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ON THE COVER OF THE ROLLIN' STONE: HOW ROLLING STONE MAGAZINE

FRAMES POLITICS AND NEWS

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By

Ashley Walter

May 2017

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Approved April 18, and 2017

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ABSTRACT

ON THE COVER OF THE ROLLIN' STONE: HOW ROLLING STONE MAGAINES

FRAMES POLITICS AND NEWS

By

Ashley Walter

May 2017

Dissertation supervised by Dr. Pamela E. Walck

The *Rolling Stone* magazine is a significant artifact spanning throughout American pop culture; yet it has fought to be considered a legitimate news source in American media. This thesis study examines how *Rolling Stone* frames news and politics, and how the magazine portrays itself as being political, through its front covers. Research has shown that magazine covers "communicate," "visually summarize" and work "as an advertisement to attract customers" (Kang & Heo, 2013). The purpose of this study is to understand how *Rolling Stone* presents itself as a legitimate news source and how the covers convey the publication's identity. A mixed-methods content analysis was used to analyze both front cover artwork and front cover text. This research reveals how magazines can use their covers to establish legitimacy in American media.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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Introduction

Since its inception, musicians have yearned to be featured on the cover of *Rolling Stone* magazine. Having one's face splashed on the cover symbolizes prestige in America's pop culture. The *Rolling Stone* magazine is a cultural artifact spanning throughout American pop culture since the publication's inception in 1967. From its beginning, *Rolling Stone* reported on rock n' roll icons and counterculture political news. *Rolling Stone* scholar Robert Draper (1990) referred to the magazine as "the voice of the counterculture" during the late 1960s and early 1970s. The publication has also been called "one of the rock institution's most prominent mouthpieces,'' however, *Rolling Stone* has fought to be considered a legitimate news source in the American media (Mazullo, 1997, 147).

In August, 2013, the magazine faced extreme backlash when it featured Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, commonly known as the "Boston Marathon bomber," on the cover. Just months earlier, on April 15, 2013, Tsarnaev, along with his brother, set off two bombs near the finish line of the Boston Marathon, killing three people and wounding over 260 victims in the name of Islamic extremism (Crouch, 2013). Public outcry immediately occurred as the magazine donned the most hated man in America on its cover. However, the same photo of Tsarnaev was used as the lead photo on both the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* (Crouch, 2013)*.* Because of *Rolling Stone's* reputation for featuring celebrities and rock stars on its covers, many felt that the magazine was glamorizing

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terrorism. Boston Mayor Thomas Menino called the cover a "total disgrace," while large

chains like CVS and Walgreens refused to sell the August 1 issue (Crouch, 2013). The

Rolling Stone Facebook page featured comments like "I've cancelled my subscription,

which I've had since 1972" and "rockstar cover portrayal of a terrorist is unacceptable."

(Rolling Stone, 2013). The publication, however, stood by its cover choice and argued

that the feature article fell "within the traditions of journalism and *Rolling Stone's* long-

standing commitment to serious and thoughtful coverage of the most important political

and cultural issues of our day" (Rolling Stone, 2013). The publication explained that it

sought to examine the "how" in its journalistic mission. *How* did a seemingly average

American boy turn to radical and violent extremism? Despite the explanation, the public

lambasted the publication. Why did *Rolling Stone* face this backlash when the *New York*

Times and *Washington Post* heard no criticism (Crouch, 2013)? It will be proposed in this

study that a possibility for this backlash is because the public does not consider *Rolling*

Stone a legitimate news source.

Sultan argued that there is a "current obsession" in American media with

Islam/Muslim and that this obsession is "tinged with negative signifiers with the global

media's predominantly negative portrayal of Islam and Muslims" (2016, p. 1). Muslims

are often considered "fodder for the front page news" in the United States, focused

mostly on negative portrayals (Karim, 2006, p. 116). The U.S. is in a "moral panic" about

terrorism and Tsarnaev took on the role of folk devil—an outlier who could not be seen

as part of American society (Cohen, 1972). By putting Tsarnaev on its front cover,

Rolling Stone defied norms of typical Islam/Muslim portrayal in the media.

The purpose of this study is to better understand how *Rolling Stone* magazine frames politics and news. This study will examine how *Rolling Stone* presents itself as a legitimate news source. To date, research regarding *Rolling Stone* covers has largely focused on sexuality, sexual objectification and gender inequality. Researchers have ignored the politicization of the publication's front covers. Through a content analysis of the front covers artwork and text, the research will progress toward how *Rolling Stone* frames U.S. politics and news. This research will reveal how magazines can use their covers to establish legitimacy in American media as magazine covers "communicate," "visually summarize" and work "as an advertisement to attract customers" (Kang & Heo, 2013, p. 5).

Literature Review

Rolling Stone Magazine, counterculture and politics

Found under the "Music Consumer" section, *Writer's Market* defined *Rolling Stone* as a "biweekly magazine geared towards young adults interested in news of popular music, entertainment and the arts, current news events, politics and American culture" (Brewer, 2016, p. 566). *Rolling Stone* published its first magazine on November 9, 1967 (Rolling Stone Magazine, 2017). To understand the impact of *Rolling Stone* during its early stages, Anson wrote, "To have come of age in the Sixties was to be aware of the presence of *Rolling Stone* — if not by reading it, then by sharing in the events it uniquely covered and, by its coverage, helped create" (1981, p. 39).

Co-founder and publisher, Jann Wenner hoped that his publication would take a unique approach to covering both rock n' roll and the counterculture movement. Frontani (2002) defined counterculture as, "a culture created by or for the alienated young in

opposition to traditional values" (p. 43) and contended that *Rolling Stone* came into existence during the peak of the counterculture movement. Frontani argued that the publication established itself not only in the counterculture world, but also "as a mainstream observer of Western popular culture" and coined it "the voice of a generation" (p. 39).

Rolling Stone began as a hybrid publication, morphing music and the voice of the counterculture's generation. In a letter, Wenner wrote, "You're probably wondering what we are trying to do … *Rolling Stone* is just about music but also about the things and attitudes that the music embraces" (Draper, 1990, p. 69). In 1969, the publication began to flourish. Draper attributes this success to the writers' relatable, trendy language and by "flaunting their blissful lack of objectivity" (p. 94).

The young publisher initially had a strong resistance to political news and an aversion to the leftist movement. Draper described Wenner's political averseness:

> While the nation buried Martin Luther King, Jr., Rolling Stone published an
> obituary of "Why Do Fools Fall in Love?" singer/songwriter Frankie Lymon;
> while America cried for Robert F. Kennedy, Jann Wenner fired bullets at the new
> Cream album. *Rolling Stone* responded to the rapid escalation of the Vietnam War
> with an article showing how soldiers were smoking good weed overseas. Nixon's
> election—a brutal blow to the counterculture—did not warrant mention, as the
> magazine was preoccupied with John Lennon's foreskin" (p. 123).

In response to the 1970 Kent State shooting, the staff at *Rolling Stone* wrote a manifesto demanding more editorial control of the magazine, as they wanted to shift to a political and news focus. Wenner responded, "We're not the *New York Times*" and reiterated that

the publication would continue focusing on music (Draper, 1990, p. 131). The managing editor, John Burks, immediately resigned and Wenner fired, or lost, those who mutinied with Burks. However, political news coverage could not be thwarted for long. As the publication devoted itself to covering rock n' roll, the music itself became political. When covering The Beatles, which the publication often did, it was difficult to avoid the band's politically charged statements and beliefs. Musicians like Grace Slick and The Rolling Stones were also no exception. The publication heavily covered the Manson family, an exemplar of the hybrid news/counterculture that *Rolling Stone* did best (Draper, 1990).

David Atkin wrote that "within months of its inceptions … the publication emerged as a leader among the alternative, or underground, press, fusing the music and politics of America's New Left" (Frontani, 2002, p. 44). Frontani noted that *Rolling Stone* differed from other underground papers because it provided "a consistent focus on politics as a function of music" (p. 46). Greil Marcus wrote on the political nature of rock n' roll in his book, *Mystery Train: Images of America in Rock 'n' Roll,* which made "an attempt to broaden the context in which the music is heard; to deal with rock 'n' roll not as youth culture, or counterculture, but simply as American culture" (1975, p. 4).

Eventually Wenner saw that his publication could no longer avoid politics, and aggressively embraced the political nature of rock n' roll. In 1974, Wenner told his staff that *Rolling Stone* would include more political coverage and said that politics "will be the rock and roll of the Seventies" (Anson, 1981, p. 185). He wrote that politics "threatens our daily lives and our daily happiness … and, willingly or not, we are in it" (Anson, 1981, p. 186). It was at this time that Wenner created a presence in Washington

D.C., not only with an office, but with a respected political coverage staff, thus starting the Rolling Stone's special section, "Politics" (Anson, 1981, p. 194).

As *Rolling Stone* became more directly involved in mainstream politics, it began to gain recognition. When Wenner hired Richard Goodwin, respected new publications "heralded *Rolling Stone's* 'quest for respectability,'" and Wenner was referred to as "a crucial fulcrum at the interface of two cultures," referring to rock n' roll and politics (Anson, 1981, p. 205). In 1970, *Rolling Stone,* won the National Magazine Award for its Altamont and Charles Manson coverage (Draper, 1990). *Rolling Stone* became known as a "writer's magazine" with the addition of Hunter S. Thompson and Joe Eszterhas and was quickly considered "different, literate" and important; no longer "simply a music magazine" (Draper, 1990, p. 180). Thompson's coverage at *Rolling Stone* was considered "revolutionary political coverage" (McKeen, 2012, p. 9). In 1983, *Rolling Stone* printed a two-part series on the AIDS epidemic. The author, freelance writer David Black, received a National Magazine Award and the story was coined "explosive" (Draper, 1990). Black was paid $26,000 for his article, an extraordinary amount showcasing the importance that *Rolling Stone* placed on investigative news.

Today *Rolling Stone's* political coverage does not solely balance on the political nature of rock n' roll. Cohen (2011) cited two different articles that show the impact of *Rolling Stone's* current political writings. The first was an interview with former General Stanley McChrystal, who criticized the Obama administration's efforts in Afghanistan (Cohen, 2011). Following the release of the article, McChrystal was dismissed as the top commander in the Afghanistan war. The second article exposed corruption and abuse of

Massey Energy's CEO and Chairman, Don Blankenship. A week following the article's

release, Blankenship resigned (Cohen, 2011).

Framing, agenda-setting and placement of the news

Agenda-setting's first origins can be found in Walter Lippmann's *Public Opinion,*

with his chapter "The World Outside and the Pictures in Our Head." He argued that

society forms pictures of the world based upon the news media's description of the world

through "stored up images" that "interpret" and "powerfully direct the play of our

attention" (Lippmann, 1922. p.15). Lippmann wrote that the political world "is out of

reach" (p. 15). Thus, the media and journalists connect the political world to the public,

creating a frame.

Agenda-setting was first conceptualized in 1968 by Maxwell McCombs and

Donald Shaw. The researcher's 1968 Presidential election research found that their

sample's concept of important issues directly paralleled with issues prominent in the

news cycle. The researchers found that readers of the news learn "how much importance

to attach to that issue from the amount of information in a news story and its position"

(McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Thus, the researchers would agree that a story prominently

featured on the front cover of a magazine indicate greater importance to its readers.

Valenzuela and McCombs argued that three key elements regulate the pattern of news

coverage: "exchanges with sources that provide information for news stories, the daily

interactions among news organizations themselves, and journalism's norms and

traditions" (p. 96). As journalists are the final decision makers of what makes it into the

news, norms and traditions are at the forefront of the elements. They continued that,

"because everyday journalists must select, process, and filter the news, there is no

guarantee that the reality portrayed in the media accurately depicts our world"

(Valenzuela & McCombs, 1996, p. 90). In a follow-up study assessing agenda setting's

twenty-five years in the marketplace of ideas, researchers found that "agenda setting is

considerably more than the classical assertion that the news tells us *what to think about*.

The news also tells us *how to think about it*" (McCombs & Shaw, 1993, p.13). Under this

reasoning, a feature on the cover of *Rolling Stone* not only indicates special attention, but

frames the feature in a certain way that shapes the views of the reader.

It is frequently argued that agenda-setting theory is closely related to framing.

Todd Gitlin's influential study on the news media and the 1960s student movement first

imagined the concept of framing (1980). He defined framing as a "persistent selection,

emphasis, and exclusion" that "enable journalists to process large amounts of information

quickly and routinely (Gitlin, 1980, p. 7). Robert Entman (1991) suggested that "for

entirely new breaking events, it is the initial interactions of sources and journalists that

set the framing process in motion" (p. 8). In the case of *Rolling Stone's* cover on the

Boston Marathon bomber, the magazine adhered to the framing process established by

other news organizations, but the public viewed *Rolling Stone* as a less credible source.

Gamson and Modigliani (1987) developed framing as a "central organizing idea or story

line that provides meaning" (p. 143). Framing will be conceptualized as "a central

organizing idea for news content that supplies a context and suggests what the issue is

through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusive and elaboration" (Tankard, Henrickson,

Silberman, Bliss & Ghanem, 1991). Bernard Cohen (1963) wrote, "the press may not be

successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful

in telling its readers what to think about" (p. 13). While *Rolling Stone* created a negative

controversy over its Boston Marathon bomber cover, it generated a vast dialogue surrounding both the cover and the magazine.

Russell W. Neuman's pivotal study (1990) argued that placement in the news sends messages to audiences. He argued that something featured on the front page of a newspaper or magazine is amplified and sends a clear message to audiences that it is more important than something buried inside the publication. Neuman also argued that "there is consistent evidence of a curvilinear relationship between the volume of media coverage and the level of public concern" (1990, p. 172). Laurel Leff's (2000) research regarding the *New York Times'* coverage of the Holocaust takes agenda-setting theory and framing a step further by arguing the importance of news placement. Leff's research found that despite ample news coverage of the Holocaust in mainstream American newspapers, many American's were unaware of the genocide because the stories were buried inside the newspaper. Leff found that the Holocaust was "never the lead story in the *New York Times;*" a publication that set the standard for newspapers during this time (p. 55). Leff argued that, because of the placement of Holocaust news, Americans were not able to grasp the impact of the events and she contended that journalists, not the public, were to blame. She wrote, "though the facts of the Holocaust were published, the *Times* never presented those facts in a way that would enable reader to understand their importance" (p. 57). The articles were "separated by a few days, were often no more than a couple of paragraphs long, and were usually placed on inside pages amid thirty or so other stories," thus it was difficult for the public to "predict a pattern" (p. 57). From the beginning, to the end, the *Times* published more than a thousand articles "that together told the story of the Holocaust as it happened" (p. 58). She wrote,

It is not enough to merely cover an event and to set the facts before the public. If

the powerful fact of the slaughter of nearly six million people could be lost in the

middle of the newspaper, consider how easily less compelling facts can be

overwhelmed (Leff, 2000, p. 70).

This sheds a light on the powerful impact of front covers, and cover lines. Leff's research

suggests that if Holocaust news were placed on the front covers of newspaper, then

Americans may have recognized Hitler's atrocities sooner. Front covers feature

information that has the power to directly gauge the attention of its viewers.

Magazine front cover and cover lines

In a study analyzing magazine cover framing, Kang and Heo (2013), contended

that magazine covers function as "an independent, self-contained unit." They also argued

that "both the visual and textual elements need to be taken into consideration" because

written texts "anchor" meanings while visual aspects create an instant "appeal" (Kang &

Heo, 2013 p. 5).

Cardoso (2010) argued that magazine front covers have multiple layers, each

playing a strategic role in communicating to the public. He wrote that covers have "lines

of visibility (images); of enunciation (the title), of strength (the main headline and

image); and of fracture (separation mechanisms for multiple subjects)" (Cardoso, 2010, p.

578). The researcher called magazine covers a form of "contact with the outside" world

by using "the said (text)" and the "unsaid (graphic)" (Cardoso, 2010, p. 578). Barnett

(2003) argued that impressions responding to visual images are stronger than impressions

based on reading or hearing information.

Cantrel Rosas-Moreno, Harp and Bachmann (2013) argued that "cover exposure is much higher," compared to inside images, because it affects the "happenstance passerby as well as the selected viewer." They continue that "covers also communicate the magazine's philosophy and identity" (Cantrel Rosas-Moreno et al., 2013, p. 3). Based on front cover text and imagery, a magazine's front cover can communication to the public what topics and values are of key importance to that business. Researchers also contended that "more people see (news)magazine covers than actually read inside news content; handlers carefully control the (news)magazine cover design process, as the choice of who or what is featured on the cover is both editorial and a social indication of importance" (Cantrel Rosas-Moreno et al., 2013, p. 3).

In his *Rolling Stone* research, Draper (1990) cited a "war between its enduring conscience and its boundless commercial appetite" (p. 16). He called into question the vast difference between the front covers and the journalism inside *Rolling Stone's* pages. He wrote, "today, what *Rolling Stone* publishes and what it sells are often two entirely different things" (Draper, p. 18). The author then pressed his point by citing the February 9, 1989 issue that featured serious articles on global politics, foreign policy and drug use, but the cover hosted a tight-clothed Jon Bon Jovi. Draper (1990) argued that *Rolling Stone* newsstand sales are used to gauge the front cover person or band's financial worth to the magazine.

Research Questions

RQ1: How does *Rolling Stone* frame news and politics through its front cover artwork?

RQ2: How does *Rolling Stone* frame new and politics through its front cover lines?

RQ3: Has there been an increase in political or news covers over the lifespan of the publication?

Methods

Overview

Berelson defined content analysis as, "a research technique for objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (Stemple, 2003, p. 210). Stemple argued that content analysis communication research "can reach its full potential" by relating "content to communicator, audience, and effects" (p. 210). This research consisted of a mixed methods content analysis of *Rolling Stone* front covers, spanning across seven decades, analyzing the front cover images and cover lines. Creswell (2015) conceptualized mixed method research as

> an approach to research in the social, behavioral, and health sciences in which the
> investigator gathers both quantitative (closed-ended) and qualitative (open-ended)
> data, integrates the two, and then draws interpretations based on the combined
> strengths of both sets of data to understand research problems (p. 2).
>
> Unit of Analysis
>
> The "cover image" category examined *who* was featured on the cover of the

magazine and *how* they were featured. The front covers were analyzed for: entertainment and political/news. Covers were also categorized by visual type: illustration or photo. Illustrations were conceptualized as covers that included drawings and/or cartoons. Photos were conceptualized as covers that featured camera shots in still (Kang & Heo, 2013, p. 3).

The "cover line" category examined *what* was featured in the magazine. Cover lines were conceptualized as,

> short phrases that describe what is inside the magazine and tend to be smaller in font. Well-written cover lines catch the eye of potential readers and stimulate enough interest in a few short words to drive consumers beyond the cover into the heart of the magazine (Martin-Biggers et al., 2015, p. 767).

All cover lines were characterized into three separate categories: main feature, featured, or secondary. The *main feature*, "defined as the cover's main theme," was the singular, largest text on the cover, and oftentimes directly related to the cover story (Cardoso, p. 578-9). The *featured cover line* was conceptualized as any line of text that is smaller than the main feature, but made to stand out through color, banners, or text indicating that it is a "special report," or "special feature." All remaining smaller cover lines were categorized as *secondary cover lines*.

Each cover line was coded as either entertainment or political/news. The entertainment category was conceptualized to include bands/musicians, television/movie stars, literature, athletes, and composers. Because this study analyzes the politicization of covers and not the entertainment value of the covers, the entertainment category was not broken down further. The political category was conceptualized into subcategories using an a priori research approach and emergent coding. Subcategories were created after analyzing multiple front covers for subcategory themes. These subcategories included: Wall Street and the economy, politicians/political parties, terrorism/national security, environmental, social justice/race, prison reform, drugs/marijuana legalization, crime/news tragedies, LGBTQ/sexuality, gun control, education, war/military, cyber

politics, abortion/women's rights, healthcare, international politics/affairs and other. The other category included topics on anthropology, spiritualism, technology, cartoons, leisure activities and fashion.

Sampling

Front covers were retrieved from the *Rolling Stone* digital cover wall archive. The cover wall archive displayed covers from the magazine's inception on November 9, 1967 through the year 2013. Thus, the researcher ended the content analysis on December 19, 2013. During this time frame the magazine published 1,198 issues. Throughout 1967-2013, the magazine occasionally featured a compilation of the entire year's front covers often titled, "The Year in Music" or "Photo Yearbook." Twenty issues were excluded from the population as they featured cover artwork that were already analyzed. Also, the first seven issues (RS1-RS7), were also excluded as they were designed in a newspaper format with no distinct cover photo or cover lines. In total, 27 issues were excluded. Thus, the total population for this study was determined to be 1,171. A sample size calculator with a confidence level of 95% and a confidence interval of ± 3 was used to determine a sample size of 559 (Creative Research Systems, 2012). A random sample was obtained using Excel's random number generator function to randomly select *Rolling Stone* issues from 1967 through 2013.

Coding Procedures

To ensure reliability within this study, precise definitions of categories were developed, along with ensuring that all coders understood the defined categories and the coding process, as per Stemple's suggestions (2003). Code-creation was developed after analyzing dozens of front covers to guarantee that the categories were satisfactory.

Training and coding procedures were refined through this process as well. A total of 559 front covers were analyzed in this study; 559 pieces of cover artwork and 3,655 total cover lines. Two individual coders analyzed 5% (n=28 issues) together during the training. To test coder-reliability, 20% (n=112 issues) were coded independently, and then the results were compared for differences. Coder agreement rate was calculated at 98%. The inter-coder reliability ranged between 86% and 100% in Scott's Pi calculations.

Results

RQ1 asked how *Rolling Stone* framed news and politics through its front cover artwork. To answer this question, descriptive statistics were run. Results show that an overwhelming majority of *Rolling Stone* front cover artwork featured photos of entertainers. From 1967-2013, data showed that 89.9% of covers used photos, and 91.8% of the artwork was focused on entertainment (see Table 1 and Table 2). While these results were expected through observation, no previous research has shown the unbalanced percentage of who is featured on the publications front covers in terms of entertainers versus politician/news figures. Only 5.5% of covers featured a political or news figure, while the remaining 2.7% featured other topics (see Table 1). Thus, *Rolling Stone* cover artwork values entertainers over politics and news figures.

Table 1
Who is Featured on the Front Covers

Time	Entertainment %	Politics/News%	Other %
1968-1972	79	16.1	4.8
1973-1978	89.6	3	7.5
1979-1984	97.4	2.6	0
1985-1990	91.2	2.9	5.9
1991-1996	97.3	1.4	1.4
1997-2002	96.5	2.4	1.2
2003-2008	91	7.7	1.3
2009-2013	88	12	0
TOTAL %	**91.8**	**5.5**	**2.7**

Table 2
Type of Artwork Used on the Front Covers

Time	Photo %	Illustration %
1968-1972	90.3	9.7
1973-1978	68.7	31.3
1979-1984	90.8	9.2
1985-1990	89.7	10.3
1991-1996	95.9	4.1
1997-2002	95.3	4.7
2003-2008	91	9
2009-2013	96	4
TOTAL %	**89.8**	**10.2**

RQ2 asked how *Rolling Stone* frames news through its front cover lines. Each cover line was categorized as either a main cover line, featured cover line, or secondary cover line. To answer this question, again, descriptive statistics were utilized. Results found that 91.4% of the main cover lines were about entertainment, 7% contained a political/news focus and 1.6% were on other topics (see Table 3). As previously stated, main cover lines are typically correlated directly with front cover artwork; these findings support that assumption.

Table 3
Percentages of Categories in the Main Cover Lines

Time	Oth %	Enter.%	Pol %	Envir.%	Race%	Drugs%	LGBTQ%	War%	Gun%	Crime%	Int'l%
1968 - 1972	3.3	80.3	1.6	0	3.3	3.3	0	1.6	0	4.9	1.6
1973 - 1978	7.5	82.1	6	0	1.5	0	1.5	1.5	0	0	0
1979 - 1984	0	96.1	0	2.6	0	0	0	0	1.3	0	0
1985 - 1990	0	97.1	0	0	1.5	0	0	0	0	0	1.5
1991 - 1996	0	95.9	1.4	0	1.4	1.4	0	0	0	0	0
1997 - 2002	0	97.6	2.4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2003 - 2008	1.3	89.7	7.7	0	0	0	0	1.3	0	0	0
2009 - 2013	2	88	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL %	**1.6**	**91.4**	**3.4**	**0.4**	**0.9**	**0.5**	**0.2**	**0.5**	**0.2**	**0.5**	**0.4**

The featured cover line, which was conceptualized as any line of text that is smaller than the main feature, but made to standout through color, banners, or text indicating that it is a "special report," or "special feature," focused primarily on political/news content. Data showed that 54.9% of featured cover lines contained political/news information, 40.8% were entertainment, and 4.3% were other types of information (see Table 4).

Secondary cover lines were 74% entertainment, 20% politics/news, and 6% other (see Table 5). Results also showed that there has been an increase in secondary cover lines over the lifetime of the publication. When politics/news were featured in secondary cover lines, the topics were predominantly politicians/political parties (13.7%), international politics/affairs (6.2%), war/military (5.7%), environment (5.2%) and crime (5.2%).

Table 4
Feature Cover Line Percentage Chart

	1968-1972	1973-1978	1979-1984	1985-1990	1991-1996	1997-2002	2003-2008	2009-2013	Total %
Other %	0	12.5	0	0	6.7	5.6	2	0	**4.3**
Entertainment %	50	37.5	55	50	60	44.4	29.4	23.1	**40.8**
Wall Street/Economy %	0	0	0	0	0	5.6	0	15.4	**2.8**
Politicians %	0	21.9	10	0	3.3	5.6	27.5	11.5	**13.7**
Terrorism/Nat. Sec. %	0	0	0	0	0	5.6	0	12.4	**2.8**
Environment %	0	0	0	0	0	2.8	7.8	23.1	**5.2**
Soc. Justice/Race %	0	3.1	0	14.3	0	0	0	0	**1.4**
Drugs/Legalization %	0	0	1.5	0	0	11.1	2	7.7	**4.7**
LGBTQ/Sexuality %	0	0	0	7.1	0	11.1	5.9	0	**3.8**
War/Military %	0	6.3	0	0	0	0	11.8	15.4	**5.7**
Gun Control %	0	0	0	0	10	0	0	0	**1.4**
Abortion/Women %	0	3.1	0	0	3.3	0	0	0	**0.9**
Cyber Politics	0	0	0	0	0	0	3.9	3.8	**1.4**
Crime %	50	6.3	5	7.1	3.3	8.3	3.9	0	**5.2**
International Pol. %	0	9.4	15	21.4	10	2.8	0	0	**6.2**
Healthcare %	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	**0.5**
Education %	0	0	0	0	3.3	0	0	0	**0.5**

Table 5
Secondary Cover Line Frequency

| Time	Entertainment	Politics/News	Other
1968-1972	108	25	12
1973-1978	113	74	34
1979-1984	133	56	24
1985-1990	198	49	22
1991-1996	236	64	11
1997-2002	325	49	15
2003-2008	227	50	5
2009-2013	165	47	3
TOTAL	1505	414	126
TOTAL %	**74%**	**20%**	**6%**

RQ3 asked if there has been in increase in political/news covers over the lifespan of the publication. In looking at the question, both artwork and cover lines were analyzed. Descriptive statistics and crosstabs analyses were performed to answer this question.

Descriptive statistics results showed that from 1968-1972 the publication featured politics/news artwork 16.1% of the time on its covers. However, by 1973-1978 only 3% of the covers featured politics/news figures. By 1991-1996 this number reach its lowest at 1.4% and remained low until a substantial increase in the early 2000s. In 2009-2013, 12% of the covers featured politics/news (see Table 1). Despite the increase in political/news artwork since the early 1990s, there has been an overall decrease in political/news artwork over the lifetime of the publication (see Table 1).

A Pearson chi-square test was performed to examine the relationship between Time (five year increments) and Main Cover Lines. There was a significant association between Time and Main Cover Lines, X^2 (13, N= 557) = 38.6, p = .000. Results showed that main cover lines have been predominantly focused on entertainment (see Chart 1). Similar to the front cover artwork, the main cover lines from 1968-1972 are the most

political/news focused, and the numbers gradually declined until the 1990s. And again, in

the early 2000s, there is a steep increase in political/news main cover lines, similar to the

front cover artwork.

Chart 1
Main Category Changes Over Time
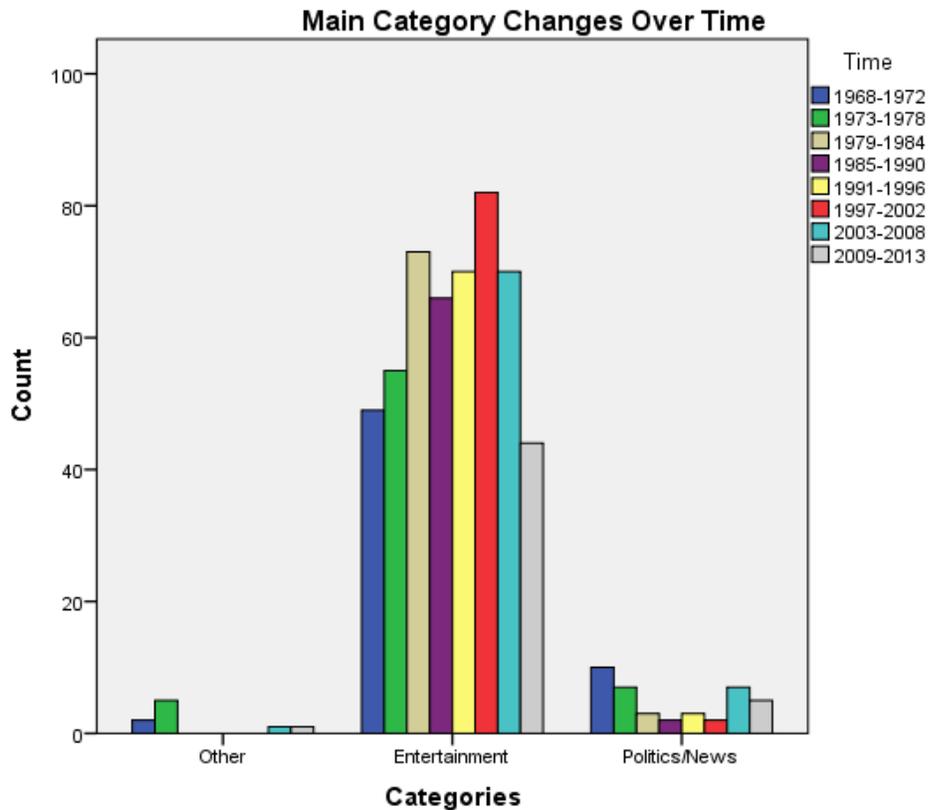
Another Pearson chi-square test was performed to examine the relationship

between Time and Featured Cover Lines. There was a significant association between

Time and Featured Cover Lines, $X2$ (13, N= 213) = 23.85, p = .048, which indicated that

there has been a change in politics and news in the featured cover line category (see Chart

2). From 1968-1972, only one featured cover line had a political/news focus. By 2003-

2008, this number climbed to 35 political/news focused feature cover lines. In total, featured cover lines have increased over the lifetime of the magazine. From 1968-1972, there were only two featured cover lines. By 2003-2008, there were 70 featured cover lines. Overall, the entertainment category remained stable, whereas the featured category had a steep incline.

Chart 2
Featured Category Changes Over Time
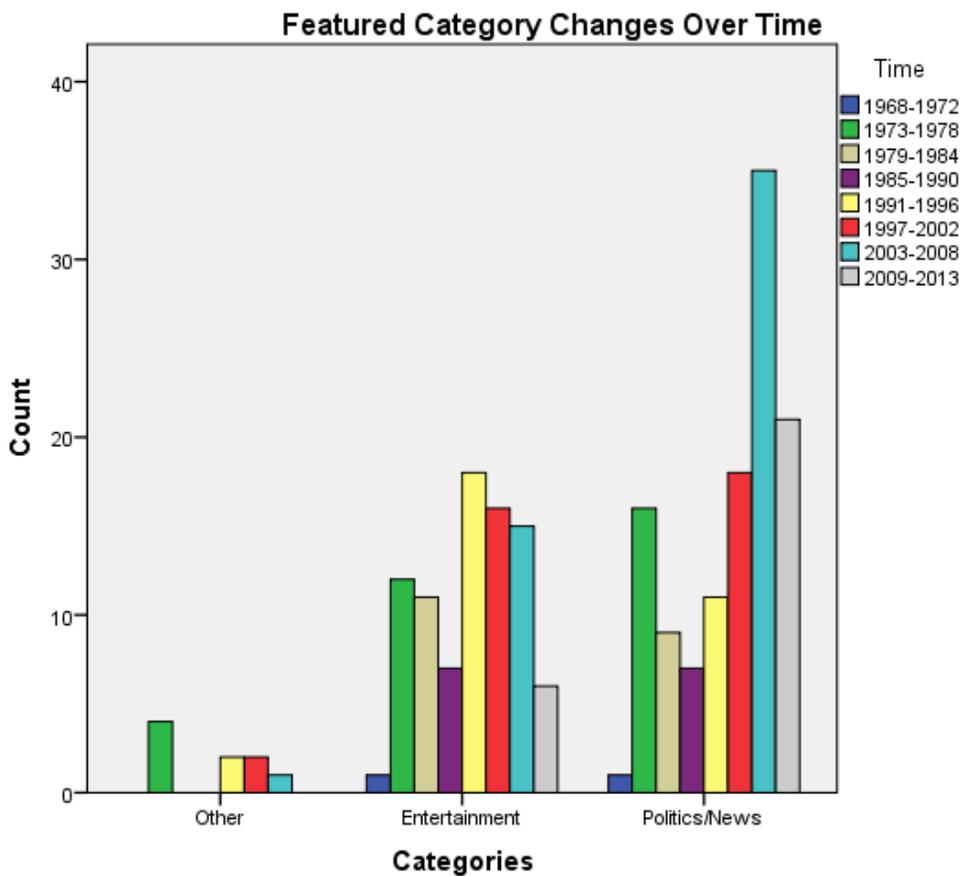
Secondary cover lines have also increased over time, which data shows has increased the number of categories allocated for entertainment (see Table 5). A Pearson

chi-square test was performed to examine this relationship between Time and Political

Secondary Cover Lines. There was no significant association between Time and

Secondary Cover Lines, X2 (2789, N=559) = 23.85, p = .47, indicating no significant

changes political/news coverage overtime in the secondary cover line category. The only

secondary cover line political/news topics that have increased overtime are: Wall

street/economy, terrorism/national security, environment, drugs/legalization and

war/military (see Table 4).

In total, results showed that *Rolling Stone* covers were predominantly focused on

entertainment, with the featured cover line category as the only exception. A trend

appears throughout several of the categories: a gradual decrease in political/news, and

then in the 2000s political/news steadily increases.

Discussion

Cantrel Rosas-Moreno et al. argued that front covers convey the identity of a

publication. Magazine covers have an extensive reach that communicate to a broad

audience, both on newsstands and the internet. This reach is arguably greater than the

content of the magazine, as one must purchase a magazine, or a subscription, to receive

said content. The function of a magazine cover is to capture attention and to

communicate about the inside content. This study examines how *Rolling Stone* covers

convey the publication's identity.

Findings show that *Rolling Stone* cover artwork and text is predominantly focused

on entertainment. *Writer's Market*, a reference for freelance writers, has listed *Rolling

Stone* in its pages for decades, however, it was not until the early 2000s the word

"politics" was mentioned in its listing (Brewer, 2005). While statistically *Rolling Stone* front covers were more political and news focused in the late 1960s, the *Writer's Market* addition of the word politics is indicative of the gradual incline of political *Rolling Stone* front covers since the 2000s.

Research found that there has been an increase in secondary and featured cover lines over the lifetime of the publication. While this increase in secondary cover lines has only allocated room for more entertainment focused text, it shows that the magazine may be attempting to appeal to a wider audience. The significant increase of featured cover lines, directly correlates to more political/news text on the front covers. Although these increases could just be a way for the magazine to get more information on the cover, the increase of political featured cover lines indicates an increased focus in politics and news.

Despite the increased featured cover lines, findings show that the August 1, 2013 Boston Marathon bomber cover fell against the identity of the publication because *Rolling Stone* is proportionately *not* political through its front covers. However, this cover featured Tsarnaev both in artwork and in the main cover line – which is typically designated for entertainers/entertainment. This key finding suggests that in this instance, the cover went against the publications norms and traditions.

While the magazine is an award-winning publication, it generally does not feature award-winning topics on the front covers—especially as extensively as the Tsarnaev cover. In 1986, *Rolling Stone* won a National Magazine Award for reporting for its coverage on the AIDS epidemic. "The Plague Years," written by David Black, ran on March 28, 1985 (issue RS944). The cover artwork on this issue features actors from the popular television show Miami Vice. The main cover line is also designated to the Miami

Vice actors. The only mention of Black's article is in a secondary cover line. In 2008 *Rolling Stone* won another Nation Magazine Award for Matt Taibbi's article titled "Obama's Moment" in the columns and commentary category. The issue was released on December 27, 2007 (issue RS1094). This cover features twelve photos of celebrities, and while Barack Obama is mentioned in a secondary cover line, it does not mention Taibbi's article. The July 8, 2010 issue (RS1108), featured Michael Hastings' profile on General Stanley McChrystal. This story is mentioned in a secondary cover line, below a nearly nude photo of Lady Gaga, and a main cover line exclaiming, "Lady Gaga Tells All." In each of these cover examples, the award-winning journalism comes secondary to the entertainer. In a study analyzing letters-to-the-editors of *Rolling Stone,* Lambiase (2005) cited a "crossroads" in the magazine's identity. As it shifts in function between pop-culture personage and a journalistic force, Lambaise suggested that the magazine conduct research from its readers to "solidify" its identity (Lambaise, p. 12).

Does the juxtaposition of these award-winning pieces alongside celebrity photos delegitimize the publication in American media? Or, is this just a mastered marketing plan, as the function of a cover is inherently to attract the public enough to purchase a copy? While this study cannot answer these questions based on its findings, one can view *Rolling Stone* as an exemplar of the fusion between politics and entertainment so often seen in U.S. culture.

Just as rock n' roll in the late 1960s and 1970s, and the counterculture movement morphed into a political entity, it is arguable that entertainment too has an inherent political nature. In a world where television shows, celebrities, award shows, and even cookie brands take political stances on controversial topics, such as marriage equality, it

has become increasingly difficult to cover entertainers without mentioning their political views. Celebrities like Russell Brand can repurpose their "celebrity capital" to meet a political end (Arthur & Shaw, 2015). The popularity of television shows like The Daily Show, show the significant synthesis occurring between politics, news and entertainment (Feldman, 2013). Just as *Rolling Stone* morphed rock n' roll and politics in the 1960s, it is continuing to seam modern entertainment and political news today.

While news organization have always covered entertainment, it is predominantly entertainment content with news as a secondary focus that could be perceived as less credible by the public. This could indeed be a possible explanation for the backlash surrounding the August 1, 2013 Boston Marathon bomber cover. The public viewed the magazine as predominantly entertainment focused.

Conclusion

Rolling Stone scholar Robert Draper cited a "war between its enduring conscience and its boundless commercial appetite" (1990, p. 16). Results from this thesis study show that *Rolling Stone* covers have primarily been focused on entertainment, despite categorizing itself as a political publication. Even in issues containing award-winning journalism, the magazine neglected to feature these articles through artwork and text.

Rolling Stone often features U.S. presidents on its front covers. Valenzuela and McCombs argue that the president is "the nation's number one agenda setter," as everything the president does is considered newsworthy (1996, p. 97). Jann Wenner has interviewed President Barack Obama four times, and Obama has graced *Rolling Stone's* cover ten times (Wenner, 2016). Following the historic 2016 Presidential election,

Obama's first interview was with Wenner, the morning following the election. This seems to demonstrate a close relationship between the publication and former President Obama. Newspapers and magazines regularly cover the president, and *Rolling Stone* is no exception. However, Obama made a statement when he selected *Rolling Stone* as his platform during this notable time in history. U.S. presidents are the ultimate agenda setters, and when Obama spoke following the election, he used *Rolling Stone* as his platform. Through its use of front cover artwork and text, it is too easy to dismiss the publication as an entertainment rag, instead of a legitimate political news source, offered inside its pages. Research shows a gradual incline in political and news covers since the early 2000s. Given *Rolling Stone's* extensive coverage of the 2016 U.S. presidential election, one could anticipate that *Rolling Stone* will continue to become more politically focused.

In a world where politics and entertainment have become blurred and intertwined, it is important to question and analyze the legitimacy and contributions of pop cultural artifacts. *Rolling Stone* morphs entertainment and political news in a very specific and unique way. It is important to understand how this publication contributes to American pop culture and political news.

Limitations of this study include limited access to *Rolling Stone* covers from 2013 to 2017. The verifiable coverwall available ends at the end of 2013. Also, while this thesis study qualitatively analyses questions, researchers note that it is not possible to know the effect of *Rolling Stone* on the public, and how people perceive it.

Further studies should focus on morphing the plentiful research on the sexualization of *Rolling Stone* covers, and the political research done here. Particularly

asking if the sexualization of the front covers delegitimizes the perceived authority of *Rolling Stone* to report political news. Further research should also explore and compare the political content inside of the magazine to the political/non-political covers. Research could also survey perceptions of the magazine, particularly following the highly publicized "A Rape on Campus," which consisted of false rape claims among University of Virginia students, which the publication neglected to fact check.

There is a significant synthesis occurring between politics, news and entertainment. This research reveals how magazines can use their covers to establish legitimacy in American media.

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Content Analysis: Coding Sheet

1.) Month/Day/Year:

2.) Issue Number:

3.) Who/What is on the cover?

      0. Other   1. Entertainer   2. Political/News Figure

4.) Is the cover a photo or illustration?

      1. Photo   2. Illustration

5.) Which category does this main feature belong to?

      0. Other

      1.Entertainment

      2. Wall Street and the economy

      3. Politicians/political parties

      4. Terrorism/National Security

      5. Environmental

      6. Social justice/ race

      7. Prison reform

      8. Drugs /legalization

      9. LGBTQ/Sexuality

      10. War/military

      11. NRA/gun control

      12. Police brutality

      13. Abortion/women's rights

      14. Cyber politics

      15. Crime/news tragedies

      16. International politics/affairs

      17. Healthcare

      18. Education

6.) If applicable, which category does the featured cover line belong to?

      0. Other

      1.Entertainment

      2. Wall Street and the economy

3. Politicians/political parties

4. Terrorism/National Security

5. Environmental

6. Social justice/ race

7. Prison reform

8. Drugs /legalization

9. LGBTQ/Sexuality

10. War/military

11. NRA/gun control

12. Police brutality

13. Abortion/women's rights

14. Cyber politics

15. Crime/news tragedies

16. International politics/affairs

17. Healthcare

18. Education

7.) Number of secondary cover lines on this page:

8.) What is the frequency of the secondary cover lines?

0. Other

1.Entertainment

2. Wall Street and the economy

3. Politicians/political parties

4. Terrorism/National Security

5. Environmental

6. Social justice/ race

7. Prison reform

8. Drugs /legalization

9. LGBTQ/Sexuality

10. War/military

11. NRA/gun control

12. Police brutality

13. Abortion/women's rights

14. Cyber politics

15. Crime/news tragedies

16. International politics/affairs

17. Healthcare

18. Education