day reality of the medium.

Another potential issue was the sales pitch component of the VNR. Within the last paragraph of the news script (see Appendix B), attention was given in the story to items available for purchase that could prevent children from drowning. The anchor mentioned a life preserver, arm floaties and a perimeter fence, along with instructions on contacting your local pool supplier for more information. Though communicated, this retail moment should have been exaggerated more to drive home the underlying subtext of the video news release, the sale of pool equipment supplies. However, such an emphasis runs antithetical to the norms of VNR use and its method of persuasion through concealment (Nebenzahl & Jaffe, 1998).

Another factor for why this research found no overall effect from disclosure within the experiment may be the nature of broadcast news itself. When viewers see information portrayed within a newscast, most expect that what they see is accurate and true (Liebes, 2000). In essence, the medium and the structure of the newscast may serve as a qualifying or legitimizing agent, lessening the negative evaluations of a source, no matter the perceived bias. Indeed, the one small area of significant difference within the results demonstrated a decrease in overall mistrust of the anchor, post-disclosure. Could disclosure improve an anchor's standing with viewers? This observation corresponds to findings in other studies that have demonstrated that the standing of a news station may improve when disclosure labels are given (Connolly-Ahern et al., 2010).

One of the main goals of this study was to determine if greater levels of persuasion knowledge would occur when source disclosure was provided to viewers. This study found no support for source disclosure within a newscast leading to an increase in persuasion knowledge. This raises the prospect that generating awareness to persuasive content, using only the tools and means available within a newscast such as onscreen source disclosure labels or auditory cues, may be too much of a limitation and expectation on viewers. In the end, time may ultimately limit a broadcaster's ability for a more through or extensive disclosure discourse. In addition, the cognitive demands needed to decipher and separate what is persuasive or not, may be too much for viewers to handle and still follow the news program.

However, and of importance, one moment of persuasive insight did occur. Post-experiment, the manipulation check clearly saw participants correctly categorize the Pool Equipment Suppliers Association and National Coalition for Hazard Assessment respectively as the "biased" and "neutral" source. In the manipulation check, post-experiment, the assessment of the sources for levels of bias potentially operated as an awakening mechanism to the previously unseen persuasive content within the experiment. Through this portion of the experiment, participants in the biased source condition were able to reflect and reassess the nature of this source. However, this insight comes after the main experiment and so outside of the possibilities of the broadcast medium itself. In effect, the question itself may have instigated the extra elaboration on the nature of the sources versus that of any effect caused by the disclosure cues within the experiment. Future research should examine, in greater detail, the ideal conditions for priming people to persuasive content within news especially when that content is not overtly so. In addition greater media literacy training may be required for general audiences to better separate persuasive content from that of standard news.

**Credibility**. In addition to persuasion knowledge, credibility was also evaluated within the five areas tested within the newscast. Similar to persuasion knowledge, credibility scores remained above average throughout. Thus, whether disclosure had any real impact on the credibility of the newscast could not be clearly determined as the first step of a two-step process was hindered due to the lack of overall recognition of the source disclosure cues within the experiment or skepticism of the validity of the VNR content.

These results run contrary to previous research regarding credibility and VNRs (see Wood, 2008 and Nelson, 2009), but are not surprising given the lack of a strong main effect from disclosure labels eliciting a greater awareness to the VNR's persuasive content. This experiment attempted to raise awareness of this content through disclosure cues alone in order to best match broadcasting conditions. However, in both previously cited studies, knowledge of persuasion was successfully communicated through the inclusion of educational materials before the experiment, thus raising skepticism to the use of VNRs and subsequently affecting media credibility post their viewing. The lack of an effect in this regard, within this experiment, showcases the difficulty of executing this process within the format of a television newscast.

**Policies and Practices**

On the one hand, these results could be seen as a disappointment, and indeed demonstrating a clear link between source disclosure and credibility would have been an ideal outcome. Nelson states, " If news viewers believe VNRs are subtle persuasion tactics or if they believe companies are biased sources of news stories, they may perceive VNRs as an inappropriate form of television news" (Nelson et al., 2009, pg. 225). However, the absence of any effect, either positive or negative, gives weight to disclosure proponents who advocate news operations do more to disclose the origins of their news. Results from this study show that

disclosure did not negatively affect credibility for the news anchor, news station, or any other part of the news broadcast. While perceptions of VNR use could change in the future, fear of a loss of credibility should not be at the center of a decision not to disclose VNR usage to an audience.

On the whole, this research will be helpful to news stations and news consumers alike. First, broadcast stations on the whole should explicitly disclose VNR use. As of today, as few as five percent of VNRs are disclosed to an audience (Nelson, Wood, & Paek, 2009), those that do may implement only simple visual disclosure cues that are easy to overlook. This study provides evidence that bolstering source disclosure through both audio and video means can lead to better overall levels of audience recognition of VNR sources.

News viewers also have a role to play in terms of source disclosure of video news releases. This study demonstrates the difficulty of recognizing a disclosure label or source cue when it is given, as well as, understanding the differences between biased and neutral sources within a newscast. Not all sources are created equally, and it is incumbent on news viewers to better evaluate the news they are seeing and hearing, not just take information at face value.

A recent Stanford study of students from middle school through college found that students, across the board, had difficulty evaluating the credibility of information and distinguishing real news from fake news (Wineburg, McGrew, Breakstone, & Ortega, 2016). This study demonstrates a similar outcome to those findings with little distinction found between the evaluations of the two VNR sources within the experiment. It also points to the need for training to help foster and develop critical thinking skills when evaluating news sources. As the author of the Stanford study, Sam Wineburg states in an article for NPR, "the kinds of duties that

used to be the responsibility of editors, of librarians now fall on the shoulders of anyone who uses a screen to become informed about the world." (Domonoske, 2016).

**Limitations**

There are several limitations that should be acknowledged in evaluating this study that future studies could amend. The constructed news story was not produced by an official news station or news source. It was produced on a student-run news set and in such a way as to limit as much attention to the artificial story as possible. Producing the video with assistance from a local news station in its establishment and using an established anchor talent may have added believability to the experiment. The downside to this approach, though, is using a local news station may skew the results of credibility or persuasion toward the positive, as viewers bring their experiences of that station to their overall evaluations of content.

It should also be noted that, by and large, respondents who participated in this survey were not avid consumers of broadcast news, especially local news. On average, participants reported social media as the medium most used for news, at 2.5 hours per day, followed by the Internet in general, with 1.7 hours per day, and online newspapers at 1.3 hours. Of the eight news platforms listed in the survey, local TV news was used the least. An older audience who had a greater familiarity with local news may have increased the overall ability of participants to discern the various parts of a newscast and to identify unexpected and non-traditional additions to the news stories such as source disclosure cues. These other avenues of research may also serve as possible future areas of study regarding persuasion in news.

This study attempted to bridge a gap in the reality of broadcast news that observes disclosure and transparency on one side and fear and obfuscation on the other. Broadcasters have a duty to disclose VNR usage to their audience. How and if the public are able to recognize this

disclosure, the potential impact that source disclosure has on perceptions of news media's credibility, and the overall ability of news consumers to know when they are being presented with persuasive content, are essential issues to address in the quest for a more media-literate democracy and, ultimately, a healthy and vibrant news industry.

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# Appendix A - Study Questionnaire

1. Which of the following entities PROVIDED the news story/video on pool safety to the news station?

A) University of California B) The National Coalition For Hazard Assessment C) The Pool Equipment Suppliers Association E) KWCT F) I don't know

2. Which of the following helped you to identify the PROVIDER of the news story/video on pool safety?

A) An on-screen graphic B) Anchor verbally notified me C) Both the anchor and an on-screen graphic informed me D) I'm not sure

Based on the word pairings below, choose a value for every line of opposite words pairs that best reflects your beliefs on a specific item from the video clip.

3. I believe the **NEWS STATION, KWCT** (is):

Unfair (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) Fair

Biased (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) Unbiased

Untrustworthy (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) Trustworthy

Inaccurate (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) Accurate

Told the WHOLE story (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) Did NOT tell the whole story

4. I believe the **NEWS STATION, KWCT** (is):

Deceptive (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) Not deceptive

Not believable (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) Believable

Not Sincere (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) Sincere

Manipulative (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) Not manipulative

Honest (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) NOT honest

5. I believe the **NEWS STORY** on pool safety (is):

Unfair (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) Fair

Biased (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) Unbiased

Untrustworthy (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) Trustworthy

Inaccurate (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) Accurate

Told the WHOLE story (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) Did NOT tell the whole story


6. I believe the **NEWS STORY** on pool safety (is):

Deceptive (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) Not deceptive

Not believable (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) Believable

Not Sincere (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) Sincere

Manipulative (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) Not manipulative

Honest (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) NOT honest


7. I believe the **National Coalition for Hazard Assessment/Pool Equipment Suppliers Association is:**

Unfair (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) Fair

Biased (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) Unbiased

Untrustworthy (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) Trustworthy

Inaccurate (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) Accurate

Told the WHOLE story (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) Did NOT tell the whole story


8. I believe the **National Coalition for Hazard Assessment/Pool Equipment Suppliers Association is:**

Deceptive (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) Not deceptive

Not believable (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) Believable

Not Sincere (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) Sincere

Manipulative (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) Not manipulative

Honest (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) NOT honest


9. I believe **ASHLEY BROOKS**, the **NEWS ANCHOR** presenting the video (is):

Unfair (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) Fair

Biased (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) Unbiased

Untrustworthy (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) Trustworthy

Inaccurate (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) Accurate

Told the WHOLE story (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) Did NOT tell the whole story


10.  I believe **ASHLEY BROOKS**, the **NEWS ANCHOR** presenting the video (is):

Deceptive (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) Not deceptive

Not believable (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) Believable

Not Sincere (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) Sincere

Manipulative (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) Not manipulative

Honest (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) NOT honest


11.  I believe **BRADFORD EVANS**, the person interviewed in the video (is):

Unfair (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) Fair

Biased (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) Unbiased

Untrustworthy (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) Trustworthy

Inaccurate (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) Accurate

Told the WHOLE story (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) Did NOT tell the whole story


12. I believe **BRADFORD EVANS**, the person interviewed in the video (is):

Deceptive (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) Not deceptive

Not believable (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) Believable

Not Sincere (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) Sincere

Manipulative (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) Not manipulative

Honest (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) NOT honest


Please answer a few questions about yourself and your news viewing/reading habits.


13. On average, how many hours daily do you use the following to access news?


Local Television News (examples: WIBW, KSNT, KTKA, etc.)

1 Hour or Less_____2 hours_____3 hours_____ 4 hours _____5 or more

National Television News (examples: ABC, NBC, CBS, CNN, FOX, MSNBC, etc.)

1 Hour or Less_____2 hours_____3 hours_____ 4 hours _____5 or more

Print Newspaper (examples: Manhattan Mercury, Collegian, New York Times, etc.)

1 Hour or Less_____2 hours_____3 hours_____ 4 hours _____5 or more

Online editions of Newspapers (examples: New York Times, Washington Post, Los Angeles Times, etc.)

1 Hour or Less_____2 hours_____3 hours_____ 4 hours _____5 or more

News Magazines (examples: Newsweek, US News &amp; World Report, Time, etc.)

1 Hour or Less_____2 hours_____3 hours_____ 4 hours _____5 or more

Internet (examples: Slate, Yahoo, The Atlantic, Huffington Post, etc.)

1 Hour or Less_____2 hours_____3 hours_____ 4 hours _____5 or more

Social Media (examples: Facebook, Twitter, etc.)

1 Hour or Less_____2 hours_____3 hours_____ 4 hours _____5 or more

Radio Stations (examples: National Public Radio, ESPN radio, 91.9 The Wildcat, etc.)

1 Hour or Less_____2 hours_____3 hours_____ 4 hours _____5 or more

14. What is your gender?

Male_____ Female_____ Other_____

15. Choose one or more races that you consider yourself to be:

____Black or African American

____White

____Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino

____Asian

____American Indian or Alaska Native

____Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

____Other

16. In what year where you born?

17. What year student are you?

Freshman_____ Sophomore_____ Junior_____ Senior_____

Graduate Student _____

18. Please list feedback or anything else you'd like researchers to know about this study.

# Appendix B - News Script for Disclosure Conditions

**Red Text = Audio Disclosure**

**Blue Text = Video Disclosure**

**Green Text = Biased Source**

**Orange Text  = Neutral Source**

**ANCHOR**

WELCOME BACK TO KWCT, I'M ASHLEY BROOKS.

FOR PARENTS, IT'S NEVER TOO EARLY TO START THINKING ABOUT WHAT YOUR KIDS ARE GOING TO DO THIS SUMMER, AND NOTHING SAYS SUMMER-FUN MORE THAN A BACKYARD POOL.

**VO (FAMILY AT A HOME SWIMMING POOL, CHILDREN IN THE WATER)**

BUT BEFORE YOUR CHILD ENJOYS THE PERKS OF A SUMMER VACATION SPENT POOLSIDE, THERE ARE A FEW THINGS THAT YOU NEED TO REMEMBER IN ORDER TO KEEP YOUR CHILD HAPPY AND SAFE.

ACCORDING TO SAFETY EXPERTS, SWIMMING IS THE NUMBER ONE CAUSE OF ACCIDENTS WITH YOUNG CHILDREN.

**ANCHOR**

CHILD SAFETY SPECIALIST BRADFORD EVANS, {*(1) WITH THE NATIONAL COALITION FOR HAZARD ASSESSMENT, (2) WITH THE POOL EQUIPMENT SUPPLIERS ASSOCIATION, THE GROUP WHO PROVIDED THIS STORY AND VIDEO CONTENT TO KWCT}*, SAYS WITH THE RIGHT ACCESSORIES AND AN ACCURATE UNDERSTANDING OF YOUR CHILD'S ABILITIES IN THE WATER, THIS FAVORITE PASTIME DOESN'T HAVE TO BE A DANGEROUS ONE.

**CG: Bradford Evans, Child Safety Specialist**

(19 sec) Right at the point where children feel very comfortable swimming, is about the same point that adults feel comfortable with their kids swimming, and that is the point in time where the most accidents happen. Because adults trust their children and children overthink their abilities.

**VO (FAMILY AT A HOME SWIMMING POOL, CHILDREN IN THE WATER)**

{*CG IN: STORY AND VIDEO CONTENT PROVIDED BY*: (1) *THE NATIONAL COALITION FOR HAZARD ASSESSMENT, (2) THE POOL EQUIPMENT SUPPLIERS ASSOCIATION*}

SUMMER FUN ALSO BRINGS WITH IT THE SUMMER SUN AND EXHAUSTION FROM HEAT, SAYS EVANS, CAN BE A PROBLEM FOR CHILDREN AT PLAY. SWEAT, NORMALLY EASILY SEEN DURING A HOT SUMMER DAY, CAN BE MASKED WHEN SWIMMING, AND A CHILD'S BUOYANCY MAY DISGUISE FATIGUE OTHERWISE NORMALLY FELT. EVANS REMINDS THAT A CLOSE WATCH BY PARENTS IS NEEDED, IN ORDER TO KEEP YOUR CHILD SAFE.

{CG OUT}

**CG: Bradford Evans, Child Safety Specialist**

(30 sec) We're so used to checking out as parents, sitting on the side and reading a book and letting our kids do whatever it is they do, but the issue with that is takes a split second for something really bad to happen and you are never going to care about whatever it was you were reading, watching on your phone, or texting, or anything after that moment.

**VO (family at a swimming pool)**

FOR PARENTS WITH PORTABLE OR "KIDDIE" POOLS, EVANS RECOMMENDS DRAINING THEM ON A DAILY BASIS TO PREVENT ACCIDENTS. FOR MORE PERMANENT POOL SYSTEMS, PROFESSIONALS SUGGEST A FENCE AROUND THE PERIMETER OR A POOL COVER TO SAFEGUARD THE AREA, AND AN ALARM SYSTEM THAT DETECTS IF AN OBJECT ENTERS THE WATER WHEN NOT IN USE.

**ANCHOR TAG**

IN ADDITION, OTHER ITEMS SUCH AS ARM FLOATIES AND SWIM VESTS CAN ALSO AID YOUR CHILD AND ENSURE THAT THEY ARE HAVING A FUN AND SAFE TIME WHEN SWIMMING. TALK WITH YOUR LOCAL POOL SUPPLIER TO SEE WHAT EQUIPMENT IS RIGHT FOR YOU.

# Appendix C - Stimulus Videos for Each Condition

Biased/No Disclosure: https://youtu.be/Nea-kC5e2Co

Biased/Visual Disclosure: https://youtu.be/mPWNz-rrj2M

Biased/Audio Disclosure: https://youtu.be/SFPfrvpqbQI

Biased/Combo Disclosure: https://youtu.be/FON35bQ7LYE

Neutral/No Disclosure: https://youtu.be/KkjADz4WdPo

Neutral/Visual Disclosure: https://youtu.be/LL9lSGIRptw

Neutral/Audio Disclosure: https://youtu.be/orYNnC2_fa8

Neutral/Combo Disclosure: https://youtu.be/m9wF3AagdsI

# Appendix D - VNR Examples

http://www.prwatch.org/fakenews/vnr1

http://www.prwatch.org/fakenews/vnr2

http://www.prwatch.org/fakenews/vnr3