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Inoculation Theory: A Theoretical and Practical Framework  
for Conferring Resistance to Pack Journalism Tendencies

Gerald-Mark Breen

Jonathan Matusitz

University of Central Florida

**Gerald-Mark Breen** is a research assistant in the Department of Public Affairs at the University of Central Florida. He specializes in health communication, social policy, and media studies.

**Jonathan Matusitz, Ph.D.**, is an Assistant Professor in the Nicholson School of Communication at the University of Central Florida. His academic interests are media studies, organizational communication, and communication & technology

Please address correspondence to Dr. Matusitz at 1176 Amanda Kay Circle, Sanford, FL 32771, ☎ (407) 531-5459. E-mail: [matusitz@gmail.com](mailto:matusitz@gmail.com).

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the nature of inoculation theory, a process through which attitude change can be resisted in the face of counterattitudinal communication intended to convert or shift existing attitudes, and how it applies to pack journalism, an unethical media practice where herds of journalists repeatedly and widely cover one particular story and storm the targets (i.e., people, buildings, etc.) with their overwhelming presence. Based on inoculation theory's theoretical assumptions, and by deriving concepts and designs from previous inoculation studies, the authors urge scholars to implement a viable theoretical and practical platform by which inoculation treatments can be executed on journalists to render maximum attitudinal resistance toward the copycat (and unethical) element of pack journalism coverage.

**Key words:** ethics, inoculation, journalism, media, news, pack journalism, reporters

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Introduction

Pack journalism is an unethical media practice where herds of journalists repeatedly and widely cover one particular story and storm the targets (i.e., people, buildings, etc.) with their overwhelming presence (Frank, 2003). One usual element of this pack journalism coverage is the sharing and copying of others' news sources (that is, words, titles, and content) and the eventual reporting of that news in a similar if not identical fashion as the others' reports (Kann, 1994). This tends to lead to an elimination of independent reporting (Mundy, 1995). Journalists' attitudes can be made to resist the influence of such lazy and convenient reporting through a well-established, communication process of systematic resistance: inoculation (McGuire, 1961; Pfau, 1995). Although a great deal of literature emphasizes the unethical nature of pack journalism coverage (Berkowitz, 1997; Brock, 1993; Crouse, 1973; Frank, 2003; Gordon et al., 1999; Kann, 1994; Matusitz & Breen, 2005; Mundy, 1995), as well as the need for more independent reporting (Crouse, 1973; Lule, 1992; Stone, 1967), journalism scholars demand that more research be done on pack journalism to better identify its implications and intricacies (Frank, 2003). In addition, since Eagly and Chaiken (1993) argue that more exploration on inoculation is required for further understanding of this theory in practice, this study breaks new ground by attempting to evaluate the relative merits of inoculation in conferring resistance to pack journalist practices.

In view of the fact that a certain number of journalists recognize the wrongfulness of copying others' sources (i.e., plagiarism) and have attitudes against blatant acts of pack

journalism, these journalists are ripe for undergoing inoculation treatments. The results of these treatments should include immunity/resistance to pressures to copy others' reports. This ultimately facilitates independent reporting and minimizes the tendency or desire to resort to copycat pack journalism coverage. As such, this study first examines the nature of inoculation theory, that is, its main elements (threat and refutational preemption) and its three stages (warning, weak attack, and active defending). Second, this study provides a detailed description of pack journalism and relevant cases that illustrate its copycat and unethical nature. Based on inoculation theory's theoretical assumptions (Compton & Pfau, 2004; McGuire, 1964), and by deriving concepts and designs from previous inoculation studies, such as studies on smoking prevention (Pfau, 1995; Pfau & Van Bockern, 1994), the authors urge scholars to implement a viable theoretical and practical platform by which inoculation treatments can be executed on journalists to render maximum attitudinal resistance toward the copycat (and unethical) element of pack journalism coverage.

#### The Nature of Inoculation Theory:

##### Description and Previous Studies

By focusing on journalists who are regularly exposed to news assignments that compromise their abilities to independently report news – i.e., because they have a hard time doing so due to the pack journalism phenomenon that pervades the vast majority of media outlets (particularly newspaper organizations) – applying inoculation on those journalists may be a successful tactic in strengthening their attitudes against copycat reporting and may contribute to this ideal of independent reporting, otherwise known as enterprise journalism (Crouse, 1973).

In this section, the authors give a detailed analysis of the nature of inoculation theory by explaining two main points. First, a general description of inoculation theory is provided from a variety of scholarly sources. Second, previous inoculation studies are addressed to demonstrate the viability of this theory in multiple applications, including the one this study emphasizes. In short, these two subsections are designed to educate the reader as to the nature of the theory and its general application power in building resistance to persuasion, social influences, and counterattitudinal attacks.

### *Inoculation Theory*

People can learn to protect their existing attitudes from counterattitudinal influences (or persuasion). Put differently, peoples' attitudes can be inoculated against persuasive communications (e.g., arguments or social influences) that are directed at them by some sources (e.g., peers, journalistic leaders, commercials, authority figures, editors, etc.) (Matusitz & Breen, 2005). Inoculation theory was officially coined by McGuire (1961, 1964). McGuire described it as a process through which attitude change can be resisted in the face of counterattitudinal communication intended to convert or shift existing attitudes (McGuire, 1964; Miller, 2002; Pfau & Burgoon, 1988). As the theory developed, it became more elaborately defined as a method of fortifying existing attitudes to decline persuasive communications before those messages generated and presented themselves to the recipient(s) (Compton & Pfau, 2004; Matusitz & Breen, 2005; Miller, 2002; Pfau, 1992).

Inoculation systematically provides information to receivers prior to persuasive communication. This allows for some expectation that the information will reinforce the receiver's resistance to future counterattitudinal strikes (Borchers, 2001; Miller, 2002).

Inoculation theory also suggests that by methodically delivering low doses of contrasting perspectives, the audience members will develop a stronger immunity and, consequently, will diminish or minimize their responses to those discordant perspectives (Infante, Rancer, & Womack, 1997; McGuire, 1964; Pfau, 1995).

#### *Attitude as a Component of Inoculation*

Before inoculation theory can be described further, a solid grasp of what attitude is and how it is generally represented to the scholarly and academic communities is necessary. Why is this? The reason lies in the fact that attitude is a critical concept that is deeply embedded in the model of inoculation theory (Compton & Pfau, 2004; McGuire, 1964; Pfau, 1992, 1995). As such, attitude can be described as a collection of opinions about a specific situation or circumstance (i.e., religion, practices, behaviors, dress styles, etc.) weighted by the evaluation of those opinions (Ajzen, 1988; Miller, 2002). In light of this definition, coupled with the concept of inoculating peoples' existing attitudes, humans in particular can undergo carefully designed inoculation treatments that maximize the strength of their current attitudes and enable them to refuse embracing communicative messages that are attitudinally dissimilar (Breen & Matusitz, 2005; Matusitz & Breen, 2005).

#### *Elements of Inoculation: Threat and Refutational Preemption*

Besides a general framework of inoculation theory, it [the theory] has two significant elements: threat and refutational preemption. According Pfau and Van Bockern (1994), both of these elements are necessary in order to confer resistance to subsequent persuasive messages. Nonetheless, the first key element to inoculation theory is threat. According to Pfau and Burgoon (1988), a threat consists of a recognition or

perception that an attitudinal challenge may be impending. More complexly, the threat element of an inoculation persuasion has the power to “trigger the receiver’s motivation to bolster attitudes and gives inoculation its distinctive power” (Pfau, 1995, p. 101). In essence, a threat stimulates resistance to the contrasting persuasive communication (Breen & Matusitz, 2005; Matusitz & Breen, 2005).

The second key element to inoculation theory is refutational preemption (Miller, 2002; Pfau, 1992). According to Pfau (1995), refutational preemption is represented by potential attacks to current attitudes that are initially addressed and subsequently preempted. In this regard, when an audience member receives a persuasive communication, he or she must immediately cast the idea out from his or her attitudinal structure.

#### *Three Stages of Inoculation: Warning, Weak Attack, and Active Defending*

Beyond the two key components (or elements) of inoculation theory, three stages also exist with regard to effective inoculation treatments. According to McGuire (1964) and Pfau (1992), the three stages to efficacious inoculation include (1) the warning, (2) the weak attack, and (3) the active defending. In reference to the first stage of inoculation, that is, the warning, the participant undergoing inoculation treatment is apprised that there will be an upcoming argument and, consequently, he or she should be ready for a counterattitudinal attack (Pfau, 1992, 1995). With respect to the second stage of inoculation, that is, the weak attack, the participant is lightly challenged, an approach that allows the individual to readily reject the argument (Pfau, 1995). In regard to the third stage of inoculation, that is, the active defending, the participant must successfully

protect his or her beliefs with simple defense (Compton & Pfau, 2004; McGuire, 1964). These stages enable effective inoculation.

### *Why Is Inoculation Effective?*

The question arises as to why inoculation is such an effective strategy. The reason lies in the fact that it first allows people to be influenced by persuasion. Then, in effect, this persuasive attempt will induce the inoculated participants to contemplate and contrive rebuttals (Miller, 2002; Matusitz & Breen, 2005). Ultimately, when these participants are faced with the same arguments in the future, they will generally disregard or ignore the arguments because their strengthened – or inoculated – attitudes both unconsciously and consciously resist them (Miller, 2002; Pfau & Burgoon, 1988; Pfau et al., 2001). In essence, inoculation is a sort of mental immunization process against external, attitudinal influences that are typically undesirable to those who seek to be (and sustain such) morally or ethically sound.

### *The Broad Scope of Inoculation Studies*

Inoculation has been both theoretically and empirically applied as a resistance strategy (e.g., to social influences, persuasion, etc.) in a variety of contexts, many of which have demonstrated inoculation as an efficacious stratagem. Some of these studies include alcohol consumption prevention (Godbold & Pfau, 2000), commercial advertising (Pfau, 1992), gang prevention (Breen & Matusitz, 2005), political campaign issues (Pfau & Burgoon, 1988), public relations issues (Wan & Pfau, 2001), sexual harassment (Matusitz & Breen, 2005), and smoking prevention (Pfau & Van Bockern, 1994; Szabo & Pfau, 2001). As we can see, a tremendous amount of research has already been conducted on inoculation theory and its impact on inducing resistance to



counterattitudinal attacks. Interestingly, the focus of this study, that is, the potential use of inoculation in conferring resistance to pack journalism practices, is the first to date to examine the connection and viability of inoculation theory to this context of journalism practices. The next section provides a detailed analysis of pack journalism, the practice that this study aims to minimize through applying a practical form of inoculation.

#### A Detailed Analysis of Pack Journalism

In this section, the authors provide a detailed analysis of pack journalism by examining two of its important elements. First, a general and primarily negative description of pack journalism is provided from a variety of scholarly sources, including straight definitions and commentaries portraying it. Second, past and present cases in which pack journalism occurred are identified to illustrate the many negative implications and outcomes created through such a media practice. Through this analysis, the authors attempt to illuminate the near pure negativity of such a media practice, and how inoculation may just work to minimize such blatant acts of pack journalism.

#### *What Is Pack Journalism?*

Pack journalism can be thoroughly explained as a media practice that takes place when a substantial number of reporters (i.e., anchors, newspaper crew, camera equipment people, etc.) passionately pursues one incredible story, fills the site with their overwhelmingly thick presence, and frequently releases similar if not identical stories (Crouse, 1973; Frank, 2003; Kolodzy, 2004; Mundy, 1995; Vincent, Crow, & Davis, 1997). Quite simply, Kann (1994) describes pack journalism as a few dozen reporters who “chase the same story together” (p. 2).

In line with these contentions, peer influence is a major factor in pack journalism behavior (Crouse, 1973). According to Mundy (1995), pack journalism is nothing more than “mindless, ruthless copycat behavior sprung of fear and laziness” (p. 15). What oftentimes happens in these cases is that the reporters share and copy each other’s notes and ideas, lazily refrain from writing up their own perceptions, and agree to the validity of the sources without verifying them (Crouse, 1973). They report the news in media outlets (i.e., newspapers, magazines, etc.) in a one-track fashion. Consequently, the story’s common sense, or logic, as well as its component of independence and fairness, disappear. Due to this fact, Kann (1994) sadly professes that these journalism and media standards “seem to drop to the lowest common denominator” (p. 2). Plus, Vincent, Crow, and Davis (1997) support this claim by remarking that stories that are mass produced (and distributed) by pack journalists are one-sided or one-dimensional, lacking a variety of perspectives, opinions, or facts. As such, it becomes understandable why renowned media critics and scholars reprehend pack journalism because of its flagrant exclusion of independent reporting (Frank, 2003; Gordon et al., 1999; Kann, 1994).

Given all this, Ben-David (2000) describes the rationale and ramifications of pack journalism as follows: “For some reporters, it is easier to file the same story as their colleagues. They can share the research, the cab fare, the information, and the work – and in some cases the ignorance (p. 1). Similarly, Kalb (1994) states that,

for those who still see conspiracy in examples of overlapping reporting, there is a possible explanation in what is called “pack journalism,” reporters who band together and cover the same story, the same sources, in the same way. Covering a campaign or the White House or any other story where a horde of journalists rush

after a single source can often yield the meager one-dimensional news product associated with “pack journalism.” But, though a number of prominent news organizations may highlight similar stories, using virtually identical sources, this is not to be mistaken for conspiracy. It is only lazy journalism (p. 1).

Pack journalists are often the real villains; they turn trivial news stories into national concerns through the cowardly strategy of repetition and emphasis. It is not that events about Woody and Mia or Prince Charles and Princess Di are not newsworthy. On the contrary, they should be of concern, but not to the exclusion of everything else (Saltzman, 1993). By the same token, those celebrities are often the first casualties of pack journalists themselves (Cloud & Kamlani, 1990).

#### *Examples of Pack Journalism*

Pack journalism has occurred in a large number of events across the globe and has generally been viewed as producing negative outcomes in these cases. From what can be seen, reporters exchange each other’s notes, plagiarize news releases (including titles, content, and style, from other dominant news sources), and ignore the benefit of substantiating the sources via independent research (Ben-David, 2000). For example, the Scott Peterson murder trial received such significant coverage (Rooney, 2004) and witnessed global plagiarism of news stories, their titles, and information about the key members in the trial (i.e., defendant, victim’s family, attorneys, jurors, etc). From textually analyzing a variety of news sources, the newspaper articles were practically identical in language and bias, and the information provided was moot and unfinished at best (Rooney, 2004).

Ohio's media coverage of the Lucasville prison riot of 1993 was also a prime example of pack journalism coverage, not to mention a clear negative reflection of what lies within such reporting. This riot resulted in a prison-wide uproar and ended with several dead inmates and guards. In reference to the pack journalism coverage this riot received, Hallett (2003) stated that "never in this state's history has an event been covered so relentlessly or so massively, or, as it turned out, so badly" (p. 5). Hallett (2003) went on to point out that since scarce information was provided to journalists needing reports on the status of the riot, "rumors were widely reported, potentially harming delicate negotiations with inmates and endangering the lives of hostages" (p. 5). Porter (2003) mentioned that the incidents that transpired epitomized the "perils of pack journalism, of competing reporters hitting on one theme and then running around like lemmings trying to track down atrocities, while editors back in the newsrooms push them, paranoid that another paper or station will beat them" (p. 1). As shown in this case, some of the travesties of pack journalism are that rumors can be spread, incorrect information can be published (Crouse, 1973), and as the worst consequence, deaths can occur.

#### *Cases of Copycat Reporting*

Cases of copycat reporting (or, pack journalism) are certainly not few in number. Other fresh cases of such reporting practices include the Michael Jackson sexual molestation case (Broder, 2003; The Chicago Tribune, 2003; Madigan & Carter, 2003) and the Tsunami destruction of Southern Asia (The Bangkok Post, 2004; The Business Standard, 2004; The Chicago Tribune, 2004; Djuhari, 2004). Historically speaking, pack journalism coverage that involved such copycat reporting also included, in a nutshell, the

murder of James Byrd, Jr. (Stewart, 1999), the homicide of police officers at the US Capitol Building (Arterburn, 1998), and the massacre of teachers and pupils at Thurston High School (Postman, 1998). Rash, rampant, and oftentimes imprecise reporting was practiced, therefore resulting in abysmal outcomes.

The above section identified pack journalism as a negative and unethical media practice. Some of the downsides of pack journalism include its elimination of fair and independent reporting, its ability to spread rumors, and its potential to create devastating outcomes (i.e., harm, death, etc.). In the next section, an inoculation platform by which pack journalism may be reduced is explained in detail.

#### How to Apply the Use of Inoculation on Journalists against Pack Journalism

This section broadly describes this new framework for applying inoculation theory, explains why traditional inoculation should be used instead of social inoculation, proposes proper timing and sequential reinforcement as a way to administer inoculation, incorporates the factors of self-esteem and locus of control as preventive measures against pack journalism, and emphasizes the importance of using normative appeals to display opinions held by familiar others (i.e., colleagues, close friends) about a particular unethical behavior (i.e., plagiarizing other journalists' stories).

#### *Broad Description of This New Framework*

To create a solid framework aimed at preventing pack journalism tendencies from affecting ethical journalistic practices, methodologies will be borrowed from the inoculation studies on smoking prevention conducted by Pfau and Dillard (2000) and Pfau and Van Bockern (1994). In the first studies on smoking prevention, the researchers

found that individual inoculation treatments cultivated resistance 84 weeks after the initial treatment. Still, the potency of the effects minimized over time. Ultimately, the results of the study demonstrated that the reinforcement videos that were given to the subjects eight weeks after the first treatment did not provide any added boost. In the earliest study, Pfau and Van Bockern (1994) gathered that this lack of inoculation achievement might have been the result of wrong delivery times of the boosters. This also led to their suspicion that had reinforcing videos been utilized at another time, greater success would have been seen in their inoculation treatments (Compton & Pfau, 2005).

Based on the above-mentioned studies involving smoking prevention, the premise and protocol of this study's framework for applying inoculation theory can logically be transferred over into the realm of pack journalism prevention. As such, by following these notes, inoculated pack journalists who undergo regular reinforcements should demonstrate increased resistance to copycat or plagiaristic note-taking, than those pack journalists who do not receive such treatment. Although Crouse (1973) maintains that independent journalists are hard to find and few in number, and even though he asserts that "even the most independent journalist cannot completely escape the pressures of the pack" (p. 15), there is, indeed, a way to increase the number of these scarce few: inoculation. By targeting journalists who are frequently exposed to news assignments that compromise their abilities to independently report news – i.e., because they find it difficult to do so due to the pack journalism phenomenon that pervades the vast majority of media outlets (particularly newspaper organizations) – applying inoculation on those journalists may be a successful strategy to reinforce their attitudes against copycat reporting and may contribute to this ideal of independent reporting (Crouse, 1973).

*Traditional Inoculation as Opposed to Social Inoculation*

In addition, recall a statement that was made earlier: peer influence is a major factor in pack journalism behavior (Crouse, 1973). Since peer influence contributes to this behavior, one could think that the concept of “social inoculation” (Kirby & Barth, 1991) could be used to explain these socially inspired actions. However, social inoculation is not as effective as the traditional inoculation strategy, for three reasons. First, social inoculation merely combines portions from both McGuire’s inoculation (1961, 1964) and Bandura’s constructs of social learning (Wallack & Corbett, 1987). Second, the threat component (McGuire, 1961), or the antecedent to refutational preemption, is not considered or included. Third, although social inoculation employs a vast array of strategies, such as slide and video displays and simulations (Flay, 1985), it has been shown to be unfruitful in terms of rendering acceptable levels of inoculation (e.g., short-lived effects, and low general effect) (Best et al., 1988).

For all these reasons, social inoculation will be discarded, and, instead, the normal version of inoculation will be suggested as part of the appropriate platform this study proposes with regard to applying inoculation in the prevention of pack journalism practices. As suggested by Pfau and Dillard (2000), an appropriate inoculation of subjects could and should include basic 5-10-minute videos (presentations). As based on previous research findings, inoculation should render relatively strong outcomes (e.g., inoculation participants should demonstrate more resistance to pack journalism practices than those who do not undergo inoculation) on subjects through this video presentation process. Moreover, similar strategies that could be used might involve the use of actual journalists

in a simulation-like atmosphere, engaging an inoculation framework – applying similar steps in video presentations – to achieve the same results.

#### *Proper Timing and Sequential Reinforcement*

As shown in multiple inoculation studies (Pfau, 1995; Pfau & Dillard, 2000; Pfau & Van Bockern, 1994), the right timing for delivering pretreatments with respect to succeeding attacks is a critical factor to take into account when administering inoculation. Even though Miller and Baron (1973) contend that threat is a crucial component to inoculation, and although Pfau et al. (1990) argue that inoculation degenerates with time, a pause is imperative between the pretreatment and the attack so that counterarguments can be formed. However, since it is impossible to ascertain the precise timing sequences for inoculation treatments, devising the best timing sequences for this study stipulates that the protocols and procedures used from previous inoculation studies be derived. Plus, as Manis and Blake (1963) point out, resistance formed by diversified inoculation pretreatments increased following a short halt before an attack.

#### *Receiver Variables in Reactance: Self-Esteem and Locus of Control*

Self-esteem and locus of control are dual receiver variables that increase the likelihood that influence attempts could render reactance (Pfau & Dillard, 2000). As background information, individuals who carry higher levels of internal locus of control have a greater propensity to observe themselves as in control of their actions. Contrariwise, individuals who carry higher levels of external locus of control have a greater proclivity to believe that external variables are in control of or greatly contribute to their actions. Moyer (1978) explains this pattern quite nicely. He argues that humans who have sizable levels of internal locus of control prize their personal freedom and



hence have higher reactance. To strengthen this point, he also contends that humans who carry high levels of external locus of control typically lack sufficient esteem of their personal freedom, and naturally, have diminished reactance. Since this study targets adults who are typically professional journalists, the authors propose that preventive measures be applied on the participants who have stronger external locus of control statuses. Given this proposition, the authors suggest that inoculation should bring a more puissant effect on those journalists who have higher external locus of control statuses, or those who are more susceptible to being influenced by pack journalists and copycat, or plagiaristic-style, reporting.

Interestingly, the authors also put forward or posit the idea that self-esteem is an important factor in this equation. As known by inoculation theory scholars (i.e., Compton & Pfau, 2005; Matusitz & Breen, 2005), a positive correlation exists between those who carry higher internal locus of control levels and those who carry higher degrees of self-esteem. Put differently, the higher the self-esteem, the higher the internal locus of control. Now comes the time to explain what self-esteem is. According to Coopersmith (1967), self-esteem can be described as the degree to which a human “believes himself to be capable, significant, successful, and worthy (p. 5). In linking self-esteem to inoculation, Pfau (1992) concluded that inoculation messages infuse the greatest level of resistance in individuals with substandard self-esteem. More importantly, as suggested by Crouse (1973) as well as Marris and Thornham (2000), a lack of self-esteem or perceived journalistic autonomy in [pack] journalists also contributes to the choice of copying others’ work and publishing it without any revisions or signs of independent reporting. Hence, based on the aforesaid findings and suggestions, engaging inoculation should

produce the following effects on pack journalistic subjects: (1) pack journalists undergoing an inoculation treatment who rate higher in external locus of control should demonstrate greater resistance to copycat, or plagiaristic, note-taking and reporting; and (2) pack journalists undergoing an inoculation treatment who rate lower in self-esteem should exhibit greater resistance to the same pack journalism practices.

#### *Normative Appeals and Inoculating Pack Journalists*

One type of appeal that works well in inoculation studies is called normative appeals. Normative appeals are simply appeals that display opinions held by familiar others (i.e., colleagues, close friends) about a particular behavior (Blumenthal, Christian, & Slemrod, 2001). Besides the unethical nature of pack journalism and the numerous consequences it can reap to those involved, journalists can be greatly influenced by how these other people perceive the plagiaristic element of pack journalism and convey those ideas or perceptions to them with some attempt at influence. The veracity of this claim is reinforced by a comparable analysis done by Greene et al. (1997) regarding condom use and AIDS, and was mentioned by Pfau and Dillard (2000), as well as Breen and Matusitz (2005), in their inoculation studies. Since numerous studies using inoculation have successfully applied normative appeals (Pfau & Dillard, 2000), they seem to fit cozily in the context of preventing pack journalism practices, particularly the copycat-reporting element of it. By taking this into account, this framework suggests that normative inoculation appeals can cause pack journalists to resist such plagiaristic tendencies and behavior without inducing reactance.

## Methods

To witness the successful results of such a study, the methodology should follow a longitudinal analysis frame similar to Pfau and Dillard's (2000) inoculation study on smoking prevention. In this study, pack journalism prevention is the focus. So why is it appropriate to draw from former studies? In particular, Pfau and Dillard's (2000) methodological structure was solid, and, as such, the results yielded were arguably valid. Plus, Breen and Matusitz (2005) derived concepts from Pfau and Van Bockern's (1994) study, which later led to future inoculation studies (see Matustiz & Breen, 2006). Nevertheless, the longitudinal examination proposed here should focus on the effectiveness of inoculation pretreatment and reinforcement videos in conferring resistance to plagiaristic tendencies and behaviors in designated pack journalists. As opposed to conducting a quantitative analysis that engages sophisticated statistical analyses – such as employing a 5 (experimental condition: inoculation, inoculation plus one reinforcement, inoculation plus two reinforcements, inoculation plus three reinforcements, and no inoculation/control condition) x 2 (content focus: social-based appeal versus normative appeal) factorial archetype (i.e., Pfau & Dillard, 2000) – the overall efficacy of inoculation should be evaluated by looking at the similarities and differences in the attitudes and behavioral dispositions of pack journalists who undergo treatments versus those who do not, at 1-, 2-, 4-, and 8-month intervals. As such, creating experimental protocols (i.e., treatments) is necessary at this point.

For example, inoculation consists of a series of steps in which the subject or participant – that is, a journalist – becomes increasingly resistant to influence. A scenario that could attain such influence, in terms of sustaining journalistic ethics, is one that

consists of making the journalist aware that pack journalism is a practice that falls into the category of dishonesty and that is antithetical to proper journalism practices (i.e., independent reporting or enterprise journalism). By making this notion salient in the journalist's mind, the next stage would be to introduce the journalist to a sort of temptation – via simulation in a controlled environment or using comparable video presentations – that could sway the individual into committing an act of pack journalism (or that which involves plagiarism, publishing news or information without first verifying the sources, etc.).

This temptation, as a situation, could be observed as a scene – set up by the researchers – in which a herd of journalists are physically present at a site of a big story; the journalist [the subject or participant] who is targeted for inoculation is offered the opportunity of committing acts consistent with unethical pack journalism practices. Because the journalist is aware that the scene or experiment is designed or intended to test the journalists' resistance to influence, the journalist should be able to mindfully avoid succumbing to the trap of journalizing in this unethical fashion. Once the journalist is fully aware that these are the circumstances surrounding the test, the journalist will conscientiously refrain from the unethical practice. This segment to the inoculation series could be perceived as the weak attack. The active defending could be similarly achieved by repeating this scenario, but with perhaps greater pressure and influence from the surrounding pack. If inoculation is effective, those pack journalists who undergo treatments will be more likely to resist plagiaristic or copycat note-taking influences and actions, less positive about such unethical pack reporting practices, and, ultimately, less likely to partake in such behavior.

## Procedures

Creating the platform for this inoculation campaign is the next important step. As implicitly suggested in previously mentioned studies, an inoculation campaign on pack journalists would best work by selecting participants who are self-professed pack journalists at newspapers. This can be discovered through questionnaires identifying the attributes of pack journalists and if such journalists admit to copycat reporting. Next, 50% of the participants should be randomly placed in a pack journalism education course during the first month and the other 50% of the participants should be randomly placed in a pack journalism education course during the second month. The study should include pack journalists who are involved in this course during the first month of the study. Obviously, the newspapers where these journalists work would need to provide consent to allow their journalists to partake in this study. Locations where the newspaper journalists should be selected should be from larger, metropolitan cities, where big events are covered frequently.

Before engaging the participants in the inoculation treatments, they should be surveyed beforehand to collect standard demographic information, evaluate self-esteem and locus of control, and gauge attitudes about pack journalism, its ethical implications, and whether they participate in and how they feel about engaging in pack journalism. After the administration of the survey, participants should then be grouped off into pack journalism education classes and then placed into the social-based or normative inoculation condition, or as controls. Each participant in the treatment condition should watch an inoculation video during the first injection. Also, 75% of treated participants should watch one or more reinforcement videos, delivered at 2- to 3-week intervals.

Treatment and control participants should be periodically or regularly evaluated to check their attitudes and behaviors toward pack journalism. The evaluations, which should take the form as questionnaires, should be conducted at four-months and eight-months to determine overall efficacy of the treatments.

#### The Video Presentation Component

Once more, the layout for this section is designed combining elements from the inoculation study conducted by Pfau and Dillard (2000) and comparable replications proposed by Breen and Matusitz (2005). Four videos should be manufactured and utilized in this campaign on inoculating pack journalists. The videos should be made to last at least 5 minutes, but no longer than 10 minutes. Two of the videos should present the previously described inoculation treatments, operationalized as consisting of threat to attitudinal freedom along with refutational preemption displays. One of the inoculation videos should apply a social-based appeal whereas the other should utilize a normative appeal, as described earlier. The social-based appeal should stress or emphasize the negative effects of pack journalism and its other harmful implications, and the normative appeal should include commentaries from journalism critics and scholars that denounce and loathe the practice (pack journalism). One additional social-based and normative appeal video should be applied to bolster or reinforce the nascent inoculation treatments. Videos should exhibit visual and musical displays steered to supplement the corresponding verbalizations.

As suggested by Pfau (1995) in behavioral inoculation studies, the intricacies and designs behind inoculation message generation and video composition should follow his guidelines. In this case, if any videos currently exist that depict pack journalism practices

and their negative results, they should be watched first and assessed to see what qualities and features manifest the most pronounced effects of pack journalism. Such work allows for pretesting for efficacy. Then, ideal videos can be produced that create maximum impact for an inoculation presentation.

#### Essential Financial Expenses for Research

As an experienced researcher (for example, inoculation researchers) can imagine, tremendous fiscal costs are attached to such an inoculative campaign (Pfau & Dillard, 2000). Employment funds are needed to monetarily support the human resources, including primary researchers and assistant researchers. As suggested by earlier studies, such costs could reach or exceed \$40,000. Equipment is also necessary for such a project, including televisions, VCRs, high-quality and standard video cassettes for recording, which could total up to \$700. Creating videos for inoculation treatments by using a professional agency could rise to \$40,000. Plus, software to analyze such data, such as SPSS, could reach between \$300-500. In any event, inoculation is not a cheap undertaking. It requires tremendous financial resources in addition to many committed people. But by following the recommendation as outlined in the paper (as based on previous studies and researchers' recommendations), an inoculation campaign designed to minimize pack journalism practices may be possible.

#### Discussion, Limitations, and Future Directions

What this paper has demonstrated is that the nature of inoculation theory can make journalists more resistant to pack journalistic attitudes and practices. As we have seen, inoculation is a mental immunization process against attitudinal influences deemed undesirable to individuals who seek to be morally or ethically sound. Based on

inoculation theory's theoretical assumptions and deriving concepts and designs from previous inoculation studies on smoking prevention, the authors have laid out a theoretical and practical framework from which inoculation treatments can be executed on journalists to render maximum attitudinal resistance toward the copycat (and unethical) element of pack journalism coverage. Arguments were made as to why inoculation is an effective strategy. As it was explained, inoculation allows participants to be influenced by persuasion. This persuasive attempt, in turn, induces the inoculated participants to contemplate and contrive rebuttals (Miller, 2002). Ultimately, when these participants are faced with the same arguments in the future, they generally disregard or ignore the arguments because their inoculated attitudes unconsciously and consciously resist them (Compton & Pfau, 2004; Miller, 2002; Pfau & Burgoon, 1988; Pfau et al., 2001).

Based on the premises of this study, inoculated pack journalists who are placed into experiments to undergo regular reinforcements should exhibit increased resistance to copycat or plagiaristic note-taking, than those pack journalists receiving no such treatment. By concentrating on journalists who are regularly exposed to news assignments that compromise their abilities to independently report news – i.e., because they find it difficult to do so due to the pack journalism phenomenon that pervades the vast majority of media outlets (particularly newspaper organizations) – applying inoculation on those journalists may be a successful strategy to reinforce their attitudes against copycat reporting and may contribute to this ideal of independent reporting (Crouse, 1973).



In future research germane to this topic, it might prove interesting to search for and identify, via the Internet and other equally feasible means, journalists who engage in these pack practices, who acknowledge the unethical nature of the practice, and who would be interested in participating in inoculative experiments so that their standards of journalistic conducts can be improved. Finding more and more of these types of participants may ultimately lead to a global reassessment of journalistic practices, thereby changing the paradigm by which these news gatherers collect and report their information to the world. Journalists are in fact major contributors to how the world changes (Crouse, 1973; Gordon et al., 1999). Perhaps by improving journalists in this way, the world as a whole can be made better. In turn, inoculation can become a more accepted theoretical and practical procedure for enhancing human behavior, a benevolent and noble goal that all communication scholars should strive to attain.

As a later form of future research on this topic, journalists who have undergone and successfully changed their ways of journalistic news gathering (i.e., abandoned pack journalism practices) can be surveyed to show if the inoculation model or strategy, in fact, works in bettering their methods of news collection and reporting. If journalists answer honestly to survey questionnaires that inquire if they were indeed influenced to behave in a more ethical manner in their journalism practices as a result of the inoculation treatments, then we as scholars have succeeded in our academic and moral obligation to better the world and add to the body of knowledge and goodness.

However, it should be noted that inoculation theory presents weaknesses that may restrict research reliability and objectives. For example, according to Miller (2002), inoculation theory hardly ever provides a full explanation of observed behavior and,

consequently, fails to concentrate on many elements of variance. Besides, the theory is relatively limited in terms of the scenarios and behaviors in which it can provide explanations. For this reason, only a restricted range of studies can be reasonably conducted and explained through the application of inoculation theory. With regard to the theory as applied to pack journalism, an inoculative campaign targeting those who are prone to engaging in pack journalism (i.e., sportswriters, etc.) may be difficult to implement. Part of the reason is that some participants in the study may resist the inoculative experiment because they may misconstrue it as a form of indoctrination or brainwashing.

Nevertheless, no matter what form of inoculative strategy is used and without consideration of the context or area selected for new research, occurrences of pack journalism through effective inoculation, will, hopefully, be lessened considerably or eliminated altogether for the betterment of the media world and its consumers.

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