FACE-ISM THEORY IN YOUTUBE IMAGES OF CANDIDATES IN THE 2020 U.S. PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

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ABSTRACT

Face-ism theory (Archer, Kimes & Barrios, 1983), which posits that newsmakers whose media images display more facial prominence are viewed as more powerful by media consumers, informed the theoretical research perspective. The study is relevant to public relations, because how images of candidates are displayed in news content may have an impact on voter perceptions of the candidates. The unit of analysis was any still photograph of the Democratic and Republican presidential and vice-presidential candidates in the United States 2020 general election from YouTube videos published by United States television news networks Aug. 12 until Nov. 3, 2020, election day. Two coders examined 5,425 candidate photos; intercoder agreement was 96 percent or higher on each variable. A six-point body index scale served as the dependent variable. Independent variables were the networks, candidate, gender and political party. Trump's images were the most frequent (3,276/60.4%), followed by Biden (1,386/25.5%), Harris (480/8.8%) and Pence (283/5.2%). FOX published more images of the candidates (1,051/19.4%) than any other network; CNN published the least (418/7.7%). Images of Democratic candidates (56.6%) were more frequently cropped at upper regions of the body with more facial prominence than images of Republican candidates (46.8%) who were more frequently cropped at lower regions of the body with less facial prominence, significant at <.001. Images of Trump (46.1%) showed less facial prominence than images of the other candidates, significant at <.001. Images of the female candidate displayed more facial prominence (52.9%) than male candidate images (49.9%), but the differences were not significant.

Keywords: Face-ism theory, public relations campaigns, political communication, United States Presidential Election

INTRODUCTION

Informing the theoretical perspective of this research was face-ism theory; which posits that news makers whose published images show more facial prominence, such as face or head and shoulder photos, as opposed to half body or full body photos, are viewed as more powerful and intelligent by media consumers. Face-ism theory was of particular interest in the 2020 United States presidential election campaign because the candidacy of Kamila Harris, the Democratic vice-presidential candidate, presented an opportunity to research differences in the display of facial prominence in images published by the major United States television networks in terms of gender, race and ethnicity. Harris, who was ultimately elected vice-president with Joe Biden as president, represented the first female, African American, Asian vice-presidential candidate in the United States.

Numerous studies, as outlined in the literature review, have found that mediated images of women and minorities have consistently displayed less facial prominence than published images of men. Harris's candidacy presented a unique opportunity to test the theory once again. This election also generated intense interest from the voting public and the news media.

The primary objective of the study was to examine the effects that gender, race, ethnicity, political party and news organizations may have had on how published images displayed facial prominence of the Republican candidates, Trump and Pence, and Democratic candidates, Biden and Harris, in the 2020 United States presidential general election. A secondary objective was to measure frequencies of the dependent variable and the independent variables for an overall picture of the visual news coverage of the campaign. The study is relevant to public relations, because how images of candidates are displayed in news content may have an impact on voter perceptions of the candidates. By carefully planning public appearances to maximize more close-up visual opportunities, campaign managers may have some influence on how their candidates are depicted visually in media coverage.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Face-ism Theory

Archer, Kimes and Barrios (1983) published the seminal study on face-ism. They conducted five studies to test the theory. The first study examined photographs published in United States newspapers and news magazines. Results showed that images of men were much more frequent than images of women, and facial prominence was greater for men than women. A second study examined 13 publications from 11 cultures outside the United States. The face-ism effect was even more pronounced, and images of men were even more frequent than images of women. A third study examined artwork (paintings and drawings) from the 15th century to the 20th century and found significant differences in facial prominence, with images of men having a higher face-ism score than women. The fourth study featured two experimental groups of both genders. One group was asked to draw pictures of a woman; the second group was asked to draw pictures of a man. In both conditions, facial prominence in pictures of men was greater than for images of women, regardless of the gender of the amateur artist. The fifth study, also an experiment, was designed to test whether face-ism has an effect on perceived attributes of the person pictured. The study found that subjects rated people in photographs that featured more facial prominence higher on intelligence, ambition and physical appearance. All five studies found strong support for the face-ism theory.

Schwarz and Kurz (1989) reported that experimental manipulations of images of the same people, one showing head and shoulders portraits and another showing the full body, resulted in significant differences in perceived trait attributes. Subjects in the photos displayed as portraits, with more facial prominence, were judged by both women and men to be more intelligent, assertive and ambitious than subjects in photos displayed as full body shots.

Zuckerman and Kieffer (1994) examined the effects of face-ism and race. They found evidence that images of racially discriminated minorities were displayed with lower facial prominence than images of Caucasians in American and European periodicals, American paintings and American

postal stamps. They also found that people in photos with higher facial prominence were rated higher in dominance than people with lower facial prominence in photos. The researchers concluded that close-up images of faces can imply confrontation, a concept that suggests higher facial prominence relates to perceptions of dominance in the person pictured.

Dodd, Harcar, Foerch and Anderson (1989) examined photos of men and women published on the covers of United States magazines from 1938-1986. Their longitudinal study found that images of women more frequently focused on the body, while images of men were more frequently focused on the face.

King (2002) content analyzed published photographs by online newspapers across 17 Latin American nations and found strong differences in displays of images of males and females. Images of men displayed more facial prominence than images of women across all story types.

Copeland (1989) applied the face-ism theory to television and found support for the hypothesis that televised shots of men would display more dominant facial prominence than televised shots of women in a random sample of 14 prime time network television shows in the United States.

Face-ism and Politics

Sparks and Fehlner (1986) found contrasting results in their study of magazine photos of candidates in the 1984 United States presidential election. There was no difference in the facial prominence of images of female vice-presidential candidate, Geraldine Ferraro, on the Democratic ticket compared to images of the three major male candidates, Walter Mondale, the Democratic presidential candidate, Ronald Reagan, the Republican presidential candidate and George Bush, the Republican vice-presidential candidate.

Konrath and Schwarz (2007) found evidence of face-ism in headshot portraits of American governors, senators and representatives as well as members of parliament in Canada, Australia and Norway. The cross-cultural study concluded that images of males displayed more facial prominence than images of females in all countries analyzed.

Price and King (2010) performed a content analysis of photographs of candidates in the 2008 United States presidential general election published in news and business magazines including Newsweek, U.S. News & World Report, Time, Forbes, Business Week and Money. The general election campaign featured Sarah Palin, the female Republican vice-presidential candidate, and three male candidates, John McCain, Republican presidential candidate, Barack Obama, Democratic presidential candidate and Joe Biden, Democratic vice-presidential candidate. The researchers developed a body index scale to measure facial prominence based on where the photo was cropped on the body (1= head/face/eyes, 2= head, neck and shoulders, 3= chest up, above breastline, 4= waist up, 5= below waist, hips, above knees, or 6= legs, at or below knees, feet or full body). Their analysis of the nominal data found strong support for the face-ism theory.

> Photographic images of male candidates were more frequently cropped to show the head/face/eyes (27.8%), head/neck and shoulders (28.2%) and chest up/above breastline (14.5%) than photographic images of the female candidate.

> Photographic images of the female candidate were more frequently cropped at the waist up, below waist/hips/above knees and legs/at or below knees/feet/full body than images of the male candidates. This indicates that photographic images of the male candidates more frequently were cropped at the upper regions of the body, emphasizing intellect and power, while photographic images of the female candidate were more frequently cropped at the lower regions of the body, emphasizing the figure. (Price & King, pp. 573-574)

Konrath, Au and Ramsey (2012) used a database of 6,610 official online photographs of politicians across 25 cultures to study face-ism. Surprisingly, they found that face-ism bias was higher in cultures where institutional gender inequality was lower.

Peng (2018) used computerized analysis to study presentation bias in the 2016 presidential election including facial orientation (pitch, roll and yaw), face size and location, facial expressions, eye and mouth status, skin condition and whether other people were present in the photo with the candidate or if the candidate was pictured alone. Photos of Democratic presidential candidate, Hillary Clinton, and Republican presidential candidate, Donald Trump, were analyzed using regression analysis according to whether the media outlet was liberal, conservative or neutral.

> In overall media coverage, compared with Clinton, Trump images had larger faces ($\beta = .14$), showed less happiness ($\beta = -.46$) but more anger ($\beta = .42$), and portrayed less healthy facial skin ($\beta = -.09$) and fewer other people's faces ($\beta = -.12$, all ps < .001). As indicated by significant interactions, these gaps regarding face size ($\beta = -.12$, $p < .001$), happiness ($\beta = .08$, $p < .001$), anger ($\beta = -.06$, $p = .002$), skin health ($\beta = .07$, $p = .002$), and number of other faces ($\beta = .07$, $p = .001$) narrowed or reversed as the media outlets' political orientations moved from liberal to conservative (Figure 3), implying that these attributes were adopted by outlets to differentially portray the two candidates. (Peng, p. 13)

RESEARCH QUESTIONS/HYPOTHESES

The review of literature on the face-ism theory informed the following hypotheses and research questions:

> H1: Images of male candidates in the U.S. presidential and vice-presidential general election will display more facial prominence than images of the female candidate.
>
> H2: Images of the incumbent Republican candidates (Trump and Pence) will be more frequent than images of the Democratic candidates (Biden and Harris).
>
> H3: Television news networks that generally favor one political party over another, will publish images that feature more facial prominence of the candidate from the same party than television news networks that are generally neutral politically.
>
> RQ1: Will images of Democratic Party candidates be displayed with different facial prominence than images of Republican Party candidates?

RQ2: Will there be differences in display of facial prominence among the four candidates?

RQ3: Will there be differences in overall display of facial prominence among the news organizations that published the images?

RQ4: Will there be differences in display of facial prominence of the individual candidates among the individual news organizations that published the images?

METHODS

The unit of analysis was any still photograph of the Democratic and Republican presidential and vice-presidential candidates in the United States 2020 general election (Biden, Harris, Trump and Pence) from YouTube videos published by United States television news networks including CNN, FOX, MSNBC, NBC, ABC, CBS and PBS. Images of more than one candidate in a single photo were coded separately. The time period of the study was Aug. 12, 2020, when Kamala Harris was announced as the Democratic vice-presidential candidate, until Nov. 3, 2020, election day. Still images from YouTube of each of the four candidates were captured digitally each day during the time period of the study by performing a search for each network each day on YouTube. Two coders examined 5,425 photos of the candidates. Intercoder agreement was 100 percent on all variables except the body index scale, which was 96 percent. Coders used King's body index scale, a modification of the original face-ism measurement, which was the dependent variable (1=head/face/eyes, 2=head/neck/shoulders, 3=chest/at or above breastline, 4=below breastline/at waist, 5=below waist/hips/above or at knees and 6=below knees/feet/full body). Dependent variables were the networks (CNN, FOX, MSNBC, NBC, ABC, CBS and PBS), candidate (Biden, Harris, Trump and Pence), gender (male or female). political party of the candidate (Democrat or Republican) and general favorability of the networks toward the Democratic Party (MSNBC), the Republican Party (FOX) or neutral (CNN, NBC, ABC, CBS and PBS). General political party favorability by the networks was determined by the author based on consistent viewing of campaign coverage by the networks for the duration of the campaign. Chi-square statistical analysis was performed on the independent and dependent variables, which were all nominal variables. Probability was set at <.001, due to the very large sample size. Frequencies were also recorded for each variable.

RESULTS

Table 1. Network Frequency

Network	Frequency	Percent
FOX	1051	19.4%
CBS	982	18.1%
MSNBC	970	17.9%
NBC	886	16.3%
PBS	613	11.3%
ABC	505	9.3%
CNN	418	7.7%

Note. n= 5,425

As seen in Table 1, overall frequency results showed that FOX 1051/19.4%) published more photos of the candidates than any other network. CNN (418/7.7%) published the least photos.

Table 2. Body Index Frequency

Head/ face/ eyes	Head/neck/ shoulders	Chest/at or above breastline	Below breastline/ at waist	Below waist/hips/above or at knees	Below knees/feet/full body
90 1.7%	798 14.7%	1835 33.8%	1941 35.8%	438 8.1%	323 6.0%

Note. n= 5,425

Table 3. Body Index frequency (collapsed)

chest/at or above breastline	below breastline
2723 50.2%	2702 49.8%

Note. n= 5,425

Overall frequency for the body index scale, as evident in Tables 2 and 3, shows that the seven major U.S. television news networks published images of the candidates in the United States general presidential election with about the same percentages of higher facial prominence, with the image cropped at the chest/at or above breastline (50.2%) as they did the percentages of less facial prominence, with images cropped below the breastline (49.8%).

Table 4. Network Political Favorability Frequency

Network	Frequency	Percent
Neutral **CNN** **NBC** **ABC** **CBS** **PBS**	3402	62.7%
Favor Republican **FOX**	1051	19.4%
Favor Democrat **MSNBC**	970	17.9%

Note. n= 5,425

Table 4 shows the frequency breakdown of political party favorability among the television networks. Television networks that were generally neutral toward political parties published the majority of the images of the candidates (3403/62.7%).

Overall frequencies for the remaining variables including candidate, gender and party are included in the tables below.

H1: Images of male candidates in the U.S. presidential and vice-presidential general election will display more facial prominence than images of the female candidate.

Table 5. Gender by Body Index

	Head/ face/ eyes	Head/neck/ shoulders	Chest/at or above breastline	Below breastline/ at waist	Below waist/hips/above or at knees	Below knees/feet/full body
Female	15 3.1%	64 13.3%	175 36.5%	176 36.7%	26 5.4%	24 5.0%
Male	75 1.5%	734 14.8%	1660 33.6%	1765 35.7%	412 8.3%	299 6.0%

Note. n= 5,425; chi-square= 14.1; df= 5; p <.01

The difference in facial prominence in the published images was significant, but in the opposite direction of the hypothesis, as seen in Table 5. Images of the female candidate had slightly more facial prominence than images of the three male candidates.

H2: Images of the incumbent Republican candidates (Trump and Pence) will be more frequent than images of the Democratic candidates (Biden and Harris).

Table 6. Party Frequency

	Frequency	Percent
Republican	3559	65.6%
Democrat	1866	34.4%

Note. n=5,425

As is evident in Table 6, almost two-thirds of the published images featured the incumbent Republican candidates.

H3: Television news networks that generally favor one political party over another, will publish images that feature more facial prominence of the candidate from the same party than television news networks that favor the opposite political party or that are generally neutral politically.

Table 7. Network Favorability by Body Index (collapsed) by Candidate

Candidate	Network Favorability	Chest at/above breastline	Below breastline	Notes
Biden	**Favor Democratic**	159 (63.1%)	93 (36.9%)	n=1386; chi-square= 7.5; df= 2; p= n.s.
	Favor Republican	125 (63.1%)	73 (36.9%)	
	Neutral	518 (55.3%)	418 (44.7%)	
Harris	**Favor Democratic**	35 (60.3%)	23 (39.7%)	n=480; chi-square= 1.9; df= 2; p = n.s.
	Favor Republican	39 (48.8%)	41 (51.2%)	
	Neutral	180 (52.6%)	162 (47.4%)	
Trump	**Favor Democratic**	315 (48.8%)	330 (51.2%)	n=3276; chi-square= 20.4; df= 2; p < .001
	Favor Republican	364 (52.2%)	333 (47.8%)	

	Neutral	830 (42.9%)	1104 (57.1%)	
Pence	**Favor Democratic**	7 (46.7%)	8 (53.3%)	n=283; chi-square= 9.8; df= 2; p < .01
	Favor Republican	582 (55.4%)	469 (44.6%)	
	Neutral	97 (50.5%)	95 (49.5%)	

Note. n= 5,425

Table 7 shows that support for the hypothesis was mixed. The television network that favored the Democratic Party, MSNBC, and the network that favored the Republican Party, FOX, displayed images of Biden, the Democratic presidential candidate with exactly the same level of facial prominence. There was a difference in images of Harris, the Democratic vice-presidential candidate. MSNBC more frequently displayed images of Harris with more facial prominence than FOX, but the difference was not significant. Images of Trump and Pence were displayed differently. FOX published images of Trump, the Republican presidential candidate, with more facial prominence than MSNBC, significant at <.001. FOX did the same for Pence, the Republican vice-presidential candidate, significant at <.01. Networks that were generally neutral politically, published images with more facial prominence of Biden, Harris and Pence more frequently, but they published images of Trump with less facial prominence more frequently.

RQ1: Will images of Democratic Party candidates be displayed with different facial prominence than images of Republican Party candidates?

Table 8. Party by Body Index

	Head/ face/ eyes	**Head/ neck/ shoulders**	**Chest/at or above breastline**	**Below breastline/ at waist**	**Below waist/hips/ above or at knees**	**Below knees/feet/ full body**
Democrat	28 1.5%	332 17.8%	696 37.3%	592 31.7%	107 5.7%	111 5.9%
Republican	62 1.7%	466 13.1%	1139 32.0%	1349 37.9%	331 9.3%	212 6.0%

Note. n= 5,425; chi-square= 61.3; df= 5; p <.001

Table 9. Party by Body Index (collapsed)

	chest/at or above breastline	**below breastline**
Democrat	1056 56.6%	810 43.4%
Republican	1667 46.8%	1892 53.2%

Note. n= 5,425; chi-square= 46.6; df= 1; p <.001

As displayed in Tables 8 and 9, images of Democratic candidates (56.6%) were more frequently cropped at upper regions of the body with more facial prominence than images of Republican

candidates (46.8%) who were more frequently cropped at lower regions of the body with less facial prominence, significant at <.001.

RQ2: Will there be differences in display of facial prominence among the four candidates?

Table 10. Television News Network by Body Index (collapsed)

	CNN	FOX	MSNBC	NBC	ABC	CBS	PBS
Chest at/above breastline	340 81.3%	582 55.4%	516 53.2%	446 50.3%	147 29.1%	456 46.4%	236 38.5%
Below breastline	78 18.7%	469 44.6%	454 46.8%	440 49.7%	358 70.9%	526 53.6%	377 61.5%

Note. n= 5,425; chi-square= 305.9; df= 6; p <.001

Table 10 reveals that CNN most frequently published images that displayed more facial prominence (81.3%); ABC published images that displayed more facial prominence much less frequently (29.1%), significant at <.001. CNN, FOX, MSNBC and NBC published images that more frequently displayed more facial prominence; ABC, CBS and PBS more frequently published images that displayed less facial prominence.

RQ4: Will there be differences in display of facial prominence of the individual candidates among the individual news organizations that published the images?

Table 11. Network by Body Index (collapsed) by Candidate

Candidate	Network	Chest/at or above breastline	Below breastline	Notes
Biden	**CNN**	77/92.8%	6/7.2%	n= 1386; chi-square= 98.6; df= 6;p< .001
	FOX	125/63.1%	73/36.9%	
	MSNBC	159/63.1%	93/36.9%	
	NBC	154/57.7%	113/42.3%	
	ABC	54/34.6%	102/65.4%	
	CBS	166/61.3%	105/38.7%	
	PBS	67/42.1%	92/57.9%	
Harris	**CNN**	46/88.5%	6/11.5%	n= 480; chi-square= 41.4; df= 6; p <.001
	FOX	39/48.8%	41/51.2%	
	MSNBC	35/60.3%	23/39.7%	
	NBC	41/60.3%	27/39.7%	
	ABC	27/42.9%	36/57.1%	
	CBS	37/45.1%	45/54.9%	
	PBS	29/37.7%	48/62.3%	
Trump	**CNN**	190/74.5%	65/25.5%	n= 3276; chi-square= 177.7; df= 6; p < .001
	FOX	364/52.2%	333/47.8%	
	MSNBC	315/48.8%	330/51.2%	
	NBC	232/45.5%	278/54.5%	
	ABC	52/21.4%	191/78.6%	

	CBS	236/39.5%	361/60.5%	
	PBS	120/36.5%	209/63.5%	
Pence	**CNN**	27/96.4%	1/3.6%	n= 283; chi-square= 41.3; df= 6; p < .001
	FOX	54/71.1%	22/28.9%	
	MSNBC	7/46.7%	8/53.3%	
	NBC	19/46.3%	22/53.7%	
	ABC	14/32.6%	29/67.4%	
	CBS	17/53.1%	15/46.9%	
	PBS	20/4.7%	28/58.3%	

Note. n= 5,425

There were clearly strong differences in the way images of the individual candidates were displayed among the individual television news networks, all significant at <.001, as shown in Table 11. Images of Biden showing more facial prominence were published more frequently by CNN, FOX, MSNBC, NBC and CBS. ABC and PBS published images of Biden with less facial prominence. CNN and FOX were the only networks that more frequently published images of Trump with more facial prominence. MSNBC, NBC, ABC, CBS and PBS more frequently published images of Trump with less facial prominence.

Harris had more frequent images showing more facial prominence published by CNN, MSNBC and NBC. FOX, ABC, CBS and PBS all published images of the female, African American, Asian vice-presidential candidate that more frequently featured less facial prominence. Images of Pence with more facial prominence were more frequently published by CNN, FOX and CBS. MSNBC, NBC, ABC and PBS more frequently published images of Pence showing less facial prominence.

DISCUSSION

This study of 5,425 images of the Democratic and Republican presidential and vice-presidential candidates in the United States 2020 general election from YouTube videos published by United States television news networks has revealed many interesting findings.

The face-ism theory as applied to gender was not supported. In fact, published images of the female, African American, Asian candidate, Harris, displayed slightly more facial prominence than published images of the male Caucasian candidates, Biden, Trump and Pence. This could be a reflection of increased media and societal awareness of gender and minority equality issues.

Results from the current study were most consistent with results from Sparks and Fehlner (1986), which found that images of the female vice-presidential candidate, Ferraro, did not score lower on the face-ism index than her male counterpart, Bush. However, the current study found that images of the female vice-presidential candidate, Harris, actually scored higher on the face-ism index than images of the male vice-presidential candidate, Pence.

The current study found contrasting results from studies by Price and King (2010) and Peng (2018), which all found support for the face-ism theory. Images of the female vice-presidential candidate, Palin in the 2008 campaign, and images of the female presidential candidate, Clinton in the 2016 campaign, scored lower on the face-ism index.

These previous studies were based on images of the candidates in print media, while the current study examined still images of the candidates from broadcast networks. Perhaps broadcast networks were more sensitive to the face-ism issue in the 2020 election than print media in previous elections.

The face-ism effect was most evident when comparing television news networks in terms of their general favorability toward a particular political party or general neutrality toward political parties. FOX, the network that favored the Republican Party, published images of Trump, the Republican presidential candidate, with more facial prominence than MSNBC, significant at <.001. Interestingly, the networks that were generally neutral toward the political parties, published even lower frequencies of images of Trump displaying facial prominence than those that generally favored one political party, significant at less than <001.This suggests that these networks may not have been as neutral as expected.

Face-ism was also supported when comparing the body index by party. Democratic candidates had images that showed more facial prominence than Republican candidates. Images of Democrats were more frequently cropped at the upper regions of the body, while Republicans were more frequently cropped at lower regions of the body. This was mostly due to frequent media selection of images of Trump. Images of Pence, the Republican vice-presidential candidate, were more frequently cropped at the upper regions of the body, showing more facial prominence. However, several close-up images of Pence's head, with a fly sitting in his hair during the only vice-presidential campaign may have had sone effect on this outcome.

There were clear differences among the television news networks in terms of face-ism in the way they published photos overall. ABC, CBS and PBS more frequently published images that displayed less facial prominence, while CNN, FOX, MSNBC and NBC published images that more frequently displayed more facial prominence.

Strong differences were evident among the individual television networks in how images of the individual candidates were cropped, all significant at <.001. CNN, FOX, MSNBC, NBC and CBS more frequently published images of Biden showing more facial prominence. CNN and FOX were the only networks that more frequently published images of Trump with more facial prominence. Harris, the female, African American, Asian vice-presidential candidate had more frequent images showing more facial prominence published by CNN, MSNBC and NBC. CNN, FOX and CBS more frequently published image of Pence with more facial prominence.

From a public relations perspective, implications for political campaign operatives who manage media relations are suggested by this research. As explained in the literature review, how images of candidates are cropped when published may have an effect on media consumers. By carefully planning public appearances to maximize more close-up visual opportunities, campaign managers may have some influence on how their candidates are depicted visually in media coverage. By extension, this may have an effect on media consumers', potential voters', perceived attributes of the candidates.

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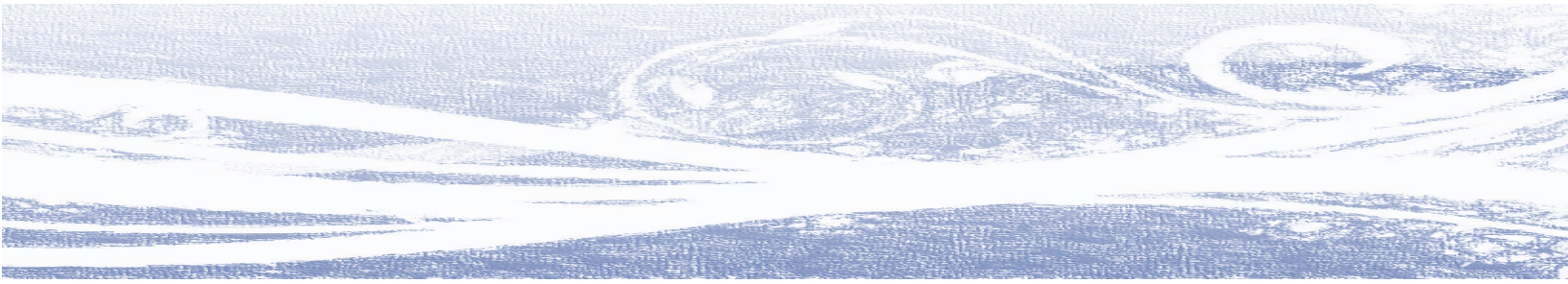

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