

## Conclusions

The market for information programs on television convenes daily as viewers turn on their sets. On an average night during the November 1999 sweeps, sixty-three million households had their televisions turned on between 8 P.M. and 9 P.M.<sup>10</sup> Fashioning a program to attract a significant number of these viewers represents a tremendous challenge for programmers, who must consider many variables: the relative interests of viewers; the value of particular viewers to advertisers; and the plans of competitors to offer shows aimed at specific demographic groups. The results here show that when the networks offer information programs the content they choose favors the provision of soft news over hard news. The DICTION software analysis provides a way to quantify these choices. Relative to the evening news programs, for example, the morning programs and news magazines are more likely to use language that focuses on human interest, uses self-references, and contains shorter words. These genres are also less likely to use the collective terms or numerical phrases that are employed on the nightly news programs.

Differences in the style and content of information programs translate readily into distinct differences in audience composition. Controlling for the general popularity of a program, I find that ratings are higher among women where human interest language is used more frequently. Ratings among men increase where collective terms are used or self-references employed. Younger viewers of both sexes turn out for shows that score higher on the language of blame or focus on human interest. The differences in audiences translate into different advertising rates for programs. Shows that score higher on human interest and self-reference charge more for thirty-second ads. Dimensions such as use of collective phrases, complexity of terms, or variety of word use did not have a statistically significant impact on ad rates. The variation of ad prices with viewer demographics shows the strong returns to attracting viewers 18–49, particularly women, to many types of information programming. Overall, the analysis of information programs on network television reinforces that news interests segment by age and gender and that the market rewards outlets differently for gaining the attention of specific demographic groups. The next chapter focuses on how the spatial model helps explain outcomes in two sets of relatively smaller markets, local newspaper and local television markets.

## Chapter 5

### What Is News on Local Television Stations and in Local Newspapers

LOCAL NEWS is often crafted and marketed as a personalized product. Local television stations promise to be “your eyewitness news team,” to be “on your side,” or to deliver “news you can use.” Local newspapers stress their ties to the community in statements or slogans on their mastheads and editorial pages. Internet versions of these papers often invite readers to “personalize” the newspaper by selecting the types of news they wish to see. The large fixed costs of creating a news story means that individuals will not find a story to match their every interest. The likelihood that you are the “You” in television and newspaper advertising campaigns depends on local demographics. How many local residents share your interests? How attractive are you to advertisers? How many outlets are clamoring for your attention? This chapter explores the impacts on content of local demand for information and the supply of contending media outlets. The results overall demonstrate the influence of local consumers’ tastes and of owners outside the community on the types of news delivered.

The spatial location model described in chapter 1 offers a number of predictions about how local television stations will shape their news broadcasts. Within a given market, some news directors will attempt to capture younger or female viewers with news programs that feature less hard news and more soft news. Across markets, stations in cities where viewers exhibit a greater interest in public affairs information will be more likely to include national or international hard news stories in their local news broadcasts and more likely to cover local and state officials. News programs in markets where people have a stronger preference for soft news will be more likely to cover topics such as entertainment news. Stations owned by group owners may be more likely to provide news from outside the local area because of the low costs of transmitting information developed by affiliated stations. In this sense, group ownership can translate into less time for coverage of local or state officials. The affiliation of a station with a particular network will also influence the local news content. A station may be more likely to include stories about its affiliated network’s programs or stars, both because this reinforces demand for the station’s entertainment programming and because the network is likely to offer prepackaged stories for free about a program or star to its local news outlets.

The theory of information bundling outlined in chapter 1 provides insight into how local newspapers will tailor their coverage. Television news directors

have to worry about the impact of each story on all viewers, since stories have to be presented in the same fashion to all of the program's consumers. The nature of a newspaper as a portfolio of stories allows readers to make choices about what stories to consume. This means that newspapers can add stories of less-than-universal interest without alienating the majority of readers, since a paper's consumers can choose which sections and articles to peruse.<sup>1</sup> Audience demand will still influence the bundle of stories editors choose to offer, with greater interest in hard news in a city resulting in more hard news content in the local paper. In adding stories with limited appeal, the editors will still calculate the number of potential readers to decide what specialized coverage gets added to the news product. If the real-world incidence of a problem interests a newspaper's target readers, then the extent of a policy problem in a city will be a good predictor of its coverage. If a paper's target audience, which will generally be an area's more affluent and educated residents, is less interested in a problem, then the prevalence of that problem in a city will not affect its coverage.<sup>2</sup> There is a market-induced limit on the impact of some local tastes on content. Many papers will endorse presidential candidates in their editorials. The endorsements may arise from a desire of owners to express their ideology, or an attempt by papers to satisfy audience demand for political expression. The profitability of objective coverage in news coverage discussed in chapter 2, however, should mean that a paper's editorial endorsement will not affect how it covers national political events such as the race for the presidency.

This chapter explores the workings of local television news markets by taking a snapshot of local news programs in the top fifty television markets in November 1999. The results largely bear out the predictions of the spatial news model. Programs targeted at specific demographics do vary their news contents. Local television news shows with a higher percentage of female viewers were less likely to show hard news stories dealing with national and international affairs and less likely to do stories about state and local political officials. Programs in markets with higher viewer interest in hard news carried a higher number of national hard news stories and local political stories. In areas where viewers demonstrated a greater taste for entertainment news, news directors added more soft news stories to local news broadcasts. Stations owned by group owners carried fewer hard news stories and fewer stories about a state's U.S. Senators. Network affiliation also influenced which celebrities and television programs were discussed on local television news broadcasts. Fox stations were more likely to carry stories about the Fox program *Greed*. ABC stations were more likely to talk about Monica Lewinsky during the time when the network's star Barbara Walters became the first person to interview in-depth the former intern about her relationship with President Clinton. ABC affiliates were also more likely to air segments in their newscasts about the highly successful quiz program *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?*.

The analysis of local newspaper markets focuses on the content of daily

newspapers in the top fifty cities in samples of coverage from 1998 through 2000. Using the same soft news stories from November 1999 examined in the television analysis, I find that the overall interests of readers had no statistically significant impact on the number of soft news stories carried in the daily newspapers. For particular hard news topics in 1998 and 1999 I am able to measure the local incidence of the problems. For stories such as poverty, Medicaid, and campaign finance reform, I find that local interest in hard news translates into more stories on these topics in the local daily newspapers. In terms of local incidence of problems, areas with greater levels of food stamps or family assistance spending actually have fewer articles written about these topics. For topics likely to be of interest to a paper's target readers, such as computers or soft money contributions in politics, the greater the real-world incidence of these topics in the community the larger the number of stories about the topic in the paper. In contrast, local crime rates have almost no statistically significant impact in explaining the amount of coverage devoted to particular types of crime in a city. Crime coverage appears to be more related to reader interest than real-world incidence. An area where coverage appears divorced from local preferences is news coverage of the presidential campaign. Analysis of the coverage of the convention speeches by Al Gore and George Bush in 2000 shows that there were almost no differences based on the editorial politics of a paper. Newspapers covered Gore's speech in similar ways regardless of which candidate the editorial page endorsed. The same pattern held for coverage of Bush's speech.

A key decision in analyzing media coverage of hard and soft stories in local news markets lies in defining hard and soft news.<sup>3</sup> The following sections lay out the definitions of these terms and explore how local television stations and newspapers make their content selections based on audience interests in different topics.

### Local Television News Programs

Local television news programs can cover the world. The primary focus of news programs produced by local stations remains local, including local weather, sports, crimes, and accidents. The easy availability of satellite feeds and the stream of stories generated by news services and the networks means that local news directors also have the ability to include national or international stories in their broadcasts. The resources devoted by entertainment companies to publicizing film releases and television programs means that local news programs can easily carry stories about celebrities and their work. While community events that can be covered will vary widely across cities, local television news directors in different markets face the same potential pool of national hard news stories and same potential set of national entertainment celebrities to cover. It could be the case that decisions about whether to include

a national hard or soft news story in a local news broadcast depend on a news director's vision of what local viewers need to know. If the self-interest of broadcasters drives the selection of stories, however, the interests of local viewers and structure of the local broadcasting market will influence the content decisions in local news programs.<sup>4</sup>

To test the impact of market forces on local television news programs I took a snapshot of decisions made in the top fifty local television markets during November 1999 about how to cover national hard and soft news stories. The sample of hard news stories was defined as those stories during the month that were included in the end of the program summary on the broadcasts of the *NewsHour with Jim Lehrer* on PBS. This definition yielded a total of thirty-eight hard news stories, including reports about the stock market, budget bill debates, an earthquake in Turkey, and the Microsoft antitrust case. For soft news stories, I analyzed the stories promoted in the opening segments of the entertainment/tabloid television programs *Entertainment Tonight*, *Access Hollywood*, and *Inside Edition*. This generated a sample of ninety-six soft news topics, including Carmen Electra, Tom Hanks, Sylvester Stallone, *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?*, and the World Wrestling Federation. To measure the coverage of state and local public affairs, I used the names in each respective television market of the U.S. senators, the governor, and the mayor(s). Searching the abstracts in Lexis of local television news programs allowed me to count the number of stories about these topics on a specific news program during its broadcasts in November 1999. At least twelve broadcasts of a given news program had to be abstracted for the program to be included in the analysis. The availability of news abstracts in Lexis resulted in a sample of 707 local television news programs spread across forty-nine of the top fifty television markets.

If local news directors decide what is news based on audience demand, program content should vary across and within markets in predictable ways. Areas where residents have a strong interest in public affairs should get more hard news stories included in their local news. Within a given market, a station targeting demographic audiences interested in government should include more national hard news stories and fewer national soft news stories. To measure the variation (across cities) in tastes for particular types of information, I use figures based on the percentage of households in the television market that subscribe to four magazines: *Time* (reflects interest in hard news); *People* (reflects tastes for entertainment/celebrity stories); *Modern Maturity* (denotes interests of residents age 50+); and *Playboy* (captures interest of younger men in sexual content).<sup>5</sup> Since the age and gender composition of television audiences varies by time of day, I control for attempts to target particular demographic groups by noting when a program aired. Nielsen ratings data on the percentage of a given program's adult viewers who were 18–49 in November 1999 and on the percentage that were female also allow me to test specifically how shows with

particular demographics target their content. The brand position of a local news program may also relate to its network affiliation, since the lead-in audience for news programs will depend on the viewers watching the previous entertainment programs. News directors at Fox affiliate stations, for example, may choose stories aimed at younger viewers since the audience for Fox entertainment shows are often younger than those for the other major broadcast networks.<sup>6</sup>

On the supply side, I include the number of broadcast stations in a market to examine how increased competition affects news decisions. Nearly all (96%) of the programs in the sample air on stations controlled by group owners, defined as companies that own more than one station. To see how the type of media company that owns a station may affect local news decisions, I include controls for whether a station is controlled by a group owner, the total number of stations held by the owner, and the number of newspapers held by the owner.<sup>7</sup>

The results in table 5.1 indicate that patterns of hard and soft news coverage across markets vary predictably based on audience interests and market structure. Competition appears to generate higher story totals for national hard news, national soft news, and state and local officials' stories. This may be because as the number of broadcast stations in a market increases, the pressure to hold viewer attention generates shorter stories (and hence more stories per broadcast). As market size increases, stations are more likely to increase soft news coverage and less likely to include stories about national hard news topics or state/local officials. Strong evidence that local news directors make content decisions based on audience demand appears in the link between program content and magazine circulation in the area. Stations in cities with higher circulations for *Time* are more likely to cover hard news stories. A one percentage point increase in *Time* magazine circulation in a city translates into 2.78 more national hard news stories covered on a local news program in the market during the month. Markets with higher circulations for *People* magazine also carry more hard news stories, with a one percentage point increase in the *People* magazine circulation resulting in 1.65 more hard news stories.<sup>8</sup> For soft news coverage, areas with higher *Time* magazine circulations have fewer soft news stories. A one percentage point increase in *Time* circulation results in 3.48 fewer stories about national entertainment topics or celebrities. News directors in cities where *People* magazine is popular are more likely to add soft news stories to local news broadcasts. A one percentage point increase in the *People* circulation results in 4.24 more soft news stories covered in a program. Soft news coverage is lower in areas with higher circulation for *Playboy*, which may be because soft news is generally targeted at female viewers and higher *Playboy* circulations may represent more young males in a market.<sup>9</sup> Coverage of state and local officials also responds to audience demand, with a one percentage point increase in *Time* magazine circulation generating .6 more stories about the U.S. Senators, the governor, or mayors in a market.

**TABLE 5.1**  
Determinants of Local News Broadcast Content

|  | <i>Hard News<br/>Story Totals</i> | <i>Soft News<br/>Story Totals</i> | <i>State and Local<br/>Officials Story Totals</i> |
|--|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| Total Television Households (000)        | -1.74e-3**<br>(7.08e-4)           | 1.80e-3***<br>(6.44e-4)           | -1.54e-3***<br>(2.56e-4)                          |
| No. Broadcast Stations                   | 0.47**<br>(0.42)                  | 0.53**<br>(0.22)                  | 0.69***<br>(0.09)                                 |
| Broadcast Length 30 Minutes              | -8.56***<br>(1.01)                | -8.33***<br>(0.92)                | -1.25***<br>(0.36)                                |
| No. Days in Sample                       | 0.75***<br>(0.13)                 | 0.37***<br>(0.12)                 | 0.16***<br>(0.05)                                 |
| Program Starts 4–5:30 PM                 | -5.47***<br>(1.08)                | -1.23<br>(0.98)                   | 0.50<br>(0.39)                                    |
| Program Starts 6–7 PM                    | -11.45***<br>(1.20)               | -6.46***<br>(1.10)                | 1.13***<br>(0.43)                                 |
| Program Starts 9–11:30 PM                | -4.52***<br>(1.21)                | -0.07<br>(1.10)                   | 0.82<br>(0.43)                                    |
| Time Circulation, %                      | 2.78***<br>(0.82)                 | -3.48***<br>(0.74)                | 0.60**<br>(0.30)                                  |
| People Circulation, %                    | 1.65**<br>(0.81)                  | 4.24***<br>(0.74)                 | 0.28<br>(0.29)                                    |
| Modern Maturity Circulation, %           | -0.10<br>(0.11)                   | -0.20**<br>(0.10)                 | -0.08**<br>(0.04)                                 |
| Playboy Circulation, %                   | -1.66<br>(1.05)                   | -1.90**<br>(0.95)                 | 0.06<br>(0.40)                                    |
| Group Owned Station                      | -4.19*<br>(2.15)                  | -2.90<br>(1.96)                   | -0.20<br>(0.77)                                   |
| No. TV Stations Held by Station<br>Owner | 0.07<br>(0.06)                    | -0.01<br>(0.06)                   | 0.03<br>(0.02)                                    |
| No. Newspapers Held by Station<br>Owner  | -7.24e-3<br>(0.02)                | -0.02<br>(0.02)                   | -0.01*<br>(6.34e-3)                               |
| ABC Affiliate                            | 3.88*<br>(2.27)                   | 7.20***<br>(2.07)                 | 1.54*<br>(0.81)                                   |
| CBS Affiliate                            | 3.58<br>(2.26)                    | 4.26**<br>(2.06)                  | 1.16<br>(0.81)                                    |
| FOX Affiliate                            | 6.59***<br>(2.47)                 | 8.77***<br>(2.25)                 | 1.14<br>(0.88)                                    |
| NBC Affiliate                            | 4.01*<br>(2.24)                   | 3.63*<br>(2.04)                   | 0.97<br>(0.80)                                    |
| Election, Governor                       |                                   |                                   | 1.93<br>(0.94)                                    |
| Election, U.S. Senator                   |                                   |                                   | 7.97***<br>(1.06)                                 |

**TABLE 5.1 Continued**

|                         | <i>Hard News<br/>Story Totals</i> | <i>Soft News<br/>Story Totals</i> | <i>State and Local<br/>Officials Story Totals</i> |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| Election, Mayor         |                                   |                                   | -0.08**<br>(0.29)                                 |
| Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> | 0.32                              | * 0.37                            | 0.21  |

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\* = statistically significant at the .01 level; \*\* = significant at the .05 level; \* = significant at the .10 level. Each specification also included an intercept term. Totals are for November 1999 broadcasts of 672 local news programs.

Group ownership also affects story selection. Stations owned by a company with more than one broadcast station are less likely to provide hard news. Programs on group-owned stations provided 4.19 fewer national hard news stories. Group ownership did not have a statistically significant impact on soft news coverage. Relative to stations not affiliated with the four major networks, stations with a major network affiliation generally carried more hard and soft news stories. The Fox stations had the greatest difference with unaffiliated stations, carrying 6.59 more national hard news stories. This may be because Fox stations have more stories to generate a faster pace for attracting (relatively) younger audiences. It may also relate to the fact that Fox stations do not carry a national evening news broadcast, so they may be more likely to include national hard news stories in their local broadcasts. Fox affiliates also had more national soft news stories, registering 8.77 more stories. In terms of time of day effects, programs in the afternoon or evening carried fewer national hard news stories relative to the noon broadcasts. The dinner-hour newscast (6–7 P.M.) carried significantly fewer soft news stories (6.46) relative to the noon-hour broadcasts. The dinner-hour offerings carried more stories about state/local officials, however, than the lunchtime programs. Programs that were only thirty minutes (rather than an hour) carried fewer of each story type. Programs with more days of transcripts in the sample had higher story counts. Programs in an area holding a U.S. Senate election had higher counts of officials' stories. Elections for governor or mayor, however, did not have this impact.

Within a given television market, news programs may segment so that some appeal to specific demographic groups based on age and gender. To examine this hypothesis, I use Nielsen ratings data from November 1999 to estimate for each program the percentage of a program's adult viewers that are 18–49 and the percentage that are female. This specification assumes that the actual viewers garnered by a program provide evidence on the targeted viewers and relates viewer composition to program content. Table 5.2 uses the same specifications as table 5.1 but replaces the audience demand information variables relating to

**TABLE 5.2**  
Targeting Audiences through Local News Broadcast Content

|  | <i>Hard News<br/>Story Totals</i> | <i>Soft News<br/>Story Totals</i> | <i>State and Local<br/>Officials Story Totals</i> |
|--|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| Total Television Households (000)        | -1.03e-3<br>(6.35e-4)             | 1.53e-3***<br>(5.82e-4)           | -9.02e-4***<br>(2.27e-4)                          |
| No. Broadcast Stations                   | 0.14<br>(0.21)                    | 0.66***<br>(0.19)                 | 0.55***<br>(0.08)                                 |
| Broadcast Length 30 Minutes              | -8.87***<br>(1.01)                | -8.63***<br>(0.93)                | -1.44***<br>(0.36)                                |
| No. Days in Sample                       | 0.81***<br>(0.13)                 | 0.31***<br>(0.12)                 | 0.19***<br>(0.05)                                 |
| Program Starts 4–5:30 PM                 | -6.82***<br>(1.26)                | -0.19<br>(1.15)                   | -0.30<br>(0.45)                                   |
| Program Starts 6–7 PM                    | -13.53***<br>(1.54)               | -4.73***<br>(1.41)                | -0.03<br>(0.54)                                   |
| Program Starts 9–11:30 PM                | -5.72***<br>(1.67)                | 1.97<br>(1.53)                    | -0.27<br>(0.59)                                   |
| Program Viewers (000)                    | 1.12e-3<br>(1.12e-3)              | -4.27e-3<br>(5.04e-3)             | 6.27e-3***<br>(1.94e-3)                           |
| % Program Viewers 18–49                  | -0.04<br>(0.04)                   | -0.03<br>(0.04)                   | -8.03e-3<br>(0.01)                                |
| % Program Viewers Female                 | -0.23***<br>(0.09)                | 0.11<br>(0.08)                    | -0.09***<br>(0.03)                                |
| Group Owned Station                      | -5.59**<br>(2.24)                 | -1.41<br>(2.06)                   | -0.79<br>(0.79)                                   |
| No. TV Stations Held by Station<br>Owner | 0.08<br>(0.06)                    | 0.01<br>(0.06)                    | 0.03<br>(0.02)                                    |
| No. Newspapers Held by Station<br>Owner  | -0.01<br>(0.02)                   | -0.03*<br>(0.02)                  | -0.01*<br>(6.36e-3)                               |
| ABC Affiliate                            | 7.41***<br>(2.58)                 | 1.12<br>(2.36)                    | 1.27<br>(0.91)                                    |
| CBS Affiliate                            | 7.28***<br>(2.63)                 | -2.11<br>(2.41)                   | 1.12<br>(0.93)                                    |
| FOX Affiliate                            | 9.19***<br>(2.56)                 | 3.16<br>(2.31)                    | 0.82<br>(0.90)                                    |
| NBC Affiliate                            | 7.44***<br>(2.52)                 | -2.13<br>(2.34)                   | 0.52<br>(0.93)                                    |
| Election, Governor                       |                                   |                                   | 1.57*<br>(0.93)                                   |
| Election, Senator                        |                                   |                                   | 8.39***<br>(1.03)                                 |
| Election, Mayor                          |                                   |                                   | 0.03<br>(0.29)                                    |
| Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>                  | 0.29                              | 0.34                              | 0.21  |

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\* = statistically significant at the .01 level; \*\* = significant at the .05 level; \* = significant at the .10 level. Each specification also included an intercept term. Totals are for November 1999 broadcasts of 695 local news programs.

magazine circulation with Nielsen ratings information. The results indicate that programs targeting female viewers are less likely to cover national hard news stories and state/local official stories. This is consistent with the evidence in chapter 3 indicating that female viewers express lower interest in government and public affairs coverage. An increase in one percentage point in a program audience's female viewing percentage results in .23 fewer national hard news stories and .09 fewer state and local officials stories. The age composition of the program did not have a statistically significant impact on hard or soft news coverage. Programs with larger viewerships did cover state/local officials more.<sup>10</sup>

Table 5.3 offers more detailed evidence on covering local officials. The table reports logit results where the dependent variable is whether a program carried any stories during November 1999 about the state's governor, its U.S. Senators, or the mayors in the relevant television market. As the circulation for *Time* increased in a market, stations were more likely to carry stories about U.S. Senators from the state and stories about local mayors. The higher the *People* magazine circulation, the lower the probability that a program would cover the relevant senators or mayors in a market. Programs with a higher female percentage of viewers were less likely to cover governors or mayors. Female audience composition had no impact on Senate coverage. Overall, programs with larger audiences were more likely to cover local U.S. senators. Group-owned stations did not differ from others in their coverage of governors or mayors, but group-owned stations were less likely to cover U.S. Senators in their local news programs. Note, however, that as the number of stations owned by the parent company grew the likelihood that the program would contain news about U.S. Senators or the local mayors increased.

While news directors may favor soft news stories in markets where viewers are strongly interested in entertainment or celebrity stories, a station's network affiliation may influence which particular stars, shows, or movies are discussed on local television news programs. Stations may talk about stars that appear on their network to reinforce demand for the entertainment programs shown on the local station. News directors may also include stories about network stars since the network may supply ready-made stories about the programs for easy inclusion in local news shows.<sup>11</sup> Table 5.4 examines how coverage of specific topics from the soft news sample varied by network affiliation. The table reports the percentage of programs on stations with a given network's affiliation that had at least one story about the person or product in the column headings. The results clearly indicate that local stations insert stories about their network's stars or programs during their news programs. During November 1999, the program *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* attracted significant media coverage as a cultural phenomenon. The popular ABC quiz show was mentioned in 80.2% of the local news programs on ABC network affiliates. This contrasts with zero mentions on the news programs of NBC affiliates. Regis Philbin, the quiz program's host, rated mentions on 33.5% of ABC affiliate news programs,

TABLE 5.3  
Determinants of Local News Broadcast Coverage of State and Local Affairs

| Variable                          | Coefficient (Standard Error) |                       |                      |                         |                        |                      |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|
|                                   | Governors                    | U.S. Senators         | Mayors               | Governors               | U.S. Senators          | Mayors               |
| Intercept                         | -0.98<br>(1.24)              | -4.75***<br>(1.48)    | -4.51***<br>(1.31)   | 1.60<br>(1.57)          | -0.48<br>(1.73)        | 0.97<br>(1.58)       |
| Total Television Households (000) | -7.5e-4***<br>(1.67e-4)      | -3.5e-4*<br>(2.06e-4) | -1.6e-4<br>(1.74e-4) | -5.9e-4***<br>(1.47e-4) | -3.8e-4**<br>(1.63e-4) | -3.0e-5<br>(1.59e-4) |
| No. Broadcast Stations            | 0.24***<br>(0.06)            | 0.02<br>(0.06)        | 0.12**<br>(0.06)     | 0.18***<br>(0.05)       | 0.02<br>(0.05)         | 0.10<br>(0.05)       |
| Broadcast Length 30 Minutes       | -0.22<br>(0.23)              | 0.04<br>(0.25)        | -0.24<br>(0.25)      | -0.20<br>(0.23)         | -0.22<br>(0.24)        | -0.39<br>(0.24)      |
| No. Days in Sample                | 0.11***<br>(0.03)            | -3.40e-3<br>(0.03)    | 0.09***<br>(0.03)    | 0.10***<br>(0.03)       | 0.02<br>(0.03)         | 0.10***<br>(0.03)    |
| Program Starts 4-5:30 P.M.        | 0.12<br>(0.25)               | -0.03<br>(0.28)       | 0.54**<br>(0.25)     | -0.17<br>(0.28)         | -0.54*<br>(0.31)       | -0.02<br>(0.28)      |
| Program Starts 6-7 P.M.           | -0.18<br>(0.27)              | 0.39<br>(0.30)        | 0.76***<br>(0.28)    | -0.62*<br>(0.34)        | -0.24<br>(0.36)        | -0.10<br>(0.35)      |
| Program Starts 9-11:30 P.M.       | 0.04<br>(0.28)               | 0.04<br>(0.31)        | 0.36<br>(0.28)       | -0.45<br>(0.37)         | -0.74*<br>(0.41)       | -0.49<br>(0.38)      |
| Time Circulation, %               | -0.36*<br>(0.19)             | 0.96***<br>(0.21)     | 0.93***<br>(0.22)    |                         |                        |                      |
| People Circulation, %             | 0.17<br>(0.19)               | -0.34*<br>(0.20)      | -0.52***<br>(0.20)   |                         |                        |                      |
| Modern Maturity Circulation, %    | -0.03<br>(0.02)              | -0.07***<br>(0.03)    | -0.03<br>(0.02)      |                         |                        |                      |
| Playboy Circulation, %            | -0.09<br>(0.24)              | 0.69***<br>(0.27)     | 0.16<br>(0.26)       |                         |                        |                      |

|                                       |                       |                      |                       |                       |                         |                        |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| Program Viewers (000)                 |                       |                      |                       | 1.52e-3<br>(1.25e-3)  | 5.21e-3***<br>(1.37e-3) | 1.11e-3<br>(1.41e-3)   |
| % Program Viewers 18-49               |                       |                      |                       | -0.22<br>(0.92)       | 1.24<br>(1.02)          | 1.09<br>(0.94)         |
| % Program Viewers Female              |                       |                      |                       | -5.57***<br>(1.95)    | -1.57<br>(2.17)         | -7.29***<br>(2.01)     |
| Group Owned Station                   | 0.22<br>(0.51)        | -1.06**<br>(0.52)    | -0.39<br>(0.49)       | -0.37<br>(0.52)       | -0.99**<br>(0.50)       | -0.71<br>(0.50)        |
| No. TV Stations Held by Station Owner | 5.07e-3<br>(0.01)     | 0.03*<br>(0.02)      | 0.04***<br>(0.02)     | 9.30e-3<br>(0.01)     | 0.02<br>(0.02)          | 0.04***<br>(0.01)      |
| No. Newspapers Held by Station Owner  | -2.37e-3<br>(4.06e-3) | -0.01**<br>(4.99e-3) | -5.57e-3<br>(4.25e-3) | -2.82e-3<br>(3.94e-3) | -0.01**<br>(4.88e-3)    | -7.15e-3*<br>(4.06e-3) |
| ABC Affiliate                         | 0.29<br>(0.55)        | 1.46*<br>(0.86)      | 0.79<br>(0.51)        | 0.45<br>(0.58)        | 0.80<br>(0.68)          | 1.78***<br>(0.58)      |
| CBS Affiliate                         | -0.10<br>(0.54)       | 1.19<br>(0.83)       | 0.63<br>(0.50)        | 0.19<br>(0.59)        | 0.89<br>(0.69)          | 1.76***<br>(0.60)      |
| FOX Affiliate                         | -0.62<br>(0.59)       | 1.45*<br>(0.87)      | 1.07*<br>(0.57)       | -0.35<br>(0.57)       | 0.65<br>(0.68)          | 1.55***<br>(0.59)      |
| NBC Affiliate                         | 0.11<br>(0.54)        | 1.16<br>(0.83)       | 0.60<br>(0.50)        | 0.24<br>(0.57)        | 0.54<br>(0.67)          | 1.45**<br>(0.57)       |
| Election, Governor                    | -0.26<br>(0.64)       |                      |                       | 0.17<br>(0.61)        |                         |                        |
| Election, U.S. Senator                |                       | 16.82<br>(752.6)     |                       |                       | 16.97<br>(738.6)        |                        |
| Election, Mayor                       |                       |                      | -0.03<br>(0.19)       |                       |                         | -0.05<br>(0.18)        |
| Log Likelihood                        | -404.8                | -349.1               | -391.9                | -427.0                | -379.8                  | -403.8                 |

Note: Dependent variable in logit analysis equals 1 if program covered the state's governor or U.S. Senators or the mayors within the DMA in November 1999 programming. \*\*\* = statistically significant at the .01 level; \*\* = significant at the .05 level; \* = significant at the .10 level. Sample contained 672 local news programs.

versus 1% of CBS affiliate news programs in the sample. The Fox network introduced a quiz show called *Greed* that was modeled after ABC's successful program. The program gained mentions on 37.9% of Fox news programs versus zero for CBS or NBC affiliates.

Promotion of a particular episode of a program during a sweeps period is also evident in the data. During November 1999 the Fox program *Ally McBeal* contained a lesbian kiss scene, a story line covered in the popular press.<sup>12</sup> Among Fox affiliates, 34.7% of the news programs contained stories about *Ally McBeal* versus 2.5% for CBS affiliates. In November 1999 Barbara Walters scored the journalistic coup of landing an interview with Monica Lewinsky, the intern involved in a sex scandal with President Clinton. Though for a time she was featured nightly on news programs, by 1999 coverage of Lewinsky had faded. In order to promote her book, Lewinsky granted Barbara Walters an interview on ABC. On the ABC affiliates, 17.6% of programs mentioned Monica Lewinsky during the month versus 4.0% on CBS affiliates. Ricky Martin had a music special on CBS during the month. While 29.2% of programs on CBS affiliates mentioned Ricky Martin, high percentages of programs on ABC (28.6%) and Fox (27.4%) also discussed the Latin pop star.

When *Toy Story 2* was released in November 1999 the movie received wide coverage across all networks. The film was produced by Disney, the parent company of ABC. Among news programs on ABC affiliates, 37.9% mentioned *Toy Story* during the month versus 30.7% for CBS and 28.9% on NBC. Fox affiliates, which aim for a younger demographic audience, actually had the highest percentage of programs mentioning the movie, 44.2%. In terms of talking about the stars of this animated movie, Fox affiliate news programs referred to Tom Hanks so frequently that 41.1% carried at least one reference to him.

TABLE 5.4  
Impact of Network Affiliation on Local News Broadcast Coverage of Soft News Stories

| Program's<br>Station<br>Affiliation | Percentage of Programs Covering during November 1999 |       |              |                    |                 |                |                  |              | Who Wants<br>to Be a<br>Millionaire? |
|-------------------------------------|--|-------|--------------|--------------------|-----------------|----------------|------------------|--------------|--------------------------------------|
|                                     | Tim<br>Allen   | Greed | Tom<br>Hanks | Monica<br>Lewinsky | Ricky<br>Martin | Ally<br>McBeal | Regis<br>Philbin | Toy<br>Story |                                      |
| ABC Affiliate<br>(N = 182)          | 13.2   | 1.7   | 19.2         | 17.6               | 28.6            | 5.0            | 33.5             | 37.9         | 80.2                                 |
| CBS Affiliate<br>(N = 199)          | 5.0  | 0.0   | 13.6         | 4.0                | 29.2            | 2.5            | 1.0              | 30.7         | 2.5                                  |
| Fox Affiliate<br>(N = 95)           | 23.2   | 37.9  | 41.1         | 6.3                | 27.4            | 34.7           | 6.3              | 44.2         | 3.2                                  |
| NBC Affiliate<br>(N = 204)          | 7.8  | 0.0   | 23.0         | 5.9                | 15.7            | 3.9            | 0.5              | 28.9         | 0.0                                  |

Hanks also had at least one production deal with the Fox parent company at this time. Tim Allen was mentioned on 23.2% of the programs on Fox affiliates; he too had a production deal with Fox. News programs on ABC, which once showed his program *Home Improvement*, mentioned Allen at the next-highest rate (13.2%). This compares to references of 5.0% on CBS affiliates and 7.8% on NBC. Overall, table 5.4 provides strong evidence that local news programs promote the stars and shows of their networks and some indication that the amount of movie coverage is related to the ownership interests of the parent company of the network.

### Local Newspapers

A different economic calculus drives the content decisions of newspaper editors than the process that governs actions of local television news directors. Local television news programs sell audiences to advertisers, which means that viewers who bring few returns in the advertising marketplace have little influence in content decisions. Newspapers sell readers to advertisers too, but they also gain revenues from subscriptions so that readers with less value to advertisers may still matter in a financial sense. A news director in a local market may worry about competition from three or more competing news broadcasts and entertainment fare on cable channels. Many newspaper editors make content decisions in towns with only one local newspaper.<sup>13</sup> While a station may thus try to segment the market and carve out a niche, the newspaper can appeal to a broader portion of the city's population. The technology of information transmission limits television news programs to one story at a time, so that news directors have to balance the relative interests of different viewers in any particular topic. Newspapers bundle stories into a portfolio and leave readers free to choose the stories they consume, which allows papers to cover a greater variety of stories in a single edition. To explore how audience demand and the real-world incidence of problems affect the content decisions of local newspapers, I examine in this section the content of the sixty-eight daily papers in the top fifty cities in the United States whose texts are collected in Lexis.<sup>14</sup> In table 5.5 I examine how newspapers chose to cover the ninety-six soft news stories in November 1999 previously analyzed in the local television news models. For each newspaper I searched the file in Lexis containing the text of the November 1999 articles from the paper. Two dependent variables were calculated, the total number of stories dealing with these ninety-six soft news topics published in the paper during November 1999 and the percentage of the ninety-six celebrities/entertainment products that received at least one story in the paper. The market variables are defined by the same geographic boundaries as in the television analysis, that is, the top fifty television markets. Since a local television market may encompass more than one city, this means that the vari-

TABLE 5.5  
Soft News Coverage by Local Newspapers

| Variable                          | Number of Soft News Stories | % of Soft News Topics Covered |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Total Television Households (000) | 4.82e-3<br>(0.02)           | -1.39e-3<br>(2.14e-3)         |
| No. Daily Newspapers              | -8.48<br>(7.11)             | -0.91<br>(0.89)               |
| Total Lexis Articles, Nov. 99     | 0.07***<br>(7.81e-3)        | 7.71e-3***<br>(9.83e-4)       |
| Time Circulation, %               | 15.93<br>(33.73)            | 6.20<br>(4.24)                |
| People Circulation, %             | 19.82<br>(27.82)            | 2.07<br>(3.50)                |
| Modern Maturity Circulation, %    | -5.08<br>(3.51)             | -0.34<br>(0.44)               |
| Playboy Circulation, %            | -50.64<br>(42.43)           | -4.47<br>(5.34)               |
| Group-Owned Paper                 | 45.34<br>(38.99)            | 7.17<br>(4.91)                |
| No. Daily Papers Held by Owner    | 0.64<br>(0.86)              | 0.26**<br>(0.11)              |
| Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>           | 0.64                        | 0.55                          |
| No. Papers                        | 68                          | 68                            |

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\* = statistically significant at the .01 level; \*\* = significant at the .05 level; \* = significant at the .10 level. Each specification also included an intercept term.

ables, such as the number of daily newspapers in the area, may refer to the number of newspapers in a cluster of cities. The results indicate that soft news coverage is not influenced by audience-demand variables. Circulation percentages for *Time* magazine and for *People* magazine did not have a statistically significant impact on soft news content decisions (unlike the results in the local television news analysis). The total number of stories cataloged in Lexis from the newspaper in November 1999 did increase the number of stories and the percentage of soft news figures covered, which may indicate that as newspaper size expands soft news stories are more likely to be included. Whether the paper was controlled by a group owner did not influence the coverage of soft news. As the number of papers controlled by the parent company grew, however, the percentage of soft news figures covered increased.

Coverage of hard news topics in local newspapers appears more responsive to audience demand. The incidence of a problem in a city also influences coverage,

if the problem is one likely to be of interest to a paper's readers. To explore how variations in the nature of policy problems across cities affect coverage in local newspapers, I first assembled quantitative information on how cities vary in terms of policy outcomes that are quantifiable. I found statistical measures across the largest cities in the United States for variables relating to topics such as poverty, health, and the environment.<sup>15</sup> In table 5.6 I explore how a paper's coverage varies with audience interest and the incidence of the policy problem in the city. The dependent variable in the analysis is the number of articles in the paper dealing with the policy problem over a given time period, where the time period is defined by the time covered by the real-world incidence variable. For example, in the first column I model the total number of stories using the term "poverty" that appeared in a paper as a function of audience-demand variables, market-structure variables, and the amount of family-assistance payments provided by the federal government in the city. I use the later variable as an indicator of poverty in the city.

The results in table 5.6 suggest that editors add hard news stories depending on audience interest in the topic. As the percentage of residents subscribing to *Time* magazine increased, papers were more likely to add stories about poverty, Medicaid, soft money political contributions, and campaign finance reform. As *People* magazine subscription percentages increased, editors were less likely to cover Medicaid. Since survey data indicate that younger readers are more interested in entertainment news, this is consistent with editors downplaying Medicaid if there is less audience interest in the topic. The higher the circulation for *Modern Maturity*, a proxy for the interests of older readers, the less coverage of poverty, computers (consistent with their appeal to the young), AIDS, and HIV.<sup>16</sup> Areas with higher *Playboy* subscriptions had fewer discussions of food stamps and Medicaid in their newspapers. Not surprisingly, the larger the number of stories in a newspaper during the sample period the greater the number of stories about each particular policy area.

The real-world incidence of a problem in a city influences its coverage, yet the effect may depend on whether the problem is of interest to likely readers of a paper. Newspaper readers are unlikely to be on welfare or food stamps. The real-world incidence of poverty and food stamps is actually negatively correlated with newspaper coverage. The higher the level of family assistance payments or food stamp payments in a city, the lower the number of stories about poverty or food stamps in the paper. The level of public medical assistance payments in a city had no statistical impact on the number of stories about Medicaid in the paper. For stories of broader interest to likely readers, however, the greater the real-world effects of a policy in a city the more likely the paper was to cover it. Cities with more computer programmers had more stories about computers during 1998. Interest in campaigns and campaign finance is likely to be higher in areas with more political contributions. Table 5.6 indicates that as the amount of presidential campaign contributions grew in a city, a newspa-



TABLE 5.6  
Hard News Coverage by Local Newspapers

| Variable   | Total Stories Using Term |                          |                         |                      |                         |   |                         |                         |                         |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|---|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
|  | Poverty<br>(1998)        | Food<br>Stamps<br>(1998) | Medicaid<br>(1998)      | Computers<br>(1998)  | Soft<br>Money<br>(1999) | Campaign<br>Finance<br>Reform<br>(1999) | AIDS<br>(7/98-6/99)     | HIV<br>(7/98-6/99)      | EPA<br>(6-8/99)         |
| Intercept  | 183.84<br>(182.69)       | 75.45***<br>(23.96)      | 192.79**<br>(84.29)     | -173.37<br>(797.40)  | -0.63<br>(31.51)        | -12.15<br>(49.70)                       | 44.40<br>(154.75)       | 49.80<br>(96.42)        | -758.72*<br>(448.06)    |
| Total Television<br>Households<br>(000)          | 0.08*<br>(0.05)          | 0.02***<br>(7.23e-3)     | -4.25e-3<br>(0.02)      | -0.02<br>(0.09)      | -0.02***<br>(4.80e-3)   | -0.02***<br>(7.56e-3)                   | -0.06**<br>(0.02)       | -0.04***<br>(0.02)      | 2.07e-3<br>(3.41e-3)    |
| No. Daily<br>Newspapers                          | -13.68*<br>(8.04)        | -0.92<br>(1.12)          | -3.99<br>(3.82)         | -49.60<br>(34.40)    | -1.28<br>(1.43)         | -2.27<br>(2.26)                         | -1.25<br>(7.37)         | 3.05<br>(4.59)          | 0.82<br>(1.41)          |
| Total Lexis Articles<br>in Sample<br>Period      | 8.07e-3***<br>(7.50e-4)  | 1.03e-3***<br>(9.89e-5)  | 2.41e-3***<br>(3.52e-4) | 0.05***<br>(3.33e-3) | 6.73e-4***<br>(1.26e-4) | 1.44e-3***<br>(1.99e-4)                 | 6.84e-3***<br>(6.10e-4) | 4.24e-3***<br>(3.80e-4) | 9.97e-4***<br>(1.26e-4) |
| Time Circulation,<br>%                           | 87.04**<br>(37.43)       | -7.84<br>(4.90)          | 35.37*<br>(17.98)       | 228.12<br>(172.21)   | 17.53**<br>(7.27)       | 25.35**<br>(11.47)                      | 50.07<br>(36.51)        | 15.56<br>(22.75)        | 9.08<br>(6.55)          |
| People Circulation,<br>%                         | -17.02<br>(30.50)        | -1.67<br>(4.03)          | -29.35**<br>(14.26)     | -2.80<br>(137.52)    | -8.63<br>(5.62)         | -10.15<br>(8.86)                        | -13.95<br>(29.19)       | -0.14<br>(18.19)        | -5.94<br>(5.67)         |
| Modern Maturity<br>Circulation, %                | -20.78***<br>(4.01)      | 0.79<br>(0.52)           | 0.68<br>(1.83)          | -59.36***<br>(17.32) | -0.32<br>(0.68)         | -0.90<br>(1.06)                         | -6.37*<br>(3.47)        | -3.77*<br>(2.16)        | 0.08<br>(0.69)          |
| Playboy Circula-<br>tion, %                      | -38.59<br>(48.74)        | -12.21*<br>(6.50)        | -49.74*<br>(25.25)      | 94.17<br>(207.34)    | -7.03<br>(8.14)         | -5.44<br>(12.84)                        | -23.93<br>(41.47)       | -11.24<br>(25.84)       | 15.41<br>(10.50)        |
| Group Owned<br>Paper                             | 91.95**<br>(44.18)       | -7.20<br>(5.81)          | 13.98<br>(20.67)        | 252.67<br>(193.28)   | 3.65<br>(7.47)          | -7.03<br>(11.78)                        | 90.41**<br>(36.83)      | 41.74*<br>(22.95)       | -11.35<br>(7.97)        |
| No. of Daily Papers<br>Held by Owner             | 0.34<br>(0.95)           | 0.08<br>(0.12)           | 0.42<br>(0.44)          | 1.44<br>(4.38)       | 0.12<br>(0.16)          | 0.29<br>(0.26)                          | 0.04<br>(0.80)          | 0.07<br>(0.50)          | 0.47**<br>(0.18)        |
| DMA City Missing<br>Indicator                    | -150.79<br>(134.19)      | 61.94***<br>(17.70)      | -158.96**<br>(61.53)    | 203.59<br>(347.50)   |                         |   | -5.05<br>(42.67)        | -0.44<br>(26.59)        |                         |
| Family Assistance<br>(000\$)                     | -3.06e-4***<br>(1.15e-4) |                          |                         |                      |                         |   |                         |                         |                         |
| Food Stamps<br>(000\$)                           |                          | -1.61e-4***<br>(4.39e-5) |                         |                      |                         |   |                         |                         |                         |
| Public Assistance<br>Medical Care<br>(000\$)     |                          |                          | -1.61e-5<br>(1.31e-5)   |                      |                         |   |                         |                         |                         |
| Computer Pro-<br>grammer Em-<br>ployment         |                          |                          |                         | 0.02**<br>(0.01)     |                         |   |                         |                         |                         |
| Presidential<br>Campaign Con-<br>tributions (\$) |                          |                          |                         |                      | 1.01e-5***<br>(2.30e-6) | 1.44e-3***<br>(1.94e-4)                 |                         |                         |                         |
| Cumulative AIDS<br>Cases                         |                          |                          |                         |                      |                         |   | 6.43e-3**<br>(2.52e-3)  | 4.19e-3***<br>(1.57e-3) |                         |
| Good Air Pollutant<br>Index Days                 |                          |                          |                         |                      |                         |   |                         |                         | 7.52<br>(4.76)          |
| Moderate Air<br>Pollutant Index                  |                          |                          |                         |                      |                         |   |                         |                         | 7.54<br>(4.77)          |
| Unhealthful Air<br>Pollutant Index<br>Days       |                          |                          |                         |                      |                         |   |                         |                         | 8.86*<br>(4.80)         |
| Very Unhealthful<br>Air Pollutant<br>Index Days  |                          |                          |                         |                      |                         |   |                         |                         | -3.67<br>(13.36)        |
| Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>                          | 0.74                     | 0.72                     | 0.57                    | 0.87                 | 0.55                    | 0.61                                    | 0.74                    | 0.72                    |                         |
| Number of Papers                                 | 68                       | 68                       | 68                      | 67                   | 68                      | 67                                      | 68                      | 68                      | 68                      |

Note: \*\*\* = statistically significant at the .01 level; \*\* = significant at the .05 level; \* = significant at the .10 level.

per editor included more stories about soft money contributions and campaign finance reform. The higher the cumulative number of AIDS cases in a city, the more stories about AIDS or HIV included in a paper. The larger the number of unhealthy air pollutant index days in an area, the more stories about the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) were included in a paper.

Market structure had some limited impacts on the coverage analyzed in table 5.6. The number of daily newspapers in a market did not have a statistically significant impact on story counts, except for a negative impact on the number of stories about poverty. Group ownership had a positive impact on the number of stories devoted to poverty, AIDS, and HIV. This may indicate that papers that are part of a chain were able to share stories and gain additional coverage at little cost on these topics. As the number of papers owned by a parent company grew, a paper was more likely to include stories about the EPA. Larger chains again may facilitate the sharing of hard news stories across papers.<sup>17</sup>

Table 5.7 explores how crime coverage relates to audience demand, market structure, and real-world incidence of crime. In this table I use U.S. Department of Justice (1999a, 1999b) statistics on the number of murders, assaults, and rapes in the city and on the percentage of white arrestees testing positive for drugs as indicators of the nature of crime and drug use in an area.<sup>18</sup> The results indicate that crime coverage in newspapers is driven more by audience interests than the level of crime in a city. In areas with higher interest in hard news, as reflected in higher-circulation percentages for *Time* magazine, editors are more likely to include stories about rape or drugs. As the subscription percentage for *Modern Maturity* increases, newspapers include fewer stories about murder and shootings. As the young male audience in a city increases, denoted by increasing *Playboy* subscriptions, editors were more likely to include stories about the two Columbine high school shooters, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold. The real-world incidence of crime did not have an impact on coverage overall. The number of murders in a city did not have a statistically significant impact on the number of stories about murder or the Columbine shooters. The number of stories about rape or drugs were not related to the number of rapes or incidence of drug use in a city. Stories about shooting actually declined slightly as the number of assaults increased in a city. Group ownership and the number of daily newspapers in the city had no impact on crime coverage.

Newspapers may vary not only in their decisions about whether to cover a particular hard news story; they may also differ in the tone they use to cover a specific topic or event.<sup>19</sup> Chapter 2 develops the argument that political independence in newspaper coverage may be profitable because it allows the assemblage of a large audience to sell to advertisers. In the current era of objective news coverage, newspapers do not identify themselves with a particular party or faction. Some papers do, however, continue the practice of making editorial endorsements in campaigns. The endorsement of a Republican presidential candidate on the editorial page could arise from numerous motives: a desire of

a paper's owner to influence readers to vote Republican; an attempt by editors to gain favor with Republican readers; or a move by a paper's editors (as distinct from its owners) to use the paper to influence voters. Regardless of why a paper chooses a particular candidate, the question arises of whether this endorsement is reflected in the manner in which the news department covers the race in question.

In table 5.8 I explore whether a paper's editorial endorsement is reflected in the tone of candidate coverage. I chose two events likely to be covered by newspapers in 2000, the convention acceptance speeches of George W. Bush and Al Gore. For each paper's coverage I ran the articles through the DICTION software, which provides summary indicators of five different dimensions of coverage: certainty, optimism, activity, realism, and commonality. This process yielded 390 segments of coverage of at least 250 words for the Bush speech and 365 segments of coverage of the Gore speech. These segments came from the twenty-eight papers in the top fifty cities for which I was able to ascertain that they endorsed Bush, Gore, or no candidate.<sup>20</sup> The results in table 5.8 indicate that there were not statistically significant differences in the mean DICTION coverage dimensions of the Gore convention speech related to the editorial positions of the newspapers in the sample. Whether the tone of coverage is compared for pro-Bush versus pro-Gore, neutral versus pro-Bush, or neutral versus pro-Gore, newspapers did not differ in the language they used to describe and convey Gore's acceptance speech. There were only slight differences in how types of papers treated the Bush acceptance speech. The papers that endorsed Bush were slightly more likely to use active words to describe his speech than the papers that endorsed Gore. Those outlets that endorsed Gore, however, used slightly more optimistic language in covering the Bush speech than those that eventually endorsed the Republican presidential candidates. Overall these results indicate that the editorial positions of newspapers do not influence the tone of coverage used to describe major campaign events.

## Conclusions

While local television news programs and newspapers are often overshadowed by national news organizations in discussions of the media, these local outlets in aggregate capture a larger share of viewers and readers. More than half (55.8%) of survey respondents report that they regularly watch local television news, compared to 29.9% for the national network evening news programs.<sup>21</sup> A high number of adults (62.5%) report that they regularly read a daily newspaper, compared to 12.5% that say they read the national news magazines. This chapter shows that local news outlets are able to tailor their coverage to the tastes of their targeted readers and viewers. For local television news directors, the public's interests appear to define stations' definitions of broadcasting in

TABLE 5.7  
Crime Coverage by Local Newspapers

| Variable                              | Total Stories Using Term |                      |                         |                        |                         |                         |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
|                                       | Murder                   | Shooting             | Rape                    | Drugs                  | Eric Harris             | Dylan Klebold           |
| Intercept                             | 104.44<br>(398.59)       | 407.49<br>(442.43)   | 74.56<br>(114.96)       | 1269.03<br>(819.74)    | -182.43**<br>(71.54)    | -171.05**<br>(68.08)    |
| Total Television Households (000)     | 0.01<br>(0.06)           | 0.14<br>(0.09)       | 6.31e-3<br>(0.02)       | -0.06<br>(0.06)        | -3.13e-3<br>(9.87e-3)   | -3.80e-3<br>(9.39e-3)   |
| No. Daily Newspapers                  | -13.33<br>(18.20)        | -26.35<br>(19.95)    | -2.67<br>(4.57)         | -34.07<br>(31.94)      | 0.67<br>(3.26)          | 1.20<br>(0.41)          |
| Total Lexis Articles in Sample Period | 0.02***<br>(1.66e-3)     | 0.02***<br>(1.81e-3) | 3.74e-3***<br>(4.62e-4) | 0.03***<br>(2.65e-3)   | 9.48e-4***<br>(2.98e-4) | 9.03e-4***<br>(2.84e-4) |
| Time Circulation, %                   | 101.73<br>(79.56)        | -20.22<br>(94.45)    | 43.93*<br>(22.71)       | 297.38**<br>(129.09)   | 7.32<br>(14.27)         | 5.05<br>(13.58)         |
| People Circulation, %                 | -9.25<br>(70.41)         | 72.07<br>(79.02)     | -20.32<br>(18.68)       | 102.89<br>(121.98)     | 1.96<br>(12.63)         | 3.00<br>(12.02)         |
| Modern Maturity Circulation, %        | -20.95**<br>(10.18)      | -22.56*<br>(11.48)   | -3.37<br>(2.70)         | -8.51<br>(23.73)       | -0.82<br>(1.83)         | -0.75<br>(1.74)         |
| Playboy Circulation, %                | -39.09<br>(99.61)        | -1.28<br>(111.18)    | -23.91<br>(26.46)       | -513.05***<br>(160.70) | 51.51***<br>(17.87)     | 48.65***<br>(17.00)     |
| Group-Owned Paper                     | 89.94<br>(94.15)         | 31.37<br>(105.60)    | -24.33<br>(25.59)       | 24.94<br>(163.80)      | 11.21<br>(16.89)        | 10.09<br>(16.07)        |
| No. of Daily Papers Held by Owner     | 2.17<br>(2.43)           | 3.02<br>(2.70)       | 1.10*<br>(0.63)         | 3.54<br>(4.19)         | 0.34<br>(0.44)          | 0.32<br>(0.41)          |
| DMA City Missing Indicator            | 42.00<br>(94.60)         | 52.30<br>(105.75)    | -6.10<br>(25.59)        | -61.11<br>(174.64)     | -15.95<br>(16.97)       | -14.16<br>(16.14)       |
| Murders                               | -0.07<br>(0.69)          |                      |                         |                        | -0.09<br>(0.12)         | -0.08<br>(0.12)         |
| Assaults                              |                          | -0.03*<br>(0.02)     |                         |                        |                         |                         |
| Rapes                                 |                          |                      | -0.05<br>(0.11)         |                        |                         |                         |
| White Arrestees Using Drugs, %        |                          |                      |                         | -1.14<br>(9.50)        |                         |                         |
| Adjust R <sup>2</sup>                 | 0.75                     | 0.78                 | 0.60                    | 0.87                   | 0.19                    | 0.19                    |
| No. Papers                            | 63                       | 62                   | 60                      | 33                     | 63                      | 63                      |

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\* = statistically significant at the .01 level; \*\* = significant at the .05 level; \* = significant at the .10 level. Sample period for each regression was January through June, 1999, except for drugs (where the sample period was 1998).

TABLE 5.8  
Local Newspaper Coverage of 2000 Convention Speeches

| DIRECTION<br>Dimension                   | Bush Convention Speech |                       |                      |                      | Gore Convention Speech |                       |                      |                      |
|--|------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
|  | All Papers Mean        |                       | Difference of Means  |                      | All Papers Mean        |                       | Difference of Means  |                      |
|  | Pro Bush-<br>Pro Gore  | Pro Bush-<br>Pro Gore | Neutral-<br>Pro Bush | Neutral-<br>Pro Gore | Pro Bush-<br>Pro Gore  | Pro Bush-<br>Pro Gore | Neutral-<br>Pro Bush | Neutral-<br>Pro Gore |
| Certainty                                | 46.5                   | 0.3                   | -0.4                 | -0.1                 | 45.9                   | 0.1                   | -0.3                 | -0.2                 |
| Optimism                                 | 50.4                   | -0.7**                | 0.4                  | -0.2                 | 50.4                   | -0.2                  | 0.0                  | -0.2                 |
| Activity                                 | 52.2                   | 0.5**                 | -0.3                 | 0.2                  | 51.6                   | -0.2                  | -0.2                 | -0.5                 |
| Realism                                  | 48.1                   | -0.3                  | 0.1                  | -0.2                 | 48.2                   | -0.3                  | 0.2                  | -0.1                 |
| Commonality                              | 49.9                   | 0.1                   | 0.3                  | 0.3                  | 50.0                   | 0.1                   | -0.1                 | -0.1                 |
| Number of Segments                       | 390                    | 124                   | 74                   | 74                   | 365                    | 90                    | 88                   | 88                   |
| First Paper Category                     |                        |                       |                      |                      |                        |                       |                      |                      |
| Number of Segments Second Paper Category |                        | 192                   | 124                  | 192                  |                        | 187                   | 90                   | 187                  |

Note: \*\*\* = statistically significant at the .01 level; \*\* = significant at the .05 level; \* = significant at the .10 level. Papers are categorized by their editorial endorsements in the 2000 presidential election.

the public interest. The higher the subscriptions for *People* magazine in the market, the greater the number of soft news stories about celebrities and entertainment products in local news programs. The greater the penetration of *Time* magazine in a market, the more hard news stories about national and international events are included in local television news programs. Economic forces outside the local market also influence the local television news programs. Stations are more likely to feature in their news programs the stars and shows of the network they are affiliated with, a form of promotion that benefits the local station and the national network. If a station is part of a larger group of stations controlled by a single company, its programs are less likely to cover national hard news events or stories about the area's U.S. senators.

Local newspapers operate under a different set of market conditions. Their bundling of stories into a portfolio of sections allows readers to choose which information to sample. This means that editors can add stories without considering whether all consumers will be interested. The results here indicate that local newspapers still do take tastes into account when making some content decisions. The number of soft news stories is not driven by the level of interest in entertainment or celebrity news. Hard news coverage of stories such as poverty, Medicaid, and campaign finance reform does increase as the percentage of *Time* subscribers grows. Coverage of issues also grows if the local incidence of a problem affects a newspaper's likely readers. Coverage of computers, campaign finance reform, or the EPA was higher in areas with larger computer employment, more local donations to presidential campaigns, or worse air pollution. Group ownership had impacts on newspapers too. Papers controlled by group owners covered a higher percentage of the soft news topics examined in the sample. These papers also included more stories about hard news topics such as poverty and AIDS. The news content of daily papers is not responsive to partisan pressures. Papers covered the Bush convention speech in similar tones regardless of the papers' later editorial endorsements in the race; the same held true for coverage of the Gore convention speech. This is not surprising given that objective coverage allows a newspaper to attract readers of many political allegiances, whose attention can then be sold to advertisers who value larger audiences.

These results provide a snapshot of how economics affect media content decisions across U.S. cities. Chapter 6 offers a view of how content has changed across time due to the changing economic fortunes of a particular media institution, the national network evening news programs.