

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 433 555

CS 510 136

TITLE Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (82nd, New Orleans, Louisiana, August 3-8, 1999). Radio-Television Journalism.

INSTITUTION Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication.

PUB DATE 1999-08-00

NOTE 151p.; For other sections of this proceedings, see CS 510 132-153.

PUB TYPE Collected Works - Proceedings (021)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC07 Plus Postage.

DESCRIPTORS *Broadcast Journalism; Competition; Content Analysis; Higher Education; Journalism Education; Journalism Research; Mass Media Effects; *News Reporting; Presidential Campaigns (United States); Salaries; Salary Wage Differentials; *Television; Television Viewing

IDENTIFIERS Fairness; Local News; *Media Coverage; Michigan; News Bias; *Newsmagazines; Television Stations

ABSTRACT

The Radio-Television Journalism section of the Proceedings contains the following 7 papers: "Winner by a Sound Bite: Fairness and Balance in the 1998 Michigan Governor's Race" (Sue Carter, Frederick Fico, and Jocelyn A. McCabe); "The Effects of Competition on Television Coverage of City Hall" (Stephen Lacy, Charles St. Cyr, and David Coulson); "Television Network Affiliation Changes in a Major Market and the Effect on News Viewing" (Samuel J. Sauls and Marilyn L. Boemer); "The 1996 Presidential Nomination Contests: Network News Coverage" (Karon Speckman); "Prime Time News: Effects Associated with the Rise of the Television News Magazine Format" (Jennie Rupertus); "A Quarter Century of Television Network News: Fewer, Longer (?) and Softer News Items" (Daniel Riffe and Lori Spiczka Holm); and "Has the Salary Gap Closed? A Survey of Men and Women Managers at U.S. Television Stations" (Jennifer Greer and Keisha Williams). (RS)

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for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication
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Radio-Television Journalism.

Association for Education in Journalism and Mass
Communication.

1999-08

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WINNER BY A SOUND BITE: FAIRNESS AND BALANCE IN
THE 1998 MICHIGAN GOVERNOR'S RACE

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Abstract

Much of what voters learn about candidates for state office comes to them from local television news programs. Just how frequent and, more importantly, how fair and balanced coverage of these candidates is presents a fertile area for research. In this study, "Winner by a Sound Bite: Fairness and Balance in the 1998 Michigan Governor's Race," the researchers discovered that local television stations may claim fairness and balance in their overall coverage from Labor Day to the election, but that individual stories can be substantially out-of-whack when it comes to structural and partisan balance.

INTRODUCTION

For as long as reporters have put ink to paper, politicians have decried the bias they perceive in news coverage, especially coverage directed at politicians. Journalists argue that, to the contrary, the notions of fairness and balance are central to late 20th century reporting and are widely exercised.

The words “fairness and balance” may be part of a fairly recent journalistic lexicography, but the core ideas have a long tap root. Indeed, the ideals of free speech and free press are inextricably intertwined in the First Amendment to the United States Constitution, agreed upon more than 200 years ago. Such freedom of expression — whether speech or press — is most valued because the freedom is critical to the healthy operation of democracy. Freedom of expression especially must be imbued with fairness and balance in reporting public policy because it is vital to the functioning of democratic institutions. Fairness and balance in reporting elections to decide among those with differing policy priorities is foundational to a democratic society’s ability to make full, informed choices. Such fairness and balance is the focus of the research presented here.

Fairness and balance in reporting is important for the well-being of both society as a whole and for mass media institutions in particular. The fairness and balance with which issue positions are presented in the media influence the functioning of the political process through the media’s ability to set the public policy agenda. Fairness and balance are central ethically to journalism’s self-defined role as an impartial and objective observer. Finally, fairness and balance are also economically important to the mass media, which depend on a mass audience attracted in part by the credibility of their claims to report conflicts fairly and objectively.

The ethical assumption underpinning this research is that candidates and their supporters cannot hope to inform and persuade voters unless they obtain a forum for expressing their own views in their own words. Inquiry into fairness and balance in this context can explore the extent to which opponents obtain a manifestly equal forum for those expressions.

The broad purpose of the research is to further an understanding of local television news coverage of elections and to share with broadcasters findings that relate to the fairness and balance of their presentation. Given that television has become society's primary source of information, the manner in which news is relayed becomes an increasingly important factor in our political system. Just as news consumers rely on television for accurate information about the weather and the community, so, too, do they depend on television for accurate details about elections and political leaders. For this reason alone, research into the level of fairness and balance in reporting merits academic scrutiny. A check on reporting serves not only the profession, but the greater interests of society as well.

This study of the way in which four mid-Michigan television stations covered the 1998 gubernatorial race focuses primarily on two assessments of reporting: partisan balance and structural balance. News stories were evaluated not only in terms of whether they supported a particular candidate, but also the manner in which they were constructed. For example, did journalists seek out more than one source in relating their story? If they did, were the sources from the same sides or did they represent different viewpoints? And once the stories were edited (and sometimes packaged) where did they appear in the nightly local newscasts? This research relied upon such factors as story length, sound bite length, story position and story topic to address these and similar questions about fairness and balance in local political broadcast

coverage.

Specifically, the assessment of the partisan balance of coverage concerns whether stories in their aggregate gave more attention to assertions supporting a particular candidate. Partisan balance, therefore, relates to the potential influence of this news coverage on elections and the consequent public policy outcomes. The assessment of the structural balance of coverage concerns whether stories in their aggregate are constructed to be even-handed or one-sided in attention to such assertions, regardless of the direction of any partisan tilt. Structural balance therefore relates more narrowly to the ethical self-consciousness of journalists and more broadly to the credibility of their ethical claims with consumers.

IMPLICATIONS OF BROADCAST STORY BALANCE

These two assessments, partisan balance and structural balance, are clearly related but also differ in fundamental ways. Across the life of an election, the partisan balance of coverage may be quite even, although any particular story might be very one-sided. Journalists might credibly claim that coverage of the particular election was fair, while viewers of any particular one-sided story would assert the opposite. Assessing both partisan and structural balance of campaign stories permits a probabilistic approach to determining the likelihood that news consumers will perceive bias in the news, whatever its partisan direction. Specifically, this research assesses the fairness and balance of each election story broadcast, and aggregates those findings across the life of the election as a whole. Because few viewers encounter all broadcast election stories, this research estimates the chances of encountering a story that is structurally balanced or imbalanced. In other words, whatever the partisan balance of the total election coverage, what are the chances of

viewers encountering stories that are fair or unfair, balanced or imbalanced?

The broadcast medium is more restrictive for consumers than print, and the way stories are constructed more likely determines what viewers take from them. A broadcast story is linear, and therefore, gives viewers the opportunity for only a single exposure to a story that cannot easily be reexamined. That story might present only one side in an electoral contest or two (or more) sides. If the story is two-sided, the order in which the sides are presented, and the relative length of their assertions, will influence the likelihood that a viewer will be exposed to a particular candidate.

Certainly the results of a study such as this can be used in several different ways by broadcast journalists. Obviously, the methods for monitoring election coverage can be adopted so that broadcast stations are aware of their day-to-day and overall campaign coverage of candidates. Awareness of how candidates have been covered can provide feedback to both the journalists themselves and to members of the public as well as candidates. Further, such information can serve to guide election coverage, correcting for biases in attention that may develop in a campaign's coverage.

Giving emphasis to the need for awareness of typical story structural characteristics are studies linking fairness and balance with journalistic credibility with the public. Virtually every study of media credibility has considered fairness and balance as influencing public perception of the media.¹ As recently as November 1997, the Freedom Forum pledged \$1 million for research and other projects on newspaper fairness because of its link to credibility in the public mind.²

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Bias, or the lack of fairness and balance in a news story, is popular fodder for most studies concerning broadcast news and election coverage.³ However, little published research offers insight into the presence of these structural characteristics solely in television journalism; analysis of local TV news coverage of local elections is even rarer.

Much of the available mass communications research concerns network television coverage of national elections. Johnson, for example, used a content analysis of the *New York Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, and the three major television networks to probe coverage of the primaries and the primaries of the 1988 presidential election.⁴ Similar research was conducted in conjunction with the 1996 elections, in which coverage was drawn from CNN, ABC, and more than 40 national newspapers.⁵ With the aid of a computer content analysis program, Domke et al. sought to determine whether — and how — potential biases in media coverage play out in various types of election coverage.⁶ Their findings revealed noticeably balanced media coverage of the two presidential candidates, Bob Dole and Bill Clinton, in spite of comments from the candidates and the public indicating otherwise. The oft-perceived “liberal bias” of the news media, as suggested by journalists, politicians, and the public alike, was not supported in the study’s analysis of national print and broadcast media. Similarly, Lowry’s⁷ study of TV sound bites during the 1992 presidential campaign found no evidence of liberal news bias in the network news sound bites of the candidates themselves. However, the liberal news bias was proven out in the sound bites of the non-candidates (political aides, party representatives, candidate family members, etc.).

Additionally, the amount of election coverage TV stations give over to local political news appears to be shrinking in some parts of the country.⁸ In 1998, the Annenberg School for

Communication's analysis of the California governor's race revealed that less than one-third of one percent of local television news was devoted to that race.⁹ Given that local politics plays such a vital role in the lives of the constituency, a decrease in local election news coverage does not bode well for the democratic process.

Past studies of election coverage have relied on subjective measures to complete their analyses, meaning that the researchers interjected their own perspectives into the studies. Specifically, previous research rests on researcher interpretations of election material. In a study of TV and newspaper coverage of the 1988 Democratic primaries, Johnson tracked the amount of coverage and its tone, based on the story's perceived theme.¹⁰ In tracking the presidential primaries, Johnson found a cyclical relationship existed between media coverage and the campaign's performance.¹¹ Candidates who performed poorly suffered negative coverage, while those who did well enjoyed more positive coverage. Similarly, Hofstetter and Buss charted a story's theme to aid in determining bias in the coverage of political events by treating bias as a function of selectivity.¹² By removing bias from its prototypical definitions and examining it as a scientifically measurable variable free from value judgements, Hofstetter and Buss were able to analyze the news through an empirical analysis of the term.

Finally, a substantial proportion of studies do not rely solely on television content for their data. Frequently, researchers have used a combination of print (magazines, newspapers or both) and national broadcast material for their studies. Evarts and Stempel III scrutinized the three major T.V. networks (ABC, CBS, and NBC), the three major news magazines (*Newsweek*, *Time* and *U.S. News & World Reports*) and six major newspapers in their analysis of the 1972 presidential campaign.¹³ As in this study, Evarts and Stempel tracked election coverage from

Labor Day, the traditional start of the campaign period, to the day before the election to determine bias. No clear-cut bias could be found in their analysis of the media's election coverage that year. Johnson¹⁴ and Hofstetter¹⁵ also made use of a cross-media analysis to determine bias in election coverage, with mixed results.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research examines the partisan and structural balance of broadcast stories covering the 1998 governor's race in Michigan. Specifically, such partisan and structural balance are related to the prominence of the position of election stories in the newscast, the fairness of stories as indicated by whether they were one-sided or two-sided, and finally whether election stories were read by an anchor or presented as a package by an on-air reporter.

Further, this research seeks to illuminate factors influencing the structural balance of election stories. Specifically, this research takes Shoemaker and Reese's perspective that a hierarchy of influences shapes media content.¹⁶ Shoemaker and Reese identify influences emanating from societal ideology, other social institutions, media organizational characteristics, work routines within media organizations and individual media worker characteristics.

Variables examined by this study as predictors of story structural balance include staff size at the organizational level, the station's total election story output and story prominence at the newsroom level, and whether stories were anchor reads or reporter packages at the individual journalist level. Studies have found that management's allocation of resources at the organizational level will affect reporting through staffing which will in turn influence total story output.¹⁷ Obviously too, such story output will also be influenced by the norms at the newsroom

level which are controlled by news directors. Further, these personnel also influence where in a newscast a particular story will be broadcast, and thereby allocate the professional prestige valued by journalists.¹⁸ Finally, these individual journalists themselves influence story content by the way they meld professional norms and their own perspectives and values into the final story package.¹⁹

The following research questions are therefore explored in this study:

RQ1: How does the partisan balance of stories vary with story position, fairness and packaging?

RQ2: How does the structural balance of stories vary with story position, fairness and packaging?

RQ3: How is the structural balance of stories influenced by station staff size, the station's electoral story output, the prominence of election stories and the packaging of election stories?

METHOD

This study explores these questions with a content analysis of all hard news election stories broadcast by four television stations on the 1998 Michigan governor's race. John Engler, the incumbent Republican governor, defeated Democrat Geoffrey Fieger in a campaign notable for the challenger's insulting attacks on the governor's personal appearance and family.

The four stations were selected from across the lower peninsula of Michigan. These stations were WXYZ-TV in Detroit, a No. 9 market station, WOOD-TV in Grand Rapids, a No. 38 market station, WJRT in Flint, a No. 64 market station, and WLNS-TV in Lansing, a No. 106 market station. Stations identified their major daily news broadcast and these were taped for the

study. The WXYZ and WJRT newscasts were an hour long. WOOD newscasts were a half-hour on weekdays and an hour on weekends. WLNS newscasts were a half-hour each day.

These broadcasts were taped from the Labor Day start of the campaign to voting on Nov.

3. Some newscasts were canceled because of sporting events. The final number recorded included 48 from WXYZ, 50 each from WJRT and WLNS, and 55 from WOOD.

Stations furnished information on the number of staff involved in their news operation. The total number of hard news stories (excluding weather and sports) were counted from the tapes.

Partisan and Structural Balance

Those election stories in which the candidates or their supporters made campaign-relevant partisan assertions were content analyzed. Such assertions were considered to be statements attributed to the candidates or their supporters that advocated or opposed a candidate's election. Stories containing only unattributed statements by the anchors or the reporter were not assessed. Further, stories that only reported poll results or that contained only visuals of the candidates but no assertions were also not assessed.

Qualities analyzed in stories containing partisan assertions included the position of the story in the newscast and whether the story was one-sided or included supporters for both candidates. Four story components were analyzed to assess partisan and structural balance of stories containing campaign assertions. Specifically, the story was analyzed to determine the side making assertions first in the story, the total time given sides for such assertions, whether visuals were included and whether the candidates were quoted directly on air or were paraphrased by reporters.

The Partisan Balance of a story was determined by counting how many of the four story components favored either Engler or Fieger. For example, if Fieger obtained more air time in a story than Engler, that story component was judged to favor his candidacy. If Fieger was favored by three story components and Engler by one, the story as a whole was judged to favor Fieger. The story was judged to be balanced if an equal number of components favored the candidates.

The Structural Balance of a story was similarly determined by counting how many story components favored each candidate. However, in the case of structural balance, the number of components favoring Fieger were subtracted from the number favoring Engler, and the absolute value of that figure taken. The resulting scale could range from 0, indicating a perfectly balanced story (and also one balanced on the partisan balance measure) to 4, indicating that the same candidate dominated every measured story component.

Validity and Reliability of Measures

Both Partisan and Structural Balance measures assume that broadcast stories are encountered once by viewers and that material presented first has a greater, if unknown, likelihood of being attended to than material later on. Consequently, components assessing the sides speaking first and longest dominate the scale, since visual elements or direct quotation may not always be part of a story.

Further, these balance measures assess the presence and position of partisan assertions, but make no assessment of the substantive qualities of the assertions themselves. Clearly, however, whether viewers find the assertions persuasive or not depends on the prior chance of exposure to the assertions themselves. Consequently, this study assesses the chances of such exposure to candidate assertions in the news.

Finally, these measures differ from those employed in past studies that assess the positive or negative tone or bias in the newscast. While such studies have achieved high coder reliability in such assessments, it is unclear whether ordinary viewers exposed to the newscasts in a naturalistic setting would make the same assessments. The present research makes no assumptions about how viewers might react to the candidate assertions in the newscast.

The coding procedure employed in this study had one researcher initially identify election-relevant stories and two other researchers confirm that judgment and code relevant stories. Two researchers subsequently performed a coder reliability assessment on **all** election stories containing campaign-relevant assertions, thereby producing an actual assessment of reliability rather than an estimate of it. No variable achieved less than a 90 percent agreement. The Alpha Reliability for the four-item Structural Balance index was .92.

Analysis of Data

Research questions on differences in partisan and structural balance of election stories based on story position, fairness and packaging were addressed with story proportions and means. These data are from the universe of election stories, so findings do not require inferential statistics for generalization.

The research question probing influences on story structural balance was explored with regression analysis using variables that met appropriate statistical assumptions. Two regression equations were run. The first predicted the fairness of an election story based on station staff size, the station's total election stories, the prominence of the election stories, and whether a given story was a reporter package. These five variables were then used to predict a story's structural balance. Inferential statistics were used in these analyses only to emphasize substantively

important influences.

RESULTS AND IMPLICATIONS

Some 2,299 hard news stories were broadcast by the stations during the study period. These included 947 from WXYZ (41 percent of the total), 595 from WOOD (26 percent) 408 from WJRT (18 percent) and 349 from WLNS (15 percent).

Further, all governor's election stories were also counted. Some 86 stories (3.7 percent of all stories) explicitly mentioned the governor's race, contenders John Engler or Geoffrey Fieger, poll reports, campaign events or candidate supporters or opponents. WOOD in Grand Rapids had the greatest number of election stories, with its 27 making up 4.7 percent of its total. WXYZ had the fewest election stories with its 17 making up 1.8 percent of all its stories.

Some 64 of these stories included campaign-relevant assertions and were further content analyzed. Few of these stories were featured prominently in newscasts. Fewer than 10 percent led newscasts. Some six in ten of the election stories were completely one-sided. About 4 in ten of the election stories were reporter packages.

Partisan Balance of Stories

Democrat Geoffrey Fieger dominated the partisan balance of just 52 percent of the election stories, with Engler dominating 42 percent and the rest evenly divided. By station, WJRT and WOOD broadcast stories favoring Fieger by 64-36 and 67-28 margins respectively, while WJRT and WLNS ran stories favoring Engler by 50-43 and 57-33 margins respectively. Fieger also dominated three of the four components of the partisan index. More than three-fifths of the time he was the first candidate presented. He was slightly more likely to have more time in stories

than Engler and was slightly more likely to have visuals of his campaign presented. Engler, however, was slightly more likely to be quoted, in stories, with 27 percent of stories compared to 22 percent for Fieger.

Stories that led newscasts were more likely to be balanced than stories that ran later in the newscast or election stories that followed other election stories (See Table 1). Unfair or one-sided stories were interestingly more likely to favor Engler, while two-sided or fair stories were more likely to be dominated by Fieger (See Table 2). Finally, reporter packages were more likely than those read by anchors to be balanced, or if one-sided, offsetting so that an Engler-dominated story was answered by a Fieger-dominated one.

Structural Balance of Stories

Overall, viewers had only a one in four chance of encountering either a perfectly balanced story (6 percent of the total) or a story imbalanced by only one component. By contrast, viewers had better than a 4 in 10 chance of encountering a story imbalanced toward the same candidate in every measured way.

The mean structural balance score of stories was 2.8 on a scale of 0, indicating a perfectly balanced story, to 4, indicating that the same candidate dominated every component measure. (See Table 4). Stories dominated by Engler on the partisan balance scale were also more structurally imbalanced than stories dominated by Fieger..

Similarly to the pattern in the partisan balance, election stories that led newscasts were less imbalanced than those run elsewhere. (See Table 4). Not surprisingly, one-sided stories tended to be much more imbalanced than two-sided ones. Finally, reporter packages were less imbalanced structurally than those read by anchors.

Influences on Structural Balance of Stories

The prominence of election stories and reporter packaging were the most important influences on the fairness of the election stories. (See Table 5). Possibly news directors were more concerned that highly visible stories be more fair. And given that reporter packages required more time and effort, reporters may well have been able to plan fairness into the coverage they gave some campaign issue or event.

The structural balance of a story was largely influenced by the packaging of the story and its fairness. (See Table 5) Obviously a story that was unfair in its sourcing would be imbalanced in its structure. However, reporters able to put more time and effort into a story's package did not necessarily shape the content to be more balanced.

IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS

Few stories were broadcast about the governor's race in Michigan, a finding consistent with other studies of such races in other states. Further, only three-quarters of those stories broadcast included the kind of assertions by electoral partisans that might arguably have informed or persuaded voters. Finally, very few of even those stories were fair and balanced by the standards used in this study.

Interestingly, these findings were virtually unrelated to staff size at the stations studied, a factor that intuitively might have produced more attention to story qualities such as fairness and balance. Rather, those factors most importantly related to fairness and balance were more grounded in the journalistic values of news directors and reporters. Directors showcased those stories more likely to emphasize those content qualities. And when reporters assumed the most

creative control over a story, they were more likely to build those content qualities into the work.

It is possible that the structural qualities found in these stories influence the judgments of bias that viewers exposed to them might make. Experimental treatments, surveys and focus groups should be conducted to determine if this is so. But certainly this study illuminates that the professional concern for fairness and balance is not articulated in a great many stories that are aired.

CONCLUSION

The results of this research highlight the different ways in which broadcast news personnel and TV viewers perceive local TV election coverage. Those differences are of consequence because the journalist's opinion that local election coverage is fair and balanced in both a partisan and structural manner may be at variance with the opinion held by the viewer. And it matters because the fact, and perception, of fairness and balance in reporting is critical for the operation of a democratic society as well as the functioning of the mass media. Taken as a whole, there was reasonable fairness and balance between stories covering John Engler and those covering Geoffrey Fieger. For example, the partisan balance tipped in favor of Fieger in slightly more than half of the stories. On the other hand, Engler was marginally favored in all of the stories that featured a quote from the candidate. A news director sitting back at the end of an election season might well be satisfied in the overall coverage for, in toto, all things were rather equal from a broadcast news manager's perch. This perspective, however, does not recognize the way in which the TV viewer takes in the coverage. While fairness and balance may have existed over the course of the entire election coverage, it hardly existed in individual stories and packages. As measured

both in terms of partisan balance and structural balance, individual stories were substantially lacking in balance and fairness. In any given setting, the viewer had a one in four chance of seeing a perfectly balanced story. In fact, 40 percent of the time, the viewer was likely to see a story that was imbalanced in every measured way. This research suggests that broadcast news personnel and TV viewers are grabbing different parts of the elephant. One party finds coverage that is fair and balanced in both partisan and structural ways. The other party is likely to be convinced of the opposite as stories are viewed individually and not seen in the aggregate. Broadcast news managers might be well-advised to step out of their video-inundated newsrooms and look at their coverage of local elections the way their audience does. They, quite possibly, will see another part of the elephant.

Table 1: Partisan Domination of Stories on the 1998 Governor's Race by Election Story Prominence in the Newscast (Percent of Stories Favoring Engler or Fieger)

	Leads Newscast	First Or Only Story	Second Story
Favors Engler	33%	43%	44%
Favors Fieger	50%	51%	56%
Balanced	17%	6%	0%
N	6	49	9

Table 2: Partisan Balance of Unfair and Fair Stories on the 1998 Governor's Race. (Percent of Stories favoring Engler or Fieger)

	Unfair Stories	Fair Stories	All Stories
Favors Engler	54%	24%	42%
Favors Fieger	46%	60%	52%
Balanced	0%	16%	6%
N	39	25	64

Table 3: Partisan Balance of Anchor Reads and Reporter Packages on 1998 Governor's Race (Percent of Stories favoring Engler or Fieger)

	Anchor Read	Reporter Package
Favors Engler	40%	45%
Favors Fieger	57%	45%
Balanced	3%	10%
N	35	29

Table 4: Structural Balance of Stories on the 1998 Governor's Race (Mean Structural Balance Scores. Higher scores indicate more story imbalance.)

	Mean Score	N
All Stories	2.80	64
Partisan Domination		
Favors Engler	3.19	27
Favors Fieger	2.82	33
Story Prominence		
Leads Newscast	1.83	6
First/Only Story	2.86	49
Second Story	3.11	9
Story Fairness		
One-sided	3.51	39
Two-sided	1.68	25
Story Type		
Anchor Reader	2.89	35
Package	2.69	29

Table 5: Influences on Story Fairness and Structural Balance in Stories on the 1998 Governor's Race (Coefficients are Betas. Betas significant at .least at 05 level are in bold. Positive Betas indicate greater story fairness and greater story imbalance.)

	Story Fairness	Structural Balance
Station Staff Size	.06	.10
Station's Total Election Stories	.16	-.04
Story's Newscast Prominence	.27	.01
Reporter Story Package	.31	.21
Story Fairness	---	-.75
Explained Variance	.18	.46
Equation Significance	.004	.000

ENDNOTES

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2. "Project will study fairness in media," *The Freedom Forum News*, 24 February 1997, p. 1.
3. See, for example, David Domke, David P. Fan, Michael Fibison, Dhavan V. Shah, Steven Smith and Mark D. Watts, "News Media, Candidates and Issues, and Public Opinion in the 1996 Presidential Campaign," *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 74 (Winter 1997): 718-737; Dru Evarts and Guido H. Stempel III, "Coverage of the 1972 Campaign by TV, News Magazines and Major Newspapers," *Journalism Quarterly* 51 (Winter 1974): 645-676; C. Richard Hofstetter, *Bias in the News: A Study of Network News Coverage of the 1972 Election Campaign*, (Columbus; Ohio State University Press, 1976); C. Richard Hofstetter, "Perception of News Bias in 1972 Presidential Campaign," *Journalism Quarterly* 56 (Summer 1979): 370-374; C. Richard Hofstetter and Terry F. Buss, "Bias in Television News Coverage of Political Events: A Methodological Analysis," *Journal of Broadcasting* 22 (Fall 1978): 517-530; Dennis T. Lowry and Jon A. Shidler, "The Sound Bites, the Biters, and the Bitten: An Analysis of Network TV News Bias in Campaign '92," *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 72 (Spring 1995): 33-44.
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12. C. Richard Hofstetter and Terry F. Buss, "Bias in Television News Coverage of Political Events: A Methodological Analysis," *Journal of Broadcasting* 21 (Spring 1997): 177-186.
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18. Breed identified such influences as the "newsroom socialization of reporters." See Warren Breed, "Social Control in the Newsroom." *Social Forces* 33 (May 1955): 326-335.
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The Effects of Competition on Television Coverage of City Hall

by

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The Effects of Competition on Television Coverage of City Hall

by

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A national sample of 303 television reporters found no correlation between the number of news organizations covering city hall and journalists' perceptions of how competition affected their coverage. However, 40 percent or more of the journalists said television competition increased the number of city hall stories produced, made it more difficult to do in-depth city hall stories, and increased the coverage of stories that might have been missed otherwise. Newspaper competition was perceived as putting greater pressure on TV journalists to produce more stories and to cover news they otherwise might have overlooked.

Effects of Competition on Television Coverage of City Hall

National samples of U.S. metropolitan areas indicate local television news often outstrips network newscasts in use.¹ Due to the expansion of local television news over the past 35 years, every major metropolitan area boasts three or more television stations that battle for news consumers' attention.

The expanding number of television news operations has raised the question of whether this competition, or its potential, affects TV news coverage. Even though some research indicates an impact of competition on financial commitment,² no published research has studied the impact of "sociological" competition on coverage. This competition involves journalists reacting to the coverage of other journalists, rather than management allocating financial resources.³

This study examines television reporters' perceptions of the impact of television and newspaper competition on their stations' city hall coverage. This paper is part of a larger study of city hall coverage that isolated one beat in order to control for the variation of reporting across beats. Local government was selected because this has been a traditional area in which journalists exercise their government watchdog function. In addition, local television news has been far less studied than newspapers and network newscasts despite its being a dominant force in the American news industry.

Research into newspaper competition has demonstrated a positive impact on content available to the community.⁴ However, that competition continues to decline as daily newspapers close and newspaper companies buy potential competitors in a process known as clustering. These clusters create economic advantages for the newspaper groups, but they reduce competition.⁵ The decline of daily newspaper competition raises the question of whether competition among television news operations or between the local newspaper and local television news might affect local television coverage available to a community. This research begins to study such an impact.

Literature Review

Because of the scant research on competition and city hall coverage, this review will look primarily at the effects of local television and daily newspaper competition on news content. A connection has been found between newspaper competition and the amount of money spent on the editorial product.⁶ Competitive newspapers had larger newsholes, more reporters per amount of news space, and more wire services. This relationship between competition and newsroom expenditures is termed the "financial commitment" model.⁷

In addition to research using content and financial data, the model is supported by a national survey that examined newspaper journalists' perceptions of the impact of competition on editorial content and journalistic performance.⁸ The Coulson and Lacy study considers more than budgetary factors in exploring four sociological effects of direct competition. Most of the respondents believed that competing dailies promote higher quality local news coverage, greater editorial diversity, and competitiveness among journalists. But competition also was seen as having a negative influence -- increased sensationalism.

A 1997 survey found newspaper journalists perceived newspaper competition to be more likely to affect city hall coverage than television news competition. Television competition had an impact in a small percentage of markets and was most likely to affect content when there was no competition from a daily newspaper. Probably the most interesting finding was that editors were perceived as having a great deal of influence on how beat competition affects city hall coverage.⁹

Consistent with newspaper research, local television news research has shown a relationship between competition and financial commitment in the form of greater expenditures on local news,¹⁰ more minutes of local news,¹¹ more full-time staff and bigger newsroom budgets,¹² acquisition of satellite news-gathering vehicles,¹³ and more resources used to assemble stories on local news programs.¹⁴

In other research, about half of the stories covered in local competing newscasts in three cities were unique. The news directors' conscious effort to differentiate their newscasts¹⁵ is consistent with the financial commitment model. It is more expensive and time consuming to

develop stories that other stations will not have than to depend upon beat sources and press releases, but the unique stories were used to differentiate the newscasts to attract viewers.

Although research on both daily newspaper and local television news indicates that media competition can affect expenditures and content, little research has explored the way in which news competition can affect decisions of journalists and their supervisors about day-to-day coverage. This type of research is meaningful because of the important programming changes television news has undergone during the past 15 years. Today many local newscasts last one to two hours. As a result they include a greater amount of local news, but the proportion of time devoted to local news has remained stable. Often stations expanding their newscast length do not sufficiently increase their staff to fill the added time with an equivalent amount of local news.¹⁶ Such findings suggest that the length of newscasts may affect content.

Two studies about local news conducted during the 1970s and early 1980s were consistent in their results. The content of television newscasts in San Diego was found to deal primarily with local news, and most stories dealt with issues and spot news.¹⁷ Pennsylvania television stations tended to cover their central city and county more extensively than other cities in the area of dominant influence.¹⁸ Since these studies, local television news content has changed. In a follow-up to the Pennsylvania study, researchers found 10 stations provided less city hall coverage in 1992 than in 1976.¹⁹

City hall is the most logical location of news generation for the community, but the only beats consistently worked by reporters at three network-affiliated stations in the West were courts and police. The stories aired from those beats suggested that they were staffed as economical access points to dramatic events, rather than as an attempt to report on how two arms of the community's justice system work.²⁰

Research Questions

Given the scarcity of research on the impact of competition on city hall coverage, this study explores the following research questions:

1. To what degree and in what ways do television reporters perceive television news competition affects television coverage of city hall?

This question presumes that television competition influences the behavior of at least some television reporters who cover city hall. The respondents' answers address the degree and nature of these effects.

2. To what degree and in what ways do television reporters perceive newspaper competition affects television coverage of city hall?

This question expands the scope of the inquiry to competition between television and newspapers. The Lacy, Coulson and St. Cyr survey of newspaper journalists found that newspaper competition is perceived as having an impact on local government coverage.²¹ However, how television journalists view the relationship between newspaper competition and city hall reporting has not been investigated previously.

3. Are news director-reporter discussions of television competition's impact related to television reporters' perceptions of variations in city hall coverage?

Television competition may have a direct impact on city hall reporting, but it is also likely that the coverage is influenced by interaction between news directors and reporters. For instance, reporters need to talk with their news directors about the number, type and length of city hall stories.

This research question is represented by the path model in Figure 1. The model illustrates that increased competition on the city hall beat is related to a greater likelihood that news directors and reporters will discuss this competition (step 1). The possible impact of this discussion being linked to content is represented by step 3. The model also suggests a direct correlation between beat competition and content (step 2).

4. Are news director-reporter discussions of newspaper competition's impact related to television reporters' perceptions of variations in city hall coverage?

This question is the same as research question 3 other than it applies to newspaper competition with television newscasts. The path model in Figure 1 also is applicable here.

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

Method

Two network-affiliated stations were randomly selected for this survey from each of the 214 television areas of dominant influence in the United States. Telephone calls were made to the stations' newsrooms to obtain the names of reporters most likely to cover city hall. The result was 459 reporters' names at 428 television stations. Each reporter was sent a questionnaire: 17 were undeliverable. Of the 442 potential respondents, 303 returned questionnaires for a 69 percent response rate.

The survey was conducted in three waves during spring 1997. The first wave included the questionnaire, cover letter and a return envelope. Next a post card was sent reminding the reporters of the questionnaire and telling them they would receive another one in about two weeks if they had misplaced it. The third wave was the same as the first and followed the post card by about two weeks.

Close-ended questions involved seven-point scales. Responses ranged from strongly disagree, which received a one, to strongly agree, which received a seven.

Answers to research questions 1 and 2 were based on proportions of respondents replying to statements about five possible effects of competition on content. These statements appear below. Open-ended responses also were analyzed to determine perceived influences on city hall coverage that were not foreseen with close-ended questions.

Research questions 3 and 4 were answered with least-squares multiple regression analysis applied to the path model in Figure 1. The dependent variables for the analysis of television competition were responses to the following statements:

- * My news director and I discuss how competition from television news affects our station's city hall coverage.
- * Television news competition increases how many city hall stories I write.

- * Television news competition makes it harder for me to find time to do in-depth city hall stories.
- * Television news competition makes me report city hall stories I don't think are important.
- * Television news competition makes me report city hall stories I otherwise might have missed.
- * Television news competition makes me sensationalize city hall news.

Similar statements were used to analyze newspaper competition, but the term "television news competition" was replaced with the term "newspaper competition."

The independent variables included reporter and news director interaction, years reporters have covered city hall, number of television stations covering city hall every day, and number of daily newspapers covering city hall every day. The last two variables were used as measures of competition, and the number of years covering city hall was used as a control variable.

Data were analyzed to see if they fit the assumptions of multiple regression. Years spent covering city hall stories, number of television stations covering city hall on a daily basis, and number of dailies covering city hall on a daily basis showed skewness figures greater than 1 and had outliers.²²

The outliers were reassigned the value of three standard deviations from the mean to reduce their effect but to retain the cases. This decreased the skewness. However, years covering city hall continued to have skewness figures close to 2. A means of correcting for skewness is to use the natural log of the cases. This was done. But the increase in the coefficient of determination (multiple r-squared) was minimal and none of the conclusions would have been changed by use of logged data.

This study assumes that television reporters who cover city hall stories hold perceptions of how competition affects their behavior that are somewhat valid representations of reality. Although there is certainly measurement error involved, it seems logical that reporters would have some idea

of how their decisions are connected to external factors. This assumption underlies the use of many, if not most, surveys about behavior.

Results

Sixty-four percent of the television reporters were male, and 78 percent of the respondents had completed college. The average age of the reporters was 33. They ranged in age from 22 to 66 years old, with a standard deviation of 9.3.

Average television reporting experience was 10.4 years, with a standard deviation of 9.1 and a range of three months to 42 years. They had worked at their current station an average of 5.5 years, with a standard deviation of 6.4 and a range of two months to 36 years.

On average they had covered city hall for 4.6 years, with a standard deviation of 5.5. The range of this experience was two months to 36 years. City hall was the only assignment for 5 percent of them. This statistic indicates most local television news covers city hall with general assignment reporters, which runs counter to the newspaper beat system where specialty reporters cover city hall.

Extent of Competition

The average number of stations within a market covering city hall was 2.95, with a standard deviation of 1.0 and a range of zero to 6.0. On average, newspapers covering city hall in a market on a daily basis totaled 1.22, with a standard deviation of .70 and a range of zero to 3.0.

The average number of daily newspapers covering city hall differed by television market size.²³ Television reporters in large markets indicated an average of 1.54 dailies covered the beat compared to those in mid-size markets who reported an average of 1.19 dailies. Reporters in small markets indicated city hall was covered by an average of 1.09 dailies. These daily newspaper averages represent the continued existence of joint operating agreements,²⁴ a few morning-afternoon combinations, and the existence of intercity competition within counties.

Overall, these results suggest strong competition among news organizations covering city hall in television markets. In the large markets an average of nearly four news operations reported each weekday on city hall.

Impact of Competition

Research question 1 asks "To what degree and in what ways do television reporters perceive television news competition affects television coverage of city hall?" Data in Table 1 indicates variations in television reporters' perceptions of the impact of television beat competition across markets and types of news coverage statements.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Three of the statements show nearly equal percentages of responses when the three agree and three disagree categories are collapsed into two categories -- agree and disagree. Forty-five percent of the respondents disagreed that television competition increased the number of city hall stories they produced; 41 percent agreed.

Forty-eight percent of the reporters said that television competition made it difficult to find time to do in-depth stories about city hall, and 41 percent felt otherwise. Similarly, 46 percent of the respondents indicated that television competition caused them to report municipal government stories they otherwise might have missed, and 41 percent differed.

The variation for the other two statements was much greater. Nearly two-thirds of the reporters disagreed that television competition made them report unimportant city hall stories, compared to 28 percent who agreed. An even higher percentage of respondents, 74 percent, disagreed that television competition made them sensationalize local government news, while only 21 percent agreed.

The second research question asks "To what degree and in what ways do television reporters perceive newspaper competition affects television coverage of city hall?" By collapsing data in Table 2 to categories of agree and disagree, the results suggest that television reporters vary less in their perceptions about newspaper competition's effects on the coverage than they do about

television's effects. However, they also perceived newspaper competition to have a greater impact than television competition in two areas -- number of city hall stories reported and coverage of stories that otherwise might have been missed.

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Fifty-three percent of the television reporters agreed that newspaper competition increased the number of city hall stories they wrote, compared to 36 percent who disagreed. Three-quarters of them admitted that newspaper competition prompted them to report stories they otherwise might have missed, while only 17 percent disagreed.

Respondents indicated much less of an impact of newspaper competition with regard to the other three statements in Table 2. Two-thirds of them said that newspaper competition made it harder to find time to do in-depth city hall stories; 20 percent felt otherwise. Similarly, 68 percent disagreed that newspaper competition made them report unimportant municipal government stories, compared to a quarter who agreed.

The least perceived impact of newspaper competition related to sensationalism. Eight out of ten respondents disagreed that newspaper competition made them sensationalize city hall news. Only 14 percent agreed.

Open-ended Responses

When television reporters spoke positively about the effects of television and newspaper competition on their city hall reporting, they emphasized timeliness, aggressiveness, sharpened news judgment, and increased productivity.

Negative aspects of competition for television reporters covering the beat included too much reliance on newspapers as agenda setters, time constraints associated with general assignment reporting, lack of adequate time to develop, report and present the often complex stories, and problems related to visualization of the stories, especially routine city government meetings.

In competing with newspaper journalists on the city hall beat, television reporters stressed developing new angles. These included "live" reports, different approaches, new details, and a new or different source. The most common strategy was to "personalize" city government decisions to try to show how they affected people.

Impact of News Director-Reporter Interaction

Research question 3 asks: "Are news director-reporter discussions of television competition's impact related to television reporters' perceptions of variations in city hall coverage?" The question was examined using regression analysis with the five statements in Table 1 serving as the dependent variable. The relationships are shown by the path model in Figure 1.

Table 3 presents beta weights from the regression analysis. In addition to the news director-reporter interactions, the regression equations included years covering city hall stories, the rankings of the stations with regard to ratings, and the number of other stations covering city hall.

INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

Overall, the conclusion is that little variance is accounted for by the equations, with the *r*-squared ranging from .018 to .071. The only notable relationship was with the responses to the statement that television competition increases the number of city hall stories that reporters produce. The entire regression explained about 7 percent of the variance in these responses, with news director-reporter interaction being the only important independent variable. The relationship was positive that indicates reporters who discussed the impact of television competition with their news directors were more likely to agree that television competition increases the number of stories they produce.

Also of interest in Table 3 is the negative relationship in the first equation between the number of television stations in a market covering city hall and whether news directors and reporters discuss the competition. As the number of stations increased, the reporters were more likely to disagree that they talked about the competition with news directors.

Because the number of television stations is a function of market size, an additional regression equation was run that included size of market.²⁵ The r-squared increased to .068, and the impact of number of stations almost disappeared. The beta weight in the new regression for news director-reporter discussion was -.030, while the beta for market size was -.221. The betas for the other two independent variables in the Table 3 equation changed only slightly.

The additional regression equation suggests that as market size increased, reporters were less likely to state that they discussed the impact of television competition on city hall coverage with their news directors. This may reflect the relationship between market size and journalistic experience. Smaller markets have less experienced reporters. The Pearson's correlation coefficient between market size and experience was .31.

The fourth research question asks: "Are news director-reporter discussions of newspaper competition's impact related to television reporters' perceptions of variations in city hall coverage?" Data in Table 4 indicate the answer is yes, although the degree of impact varies among the five statements.

INSERT TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE

The r-squared for the regression equations in Table 4 vary from .253 to .014. However, in all the equations the only notable beta weights were for news director and reporter discussions of the impact of newspaper competition.

The strongest relationship was with the statement that newspaper competition increases the number of city hall stories television reporters write. Nearly 24 percent of the variance in reporters' responses to this statement was explained by their perceptions of discussions with news directors about the impact of newspaper competition. Reporters who were more likely to say they talked with their news director about newspaper competition were more likely to say such competition increased the number of city hall stories they produced.

Although the influence was considerably less, television reporters who were likely to say they discussed the impact of newspaper competition on city hall coverage with their news director were more likely to agree that newspaper competition made it harder to find time to do in-depth

stories (part correlation squared = .049),²⁶ made them report stories they thought were unimportant (part correlation squared = .04), made them report stories they otherwise might have missed (part correlation squared = .078), and made them sensationalize the stories (part correlation squared = 0.32). The strength of the relationship in all these equations was small, ranging from 3.2 percent to 7.8 percent of explained variance.

Conclusions

Although several news organizations covered the city hall beat in these markets, regression analysis found no direct impact of number of news organizations on the journalists' perceptions of how competition affects coverage. Despite the lack of correlations, roughly 40 percent or more of the journalists indicated that television competition increased the number of stories produced, made it more difficult to find time to do in-depth stories, and increased the coverage of stories that might have been missed. The inconsistency between the journalists' response and the regression analysis suggest that competition on a beat is not related to number of news organizations, but to some sociological interaction among the journalists on that beat.

The fairly even distribution of responses across seven response categories for the three statements mentioned in the previous paragraph indicates that television competition may be affecting content in some markets but not in others. This should not be surprising because sociological competition reflects individual journalists' reactions to competition. One journalist may not respond in the same way as another one to the same competitive journalist.

The variation among journalists also may reflect the approaches taken by various local newsrooms. A content analysis of 61 local newscasts found wide variance in whether a television newsroom pursued quality journalism. Quality was defined as news coverage with a wide range of sources, viewpoints, and topics, as well as coverage with depth, enterprise and local relevance. Some stations provided quality while other broadcast mostly crime, car crashes and other breaking news with strong visual content.²⁷ The difference in types of newscasts was supported by open-ended comments in this survey.

The variation among reporters was not as great with two other statements. Most reporters agreed that television competition did not make them report unimportant stories and sensationalize municipal government news. Often the selection practice at television stations favors stories high in entertainment value over those high in consequence as a matter of routine rather than a matter of competition.²⁸

Respondents expressed the belief that newspaper competition had much less impact on certain facets of their city hall coverage than did television competition. At the same time, newspaper competition was seen as putting greater pressure on them to write more stories and to cover news they otherwise might have ignored. Some reporters said the competition prompted them to create new story angles, such as "humanizing" local government decisions in an attempt to make them more meaningful to the average viewers.

Reporters in small markets were more inclined to interact with their news directors about issues related to television and newspaper competition. This may reflect the relationship between market size and staff size. Small markets employ fewer seasoned reporters .

Discussions between news directors and reporters about the effects of newspaper competition had a greater influence on city hall beat coverage than discussions about television competition's impact. The talks about newspaper competition appeared to induce reporters to produce more local government news. Other research indicates that television stations reported fewer stories on city hall in the early 1990s than in the mid-1970s²⁹ despite its accessibility for information important to people's civic awareness.

The vast majority of variation in television reporters' responses was not explained by independent variables in the regression equation. Perceptions of content variation were only slightly correlated with the number of news organizations in the market. Other variables were more important, although newspaper competition had a notable impact on the number of city hall stories reported.

A comparison of the findings from this survey with those of the study based on newspaper reporters' concepts of city hall beat competition³⁰ indicates an asymmetrical relationship between

local television news and daily newspapers. Newspaper reporters were much less likely to perceive variations in the impact of television competition on city hall coverage than television reporters were to perceive such variations in the coverage from newspaper competition. Furthermore, television reporters discerned practically no variations in the effects of television competition on city hall coverage, whereas their newspaper counterparts sensed much stronger variations in the impact of newspaper competition on the coverage.

The interesting implication is that newspaper competition has a direct and indirect impact on city hall coverage within a community. The direct impact affects newspaper reporters' content, and the indirect impact affects the discussion between news directors and TV reporters about the beat competition. This discussion in turn affects content. This suggests that the historic reduction in newspaper competition has had a double impact on coverage of city hall. The implications are noteworthy when it is realized that most news consumers look to newspapers for their local government coverage.³¹

This study's findings on the relationship between television and newspaper competition and city hall reporting raise some questions for related future research. How do television reporters who perceive an impact of television competition on city hall coverage differ from those who reported no impact? How do news directors and reporters interact in their discussions about competition, and do the news directors dominate the interaction? Do the journalistic skills of reporters affect how they cover a beat, and how they react to other reporters given a similar assignment? How can sociological competition best be measured?

The study is limited because it did not include news directors, who may well perceive the impact of competition differently than do reporters. Although perceptions provide insight into the dynamics of competition, an important step would be to validate these perceptions through content analysis. It would be valuable to know whether the television reporters' views about the effects of news media competition on city hall beat coverage are consistent with more objective analyses of content.

This study could be applied to other beats to determine if competition affects journalistic performance and news content. For instance, does competition influence coverage of the police, courts and education beats? Does it have a different effect on cultural beats, such as ethnicity, than on traditional organization beats?

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 - 3 Stephen Lacy and Todd F. Simon, *The Economics and Regulation of United States Newspapers*. (Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1993).
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 21. Lacy, Coulson, and St. Cyr, "The Impact of Beat Competition."
 22. Outliers were defined as cases with values greater or less than three standard deviations from the mean. In all cases the outliers were on the positive side of this range.
 - 23 The 214 television areas of dominant influence were categorized into three market sizes: small -- ranked smaller than 125 other markets, medium -- ranked 51 to 125 in market size, and large -- ranked among the 50 largest markets.
 24. Joint operating agreements occur when two dailies in the same city combine all their business operations but maintain separate newsrooms. Seventeen cities were listed with JOAs in early 1998 in David C. Coulson and Stephen Lacy, "Newspapers and Joint Operating Agreements," in W. David Sloan and Emily Erickson Hoff, eds., *Contemporary Media Issues* (Northport, AL: Vision Press, 1998), 206, but the joint ventures in Nashville and El Paso closed during 1998.
 25. To check if market size affected the relationship in the other regression equations in tables 3 and 4, additional regressions were run with market size included. In all cases, the result was either

no increase in r-squared or only minor, 1 percent or less, increases. The conclusion was that market size did not affect the reporters' perceptions in any of these questions.

26. The part correlation squared is the unique variance shared by the dependent and independent variable after the influence of all other independent variables in the regression equation has been removed.

27. Tom Rosentiel, Carl Gottlieb and Ann Brady, "Local TV News: What Works, What Flops and Why," *Columbia Journalism Review*, January/February 1999, pp. 53-56.

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29. Slattery and Hakanen, "Sensationalism Versus Public Affairs Content."

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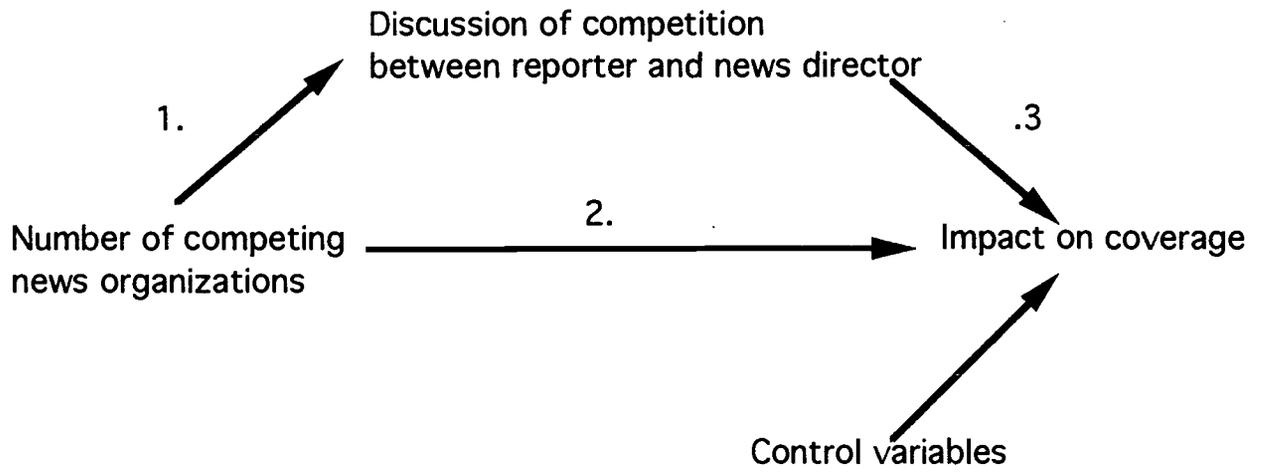


Figure 1: Path model for the impact of beat competition on news coverage of city hall

Table 1
The Impact of Television Competition on Television City Hall Coverage

Responses	Local television news competition:					
	increases how many city hall stories I produce.	makes it harder for me to find time to do indepth city hall stories.	makes me report city hall stories I don't think are important.	makes me report city hall news I otherwise might have missed.	makes me sensationalize city hall news.	
Strongly disagree	11%	13%	23%	11%	39%	
Disagree	17%	16%	27%	16%	19%	
Somewhat disagree	17%	12%	15%	14%	16%	
Not sure	14%	11%	7%	13%	5%	
Somewhat agree	24%	14%	11%	27%	11%	
Agree	12%	17%	9%	14%	5%	
Strongly agree	5%	17%	8%	5%	5%	
Mean	3.8	4.2	3.1	3.9	2.7	
N	245	245	247	245	247	

Table 2

The Impact of Newspaper Competition on Television City Hall Coverage

Responses	Competition from newspapers:					
	increases how many city hall stories I produce.	makes it harder for me to find time to do in-depth city hall news stories.	makes me report city hall stories I don't think are important.	makes me report city hall news I otherwise might have missed.	makes me sensationalize city hall news.	
Strongly disagree	11%	27%	27%	5%	43%	
Disagree	10%	23%	25%	7%	24%	
Somewhat disagree	15%	16%	16%	5%	13%	
Not sure	11%	16%	7%	8%	6%	
Somewhat agree	29%	10%	12%	31%	9%	
Agree	13%	6%	8%	25%	3%	
Strongly agree	11%	2%	5%	19%	2%	
Mean	4.2	2.84	2.97	5.04	2.32	
N	261	264	264	263	264	

Table 3

Beta Weights for Path Model in Figure 1 for Local Television News Competition

Independent variables	Dependent Variables ^a						
	News director & reporter discuss the impact of TV competition.	TV competition increases the # of city hall stories I produce.	TV competition makes it hard to find time to do in-depth city hall stories.	TV competition makes me report unimportant city hall stories.	TV competition makes me report city hall stories I might have missed.	TV competition makes me report sensationalize city hall news.	TV competition makes me report city hall news.
News director & reporter discuss the impact of TV competition	Not applicable	.257	.095	.048	.151	.104	.104
Years covering city hall	-.081	-.062	.083	-.076	-.054	.054	.054
Station's market ranking	-.037	-.004	-.013	.060	.130	.111	.111
Number of TV stations covering city hall	-.153	.043	.066	-.070	-.018	.063	.063
R-squared	.038	.071	.018	.019	.043	.029	.029
Degrees of freedom	3,212	4,211	4,211	4,211	4,209	4,211	4,211

^a All dependent variables were measured by responses on a seven-point scale from strongly disagree equaling one and strongly agree equaling seven.

Table 4

Beta Weights for Path Model in Figure 1 for Newspaper Competition

Independent variables	Dependent Variables ^a						
	News director & reporter discuss the impact of NP competition.	NP competition increases the # of city hall stories I produce.	NP competition makes it hard to find time to do indepth city hall stories.	NP competition makes me report unimportant city hall stories.	NP competition makes me report city hall stories I might have missed.	NP competition makes me report sensationalize city hall news.	NP competition
News director & reporter discuss the impact of NP competition	Not applicable	.492	.222	.201	.281	.181	.181
Years covering city hall	.039	-.034	-.017	-.060	-.009	.181	.181
Station's market ranking	-.078	-.051	.038	-.066	-.014	.021	.021
Number of TV stations covering city hall daily	-.071	.015	-.109	-.112	.035	-.032	-.032
Number of dailies covering city hall	.031	-.068	.096	.091	.068	.024	.024
R-squared	.014	.253	.070	.072	.084	.069	.069
Degrees of freedom	4,220	5,218	5,219	5,219	5,219	5,219	5,219

^a All dependent variables were measured by responses on a seven-point scale from strongly disagree equaling one and strongly agree equaling seven.

TELEVISION NETWORK AFFILIATION CHANGES IN A MAJOR MARKET
AND THE EFFECT ON NEWS VIEWING

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Prepared for

Refereed Paper Session
Radio-Television Journalism Division
Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication
(AEJMC) 1999 Annual Convention
August 5, 1999
New Orleans, LA

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TELEVISION NETWORK AFFILIATION CHANGES IN A MAJOR MARKET
AND THE EFFECT ON NEWS VIEWING

Abstract

In most studies of the reasons why viewers tune in to any given television program, the effects of program loyalty, channel loyalty, and network loyalty may be somewhat difficult to separate. Network affiliation changes will offer a naturally occurring opportunity to observe these effects. Thus, the purpose of this study was to determine which of these concepts would determine news viewing in a major market after experiencing a network affiliation change.

TELEVISION NETWORK AFFILIATION CHANGES IN A MAJOR MARKET AND THE EFFECT ON NEWS VIEWING

There can be no better scenario through which to monitor and evaluate viewing patterns and preferences than when local television stations change network affiliation. (Abelman, Atkin, & Rand, 1997, p. 363)

News viewing levels are of considerable importance to both television network news operations and local television news departments because of the major profit potential of news. Research examining viewing patterns of news, as well as other forms of programming, has grown, lending support for concepts such as channel loyalty, network loyalty, program loyalty, and lead-in effects.

In the period encompassing 1994 and 1995, numerous television markets in the United States experienced major shifts in station network affiliation because of the Fox Network's agreement to buy 20 percent of New World Communication Group. New World had acquired American Communications Corporation and Argyle Television Holding. This move caused several stations who were affiliated with one of the "Big Three" networks (ABC, CBS, NBC) to become Fox Network affiliates (see Abelman et al, 1997, pp. 363-364). One of these stations is located in the Dallas-Fort Worth market, the eighth largest market in the United States, and one of the few to have had a VHF independent station. The shakeup in affiliations on July 1, 1995 resulted in KDFW-TV (Ch. 4), the former CBS affiliate, becoming a Fox Network affiliate; KTVT (Ch. 11), formerly an independent superstation becoming a CBS affiliate; and KDAF-TV (Ch. 33), which was the Fox affiliate, becoming an independent.

Perhaps the biggest effect of the changes was on the news operations of these stations. Fox continued local newscasts on KDFW-TV at 5 PM, 6 PM, and 10 PM, and added another hour of news from 9 to 10 PM. KTVT had a one hour-long nightly newscast from 9 to 10 PM before the change; it now schedules local news at 5, 6, and 10 PM. KDAF-TV had no newscasts, before or after the change.

These changes offered an opportunity to observe the effects of network, program, and channel loyalty. A somewhat similar change occurred in 1979 in Indianapolis, when the NBC and ABC affiliates switched places. This study found strong support for channel loyalty. "Repeat viewing of a channel's local and network newscast appears to be the rule, even if there is a change of network" (Wakshlag, et al, 1983, p. 66).

This study replicated some of this earlier research, and presents a unique opportunity to determine if channel loyalty would be as strong in one of the top ten markets as it was in the smaller Indianapolis market, especially in this somewhat different situation; also taking into consideration the changing marketplace situation for television viewing. Because KDFW-TV (Ch. 4) has had a strong news operation and the same news anchors for a number of years, and KTVT (Ch. 11) has had only local newscasts for a relatively few years in a different time period, this affiliation change had the potential to give a strong indication of channel loyalty in this major market.

Statement of the Problem

In most studies of the reasons why viewers turn in to any given television program, the effects of program loyalty, channel loyalty, and network loyalty may be

somewhat difficult to separate. Network affiliations changes offer a naturally occurring opportunity to observe these effects.

Questions to be answered included: (1) Will viewers remain loyal to the Channel 4 local newscasts? (2) Will viewers continue to watch the CBS Evening news when it switches to Channel 11, and, if so, will the 6 PM local newscast on Channel 11 gain these viewers? If the ratings for the Channel 4 local newscasts remain constant, strong support for the concept of channel loyalty will be indicated. But, if the ratings indicate a shift in viewers to the newscasts on Channel 11, support for network loyalty, as well as lead-in effect, may be indicated.

Previous studies have attempted to predict audience flow by examining audience duplication. A 1985 study (Webster) defined audience duplication as both the proportion of the total audience viewing any pair of programs, and the percentage of a program's total audience that also views another program. The findings suggested that inheritance effects were more of a matter of lead-in then lead-out. Support has been found for program type loyalty (Headen, Klompaker, & Rust, 1979); and for network loyalty (Bruno, 1973). Boemer (1987) found significant correlations between lead-in show ratings and local television news ratings; Davis and Walker (1990) studied inheritance as share maintenance. While share maintenance effects between network prime time programs did decline from 1983 to 1985, there was a substantial increase from 1986 to 1988. Youn (1994) found that an increase in program choice options (in a multichannel situation) facilitates such choices based on program type preference.

Lin's 1996 survey of affiliate general managers examined factors that might influence ties between TV networks and their affiliate stations. Lin wrote that the

"impact of network news programs on affiliate loyalty, however, seems negligible. This is perhaps due to the fact that network news programs primarily provide a station with prestige and symbiotic reliance more than economic gains" (p. 210). Lin's premise highlights the fact that financial factors are at the forefront of the network-affiliate relationship (p. 206).

Abelman, Atkin, & Rand's study of 1997 investigated nine of 37 markets that had experienced affiliation shifts. Their underlying motive was "how do viewing motivations relate to viewing patterns and view perceptions, particularly during a period of unprecedented television affiliate realignment" (p.374)? Their study confirmed "the existence of ritualized/habitual viewers, but it ha[d] also been determined that these viewers are relatively indiscriminant consumers with regard to the source of programming" (p. 375).

Barrett's 1998 study examined the relationship between affiliation change and ratings changes for local and network television news. She found that the Nielsen ratings data from February 1994, 1995 and 1996 showed a negative relationship between an affiliation change and change in ratings for local news, but no relationship between affiliation change and change in ratings for network news (p.17). Barrett (p. 5) stated that Webster and Newton (1988) found a greater degree of correlation between network and local news ratings when the local news led into the network news, thus "the overall relationship between the network news and local news was determined more by the strength of the local news than vice versa" (p. 386).

Method

The difference in methods between the present study and the 1979 Indianapolis study lies first in the choice of respondents. The Nielsen VI/P for the Dallas-Fort Worth DMA indicates strong news viewing shares among working women and was noted for all three of the evening newscasts before the change. Thus, the selected population for this study was stratified as working women.

While the earlier study used viewing diaries, a random sample of listed telephone numbers yielded a sample of women who work outside the home. Telephone responses provided for immediate feedback and confirmation of availability for later questioning. Respondents were called in June 1995 before the affiliation change and asked about news viewing for the 5, 6, and 9-10:30 PM local newscasts, and the 5:30 PM network newscast. The same respondents were called again in October 1995 after the July 1 change and asked again about their news viewing for the week. Ratings were calculated for each of the newscasts based on the sample.

Findings

As provided in Table 1, the findings of study indicate statistically significant results. The findings were analyzed utilizing paired comparisons of the main effects by television station. (The central distribution limited theorem provides that the sampling distribution with large samples will be normally distributed. As an additional check, “bootstrap” confidence intervals were calculated by resampling with replacement from the original data set. This allows one to empirically construct for a sampling for the mean

differences. The p values and confidence intervals did not appreciably differ from the parametric tests.)

Table 1

t-Tests of Paired Samples			
(NOTE: any p value less than .05 indicates “statistically” significant result)			
<u>Variables</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>2-tail Sig</u> = .022	
<i>Ch.4, 5pm</i>			
Pre	.3563		
Post	.1494		
<u>Variables</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>2-tail Sig</u> = .007	
<i>Ch.4, 6pm</i>			
Pre	.3276		
Post	.0862		
<u>Variables</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>2-tail Sig</u> = .319	
<i>Ch.5, 5pm</i>			
Pre	.4195		
Post	.3333		
<u>Variables</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>2-tail Sig</u> = .649	
<i>Ch.5, 6pm</i>			
Pre	.3793		
Post	.3391		
<u>Variables</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>2-tail Sig</u> = .003	
<i>Ch.8, 5pm</i>			
Pre	.9310		
Post	.5575		
<u>Variables</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>2-tail Sig</u> = .077	
<i>Ch.8, 6pm</i>			
Pre	.7989		
Post	.5862		
<u>Variables</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>2-tail Sig</u> = .244	
<i>Ch.11, 9pm-10pm</i>			
Pre	.2241		
Post	.1437		
<u>Variables</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>2-tail Sig</u> = .112	
<i>Ch.4, 5:30pm</i>			
Pre	.2874		
Post	.1379		
<u>Variables</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>2-tail Sig</u> = .005	
<i>Ch.4, 9pm-10pm</i>			
Pre	.5977		
Post	.2299		
<u>Variables</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>2-tail Sig</u> = .773	
<i>Ch.5, 5:30pm</i>			
Pre	.3046		
Post	.3276		
<u>Variables</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>2-tail Sig</u> = .684	
<i>Ch.5, 9pm-10pm</i>			
Pre	.5690		
Post	.5230		
<u>Variables</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>2-tail Sig</u> = .023	
<i>Ch.8, 5:30pm</i>			
Pre	.8563		
Post	.5632		
<u>Variables</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>2-tail Sig</u> = .027	
<i>Ch.8, 9pm-10pm</i>			
Pre	1.2759		
Post	.8793		

(Note that *Channel 11* became the CBS affiliate after the change, thus taking over the network newscast from *Channel 4* at 5:30pm.)

Findings indicate that viewership changes for Channel 4 (the former CBS affiliate, later Fox Network affiliate) were statistically significant at 5pm, 6pm, and 9pm, all showing decreases in viewing among the sample group (See Table 1). The other statistically significant station was Channel 8 (the ABC affiliate) at 5pm, 5:30pm, and 9pm, also showing a decline in viewership.

It is interesting to note that the overall "winner" occurring from the affiliate change was Channel 5 (the NBC affiliate) as show in the in-tab sample findings of the Nielsen ratings for the same period. These findings are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Nielsen In-Tab Samples

<i>5-5:30pm</i>	<i>Channel 4</i>	<i>Channel 5</i>	<i>Channel 8</i>	<i>Channel 11</i>
May 1995	27(.048)	26(.047)	62(.111)	19(.034)
October 1995	25(.052)	38(.079)	43(.089)	---

<i>5:30-6pm</i>	<i>Channel 4</i>	<i>Channel 5</i>	<i>Channel 8</i>	<i>Channel 11</i>
May 1995	34(.061)	28(.050)	67(.120)	13(.022)
October 1995	30(.062)	47(.979)	48(.100)	4(.008)

<i>6-6:30pm</i>	<i>Channel 4</i>	<i>Channel 5</i>	<i>Channel 8</i>	<i>Channel 11</i>
May 1995	39(.070)	33(.059)	82(.147)	21(.036)
October 1995	32(.067)	55(.115)	63(.131)	6(.015)

<i>9-10:30pm</i>	<i>Channel 4</i>	<i>Channel 5</i>	<i>Channel 8</i>	<i>Channel 11</i>
May 1995	71(.127)	105(.189)	141(.253)	27(.048)
October 1995	62(.129)	122(.254)	117(.244)	43(.089)

Note: In-tab sample for May 1995 was 557; In-tab sample for October 1995 was 480. DMA Ratings are for working women.

The Nielsen findings are somewhat consistent when compared with the pre- and post-viewing results for the sample group as provided in Table 3. While not all of the respondents were available for the post-survey, all pre- and post-survey results are

presented. Average persons viewing are for each newscast watched (the number of times) and each newscast finding is adjusted for the number of days each week the broadcasts were presented for the individual stations (5, 6 or 7 days).

Table 3

Viewing Results: Pre-/Post-

5-5:30pm *Pre: Yes Watched = 70* *No Watched=104* *TOTAL=174*
 Post: Yes Watched = 52 *No Watched=78* *TOTAL=130*

	Channel 4			Channel 5			Channel 8			Channel 11		
	<i>Count</i>	<i>Av.Per</i>	<i>Rating</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Av.Per</i>	<i>Rating</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Av.Per</i>	<i>Rating</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Av.Per</i>	<i>Rating</i>
<i>PRE</i>	62	12.4	.071	73	14.6	.083	162	32.4	.186	---	---	---
<i>POST</i>	26	4.3	.03	58	11.6	.089	94	18.8	.145	4	.8	.006

5:30-6pm *Pre: Yes Watched = 66* *No Watched=108* *TOTAL=174*
 Post: Yes Watched = 54 *No Watched=76* *TOTAL=130*

	Channel 4			Channel 5			Channel 8			Channel 11		
	<i>Count</i>	<i>Av.Per</i>	<i>Rating</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Av.Per</i>	<i>Rating</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Av.Per</i>	<i>Rating</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Av.Per</i>	<i>Rating</i>
<i>PRE</i>	50	8.3	.048	53	8.8	.05	149	24.8	.143	---	---	---
<i>POST</i>	24	4.8	.037	57	9.5	.073	95	19.0	.146	7	1.2	.009

6-6:30pm *Pre: Yes Watched =71* *No Watched=103* *TOTAL=174*
 Post: Yes Watched = 51 *No Watched=79* *TOTAL=130*

	Channel 4			Channel 5			Channel 8			Channel 11		
	<i>Count</i>	<i>Av.Per</i>	<i>Rating</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Av.Per</i>	<i>Rating</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Av.Per</i>	<i>Rating</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Av.Per</i>	<i>Rating</i>
<i>PRE</i>	57	9.5	.055	66	11.0	.063	139	23.2	.133	---	---	---
<i>POST</i>	15	2.5	.019	59	9.8	.075	102	17.0	.1315	6	1.2	.009

9-10:30pm *Pre: Yes Watched =103* *No Watched=71* *TOTAL=174*
 Post: Yes Watched = 87 *No Watched=43* *TOTAL=130*

	Channel 4			Channel 5			Channel 8			Channel 11		
	<i>Count</i>	<i>Av.Per</i>	<i>Rating</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Av.Per</i>	<i>Rating</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Av.Per</i>	<i>Rating</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Av.Per</i>	<i>Rating</i>
<i>PRE</i>	104	14.9	.086	99	14.1	.081	222	31.7	.182	39	5.6	.032
<i>POST</i>	40	5.7	.043	91	13.0	.10	153	21.9	.168	25	3.6	.028

Notes:

- 1) Although all of the respondents were not available for the post-survey, all pre- and post-survey results are presented.
- 2) Av. Per is Average Persons viewing each newscast within the pre and post results.
- 3) Ratings are the percentage of the total respondents in the pre and post results.
- 4) Results for each newscast are adjusted for the number of days which broadcasts are presented each week for the individual stations (i.e., 5, 6, or 7 days).



Conclusions

Overall, the findings of this study, along with the Nielsen ratings for the same period, show little support for channel loyalty, network loyalty, or program loyalty. This finding is similar to Barrett's 1998 study. In contrast, the channel loyalty factor was supported in Wakshlag's (1983) study and Boemer's (1987) study, which professed lead-in characteristics.

Because the CBS evening lost viewers in the sample study, there appeared to be little network loyalty. Even though Channel 4 (the former CBS affiliate, later Fox Network affiliate) continued with the same anchors, there was no indication of program loyalty or channel loyalty. By contrast, Channel 4's Nielsen numbers are nearly stable failing to reflect the decline as presented in the study's results. It might also be noted that, although Channel 11's non-news programs were not included in the study survey, an examination of the Nielsen In-Tab Samples showed a considerable loss in viewership, there again indicating little support for channel loyalty. Interestingly though, Nielsen results show an increase in the Channel 11 9:00pm-10:30pm time slot, while the survey results show a slight decrease (although statistically insignificant). Additionally, the Channel 4 local newscasts lost to Channel 8 (the ABC affiliate) and Channel 5 (the NBC affiliate), although the Nielsen ratings showed Channel 5 as the big winner, as previously noted.

Further review of the data presented can help to explore the on-going attributes of channel loyalty coupled with individual station gains at the expense of local market competitors. Of course, many of these factors are tied directly to the individual station's utilization and reliance upon network originated programming.

With the proliferation of cable channels and direct satellite distribution capabilities, loyalty aspects will continue to play a vital role in viewership habits, particularly in relation to locally originated programming (Henke, et. al, 1984). Given the importance of local and network newscasts and their relationship with local affiliate programming, and the overall economics involved (see Lin, 1996), factors regarding channel, network, and program loyalty (including lead-in effects) remain a topic for further research. Additionally, studies should be carried out to determine the role such loyalty attributes play in the sales and marketing aspects (White, 1977 & Darmon, 1976). Confirmation of this on-going research was epitomized when Barrett wrote earlier this year that "[t]elevision programmers and academic researchers have also believed that viewers are loyal to channels, to networks and to particular kinds of programs" (1999, p. 101).

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Abstract**The 1996 presidential nomination contests:
Network news coverage**

This study examined whether television network newscasts during the nomination period of 1996 focused on strategy and horse-race schemata rather than explanations of how nomination contests differed from state to state. Specifically, lead-ins, introductions, segments, kickers, video sequences, and graphics were studied. Results showed that strategy messages were more frequent than explanatory information on contest differences both in words and pictures. The opportunity to use full-screen graphics was not utilized for learning.

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The 1996 presidential nomination contests: Network news coverage

Two democratic theories are relevant to evaluating nominating systems (Crotty, 1987). One favors a “plural elite” or an indirect representative approach, and the other theory favors a more direct “participant-oriented” method; America’s nominating system is a combination (p. 63). The participatory model may be necessary to maintain the tie between the governed and the governors in a democratic society (Fiorina, 1981), yet the participatory-oriented model is difficult for voters because the rules of the state contests vary from state to state. The concentration of contests made the 1996 season even more difficult for voters. Although Republicans are discussing spreading out the contests in 2000 (Ayres, 1999; Cook, 1997), there is no guarantee that Democrats will do likewise or even that the Republicans will follow through with their plans. Lessons learned from the 1996 election may be vital to improved coverage for 2000. Studying television coverage of the nomination period is important because voters or potential voters get more information from television news than from newspapers (Chaffee, Zhao, & Leshner, 1994).

The best word to describe the intensity of the 1996 nomination season is “front-loading” (Barnes, 1995). About 30 nominating contests were packed into early February to late March as opposed to the more traditional time frame of scattering nomination contests from February to June. By the end of March, the Republican nomination was almost decided because even with a third of the states still to hold their contests, seven of the 10 largest states had determined their votes with more than 75% of the Democratic

delegates and nearly 70% of the Republican delegates selected (Cook, April 29, 1995). State parties desire front-loading for two reasons: "to capture more attention from the candidates for regional or local issues" and to respond to voters who feel disenfranchised when the candidate has already been chosen by the time the voter gets to vote (Barnes, 1995, p. 1156). Also, as witnessed in the 1996 fight between Iowa and Louisiana to hold the first caucus, states were eager to capture media attention lavished upon those states holding the first contests. Party leaders know that in modern history, the nominations usually have been decided early with the exceptions of the 1976 Republican race between President Gerald R. Ford and Ronald Reagan lasting up to the national convention and the 1984 battle between Walter F. Mondale and Gary Hart continuing to the final week of the primary season (Cook, August 19, 1995).

However, front-loading has negative implications for voters for several reasons (Cook, January 22, 1994). Because campaigning is so fast-paced, candidates will spend too little time in primary/caucus states to engage the electorate. Front-loading also can trigger a domino effect and reduce the likelihood of meaningful participation for voters. Therefore, it was extremely important in 1996 for media to give explanatory information to citizens. Although national media could not tell people exact times of poll closings and how to register in each state, they could give information such as whether the primary is closed or open and who would be allowed to vote in each state's contests. Simply giving the number of delegates to be chosen or the importance of the state contests denies potential voters information about how they might vote.

The purpose of this study is to examine whether the main emphasis of television network newscasts during the nomination period was strategy and horse-race schemata or explanations of how nomination contests differed and how voters could participate.

History and background

The nomination system changes to fit the social and political needs of the country (Warnock, 1996). In 1901, Florida was the first state to pass a presidential primary law – a reaction against selection of candidates by big business interests. By 1916, 26 states relied on primaries. But the Depression and World War II cooled the idea because of candidate and party expense. Originally, primaries in the early 20th century were a solution to corrupt conventions, but primaries' potential was soon usurped by the political bosses (Crotty). After World War II, primaries and caucuses began to increase, and by 1976, 26 states held primaries (Warnock). In 1968, Hubert Humphrey lost the primaries but won the nomination with party bosses' aid and then lost the presidential bid. The Democratic Party then formed the McGovern-Fraser Commission, which initiated the inclusion of more young people, women, and minorities (Achen, 1989). This commission was followed by the Mikulski Commission of 1972-1976 that introduced proportional representation, that is dividing a state's national convention delegates based on the popular vote rather than winner take all (Crotty). After those reform movements, a second commission, the Winograd, attempted to bypass some of the grass-roots participation concessions by changing more primaries to caucuses and advocating the awarding of 10% of the delegation to the governors and state chairs and another 25% to politically-favored candidates (Crotty). By 1980, 37 states held primaries, and the length

of the primary season was almost twice as long as the general election campaign (Warnock). With Reagan's 1980 landslide, the Democrats decided to bring the system more into the control of party regulars with the Hunt Commission, which further decreased grass roots participation and increased party professionals' influence through "winner-take-all" primaries and delegate selection based more on party committees (Crotty). The Fairness Commission of 1984-1988, instigated by Jesse Jackson and Gary Hart's 1984 delegates, attempted to reverse some of the Winograd and Hunt commissions' innovations. These constantly changing rules in the delegate-choice process matter to potential voters because "they can be conducive to favoring certain candidacies or points of view. Some groups gain, others lose. We are all affected. The rules are anything but neutral" (Crotty, p. 85).

Not only are the rules not neutral, but also the rules are not uniform from state to state or party to party – unlike the final election. For example, Missouri Democrats returned to a caucus in 1992 after abandoning that method for primaries in 1988. Missouri continued its caucus system in 1996, and both parties held caucuses but on different dates. Some states even hold different kinds of events such as Michigan where Democrats held an open caucus in 1996 while the Republicans held an open primary. Other states go a step further on the complication scale: Arizona Democrats held an open caucus and Republicans held a closed primary in 1996 (Cook, August 19, 1995).

In addition to open and closed primaries and caucuses, there are other variances. In a presidential preference primary, voters choose the candidate they'd like nominated or they select delegates (Warnock, 1996). However, the preference votes cast by voters may not even be legally binding on the delegates. The caucus system is equally as complex with

many starting at a precinct caucus level, then a county, and finally a state convention, which finally chooses the national delegates. Caucus voters on the precinct level may not feel that their votes even count. Candidates often don't target the average voter in a caucus as they would in primaries (Warnock, 1996). Although Democrats began to make changes in the 60s for more involvement, their caucuses still are usually open to party members only. Only 14 states held caucuses in 1996.

Literature review

Improvement of general election coverage has been a constant theme for media critics and researchers. Critical analyses have focused on variations of news media's preoccupation with horse-race journalism and coverage of campaigns as game strategy (Steger, 1999; Patterson, 1994; Teixeira, 1992).

Nomination contests are researched less than the general election, probably because the varied structures of primaries and caucuses make them difficult for researchers to compare from state to state. The nomination system is a moving target for voters attempting to understand or participate in primaries or caucuses (Norrander, 1993, 1991). However, some inferences can be made about the special needs of caucus and primary voters over general election voters based on differences of nomination contests and general elections.

The importance of individual nomination contests vary more than general elections. Candidate viability fluctuates more than in the general election, and the importance of the general election is constant as opposed to the salience of nomination contests in determining who gets the nomination. For example, a candidate may "lose" in one state's

primary but a week later “win” in another. In a general election, however, there is only one winner (Flanigan & Zingale, 1991).

Voters in both caucuses and primaries have no control over extrinsic or elite-level activities, but those outside-the-voter factors may affect whether voters will make the decision to participate (Norrander, 1991; Norrander, 1986). Elite-level activities center around strategic campaign factors — evident in candidate strategies, media attention, and nomination contest rules. Complicated procedural rules that vary from state to state could directly influence turnout (Norrander & Smith, 1985).

Understanding media attention or coverage, then, is necessary in determining whether voters will feel encouraged to participate. The framing concept refers to how stories are presented through “subtle alterations in the statement or presentation of judgment and choice problems...” (Iyengar, 1991, p. 11). Framing consists of selection and salience (Entman, 1993). “To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text... to highlight some bits of information about an item ... elevating them in salience ... making more noticeable, meaningful or memorable to audiences” (Entman, p. 52). Entman concluded that omissions of definitions, evaluations, and recommendations are as critical in giving the audience clues as inclusions. According to Shah, Domke, and Wackman, framing “focuses on the manner in which the construction of communication texts influences individual cognitions by selectively focusing on particular parts of reality while ignoring or downplaying other aspects” (1996, p. 509+).

Based on the principle of *gestalt coding* of television, both print scripts and pictures should be examined when studying framing because in television news, pictures are as

important as the words when analyzing how people determine candidates' personalities (Graber, 1987). The gestalt coding method examines political context; anchor's lead-in and verbal and nonverbal editorializing; audiovisual message of words, nonverbal sounds and pictures; and interactive effects within stories and among other newscast stories. Strategy and horse-race schemata often are used by news reporters to focus on politics as a game rather than viewers' schemata of viewing politics as a means of choosing leaders and solving problems (Patterson, 1994). Several problems exist with the game schema of television news: viewers seldom see candidates for more than 20 seconds, and viewers are not receiving serious political debate about issues (Hallin, 1997). Often television news focuses on candidates rather than political parties (Chafee, Zhao, & Leshner), and learning of television content must occur quickly because newscasts are transitory and cannot be reread (Robinson & Levy, 1986).

Because television has become the principal medium of campaign communication and television news the most important vehicle used to discern issues differences between candidates (Chaffee, Zhao, & Leshner; Brians & Wattenberg, 1996), studying television coverage is important to understanding what information voters are receiving in the early stages of the campaign. Although issue-oriented voters use both newspaper and television to compare candidates' issue positions, those voters utilize television as their secondary medium when searching for candidates' personal qualities (Lowden, Andersen, Dozier, Lauzen, 1994). Television media exposure during the nomination contests is important for political learning in the general election. It is during this time period, when voters' attitudes are still changing, that voters form candidates' impressions starting with

relational perceptions of candidates and evolving to perceptions of candidate competence (Pfau, Diedrich, Larson, Van Winkle, 1993).

Method and research questions

We examined scripts from CBS, NBC, and ABC news. Only these three were studied because the three networks devote the same time to the evening newscasts and follow similar formats. ABC scripts were available on Nexis-Lexis©. Tapes were used from Vanderbilt Television News Archive for CBS and NBC. Those tapes were transcribed by two researchers. Print scripts were used for coding except for graphics and video sequences.

In addition to scripts, the CBS and NBC videos were examined to determine the video sequences and full-screen explanatory graphics seen by viewers. Graphics and video clips were coded only for CBS and NBC tapes because the ABC tapes were not available because of financial constraints.

The nomination period runs from February through May. For purposes of this study, broadcasts from Feb. 12, 1996, through March 12, 1996, were examined because this was the most concentrated four-week period of the primary/caucus season. Feb. 12 was the evening before the Iowa caucus, often considered the start of the nomination season. Super Tuesday was March 12.

Preliminary testing by the researcher and a second coder resulted in the final structure of the categories. Two student researchers completed the final coding. Intercoder reliability was 88%. The SAS package was used to perform all statistical analyses.

The unit of analysis was the news story for the evening news. Information coded for each story included: (1) lead-in – first two sentences, usually spoken by the anchor; (2) introduction, lead-in plus sentences before the first correspondent or segment was introduced; (3) segment one; (4) segment two; (5) kicker, last line by anchor; (6) first three video sequences; and (7) graphics.

Segments were determined by the researcher based on introduction of a new correspondent or subject, often after a commercial. Only the first two segments were coded, and CBS had third and fourth segments while ABC and NBC devoted much less time to the nomination coverage. Thus, for comparison purposes, only the first two segments were coded, and in some newscasts from ABC and NBC, there was no second segment.

The lead-in, introduction, and first two segments were coded for 10 themes of coverage: 1) tracking poll results of network or other poll results; 2) issue coverage or comparison of issues; 3) ad analysis of different candidates; 4) leadership qualifications or experience for the job; 5) strategy or horse-race coverage (which candidate is behind or ahead, importance of primary or caucus to that candidate, what candidates are doing to win, which strategies are working, which are not, campaign techniques, campaign promises to a group – what candidate was trying to do to gain favor with group, change in media strategy, trouble in the campaign – staff or issue causing problems, money problems, who might be running mate, withdrawal of candidate and what effect may have on others; 6) what voters are saying about the candidates – specific voters talking – or now it's the voters turn to make up their mind or decide; 7) political expert or journalist discussing strategy; 8) person used for humor, background, or color; 9) and discussion of

nominating process. Items included under discussion of nominating process were explanation of difference between primary and caucus, explanation of open and closed primaries and caucuses, explanation of voter eligibility, explanation of how many delegates out of total number being chosen in contest, explanation of “count” or how many delegates the candidate had, explanation of phrase “winner take all,” and importance of contest.

The research questions were:

Research question 1: Because the lead-in and introduction set the tone of the newscast or how the newscast will be framed, what was the usual “theme” in the lead and introduction?

Research question 2: What is the theme of the first two segments of the newscasts?

Research question 3: What theme is the viewer left with by the kickers?

Research question 4: How did the picture sequences frame the nomination contests?

Research question 5: Would the full-screen explanatory graphics help learning in newscasts – explaining the complicated process of the nomination contests?

Results and discussion

We coded 79 stories. Rounded percentages or numbers are reported because the researchers used the entire population of stories; hence, statistical inference such as X^2 tests was not necessary.

Research question 1: Because the lead-in and introduction set the tone of the newscast or how the newscast will be framed, what will be the usual theme in the lead-in and introduction?

Of 29 stories for ABC, 52% of the lead-ins focused on strategy coverage with 45% focusing on nominating process, and 3.4% or 1 lead-in focused on what specific voters were saying about the candidates. Also, most of the introductions focused either on strategy coverage or discussion of nominating process (59% on strategy, 35% on discussion of nomination process). (Figure 1)

CBS's 26 stories had 85% or 22 lead-ins focusing on strategy and 12% or 9 lead-ins focusing on nominating process. CBS's introductions were 42% or 10 focused on strategy and 19% or 5 focused on nominating process.

Of NBC's 24 stories, 42% or 10 lead-ins focused on strategy with 15% or 12 lead-ins focusing on nominating process. NBC's introductions were 50% or 12 stories for strategy and 38% or 9 introductions on the nominating process.

Examining the introductions and how they covered the nominating process is more useful than just comparing lead-ins. When all three networks were totaled, 62% of the introductions used strategy as a theme with 30% using the nominating process. The percentages may be misleading, however, because the introductions that did focus on the nomination process often were mixed with strategy. Very few actually explained the system except to tell what a candidate's strategy was in winning the nomination, how many delegates were at stake, or how many delegates each candidate now possessed.

Several introductions had potential to inform voters. On Feb. 12, the lead-in of Peter Jennings on ABC said:

Every four years we remind you that the word caucus, as in these meetings tonight, is a Native-American word, Algonquin, we think, that once meant meeting of the tribal elders. Today it means a genuinely democratic exercise in which lot of people can participate if they think it's important.

An ABC introduction on Feb. 27 included strategy, but it also explained how the votes would be awarded:

Good evening. We begin tonight with Republicans. There are three presidential primaries today. And for the first time, this political season we hear from the Midwest and the Southwest. The two Dakotas and Arizona are having their voices heard today. Among the front runners, there's a very good chance that Senator Bob Dole will win a primary and there's also a pretty good chance that he will be embarrassed by Pat Buchanan or by Steve Forbes.

In the primaries today, 75 delegates to the Republican convention will be awarded; 18 each in North and South Dakota. They will be awarded proportionately – get 50 percent of the vote, you get half the delegates. The largest prize is in Arizona – 39 Republican delegates there and winner takes all.

Other introductions from ABC, CBS, or NBC gave little explanation about the intricacies of the process.

Figure 1: Leads and introductions – numbers and percentages of stories in top two categories

		Strategy	Nominating process
ABC	Leads	5 or 52%	13 or 45%
	Introductions	17 or 59%	10 or 35%
CBS	Leads	22 or 85%	3 or 12%
	Introductions	20 or 77%	5 or 19%
NBC	Leads	10 or 42%	12 or 15%
	Introductions	12 or 50%	9 or 38%
Total for 3	Leads	47 or 59%	28 or 35%
	Introductions	49 or 62%	24 or 30%

Research question 2: What is the focus of the first two segments of the newscasts?

Research question 2: What is the focus of the first two segments of the newscasts?

Combining the two segments, seven of the 79 newscasts contained segments about the nomination process in either the first or second segment. All those stories were on ABC or NBC with CBS carrying no nomination process stories in its first two segments.

ABC's Feb. 14 story focused on what made caucuses different from primaries and explained that the caucus system requires more than just pulling a lever – it meant discussing issues and a willingness to give up an evening. The segment showed Democrats in the Iowa caucus having to move into groups or caucuses according to whom they supported, and it explained that this was different from the Republicans who voted by a secret written ballot. Although this newscast contained only one segment, it explained well not only the difference in caucuses and primaries but also between Democrat and Republican rules.

ABC's second story explaining the nominating process said that it was not a playoff tournament – that losing one state contest did not mean that candidate was finished. It also explained that the contests were regional and local, not national: "People cast their votes in their own communities." Then it explained how the delegates were counted:

JEFF GREENFIELD: Three, winning means different things in different states. In five New England states on Tuesday, the winner gets all the delegates, even if he gets just one more vote than the other guy. Two days later, New York will hand out 93 delegates based on who carries each of the states' 31 congressional districts. Those winner-take-all states, by the way, create an intriguing possibility.

MICHAEL BARONE: If you have a three-way or multi-candidate race, a candidate with winning a plurality of votes just slightly ahead of a couple of others can win a majority of convention delegates even though a majority of primary voters don't really want him.

JEFF GREENFIELD: One last point to keep in mind – delegates from 17 states will be going to the San Diego convention this summer not legally bound to vote for anyone. If enough of them don't like what they've seen so far, they just might have enough clout to put some new name in nomination.

NBC's stories concentrated mostly on the strategy of winning the nomination without giving explanations of the system. For example, segment 2 on Feb. 21 started with a voiceover and a graph that showed which states would be voting when. The voiceover discussed the nomination schedule, and Tim Russert followed and commented on what strategy the candidates would have to use. The Feb. 24 story was a mixture of strategy and commentary on the nomination contests coming up – especially Arizona. Glen Ifill did explain that Arizona's 39 delegates would be winner take all. Ifill added: "The distaste for politics as usual here is real. Fifty-six% of those eligible are not even registered to vote."

The Feb. 28 NBC story explained how few people are engaged in the nomination process. Tom Brokaw said:

Tonight, a little perspective on all this. In the heat of the primary battles, how many Americans have actually voted so far? A total, a grand total of 802,310 votes have been cast in all the Republican contests. That means, fewer than 3 out of 100 Americans have actually had a say. And how are the candidates doing?

(Full-screen graphic with total vote, number of votes, and percentage beside picture of each candidate) Bob Dole's got the most votes. Nearly 250 thousand even if he doesn't have the most delegates. That 31%. ...

The March 2 NBC story, second segment, focused on how many delegates would be chosen in Junior Tuesday. A full-screen map graphic outlined the 10 states as they were discussed, but mostly the discussion was about what the candidates hoped to do in those states rather than the intricacies of the nomination system.

These results show that explaining the nomination process is not a top priority.

Viewers would find out how many delegates would be elected and which states would hold their contests on what days, but they would not be told whether the upcoming contests would be open to them or closed.

Figure 2a: Segment 1, top three topics

	Topic	No. of stories
ABC(27 segment 1)	Strategy	20 stories, 74%
	Issue coverage	3 stories, 11%
	Nominating process	2 stories, 7%
CBS(26 segment 1)	Strategy	23 stories, 89%
	Ad analysis	2 stories, 8%
	Political experts	1 story, 4%
NBC(24 segment 1)	Strategy	22 stories, 92%
	Nominating	1 story, 4%
	Issue coverage	1 story, 4%

Figure 2b: Segment 2, top three topics

	Topic	No. of stories
ABC(18 segment 2)	Strategy	7 stories, 39%
	Political expert	5 stories, 28%
	What voters said.	3 stories, 17%
CBS(20 segment 2)	Strategy	13 stories, 65%
	Political expert	5 stories, 25%
	What voters said & Issue coverage	1 story each, 4%
NBC(16 segment 2)	Strategy	8 stories, 50%
	Nominating	4 stories, 25%
	Political expert	3 stories, 13%

Research question 3: What theme is the viewer left with by the kickers?

The kicker is the last statement in the newscast, the one that completes the tone of the newscast. Up to the kicker, most of the stories focused on strategy. Focusing on strategy has been interpreted as a technique to retain objectivity. However, 50% of ABC's kickers were editorial or interpretative comments with CBS at 63% and NBC at 53%. Those kickers often appeared to give one final impression that politics is a game, and the viewer would not be able to get involved. Often the kickers could be classified as "zingers" or sarcastic comments about the process. Below are representative kickers coded as editorial or interpretive comments, based on the context of the previous segments:

ABC:

● There was just a little encouragement for the Republican establishment today. When Mr. Buchanan showed up at a rodeo in Tucson, Arizona today, some people hollered, "go, Pat, go"; others hollered, "Go home, Pat, go Home."

● Unlike the Republican contenders, President Clinton can do more than make campaign promises: Sometimes he can deliver.

● Buchanan admits that his language is, at time, indelicate, but he says that is part of his appeal. But the free-wheeling talk that is so effective on the campaign trail is not the voice of America that foreign leaders are used to hearing.

CBS:

● Alexander said: No, I'm going straight ahead, I'm coming up. Senator Dole has no fresh ideas, Buchanan has the wrong ideas, and I'll be coming straight up, I'll be the Republican nominee. Rather answered: We'll see, governor. Thank you.

● In this age of electronic politics, a simple idea that connects with voters is still what it's all about.

NBC:

● ... the golden rule, the first law of politics is that anything can happen – it is a long, long way, and the White House is dealing with a lot of issues that could blow up on them, and they know that.

●Dole said: I may not be a good talk show host, but I'm a good leader. Lisa Meyers answered: But will it be enough? And is it in time?

Figure 3: Top three themes of kickers

	Topic	No. of stories
ABC	Editorial or interpretative comment	12 stories, 50%
	Strategy	6 stories, 25%
	Other categories split	
CBS	Editorial or interpretative comment	17 stories, 63%
	Strategy	8 stories, 30%
	Other categories split	
NBC	Editorial or interpretative comment	14 stories, 53%
	Polls, person giving humor, anchor repeats name or tells to watch tonight	3 each, 12% each

Research question 4: How did the pictures frame the nomination contests?

Although a network newscast has many video shots, in this study only the first three sequences were coded. Campaigning shots that only lasted a few seconds or less were combined to form a sequence. Thus, sequence 1 might include a shot of a candidate shaking hands, later giving a speech, meeting with voters, etc. Sequence 2 might be a shot of the candidate being interviewed – if the interviewed lasted more than one question. Sequence 3 might be an interview with the candidate.

For both CBS and NBC (ABC was not coded, see Method section), about 50% of the first three picture sequences were campaign sequences – or strategy. The dominance of those strategy sequences were combined with a majority of segments covering strategy.

The strategy emphasis of the audio and visual combination reinforced earlier research that news focuses on strategy at the expense of other needed information.

Figure 4: First three sequences of video shots

	Picture topics	No. of sequences
CBS	Campaigning clips	38 or 56%
	Candidate interviews	11 or 16%
	Other prominent Repub.	7 or 10%
NBC	Campaigning clips	34 or 47%
	Voters	8 or 11%
	Candidates' ads	6 or 8%

Research question 5: Would the explanatory graphic elements help learning in newscasts or explain the complicated process of the nomination contests?

Graphics abound in television news – from logos such as “Campaign 96” and “Decision 96” to graphics explaining poll stories. Three kinds of graphics were used in the newscasts: full-screen graphics, graphic boxes with a reader, and almost-full screen. The graphics analyzed in this study were the full-screen graphics. Usually the almost-full-screen graphics were used to show ads from different candidates, and the graphic boxes with a reader were used for visual relief. Also, more so than in newspapers, graphics are combined with photos. For example, the stories focusing on ad watches or simply what candidates’ ads were saying about each other showed the ads in almost-full-screen graphics of a TV set combined with campaign sequences.

CBS graphics

During the 29 coded days, CBS ran six graphics covered the nominating process. The first one ran Feb. 21, the day after the New Hampshire primary. A headline said “Upcoming Primaries and Caucuses,” with two subheads saying “Delegates at stake: 417” and “Need to nominate: 996.” The picture element was a map of the United States with states highlighted as the anchor mentioned the states. The voiceover said: “The next two weeks may be decisive – more than 1/3 delegates needed will be on the line.”

A similar nominating process map graphic appeared on Feb. 27 on CBS with states colored with number of delegates at stake. The voiceover said: “In the Dakotas, north and south and Arizona, where it’s winner take all....” However, there was no explanation of what winner take all or proportional voting meant. The remaining nominating graphics were similar to those on March 2 with an explanation that Junior Tuesday was coming up. The March 4 graphic showed the dates March 7, 9, and 12 and how many delegates would be chosen in those three days, and the March 5 one did mention that two states would also have caucuses. What is missing from these graphics is any further explanation of the primary system.

Other full-screen graphics were used at this time – three graphics showing who got what percentage of votes and the number of delegates. Another popular graphic was the one showing the results of a CBS poll, either the percentage of voters on issues in one state’s primaries or comparing states. An example of that graphic was one on March 5 that polled Republican primary voters: “Buchanan Too Extreme – Colorado – 61%, New England – 58%, Georgia – 53%; followed by the results of Dole voters in Georgia: Most Important Quality – can beat Clinton, 30% and Washington experience 24%.”

Six days showed a map of primary or caucuses and how many delegates needed to win or which contests were the next day or next week. No days had a graphic that explained the primary function in the nomination system. One day had a graphic explaining the difference in their views or showed views of just one candidate. Other graphics that appeared were five graphics that showed who got what percentage of delegates and 25 graphics that showed the results of CBS polls.

NBC graphics

NBC's graphics were similar. Nine graphics showed a primary map with how many delegates to win, and none explained the nomination system. Three showed differences in views, and three showed the percentage of delegates won by a candidate. Some differences from CBS in "other" surfaced. Although several also showed poll results, others shown were: a map showing in which states Republicans had gained Congressional seats since 1994, pictures of who endorsed whom, and the percentage of foreign-owned companies in South Carolina.

Figure 5: Types and number of graphics for CBS and NBC.

	CBS	NBC
Type of graphic		
Primary map, how many delegates at stake	6	9
Explanation of nomination system	0	0
Difference in views	1	3
Percentage of delegates, number of delegates	5	3
Poll results, other	25	9

Because television is transitory, full-screen graphics are needed to help viewers learn from the newscast. Graphics that explained the nomination season were few and lacked specificity. Most of the graphics explaining the nomination system focused on maps with number of delegates to be chosen in upcoming contests and which states would be choosing delegates. If a state had a caucus rather than a primary, that was noted, but no explanation was given about the difference. No graphics explained who could vote, whether the primary was open or closed, etc. A voter could determine that a contest was coming to his or her state, but the voter would have to seek all participatory information from local TV newscasts, newspapers, or parties.

Conclusions

The bottom line in American politics should be participation. Participation, however, can be difficult if not enough information is given to understand the process. This study concludes that lead-ins and introductions focused on strategy rather than explaining the process. Also, the first two segments and video sequences concentrated on strategy. Finally, full-screen graphics could be used to inform voters about the differences in contests, but the graphics were used more to explain polls than explain the differences in the contests. Repetition helps learning, but the repetition of the newscasts focused on repeating campaign shots and discussing “who was doing what to whom to win.” National newscasts cannot focus on times of poll openings and how to register, but they could give information on the differences between open and closed primaries and explain more adequately the differences between caucuses and primaries. Then voters could find out from local parties or media how to register and where to vote.

Downs's theory applies economics to voting – voters are looking for ways to maximize benefits and minimize costs when seeking participation information (Downs, 1957). The results of this study show that voters would have difficulty in minimizing costs by watching network news. Voting at the nomination level may be necessary to stop cynicism and alienation that Gans cites for declining voter participation (Gans, 1995). If potential voters believe that there is no way they can get involved or catch the nomination train, they may be unhappy with the final two choices, thus adding to cynicism and alienation.

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PRIME TIME NEWS
Effects Associated with the Rise of the Television News Magazine Format

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December, 1998
(revised in 1999 with updated data)

PRIME TIME NEWS

Effects Associated with the Rise of the Television News Magazine Format

In the past few years, the television news magazine format has become increasingly pervasive in prime time programming. Not only has there been an increase in the number of news magazine programs, but there has also been an increase in how frequently these shows are aired. This has changed the face of prime time programming, but how has the increase effected news and its content, the viewers and their attitudes?

The purpose of this paper is to examine the increased pervasiveness of the television news magazine and the effects associated with such an increase. It will first provide a brief overview of the development of the news magazine format. It will go on to investigate the increase of news magazine programming with regard to ratings, production benefits, and other programming factors. This paper will address the impact of the news magazine format on prime time programming. It will evaluate the influence of the format on traditional, network news and tabloid journalism programs. It will also explore the potential consequences of these changes with regard to audiences. Finally, this paper will conclude with a critique of news magazine programming and suggest a new course for the future.

The development of the news magazine format

In 1968, when '60 Minutes' broadcast its first show, producer Don Hewitt was characterized as an industry 'pioneer.' '60 Minutes' was based on the idea that news correspondents, not cameras, should cover events (Madsen 1984). In 1970, the Federal Communication Commission ruled that the top broadcast markets would be required to relinquish a half hour of prime time programming each weekday, and an entire hour each Sunday, in order to increase the variety of available television programming. Stations were required to individually program these new 'access' periods. However, because sponsors refused to support locally produced programming, an exception was made for stations to program documentaries, children's specials and public affairs shows (produced for national audiences) on Sundays (Fishman and Cavender 1998). This is where '60 Minutes' eventually found its niche (Madsen 1984).

'60 Minutes' defined the news magazine genre as three in-depth, narrative segments. However, the more traditional documentary producers of the 1960s and 1970s contested running three stories each hour, claiming that documentaries needed to be an hour in length. Surprise, 'ambush' interviews were considered outrageous. (Carter 1998) '60 Minutes' was highly criticized; nevertheless, it has endured as one of the top-rated, longest-running programs in television history (Madsen 1984).

In 1978, ABC hired entertainment producer Bob Shanks to create '20/20.' It was meant to be a new show, based on general interest print magazines such as *Life* and *Look*, not a clone of '60 Minutes.' (Madsen 1984) To distinguish '20/20', prime time production techniques (sophisticated lighting, for example) were incorporated with the show's live and on location coverage. However, before the end of its first season, '20/20' began to look like '60 Minutes' with standard, magazine-style, taped segments including interviews, investigative stories and human interest features

(Diamond 1991). The formulation was so strongly held that stories were covered on the basis of how well they fit within the genre. A segment producer for '60 Minutes' admitted, "We don't do the broad issues at '60 Minutes'; we do stories from which issues can emerge" (Ettema et al 1991, p. 82). She clearly elaborated that story selection had to do "with the practical concerns of the investigative journalism genre" (Ettema et al 1991, p. 82).

Now producers like Neal Shapiro (Dateline NBC) are attempting to redefine the genre, incorporating more viewer-friendly touches by increasing feature reporting and including regular programming elements (i.e., the 'Dateline Timeline' and 'Picture of the Week'). News magazines are beginning to provide extensive, blanket coverage of events and breaking stories. (Carter 1998)

The news magazine format has tended to be characterized by its in-depth, investigative approach to journalism. News magazines such as 'PrimeTime Live' and '20/20' (in contrast with entertainment magazines like 'Access Hollywood' and 'Extra') are produced by the network news divisions, and therefore have traditionally been associated with network news more than entertainment programming. Throughout the remainder of this paper I hope to challenge the practicality of this tacit association.

The impact of the news magazine on prime time programming

Originally, news magazines were developed as defense mechanisms, used to fill problematic programming slots. Now, news magazines are a network's 'secret weapon.' They alleviate programming pressures, fill problem slots and generate respectable ratings in the process (McClellan 1992; Stroud 1998). They are "an important embodiment of how a network is perceived by viewers ... these programs come into the home for 10 or 20 years, unlike a hit sitcom which comes and goes. So ... there are powerful reasons for programming [a proliferation of news magazines] in prime time" (McClellan 1998, p. 48).

Shapiro remembers a time when the production of even two news magazines (per week) was a daunting thought. With regard to the prospect of Dateline's expansion, he recalls a friend's (from ABC's 'PrimeTime Live') warning: "This will never work. You can't do two shows as well as one. You'll never find enough people. There's no way to find enough stories to be on twice a week. You'll crash and burn" (Carter 1998). Ironically, these words were spoken less than five years ago. This season (1998-1999), NBC revised its program schedule to air 'Dateline' five nights a week, introducing the concept of 'stripping' to prime time. Traditionally, 'stripping' (which refers to scheduling a television show five or more times a week) has been reserved for game shows and local station programming, outside of the prime time hours (Turner and Hosenball 1998). But news magazines are beginning to change that tradition.

Don Hewitt commented that 'Dateline' reminded him of the Dole pineapple family and their missionary trip to Hawaii, "they went to do good, and they did well; 'Dateline' is doing very well for itself," (Carter 1998). Hewitt has not been shy in asserting his opinion that the current craze and enthusiasm over news magazines is not about high journalistic ideals. But despite Hewitt's worry that a second edition of '60 Minutes' would run the risk of being another "'Dateline' with the name '60 Minutes' on it," (Carter 1998) '60 Minutes II' was unveiled this spring (Turner and Hosenball 1998; Consoli 1998; Weintraub 1998), in addition to CBS's three showings of '48 Hours.'

Similarly, ABC has merged 'PrimeTime Live' with '20/20,' which began the season airing three shows a week and added a fourth show following the end of the football season. In short, news magazines are giving prime time television a face lift. With the advent of another '20/20' and '60 Minutes II,' 28 of the prime time programming slots are devoted to news magazines (Weintraub 1998; Mifflin 1999).

As if 28 programming slots were not enough, the current pervasiveness of news magazines does not stop there. In the summer of 1998, David Westin, president of ABC News, revealed his hope expand '20/20' to run seven nights a week (McClellan 1998). NBC has also admitted considering similar programming changes. Even more startling is the recent concession that Dan Rather (CBS news anchor and managing editor of CBS's nightly news) made, validating the plausibility of traditional, nightly news becoming a half hour lead into the more popular news magazines on one or more networks (Brill 1998).

At some point the news magazine market will become over-saturated. However, the continuous proliferation of news magazine programming shows no sign of easing in the near future. Don Ohlmeyer, head of NBC's entertainment division, stated, "There is no show more important to us than 'Dateline.' I look on 'Dateline' as a hit show the same way I look on 'E.R.' as a hit show" (Carter 1998). As long as the networks estimate that the net profits of their news magazines outweigh the risks associated with new entertainment programming, news magazines will continue to increase in pervasiveness. It is safe to conclude that news magazines have transformed prime time programming.

Why has the news magazine become so pervasive?

Economics is the primary motivation behind the increased pervasiveness of news magazine programming. First, they are significantly less expensive to produce (as much as 50% less) than entertainment comedies and dramas, which can run more than \$1.2 million per episode (Coe 1994; Stroud 1998; Miller 1998). Secondly, the networks own the news magazines. This is where the true value of the shows lies. Ownership frees the networks from being subjected to high license fees and the threat of popular shows being sold to other networks (McClellan 1994; Miller 1998). Although, news magazines generally have not been able to generate revenues in syndication, news departments now repurpose their stories, or segments of their stories in other news programming, and especially on cable networks like CNBC and MSNBC (McClellan 1994; Miller 1998). It appears that this trend will continue as networks expand and develop additional outlets, such as online magazines. There is also an increasing demand for news magazine programming in the international markets (McClellan 1994).

News magazines represent less risk for the networks. A number of failed news magazine programs can still be a less expensive investment than just one failed comedy or drama (Turner and Hosenball 1998). In addition, news magazines are cheaper to promote. Many network news programs refer to and promote one another. For example, segments of the 'Today' show highlight stories that will air on 'Dateline,' and Peter Jennings promotes upcoming episodes of '20/20' at the end of his nightly news broadcast.

Strip programming also makes it easier to promote news magazines. Each broadcast night that a news magazine airs generally targets a demographically diverse audience, such as 'Dateline

Monday' targeting women while 'Dateline Wednesday' targets men. However, all of the broadcasts are promoted under the same, recognizable banner. Viewers recognize 'brand names,' and also identify with the familiar journalists that host the shows (Reibstein, Brant and Biddle 1994; Lando 1998; Consoli 1998; Weintraub 1998). Each show relies on the reputation of those broadcast on other evenings.

Highly rated news magazines have been unable to attract the advertising dollars that entertainment programming can generate (Coe 1994; Stroud 1998; Weintraub 1998). For example, in April of 1998, a 30 second spot on 'Dateline Tuesday' cost approximately \$149,000, compared to \$272,000 on 'Frasier' or \$208,000 on the lower rated 'Mad About You' (Stroud 1998). Some advertisers prefer to buy time on entertainment formats, despite higher advertising rates. This holds true, even when the entertainment audiences are smaller. "[A] 10 rating on a reality show gets the same advertising dollars that a 7 rating gets on a sitcom" (Coe 1994). This paradox might be connected to the fact that news magazines are sometimes described as 'activist,' a label that many sponsors do not want to be associated with.

Nevertheless, news magazines are profitable and extremely attractive to other types of advertisers. In fact, some advertisers (such as cosmetic and packaged goods companies) prefer to sponsor a news magazine like 'Dateline' because it brings in a more significant portion of the 18-to-34 year olds than entertainment programs do (Weintraub 1998). News magazines have been able to attract groups that are demographically appealing to advertisers. Ratings for men 18-49 have increased by eight percent, and by eleven percent for men 25-54 (Mifflin 1998). A news magazine like '60 Minutes' tends to attract males with higher socioeconomic status. This is appealing to advertisers such as investment companies (Merrill Lynch, for example) and luxury car companies (Weintraub 1998). Coupled with low production costs, the news magazines' ability to deliver homogeneous audiences (with spending power) to advertisers at reduced rates has contributed to making news magazines highly profitable for their corresponding networks.

News magazines are also flexible programming alternatives. They can be placed in problematic programming slots, where entertainment revenues have been historically inconsistent. In this sense, they have the potential to transform 'rating sinkholes' into profitable time slots. This is due, in part, to their low production costs. However, the unpredictability of news magazine programming is also associated with the viewers' attraction to the genre (Stroud 1998).

The ratings of news magazines are fairly good, frequently occupying spots in the Nielsen ratings Top 10. This has much to do with their summer programming schedule, when news magazine shows are still new, playing against entertainment re-runs (McClellan 1994; Rice 1996). Even with their massive increase in programming hours, news magazine ratings are now only slightly lower than they have been in the past. In fact, news magazine ratings have not fallen by as much as the ratings of broadcast networks (Mifflin 1999). Overall, ratings have remained relatively consistent. This can be explained, in part, to viewers feeling more productive about their viewing time when watching news magazines. Busy viewers want to feel that their television viewing time is not wasteful, but both entertaining and informative (Miller 1998).

It is important to note that news magazines are not as popular or successful as top entertainment programming. What they are are low-cost, flexible, low-risk, long-term, profitable alternatives to the high-cost, less versatile, high-risk, short running entertainment sitcoms and

dramas. These facts will continue to reserve a place in prime time programming for the magazine format.

The influence of the news magazine on traditional and tabloid news

According to Neal Shapiro, 'Dateline' satisfies its viewers' cravings for drama. The ideal 'Dateline' story has "a good character in conflict over something. That's the essence of what we do," (Carter 1998). Does this mean that 'Dateline' only covers stories that contain these essential elements, or could it mean that 'Dateline' makes each story fit this formulation? Whatever the case, this formulation implies that to be newsworthy, stories should also be dramatic.

Increasing claims that news magazines are public watchdogs can result in the tendency to inflate the significance of the role of reporters as well-informed citizens and public servants. Rather than reporting the facts, journalists, now more than ever, are becoming personalities or celebrities that audience members are expected to identify with (Landow 1998, Brill 1998). This is represented by the high salaries that anchors and news magazine hosts annually generate. NBC's highly publicized contract with Katie Couric is for an estimated \$7 million annually. In addition, Jane Pauley and Stone Phillips are each contracted at an estimated \$5 million annually (Stroud, 1998). Yet many of the anchors are never involved in the investigation of stories (Landow 1998). The anchors now package the news, rather than report it, contributing an air of familiarity in the process (Reibstein, Brant and Biddle 1994, Turner and Hosenball 1998, Consoli 1998, Brill 1998). This shifts their approach to reporting a story. Now, coverage sounds more like dramatic narrative than traditional journalism (Campbell 1991, Sawyer 1998).

Familiar hosts are also used to generate viewer trust (Madsen 1984, Campbell 1991, Reibstein, Brandt and Biddle 1994, Turner and Hosenball 1998, Sawyer 1998). This has allowed news magazines to incorporate more 'tabloidism' into their programming, disguising it behind the imprimatur of the news anchors, such as Tom Brokaw or Barbara Walters (Reibstein, Brant and Biddle 1994). Now, sleazier stories are tolerated as part of news magazine programming, to boost ratings, as long as the shows are balanced out in the end. Diane Sawyer claims, "What makes a show tabloid is proportion: do you do Michael Jackson every night of the week or not?...It's not about the topic, but the quality," (Reibstein, Brant and Biddle 1994). Barbara Walters seems to agree, "The big question is the balance and the taste," (Reibstein, Brant and Biddle 1994).

The increased pervasiveness of news magazines has contributed to blurring the lines between what is entertainment and what is news, and between what is 'legitimate' journalism and what is 'tabloid' journalism. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* published a definition of tabloid news (in contrast with traditional news) stating:

Tabloid news follows a recipe of involvement of subjectivity to produce authenticity and credibility. Tabloid reporters become part of the human interest drama and the subjective eyewitness camera viewpoint is employed to draw the viewer into the news stories...[tabloid news] acts as a mirror, not in the conventional sense as an attempt at a reflection of 'reality,' but as an instrument through which the viewer is encouraged to recognize him/herself in meaningful ways (Grabe 1996, p. 927).

Ironically, this account sounds more like the current formulations for network news programs than 'Hard Copy.'

At an implicit level, news magazines legitimate themselves as news, despite their formulas, program content (which includes 'warm fuzzy' pieces and celebrity profiles), and narrative. The success of the news magazine and magazine formats has been able to influence the format of traditional news, which has now become more sensationalized. Tom Brokaw no longer sits behind a news desk during NBC's nightly news broadcasts. Instead, he stands in front of a large visual image and introduces longer, more narrated news segments. At an industry conference on the re-definition of news and television broadcasting, an executive producer of a magazine show stated that "[t]he success of syndicated news magazine shows has probably forever changed how the networks cover news," (Tobenkink 1994).

In addition, tabloid shows and entertainment magazines are also mimicking the news magazine format, in an attempt to look more serious and re-capture audience ratings (Mifflin, 1999). 'Hard Copy' is undergoing a major makeover to compete for the news magazines' advertising dollars. They are starting fresh with new anchors and longer, in-depth reporting to help reverse the ratings decline that the show has suffered over the past few years (Schlosser 1998). This represents a blurring of the lines between news and entertainment from both sides.

What does this mean for the audience?

Networks are continually claiming that news magazines provide a public service for their audiences, acting as watchdogs and uncovering issues for public debate. A group at Northern Arizona University studied the influence of media investigations in defining public agendas and inspiring policy formation. They found that "[m]edia presentations influence [the] general judgement of problem importance," (Files 1983, p. 36). However, they also found that instead of facilitating public debate, media investigations 'almost completely bypassed' the public in the process of creating new policy (Files 1983).

Because investigative journalists seek recognition and awards, they often work 'solutions' into their stories. "This role, which teams journalist and public official as Fact Finder, Presenter of 'Reality,' and Creator of Policy Result, may be seen as inimical to the democratic process," (Files 1983, p. 36). This may contradict the news magazines' claims of public service. More significantly, it emphasizes the potential danger of an increased quantity of investigative reporting, especially as reporters face escalating pressures to find stories where they may not exist.

With the rise of competition and a proliferation of shows, magazine story producers feel increasing pressure to uncover stories. But are there really that many stories? Twenty-eight prime time programming slots times one, two, or even three segments per show adds up to quite an excess of investigative journalism. Especially considering that Shapiro and fellow producers wondered how they would find stories and maintain quality when they expanded to just two shows per week.

In October, Brill's Content ran an investigation on an investigative journalist: NBC's Lea Thompson. News magazines are continuously promoted as consumer watchdogs, making claims like "Lea Thompson: She's one tough consumer reporter fighting for your rights ... She pounds

the consumer beat ... going undercover, exposing scams, and digging for the truth,” (Stevens 1998, p. 98). When Thompson boasts, “I’m trying to keep people from getting ripped off ... We’ve sent some people to jail,” (Stevens 1998, p. 98) she gives viewers the impression that news magazines are responsible for uncovering the crimes and scams that they report. However, this is not always the case. The *Brill’s Content* investigation revealed that “not one person had been sentenced to jail or prison for crimes unearthed and broadcast by Thompson,” (Stevens 1998, p. 98). In fact, three of the seven cases that NBC cites (crediting Thompson’s stories for sending people to jail) were actually instances of the police allowing ‘Dateline’ to document arrests that would have been made regardless of Thompson’s report (Stevens 1998). News magazine segments can give audience members the impression that investigative reporting keeps them safe, when in fact, these segments may function to alarm viewers unnecessarily.

In the same issue of *Brill’s Content*, Jensen, Osborne, Pogrebin and Rose found that news magazines can provide in-depth reporting and helpful information, but also regularly (as much as 40% of the time) report alarming stories unfairly. They state that, when it comes to consumer reporting, “If you scare them, they will watch,” (Jensen, Osborne, Pogrebin and Rose 1998, p. 130) could be a slogan for television news magazine shows.

Unfair reports tend to distort or omit relevant facts. “[I]n a drive to produce gripping television, facts and fair comment too frequently yield to hype and spin,” (Jensen, Osborne, Pogrebin and Rose 1998, p. 132). The manipulation of interviews and comments has resulted in corporate press representatives declining the opportunity to comment on segments. Companies claim that cooperating with news magazine producers has backfired too often, with the broadcast of distorted and incomplete interviews. The implication of unbalanced reporting in investigative stories should be taken seriously in light of the fact that viewers now rate news magazine reporters as the most trusted journalists in the industry (Sawyer 1998).

Increasing pressures, coupled with the old adage “the deeper you dig, any story collapses” might suggest that the nature of the business dissuades producers from probing into the weaknesses of their stories. Former ‘60 Minutes’ producer, Barry Lando suggests:

most investigative reports ... are usually painted starkly: black and white ... [but] most of life is played out in shades of gray ... The producer frequently finds he no longer has ‘a story.’ ... It’s when the revelation occurs after you have already committed several weeks and tens of thousands of dollars to report that the process is most painful, the temptation to continue, in spite of what you have uncovered, is greatest (Lando 1998).

In this sense, news magazines could actually be viewed as doing more harm than good, informing audience members about insignificant issues.

The parallel that is made between news magazine journalism and public journalism represents an issue that needs to be examined with the increased pervasiveness of magazine programming. News magazines have expanded audience exposure to (what the networks classify as) news, they are reported by journalists that audience members consider to be trustworthy, and they claim to address issues relevant to the everyday lives of the public. But do they really contribute to the public’s involvement in democracy and civic activity? And, do they make us more informed citizens? These are questions that we seriously need to consider as news magazines continue to influence what we know to be news.

A critique of television news magazine programming

The appearance of news magazines in prime time programming implicitly suggests the convergence of news and entertainment. Or, in the least, the convergence of entertainment programming principles with broadcast news principles. News magazine producers strategically arrange their shows to keep audiences watching. Stories addressing women's health issues, for example, are now run opposite of Monday Night Football, male-oriented features are used to counterprogram shows that target females (such as 'Dharma & Greg' and 'The Nanny,') and especially dramatic stories are reserved for broadcast during sweep weeks (McClellan 1995, Carter 1998, Stroud 1998, Miller 1998). On the surface, this simply appears to be savvy programming. However, shifting news standards to incorporate entertainment strategies is another step that contributes to blurring the distinctions between the two spheres. We cannot simply pass off the fact that news divisions are being influenced by entertainment divisions as smart business. Instead, we need to question whether or not this is acceptable.

It was mentioned, in a previous section, that news magazine ratings have increased among demographic groups that are attractive to advertisers. Although the overall ratings of news magazines have decreased slightly, the sales departments boast about increasing program revenues (Mifflin, 1998). It is not coincidental that ratings have decreased with demographic groups that are less consequential to advertisers while they have increased for groups with more spending potential. News magazines target the audiences that represent more lucrative advertising revenues. This trend has major implications for news audiences. Rather than each audience member being considered as an equally important citizen (as we would strive for in a normative public sphere), broadcast news is following in the footsteps of urban newspapers and general interest magazines that were not concerned with losing certain segments of their audiences, while trying to attract segments that were more economically attractive.

News magazine journalists are considered the most trusted journalists in news, despite the fact that they also tend to be the hosts of other network news programs. This seems to indicate that the format of the news magazine is what actually functions to gain the trust of the audience. A small number of people have begun to question the ethics of investigative journalism, ambush interviews and hidden camera reports. The question of hidden cameras has been most publicly debated, recently exacerbated by cases like the Food Lion grocery chain versus ABC's former 'PrimeTime Live.' In addition, Dean Rotbart, editor of *The Business News Reporter* (a newsletter on ethics) challenges the practice of news magazines targeting small scale businesses with their investigations. He questions, "When you have a well-funded, for-profit cop on the beat pursuing five-and-dime criminals, is that real journalism [or] 'Candid Camera' gone berserk?" (Alter 1993).

Also problematic is the news magazine's willingness to pursue any story featured in *The New York Daily News* or *The New York Post*. It is this approach that has generated the most continuous criticisms. Blanket, tabloid-style coverage of stories like the O. J. Simpson trial, the Jon Benet Ramsey murder, or the death of Princess Diana convinced critics that news magazines pandered to popular taste (Mifflin, 1999). Neal Shapiro answered similar charges by stating that many of Dateline's stories provided information that could not be found in other places. Yes, he admitted that he tried to attract an audience, but he also asserted that attracting an audience did not necessarily detract from providing good stories. If audience members watch a 'Dateline' and leave saying, "I didn't know that," Shapiro is satisfied. But should we consider a program to be newsworthy on the basis of merely informing an audience? Can we continue to accept the

classification of news magazines as news without considering program content, presentation style and what, exactly, the audiences are being informed about?

The equation for evaluating news magazines is based on relative profits minus relative costs, while factoring in the relative risk of programming alternatives. This formula has been embraced by network chairmen like Michael Eisner:

Why pay for 13 episodes of an expensive, hard-to-promote hour-long drama no one had ever heard of and that would probably fail? [Eisner] asked for an extra episode of '20/20' on Monday nights ... the news division produced it, and though the show's ratings are down slightly from last year, they're still far better than what most entertainment shows get (Turner and Hosenball 1998).

Perhaps Hewitt inadvertently stumbled onto a basis for evaluating true quality in a news magazine when he asserted, "Tomorrow, if NBC found five 'Seinfelds,' you think 'Dateline' would be on five times a week? But if CBS found five Lucille Balls, we'd still be on. In fact, we were on," (Turner and Hosenball 1998). It is telling that the once radical Hewitt is now the magazine genre's most conservative producer.

Final Analysis

Surprisingly, despite their obvious abundance and continual proliferation, news magazines are rarely studied in academia. The paucity of academic sources cited in this paper is testimony to that fact. In part, this can be attributed to a scholarly refusal to recognize and legitimate news magazines as news. Perhaps scholars are right in not wanting to classify news magazines as news. What is certain is that proponents of this opinion (and others) need to enter a debate that is currently nonexistent. We need to challenge whether or not news magazines deserve to be associated with news divisions, rather than entertainment divisions. The present dialogue is dominated by network news organizations, and the vast majority of the conversation is 110% supportive of continued expansion of magazines, as news. Prime time's 28 programming slots should be evidence enough to jerk even the most stubborn out of denial. It is time to acknowledge the arrival and subsequent influence of television news magazines, empirically study their effects and impacts, and either support or challenge the virtually uncontested enthusiasm associated with their increasing pervasiveness.

There was a time when economics were not considered proper criteria by which to produce the news. News divisions performed a public service, and they were not expected to be profitable. This approach, by no means, represented utopia. Overly dry, disengaging news cannot justify itself as a public service if it alienates the very public it claims to serve. But has the pendulum now swung too far to the opposite extreme? We need to engage in this debate before we, the public, cease to differentiate between what constitutes news and what constitutes entertainment.

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Radio-Television Journalism
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A Quarter Century of Television Network News:
Fewer, Longer (?) and Softer News items

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Paper presented at the annual convention of the Association for
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August 1999.

A Quarter Century of Television Network News: Fewer, Longer(?) and Softer News Items

This paper reports the results of a study of 27 years (1971-1997) of television network news.

Background

The nightly news programs of the so-called "Big Three" networks--ABC, CBS and NBC--have weathered changes over the years affecting their audiences and news packages. Consider, for example:

--**audience share.** A 1998 Pew Center report warned: "As the public's appetite for national and international news wanes, viewership of nightly network news continues its decline."¹ Commanding a combined 90% share as recently as 1980, ABC/CBS/NBC could claim a share closer to 55% by 1991.² Indeed, by 1996 Pew would report that 42% of the public regularly watches a nightly network broadcast--down from 48% in 1995 and 60% in 1993.³ (When viewership of network morning, evening and "magazine" news shows is combined, only 57% reported viewing any network news in 1998.)⁴ ABC, CBS and NBC nightly newscasts are attracting a shrinking and older audience (regular viewership of network news dropped from 36% in March 1995 to 22% in April 1996 for 18-29-year olds, from 42% to 35% in the 30-49 group, but remained a constant 62% for

¹ The Pew Research Center, "Internet News Takes Off," 1998, <http://www.people-press.org/med98rpt.htm>.

² "Calendar," *U.S. News & World Report*, 18 March 1991.

³ The Pew Research Center, "TV News Viewership Declines," 1996, <http://www.people-press.org/mediarpt.htm>

⁴ Pew, "Internet News Takes Off," 1998.

those over 50).⁵

--**changing audience lifestyles.** Only 10% of people polled in 1996 report watching less dinner-hour network news because the same content can be attained elsewhere, but 48% blamed lack of time.⁶

--**the success of "60 Minutes" and other news magazines.** Surveys show that the audience for tv news magazines has held steady since 1996, despite declining viewership of other news programming.⁷

--**the popularity of sensational, tabloid-news magazine programs.** Surveys show this audience has held steady since 1996, even though "a significant percentage of tabloid audiences say they don't believe the very shows they watch."⁸

--**CNN's success.** Despite its head-of-the-class image, 1998 viewing data show CNN too has remained mired "in its mid-1990s slump,"⁹ being viewed regularly by 26% of those polled in 1996, compared to 30% in 1995 and 33% in 1994.¹⁰

--**the proliferation of cable news services.** Nets like CNBC, MSNBC, Fox, and CNN, according to a 1998 survey, are regularly viewed by a total of 40% of Americans--60% if specialty programming (Weather Channel, ESPN) is included.¹¹ The Big Three can claim only 42%.

--**emergence of Internet news.** Pew Center surveys show that

⁵ Pew, "TV News Viewership Declines," 1996.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Pew, "Internet News Takes Off, " 1998.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Pew, "TV News Viewership Declines," 1996.

¹¹ Pew, "Internet News Takes Off," 1998.

the percentage of Americans getting news from the Internet at least once a week has tripled in the past two years--from 11 to 36 million news users.¹²

News magazines and tabloids represent an alternative to network hard news content, while 24-hour-a-day news services and the Internet represent an alternative delivery system. According to CNN's Garrick Utley, "What we're living through right now is this very profound transformation and transition period in terms of information available and the many ways it can be delivered."¹³

In short, viewers who once made up the audience for network news are more able than ever before to make multiple sources of news fit their schedules and tastes. The losers are the three major networks.

The Content

Critics suggest that the effect of declining viewership, particularly among desirable younger demographic subgroups, has been predictable: The networks have changed the product to hold an audience. Newscasts have moved to a style that focuses on the soft, sensational and entertaining, resulting in superficial treatment of events.¹⁴

This has been triggered by public interest in celebrity news

¹² Pew, "Internet News Takes Off," 1998.

¹³ Lisa Chan, "CNN's Utley Says TV Reporters Still Matter," The Freedom Forum OnLine, Nov. 24, 1998, <http://www.freedomforum.org/professional/1998/11/24utley.asp>

¹⁴ Daniel Riffe, "A Deeper Look at the 'Superficiality' of Television News," paper presented at the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication annual convention, Anaheim, California, 1996.

and by the audience-building success of news magazine programs.¹⁵ As nightly newscasts of the Big Three networks copy those magazines, they too offer soft news features that can be promoted for several days. The evening news shows "are going to more feature stories, more medical, more lifestyle," according to CBS correspondent Mitchel Krauss.¹⁶ (Not coincidentally, according to former CNN executive Ed Turner, this kind of news is also cheaper to produce and easier to use.)¹⁷

Thus, according to Scott and Gobetz, "(E)conomic pressures" swing news gates open because of anticipated audience preferences and the need to "satisfy advertisers by appealing to the largest number of people possible."¹⁸ Perceived audience demand for entertaining, soft news, in a system "driven by free market forces," can lead programmers to "make a portion of the news diet more palatable, more consumable, more human." Newsworthiness thus has little to do with responsibility to communicate "the things that (the) public needs to know." (They also blame softening of network news on consultants fighting ratings battles, the "cheapness" of producing soft news, and the longer "shelf life" or flexibility for airing of soft news.)¹⁹

Of course, tailoring news to public taste has been going on

¹⁵ Philis S. Cook, Douglas Gomery and Lawrence W. Lichty, *The Future of News* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), p. xvi.

¹⁶ Tim Feran, "Drop in World Coverage Troubles Ex-Newsman," *Columbus (Ohio) Dispatch*, May 13, 1998, p. 9E.

¹⁷ Associated Press, "ABC, CBS, NBC, Downsizing Overseas Bureaus, Discuss Shared Effort With CNN," *The Freedom Forum Online*, October 27, 1998, <http://www.freedomforum.org/professional/1998/10/27downsize.asp>.

¹⁸ David K. Scott and Robert H. Gobetz, "Hard News/Soft News Content of the National Broadcast Networks, 1972-1987," *Journalism Quarterly*, 1992, 69: 406-407.

¹⁹ *Ibid* p. 412.

for some time. Cook, Gomery and Lichty (1992, p. xvii) argued that network commitment to "sustained, serious journalism" began to waver by the 1980s.²⁰ Levy agreed, lamenting that "TV's great power to provide drama and emotion is not matched by a capacity to inform in depth about complicated, serious matters."²¹ Case in point: While CNN Clinton impeachment hearing coverage was seen by 1.5 million people, a typical audience during the O.J. Simpson trial was 5 million.²²

Previous Longitudinal Studies

Scott and Gobetz looked at growth of soft news as a portion of network evening newscasts during the 1972-1987 period. Soft news was a relatively small part, but did increase dramatically and significantly, from 60-70 seconds per newscast in the early 1970s to about 140 seconds by 1985.²³ However, the researchers' consecutive-day sampling each year (March 1-7 and Oct. 1-7) is problematic.²⁴

Riffe used a representative sampling procedure (four constructed weeks, one per quarter) to examine network news during the 1971-1990 period.²⁵ Over time, the networks provided "less breadth," or fewer items, per newscast--from a high of 24 per

²⁰ Cook, Gomery and Lichty, *The Future of News*, 1992, p xvii.

²¹ Mark R. Levy, "Learning from Television News," in Cook, Gomery and Lichty, *The Future of News*, 1992, p. 70.

²² Bill Carter, "Networks Take a Pass," *Dayton (Ohio) Daily News*, Dec. 12, 1998, p.15A.

²³ Scott and Gobetz, "Hard News/Soft News," 1992.

²⁴ Daniel Riffe, Steve Lacy, Jason Nagovan and Larry Burkum, "The Effectiveness of Simple and Stratified Random Sampling in Broadcast News Content Analysis," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 1996, 73:159-168; and Daniel Riffe, Chuck Aust and Steve Lacy, "The Effectiveness of Random, Consecutive Day and Constructed Week Samples in Newspaper Content Analysis," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 1993, 70:133-139.

²⁵ Riffe, "A Deeper Look at the 'Superficiality' of Television News," 1996.

half-hour newscast to as few as 10. But each item drew more air time. "In that sense, the narrower breadth would yield greater depth--hardly 'superficial' coverage" (p. 12). The shift was not just away from 1-10 second headlines, but to more pieces of more than a minute in length. Moreover, all three networks aired an increasingly greater percentage of soft news, while hard news decreased.

The Present Study's Research Question

Have the patterns suggested in the 1971-1990 study continued? Recent media use surveys suggest continuing change in audience viewing patterns and preferences that would create "economic pressures" to change the news package, as networks provide a softer news product to attract viewers and advertising revenue.

This study takes a 27-year (1971-1997) look at the softening of news at ABC, CBS and NBC, examining number of items covered in a newscast, item length and item topic.

Method

Using the *Television News Index and Abstracts*, coders examined nightly newscasts on ABC, CBS and NBC for four constructed weeks (Monday through Friday only) per year (1971-1997), controlling for each quarter. A Monday was randomly selected from all Mondays in each quarter (e.g., January-March, April-June, etc.), a Tuesday was selected, etc., until four constructed weeks per year were selected. The sample was stratified by quarter to help guard against seasonal variation that might, in a purely random sample, distort the results.²⁶

In all, 20 randomly selected dates for each of 27 years were

²⁶ Riffe, Lacy, Nagovan and Burkum, "The Effectiveness of Simple and Stratified Random Sampling in Broadcast News Content Analysis," 1996.

coded, for a total of 540 days and 1,620 newscasts (3 networks X 540 days). Fifteen trained coders were assigned randomly ordered sets of sample dates to minimize systematic coder bias. Composite agreement scores among coders²⁷ for the topic variable reached .90 and .94 in two reliability tests.²⁸ Coders coded all news items in all three networks' newscasts. An "item" was operationally identified as having a distinct beginning time and a boldfaced, capped headline in the index.

Annual totals of items sampled were calculated and yielded annual per-newscast averages (annual total divided by 20 sample dates). To test for changes over time, a non-parametric measure of trend was used.²⁹

Findings and Discussion

The 1,620 sampled newscasts yielded 21,966 total news items. However, there were between-network differences over time (see Table 1). The data in the table show two patterns. First, the annual "n" shown under a network indicates total number of items located by that year's sample of four constructed weeks (or 20 newscasts). For example, the 1971 sample found a total of 227 items for the 20 ABC newscasts. Change in those annual n's

²⁷ Ole Holsti, *Content Analysis for the Social Sciences and Humanities* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1969), p. 137-140.

²⁸ Those coefficients reflect coders' initial application of a 25-category topic scheme, but there is no reason to believe that the "collapsed" topic categories used below--hard, soft and bad news--would in any way decrease the reliability of the data.

²⁹ Ranks were assigned for years (e.g., a rank of "1" was given to 1997, the most recent year coded) and for prevalence of a pertinent variable for a single network. For example, "1" might be assigned to the year for which ABC had its largest percentage of "soft" news items. A significant positive between-ranks rho would then indicate a trend, across the 27 years, to more "soft" news items. The conventional 0.05 probability level was used to assess statistical significance. See Gerhard Tintner, *Econometrics* (New York: Wiley and Sons, 1952), pp. 211-215).

reflects a decreasing number of items per year.

But because the totals are for only a sample of 20 days and not truly for an entire year, the differences among networks and across time are made clearer when that annual n is divided by 20, yielding an average newscast frequency of items (e.g., for 1971, ABC's 227 divided by 20 yields 11.35 news items per newscast, contrasted with CBS's 16.7 and NBC's 16.75).

CBS's 1978 average of 24.15 items per newscast was the highest among all three networks across all 27 years. Indeed, 1978 was the peak year for all three networks. CBS's 1991 average of 7.65 items was the smallest overall; in 1991, NBC also aired its lowest number of items. Moreover, there were precipitous year-to-year changes. Note the 1974 to 1975 decrease for all three networks, for example, as well as the changes from 1977 to 1978, followed by an equally dramatic 1978-1979 decrease.

But if the 1978-1979 decrease was dramatic, it also signaled the beginning of a trend. Generally (and with a few exceptions), post-1978 newscasts included fewer items. No network in any year after 1978 would average more than 16 items per newscast, a sharp contrast with the 1970s averages that included many above 16. In fact, after ABC averaged 15.45 and 15.6 items in 1981 and 1982, no network would average as many as 15 items in the next 15 years.

Year-to-year fluctuations are intriguing, particularly when all three networks behave similarly. But a peak year like 1978 can disguise an overall pattern or trend that is more meaningful. When ranks are assigned to each year (the most recent year, 1997, is "1") and for average number of items per newscast (1978 is "1"), and between-ranks correlations computed (Spearman's ρ), the

magnitude of the changes in the nightly package is indexed clearly. Data for all three networks show clear, significant trends toward fewer and fewer items per newscast (ρ is -0.72 for ABC, $p < .001$; -0.90 for CBS, $p < .001$; and -0.87 for NBC, $p < .001$).

While news programs thus moved toward airing fewer items per package, the resulting fewer items were longer items. In 1992, Lichty and Gomery remarked on a trend for the programs to try "distinctive, longer-than-average features";³⁰ ABC incorporated this approach in 1988, they wrote, while NBC has included longer features since the 1970s. Our data, however, show ABC devoting more time to fewer items as early as 1971 and 1972. After 1978, all three networks did so.

How did the move to fewer items affect item length? To explore this question, Table 2 reports the percentage of items per year, per network, that were from 1 to 10 seconds long, 11 to 20 seconds long, 21 to 60 seconds long, and longer than 60 seconds.

From 1971 until 1975, ABC ran more stories of a minute or more length than did the other two networks. After that, nearly half the items for all three networks were over a minute long, with only a few exceptions.

Table 3 summarizes Table 2, using the trend procedure detailed in discussion of Table 1. ρ was computed for each network, with separate ranks based on each year's percentage of items in the shortest and longest time categories. The between-ranks ρ shows 27-year trends for each network's use of items in each the two "extreme" length categories. Surprisingly, no network showed a significant pattern of fewer 1-10 second items. And

³⁰ Lawrence W. Lichty and Douglas Gomery, "More is Less," in Cook, Gomery and Lichty, *The Future of News*, 1992, p. 26.

while Riffe³¹ found all three exhibiting significant 1971-1990 trends toward more 60-second+ items across 20 years, this study's 27-year design found only CBS demonstrating a significant trend toward more 60+ second items, despite Table 1's indication of fewer and necessarily longer items over the 27 years for all three networks.

Of course number of items and item length are only two aspects of coverage. But criticism of network news also involves TV news' concentration on soft or sensational news topics.

Table 4 contrasts the three networks for each of the 27 years in terms of whether the news covered fit definitions of "soft" news (human interest, sports, features), "bad" news (sensational crimes, accidents, disasters, etc.) or "hard news" (including all other news, such as politics, diplomacy, defense, economy, etc.).

Perhaps the most striking--given the between-network differences in item length--observation on Table 4 is the lack of difference among networks in the distribution of items among the three topic categories. None of the 27 tests of association between network and topic was significant.

For all three networks, hard news dominated, accounting for from 53% to 82% of items--until 1997 when the percentage of hard news dropped below half. Of course, hard news is a staple, and similarity among networks has been demonstrated.³²

But if Table 4 shows the networks can be viewed as "rivals in

31 Riffe, "A Deeper Look at the 'Superficiality' of Television News," 1996.

32 James B. Lemert, "Content Duplication by the Networks in Competing Evening Newscasts," *Journalism Quarterly*, 1974, 51:238-244; and Daniel Riffe, Brenda Ellis, Momo Rogers, Roger Van Ommeren and Kierean Woodman, "Gatekeeping and the Network News Mix," *Journalism Quarterly*, 1986, 63:315-321.

conformity"³³ because of their generally similar mix of hard, soft and bad news, Table 5 provides a slightly different picture. As with earlier examination of length data in order to assess 27-year trends, Table 5 looks at within-network trends over time. All three networks exhibited significant negative rho trend scores for hard news, indexing overall reductions.

And while percentage of soft news or bad news is not independent of percentage of hard news (a decrease in the relative percentage devoted to the latter must impact the percentage of the former), significant trend scores show increased use of both soft and bad news.

Conclusions

This research has its limitations. Most obvious is its use of television indices. Also, it uses ordinal time categories rather than comparison of mean length scores to test for greater "depth" of coverage. The percentage in the one-minute-or-longer category is only a rough index of network commitment to "depth." Similarly, the question of independence--or lack thereof--among the three topic categories suggests caution in comparing the trend scores. But despite those limitations, the study encompasses a broad time frame using a "deep" sample of four constructed weeks per year, and it permits between-network comparisons as well as within-network trend analyses.

The study set out to examine how network news has changed during the last quarter century. In particular, it looked at measures one might associate with a "softening" of the news product.

³³ Stanley K. Bigman, "Rivals in Conformity: A Study of Competing Dailies," *Journalism Quarterly*, 1948, 25:127-131.

Over time, the networks provided less breadth in their coverage, airing fewer items per newscast--from a high of 24 per half-hour newscast to as few as 8. But of course each of those 8 would presumably take a larger chunk of the fixed time of the newscast. In that sense, the narrower breadth would yield greater depth.

Yet trend analysis demonstrated that only CBS exhibited a significant trend to pieces of more than a minute in length.

The third measure of softening--topic emphasis on soft news--provided perhaps the clearest evidence of the softening of three "rivals in conformity." ABC, CBS and NBC aired an increasingly greater percentage of items that qualified as soft news (and bad news), while hard news decreased.

It is beyond the scope of this study to speculate whether TV news' move to fewer and softer items should be seen as a response to viewer preferences (and corporate desire to appeal to those preferences) or as a "repositioning" in a changing market dominated by sensational news magazines and where CNN dominates the "serious" broadcast news niche.

Regardless, we began by discussing the declining role of ABC, CBS and NBC news for today's viewers, along with critics' suggestions that network response would be to make the product "more palatable, more consumable, more human."³⁴ The analysis reported here suggests that TV news has indeed become increasingly soft.

³⁴ Scott and Gobetz, "Hard News/Soft News Content," 1992, pp. 406-407.

Table 1

Average Frequency of News Items
per Nightly Newscast (n/20),
by Network and Year

Year	ABC		CBS		NBC	
	nightly	annual	nightly	annual	nightly	annual
	f	(n)	f	(n)	f	(n)
1971	11.35	(227)	16.70	(334)	16.75	(335)
1972	12.80	(256)	14.50	(290)	15.55	(311)
1973	16.00	(320)	17.15	(343)	17.05	(341)
1974	20.60	(412)	22.35	(447)	21.15	(423)
1975	15.20	(304)	16.55	(331)	14.50	(290)
1976	19.35	(387)	19.25	(385)	16.65	(333)
1977	13.50	(270)	15.95	(319)	13.75	(275)
1978	23.40	(468)	24.15	(483)	23.95	(479)
1979	14.55	(291)	13.90	(278)	12.45	(249)
1980	14.40	(288)	14.25	(285)	12.50	(250)
1981	15.45	(309)	13.90	(278)	13.95	(279)
1982	15.60	(312)	13.85	(277)	14.50	(290)
1983	14.55	(291)	14.65	(293)	14.35	(287)
1984	12.00	(240)	13.15	(263)	12.15	(243)
1985	11.00	(220)	14.05	(281)	11.45	(229)
1986	10.45	(209)	13.85	(277)	12.95	(259)
1987	11.35	(227)	12.20	(244)	11.35	(227)
1988	11.55	(231)	12.10	(242)	10.15	(203)
1989	12.75	(255)	11.95	(239)	12.80	(256)
1990	11.80	(236)	11.15	(223)	11.30	(226)
1991	10.15	(203)	7.65	(153)	7.90	(158)
1992	10.50	(210)	9.25	(185)	8.45	(169)
1993	9.90	(198)	9.55	(191)	11.00	(220)
1994	10.75	(215)	11.30	(226)	12.25	(245)
1995	9.90	(198)	11.05	(221)	11.05	(221)
1996	11.95	(239)	11.80	(236)	9.75	(195)
1997	11.00	(220)	11.20	(224)	9.30	(186)

trend score

Spearman's rho: -.72** -.90** -.87**

NOTE: ** = $p < .001$

The n shown is the annual total of items coded for each network. Four constructed weeks (Monday-through-Friday), or 20 sample days, were used for each year. To determine the average frequency of items per newscast, the annual n was divided by 20.

Table 2
(continued)

	1991			1992			1993			1994		
	ABC	CBS	NBC	ABC	CBS	NBC	ABC	CBS	NBC	ABC	CBS	NBC
1-10 sec.	12.8	9.8	15.8	10.0	4.9	11.2	8.6	3.7	15.0	8.4	6.6	11.0
11-20 sec.	14.3	8.5	7.6	22.9	19.5	11.2	17.7	19.4	17.3	20.0	22.6	22.9
21-60 sec.	13.8	11.1	3.8	13.8	15.7	8.9	12.6	15.7	13.6	20.0	13.7	15.1
>60 sec.	59.1	70.6	72.8	53.3	60.0	68.6	61.1	61.3	54.1	51.6	57.1	51.0
n =	203	153	158	210	185	169	198	191	220	215	226	245
χ^2 6 d.f., (p)	19.05 (<.01)			18.93 (<.01)			16.39 (<.05)			7.07 (n.s.)		
	1995			1996			1997					
	ABC	CBS	NBC	ABC	CBS	NBC	ABC	CBS	NBC			
1-10 sec.	7.1	11.3	13.1	16.3	14.4	7.7	12.3	9.4	9.7			
11-20 sec.	12.6	18.6	20.8	15.1	14.0	17.9	18.6	20.1	14.0			
21-60 sec.	20.2	15.4	20.8	25.1	22.5	20.5	20.0	18.8	17.2			
>60 sec.	50.1	54.8	45.2	43.5	49.2	53.8	49.1	51.8	59.1			
n =	198	221	221	239	236	195	220	224	186			
χ^2 6 d.f., (p)	14.53 (<.05)			11.07 (n.s.)			5.77 (n.s.)					

Table 3

Trend Scores for Annual Percentages of News Items in
 "Short" (1-10 sec.) and "Long" (> 60 sec.)
 Categories

27-year trend (rho) for items:

Network:	1-10 seconds long	> 60 seconds long
ABC	-03	25
CBS	-09	74**
NBC	-27	35

NOTE: ** = $p < .01$

Decimals removed from values of rho. Trend scores are based on annual percentages in these categories as shown in Table 2 and are computed using same procedure as in discussion of Table 1.

Table 4
Percentage of News Item by Topic, by Network by Year

	1971			1972			1973			1974		
	ABC	CBS	NBC	ABC	CBS	NBC	ABC	CBS	NBC	ABC	CBS	NBC
hard news	75.6	70.1	74.5	75.9	77.4	74.1	75.1	74.6	76.4	77.1	79.6	79.4
soft news	11.3	16.7	11.7	11.1	11.5	14.9	9.9	10.2	13.1	10.8	8.3	8.5
bad news	13.1	13.0	13.8	13.0	11.1	11.0	15.0	15.2	10.5	12.1	12.1	12.1
n =	221	331	333	253	287	309	321	343	342	464	504	506
χ^2 4 d.f., (p)	5.19 (.27)			2.83 (.59)			5.42 (.25)			2.16 (.71)		

	1975			1976			1977			1978		
	ABC	CBS	NBC	ABC	CBS	NBC	ABC	CBS	NBC	ABC	CBS	NBC
hard news	74.6	75.0	78.2	75.6	78.7	74.6	77.4	80.0	76.7	68.4	68.9	61.8
soft news	9.9	10.2	7.5	8.6	7.0	10.5	9.2	6.5	11.3	16.5	17.9	19.6
bad news	15.5	14.8	14.3	15.8	14.3	14.9	13.4	13.5	12.0	15.1	13.2	18.6
n =	304	331	294	387	385	335	270	319	275	478	486	479
χ^2 4 d.f., (p)	1.94 (.75)			3.17 (.53)			4.21 (.38)			8.23 (.08)		

	1979			1980			1981			1982		
	ABC	CBS	NBC	ABC	CBS	NBC	ABC	CBS	NBC	ABC	CBS	NBC
hard news	79.3	79.9	76.0	76.4	71.5	73.7	77.3	79.2	80.7	70.5	67.4	67.6
soft news	10.0	11.1	13.2	11.3	13.9	11.2	12.0	9.3	11.0	13.6	17.0	16.4
bad news	10.7	9.0	10.8	12.3	14.6	15.1	10.7	11.5	8.3	15.9	15.6	16.0
n =	297	278	249	284	280	251	300	270	265	308	276	287
χ^2 4 d.f., (p)	2.09 (.72)			2.48 (.64)			2.65 (.62)			1.51 (.82)		

	1983			1984			1985			1986		
	ABC	CBS	NBC	ABC	CBS	NBC	ABC	CBS	NBC	ABC	CBS	NBC
hard news	64.4	64.1	63.4	65.7	65.0	63.4	66.2	59.9	62.7	59.8	61.1	64.7
soft news	18.3	19.3	20.1	20.4	18.8	20.6	19.4	22.4	18.4	22.5	19.6	18.2
bad news	17.3	16.6	16.5	13.9	16.2	16.0	14.4	17.7	18.9	17.6	19.3	17.1
n =	289	290	284	230	260	238	216	277	228	204	275	258
χ^2 4 d.f., (p)	.31 (.99)			.80 (.94)			3.25 (.52)			1.98 (.74)		

	1987			1988			1989			1990		
	ABC	CBS	NBC	ABC	CBS	NBC	ABC	CBS	NBC	ABC	CBS	NBC
hard news	66.5	68.8	67.7	72.3	70.8	67.7	68.8	67.8	64.5	68.5	64.4	63.4
soft news	17.4	15.2	17.7	20.8	20.4	22.7	17.4	14.4	21.3	17.5	18.5	21.0
bad news	16.1	16.0	14.6	6.9	8.8	9.6	13.8	17.8	14.2	14.0	17.1	15.6
n =	224	244	226	231	240	198	253	236	254	228	222	224
χ^2 4 d.f., (p)	.84 (.93)			1.61 (.81)			5.16 (.27)			1.93 (.75)		

(continued)

Table 4
(continued)

	1991			1992			1993			1994		
	ABC	CBS	NBC	ABC	CBS	NBC	ABC	CBS	NBC	ABC	CBS	NBC
hard news	81.8	77.1	77.2	71.9	66.5	63.9	68.7	61.3	58.6	67.0	62.4	61.6
soft news	8.9	9.2	8.9	14.3	18.9	20.1	16.2	22.0	24.1	13.0	13.7	15.9
bad news	9.4	13.7	13.9	13.8	14.6	16.0	15.2	16.8	17.3	20.0	23.9	22.4
n =	203	153	158	210	185	169	198	191	220	215	226	245
χ^2 4 d.f., (p)	2.38 (.67)			3.36 (.50)			5.39 (.25)			2.10 (.72)		

	1995			1996			1997		
	ABC	CBS	NBC	ABC	CBS	NBC	ABC	CBS	NBC
hard news	64.1	58.4	56.1	54.8	59.7	53.1	42.7	46.4	42.5
soft news	14.1	13.1	15.8	27.2	22.9	27.8	29.5	29.5	37.6
bad news	21.7	28.5	28.1	18.0	17.4	19.1	27.7	24.1	19.9
n =	198	221	221	239	236	194	220	224	186
χ^2 4 d.f., (p)	4.02 (.40)			2.38 (.67)			5.76 (.22)		

Table 5

Trend Scores for Annual Percentages of News Items in
 "Hard," "Soft" and "Bad" News Categories

27-year trend (rho) for items that are:

Network:	Hard News	Soft News	Bad News
ABC	-60**	61**	42*
CBS	-74**	56**	67**
NBC	-72**	66**	63**

NOTE: * = $p < .05$

** = $p < .01$

Decimals removed from values of rho. Trend scores are based on annual percentages in these categories as shown in Table 4 and are computed using same procedure as in discussion of Table 1.

**Has the salary gap closed?
A survey of men and women managers
at U.S. television stations**

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Submitted to the Radio-Television Journalism division of the Association for Education
in Journalism and Mass Communication for the 1999 annual conference.

Abstract

Has the salary gap closed?

A survey of men and women managers at U.S. television stations

A survey of 169 general managers, general sales managers, news directors, and program managers at the nation's television stations found that while more women have reached the industry's top ranks, they still report lower salaries, number of benefits, and feelings of authority than male managers. However, when personal (gender, education, and age) and job characteristics (including market size and job title) were entered into a regression analysis, gender was a significant predictor only for salary.

In 1972, Stone reported that only two of 398 respondents in a survey of news directors in the Radio-Television News Directors Association were female. Two decades later, women were beginning to crack the glass ceiling. A 1996 survey found that women held 24.1% of the news director positions in television (Media Reports to Women, 1997). Joyce Reed, a news director at KWTW in Oklahoma City, said in 1995, "We have a long, long way to go before we dominate newsrooms, but we've come a long way since 1976 when I was the only girl in the newsroom" (quoted in Prato, 1996, p.48). But despite the improvement in the last 25 years, women still hold less than a quarter of television the news director positions.

The limited number of women in top television management has affected society in many ways. Within the stations, the lack of women in management deprives employees of the diverse strengths that women bring as managers (Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Herkelmann et al., 1993; Gottepe & Schneier, 1989). Walsh (1996) contends that the under-representation of women in the television industry "deprives women of positive reinforcement, deprives children of female role models, and deprives the nation of key intellectual and emotional feedback" (p. 4).

Others contend that dearth of women in management is reflected in content, leading to an inaccurate portrayal of women and society as a whole (Hayes, 1979). In many markets, weather and health top the list of most important issues, but crime and justice stories dominate newscasts (Fitzgerald, 1997). Ziegler and White (1990) contend that women's issues, including as health, gender-bias, and domestic violence, are not being explained on television in a realistic manner. With more women at the table when decisions are being made, areas such as education and discrimination might be discussed more often (McCartney, 1997). Epstein's 1978 survey of female television reporters suggests that women are more likely than men to focus on topics like health care, family welfare, education, rape, and child abuse, just to name a few. Equal

representation in media management is essential for diversity in news coverage. Fox president Mitch Stern said in 1997 that without equal representation, “we would be very one-dimensional” (quoted in Littleton, p. 32).

The growing number of female television managers is a start in diversifying the industry. But even as women are moving into top positions, they are faced with other barriers. Hernandez (1996) contends women in television management now are being discriminated against in areas such as “salary, access to jobs, access to information, harassment, and negative attitudes” (p. 12). Others contend that while more women are being given prestigious job titles, their comments are not being taken seriously and they are not being allowed to make the decisions that matter (Chaffins, Forbes, Fuqua, & Cangemi, 1995).

Past research has examined how many women are working in the television industry and climbing the ranks to executive positions. Fewer studies have examined how women compare to their male counterparts once they reach the top. The few studies that go beyond looking at sheer numbers have concentrated on salary gaps. And most studies have looked at one specific job title (reporter, anchor, or news director) or at all women in the industry in general. This study aims to fill that gap by surveying top television executives in four different job categories (general manager, general sales manager, news director, program director) about their compensation and other experiences on the job. Now that more women are heading departments in the television industry, are they making the decisions that affect their stations as a whole? Are these women receiving salaries and benefits equal to their male counterparts? These are the key issues that this study will address by surveying managers at stations in varying market sizes across the nation. Further, the study examines whether salary, benefits and feelings of authority are related to

characteristics other than gender, including market size, education, length of time in current position, length of time in the industry, age and ethnicity.

Literature review

Women in management

As recently as 1995, women only held 5% of all top-level corporate positions (Kaufman-Rosen, 1995). In the Fortune 500 companies, women hold 2% of senior executive positions, 3.6% of board directorships, and 1.7% of corporate officerships (Chaffins et al., 1995). Another study examining Fortune 1000 industrial and Fortune 500 service companies found that 95% of the managers were men and nearly 97% were white (Castro & Furchtgott-Roth, 1997). While women are nearly nonexistent at the very top levels of the corporate world, they fare better when all management positions are examined. Linden (1994) estimates that women hold about 40% of all management positions.

Researchers say women face some of the most blatant forms of discrimination with gaps in salary, benefits, and feelings of authority (Hernandez, 1996). In many companies, the highest-paid woman has the 20th highest salary in the organization as a whole (Castro & Furchtgott-Roth, 1997). In general, women in middle management were said to make about \$.66 for every \$1 made by men (Solomon, 1990). Morrison and Von Glinow (1990) found similar results, reporting that most females in top management earn 42% less than males in the same position. But recent studies show those gaps closing. During the past 15 years, the salary of women in upper-level positions has increased 18.3% compared to an average 1.7% salary increase by their male colleagues (Harris, 1995).

In the cable industry for example, the average female manager's salary was \$50,376 in 1997 while the average male salary was \$59,354. That 15% salary gap was down 2% from the

previous year. Women supervisors fared worse, however, with average salaries about 25% lower than their male counterparts (Media Report to Women, 1997). That same year, women with degrees and job tenure of one to three years earned 30% less than their male counterparts in the cable industry (Media Report to Women, 1997).

In general, the gap between the genders in compensation holds even when men and women have the same educational backgrounds. Over the past two decades, women have been strongly represented in graduate training programs, earning more than 50% of all master's degrees since the early 1980s (Castro & Furchtgott-Roth, 1997). Despite the increase in education, few women have made it to the very top of the salary ranks. A 1994 Business Week study reported "that women with degrees from Top 20 business schools earned 12% less in their first year than men with comparable qualifications and took longer to move into top management" (Castro & Furchtgott-Roth, 1997, p. 24). In these high-level management positions, women with equal education are usually said to start at similar salaries as their male counterparts. But as 10 years pass, men end up making at least 20% more than women (Morrison & Von Glinow, 1990).

The gaps between men and women managers also extend to benefits. Price Waterhouse and Sheffield Consulting Group report that women receive smaller and cheaper company cars and less medical insurance. "It appears that companies are substantially under-rewarding their female management staff" (Management, 1997, p. 36). Jennie Langley, director of corporate affairs at Carter Holt Harvey, suggests: "We need to be smarter about getting what we want. It's too easy to get hooked up in the dollars, comparing ourselves with the blokes" (quoted in Management, 1997, p.37). Langley says women need to start using their benefit packages to develop themselves personally. Instead of agreeing to golf memberships, performance bonuses, and shares, women

need to focus on their needs, such as time to study, child care benefits and taking courses to better them as managers (Management, 1997).

While gaps in salary and benefits can be easily measured, perhaps the most damaging gap – women’s perceived self-worth to their organization — is harder to quantify. “Most females are now given mere ‘token’ positions in companies with only the appearance of power and prestige rather than being blatantly excluded from such positions, as was the case mere decades ago” (Chaffins, et al., 1995, p. 380). Morrison and Glinow (1990) report that women fill one-third of management positions, but they are not given the same power as their male counterparts.

Women in Television

In the 1960s, Stone found that one-fourth of all broadcasting jobs were held by women, but nearly all were traffic, continuity, or secretarial positions (Stone, 1973-74). Following the amendment of Title VII of Civil Rights Act to prohibit discrimination by gender as well as by color, creed, or national origin, women began to gain ground in the industry. By 1970, a survey found that 45% of the workers in the nation’s newsrooms were women and that 94% of news directors said they would hire a woman reporter (Stone, 1973-74). Just as supervisors were becoming more accepting of women in the newsroom, more women were preparing to work in the field. Creedon (1989) calls this the “gender switch,” with women outnumbering men in journalism programs since 1977.

Weaver, Howard, and Wilhoit’s 1992 study of journalists found women gaining ground across all media. In 1971, 20.3% of working journalists were women. By 1992, women accounted for 34% of all journalists. However, television had the lowest percentage of women, with women accounting for 24.8% of all television journalists. In contrast, 44.1% of journalists at weekly newspapers and 45.9% of the journalists at news magazines were women (Weaver, et al. 1992).

While Gerbner found in 1993 that 63% of those delivering news were men (cited in Walsh 1996, p.190), Stone reported just four years later that half of all television news reporters and anchors in the United States were women. But Stone wondered whether those women held equal status within their profession when the cameras were off.

Rakow and Kranich (1991), in examining how women serve as presenters of news, found “a gendered division between ‘serious, important’ news that is overwhelmingly masculine and ‘human interest, lifestyle’ news that is more likely to be the purview of women reporters and readers” (p. 11). Gerbner summarized this trend: “Overall, the powers in television want their men like their wine – aged – and their women like their fruit – fresh and sweet” (quoted in Walsh, 1996, p. 4).

Some contend the television industry holds different evaluation standards for men and women. Ferri and Keller (1986) cited a female anchor in their survey who “noted that they are often judged by their appearance, while their male counterparts are judged more for their work skills” (p.467). In a follow-up study, Ferri (1988) concluded that women anchors perceive more barriers than male anchors, including overemphasis placed on physical appearance, overcoming gender stereotypes, and differential treatment in hiring process based on gender (Ferri & Keller, 1986). A recent survey by Engstrom and Ferri (1998) evaluated gender role expectations and found appearance and balancing career and family as problems for many women in the television industry. Women said their primary career barriers dealt with the way others perceived them.

Another barrier many women in television say they continue to face is balancing family and career. Burks and Stone (1993) examined career perceptions of men and women television news directors and found that women news directors were more concerned with the lack of quality time at home. Many women news directors said their family obligations were impeding their

career progress, leading the researchers to conclude that the under-representation of women in upper-management might be because women don't want to risk their family time for a career. Weaver and Wilhoit (1996) reported that women had more difficulty balancing personal and professional lives even though there were signs that this barrier was beginning to change.

Women in Television Management

While women have made strides in the television industry in recent decades, they remain underrepresented in management positions. Women now account for about one-fourth of the news directors at U.S. commercial TV stations, and the number of women news directors is increasing by about 5% a year (Media Report to Women, 1997). Stone predicts that women will hold half of all news director positions by 2001. In the early 1970s, women were more likely to be executives at independent stations and in small markets, rather than at affiliates of the major networks. The gap was closing by 1994, when 18.2% of female all news directors worked at independent stations, compared to 12.8% of male news directors (Media Report to Women, 1997). Women seem to be faring particularly well at Fox. In 1997, Fox became the first network to hire women as general managers in their stations in the top three markets, and women general managers headed seven of the 22 Fox affiliates (Littleton, 1997).

But some contend that numbers don't equal power. According to Prato (1995), "more women than ever are taking over the management of local television newsrooms, but this trend doesn't mean female news executives have as much power in the business as men do" (p. 48). Burks and Stone (1993) argue that women's participation in top-level media management is lowest when compared to any other industry. And Hernandez (1996) asserts that women in the television management are more likely to hold positions in areas such as financing, rather than areas that directly affect the news content.

Research Questions

The literature cited above suggests the following research questions:

RQ1: How do women in television management compare with their male counterparts in job demographics (as measured by numbers, salary, benefits, and feelings of authority)?

RQ2: If differences are found between the genders on the variables of salary, benefits, and feelings of authority, are these primarily predicted by gender? What other personal (age, ethnicity, education) and professional variables (job title, market size, length of time in current position, length of time in the industry) significantly predict variance in salary, benefits, and feelings of authority?

Method

A mail survey was used to gather information on male and female television managers. Dillman's Total Design Method (1983) was used in an effort to increase response rate. The investigator sent subjects a detailed cover letter explaining the importance of the study and ensuring confidentiality. Along with the cover letter and the questionnaire, sent out in May 1998, the investigator sent self-addressed, stamped envelopes. A follow-up reminder postcard was mailed in early June to television managers who had not responded to the first mailer. In late June, a second questionnaire and cover letter was sent to the managers who had not responded to the first mailer.

Population and Sample

The population was all managers at 211 Television Designated Market Areas (DMAs) identified in the 1996-97 Television and Cable Factbook. The population will include only the four major television affiliates ABC, CBS, NBC, and FOX. These affiliates were chosen because these affiliates typically provide some type of local news. Therefore, each would have a news director in addition to the other three executive positions surveyed. Further these four affiliates also have a longer history of providing news and are fairly consistent throughout all markets.

Twenty-five markets were randomly selected, representing more than 10% of the population represented. The markets listed in the DMA book were ranked from one as the largest to 211 as the smallest. To draw a representative sample, the researcher divided the 211 markets into three groups: one to 50 were considered large markets, 51 to 100 were considered medium markets, and 101 to 211 were considered small markets. A former news director in a large market suggested the categorization of market size. A table of random numbers, corresponding to market ranks, was used in selection of television markets for the study. The sample included eight stations in the large and medium market sizes and nine stations in the small markets was drawn. One additional market was drawn in the smaller category because these markets tend to have fewer major affiliates and fewer managers at each station.

Throughout the selection process, the investigator evaluated the sample to make sure it was representative of the population, in terms of geography as well as size. After evaluating the markets selected randomly, the investigator discovered that East Coast markets were over-represented and virtually no western markets were included. Therefore two large and two medium markets in the eastern region were replaced with four West Coast markets to provide a better geographic representation. The following states were represented in the study: California, Georgia, Ohio, Colorado, Pennsylvania, Florida, Indiana, Wisconsin, Illinois, South Carolina, Oregon, Mississippi, Texas, and Alaska. City names are not included to protect confidentiality of the respondents.

The mail survey was distributed to four managers at each station: the general manager, general sales manager, news director, and program director. These positions were chosen because of the authority they possess. Investigators called the stations selected one to two weeks before sending out the first mailer to collect the correct names and verify titles of the managers at the

station. With four stations and four managers in each of 25 markets, the sample drawn potentially could have been 400 managers. But after calling each of the 25 markets, the investigator's survey list was reduced from 400 potential respondents to 335 because not all markets had the four major affiliates or someone in each of the four targeted positions. Based on information obtained from the stations, the sample of 335 included 244 men and 91 women managers. Eighty-three surveys were mailed out to managers at ABC affiliates; 83 to CBS stations; 94 to NBC stations, and 75 FOX affiliates. Surveys were mailed out to 88 general managers, 88 general sales managers, 77 news directors, and 82 program managers.

Variables

The independent variables in this study are gender, education level, length of time in current position, length of time in industry, age, ethnicity, and size of market. These variables were measured by single multiple-choice items on the questionnaire. Gender was measured with a single item, with men coded as 1 and women as 2. Education level was measured by asking the subjects a multiple-choice question with the following choices: (1) Some high school; (2) completed high school; (3) some college; (4) graduated from college; (5) some graduate work, no degree; and (6) completed advanced degree(s). Length of time in current position was measured by four choices from (1) less than a year to (4) five years or more. Length of time in the television industry was measured by five choices from (1) less than a year to (5) 16 years or more. Age was a single-item measure asking respondents to fill in their age in years, and six categories of ethnicity were listed. Size of market was determined by a code number on the questionnaire returned by respondents. For analysis, markets were broken into three groups as described above with 3 as the largest market and 1 being the smallest markets. Finally, job title was, again, determined by a code number on the questionnaire that indicated which of the four management titles the respondent

held. For analysis, the three non-general manager job titles were collapsed into one group (1) and general managers, who were expected to earn more as the station's top officials, were classified as (2).

The dependent variables measured are numbers of men and women, salaries, employment benefits, feelings of authority. The salary question was measured with 12 response options ranging from (1) \$29,000 to (12) \$160,000 or more. The employment benefits question also was a multiple-choice question, where subjects were asked to mark all of the benefits that apply to their employment package. These 13 choices included company car, expense account, golf memberships, additional insurance, and salary bonuses. Respondents were asked to list all benefits not on the list. A total benefits score was computed for each respondent by summing the number of benefits selected.

The dependent variable of feelings of authority was measured by combining Steel and Mento's (1987) Perceived Decision-Making Influence scale and Kohl's (1989) Self-Perceived Influence scale. The five-item perceived decision-making influence scale (Steel & Mento, 1987) assesses employees' perceptions of the degree of influence they have over decisions that affect them or their work. This scale reports reliability coefficients for the measure ranging between .85 and .90. Steel and Mento's scale correlates with ratings of job satisfaction and supervisory performance. In the original scale (1987), subjects were asked five questions based on this Likert-type scale. Responses were measured on a 7-point agree-disagree rating scale. For the current study, only minor wording changes were made to make the questionnaire relevant to television managers. For example, "Within my *work group* the people most affected by decisions frequently participate in making the decisions," was changed to "within my *station*..."

The Self-Perceived Influence scale (Kohl 1989) measures how much an employee feels he or she influences decisions in an organization. Reliability coefficients for perceived influence scale in past studies ranged from .93 to .86. For the current study, three out of five of the items in the original scale were used. The three questions were used because they focused more on participation and influence of the person's opinions and views. Again, the only modification was in wording. Responses were measured on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (very small) to 7 (very large). A sample item was "How much weight does your fellow management team give to your opinions?"

After the responses were collected, factor analysis was performed on the feeling of authority scale created for this survey. The analysis revealed a single-factor solution (Eigenvalue = 5.23, explaining 65.40% of the variance), and the eight-item scale was reliable at .92. Reliability showed that removing one item of the eight-item scale would have improved the scale's reliability to .93. However, the high initial reliability and single-factor solution indicated that all eight-items should be retained for the measure. To compute an authority score, the responses to the eight decision-making influence items were averaged for each respondent. The higher the score, the higher the feelings of authority the subject possessed.

Finally, a measure of job satisfaction was included in the survey. Job satisfaction was measured by using Downs and Hazen's (1977) Communication Satisfaction Questionnaire (CSQ). Subjects were asked three questions about their level of job satisfaction. The first question, "How satisfied are you with your job?", was measured on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (Very Satisfied) to 7 (Very dissatisfied). The second question, "In the past 6 months, how has your level of job satisfaction changed?", was measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale from Improved significantly

to Decreased Significantly. This measure was included for descriptive purposes only and was not used as a dependent variable in analysis. It will be used in the discussion of the analysis.

Findings

After the two mailings, 169 managers of the 335 in the sample returned completed questionnaires, for a response rate of 50.4%. Respondents ranged in age from 25 to 73, with about 50 percent of respondents falling between the ages of 37 and 48. One hundred and seventeen (69.2%) of the subjects were male and 51 (30.2%) of the respondents were female. For ethnicity, 157 (92.9%) identified themselves as white, two (1.2%) as African-American, five (3.0%) as Hispanic, and two (1.2%) as other. Because only nine respondents in the sample identified themselves as minorities, ethnicity was dropped in all further analysis.

Of the 169, 49 (28.9%) managers returned the survey in the top 50 markets, 70 (41.4%) managers returned the survey in the medium-sized markets, and 49 (28.9%) managers returned the survey in the small markets. Thirty-five (20.7%) general managers, 42 (24.9%) general sales managers, 42 (25.0%) news directors, and 49 (29.2%) program managers returned surveys. Forty-four (26.0%) of the managers who responded were from ABC affiliates; 42 (24.9%) were from CBS; 46 (27.4%) from NBC; and 36 (21.4%) from the FOX affiliate.

RQ1: How do women in television management compare with their male counterparts in job demographics (numbers, salary, benefits, and feelings of authority)?

When examined by both ratios of the sample selected (men = 244, 72.8%; women = 91, 27.2%) and actual respondents (men = 117, 69.2%; women = 50, 30.2%) men outnumbered women more than 2 to 1 in television these management positions. For salaries, men ($M = 7.86$, corresponding to the \$80,000 to \$89,999 salary range) reported significantly higher average salaries than women ($M = 5.17$, corresponding to the \$60,000 to \$69,999 range; $t = 4.61$, $df = 151$,

$p < .001$). Further, men ($M = 4.54$) reported having significantly more benefits than women ($M = 3.61$; $t = 2.09$, $df = 155$, $p < .038$). Finally, men ($M = 5.78$) reported significantly higher average feelings of authority than women ($M = 5.28$; $t = 3.14$, $df = 163$, $p < .002$).

Results for the dependent variables of salary, benefits, and feelings of authority also were examined by dividing the variables into high, medium, and low categories and comparing by gender on a crosstabulation analysis. While no significant differences emerged in this type of analysis for benefits, differences were found for salary and feelings of authority.

For salary, those with salaries below \$70,000 were classified as low, those with salaries between \$70,000 and \$119,999 were classified as medium, and managers with salaries above \$120,000 were classified as highly paid. A Chi-Square test showed that men were significantly more likely than expected to be in the medium and high salary groups, while women were over-represented (compared to expected counts) in the low salary classification. The results are presented in Table 1-1.

Table 1-1: Crosstabulation of Salary by Gender
observed count (*expected count*)

Gender	Low salary	Medium salary	High salary
Men	30 (38.5)	40 (37.1)	37 (31.5)
Women	25 (16.5)	13 (15.9)	8 (13.5)

$$\chi^2 = 10.2, df=2, p < .01$$

For feelings of authority, those with average scores below 5.5 (out of a possible 7.0) were classified as low, those who scored between 5.5 and 6.0 were classified as medium, and those with scores above 6.0 were classified as having high feelings of authority. While the numbers observed in the medium category were very close to the expected values, men again were significantly over-represented in the high category and women were over-represented in the low category. The results are presented in Table 1-2.

Table 1-1: Crosstabulation of Feelings of Authority by Gender
observed count (*expected count*)

Gender	Low authority	Medium authority	High authority
Men	28 (36.2)	37 (36.2)	50 (42.5)
Women	24 (15.8)	15 (15.8)	11 (18.5)

$$\chi^2 = 10.59, df=2, p < .01$$

RQ2: Are the variances in salary, benefits, and feelings of authority being driven primarily by gender or by other personal (age, education) and professional (job title, market size, length of time in current position, length of time in industry)?

Because significant differences were consistently found between the genders on salary and authority (and to a lesser extent benefits), multiple linear regression analysis was used to discover if gender or some other factor was the primary predictor of these observed differences. Stepwise analyses were run first on personal characteristics only (gender, age, education) then on all personal and professional variables combined.

Table 2-1 Regression Analysis for Salary
Betas (N = 149)

Predictor variables	Regression 1	Regression 2
Gender (female)	-.249**	-.217***
Age	.249**	.206**
Education	.189*	.045
Job title (general manager)		.341***
Market size (large market)		.353***
Length of time in current position		-.198**
Length of time in industry		.099
Constant	.197	.441
Overall adjusted R ²	.180	.421

* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

As Table 2-1 indicates, both personal and professional variables significantly predict changes in salary. When personal characteristics were run independently, gender loaded first as the strongest predictor of change in salary. As expected based on previous studies and the analyses in Research Question 1, being female is negatively related with higher salaries. In other words,

women managers are likely to earn less than their male counterparts. Education was the next biggest predictor in the equation, with those with higher education more likely to earn higher salaries. Finally, age was also a significant predictor. Older managers are likely to earn more, according to the model. The combined personal demographics model explained about 19.7% of the total variance in salaries.

To examine the effect of professional factors as well, the four job-related variables were included in the regression analysis. Table 2-1 shows that job title predicted the largest portion of the variance in salary, with general managers likely to earn higher salaries. Market size was the next in predictive value, with those in larger markets likely to earn more. In the combined analysis, gender was the third largest predictor of salary. Next came age, followed by length of time in the position, which interestingly had a negative relationship with salaries. This data indicates that new hires make more than those who have held their management position longer. Neither length of time in the industry or education were significant predictors of salary in the combined analysis.

Table 2-2 Regression Analysis for Benefits
Betas (N = 152)

Predictor variables	Betas	Standard Errors
Gender	-.151 ⁺	-.083
Age	.030	-.004
Education	..103	.075
Length of time in position		.296***
Length of time in industry		.042
Market size		-.072
Job title		.066
Industry	.023	.088
Company size	.016	.082

⁺ p < .1; * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

As Table 2-2 indicates, only gender came close to being a significant predictor for benefit variance in the personal demographics regression model. However, this predictor was very weak

($t = -1.87, p < .06$). The total variance explained by the personal demographics model was a slight 2.3%, all of which was accounted for by change in gender. When job variables were added to the equation, only job title was a significant predictor of the number of benefits. Being a general manager, as expected, leads to more benefits. The total variance in benefits explained by the combined personal and job demographics regression model was 8.8%, all of which was accounted for by job title.

Table 2-3 Regression Analysis for Feelings of Authority
Betas (N = 159)

Predictor variables	Regression	Regression
Gender	-.213***	-.117
Age	.056	-.113
Length of time in industry	.101	.092
Job title (general manager)		.352***
Market size (large markets)		.018
Length of time in position		-.047
Length of time in industry		.207*
Adjusted R	.046	.197
Adjusted R	.039	.159

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Gender again played a weak role in feelings of authority among managers. When personal characteristics were run alone, gender was the only significant predictor. The total variance explained by the personal demographics model was 4.6%, all due to gender. Being female predicted lower scores on feelings of authority. When job variables were added in, job title again was the dominant predictor of variance in benefits in the model, followed by length of time in the industry. Gender was not a significant predictor in the combined model. The total variance in benefits explained by the combined personal and job demographics regression model was 19.7%, most of which was accounted for by job title and length of time in the industry.

It was not surprising that job title accounted for significant differences in all three variables, given the fact that the four managers surveyed were not really at equal levels in their organizations. General managers are at the level above the other three positions surveyed for this project. It would be expected, therefore, that managers in these positions would be better compensated and feel more powerful at their stations. Of the 35 general managers who returned surveys, 31 were men and only 4 were women. Of the 132 in the other three positions, 85 were men and 47 were women. Therefore, to better compare managers at the same levels, analyses for all three dependent variables were repeated for only the 132 managers on the "second tier" and job title was dropped as an independent variable. The results are presented in Table 2-4.

Table 2-3 Regression Analysis for All Dependent Variables
General managers removed
Betas (N = 129)

Predictor variables	Salary	Benefits	Authority
Job Title	-.226**	-.045	-.109
Gender	.033*	-.039	-.118
Length of Time in Industry	.090	.139	.075
Market Size	.391***	.116	.068
Length of Time in Position	.202**	.026	-.118
Length of Time in Management	.097	.054	.176
Age	.285	.042	.031
Constant	.260	.009	.023

* p < .1; * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

Looking only at the respondents who were general sales managers, news directors, and program managers (three relatively equal management titles) significant predictors were identified only for salary. Market size was the strongest predictor of salaries, followed by gender and length of time in the position. No significant predictors were identified for benefits. For authority, only length of time in the industry produced a weak effect. Only the salary model predicted any real variance, with 28.5% of variance in salary explained by the model.

Discussion

Summary

The first research question evaluated how women in television management compare with their male counterparts on salary, benefits and feelings of authority. The results showed that, overall, men outnumbered women by more than 50% and men averaged at least \$20,000 more than women in average salary. The data also revealed men had significantly higher average benefits and feelings of authority overall. Dividing respondents into categories of low, medium, and high on salary, benefits, and authority confirmed these findings. For both salary and benefits, women were over-represented in the low groups, while men were over-represented in the high groups. No differences, however, were found for the number of benefits held by TV managers.

Once differences were discovered in the genders, regression analysis was used to determine what variables contributed to these differences. In each case, gender was found to be a significant predictor when personal characteristics were examined alone. But when the personal characteristics were examined in conjunction with job-related factors, gender remained a strong predictor only for salary. Consistently, the analysis showed that the variable with the largest predictive value was job title. As would be expected, being a general manager — the manager above the other three included in the study — was most predictive of higher salaries, benefits, and feelings of authority. Next for salary in predictive weight was, was market size. Stations in larger markets typically have more resources and can afford to pay all employees at higher rates than medium and small markets. One curious finding on the job-related variables is that length of time in the industry was not a significant predictor for salary or benefits, only for authority. Further, length of time in the current position was negatively related to salary. These finding suggest that the industry is not raising salaries of veterans as quickly as salaries for new managers. As is the

case in other industries, stations probably have to pay newcomers more to attract them than they have to pay to retain current managers.

Removing the general managers from the analysis, clear predictors were found only for salary, where market size, gender and length of time in the position played key roles. No significant predictors, including gender, were discovered for benefits and authority among the lower-tier of top television management.

Implications

While these job demographics are important variables, it should be noted that gender still was a significant predictor for salary, even with all seven factors controlled for. Further, gender was a significant predictor for salary looking among managers working at comparable levels. This paints a clear picture that women in top-level television management continue to struggle for equality. Over the past decade, more women have moved into these positions, but they continue to battle for equal compensation. Women fare better in benefits, but benefits alone will not keep women in these television management positions. The question that the industry must address is whether women will want to stay in the industry given the inequities. Perhaps women will become frustrated and leave for other industries. Attracting women to top management positions is futile if steps aren't taken to retain the women that already fill the positions.

Some evidence for this position comes from Weaver, Howard, and Wilhoit's 1992 survey of journalists. While women were virtually equal in numbers to men when they were just starting out in broadcast journalism, as the years progress women's percentage of overall workers decreased tremendously. Of all television workers who had been in the industry four years or less, women accounted for 45%. But women in the industry 20 plus years dropped to 24% of all workers with the same tenure (Weaver, Howard, & Wilhoit, 1992).

On a positive note, the results indicate that women by and large feel as powerful as male managers in the decisions made by the management team. Women may not be making as much as their male counterparts, but they do feel their voices are being heard. These feelings of efficacy should not be discounted. Often it is frustrations over role, not salary inequities that force people from their jobs. Women who see themselves as having the authority to make decisions might overlook pay gaps and feel happy in their jobs.

As a check of this proposition, a single item was included in the current survey, asking respondents how satisfied they were with their jobs. Of 168 respondents who answered that question, 159 (94.6%) said they were somewhat satisfied (21 responses), satisfied (71 responses), or very satisfied (67 responses). No one checked the neutral box, and only 9 said they were somewhat dissatisfied (4 responses), dissatisfied (3 responses), or very dissatisfied (2 responses). Because there was so little variance in the responses, no differences were likely to occur based on gender of respondent. As expected, mean scores for men (1.92) and women (1.94) were virtually identical. What the job satisfaction scores, as basic as they are, suggest is that while clear salary differences emerge between men and women, the genders are equally satisfied in their jobs.

Limitations

Although all efforts were made to include a large number of women in the sample and a response rate of more than 50% was achieved, it must be noted that only 51 women managers returned. Caution is urged in interpreting the data analysis because of this small number. This especially is true in the final regression analysis, which included only 47 women and independent six variables. The significant lack of findings for gender on benefits and feelings of authority might stem from that low number.

The few minority respondents posed a similar problem. While it is clear that there are very few minority managers in the industry, the limited response from minorities (nine returned surveys) meant that race could not be a variable in analysis. Future studies that wish to include race should perhaps deliberately over-represent minority managers in their sample, although this data is hard to obtain before the actual surveys are mailed out.

Caution also is urged in interpreting the reported lower feelings of authority among women managers found in research question one. Differences in this construct do not necessarily mean that women are powerless in their management positions. An alternative explanation is that perhaps men and women actually have the same authority, but they perceive their authority in different ways. But that explanation should not mitigate the importance of the findings. Does it matter if a person only feels less powerful even when in reality she has the same authority as her male counterparts? A perception of powerlessness is still a problem if employee morale and retention are the issues of concern. Further, the responses from this population suggested that most women in the markets surveyed held the position of program director. Future research should look at what type of voice this position has from the view of the management to help explain how women managers contribute to station decisions.

Finally, the survey instrument was not designed to rule out rival explanations for the findings. Even though gender is a significant predictor in the variance in salary (and to a lesser extent benefits and authority when only personal factors are considered), other factors associated with gender may be the real cause of the differences. For example, women may have lower salaries because they don't change jobs (the fastest route to a raise in the TV industry) as much as men. Research suggests that men and woman tend to have different patterns when it comes to moving for a job. Perhaps women are more hesitant to relocate once they've established

themselves in a community. Staying at one station, as women might be prone to do, typically means raises in small increments over the years. Future research, especially longitudinal studies, could examine career patterns of women and men managers, seeing if differences emerge in how often they change stations and why they choose to leave. In-depth interviews with current and past television managers also would further our understanding of gender-related issues not measure by the mail questionnaire method.

Conclusion

The results of this study should send a message to television stations and to the industry as a whole. Over the past few decades, the industry has done a better job of hiring women and promoting them into the top levels of management. But are these new hires going to stay in the industry? Simply attracting a sufficient number of women is not the solution if they grow dissatisfied with their jobs and leave. Given the lag in salaries, and to a lesser extent benefits, as a function of gender, stations clearly are not compensating their female managers equally for their work. Perhaps more important is the relative powerlessness women managers feel in their positions compared to their male counterparts. Stations must not only compensate women equally to make them feel valued, they must also keep women actively involved in the daily decision-making process. Although the vast majority of women surveyed say they feel satisfied with their jobs, these things currently are not happening. Because of its influence on society, the television industry should strive to present as accurate reflection of society as possible, including women and women's issues. The inclusion – and retention – of women in television management might better enable the industry to serve this role.

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