NEWS MEDIA, THE PUBLIC SPHERE, AND INFORMED CITIZENSHIP
Stephen Colbert on Market Failure
Market Pressures
The Rise of Soft and Interpretive News

News producers seek to maximize their audience

By featuring a combination of information and entertainment

Hard news = News with substantive, public policy content, societal focus

Soft news = News focusing on titillating information -- sex, sleaze, and scandal -- unusual but irrelevant events, and the lifestyles of the rich and famous
Personalized News

Patterson study – diminished focus on societal outcomes, increased emphasis on personalized news

Figure 6: Use of Collectives and Self-Reference Words in News Stories
Frequency of Crime News

Crime versus foreign affairs as newsworthy issues

![Bar chart showing the frequency of crime news and foreign policy news in 2003.](chart.png)

- **Network am News**
- **Network pm News**
- **Local pm News (LA)**
Trayvon Martin Case vs 2012 Election

News Coverage of the Trayvon Martin Case vs. 2012 Presidential Election
Percent of newshole

- Trayvon Martin
- 2012 Presidential election

Date Range: March 19-April 22, 2012
PEW RESEARCH CENTER
### Most Followed Stories
(\% Followed Very Closely)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Story</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Challenger disaster</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Francisco earthquake</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rodney King verdict/riots</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crash of TWA Flight 800</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little girl in well, Texas</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End of Persian Gulf War</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hurricane Andrew</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq's invasion of Kuwait</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Floods in Midwest</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earthquake in Southern California</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq's occupation of Kuwait</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase in price of gasoline (10/90)</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invasion of Panama</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hurricane Hugo</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oklahoma City bombing</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US air strike on Libya</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olympic Park bombing</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcome of presidential election</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Airlines crash/Sioux City, IA</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US forces sent to Somalia</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Contributory Factors

Changes in management culture and accounting

• News divisions no longer subsidized

Cost cutting in the 1990s

• “Several of the most basic principles of serious journalism -- worldwide news coverage, multiple correspondents working the same story, and the commitment to getting the story right all became victims of the new economic logic.”

Deregulation

• The ending of the fairness doctrine, easing of ownership rules
“Feeding frenzies” on Candidates’ Private Lives

- Reporters ignored details of politicians’ personal affairs in the 50s and 60s; considered not newsworthy
- Beginning in the 1980s, a series of reporting waves focusing on extra-marital affairs and womanizing (Hart, Clinton, Edwards, Cain), plagiarism of rhetoric (Joe Biden), and use of ethnic slurs (Jesse Jackson)
- News coverage of personal foibles exceeded coverage of policy proposals and performance by 10:1
The “Character” Issue

Increased focus on the personal lives of politicians; zero attention in the 1960s, but major story in the 1980s

Gary Hart - 1988

Herman Cain - 2012

October – Cain topped the Republican preference poll (18%)
December – announces withdrawal from race
Feeding Frenzy at Nightline (1991)

“The Clintons versus the Media and the Right Wing”

“Battle Lines—Roots of a Scandal,” “Battle Lines—How did it get so personal,” “Battle Lines—Hunt for truth in new media jungle”

“White House Intern,” “Who is Ken Starr?”

“Jones v. Clinton”

“Dark day at the White House,” “Crisis in the White House”

“The Developing Saga of Kathleen Willey”
European tradition of tabloid journalism – high circulation, entertainment-oriented newspapers

UK’s three tier system

- “Quality” broadsheets (Times, Guardian, Independent)
  - Circulation (2005): 6 million

- Mid-market tabloids (Daily Mail, Daily Express)
  - Circulation (2005): 8 million

- Popular tabloids (Sun, Daily Mirror)
  - Circulation (2005): 15 million
Tabloid News

- Content analysis of *Sun* and *Mirror* show predominance of soft news (Uribe & Gunter).

Defined in terms of:

- **RANGE** (of subject matter)
- **FORM** (text versus visuals)
- **STYLE** (personalization)

- **Visuals**: 29 → 33 → 36
- **Personalized**: 29 → 30 → 37
- **Domestic**: 88 → 89 → 91

Year range: 91, 96, 2001
Tabloids Less Prominent in US

NYC Post has a circulation of approximately 700,000.

The combined circulation of the two NYC tabloids (Daily News and Post) exceeds that of NY Times.
Does Soft News Sell?

Patterson
• Argues that softening of news is driving away the “core” audience – people interested in current events

Zaller
• Argues the opposite, providing evidence that periods of soft news (OJ Trial) attract increased numbers of viewers

Hamilton
• Models news content as aimed at the “marginal” or median viewer – with limited interest in politics, and greater interest in entertainment
Five Economic Ws

Who cares about a particular piece of information?

What are people willing to pay to acquire it?

Where can media outlets or advertisers reach those willing to pay?

When is it profitable to provide the information?

Why is this profitable?
The Demand for Political News

Theory of “rational ignorance” predicts low levels of demand

- Consumption needs trump voting needs
- Rational ignorance leads to rational news production – soft news

But “duty, diversion, and drama” creates some demand for news about politics

- Are there enough political junkies to make hard news profitable?

Most evidence suggests the answer is no

- Programming is aimed at the “median consumer” (spatial logic) who has some interest in hard news, but more interest in soft news
“The news directors will select a mix of stories aimed at capturing the marginal viewers while not alienating the average viewers. The result will be a mix of news stories that leave average viewers somewhat frustrated and marginal viewers somewhat placated.”
Zaller’s study shows strong effects of day of week (Mon > Fri) and for season (winter versus summer).
“The coder was given the following instruction: Using a scale that runs from one to five, assign high values to stories providing information useful to viewers for discharging the duties of citizenship; assign low codes to stories having only personal or entertainment value. Information about government, politics, international affairs, and trends in economics, society, and public policy was identified as likely to fall within the concept of civic affairs information.”
Effects of OJ Coverage Boosted Ratings

☐ Expectation: as “excessive” soft news, it will drive away core news viewers and therefore depress audience share.”

☐ Data suggests the opposite; newscasts with more OJ news got a bump in the ratings (especially in the case of NBC, which provided the most coverage)

☐ “It is notable that ABC, the audience leader at the start of our period, has the highest score on the Civic Affairs measure and the lowest amount of trial coverage. NBC News, which rose to catch ABC, has the lowest Civic Affairs score and the most O.J. coverage. This is a clear though preliminary indication that high tone news might be bad for ratings.”
Anecdotal evidence from Nightline:

Ted Koppel: “I do remember that we tried to avoid doing it too often, and we couldn't avoid doing it almost once a week. It was impossible to ignore. The fascinating thing about it was that... every time we did O.J., the ratings went up ten percent. We could see it in the overnight ratings the next morning.”
### Career trajectories of reporters who covered the OJ case:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Previous Role</th>
<th>New Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greta van Susteren</td>
<td>CNN correspondent</td>
<td>FOX anchor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dan Abrams</td>
<td>Court TV to Nightline</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aaron Brown</td>
<td>ABC correspondent to CNN anchor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack Ford</td>
<td>NBC local correspondent to CBS National News Legal Analyst</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harvey Levin</td>
<td>Los Angeles radio station to reality TV shows; eventually founded the celebrity Web site TMZ</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A Different Form of Pack Journalism

David Margolick, NYT Correspondent: “The Times reacted to the story in the way that it often does, which is that it gets kind of dragged into covering something like this... the Times tried to maintain a certain distance and decorum and didn't devote that much space to it, put its stories inside the paper, rarely put them on the front page. But as the case came to consume the entire country, all of that changed and the story gradually migrated it's way towards the front of the paper, so that by the end we were all over the story... One of the things for which my coverage is going to be most remembered - for better or for worse - is that I cited the National Enquirer in one of my stories, and for The New York Times to acknowledge the National Enquirer was considered to be a kind of journalistic Rubicon. We had crossed some line, something fundamental had changed.”
Measuring Audience Size
Metrics of Audience Size

Newspaper circulation in the US is low as most newspapers operate on a regional or local basis.

Broadcast audiences measured through Nielsen ratings and “sweeps” periods.

Because of increased number of broadcasters, market share of individual firms has declined substantially since 1980.
### Figure 3.2: Top 10 Newspapers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>Daily circ</th>
<th>% chg</th>
<th>Sunday circ</th>
<th>% chg</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>USA Today</td>
<td>2,154,539</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>2,616,824</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Wall Street Journal</td>
<td>2,091,062</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>New York Times</td>
<td>1,118,565</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>1,676,885</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Los Angeles Times</td>
<td>955,211</td>
<td>-1.1</td>
<td>1,379,258</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Washington Post</td>
<td>732,872</td>
<td>-1.9</td>
<td>1,029,966</td>
<td>-1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>New York Daily News</td>
<td>729,124</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>805,350</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>New York Post</td>
<td>652,426</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>437,117</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Chicago Tribune</td>
<td>613,509</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1,002,166</td>
<td>-1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Newsday</td>
<td>580,069</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>678,019</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Houston Chronicle</td>
<td>553,018</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>747,404</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: *Editor and publisher yearbook, 2003*. New York: Editor & Publisher Co.
### Audience Size, Fall 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Show</th>
<th>Audience Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jeopardy</td>
<td>10 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wheel of Fortune</td>
<td>9 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oprah</td>
<td>8 million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Daily circulation for the top ten newspapers is approximately half that of the combined daily audience for “Wheel of Fortune” and “Jeopardy”
Broadcast Audiences

Nielsen rating points: GRP=1.1 million “in home” viewers

Three network newscasts with a combined rating of 15

The combined audience equals the circulation for the top 40 newspapers

Broadcast news audience is tiny compared with sports/entertainment

Desperate Housewives – 17 GRP

Monday Night Football – 11 GRP

Cable news attracts much smaller audiences (Fox > MSNBC & CNN)

Cable audience grows during periods of crisis or controversy
“Sweeps”

Four times a year, audience size is recorded.

Size of audience locks in advertising rates for the next quarter.

Stations “sell” audiences to advertisers.

Advertising revenue shared with network for all non-local programming.
## Top Five TV Shows

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Channel</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Share</th>
<th>Viewers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Super Bowl XLVI</strong></td>
<td>Giants vs. Patriots</td>
<td>NBC</td>
<td>2/5/12</td>
<td>47.1</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>53,910,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Super Bowl XLVIII</strong></td>
<td>Broncos vs. Seahawks</td>
<td>Fox</td>
<td>2/2/14</td>
<td>46.4</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>53,727,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Super Bowl XLIV</strong></td>
<td>Saints vs. Colts</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>2/7/10</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>53,600,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>M<em>A</em>S*H</strong> Final episode</td>
<td></td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>2/28/83</td>
<td>60.2</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>50,150,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>XVII Winter Olympics</strong></td>
<td>Women's Figure Skating</td>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>2/23/94</td>
<td>48.5</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>45,690,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2015 ratings For Super bowl set new record – 49.7 Rating or 72% share
Bias in Nielsen Ratings

- Under-representation of non-English speakers in Nielsen samples
- “in-home” versus “outside-home” viewing; in case of major events latter could be considerable, e.g. super bowl and “party viewers” (actual audience could be 15 percent higher)
- TV set being on does not necessarily mean anyone is watching
Ratings Trend, Network News

Y axis shows Nielsen GRP annual average.

Evening News Household Ratings for ABC, CBS, and NBC, 1980–2009
The End of the National Audience?

Nielsen Ratings converted in millions of viewers.

- Presidential Debates
- World Series
- Academy Awards
One Case of Increasing Exposure

Super Bowl Viewers
1967-2009

Data: ©2007 Nielsen Media Research, Inc. All Rights Reserved.
Chart: ©TVbytheNumbers.com LLC
Cost Cutting: the Vanishing International Bureaus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overseas News Bureaus by Network</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ABC (13)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Latin American</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Havana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Europe</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moscow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Middle East</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baghdad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jerusalem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islamabad (new)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kabul (new)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Asia</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beijing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tokyo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Africa</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nairobi (new)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Declining Personnel

Significant decline in journalists post-2000

Source: ADT Research
Economics of Local News
The Rise of Local News

LA Market 2008

- KABC: 6 hours of local news/30 minutes national
- KNBC: 5 hours of local news/30 minutes national
- KCBS: 5.5 hours of local news/30 minutes national
- KCAL: 8 hours of local news
Same pattern in SF market – 20 hours of local news programming per day

Weekday Local News: SF Market

AM = 9
MD = 3
PM = 7.5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Channel</th>
<th>AM</th>
<th>Midday</th>
<th>Evening</th>
<th>Late Night</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CH 2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CH 3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CH 4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CH 5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CH 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Local News: NYC & LA Markets**

**Figure 3.2 TV Listings for Network-Affiliated Channels in New York and Los Angeles (June 30, 2010)**

### Los Angeles – Los Angeles Area Broadcast

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>4:00 PM</th>
<th>4:30 PM</th>
<th>5:00 PM</th>
<th>5:30 PM</th>
<th>6:00 PM</th>
<th>6:30 PM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KCBSHD</td>
<td>Dr. Phil</td>
<td></td>
<td>CBS 2 News at 5:00 PM</td>
<td>CBS Evening News with Katie Couric</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KNBCHD</td>
<td>Ellen DeGeneres Show</td>
<td>Channel 4 News at 5:00 PM</td>
<td>Channel 4 News at 6:00 PM</td>
<td>NBC Nightly News with Brian Williams</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KABCHD</td>
<td>Eyewitness News at 4:00 PM</td>
<td>Eyewitness News at 5:00 PM</td>
<td>Eyewitness News at 6:00 PM</td>
<td>ABC World News with Diane Sawyer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KTTVHD</td>
<td>Wendy Williams Show</td>
<td>Dr. Oz Show</td>
<td>TMZ</td>
<td>The Kilborn File</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### New York – New York City Area Broadcast

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>4:00 PM</th>
<th>4:30 PM</th>
<th>5:00 PM</th>
<th>5:30 PM</th>
<th>6:00 PM</th>
<th>6:30 PM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WCBSDT</td>
<td>Judge Judy</td>
<td>Judge Judy</td>
<td>CBS 2 News at 5:00 PM</td>
<td>CBS Evening News with Katie Couric</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WNBC-DT</td>
<td>Ellen DeGeneres Show</td>
<td>LX New York</td>
<td>4 NY News at 6:00 PM</td>
<td>NBC Nightly News with Brian Williams</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WNYW</td>
<td>Judge Jeanine Pirro</td>
<td>FOX 5 News at 5:00 PM</td>
<td>FOX 5 News at 6:00 PM</td>
<td>TMZ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WABCH</td>
<td>Oprah Winfrey</td>
<td>Eyewitness News</td>
<td>Eyewitness News</td>
<td>ABC World News with Diane Sawyer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Data from TVGuide.com, 2010.*
The “Crime Script” in Local News

“If it bleeds it leads”

Constant focus on crime, overrepresentation of violent crime

LA study (Gilliam & Iyengar) found 3-4 crime stories in each local newscast

Crime news invariably “episodic” with focus on individual perpetrator

Episodic framing emphasizes visual cues
• i.e. race-ethnicity of suspect
Why is Local News Profitable?

- Content is personally relevant (weather forecast, traffic reports)
- High level of soft news (crime script)
- Low salaries and production costs
- Strong ratings and no profit sharing with national networks (local news produced by the local station, station owners get to keep the revenue)
Bigger Audience for Local than National News

Y axis shows Nielsen ratings for LA market

Local vs National News: LA Market

- Ch 4 News
- NBC News

Nov-91 | Nov-92 | Nov-93 | Nov-94 | Nov-95 | Nov-96
6.5 | 6.5 | 7.5 | 8.5 | 8.5 | 8.5

Nielsen ratings for LA market
Rise of Interpretive Journalism
The Rise of Interpretive Journalism – a Different Kind of Market Failure

Journalists value autonomy, resist efforts at spin and manipulation

Aftermath of 1988 campaign, recognition of need to resist candidates – from description to interpretation

Ad watches

Shrinking sound bite – journalists’ voices replace those of the candidates
Whose Voice?

Commentators’ voices drown out the candidates by 6:1

Figure 19: Percent of Air Time, 2000 General Election
Labor Day to Election Day

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Journalists</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidates</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Others</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Center for Media and Public Affairs for Shorenstein Center/Smith Richardson Soft News Study
The Shrinking Sound Bite

October 1968 – daily newscast presented 5 sound bites from the two presidential candidates for a total of 5 minutes

October 1988 – 10 sound bites averaging 8 seconds (total = 80 seconds)

October 2004 – sound bites averaging 5 seconds (total = 20 seconds)

Major explanations are the threat of media manipulation (campaign aides called “handlers”), and “fast paced” news as more likely to entertain
Unmediated Coverage - 1968

Campaign coverage from CBS News; note the length of the Humphrey sound bites.
1988 – the Shrinking Sound Bite

The shrinking sound bite
Consequences for Informed Citizenship
### Informed or Misinformed Citizens? The US Case

**Barack Obama was born in the United States.**

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>True</strong></td>
<td>58%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>False</strong></td>
<td>24%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Not sure</strong></td>
<td>18%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**What is Barack Obama’s Religion?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Christian</strong></td>
<td>55</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Muslim</strong></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Don’t Know</strong></td>
<td>31</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How much of the federal budget goes to foreign aid?

Median Estimate: 25%

Actual amount: <1%
## Politics versus Entertainment

### Percent of Americans Able to Identify:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Two non-US members of the military coalition in Iraq</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PM of Canada</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom Cruise’s religious affiliation</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject of Michael Jackson trial</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Overall, European governments continue to treat broadcasting, “not simply as a private commercial enterprise but as a social institution for which the state has an important responsibility”

Later, we’ll present evidence on the sharp content differences in programming provided by public service and commercial broadcasters
Level of Political Knowledge; Switzerland vs. US

Note substantial advantage of Swiss over Stanford students for hard news, but tables are turned for soft news.

(Note – soft news questions were about US events-celebrities)
Foreign Affairs as “Dark Areas of Ignorance”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Citizens Aware of Each Term</th>
<th>U.S.</th>
<th>U.K.</th>
<th>Finland</th>
<th>Denmark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tamil Tigers</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyoto Accords</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darfur</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taliban</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Britney Spears</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Explaining Levels of Information

Differences in media systems (supply-side explanation)

- lead to differences in the production and supply of “civic” information
- existence of “inadvertent audience” for news

Market-oriented, unregulated media systems

- systematically under-produce “serious” news

Differences in political culture and civic norms (demand-side explanations)

- lead to differences in consumer demand for information
Differences in Demand for News

Percentage of respondents who watch national TV news more than 4 days a week:
- 78% in Denmark
- 76% in Finland
- 73% in UK
- Only 39% in US

Percentage of respondents who read a newspaper more than 4 days a week:
- 71% in Finland
- 58% in Denmark
- 44% in UK
- Only 37% in US
Supply Side Explanations

- Media systems as information environments making it more or less easy to avoid public affairs information
- Public broadcasters and commercial broadcasters required to deliver minimum level of news programming on daily basis and at multiple times during peak viewing hours
- US broadcasters essentially unregulated
- Significant content differences between public and commercial newscasts – more hard and international news in former
Public Broadcasters as Market Leaders

Ratings
- In most European systems, prime-time ratings substantial for public broadcaster
- Their entertainment fare is highly popular

Exclusive rights
- Public broadcasters are given exclusive rights to cover major national sporting events

Loyal audience
- Over time public broadcasters in Europe have developed loyal audiences
BBC1 (the flagship public station in the UK) devoted 22.1% of its 2002 peak hour broadcasts to current affairs.

Compared to only 9% by the commercial channels.

BBC1 airs an average of 2.2 hours of news and public affairs programming during primetime on weekdays.

NBC, CBS, and ABC average only one hour each.
Challenges Ahead for Public Broadcasters

- Deregulation, decline in public funding, and loss of monopoly access to sporting events
  - BBC lost rights in open bidding to cricket, Formula 1 and “Match of the Day”
- Italian case — from party control to Berlusconi control (Mediaset)
  - Public broadcaster reduced to importing Law and Order and Zorro
- Tension between public service obligations and market competition
Supply Side Explanations

- Media systems as information environments making it more or less easy to avoid public affairs information
- Public broadcasters and commercial broadcasters required to deliver minimum level of news programming on daily basis and at multiple times during peak viewing hours
- US broadcasters essentially unregulated
- Significant content differences between public and commercial newscasts – more hard and international news in former
Declining market share (over time) due to deregulation and competition with commercial broadcasters.

Notes:
2. The scale varies between -100 (commercial channels have 100% of audience share in the country) and 100 (PBS channels have 100% of audience share in the country).
Inadvertent Audiences & Knowledge Gaps

- Onset of newscasts during prime time means that people seeking entertainment are exposed to news.
- Counter-factual: what might occur if network televising the Super Bowl was required to air news at halftime?
- In countries dominated by commercial news providers (US) exposure to news driven by demand – political junkies watch, everyone else avoids news.
- The interested are well informed, the uninterested know nothing.
In countries with traditions of strong public broadcasting, the uninterested find it difficult to avoid newscasts since they air before the most popular entertainment programs. Exposure to the news is driven less by demand and more by supply. As a result, the differences in knowledge between the more and less attentive are relatively small.
The “Knowledge Gap”

The less educated in Europe are much more informed than their American counterparts.

Source: May 2007, four-nation survey of political knowledge (Curran et al., 2008)
Market Competition and Niche News

With multiple news providers and smaller market shares, news organizations may be able to brand themselves as providers of partisan slant.

FOX has surpassed CNN as the top-rated cable outlet.

MSNBC has also positioned itself politically (Olbermann, Maddow).

Availability of news with partisan slant can produce parallel slants in political beliefs and opinions.
### Ratings for August 24, 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>6:00pm</th>
<th>7:00pm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>FOX Spec Report w/Bret Baier</strong></td>
<td>1,932</td>
<td><strong>Fox Report (Shep Smith)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MSNBC Live</strong></td>
<td>656</td>
<td><strong>MSNBC – Hardball</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CNN Situation Room</strong></td>
<td>600</td>
<td><strong>CNN – John King</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Significant Misperceptions about Iraq War among Fox Viewers

- **Iraq – Al Qaeda Connection**: (45-50% said there was a strong connection)
- **WMD**: 20-25% responded US did find WMD
- **Global Support**: 31% responded majority of nations favored US invasion
Media Bias and Biased Beliefs

Strong association between misinformation and support for Bush Administration policies

Among those who said there was no evidence linking Iraq and 9/11, 9% agreed with decision to go to war

Compared with 56% of those responding there was evidence
Extent of Misinformation

Perceived Iraq-Al Qaeda Relationship
(June – Sept 03)

- Iraq was directly involved in carrying out the September 11th attacks: 22%
- Iraq gave substantial support to al-Qaeda, but was not involved in the September 11th attacks: 35%
- A few al-Qaeda individuals visited Iraq or had contact with Iraqi officials: 30%
- There was no connection at all: 7%

Saddam Hussein and 9/11
Washington Post (Aug 03)

How likely is it that Saddam Hussein was personally involved in the September 11th Terrorist attacks?

- Very likely: 32%
- Somewhat likely: 37%
- Not very likely: 12%
- Not at all likely: 3%
## Sources of Misinformation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>News Source</th>
<th>Average rate per misperception</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fox</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNN</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NBC</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Print media</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NPR/PBS</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: prominence of Fox as a source of misinformed beliefs
Bottom Line: Iraq War as a Case of “Motivated Reasoning”

- Republicans much more misinformed
- Among Fox watchers who paid lots of attention to news 80% believed Iraq was connected with Al Qaeda
- Regular viewers/listeners were more informed than misinformed

Strongest predictor of misinformation was respondent’s political affiliation

Second strongest predictor was reliance on Fox News

Note negative effects of tuning in to PBS/NPR
Polarization of politics has led to widespread perceptions of media bias.
Summary

- U.S. news organizations, responding to market pressures, have softened the content of news programming
- European audiences tend to be more informed because of stronger regulations and presence of a public broadcasting network
- Implications: uninformed, misinformed, or informed citizens
Content Analysis – Research Designs

1. Use analysis of text to shed light on attitudes and values
   - McClelland’s analysis of children’s fiction as a measure of “achievement motive”
   - Dodds-Danforth study of “happy” lyrics, blog posts, and State of the Union messages
   - Race-ethnicity of criminal suspects in local news as an indicator of prejudice
II. Using content of news reports messages to assess “quality” of journalism/importance of market forces
- Comparing public broadcasters and commercial broadcasters for extent of hard-international coverage
III. Examining content to make inferences about effects of messages on behavior

- Suicide notes
- Diplomatic cables and onset of war
Stages of Content Analysis

- Identify relevant sources, identify the population of messages, and draw a sample
- Develop content categories
  - Categories guided by theoretical-conceptual considerations (e.g. market forces make news organizations over-produce soft news; campaign news dwells on “horse race” at the expense of policy)
Coding Scheme

- Content categories to reflect underlying concept – soft news, objective news, news as negative, reliance on official sources, etc etc.
- Categories should be exhaustive and mutually exclusive
- Categorization process to be independent, i.e. categorization of any given message should not depend on categorization of previous message
Table of Contents

- Intro – statement of the problem, why this is relevant/important; theory and hypothesis
- Outline your research design/strategy – sample of news sources, coding scheme, inter-coder reliability
- Presentation and interpretation of results
- Discussion-Implications
Unit of Analysis and Reliability

- What gets coded – words, sentences, paragraphs, entire news report
- Holistic coding; roles played by men and women in advertisements; treatment of minorities in entertainment programs
- Issue of inter-coder reliability; have multiple coders categorize the same messages
Presentation of Results

- Tabulate results of coding – word counts, percentages, column inches
- Interpret results in terms of theoretical expectations