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Does the "News" Come First? Social Responsibility, Infotainment, and Local Television Newscasts in Portland, Oregon: A Content Analysis

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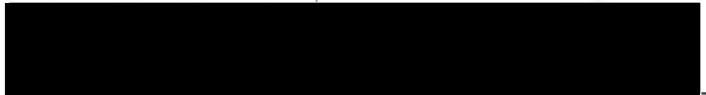
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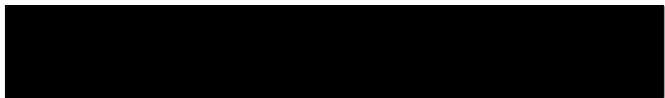
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ABSTRACT

An abstract of the thesis of Carey Lynne Higgins for the Master of Science in Communication Studies presented February 4, 2005.

Title: Does the "News" Come First? Social Responsibility, Infotainment, and Local Television Newscasts in Portland, Oregon: A Content Analysis

Local television news programs provide millions of Americans with information each day. But how well do these programs promote important public discourse and political and social understanding in the communities they are serving? This research examines the content and presentation styles of the late night local newscasts in Portland, Oregon for characteristics associated with socially responsible news and infotainment.

The goal of a socially responsible newscast is an informed audience able to make decisions about the world around them. Oftentimes, this includes content focused on policy, government, the economy, and other relevant "hard" news. The information is provided in a manner conducive to viewer learning.

In contrast, the goal of infotainment is to grab and hold the attention of the audience. These stories are of "softer" content, focused on celebrities, features, and dramatic incidents. The information is often provided in a "flashy" fashion, with the aim of catching the audience's eye more than enlightening the viewers.

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This study examines the qualities of social responsibility and infotainment in three different areas: news story content, story presentation style, and whether the time period was before, during, or after the ad-rate setting "ratings" period. This last variable examines any potential changes to a newscast during the times when newscasts are at their most competitive for viewers.

The results indicate a need for Portland's late night local broadcast newsrooms to reevaluate what is aired as news, and to look deeper into how that information is presented. Infotainment content and presentation styles play a major role in the majority of analyzed newscasts. The role of this content becomes even more pronounced during ratings periods.

The Portland, Oregon newscast viewing area is known for its high levels of civic engagement and citizen participation, and is home to over one million potential news watchers. Suggestions are made to make the newscasts more socially responsible and conducive to viewer understanding of their surroundings. This could help continue the trend of Portlander participation, community betterment, and overall citizenship knowledge.

DOES THE "NEWS" COME FIRST? SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY,

INFOTAINMENT, AND LOCAL TELEVISION NEWSCASTS IN

PORTLAND, OREGON: A CONTENT ANALYSIS

by

CAREY LYNNE HIGGINS

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AUTHOR NOTE

Carey Lynne Higgins is a professional in the local television news industry. She has worked in various newsrooms across the United States, and is currently a director/technical director and graphics operator for the Fox affiliate in Portland, Oregon.

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Introduction

Local television news programs are the largest reported providers of
information for millions of Americans each day (Carroll, 2004). But how well do
these programs provide the information necessary for important public discourse and
political and social understanding of the communities they are serving? Critics and
scholars have maintained that local television newsrooms across the country have
shifted emphasis from public service and citizen knowledge to boosted ratings and
increased station ad revenue. Some now believe "news" outlets air stories more for
their entertainment value than for informative purposes (Bennett, 2003; McManus,
1994; Patterson, 2000; Winch, 1997).

This goes against the ideals of socially responsible news, which emphasizes
"information, discussion, and debate on public affairs" (Peterson, 1956, p. 74), and
the political and social interests of the public (Napoli, 2001; Peterson, 1956).
Knowledge of such information is considered necessary for democracy. Numerous
professional journalism organizations use these ideals as guidelines for their
members.

News organizations have been criticized, however, for spending valuable
news time focusing on the "softer" news content of health trends, car chases,
scandals, celebrities, and sexually-charged reports instead of emphasizing "hard"
socially responsible community news to keep citizens informed. The soft content is
often paired with flashy, dramatic elements to keep viewers tuned in and advertising
rates up. Emphasizing such entertainment characteristics over citizenship values is
often dubbed "infotainment."

This study examines the infotainment versus social responsibility debate as it applies to local television newscasts in the United States. An overview of the concerns surrounding infotainment as news follows, including a look at a newsroom's traditional responsibilities to its viewers, as well as its current role in adding to parent company profit. Socially responsible hard news and infotainment characteristics are defined as they apply to television news broadcasts, both within the context of news story content and in presentation style.

A descriptive content analysis examines these characteristics within the late night local newscasts airing in Portland, Oregon. Portland is a large broadcast news market with over one million potential local news viewers. It is also a community with an exceptionally high rate of civic engagement (Abbott, 2001; Putnam & Feldstein, 2003). Its media coverage of the city, however, has been the subject of criticism by local columnists and national journalism scholars. A socially responsible news product would provide the city's residents with the information needed to continue the trend of participation, community betterment, and overall citizenship knowledge.

Review of the Literature

Infotainment

At its core, infotainment combines both the words and ideals of

"information" and "entertainment." Traditionally, information is provided to an

audience via straight, factual, politically-significant news story content, often called

"hard" news (Patterson, 2000; Tuchman, 1973). Hard news content orients viewers

to their community environments by answering politically- and socially-relevant

questions, allowing citizens to more fully participate in a democratic society

(McManus, 1994). "Who, what, when, where, why, and how" is the focus of hard

news (Graber, 1994). Journalists consider these the "urgent" and "collective" news

stories those in a viewing area should know (Turow, 1983, p.111). Financial profit is

not the goal of hard news; enlightenment is.

Entertainment, on the other hand, focuses on viewer amusement (Delli

Carpini & Williams, 2001; Howell, 1973; Turow, 1992), and counts financial profit

as its main goal (Turow, 1992; Winch, 1997). To be a financial success,

entertainment concerns itself with short-term audience satisfaction rather than with

longer-term goals, such as informing the audience (Howell, 1973). The education of

an audience, while possible through entertainment, is not an "urgent" priority.

As the name suggests, infotainment blurs the line between these two formerly

distinct categories to form its own hybrid category. There are two characteristics that

lead critics and scholars to classify a news item as infotainment: story content and

method of presentation to the viewer.

In terms of story content, infotainment is commonly referred to as "soft" news to contrast with "hard" news content.[1] Tuchman (1973, p. 173) describes soft news as stories that cover "interesting" matters, as opposed to hard news stories, which cover "important" matters. Drama is often a key component of story content labeled infotainment (Graber, 1994; Patterson, 2000). For presentation, a "slick, show-business" style (Dominick, Wurtzel, & Lometti, 1975, p. 213) with more "flamboyant" elements (Grabe, Zhou, and Barnett, 2001, p. 639) is also called infotainment. As with content, drama also plays a role in this designation of presentation called infotainment (Bennett, 2003; Graber, 1994).

The goal of infotainment, both in story content and in presentation style, is to grab and hold the attention of the audience, much like entertainment (Bennett, 2003). For critics, infotainment relies too heavily on the personal-satisfaction and profit-earning values of entertainment and not enough on the socially responsible values of information. This leads some to believe mainstream journalism is aimed more toward consumption than citizenship (Swanson, 2000).

Numerous professional journalism societies issue codes of ethics that highlight the responsibilities of the journalist to the audience. Both the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) and the Radio and Television News Directors Association (RTNDA), organizations representing thousands of journalists, proclaim the importance of public enlightenment for justice and democracy in their ethics

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[1] Infotainment content is also called "market-driven journalism" by McManus (1994) and "sensational/human interest" by Carroll & Tuggle (1997) and Slattery & Hakanen (1994, 1996). It is called "soft news" by Turow (1983) and Patterson (2000).

codes (RTNDA, 2000; SPJ, 1996). This is done through a "full range of information" provided to the public (RTNDA, 2000) and with "a fair and comprehensive account of events and issues" (SPJ, 1996). Infotainment would seemingly contradict these codes.

The Hutchins Commission, Social Responsibility, and News Story Content

These codes of ethics have their roots in ideals discussed for mass media even before television news existed, and follow the tenets of "social responsibility." Social responsibility is a term born from a report published by The Commission on Freedom of the Press (more commonly known as the Hutchins Commission) in 1947. The Commission determined that while freedom of the press is essential to political liberty, the responsibilities that come along with this freedom were not necessarily being fulfilled.[2] Concerns included the concentration of media ownership and news for profit instead of learning.

In order to achieve a free yet responsible press, the Commission developed five "requirements" for mass media outlets. These included providing a truthful, comprehensive, and contextualized account of the day's events; a forum for comment and criticism; a representative image of society; the presentation and clarification of society's goals and values; and the full access of news by all (The Commission on Freedom of the Press, 1947). By achieving these goals, news

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[2] At the time, the press included radio, newspapers, motion pictures, magazines, and books (The Commission on Freedom of the Press, 1947, p. v); today's definition expands to include many more modes of mass communication, including television.

organizations would fulfill their responsibilities to their audiences, thus providing the information needed to promote a democratic society.

These requirements formed the backbone of the social responsibility theory, as outlined by Peterson (1956). Social responsibility emphasizes the moral and ethical obligation of newsrooms to provide "information, discussion, and debate on public affairs" (p. 74), to enlighten the public so it can be self-governing, and to safeguard the rights of the individual by serving as a government watchdog (Napoli, 2001; Peterson, 1956).

A hard news content format is a way for a local television newscast to accomplish these goals. Major local, national, and international government policy issues that affect the citizenry such as war, health care, the economy, education, and election concerns are generally provided in this manner (Patterson, 2000; Project for Excellence in Journalism [PEJ], 1998). These are topics many consider essential to democracy.

Currently, the ownership and press-for-profit concerns of the Hutchins Commission are still troubling issues for believers in socially responsible news. Changes in media regulation beginning in the 1980s and currently ongoing in the 2000s have furthered what has been dubbed "market-driven" journalism: news for profit instead of enlightenment (McManus, 1994). While non-entertainment-driven public affairs programming, which includes hard news programs, was required for a broadcast license at the time of the Hutchins Commission, by the 1980s the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) had relaxed these guidelines, from 10% of a

station's airtime to "some" community-needs programming (Slattery & Hakanen, 1996).

In the following decade, the Telecommunications Act of 1996 revised ownership rules to allow primarily entertainment-oriented parent companies to add other media divisions, including newsrooms, to their holdings, and expanded the reach of broadcast signals to larger audiences (FCC, 1996). By 2003, Congress had to fight the FCC to keep parent companies from reaching more than 39% of the United States' television households (PEJ, 2004).

As a result, fewer companies own more of the television stations viewers look to for their local news (Hickey, 2001).[3] Efforts by these conglomerates to attract larger television audiences, higher ratings, and higher station profits have led to a documented increase in non-community-relevant programming, often presented during time designated as "news" (see Patterson, 2000; PEJ, 1998). The presentation of celebrity and lifestyle features during time previously dedicated to politically-, economically-, and socially-relevant news topics illustrate this change (Bennett, 2003; Patterson, 2000; PEJ, 1998). With local television stations enjoying an estimated 40% average profit margin in 2002 (PEJ, 2004), corporate owners are using newsrooms as profit generators, leading to a greater emphasis on filling news

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[3] By 2001, the top 25 television station group owners controlled 44.5% of America's commercial stations, up from 24.6% before the passage of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 (Hickey, 2001). The national household audience cap, dictating how many television households one station owner may reach, expanded in 2004 to 39%, compromised down from a high of 45% demanded by the FCC, but above the 35% asked for by Congress (PEJ, 2004).

programs with what sells over what informs. This financially-driven product runs counter to the ideals of socially responsible news.

The downsizing of socially responsible hard news coverage in favor of what has been called "fluff" is at the heart of the debate over what constitutes "news," and has lead to the criticism of infotainment content presented in airtime promoted as a newscast. The more time spent on fluff during a news broadcast means the less time that is available for politically-, socially-, and economically-significant topics. How can citizens make informed, responsible choices about their surroundings if local television newscasts, their main sources of community news, do not provide the information needed to answer relevant questions?

The Presentation of News Story Content

The discussion so far has mainly been focused on the *what*, or content, of the news; however, since television is a video- and an audio-driven medium, the *how* of information presentation needs to be considered as well. The comprehension and understanding of the audience can be impacted by the manner in which the information is presented. The same content can be offered in numerous ways.

Drama has played a major part in the presentation of news stories since television newscasts first hit the airwaves. In 1963, the then-executive producer of NBC's nightly news programs encouraged the responsible use of "the attributes of fiction" and drama within journalistic storytelling (Graber, 1994, p.483). Journalistic storytelling, however, has since evolved into a plethora of graphics, sound effects, theme music, and video effects -- grabbing entertainment-style presentation elements and incorporating them into the news.

Unlike news story content, presentation style is often mentioned but is rarely defined. While critics request cutbacks in the "tabloid" or sensationalistic presentation of information during local newscasts, few actually specify what elements are meant. Grabe, Zhou, and Barnett (2001) defined a number of these elements by analyzing television production techniques often associated with the "bells and whistles" of presentation (p. 642).[4] Among elements easily controlled during the context of a live newscast, the "decorative effects" of non-naturally occurring audio and video manipulations are included in their infotainment standard (p. 641). By adding these elements to an already-complete story, the effect of the video may be intensified, promoting physiological and emotional arousal in the viewer (Grabe, Zhou, Lang & Bolls, 2000; Lang, Potter, & Grabe, 2003). Used sparingly and with appropriate content, these effects can promote audience learning (Grabe et al., 2001; Lang, Bolls, Potter, & Kawahara, 1999), potentially leading to a more socially responsible broadcast. In contrast, the overuse of such elements, especially in combination with already-arousing story content, can hinder the information recall process. This is a phenomenon that will be discussed in the next section.

A number of these infotainment-style "bells and whistles" are in the form of video transition elements. The traditional transition of straight video cuts (one fullscreen picture to another without interruption) has been replaced with white

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[4] Grabe, Lang, & Zhao (2003), and Grabe, Zhou, Lang, & Bolls (2000) offer similar presentation descriptions.

flashes, dissolves, flying video, and multiple images on the screen to catch the

viewer's eye and hold their attention to the newscast (Grabe et al, 2001). These

elements also contribute to the pacing of the newscast, which may further affect the

attention and emotional arousal of the viewer (Grabe et al, 2001; Lang et al, 2003).

Added to these video effects are audio cues; sound effects and theme music

also now have a place in television newscasts. Theme music helps to ease the

transition for the audience from one "genre" of story or segment into another

(Bennett, 2003). Certain music signals a certain type of information about to be

broadcast. Composers of many familiar news themes, including the musical scores

underlining the conflicts in Iraq in 1991 and Kosovo in 1999 (Bennett, 2003) and the

NBC Nightly News theme (Kirby, 1999) are also composers for popular film, sports,

and television programs. This is not a coincidence; these musical interludes are

meant to elicit the same emotions a viewer of a movie would feel, just within the

context of the newscast (Bennett, 2003; Grabe et al., 2001). For critics, this is just

another means to blur the line between information and entertainment.

News Content, Presentation, and the Audience

The education of the audience is a main concern of social responsibility.

There is evidence that both the content of the information provided and its manner of

presentation can affect how the audience remembers and perceives the events

occurring in the world around them. An influx of infotainment can skew these

perceptions.

The vast majority of academic inquiries concerning infotainment have been

limited to news content; however, scholars have suggested that form combined with

content can have an impact on the viewers' message reception, following a theory

of limited capacity (Grabe et al., 2001; Grabe et al, 2003; Lang et al, 1999; Lang et

al, 2003). According to this theory, viewers have limited cognitive resources for

processing audio-video messages. Some television news stories can overload this

limit, causing the audience member to not remember these messages as well. The

underengagement of cognitive resources can also occur, with similar results.

In experimental studies, infotainment-style presentation elements combined

with more arousing content (often content categorized as infotainment) led to

overloaded processing, and therefore worsened content recall, even if the attention of

the viewer was heightened (Grabe et al., 2003; Lang et al., 1999). However, during

"calmer" (often more socially responsible harder news) content requiring fewer

resources to process, the more-arousing presentation elements appeared to help

engage the viewer and assist in memory recall. Therefore, for a newscast more

conducive to the socially responsible goals of audience enlightenment, a careful mix

of content and presentation style would be most beneficial.

The misuse of infotainment-style presentation also has potentially damaging

effects for the news organization. Using too many of these elements or adding them

to the wrong content may actually take away from the impact of a story (Grabe, et

al., 2000; Grabe et al., 2003). Viewer trust and news source credibility is also lower

for information formatted this way. It has been suggested that the blurring line

between what is real and what is added later, especially in the realm of added audio

effects, may fuel this distrust (Barkin, 2003).

Some newsroom managers, however, believe that using dramatic elements, for content or presentation, can help in the thought processing, and therefore the education, of viewers (Graber, 1994). By attracting an audience that likes a dramatic element, a newscast might hold usually unreceptive news viewers (Patterson, 2000), both educating the audience and profiting the broadcast station. Many of those in charge of television newsrooms argue that infotainment can bring needed community news to those who would otherwise not receive the news at all (Graber, 1994; Patterson, 2000).

In terms of content, however, those that tune in for hard news find this practice unacceptable. A survey of hard news viewers (who make up nearly half of regular local news consumers) found a negative view of the softening local news content (Patterson, 2000). These viewers are most likely to classify the news as fair, poor, or awful in quality. They believe the news is getting worse, and is sensational, superficial, uninformative, and boring. The same survey also found that soft news viewers enjoy hard news "almost as much" as soft news (p. 6). Another survey including both less frequent local news watchers and former viewers that have stopped watching expressed similar complaints, including too many fluff stories during the newscast (Potter & Ganz, n.d.). This indicates that using the overly dramatic to pull in the non-news watcher may actually be driving those who would usually watch the news away.

There is also evidence that too much dramatized content, especially in the form of incidental, non-policy-driven infotainment crime, may lead to a warped world view by the audience. Bennett (2003) and Patterson (2000) both relate studies

suggesting that television news has scared viewers into believing the world, and
their neighborhoods, were dangerous places to be. Increasing crime on television
newscasts tends to make the audience believe that the crime rate is rising, even if it is
actually decreasing (Moran, 1997, as referenced in Bennett, 2003). This kind of
"toxic" imagery, as Media Watch described local television newscasts, is more
misleading to citizens than socially responsible (Bennett, 2003, p. 11).

Audiences are aware of both the socially responsible and business
implications of the news stories they are viewing. When given the opportunity to
"produce" their own newscasts, 70 Chicago residents of varying interest in daily
news raised concerns reflecting social responsibility questions more than twice as
often (average of 16 times) as those concerning profitability (7 times) (Lind &
Rockler, 2001). This embrace of politically-, socially-, and economically-relevant
news was furthered by concerns of having enough time to cover stories fully and
fairly. At the same time, the "producers" did not totally ignore the business aspect of
television news, demonstrating that producing a socially responsible newscast, even
a mock-up that will never air, does not necessarily come at the expense of
profitability.

Indeed, studies have found that the newscasts with the highest quality news,
with little infotainment content, have had the most success in increasing their ratings
(Gottlieb & Pertilla, 2001). Higher ratings make it easier for stations to sell their
advertising time at a higher rate, thus increasing profitability while at the same time
putting out a high-quality, socially responsible newscast. This again indicates that,

even in the real world, social responsibility and profitability need not be mutually

exclusive in the business end of local television news.

Ratings

Since social responsibility is concerned with the use of local news as a

business instead of as an informative service, the effects of "ratings" periods for

local television news stations on news content should also be examined. Ratings

periods are the four months of the year when audience viewership ratings are

compiled to set station advertising income rates. This time period would appear

prime for making the infotainment-as-news phenomenon more pronounced. These

ratings, or "sweeps," periods occur in February, May, July, and November, and can

greatly affect a station's income. While there are few published studies examining

the ratings phenomenon in local television newscasts, it is an important time in

newsrooms across the United States.

This is an area worthy of investigation. Media critics have complained about

infotainment-driven "sweeps stunts" for years, pointing out the plethora of "news"

stories with bold titles and eye-catching visuals that air specifically during these time

periods in an attempt to draw in audiences (Moritz, 1989; Weiss, 2001). Many of

these are stories with more promotional value than news value (Ehrlich, 1995;

Moritz, 1989).

A Denver media critic suggested that some newsrooms base sweeps stories

on how provocative their promotions will be, even if the content is hardly "a pressing

national problem" (Weiss, 2001, p. 46). Another critic declared many sweeps stories

as running the "gamut from the cynical to the insipid to the downright moronic"

(Moritz, 1989, p. 123). A local television news director in Florida recently called

the process "turning handsprings" (Hickey, 2004, p. 6). These are hardly terms that

could be used to describe socially responsible news.

Local Newscast Trends

Critics have been pointing out examples of newscast content gone wrong for

nearly two decades. The shift from socially responsible hard news story content to

softer news infotainment content was noticed around the time deregulation began,

and has since continued. Two longitudinal media studies examining two decades of

news coverage illustrate this change. The Project for Excellence in Journalism

(1998) found between 1977 and 1997 both print and broadcast news outlets shifted

their emphasis noticeably away from government and foreign affairs in favor of

light-hearted "news you can use" and celebrity crime or scandal stories. A second

study between 1980 and 2000 found similar results (Patterson, 2000). During this

time frame, news stories with no clear connection to socially responsible policy-

oriented issues increased from 35 percent of all news media to 50 percent. While

neither of these studies was limited solely to local television news broadcasts, these

trends by United States newsrooms in general away from government news and

toward entertainment are unmistakable.

Another researcher conducted case studies in three different-sized local

television news markets in the 1980s (McManus, 1994).[5] McManus documented that

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[5] There are 210 local television news markets in the United States, ranging from New York City, the
largest with over 7 million viewing households to Glendive, Montana, the smallest with less than
5,000 (Nielsen, 2004). The "very large" market in the McManus (1994) study was one of the 10
largest, similar in size to San Francisco, California or Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. His "large" market

even in the case of the "very large" station, reaching the biggest audience of the study, just over half of its news time (55%) was spent relating "high consequence" or socially responsible topics. As the news markets the stations covered became smaller, this percentage decreased. A station in a "large" news market devoted only 53% of its time to such topics. The station with the smallest reach only covered politically- and socially-relevant news events for 38% of its news time. In further examination of news stories chosen among the three stations, those with greater audience (and therefore "market") appeal substantially outnumbered those with greater orienting (socially and/or democratically responsible) appeal.

A 1994 study examining news story content from late night (after prime time) local television newscasts across the United States found that "sensational and human interest" news filled 47.9% of the available time for news in the smallest markets studied, and 57.1% in the largest markets examined (Carroll & Tuggle, 1997). This content included crime, accidents and disasters, war and defense, human interest features, and "popular amusement" (p. 128). One hundred and seventeen newscasts from 65 local television news stations in 25 different news markets provided the sample.

In 1995, the Rocky Mountain Media Watch of Denver analyzed 50 newscasts in 29 different cities airing on the same night (Frankel, 1995). The results: the average local half hour television newscast devoted less than 13 minutes to "general"

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was in the 25 largest, similar to Portland, Oregon or Phoenix, Arizona. The smallest was between market size 50 and 100, similar to Richmond, Virginia or Madison, Wisconsin.

news, 6 minutes to sports and weather, and 8 and a half minutes to commercials.

For every 3 minutes of what the Media Watch called "news" (which included the

"mayhem" of crime and disaster), there was one minute of "fluff," including anchor

chat, celebrity items, "trivial" features, and teases for upcoming news (Frankel,

1995, p.24).

The results of a local television news study conducted by the Center for

Media and Public Affairs also in the mid-1990s were even grimmer: nightly

newscasts in 13 cities devoted 5 minutes and 40 seconds to hard news per half hour

newscast over a study period of three months (Grossman, 1998). Bennett (2003)

notes the commercial breaks used more airtime during these newscasts than the

actual news. Crime, weather, accidents, disasters, soft news, and sports dominated

news time.

Crime has also become a theme of studies and critiques of local television

newscasts. Between 1998 and 2002, 24% of news stories on 154 stations dealt with

crime, often as the first (or "lead") story, considered the most important of the day

(PEJ, 2004). Accidents and disasters were the second most common topics. Because

these stories did not focus on trends, policies or larger problems, they would be

categorized as infotainment, fluff, or mayhem, depending upon the critic. Politics

and government only accounted for 10% of news stories during the study period. In

terms of overall story focus, regardless of topic, only 15% of stories looked for

overall trends, and 8% examined local institutions.

A study during the month prior to the 2004 Presidential election involving 11

local television news markets reaching 23% of the television viewers in the United

States also found a lack of political coverage, especially at the local level (Kaplan, Goldstein, & Hale, 2005). Only 8% of broadcasts contained a story about local candidate races, and 55% contained a story about the Presidential race. In comparison, eight times the coverage went to "accidental injuries" and 12 times more was devoted to sports and weather than to local candidates.

During newscast examinations that focused on ratings periods, there was more bad news for socially responsible news content. A Chicago newscast in the 1980s presented a story that fulfilled both the story content and presentation characteristics of infotainment during a ratings period. The feature related to the prime time entertainment program *Miami Vice* came complete with footage from the series and heavy musical accompaniment (Moritz, 1989). Another Chicago three-story series on relationships was called a "disservice to viewers" by a newsroom manager after it aired (Mortiz, 1989, p. 129). A news station in Denver devoted newscast and promotional time to show "lots of leg" during a soft news piece on pantyhose (Weiss, 2001, p. 46).

These studies and critiques examined newscasts across the country for examples of the infotainment trend. It is a not a concern that has been isolated to a certain sized news market, a certain area of the country, or to certain newscasts.

Portland, Oregon and Local Television Newscasts

As the above examples illustrate, many local television newsrooms use infotainment story content and presentation techniques in an effort to build viewership. The local television news organizations in Portland, Oregon, the twenty-fourth largest television news market in the United States as of 2004, have been held

up for critique against the standards of socially responsible news and infotainment.

The city is home to five over-the-air broadcast stations that produce and air local

newscasts on a daily basis. These newscasts have the potential to be watched in over

one million households across the states of Oregon and Washington (Nielsen, 2004).

Newscasts in the market have been criticized for both the information they

provide to the community, and their styles of presentation. In 2001, the Project for

Excellence in Journalism[6] graded early evening (5 p.m. to 7 p.m.) newscasts

produced by the local CBS, ABC, and NBC affiliates. The stations scored a "C," a

"D," and a "D" respectively in terms of hard news content and how local events were

covered (PEJ, 2001). The study determined a need to increase stories concerned with

local issues and a similar need to decrease the stories covering insignificant local

incidents. Addressing both of these items would lead to a more hard news-oriented

socially responsible local newscast. Out of 14 local news markets studied, Portland

ranked eleventh. These results were reprinted in the column of a media critic of the

largest newspaper serving the Portland market, including comments from managers

in charge of the newsrooms critiqued, all of whom disputed the study for only

focusing on one particular newscast (Carlin, 2001).

Two years later, in May 2003, another Portland media critic featured the late

night newscasts in a local newspaper column outlining essentially infotainment-

oriented characteristics (Schulberg, 2003). For content, the NBC affiliate was noted

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[6] The Project for Excellence in Journalism is part of the Columbia University Graduate School of
Journalism. According to its website (www.journalism.org), the organization's aim is to clarify
journalism's role and find examples of "good journalism" around the United States to illustrate how it
should be.

for having the best contextualization of information, while the Fox affiliate was dubbed the "Crimes 'R' Us" station. Presentation-wise, the Fox used what Schulberg called a "rock-'em-sock-'em" method of information presentation, with a bit of *Entertainment Tonight* thrown in for good measure. The CBS and ABC affiliates fell somewhere in between on the hard news to infotainment scale.

A content analysis conducted by the same columnist over a week in December 2003 further criticized the content of the 10 p.m. and 11 p.m. newscasts in Portland (Schulberg, 2004, January 20). A plethora of crime "clutter" filled more local newscast time than all other local news stories combined, minus sports and weather. Many of these stories were specifically mentioned as not having any wider community implications other than X crime happened in Y location. The Fox station was again singled out as providing crime stories that were not even local in nature. Even the top-rated NBC newscast spent more time airing crime stories than local non-crime.

More recently, a writer in a Portland university newspaper took notice of the lack of political coverage by the local newscasts (Willmore, 2004). While the stations covered the upcoming Presidential election, the focus was more on poll numbers than political analysis. The newscasts were likened to "three-ring circuses" with little journalistic integrity, and an emphasis on weather, health, and entertainment.

When combined with the results of the Project for Excellence in Journalism study (2001), the comments of these local critics raise questions of what local Portland, Oregon television news outlets typically air as news. These questions are

especially significant considering that the residents of Portland have been cited as examples of exceptionally civically-engaged citizens (Abbott, 2001; Putnam & Feldstein, 2003). While levels of similar engagement steadily fell between 1974 and 1994 across the rest of the United States, increasing numbers of Portlanders began attending public meetings, joining groups to better government, writing letters to the editor, and signing petitions in their communities (Putnam & Feldstein, 2003). The people of Portland stay involved in the decision-making processes for their city.

Are the local television newscasts in Portland adding more socially responsible news content to allow these civically-minded citizens to receive the politically-, socially-, and economically-relevant information needed to make informed decisions about their city? Or does Portland, Oregon, despite its high levels of citizen participation, qualify as a news market airing a dismally small amount of socially responsible and significant local news, focused more on entertaining viewers than educating them?

Operational Definitions

Before addressing these questions, it is necessary to define what falls into socially responsible hard news and infotainment categories. Previous research provides guidelines for the analysis of both content and presentation elements within local television newscasts.

Content

News stories defined as socially responsible hard news generally follow the guidelines of the Hutchins Commission: topics traditionally thought of as news and public affairs. These are primarily identified as what informed persons in a society

should know about their surroundings (Bennett, 2003; Tuchman, 1973). As mentioned earlier, this includes the classic journalistic questions of "who, what, when, where, why, and how" of the story to place events into context for the community (Graber 1994, p. 487). This content is often time-sensitive, with an "urgent" broadcast component (Turow, 1983, p. 111).

Government, politics, and legal issues are main staples of this coverage (PEJ, 1998). These stories cover public policy, elections and campaign maneuvering, and news about government and other political organizations (Slattery & Hakanen, 1994). The state of business and the economy are also on the socially responsible hard news list (Patterson, 2000; PEJ, 2004). "Social issue" (PEJ, 2004) or "domestic affairs" stories (Patterson, 2000), including education (Patterson, 2000) and civic group concerns (Slattery & Hakanen, 1994), are also considered hard news. Foreign affairs, war and peace (PEJ, 1998) and defense (PEJ, 2004) also are generally classified as hard news. Crime, if discussed as a public policy or contextualized community issue instead of as an individual incidental occurrence, can also fall into this category (Patterson, 2000; Turow, 1983). Scientific discoveries are also included here (Bennett, 2003; Grossman, 1998). These are the topics that a socially responsible news outlet should air as the main focus of "news."

In contrast to this more socially responsible content, infotainment stories are not necessarily time-bound items, and lack urgency to be broadcast within a specific newscast (Turow, 1983). Instead, many are "evergreen" in nature, and can run in any newscast at any time (Dominick et al., 1975; Patterson, 2000). Because these are not topics crucial to citizenship and civic engagement, these softer news stories have

been described as items "you could leave out of the program without being accused of skipping the important news of the day" (Turow, 1983, p. 118).

"Quality of life" stories fall into this category (PEJ, 1998, p. 6). This content informs the viewer of the latest health and safety trends, includes advice-driven "news you can use," and other personal improvement stories (Patterson, 2000; PEJ, 1998). While topical and potentially useful to a viewer, these stories are generally not essential to democratic citizenship duties. Product recalls, road closures, and makeover tips are quality of life stories.

Content that focuses on an interesting person or story in place of a specific news event, called "human interest" (Davie & Lee, 1995; Dominick et al., 1975) or "feature" stories (PEJ, 1998), is also considered infotainment by some. Many of these stories have an underlying topic can be more socially responsible, but the focus is placed on the dramatic or emotional appeal of the story instead of on the informational (Dominick et al., 1975). Cute animal stories, such as the water-skiing squirrel, and emotional stories told from a personal perspective, such as a soldier's homecoming, fit in here.

When newsrooms play up the drama and mayhem angle of an event, instead of the community impact or policy angle, the story also becomes one of infotainment (McManus, 1994; Slattery & Hakanen, 1994). This is even if the occurrence would otherwise fit Turow's (1983) definition of "urgent." Individual, non-policy-based crime incidents are stories aired by local news organizations that have been criticized under this heading. Much like the stories presented as human interest, crime (and for some researchers, accident and disaster stories) is a topic that could be presented as

socially responsible hard news, but instead is treated as attention-grabbing fare, with little background or citizenship-building information. To define this softer type of crime in comparison to hard news crime, Patterson (2000) made this distinction in his coding: crime presented as a public policy issue was coded as a "Government & policy" story, falling into a hard news category. Crime that was not public policy received its own category, one designated as soft news.

Perhaps the most easily recognizable of infotainment stories include those focused on entertainment, celebrity happenings, their scandals and trials, and general show business news (Bennett, 2003; PEJ, 1998). Often critiqued samples of this type include devoting newscast time to coverage of prime time entertainment shows (such as *Seinfeld* and *Survivor*) and celebrities, often accused of scandalous crimes (like Martha Stewart). With the airing of these stories, celebrity and entertainment literally become the news.

Content Category Disagreement

While these definitions were derived from the literature available, researchers did not always agree in definition for all of their news content coding. Some studies only listed general topics that fell into each category, without expanding upon their definitions. Others used different definitions for similar content. This raised numerous questions in the derivation of operational definitions for the current research.

To resolve some of these inconsistencies and arrive at the outlined operational definitions, the standard definitions of socially responsible content and infotainment content set the guidelines for coding news content. If a story is of

"urgent, collective" concern (Turow, 1983, p.111) that helps a citizen "understand and respond to the world of public affairs" (Patterson, 2000), it is considered a socially responsible topic. If, on the other hand, the story is evergreen (Dominick et al., 1975; Patterson, 2000), examines an interesting person or story in place of a specific news event (Davie & Lee, 1995; Dominick et al., 1975) or focuses on the emotional and the dramatic aspects of the story (McManus, 1994; Slattery & Hakanen, 1994), then it is infotainment content. These definitions apply regardless of specific story topic.

To add to these guidelines, there is certain news content that is agreed upon by all. Government, politics, policy, and the economy are socially responsible hard news categories considered important to the knowledge of the citizen public by all reviewed literature. Therefore, if a news story discusses an issue within the context of these categories, the story is coded as socially responsible. All researchers also agreed that stories focused on celebrities, entertainment, and scandal fall into an infotainment category, as well as human interest or feature stories. Therefore, any story, regardless of topic, that is discussed within these parameters is coded as infotainment.

This follows the lead of Bennett (2003) in his categorization of crime, a large contributor to news story content at the local level. As mentioned earlier, crime can be considered hard (socially responsible) news if it includes analysis of "trends, causes, and possible solutions" (p. 13). On the other hand, it is a softer (infotainment) content story if it focuses on gore and tearful victims. Similarly, Patterson (2000) used public policy/not public policy as his coding distinction

(public policy being hard news, not public policy being soft). This eliminates a blanket categorization for all crime, allowing the story to be coded based on more specific content than just overall topic alone.

Such definitions also help in the categorization of accidents and disasters, which is another area in which researchers disagreed. For Patterson (2000), "significant disruptions in daily life," such as earthquakes and airline disasters, fall into a hard news category, necessary for citizen understanding of world affairs. Patterson, however, also characterizes news which is more incident-based or sensational as not considered part of this category. It is by this latter definition that other researchers (for example, Carroll & Tuggle, 1997; Slattery & Hakanen, 1994) code these topics as sensational, human interest, or infotainment. As with crime, the angle the story takes determines its categorization as hard news or infotainment.

So while there were some inconsistencies within past literature, following the standard definitions of socially responsible hard news and infotainment content can help to resolve some of these issues for the current study. Table 1 provides a comparison between socially responsible content stories and infotainment content stories.

Other News Segments

There are also segments that have been deemed as separate from "regular" news time. Sports, weather, and commercials are generally not considered part of regular news content time (see Davie & Lee, 1995; Dominick et al., 1975; McManus, 1994). It should be noted, however, that sports and weather segments are regarded by some critics of local television news as part of the infotainment "fluff" filling news

Table 1

Examples of Socially Responsible Hard News and Infotainment Story Content

Socially Responsible Hard News	Infotainment
Government/policy/politics and other legislative, legal, or election issues, including community meetings. Examples: election results, policy changes, ballot measures, community concerns	Entertainment/celebrity, including arts, fashion, travel, food, radio, television, film, celebrity life, scandals. Examples: TV or film actors, sports figures, local fashion designer
Military, war, terror, or political violence-related stories. Examples: War in Iraq, War on Terrorism, military issues, security issues	"News you can use," including health and safety stories. Examples: Detours, product recalls, latest diet trends, makeup
Crime, involving policy or community action. Examines crime as a broad issue in the community, not as an isolated incident. Examples: new laws, community meetings, trends	Crime, presented outside of a policy or community-action context. More incidental than broad-issue-oriented Examples: Everyday criminal incidents: theft, shooting, burglary, graffiti, etc.

Socially Responsible Content	Infotainment Content
Business and economy. Examples: recessions, interest rates, state of the economy, community business involvement	Accident and disaster stories, unless presented as community concern/policy. Examples: Fires, car accidents
Science/discoveries. Examples: Mars rover, space shuttle, cloning debate	Feature stories, focused on personality or "interesting story" characteristics instead of specific news event. All stories presented
Education. Examples: school/education policies, problems, school initiatives	in this manner, regardless of subject matter, are categorized here. Examples: The homecoming of a soldier, the waterskiing squirrel, the local hero

time instead of socially responsible hard news content (Grossman, 1998; Rapping, 1995).

Presentation

Television newscasts make use of both audio and visual elements to present information to their audiences, some of which have been labeled entertainment-

driven by critics. The elements in question during newscasts are generally added

to already complete video and audio sources as "decorative effects," and are not

essential parts of the main composition of the story (Grabe et al., 2001, p. 642).

These effects have been shown to play a role in how audiences perceive the content

they enhance (Grabe et al, 2003), and can be used to manipulate the emotions of the

viewers, turning the newscast into an entertainment-like viewing experience.

One of the visual areas that can be easily controlled during a live newscast is

the transition used between different video sources. While a straight cut from one

video source to another with no overlapping video or jarring interim visuals has been

the standard newscast video transition, Grabe, Zhou, and Barnett (2001) identify a

number of other transition elements that have made their way into television

programs labeled "news."

Of the more basic transitions is the "white flash" effect, which mimics the

effect of a camera flash by adding a short burst of the color white between two

pieces of video. Another is the dissolve, in which the images leaving and entering the

screen briefly overlap during the transition from one video to the other. Also

included are "wipes" which push one piece of video off of the television screen to

reveal the next video element.

More complex video transitions include page peel effects, which take one

video element and bend it off of the screen as if it were a page in a book to reveal the

next "page" of video. A "fly" effect is also mentioned, used most often used to pull a

shrunken piece of video out of an area in a map to fullscreen. Another visual

technique is the split screen effect. This effect enables more than one video element

to appear simultaneously on the television screen, often framed within two square or rectangular "boxes." For this reason, this effect is currently used by many news stations as a transition between the news studio crew and a reporter in the field.

Audio cues are the other elements included in infotainment presentation style. Sound effects and theme music are two of the primary added audio elements (Grabe et al., 2000; Grabe et al., 2001). Sound effects are defined as any sound added to a video other than ambient noise, reporter voice over, or music. These sounds are "dubbed in" to the story by an editor to achieve the desired effect. Like video transitions, sound effects are controlled by those airing the news, and are used as attention-getters. Examples include ticking clocks or crashing noises that were not part of the original natural sound.

Added theme music in a story or segment is also considered an infotainment-oriented presentation characteristic (Bennett, 2003; Grabe et al., 2000; Grabe et al., 2001; Kirby, 1999). The music is used to dramatize the mood of story (Bennett, 2003) or to identify and "brand" the newscast (Kirby, 1999). Any non-naturally occurring music falls into this category.

<center>*Summary*</center>

Local television newscasts across the United States have been criticized for emphasizing entertainment characteristics over socially responsible news in both content and presentation style. These criticisms become especially pronounced during the four months each year that television stations set advertising rates, when holding an audience becomes critical to station profit margins. Instead of following the guidelines of the Hutchins Commission to provide the information necessary for

public affairs knowledge and civic engagement, much news content focuses on the softer news of celebrity, human interest, and scandal.

In addition to the content, how the information is presented can have an effect on viewer memory recall. A more socially responsible newscast will carefully weigh how much drama is added to a story's presentation, especially if the content is already highly arousing. Too much drama can overwhelm the viewer, leading to lessened memory of the news. This can also damage the credibility of the news organization in the eyes of the viewer. On the other hand, adding a small amount of drama to an otherwise calm story can help enhance viewer recall.

The Portland, Oregon local television news market has been the subject of some of these criticisms at both the local and the national level. Although the city is know for its high levels of civic participation, local news viewers may not be provided with as much socially responsible news needed to be thoroughly informed of their community happenings. The current study, therefore, will examine the characteristics of news story content, presentation style, and the effects of ratings periods on the late night local television newscasts presented by Portland stations. The operational definitions derived from the literature outlined above will provide the guidelines for this study.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to determine to what extent the local newscasts in Portland, Oregon's television broadcast news market follow the socially responsible guidelines of the Hutchins Commission. Based upon the literature examined above, the content and presentation style of the late night newscasts were analyzed to determine if they fit into a hard news or infotainment category.

To guide this analysis, the following research questions were asked:

R1: What percentage of possible news time is devoted to socially responsible hard news story content versus infotainment story content during Portland's late night newscasts?

R2: Does the amount of time devoted to socially responsible hard news story content and infotainment story content change during different parts of the ratings cycle? That is, does the use of hard news story content or infotainment story content within a newscast change during weeks designated as a ratings period when compared to the weeks before and after?

R3: How often are infotainment-style video and audio presentation elements used during Portland's local late night television newscasts? Are these elements used to enhance stories of socially responsible hard news content, infotainment content, or both?

Method

Population and Sample

The study population included the late night (10 p.m. or later) local television

newscasts broadcast in the Portland, Oregon news market. The late night newscasts

were chosen because all four major network affiliates in Portland air a local newscast

during this time period. The newscasts analyzed were the 11 p.m. shows on KGW

(NBC affiliate), KOIN (CBS affiliate), and KATU (ABC affiliate), and the KPTV

(Fox affiliate) 10 p.m. newscast. The late night news on PAX affiliate KPXG was

not studied as its 10 p.m. newscast is produced by KGW, and is very similar in both

news story content and presentation elements to KGW's 11 p.m. news. This avoids a

possible overrepresentation of one newsroom's style of broadcast. Other local

Portland stations do not air a late-night newscast. KOIN, KATU, and KGW all air a

half-hour newscast; KPTV airs an hour of news.

The data collection period began Thursday, January 22, 2004 and concluded

Wednesday, March 17, 2004, for an eight-week census. This includes two weeks

prior to the February ratings period, the entire four weeks of the ratings period, and

two weeks after, providing a means of comparison for newscast stories and

presentation elements both within and outside of the ratings period (see Ehrlich,

1995; Moritz, 1989 for discussion). Both weekday and weekend newscasts were

included in the analysis.

Newscasts that did not run in their regularly-scheduled time slots or for their

regularly-scheduled amount of time were not included in the analysis. This prevented

"special" newscasts or other locally-produced shows from possibly skewing sample

content.[7] A total of 7 shows (1 KGW, 4 KOIN, 2 KPTV) were excluded, bringing

the final sample to 217 newscasts.[8] This sample included 55 KGW, 52 KOIN, 54

KPTV, and 56 KATU newscasts.

The KOIN, KGW, and KATU newscasts were recorded nightly on VHS

tapes from over-the-air broadcasting in Portland, Oregon. The KPTV newscasts were

recorded on Beta and dubbed to VHS at the Fox 12 studios through an in-house

signal identical to over-the-air output during the news show. The beginning of each

newscast was marked by a visual and/or audio cue identifying the content as part of

the newscast. This was usually either a newscast-identifying "opening" animated

fullscreen video image with audio track ("You're watching *KOIN 6 News at 11*"), or

in a split-screened promotional area available for local newscast promotions during

the network program immediately prior to the local news. This time occurs during

the previous program's credits (the credits on one portion of the screen, and the

newscast promotion on the other), and is usually accompanied by an audio track

telling viewers to "stay tuned" for the local news. When the newscast takes over this

time, these "credit squeezes" are either marked with graphics identifying them as

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[7] Many of these shows are retitled as "Special Editions" or news specials and, according to Nielsen ratings rules, are therefore not the same as a regular newscast. The ratings for these shows do not count toward the overall ratings of the regularly scheduled newscast.

[8] The shows excluded from this analysis were the KOIN 11 p.m. newscasts on Sunday, January 25, Sunday, February 1, Sunday, February 8, and Sunday, February 29, 2004; the KGW 11 p.m. on Sunday, February 29, 2004; and the KPTV 10 p.m. news on Thursday, February 26 and Friday, February 27, 2004. The most common reason for the shows to be dropped from the analysis was a late start time. Many of these programs aired following special network programming, including awards shows or prime time movies. This was the case for all but the KPTV exclusions. The two KPTV newscasts not included were half-hour editions. These half-hours were followed by a special local sports program one night and a special news magazine show to fill the second half hour of the usual newscast time period.

part of the newscast, or prominently feature the local news anchor to alert the audience to the start of the news.

Coding

News stories. News stories were the primary units of analysis. An obvious change in topic signaled a new story. This was accompanied by a visual and/or audio cue, often through an introductory animation, a change in anchor or reporter, a graphic change, or another physical change in video and/or audio onscreen.

Stories were analyzed for both news content and presentation elements, since these have been established as the two main elements contributing to a story's categorization of hard news or infotainment. For news story content, the amount of time allotted to each story, and whether the newscast fell before, during, or after the ratings period, were noted as well. For presentation, the appearance of an infotainment-style element was noted.

News Story Content. The analysis looked for news story content that has been previously identified as pertaining to socially responsible hard news content or infotainment. An analysis of the main topic of the stories determined this orientation. The criteria for determining whether a topic fell into either a socially responsible hard news or an infotainment category were derived from the literature (see, for example, Dominick et al., 1975; PEJ, 1998; Patterson, 2000).

The following topics were coded as socially responsible hard news, unless presented as a feature (see definition in infotainment story content coding below):

- Government/policy/politics and other legislative, legal, or election issues, including community meetings

- Military, war, terror, or political violence-related stories

- Crime involving policy or community action, at the local, regional, national, or international level

- Business and economy

- Science/discoveries

- Education

- Other, with an explanation

The following topics were coded as infotainment:

- Crime, focusing on the details of the particular crime occurrence, and presented outside of a policy or community-action context, at the local, regional, national, or international level

- Entertainment/celebrity, including arts, fashion, travel, food, radio, television, and film

- "News you can use," including health and safety stories

- Accident and disaster stories, both natural and manmade, unless presented as community impact or policy story

- Feature stories, focused on personality or "interesting story" characteristics instead of a specific news event. All stories presented in this manner, regardless of subject, are categorized here.

- Other, with an explanation

Following the lead of previous local news studies, sports and weather

segments were only coded for the amount of time they were allotted, and not for

content (see Davie & Lee, 1995; Dominick et al., 1975; McManus, 1994). In the case

of a major story, such as severe weather or an unexpected sporting occurrence, these

topics fell within the "news" segments of the show and were coded as either an

infotainment content story or a socially responsible hard news content story depending upon their main emphasis.

As per previous newscast analyses, commercial segments were not included in this analysis (McManus, 1994). The time allotted to commercials, however, was noted.

In some cases, news stories contained more than one of the categories defined above. All applicable categories were noted.

Presentation. In addition to story content, transitions between video elements and added audio elements within the news were counted. Due to different technical constraints and editing practices among the different news stations, transitions within the same video element (i.e. prepackaged/pre-recorded video with soundbites) were not coded. Grabe et al.'s (2001) infotainment transition elements formed the basis for this analysis.

Those coded included:

- Wipes, electronic effects pushing one picture on/another off the screen

- Dissolves, gradual transitions from one picture to the next with brief overlap

- White flash, a wipe transition that mimics the effect of a camera flash, usually via the insertion of white fullframes between the two transitioning video sources

- Opens/closes (animations – moving title pages) introducing or concluding a story or segment

- Split-screen/ "split box" effect dividing the television screen into 2 or more parts, showing different images

- Map fly – a shrunken piece of video or reporter appears from a location on a map and is pulled forward to full screen.

- Page peel – a special type of wipe, in which one piece of video folds over like a piece of paper to reveal a new image.

- Other video transitions, with a description

- Sound effects, defined as audio other than ambient sound, reporter/anchor voice, music

- Added music within a story or segment

- Other added audio, with a description

The Process

There were three coders for this analysis: one lead coder and two coders to check for reliability (one each for news story content and presentation). All three coders were television news professionals. This was done purposely for the coding of presentation elements, as these elements can often be difficult to recognize without prior experience in the field (see Grabe et al., 2001 for a discussion). The news story content coder volunteered to help code for this analysis. Cross-checking coders were not aware of the nature of the research until after the coding was completed.

The coding sheet for each newscast listed each story aired, similar to a "rundown" used in television newsrooms to organize news items in a show (see Appendix A for examples). Because all coders were television news professionals, this was the most familiar format for a printed version of a newscast. The lead coder provided coding sheets with story titles already filled in, with the instruction for the other coders to make note of additional items to insert or the desire to remove stories if they saw fit. The three coders agreed 100% on the story titles listed on the coding sheets, with no requested additions or deletions.

Each coder received a code book and coding sheets relevant to the information being coded by that person. The news story content coder received a codebook solely containing news story content definitions, and the presentation coder solely the presentation elements. The lead coder, who developed the codebook using the categories described above and descriptions used by previous researchers, followed both chapters to code both news story content and presentation (see Appendix B for the codebook).

Coder training occurred on similar newscasts outside of the study period to ensure a common understanding and a lack of problematic categories within the coding scheme (Neuendorf, 2002). Revisions were made to the codebook based upon these training tests. All coder questions and concerns were addressed prior to the final coding.

The news story content coder was instructed to classify each story into one of 17 story topics (see Appendix B). Space was provided for notes, explanations, questions, and comments regarding the stories and/or coding concerns. The presentation coder was instructed to classify onscreen transitions and audio cues as defined above. As with news story content, space was provided for notes, explanations, questions, and comments regarding coding concerns. The lead coder coded all studied newscasts for both news story content and presentation elements.

The lead coder also timed all of the news stories using a stop watch and a VCR counter.[9]

Inter-coder reliability. A random stratified sample was used to pick five newscasts per station for the cross-checking process. This sample of 20 newscasts is just under the 10% used by another infotainment researcher for this purpose (Grabe et al., 2001). The dates of all eligible newscasts for each station were drawn from a hat, one station at a time, to determine this sample. This process was repeated four times, once for each station. The same sample was used by both the content coder and the presentation coder. The two coders received VHS copies of the sample newscasts to analyze.

News story content coding by the lead and the cross-checking coder matched 89% of the time, and 92% if teases for miscoded stories were not counted (the same news story miscoded more than one time within a newscast), when comparing by specific story topic. When specific news topic categories were collapsed to "infotainment story content" and "hard news story content," the percentage of matching stories increased to 96%. The cross-checking coder used the "feature" category to describe numerous non-crime infotainment content stories that the lead coder coded more specifically, causing the majority of the miscodes.

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[9] Due to a timer malfunction, there were 12 KPTV newscasts with less than one minute of the newscast not on tape. The missing segments included either the opening tease at the beginning of the news, or the final "headlines" segment at the end of the newscast. Scripts and computer-generated read-rate times were used to approximate the times of the missing segments. Comparisons between coder hand-timed copy and the computer-generated script times on other stories matched within +/-2 seconds. The lead coder watched all of these segments as they originally aired, and can therefore attest to the accuracy of the scripts, content, and presentation of the involved stories.

Presentation coding matched between the lead coder and the presentation coder 90% of the time. The most common coding problem was a missed element: in cases where both coders saw a presentation element, coding agreement was almost 100%. (There was only one transition element used by one station seven times during the cross-checking sample that was coded differently by the two coders. This is out of a total of over 1300 presentation elements throughout the cross-checking sample). Therefore, almost all of the miscodes were caused by a missed presentation element by one of the coders. Of these, dissolves caused nearly half of the missed codes, at 49%. While this percentage of missed dissolves is higher than ideal, the element was still included in the final analysis, as only one of a number of elements contributing to infotainment-style presentation.

In summary, the intercoder reliability was judged as acceptable and sufficiently reliable.

Results

News Story Content

To answer Research Question 1, the amount of time devoted to socially responsible hard news story content and infotainment story content was examined and compared for the late night newscasts in the Portland, Oregon television broadcast market. Story length for each coded topic was calculated and categorized as either hard news or infotainment content. During the typical nightly broadcast, the percentage of news time devoted to infotainment content was considerably higher than the percentage of time devoted to hard news content. On nights with exceptional civic events, however, the stations dedicated much more time in their newscasts to socially responsible hard news content.

Socially Responsible Hard News Content

Of the 217 newscasts analyzed, 38 (18%) devoted more possible news time (an individual station's total newscast time minus commercial time) to socially responsible hard news content stories than to infotainment content stories. These hard news topics included government and policy-related stories, military and war stories, crime policy and community action, business and economy, education, and science. ABC affiliate KATU aired the most newscasts with more time devoted to socially responsible hard news content than infotainment content: 16 of 56 newscasts (29%). The CBS affiliate, KOIN, aired 11 such newscasts, out of 52 total (21%). Nine out of 55 (16%) of NBC affiliate KGW's newscasts and 2 out of 54 (4%) Fox affiliate KPTV's newscasts aired more hard news content time than infotainment content time.

Table 2 outlines the average percentage of news time each station devoted

to hard news story content. Over the eight-week period, the average ranged from

KOIN's high of 26% of possible news time for hard news content, to a low of 17%

for KPTV's hard news content. When the eight weeks is divided into pre-, during,

and post-ratings periods, KOIN also had the highest average hard news time period

in the study, with 30% of possible news time discussing socially responsible hard

news topics the two weeks following ratings. In contrast, the first two weeks of the

study included the least percentage devoted to hard news content, at 16% by KPTV.

Heavier hard news days. On their heaviest socially responsible hard news

days, stations increased this content to over half of total possible news time. For

KPTV, this meant 55% of possible news time, or almost 26 minutes (unweighted), of

Table 2

Average Percentage of Possible News Time Devoted to Socially Responsible Hard
News Content

Station	2 Weeks Before Ratings	4 Weeks During Ratings	2 Weeks After Ratings	8 Weeks Average
KOIN (CBS)	24%	24%	30%	26%
KATU (ABC)	29%	18%	26%	23%
KGW (NBC)	25%	19%	26%	22%
KPTV (Fox)	16%	17%	19%	17%

hard news topics on March 2, the night of a controversial local policy change. This is more minutes of hard news than its half-hour competitors have available for news during their broadcasts.

On the half-hour newscasts, KATU used Election Day, February 3, as its biggest hard news endeavor, devoting over sixteen and a half minutes, 66% of possible news time, to examine local and national election results. Like KPTV, KGW's biggest hard news day was March 2. Discussion about a controversial change to a local policy contributed to 13 minutes and 41 seconds of hard news content, 58% of that night's possible news time. KOIN's March 9 show included almost 12 minutes of hard news content covering numerous different topics, 50% of its possible news time.

When comparing by the number of unweighted minutes, one of the three half-hour newscasts aired the most overall minutes of hard news content 50% of newscasts, while hour-long KPTV aired the most the other 50%. Out of 50 nights when all four affiliates aired newscasts[10], KOIN had 13 (26%) late night newscasts with the most time devoted to hard news coverage. KATU had nine nights (18%), and KGW three (6%). KPTV aired the most minutes of hard news content the remaining 25 nights (50%).

Lighter socially responsible hard news days. Each station also had newscasts with the least minutes of hard news content. KGW aired the least unweighted minutes of hard news coverage 19 out of 50 nights (38%). KATU devoted the least

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[10] The other six nights, at least one station did not air a newscast in its regularly scheduled time slot.

time to hard news content 14 nights (28%). KOIN aired the least nine nights

(18%), and KPTV had the lightest hard news content newscast the remaining 8

nights (16%).

On their lightest hard news days, three of the four stations devoted less than

5% of their possible news time to hard news content. KATU aired six newscasts with

less than one minute and 25 seconds of hard news content, including 4 with less than

one minute of hard news content and one with less than 30 seconds of such news.

KGW had two newscasts with less than 5% of hard news content (one minute and 16

seconds). KPTV aired two newscasts with less than two and a half minutes of hard

news content over the course of an hour. KOIN's lightest hard news content

newscast contained less than 6% such news.

Trends. Over the eight weeks of the study, two of the stations increased their

average percentage of time devoted to hard news content per newscast. From January

to March, KOIN and KPTV each added hard news content time to their newscasts.

KATU and KGW both had decreases in hard news coverage during weeks

designated as the ratings period, a phenomenon that will be discussed further in

reference to Research Question 2.

The first, or lead, story of the newscast was most likely to be socially

responsible hard news on KGW, with 34% of its leads discussing such topics. KOIN

and KPTV began less than one-quarter of their newscasts with a hard news story, and

KPTV aired the least hard news lead stories, 15%. Figure 1 depicts the breakdown

of topics designated as the most important story of the day.
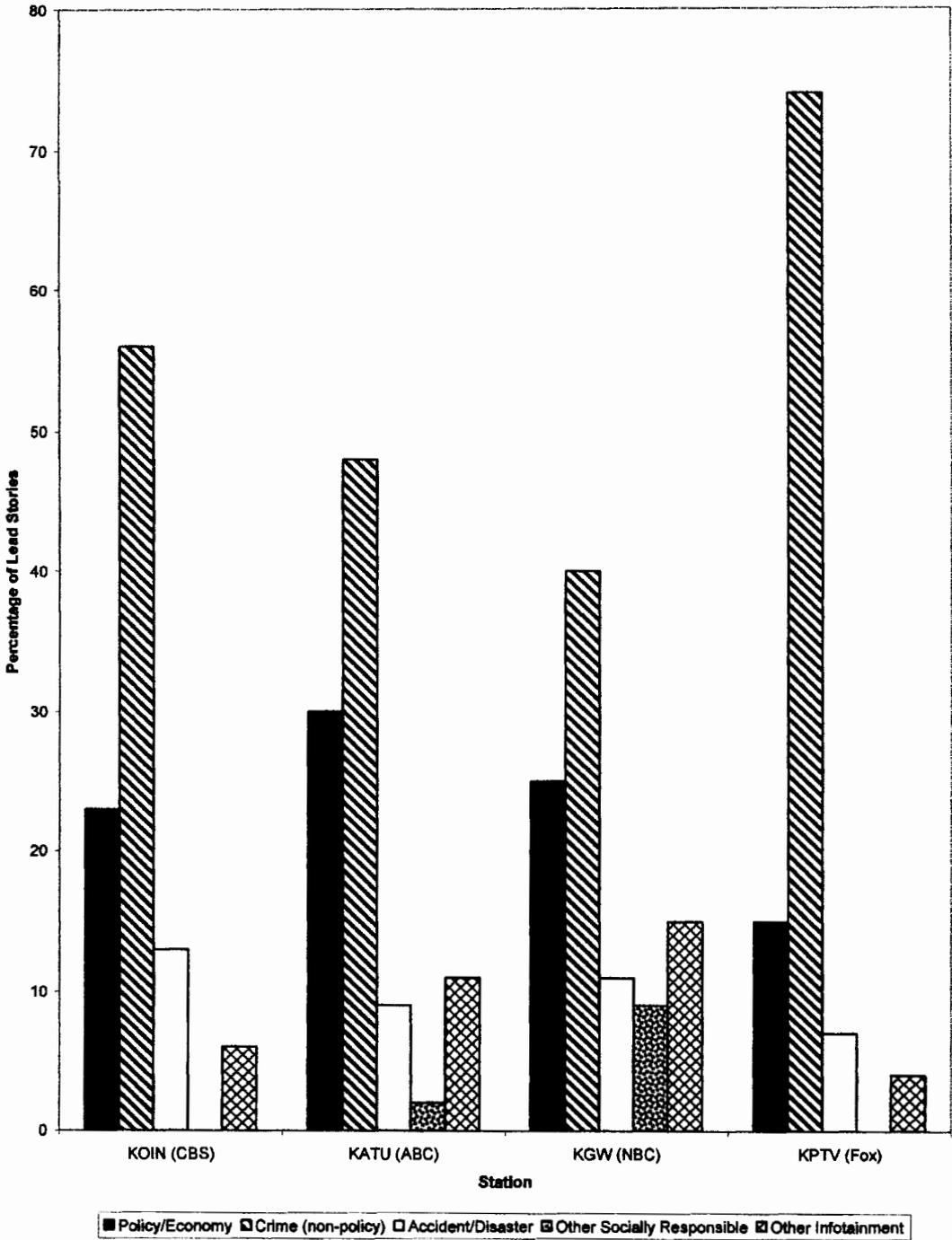
Figure 1. Lead story content percentage by station

Infotainment Content

One hundred and seventy-nine of 217 newscasts (82%) contained more time devoted to infotainment content than to socially responsible hard news content. These infotainment topics included stories about entertainment and celebrities, news you can use, crime and accidents/disasters without a policy or community action angle, and features. For percentage of possible news time, KPTV aired the most infotainment story content 45 out of 50 nights (90%) when all stations aired a newscast. KOIN and KATU each aired two newscasts with the highest percentage of infotainment content (4% each), and KGW aired one such newscast (2%). In terms of unweighted minutes per newscast, however, KPTV aired the most infotainment content every night of the study.

Table 3 outlines the average time each station devoted to infotainment story content per newscast. Over the eight weeks, KPTV averaged 59% of its possible news time covering infotainment news content. This average equals more than 27 unweighted minutes of these topics, more minutes than its late night competitors have available for possible news time. Of the half-hour competitors, KOIN averaged the most infotainment content, 44% of possible news time. KATU aired the least infotainment content time on average, with 38% of its possible news time.

Heavier infotainment days. On their heaviest infotainment nights, newscasts had more than half of possible news time devoted to this content. Forty-five of 54 KPTV newscasts (83%) spent more than half of possible news time airing infotainment content. Fifteen KOIN newscasts (of 52 total, or 29%) and 14 KGW

Table 3

Average Percentage of Possible News Time Devoted to Infotainment Content

Station	2 Weeks Before Ratings	4 Weeks During Ratings	2 Weeks After Ratings	8 Weeks Average
KPTV (Fox)	58%	60%	58%	59%
KOIN (CBS)	44%	46%	39%	44%
KGW (NBC)	37%	45%	39%	41%
KATU (ABC)	30%	44%	34%	38%

newscasts out of 55 shows (25%) spent more than half of their time on infotainment content. KATU had 13 of 56 such shows (23%).

Trends. Newscasts with a higher percentage of infotainment content tended to have a lower percentage of socially responsible hard news content. Every night KPTV aired the least hard news content among the four broadcasts, it also aired at least 30 minutes of infotainment content. For KGW, a newscast with less than one minute of hard news content meant at least 15 minutes of infotainment content. Similarly, when KATU aired less than a minute of hard news content, there were more than 13 minutes of infotainment content.

In the time frame studied, the four weeks designated as ratings (February 5 through March 3, 2004) averaged a higher percentage of news time devoted to

infotainment content than the other study weeks (see Table 3). The change was small for KPTV and KOIN, with a 2% increase in infotainment content during ratings. During the same four weeks, KGW spent 8% more news time and KATU 14% more news time dedicated to these non-socially responsible topics. Unlike the trends in hard news content, none of the stations either increased or decreased their infotainment news content steadily across the eight-week time frame. As Research Question 2 examines possible news content changes in response to a ratings period, these trends will be discussed in the next section.

Infotainment content stories, specifically non-policy- or community-oriented crime, were the lead story of all four newscasts more than half of the studied dates (see Figure 1). KPTV started its news most often with infotainment story content, 85% of leads. Seventy-four percent of KPTV's newscasts began with a non-hard news crime story (crime outside of a policy/community issue context). KOIN also began more than half of its newscasts (56%) with a non-hard news crime story. KGW aired the least non-hard news crime lead stories (40%) and least total infotainment content lead stories (66%).

KPTV and KOIN relied heavily on non-hard news content crime stories: this was the largest contributor to infotainment content time on both stations. For KPTV, nearly 48% of infotainment content time was crime-related (see Table 4). Over half (51%) of KOIN's average infotainment content time also fell into this category.

While KATU and KGW did not fill as much airtime with stories from this category, they each derived approximately one-third of their average infotainment

Table 4

Average Percentage of Infotainment Content Time Devoted to Non-Hard News Crime Content

Station	2 Weeks Before Ratings	4 Weeks During Ratings	2 Weeks After Ratings	8 Weeks Average
KOIN (CBS)	45%	54%	49%	51%
KPTV (Fox)	48%	43%	55%	48%
KATU (ABC)	29%	40%	35%	35%
KGW (NBC)	24%	36%	38%	33%

content time from infotainment crime (35% for KATU and 33% for KGW). KGW

was the only station to show a steady increase in this topic: from 24% to 38% of

infotainment content over eight weeks, an addition of one minute and 20 seconds of

non-policy crime.

News Story Content and Ratings Periods

In order to compare news content during the ratings and non-ratings periods,

the air dates of the newscasts were divided into three time periods: the two weeks

prior to the ratings period, the four weeks during the ratings period, and the two

weeks following the ratings period.[11] This allowed for comparisons both within the same station's newscasts, and also to its late night news competitors. The following findings use these comparisons to address Research Question 2.

Tables 2 and 3 outline the changes in the average percentage of time spent airing socially responsible hard news and infotainment content across the pre-, during, and post-ratings period cycle. There were changes in the time devoted to both types of content for all analyzed stations when comparing the ratings newscasts to the non-ratings newscasts. The specifics of these changes, however, depended upon the individual station. KPTV increased time spent on socially responsible hard news content during ratings when compared to the two weeks prior, while KGW and KATU decreased this content during the same time. KOIN's average time devoted to socially responsible hard news content remain exactly the same through ratings.

In contrast to these changes in hard new content, possible news time devoted to infotainment story content increased for all four stations during ratings. Much of this added infotainment content time was presented via longer-than-average length news stories, often in a "series" of related pieces. These stories were nearly nonexistent during the weeks before and after the ratings period. Here is a breakdown of how each station used these longer-length pieces, and their subsequent effects on time devoted hard news and infotainment content during ratings.

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[11] Before ratings included Thursday, January 22 through Wednesday, February 4, 2004. During ratings included Thursday, February 5 through Wednesday, March 3, 2004. After ratings included Thursday, March 4 through Wednesday, March 17, 2004.

KATU. ABC affiliate KATU had the largest changes in average news time for both hard news and infotainment story content during the ratings period. Only 22 additional minutes of total hard news time were aired during the four week ratings period when compared to the two weeks before, resulting in an 11% decrease for average time devoted to this content. During the same time period, the total number of minutes dedicated to infotainment story content nearly tripled when compared to the two weeks prior, increasing the average daily time by 14%.

Much of this added infotainment content came in the form of two series. One of these was dedicated to a behind-the-scenes look at the lives of local soldiers called "Inside Iraq." This series had the potential to be socially responsible hard news content, but instead of focusing on military practices, policies, and solider missions, the stories focused on the personal, the dramatic, and the emotional, making it a human-interest infotainment series. Teases each night for the following day's installments indicated that the harder news stories were airing in an earlier KATU newscast, leaving the features for the late night news.

The other KATU series, focusing on the local star of ABC reality prime time show *The Bachelorette*, was all but a commercial for the program, a phenomenon known as plugola (see McAllister, 2002 for discussion). These stories literally made entertainment the news. The five stories in this series, plus numerous teases, used over 16 and a half minutes of airtime for this entertainment "news."

In contrast, KATU also had an example of a socially responsible sweeps story in their presentation of "Pricey Prescriptions." This was one of very few ratings stories airing on any of the stations that could be placed into a hard news category. It

examined the impact of high-cost prescription medications, and included analysis and comments from those working in heath care and those needing the drugs for their health. Business, health, and economic issues were the main focus of this story.

When these special stories stopped airing in the weeks following ratings, the amount of time dedicated to infotainment story content dropped, but still remained 4% higher than prior to ratings. Time devoted to hard news content increased by 8% at the same time. This was 3% less possible news time than aired before ratings.

KGW. As on KATU, newscasts on NBC affiliate KGW devoted a higher percentage of possible news time to hard news story content during the four weeks surrounding the ratings period and decreased such coverage during ratings. Average time devoted to hard news coverage decreased by 6% during ratings. For the same time frame, infotainment story content time increased by 8%.

Much of this increase in infotainment content came in the form of two series entitled "Unit 8 Investigation" and "Your Health." While both investigative and health stories have the potential to be hard-hitting hard news investigations, these series as presented on KGW examined cable television bills, a professional poker-playing mom, and how to find love online. Instead of fitting the description of Tuchman's "important" socially responsible hard news category, these stories were more of "interesting" soft news (Tuchman, 1973, p. 173), placing them in an infotainment category.

All 15 of KGW's ratings stories aired prior to the first commercial break in the newscast. This is the segment where the majority of KGW's hard news content generally airs. Fourteen of the stories were longer than three minutes in length. The

increase of the percentage of time devoted to infotainment here helps to explain the subsequent decrease in hard news time as well.

Following ratings, the amount of possible news time devoted to infotainment content dropped by 6%, while hard news content increased by 7% (remember that time devoted to sports, weather, and commercial time was not included in this analysis, allowing for these percentage changes). Even so, the average percentage of news time devoted to infotainment content remained higher after ratings when compared to before ratings, adding an average of 4% more possible news time per newscast. Hard news content time was also 1% higher following ratings than before.

KPTV. Fox affiliate KPTV devoted more time to both infotainment story content and hard news story content during ratings, increasing the former by 1% of possible news time and the latter by 2%. While neither of these increases is significant, KPTV was the only station to increase hard news content during the ratings period.

Much of the infotainment content presented on KPTV during ratings came in the form of an investigative series called "I-Team Undercover." The series contained 10 stories, and aired over numerous newscasts, often with more than one story within a newscast. The reporter teamed up with an organization called Perverted Justice to identify potential child sexual predators in the Portland area. The story was told under the guise of an undercover sting operation to "bust" these potential offenders before they could do harm to local children. The series, while pursuing a public service objective, presented the investigation as a dramatic, dangerous, and emotionally- and sexually-charged finding, lacking much in the way

of contextualizing background information for these types of crimes in the community. KPTV did take this opportunity to use both its news broadcasts and its website to give parents advice about keeping their children safe, adding to the public service benefits of this otherwise infotainment-oriented series.

Following ratings, KPTV's average infotainment content time decreased to equal the time devoted to infotainment during the first two weeks of the study. Additionally, the station continued to add more time to hard news story content, so that by the end of the eight week study, an average of a minute and a quarter of socially responsible hard news story content, or nearly 3% of possible news time, had been added per show.

KOIN. CBS affiliate KOIN's average time per newscast devoted to hard news story content remained the same for the first six weeks of the data collection period, showing no increase or decrease during the ratings period. The amount of news time dedicated to infotainment increased by 2% over the same time period.

KOIN aired two series during the February ratings period, one of which featured three infotainment content stories within the same newscast. This series used 9 minutes and 10 seconds to show a reporter completing fire rescue training. This is three minutes more than the average 6 minutes and 10 seconds of hard news content aired per day on KOIN. The second series featured another reporter living in a homeless camp over the course of two newscasts, using nearly 10 minutes of news time during the two days. An emotionally-charged human interest angle was used to relate the tales of the residents, focusing on the people more than the issues surrounding homelessness and joblessness in the Portland area. Both of these series

contributed to the increase in infotainment content time found during ratings on KOIN.

Following ratings, time devoted to infotainment content decreased to its lowest level for KOIN, 7% less possible news time than it used during the ratings period. Time devoted to socially responsible hard news content increased by 6% during the same time period to its highest level for the eight week period.

Presentation Elements

The study also examined video and audio presentation elements within the newscasts. Some of these elements (labeled by Grabe et al. (2001) as infotainment-style) appeared regularly on Portland's newscasts. The four stations used these elements with both hard news content and infotainment content stories. Three of the four news organizations used an infotainment-style of presentation nearly equally for hard news content and infotainment content, with KOIN being the exception. Two stations, KPTV and KGW, presented more than half of their stories using these elements. Figure 2 illustrates the use of these presentation elements both among the four stations and within each particular station's news broadcast.

Overall usage

As standard audio cues, each station had its own theme music to begin each newscast, lead into commercial breaks, and close their broadcasts. Certain segments, often concerning investigative or election content, also had their own musical score on three of the four stations (KOIN again the exception). Sound effects were almost always paired with a video transition element, and were used regularly by KPTV and KATU.
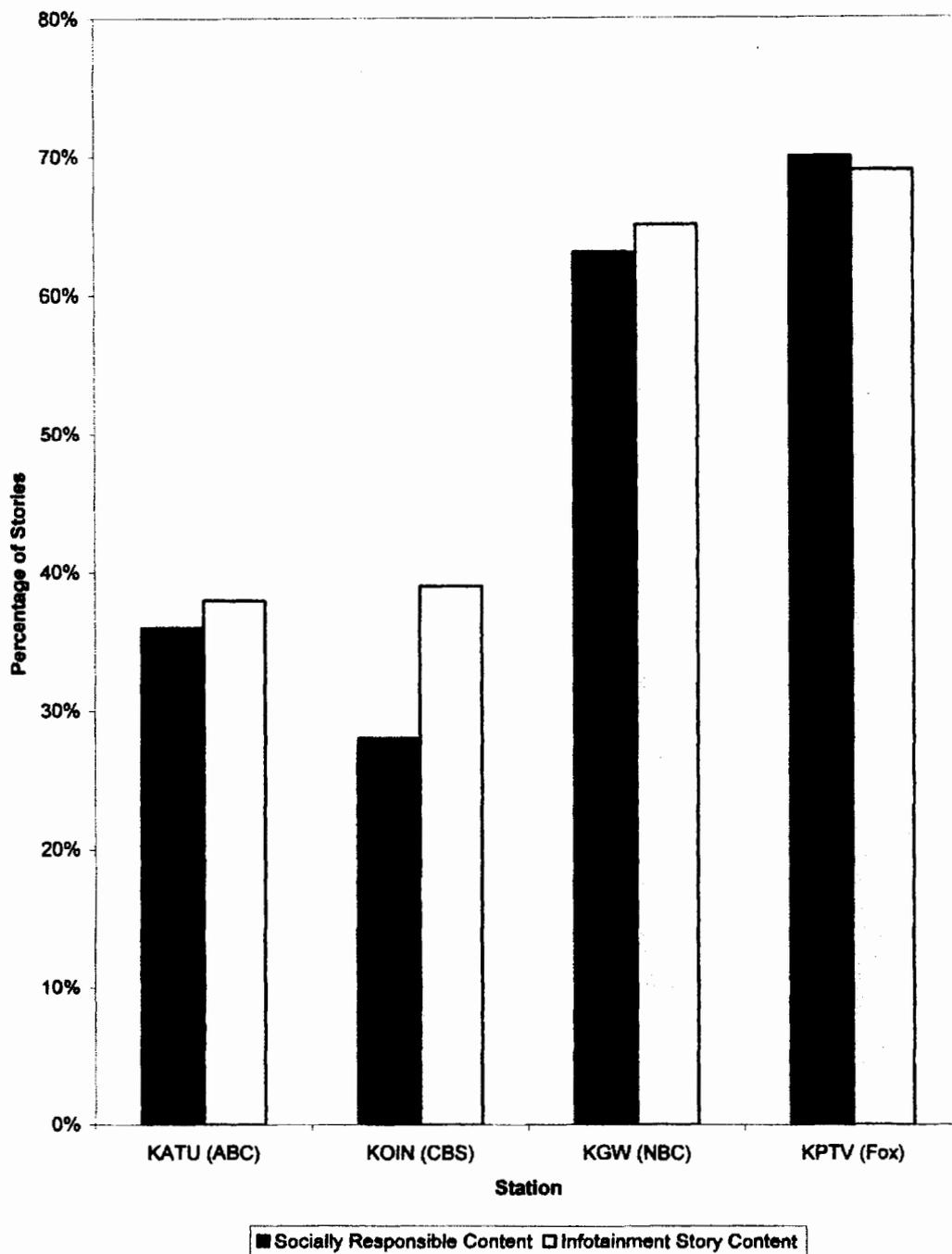
Figure 2. Percentage of hard news and infotainment content stories presented with infotainment-style elements per station.

For video transitions, split screens were regularly used by the three half-hour newscasts for in-studio anchor to out-in-the-field reporter transitions. Opening animations were also a common element within newscasts, signaling the beginning of specific segments within a broadcast. Dissolves were often used for transitions into and out of segments, especially those that began with animations (such as health, weather, or investigative reports).

Promotional "teases" ("these stories coming up next...stay tuned!") were generally the newscast segments with the most infotainment-style presentation elements. These teases combined numerous audio and video transition elements within a relatively brief (generally less than one minute, often less than 30 seconds in length) amount of time. Wipes (combined with sound effects for KPTV and KATU) were most often used as transitions between news stories within teases. Almost all teases for all stations aired with theme music. Three of the four stations also aired a tease "close" ending animation to remind viewers which newscast they were watching on a regular, if not daily (and in the case of KPTV, on a segment-by-segment), basis.

Each station also used presentation elements in ways that were unique to that particular station. Individual station analysis was also conducted to find the differences among the Portland broadcasts.

Individual stations

KPTV. Fox affiliate KPTV had the heaviest use of infotainment-style presentation elements in its hour-long newscast, both for socially responsible hard news and infotainment story content. Seventy percent of full-length (non-tease) hard

news content and sixty-nine percent of full-length infotainment content stories

used infotainment-style elements of presentation. Because of the overall number of

infotainment stories airing on KPTV, there were nearly three times as many

infotainment content stories presented using infotainment-style elements as hard

news content stories presented using similar elements.

For video transitions, KPTV used a white flash for almost any transition that

did not include an in-studio camera shot. During the typical newscast, this meant

more than 20 white flashes, oftentimes more.[12] This does not include those flashes

used in conjunction with other transitions, which are discussed below. KPTV was the

only station to make frequent use of this video transition.

KPTV aired a number of "opening" animations for segments, complete with

sound effects, sometimes music, and almost always with a wipe to the next video

element. The story content of segments beginning with an animation varied between

hard news and infotainment. In any given newscast, there were opens for "America,"

"World," and "Northwest" news (these three were a mix of hard news and

infotainment content), War on Terror (usually hard news), A New Iraq (mixed

content), Most Wanted (non-hard news crime), Mad Cow disease (mixed content),

Sports, Weather, Classrooms in Crisis (local education, usually hard news content),

Vote 2004 (elections, usually hard news content), I-Team (investigative-type reports,

often infotainment content), I-Team Undercover (more investigative reports,

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[12] This does not include white flashes between video and soundbites, which were not included in this study because of different editing techniques used among the studied stations. It should be noted, however, that this was one of the most popular uses of the white flash during KPTV's newscasts.

generally infotainment content), Breaking News (often run more than once per newscast, and usually involving non-hard news crime), and *American Idol* (infotainment, in reference to the Fox prime time television program).

In addition to these segment opens, there were also "live" versions of many of these animations to introduce a reporter in the field. These also had sound effects and a wipe transition to the reporter.

Certain teases had similar opening animations. Almost every tease also had an animated close, branding the segment with KPTV's news slogan "First. Live. Local." before the commercials began. During an average newscast, there were 21 opening and closing animations. There were 28 animations in the most heavily "opened" show, 15 in the least. The latter occurred during a weekend newscast, which has approximately five minutes less total newscast time than the weekday newscast.

Some of the segments with animations also had a specific matching wipe to transition from one video element to the next. The "America," "World," and "Northwest" segments, at least one of which aired every night, had these special wipes, which included a sound effect as well. Tease segments with more than one news story also included similar wipes with sound effects.

During a typical newscast, KPTV also aired two "prepackaged" teases. This means these teases were not put together live on the air, but were edited together prior to news time. While transitions within prepackaged elements were not examined individually for this study, it should be noted that these teases incorporated numerous infotainment elements, including multiple animations, music, sound

effects, and a combination white flash-wipe-animation-sound effect-dissolve transition element that aired as often as five times per tease, twice per newscast.

KPTV also used a number of presentation elements that were coded as "other." Many of these included graphics, maps, or video flipping around to reveal a reporter in the field, a common way for KPTV to introduce the first story of the newscast. Another example appeared during the final newscast segment of weekday newscasts, which recaps the three biggest stories of the KPTV news. Two of the video elements were presented within an animating L-shaped frame, making them stand out from "regular" video clips.

These elements all appeared regularly in newscasts throughout the study time period, indicating that this is KPTV's typical newscast presentation style. KPTV regularly used three times as many of these infotainment-style audio and video elements as its late night competitors.

KGW. Like KPTV, NBC affiliate KGW used infotainment-style elements with the majority of both infotainment content and socially responsible hard news content stories. Sixty-three percent of KGW's full-length hard news content stories were presented with infotainment-style elements. Sixty-five percent of its full-length infotainment content stories were presented with similar elements. Because there were more infotainment content stories than hard news content stories overall on KGW, there were more infotainment content stories with infotainment-style presentation elements than hard news content stories with infotainment-style elements.

Also like KPTV, KGW had a presentation style that it followed almost every night. The KGW newscast had animations to begin the news and to introduce the top story for all 55 shows. Reporters in the field almost always interacted with the anchors via split screens (95% of newscasts). During the weekday newscasts, the station used another opening animation to begin the second news segment, although there was no comparable open for the weekends. A sports tease animation and a sports open were also aired regularly. The average KGW newscast contained five animations, although during ratings, many newscasts featured six.

Between video elements that did not include reporters in the field, KGW used dissolves more than other infotainment-style transitions. Wipes were also used on a regular basis, often as the transition for a segment titled "News Beyond the Northwest." Infotainment or hard news content, of which this segment was a mix, did not affect the use of the video transition.

Audio cues were limited to the theme music used to begin and end the show and its segments before commercials. Two special segment opens, often devoted to infotainment news content and used mainly during the weeks of ratings, "Unit 8 Investigation" and "Your Health," also had music. Sound effects were used sparingly, attached only to the top story animation.

KATU. The newscasts on ABC affiliate KATU also used infotainment-style presentation elements nearly equally for socially responsible hard news and infotainment content stories. Unlike KPTV and KGW, however, less than half of full-length stories contained these elements. Thirty-six percent of full-length hard news content stories and thirty-eight percent of full-length infotainment content

stories used at least one infotainment-style presentation element. This latter was the lowest percentage of infotainment content with infotainment presentation elements among the analyzed stations. However, because the ratio of infotainment content stories to hard news stories on KATU was more than two to one, there were twice as many infotainment content stories with infotainment-style presentation elements than there were hard news content stories with infotainment-style presentation elements.

Animations had a role in presenting the news on KATU. Like KPTV, KATU had a "live" animation with sound effects to transition to reporters in the field. The station used a similar animation, also with sound effects, to introduce news content it labeled "New on Nightcast," indicating the story had information not aired in previous newscasts. There were also animations with music for stories concerning Iraq, including an animation for a ratings period infotainment-content series entitled "Inside Iraq." The newscast and most teases also began with an animation, and if time permitted, the show also ended with an animated close to thank viewers for watching KATU's news. During the eight-week period, newscasts averaged seven animations per night, used both for hard news and infotainment story content.

Split screens between the anchors in the studio and the reporters in the field appeared in 32 of 56 (57%) newscasts, with as many as five anchor-reporter split screens in a show. KATU also used the dissolve transition regularly, with an average of 18 appearances per newscast. Although not counted for this study, it should be noted that transitions between video and soundbites often used wipes.

Within KATU's newscasts, the tease segments included the most infotainment-style presentation elements. The tease prior to the first commercial break began with an animation, as did a number of other longer teases in the show. These included wipe transitions with sound effects between video elements. Some of these teases also ended with an animated close. As on the other studied stations, KATU's teases generally contained music.

KOIN. CBS affiliate KOIN was more likely to use infotainment-style presentation elements with infotainment content stories than with hard news content stories. While 28% of KOIN's full-length socially responsible hard news content stories were embellished with infotainment-style presentation elements (the lowest percentage in the study), 39% of its full-length infotainment content stories included similar elements. Because there were more infotainment content stories overall per newscast, there were over twice as many full-length infotainment content stories using these presentation elements than hard news content stories.

KOIN's presentation style incorporated every coded infotainment video and audio element during the study, but used very few on a consistent basis. As an example, in the video transition category, the first and last weeks of the study each contained the map fly effect in 12 of the 13 studied newscasts. For each of the six weeks in between however, the effect was used in four or fewer shows per week. In a similar fashion, the page peel effect was used much more heavily the final two weeks than at any other time, in 12 of the 14 final newscasts.

White flashes, wipes, slow dissolves, and animated openings and closings all also made sporadic appearances throughout the analyzed newscasts. Oftentimes, the

transitions were not exactly the same each time they aired. For example, the wipe used varied between newscasts from a simple straight colored vertical line and a fullscreen flying red "6" (for "KOIN6 News," the name of the newscast at the time of the study) with dissolves and sound effects as part of the transition. The different wipes were used in the same segments of the newscasts as the transition between similar news stories.

The one video transition element this station used on a regular basis was the split screen, which appeared in all but three newscasts (94% of the time). KOIN used this element in a different manner than its competitors by mixing the map fly effect with the split screen to fly the reporter from their respective split box to full screen. The split screen transition appeared up to 9 times per newscast, with up to 5 reporter flies from the effect.

Audio elements were generally limited to the theme music at the beginning and end of the newscast, and as a transition to the commercial break. KOIN rarely used sound effects, with the exception being in conjunction with the flying red "6" wipe, which was not used on a regular basis during the study period.

As with the other stations, the use of specific presentation elements did not depend upon hard news or infotainment story content. However, maps (for map flies) were generally used more often for crime and accident stories, which were almost always of infotainment story content.

Discussion

A socially responsible television news organization emphasizes the information citizens need to make informed decisions about their surroundings. This information should focus on politically-, socially-, and economically-relevant news potentially affecting those in the broadcast area. In addition, it should be presented in a manner conducive to viewer understanding. On a typical news day, the late night local television newscasts in Portland, Oregon often do not live up to these standards.

News Story Content

Hard news content discussing such topics as policy, politics, the economy, and how these affect the community, ideally should provide the majority of information presented within a socially responsible newscast. Based upon the results presented here, followers of social responsibility might point to Portland's late night television newscasts as poor examples of citizen-oriented news products. With 82% of the newscasts devoting a larger percentage of time to infotainment content than to hard news content, the emphasis appears to be more about entertaining than enlightening the viewer. While all four stations increased hard news content on days with important civic implications, such as local Election Day, infotainment content led the way during a typical newscast.

The high rate of infotainment content did not occur because there was a lack of hard news; there was plenty of locally-impacting hard news content to report during the eight weeks analyzed. This was a time period that included a local election, a controversial war, and a higher-than-average unemployment rate in Oregon. By the standards of social responsibility, knowledge of politics,

international relations, and the economy are necessary for a citizen to fully engage in a democratic society. While Portland's late night broadcasts did report on these socially responsible topics, they were generally not the main news focus. For 73% of the newscasts, content similar to this was not even considered important enough to air as the lead story. Instead, topics such as the latest crime incident, house fire, or even celebrity scandal took priority over socially responsible hard news content. When news topics with more potential citizenship value did air, the emotional and the personal often took precedence over the issue at hand, softening the news into an infotainment category.

Local media critics and national journalism research organizations have expressed concern regarding these trends in Portland. Since 2001, Portland's local television newscasts have been identified as not airing enough business or political news (Willmore, 2004); as lacking stories impacting local residents (PEJ, 2001); and as containing too much crime news (Schulberg, 2003; Schulberg, 2004, January 20). These are all critiques related to social responsibility, and the results of this study provide evidence for such criticism.

The amount of possible news time dedicated to hard political and election news coverage varied by station. The first three months of 2004 saw a local election affecting the Portland metropolitan area and national Presidential primaries affecting the entire country. Two of the stations spent little news time prior to the February 3 local election discussing the local economic policy measure up for vote, while the other two spent much more news time examining the issue.

Less than half of the newscasts on CBS affiliate KOIN and Fox affiliate KPTV before February 3 had any mention of elections, candidates, or measures, local or national. The information that did air was generally more national in nature than local. Although Oregon's Presidential primary was not until May, stories airing in January consisted mainly of national or non-regional Presidential candidate poll numbers, candidate stumping grounds, and voting in other states' primaries. While this is important citizenship information in a Presidential election year, information regarding the more immediate local election was not provided until just before ballots were due. The local ballot measure at hand had important local economic consequences, but was not discussed on KPTV until three days before ballot counting; KOIN aired one story over a week prior to the election, but then did not discuss the issue again until the night prior to results being tabulated.

Information provided this close to the ballot deadline may have been useful in areas where voters physically go to the polling places on Election Day; however, Oregon is a vote-by-mail state. The information provided the night before was of little help to those who had already returned their ballots. The socially responsible newscast would have examined the ballot measure in-depth with enough time for voters to still make their choices. On a positive note, KOIN did follow up with the consequences of the results in newscasts after the election. For KPTV, however, most on-air information concerning the measure was provided as the ballots were being counted.

In contrast, ABC affiliate KATU and NBC affiliate KGW covered this community-impacting topic earlier and more thoroughly. On each late night

newscast leading up to the election, both stations each presented at least one hard news content story, and oftentimes more, concerning local and national campaigns, candidates, and issues. The effects of the passage or failure of the local ballot measure received analysis early enough prior to the election to allow viewers to take the information with them to the polls. In addition, the community consequences of the election results were also discussed following the ballot count.

Other hard news topics, however, needed more in-depth coverage by all Portland stations to promote a socially- and politically-knowledgeable citizenship. An example is the controversial gay marriage policy that was abruptly implemented in Portland in March 2004. In the weeks and months leading up to this local change, other states and cities around the country were debating this same issue. While the local newscasts did air stories relevant to gay marriage policy, many of these pieces included little in-depth discussion. Instead, gay celebrity weddings and scandals caused by those performing such ceremonies put a dramatic infotainment spin on what could have been an opportunity for important community-impact discussion. Few reports framed the question in terms of potential Portland-area policy impact: what did Portlanders think about the issue? Was it a possibility in the local area? What impact would it have on the community? Instead of taking a proactive look into the effects of such a policy on local citizens' lives, the stations' coverage was more *re*active, reporting on the issue after the change had already been made.

Gay marriage policies also had an impact beyond the boundaries of the Portland metro area; gay marriage was a topic of great controversy and political significance across the country in 2004. Presidential candidates used the issue in

their political platforms. A measure to ban the practice eventually landed on the

Oregon voter's ballot. This was a potential policy-changing topic citizen news

viewers needed to make an informed decision about, but at least for the first quarter

of the year, the much-needed information was not provided by the local late night

news.

Government, politics, and policies were not the only socially responsible hard

news content stories needing more comprehensive coverage. Willmore (2004)

observed inadequate coverage of business information on the local newscasts; this is

also a valid criticism within the context of this analysis. While there were sporadic

mentions of the recession, taxes, business, and the economy, the newscasts generally

did not take the time to thoroughly examine these topics. Those stories that did air

tended toward the more sensationalistic and dramatic. For example, a business story

that aired on numerous stations involved the somewhat controversial opening of a

Hooters restaurant in the Portland area. While this story did bring a rare community

morals perspective to the newscasts, it is hard to believe that the biggest business

news in a metro area with over a million viewing households and a higher-than-

average unemployment rate is the opening of a restaurant.

One example that did stand out as a socially responsible hard news business

story involved the effects of a possible new casino in Southwest Washington, part of

the Portland metro area. This story is one that provides a good example of how to

present business and economic news in a socially responsible manner, yet with a

local impact angle. Business owners, residents of the surrounding area, and possible

patrons of the new casino discussed both the positives and the negatives of having

such a business in their neighborhood. Multi-angle discussion such as this allows others in the community to make more informed decisions about their surroundings. Similar business and economy stories were hard to find, however, on the late news in early 2004.

Even the basic stock report did not appear with any regularity. KOIN was the only station to air stock numbers during its late night newscasts, and only on a sporadic basis. A graphic reporting the closing bell numbers sometimes appeared during a tease with music. It was never referenced by the anchors, and never mentioned by any other station's late night news.

The Project for Excellence in Journalism (2001) felt story selection could be improved by including more items with important citizenship implications for the local community. This analysis supports PEJ's concern. Issues discussed in such stories should affect the local community, even if the story does not originate locally. For example, in addition to the election, policy, and economy stories mentioned previously, stories discussing such topics as human cloning, national security policies, and war and military updates also aired on all of the stations. These stories did not necessarily immediately impact the Portland area or occur in the Pacific Northwest, but had the potential to affect local citizens and their communities nonetheless. Again, providing this socially responsible news content educates that citizen majority that relies on local television newscasts for information.

To keep viewers aware of these regional, national, and international occurrences and policies that might impact them, each station regularly aired news from outside of the immediate viewing area, often in segments labeled as such.

These segments, however, did not always contain socially responsible hard news content, and did not necessarily have an impact on local viewers. For example, one KATU "News Across America" segment included a gruesome crime story from another state, a discussion of another state's gay marriage policy, and an announcement of the latest lottery numbers. The second was a hard news story that could potentially affect policy decisions in other states, including Oregon. The other stories in this segment, however, mainly filled time.

KGW similarly aired a "Beyond the Northwest" segment with a gay marriage policy story, an update on human cloning, a formula to determine a person's risk for divorce, and an entertainment story about the "break-up" of doll-couple Ken and Barbie. Again, the first two stories could potentially impact a person living in Portland; the other two were strictly entertainment fare. KPTV's "America Tonight" segment was regularly a mix of crime, entertainment, and even policy news, such as broadcasting policies affecting Las Vegas Super Bowl parties, often having no impact on the Portland viewer.

A newsroom's social responsibility deals with the relating of relevant issues to improve citizenship and democracy. Two of the Hutchins Commission requirements are to provide a truthful, comprehensive, and contextualized account of the day's events and to provide a representative image of society (The Commission on Freedom of the Press, 1947). The Society of Professional Journalists and the Radio and Television News Directors Association proclaim the enlightenment of the masses and accountability to the public within their codes of ethics (RTNDA, 2000; SPJ, 1996). With 82% of the late night newscasts spending more time on

infotainment content than on socially responsible hard news, however, the late night newscasts in Portland did not live up to these standards.

There were times, however, when Portland's late night television newscasts catered to public enlightenment: when big, important civic matters occurred in the local area. On these nights, such as elections, the stations covered the stories from numerous angles and perspectives for their viewers, giving the audience an idea of how it could be affected. However, for a truly socially responsible newscast, stations should strive to air newscasts *every day* more like those that appeared on Election Day, or like during KOIN's heaviest hard news day, March 9. This KOIN newscast was an example of a "typical" news day with no big single civic event; yet this newscast still included numerous politically- and socially-relevant topics for those living in the Portland area. There was discussion of local government and community meetings concerning the recent allowance of gay marriage, results from national presidential primary elections, a local election vote, and a community discussion about local crime policies. All of these are topics that social responsibility advocates would like to see more of on the news. However, with a typical Portland late night newscast devoting an average of 38% (KATU) to 59% (KPTV) of possible news time to infotainment content, and only 17% (KPTV) to 26% (KOIN) to socially responsible hard news content, Portland's late night newscasts often followed the less responsible path toward entertainment television.

To compare with results found in previous studies of local television news content, the amount of time devoted to hard news content in Portland is similar to that reported by local stations nationwide by the Center for Media and Public Affairs

a decade ago (Grossman, 1998). Five minutes and 40 seconds of hard news per half hour newscast[13] were the findings then; when weighted to compare with the same possible news time, in Portland, CBS affiliate KOIN is the only station to average more hard news content time, 6 minutes and 20 seconds. ABC affiliate KATU averaged 12 seconds less, with 5 minutes and 28 seconds of hard news content time; NBC affiliate KGW averaged 2 seconds less than KATU. The Fox affiliate's hour-long KPTV newscast averaged only 4 minutes and 11 seconds of hard news content when placed on the same scale, showing again that more possible news time does not necessarily mean more hard news content. As with the Center for Media and Public Affairs study, more time was devoted to commercials in Portland than to socially responsible hard news content.

To contrast these hard news content findings with infotainment content findings, in 1994, 55.7% of time in late night newscasts nationwide in markets similar in size to Portland was devoted to infotainment content (Carroll & Tuggle, 1997). The three Portland half-hour newscasts actually fell well below this percentage, with KOIN's high of 44% of average possible news time coming the closest. The hour-long KPTV newscast, however, trumped the Carroll and Tuggle study with 59% of its possible news time devoted to topics deemed infotainment-oriented.[14] When combined with its airing of the least percentage of hard news

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[13] The possible news time used in the Center for Media Affairs study was 24 minutes and 20 seconds (Grossman, 1998).

[14] The Carroll and Tuggle (1997) study placed war and military news into their "sensational and human interest" category (p. 128). Other previous content analyses (see Patterson, 2000, PEJ, 1998), as well as this analysis, categorized war and military news as hard news topics. These topics are

content, the Fox station appears to emphasize holding an audience though infotainment over educating the audience through socially responsible hard news.

This is the case even when comparing KPTV to the other stations in Portland. KPTV averaged more time per newscast on infotainment story content than the half-hours have available for total possible news time. Critics would argue that a socially responsible news organization would use the extra time available in an hour-long newscast to explore important community news topics in-depth; KPTV instead aired softer news stories and non-policy-oriented crime.

This latter topic, crime, was a staple for all of the late night newscasts in Portland, not just KPTV. Crime is a topic that has the potential to examine the socially responsible angles of trends, causes, community impact, and policy implications. Instead of focusing on these areas, however, local television news crime is often presented in the infotainment format of gore, grief, and drama. The Portland news market was not an exception: infotainment crime was determined to be the most important local occurrence of the day more often than any other topic, with more than half (54%) of the lead stories in all newscasts. This is in addition to all of the other crime stories presented during the newscasts, which averaged between 33% and 51% of time devoted to infotainment content, depending upon the station.

It was rare for the Portland late night newscasts to delve deeper into the crime stories they covered, beyond "X crime happened at Y and neighbors are shocked."

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therefore not counted toward the infotainment content statistics within this analysis, or for these comparisons.

The contextualization of the crime, or questions about laws and policies surrounding the crime were only discussed in a handful of news stories combined among the stations. The socially responsible hard news coverage would have included how law enforcement and/or the community plan to combat the crime, or discuss other ways to make the community safer, stronger, and more secure. With crime providing such a large percentage of infotainment content for all stations in Portland, it would seem that an inquiry into the "why"'s and "how"'s of such incidents would be a way to turn infotainment crime into a socially responsible news topic. Instead, the stations aired the easier-to-gather "spot news" of incidental crime with good visuals, emotional victim reaction, and quick fact-gathering ability, at the expense of the more background-intensive investigation often needed to relate hard news.

Despite the plethora of crime news airing on the late night broadcasts, there is evidence that infotainment crime coverage may be decreasing. During his one-week content analysis of the late night local newscasts in December 2003, Schulberg (2004, January 20) found KPTV averaged 16 minutes of crime coverage, and KGW five minutes of the same. During this eight-week analysis, KPTV averaged just under 13 minutes, and KGW just over three minutes of this content (KOIN and KATU averaged just over five minutes and almost three-and-a-half minutes respectively). While it is difficult to determine whether this is a step in the right direction, or just a sampling coincidence, there is no doubt that non-hard-news crime plays a very important role in filling news time in Portland.

While this abundance of both infotainment crime news and other stories categorized as infotainment during the Portland newscasts may not be best for providing important citizenship information, it should be noted that not all infotainment news content is "bad." Indeed, many of the features aired on Portland's newscasts can be considered "useful" information, if not necessarily democracy- or citizenship-enhancing, and therefore not socially responsible hard news. For example, health, safety, and recall items, often dubbed "news you can use," can all provide important information to the viewer. Knowing there is a new way to treat migraines, the local bridge is closed, or the car needs a replacement part to prevent possible serious injury all have elements of viewer usefulness. Infotainment story content can also contribute to news as a public service. KPTV aired a feature series (discussed in the next section) that won an award for its service to the public.

However, just as infotainment content can be useful, it can also be purely entertainment. Janet Jackson's breast-baring Super Bowl half time show occurred during the time frame of this analysis. The local newscasts all made a point to air the "wardrobe malfunction" numerous times over the course of numerous newscasts. KPTV even teased Ms. Jackson's apology to her "offended" fans throughout one newscast as "breaking news," placing special urgency on the event.

While the half time show was the talk around water coolers the week after the incident, the newsworthiness of the mishap should have been more of the possible ethics and policy violations of the occurrence and less of the incident itself. While these more serious issues did eventually make their way into the local newscasts, the scandal and nudity was the focus at first.

Other celebrities also made the headlines. The day domestic advice celebrity Martha Stewart was convicted of obstruction of justice and lying to the government about a stock sale, KOIN led its newscast with the story. KOIN and KGW both began their newscasts another night with a possible Portland connection to the alleged rape scandal concerning professional basketball star Kobe Bryant. All four stations started their newscasts with the trade of local sports figure Rasheed Wallace on February 9, and KGW and KATU led with the story again the following evening as well. KATU then again revisited the occurrence the following week as its top story on February 16. While some of these stories did have a local connection, none of them impacted the day-to-day life of citizens of the Portland area. These stories appeal to an audience as solely entertainment fare.

In summary, on the typical news night, the late night Portland newscasts spent much more time providing local viewers with infotainment news content than with more socially responsible hard news content. While all four broadcasts stepped up their socially responsible hard news coverage on days with important civic happenings, topics that affect the lives of citizens on a daily basis took a backseat to dramatic tales of crime, entertainment, and other infotainment content on the majority of nights. Portland news viewers relying on the late night local television newscasts as their source of community information are receiving much more in the way of entertainment news than that which can be considering enlightening.

Ratings Periods and Infotainment

Although infotainment content often filled the majority of news time throughout the eight weeks examined here, the amount of time devoted to this

content by all four stations increased further during the four weeks designated as ratings. This increase followed what the limited literature predicted: longer than average soft news content stories with high promotional potential airing specifically during ratings. The February 2004 ratings period uncovered a plethora of the special "sweeps pieces" critics love to hate. Every station aired a number of these stories, the vast majority of which were infotainment content, and often contained elements of this presentation style as well. Almost all of these stories were longer than the typical news piece.

The problem with these longer-length, often multiple-story, pieces is that they rarely serve any purpose other than acting as attention-grabbers. While reporters are rarely given more than 2 minutes to tell their story during a typical newscast, these sweeps pieces are often longer than 3 minutes, with some as long as 5 or 6 minutes per installment. Instead of using this extra time to delve deeper in the background of heavy-hitting community-impacting issues, these stories instead tend to follow the path toward entertainment.

Take, for example, the "Inside Iraq" series ABC affiliate KATU aired during February 2004. This series had the potential to provide a good basis for military, war, and policy understanding. These angles, however, were generally not explored. During the first installment, the series showed promise of examining international hard news impact, with a look at how and why local soldiers were training Iraqis at new jobs in their war-torn country. As the series progressed over the days and weeks of sweeps, however, the stories became more and more feature oriented. The focus was human interest, showing the troops at work and at rest, but not exploring

policies, procedures, or concerns of those involved. This was a series that could have been used as a means for a more socially responsible end, but KATU did not use it to their advantage, at least during their 11 p.m. news. As mentioned earlier, teases each night for the following day's Inside Iraq stories indicated that the harder news content was airing in an earlier KATU newscast, leaving the features for the late night news.

The other stations were also guilty of the long-form infotainment-as-news series. CBS affiliate KOIN used 9 minutes and 10 seconds to show a reporter struggling to complete fire rescue training during one newscast (three minutes more than their average 6 minutes and 10 seconds of hard news content), and almost 10 minutes over two nights to show another reporter living in a homeless camp. The primary focus on emotion and personality instead of local policies, safety, and economic concerns runs counter to the KOIN slogan of "News that's to the point and won't waste your time." For those looking for important community and citizenship information on KOIN's late night newscasts during the ratings period, these two series wasted nearly 20 minutes of viewer time focusing on emotion over substance.

There were also the series that were all but commercials for network programming. KATU's series about prime time reality program *The Bachelorette* and a KOIN story about a local crime scene investigation unit (a tie-in to CBS prime time drama *CSI*) fall into this category. These stories did not add to the knowledge of the audience, but instead were prime examples of market-driven journalism: free parent network advertising during a newscast in a non-commercial segment. As with other infotainment news content, some news managers argue that these tie-ins to

network programming (often the show airing directly prior to the newscast) could keep viewers tuned in to the news and educate them prior to the plugola story (see Graber, 1994, Weiss, 2001). Most critics, however, would counter that the 2 or 3 minutes dedicated to each of these stories could have served the public better through an in-depth look at a hard news topic.

Even those stories with a public service angle still emphasized drama and emotion over community impact. The "I-Team Undercover" series with Perverted Justice that aired on KPTV is an example of this phenomenon. While the series, conducted as an undercover investigation, won a public service award from the Oregon Association of Broadcasters for providing parents with tips and information to protect their children from potential internet chat room sexual predators, the series focused on the "bad guys," the danger, and the drama of luring these men to a house full of television news cameras. An examination of the trends of these types of crimes, and extra community background information regarding these dangers would have made the series more socially responsible.

This series also used presentation elements to add to its drama. Multiple animations with dramatic voice-overs and loud, heavy musical accompaniment introduced each story. There were multiple white flash transitions, numerous sound effects, and a focus on graphic sexual language and children in potential danger. The series was promoted to the viewer as infotainment in both style and content. As previous research has shown, such presentation style, especially when combined with arousing content such as these Perverted Justice stories, can have an effect both on the memory of the viewer (see Grabe et al., 2003; Lang et al., 1999 for

discussion) and the credibility and trust of the news organization in the viewer's mind (Grabe et al., 2000; Grabe et al., 2003). These effects will be discussed further in relation to Research Question 3.

There was one investigative story that aired during ratings that stood out as socially responsible hard news. KATU aired a three-and-a- half minute news story examining of the impact of high-cost prescription medications on the local community. The report included lower cost alternatives and comments from doctors, pharmacists, and regular citizens who needed the drugs in question to stay healthy. The focus was on socially responsible business, health, and economic issues affecting the local community. This was one of very few ratings-specific stories that could be considered socially responsible news.

In contrast, NBC affiliate KGW aired a similar story that was coded as infotainment. Like its KATU equivalent, health and economics played a role in the KGW story, but the emphasis was more "news you can use," namely, how to comparison shop for cheaper prescription drugs. The story was told from the perspective of a lady who saved money on her prescriptions, and from the reporter, who attempted to do the same himself. Human interest drama outweighed hard news in this version of story. Other sweeps stories airing on KGW examining a local child living with AIDS and prostitution in Portland took similar turns away from hard news and toward infotainment through extremely personal, emotional story-telling.

Impact on newscast content. So how did these sweeps pieces affect the newscast content when compared to non-ratings weeks? As mentioned earlier, there was an increase in time devoted to infotainment by every station in the Portland

market for the four weeks of ratings as local stations tried to keep audience members tuned in and advertising rates high. Not surprisingly, the amount of time devoted to this infotainment content dropped once ratings were over.

KATU was noted above for its "Pricey Prescriptions" hard news investigative story. Based upon the results of this content analysis, KATU probably should have spent more time airing these more socially responsible stories. This station saw the biggest drop in time devoted to socially responsible hard news content stories among the four stations during the ratings period. Not coincidentally, KATU also had the largest time increase in infotainment story content for the same time span. While this may have been an attempt to keep the drama-seeking audience tuned in to watch the news, when the ratings period was over, KATU was in fourth place in the late night news race according to Nielsen Media Research.[15]

For KGW during ratings, the biggest question was what content was replaced by its sweeps pieces. The majority of its ratings stories aired in the first segment of the newscast, which traditionally has the most viewers and therefore the highest ratings. This is also the time when the largest amount of hard news content generally airs on KGW, raising the concern of what community news was eliminated to air these infotainment stories. Considering Nielsen has determined that more viewers get their late night local news from KGW than from any other television news source, more hard news content would have been more socially responsible.

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[15] Nielsen Media Research is the company that collects television viewer information to allow stations and advertisers to determine how many people are watching a particular program, and the demographic makeup of that audience. Advertising rates are decided based on this data (www.nielsenmedia.com).

Even with added time for infotainment content stories, KOIN's time spent on hard news content did not decrease as on KGW and KATU during this period, and instead remained the same. However, once KOIN stopped airing longer infotainment stories, its average time allotted to hard news content jumped by one minute and twenty seconds per newscast. A more socially responsible news organization would have used that time to investigate stories with higher community impact during ratings.

KPTV was a bit of an anomaly when it came to the ratings period. Time devoted to both socially responsible hard news content and infotainment content increased during these four weeks, albeit by a very small margin (1% of possible news time for hard news, 2% for infotainment content). The only content that really stood out from the other weeks of the study period was the Perverted Justice series. With an extremely high overall rate of infotainment content (averaging 59% of possible news time over the eight weeks) and low rate of socially responsible content (17% average over eight weeks), the addition of another minute or two of infotainment content did not stand out as much as it might have on the other stations. To produce a more socially responsible newscast, KPTV needs to change its news content every day, not just during ratings. KPTV's overall trend of increasing hard news content should continue, while at the same time decreasing infotainment content, every day of the year.

Presentation

Elements of infotainment-style presentation appeared in every newscast examined for this analysis, embellishing both socially responsible hard news and

infotainment content. The regular use of infotainment-style presentation elements suggests that stations are consistently trying to grab and hold the attention of the viewing audience, even if, as previous studies have indicated, this may take away from the message being conveyed (Grabe et al., 2000; Graber, 1994; Lang et al., 1999). Each station appears to have a "look" that it is trying to achieve, regardless of news content.

The routine use of the same elements consistently by all of the stations during their newscasts makes it appear that these formerly entertainment-style methods of presentation have become news-style elements as well, at least in the Portland, Oregon broadcast market. Because these elements have been shown to increase arousal in viewers, in some cases to the detriment of recalling the story content (Grabe et al., 2001; Lang et al., 1999), this routinization of an infotainment-style of presentation should be a cause of concern for television news organizations and the publics they serve.

With the amount of time spent on infotainment story content during all four late night local newscasts, infotainment content paired with infotainment-style presentation was a common occurrence in the Portland market. Under experimental conditions, this combination has been shown to negatively affect what an audience can recall about news content by overwhelming cognitive resources (Grabe et al., 2003; Lang et al., 1999). While the current study does not delve into audience effects, if these experiments holds true in real world conditions, Portland-area viewers may not only be missing out on important community information through a relative lack of socially responsible hard news content (see previous discussion), but

the news content they do see may be so overly dramatized it can be more difficult to recall at a later time. To improve as a source of socially responsible news, those in charge of the Portland newscasts should reevaluate their methods of information presentation to their audiences.

For instance, the Lang et al. (1999) study also showed that infotainment-style presentation elements may be helpful to viewer recall during less-arousing hard news content stories. Therefore, the more responsible place to use infotainment-style presentation elements would be with harder news stories. An example of this would be the opening animation for election information, common on both KGW and KPTV. This open may be helpful in drawing a viewer's attention to the important political information being presented in that segment, increasing the potential to educate the viewer, the goal of the socially responsible newscast.

The half-hour newscasts used many of their animations in this manner. The animations beginning the newscasts on KOIN, KGW, and KATU signaled to the audience that the news was about to begin. The top story animation on KGW signaled the importance of that particular item within the news. KOIN brought viewers back from certain commercial breaks with an animation to focus attention on the news. This is a responsible way to use such an element, without overwhelming the audience or taking away from the information being presented.

In contrast, airing animation after animation for stories of varying news content, as KPTV's style dictates, may not necessarily achieve the best results. This

practice lends the same urgency to all content, from celebrities to politics, policies to petty crime; a practice that does not inform so much as entertain (not to mention possibly hinder viewer learning). Grabe et al. (2003, p. 408) described this phenomenon as the "wholesale hype" of local television news. A balance between the flashy and the more subdued could focus the attention on the content of the news instead of potentially overwhelming the viewer with presentation.

In this sense, KPTV lived up to the "rock-'em-sock-'em" moniker dubbed by local media critic Schulberg (2003). While KPTV did not discriminate in its use of infotainment-style elements in terms of news story content, it was the only station to air more infotainment-style presentation elements with hard news content than with infotainment content, albeit by a very small margin (70% to 69%). However, because more than three times the amount of air time was spent on infotainment news content than on hard news content, the pairing of infotainment story content and presentation style was a common occurrence. A relatively high story count combined with regular use of white flashes and sound effects, which were used sparingly, if at all, by the other stations, contributed to the "rock-'em" feel of the KPTV newscast.

Like KPTV, KGW also presented a majority of both hard news content and infotainment content stories with infotainment-style elements. While Schulberg had much to say about the KPTV presentation, however, the KGW style was not mentioned. This suggests that certain style elements, even if they are originally taken from an entertainment background, may not draw as much attention during a

newscast as others. The regular use of split boxes and dissolves on KGW may not have had the same eye-catching effect as the white flashes and sound effects on KPTV. However, the high percentage of stories using any of these infotainment elements, over 63% in the case of KGW, is still a concern for audience learning in a socially responsible newsroom.

At the time of this analysis, KOIN and KATU were more discriminating in their use of infotainment-style presentation than the other stations, using such elements for less than 40% of their stories. However, both stations used these elements more with infotainment content than with hard news content. Percentage-wise, KOIN had the largest disparity between the use of infotainment style on hard news content versus infotainment content among the four stations examined here. While the other three stations used the infotainment-style elements nearly equally for both types of news content, KOIN went flashier on its infotainment content. In terms of helping the audience understand happenings in their community more easily, the reverse should have been true: more subdued hard news content presented with more dramatic elements and vice versa.

As the station with the highest percentage of time devoted to hard news story content, KOIN could have used presentation to further convey the importance of certain stories within the news. This would have placed KOIN on a path toward a more socially responsible newscast; instead, it chose to make relatively dramatic content even more so. This style was indicative of presentation changes to come for KOIN's newscasts: in September 2004, the station overhauled its news look. While

they could have used this change to more effectively balance news story content with presentation style, KOIN instead opted for the more eye-catching alternative. Bright red animating graphics and numerous animating fullscreen opens with sound effects are the style of the new KOIN. Grabbing an audience's attention appears to be the main goal of these changes.

As the results of this analysis illustrate, however, KOIN is not the only station opting for the attention-catching over the responsible presentation. A reevaluation of news presentation methods is necessary by all stations. All could provide a more audience-friendly, socially responsible newscast by decreasing the use of infotainment-style elements in their newscasts, especially in the embellishment of infotainment content stories. A match between story content and presentation would be more helpful both to the audience and to the reputation of the news organization than a one-size-fits-all approach. Overly flamboyant presentation has been shown to exaggerate the content and lessen the credibility of the news in the mind of the viewer (Grabe et al., 2000; Grabe et al., 2003). A more balanced content/presentation mix could lead to a socially responsible news product more conducive to informing the public.

Conclusions

The original query guiding this research asked if the local television newscasts in the Portland, Oregon television market provide the information necessary for political understanding and public discourse in the local community. News organizations that provide such information in a manner conducive to viewer learning follow the guidelines of social responsibility. Social responsibility emphasizes the obligations of news organizations to provide the information citizens need to make enlightened decisions in a democratic society (Napoli, 2001; Peterson, 1956). Because of the nature of television, audio and video components may also have an impact on the transmission of such information to the viewer. Therefore, both the content of the information as well as its form of presentation are important in the discussion of socially responsible news.

An examination of the late night local television newscasts in Portland, Oregon provides a picture not of social responsibility, but instead one of infotainment. In contrast to social responsibility, infotainment emphasizes entertainment over enlightenment. Capturing and holding an audience seems to have replaced educating the viewer as the primary goal of these newscasts. Those weeks designated as advertising rate-setting periods, which can affect station profitability, highlight this emphasis.

With only 38 out of 217 newscasts spending more news time on socially responsible hard news content than on infotainment content, the one million potential viewers in the Portland market are at risk of being underinformed about the really important happenings around them. As a community that takes pride in participating

in the local decision-making process, Portland viewers should be especially critical of their local news organizations skimping on this content. The results presented here indicate a need for the newsrooms to reevaluate what they air as news.

A deeper look into how the information is presented should also be taken. Experimental studies have shown that presentation style can affect the ability of viewers to later recall the information they watched (Grabe et al., 2003; Lang et al., 1999). When used properly, presentation elements can be used to further educate viewers by drawing their attention to important information. However, the overuse of such elements can have the opposite effect. By including presentation style in the current study, a basis for the future examination of audience effects is provided. It also gives insight into areas that might be improved through the use or elimination of such elements as they currently appear during the news.

This is especially prudent in Portland, where certain stations appear to be making a conscious decision to use flashier transitions in their newscasts. For example, KOIN reformatted their news presentation in the months following this study to include a higher quantity of opening animations, sound effects, and bold animating graphics. KPTV has seemingly replaced the standard news "cut" transition with an eye-catching white flash and animation transitions. KGW presents more than half of its stories with infotainment-style transitions. By using such elements as a standard method of presentation, newscast content has the potential to be lost in the drama, a scenario more indicative of infotainment than social responsibility.

This study also delves deeper into an area that is rarely explored in the literature: the television ratings period. While critics complain about "sweeps stunts" stations use to garner ratings during these specific time periods, very little scholarly research has examined the phenomenon. This study establishes, at least for the Portland broadcast area, that there are changes that occur for news content, and in some instances presentation style, specifically for ratings. Unfortunately for the Portland viewer, these changes are not conducive to community and citizenship learning. With these ratings periods occurring four months of the year, this is a substantial amount of news time spent trying to keep the attention of audience members over enlightening them.

The ratings phenomenon is eye-opening since it has been established that socially responsible news does not have to compromise the business side of the television news business, of which ratings periods are a large factor. A 1999 study found that "quality" sells: newscasts meeting the standards of social responsibility, including airing more issue and idea-oriented segments, did well in the ratings (Rosenstiel, Gottlieb, & Brady, 1999). Since higher ratings generally equal higher revenue for the stations, this scenario is win-win for both the viewer and the newscast-producing station.

This is not to say that infotainment content and/or presentation style should be dropped altogether from the news. As discussed previously, useful information that is not necessarily democracy-enhancing can still benefit the viewer. Flashier presentation elements can also help viewer information processing when paired with the proper content. The problems occur when softer news and entertainment-oriented

topics take the place of critical citizenship information in a newscast, and when infotainment-style elements embellish this type of "news." Unfortunately for Portland viewers, on a typical news day, infotainment content and presentation often takes precedence over socially responsible hard news and viewing learning.

Content-wise, however, these same newsrooms demonstrate that they still understand they have a responsibility to relate important citizenship information to the public by focusing specifically on hard news content during policy-altering days. To better conform to the ideals of social responsibility, however, the Portland newscasts should routinely strive for more hard news-oriented broadcasts.

Therefore, this study concludes that on a typical news day, the Portland late night newscasts do not provide its civic-minded citizens with adequate socially responsible information. The information provided is also generally not presented in a socially responsible manner conducive to viewer learning. By increasing the amount of time spent on socially responsible hard news topics, and carefully using infotainment-style presentation elements to bring the audience's attention to such hard news information, all four stations could transform their late night newscasts into more socially responsible products. This would be most beneficial to the broadcast audiences, who are the ones most affected by newsroom decisions. As the broadcasts aired in early 2004, however, the information needed for public discourse for Portlanders was not being supported through its local late night television news.

Limitations and Future Studies

As with most studies, there are limitations to this research design. Newscasts during different times of the day tend to have different formats and news focus. Because this study only examines late night local newscasts, the results cannot be generalized to other news broadcasts in the Portland market. Therefore, future studies may wish to examine morning, midday, or early evening newscasts for their socially responsible hard news versus infotainment characteristics, both in news story content and in presentation style, to see if the patterns discovered here hold true through other time periods.

Also, due to the variations of local television news content from location to location, results found within one news market can not be considered representative of all local news markets across the United States. As such, the results of this study are not generalizable outside of the analyzed news market. However, the aim of this project was to contextualize Portland's newscasts within recent criticisms of the infotainment-like nature of Portland newscasts. Therefore, this design serves its purpose.

Although not readily generalizable to other stations in other communities, this does not mean that the results found here might not prove eye-opening for other news markets around the country. As the literature reveals, Portland is by no means the only news broadcast market being criticized for its local newscast content and presentation style. Other local markets may also wish to examine their news story content and presentation to see if the newscast they are offering is truly providing a public service to their audiences.

The ever-changing format of television newscasts also places a limit on how accurate the results presented here may be in relation to future newscasts. Since the data was collected for this study in January, February, and March 2004, at least one station, the CBS affiliate KOIN, has drastically altered its presentation style for the news, adding many more stylized elements, including numerous animations, sound effects, and changing their graphics from a common newscast blue to a bright attention-grabbing red. While this illustrates the changing nature of news presentation, the flashiness of the new presentation format has already been the subject of a newspaper column (Schulberg, 2004, September 14).

KPTV went through a similar metamorphosis following an ownership change in 2002. Future studies may wish to compare news content for KOIN and/or KPTV before and after their presentation changes to see if the presentation style has an effect on the content, or vice versa.

As this is a content analysis, questions of "why" stations air the content they do, or present the news in the manner they do, can not be answered by the results found here alone. Future endeavors may wish to work with the newsrooms discussed in this analysis to gain further insight into the routines and decision-making processes that go into producing a newscast.

The results from this study could also be a starting point for research not only in other areas of local news content analysis, but also as a place to begin looking into audience research. What do local viewers think of the news, both in content and in presentation? How much about local politics and policy information do they really know or understand? What would they like to see changed? Surveys, focus groups,

or interviews could really get into the heart of audience expectations for their local television newscasts. After all, the news is supposed to be for the viewer, not for the news station.

Additionally, studies examining how much news audiences actually remember can also be undertaken. A real-world examination of the results of the Grabe et al. (2003) and Lang et al. (1999) studies can determine if and how drastically different news presentation styles affect information recall. Whether certain infotainment-style elements have different viewer impacts could similarly be examined.

The possibilities for future research are plentiful. The results presented here, although limited to the late night television newscasts in Portland, Oregon, raise questions regarding both the content and the presentation of local television newscasts, previously determined to be the largest source of news for Americans (Carroll, 2004). To properly follow the guidelines of the Hutchins Commission and social responsibility, television news organizations need to put the needs of citizens first and foremost in their creation of news programming. This study contributes to the ever-growing body of literature demonstrating that local newscasts are not doing as good a job as they should in providing the necessary information for important public discourse in American society.

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Appendix A

Example Coding Sheets

Story Content Coding.

	WEEK: 3 KATU	DATE: THURS., FEB 5, 2004	SWEEPS: DUR. 1
P	**SUBJECT**	**NEWS STORY CONTENT**	**NOTES**
1	TEASE		
A	WX		
2	OPEN		
3	TEASE		
A	DOG POISONINGS		
4	DOG POISONINGS		
5	PDX SHOOTING PLEA		
6	SICK SCHOOL		
7	WX DISASTER RELIEF		
8	WA SALES TAX		
9	MULT CO TAX		
10	PGE SALE		
11	CARLIE FL KIDNAP		
12	TEASE		
A	SNOWBOARD STUNT		
B	PRESCRIPTION PRICE		
C	SALEM SCARE		
D	WX		
	COMMERCIAL		
13	PRESCRIPTION PRICE		
14	SALEM SCARE		
15	WX		
16	I FEAR I5 TEASE		
17	TEASE		
A	SNOWBOARD STUNT		
B	CLOSE		
	COMMERCIAL		
18	CAR THIEF CAUGHT		
19	SNOWBOARD STUNT		
20	TEASE		
A	SPORTS		

Presentation Coding.

P	SUBJECT	PRESENTATION ELEMENTS	NOTES
	WEEK: 3	**DATE: THURS., FEB 5, 2004**	**SWEEPS: DUR. 1**
P	**SUBJECT**	**PRESENTATION ELEMENTS**	**NOTES**
1	TEASE		
A	WX		
2	OPEN		
3	TEASE		
A	DOG POISONINGS		
4	DOG POISONINGS		
5	PDX SHOOTING PLEA		
6	SICK SCHOOL		
7	WX DISASTER RELIEF		
8	WA SALES TAX		
9	MULT CO TAX		
10	PGE SALE		
11	CARLIE FL KIDNAP		
12	TEASE		
A	SNOWBOARD STUNT		
B	PRESCRIPTION PRICE		
C	SALEM SCARE		
D	WX		
	COMMERCIAL		
13	PRESCRIPTION PRICE		
14	SALEM SCARE		
15	WX		
16	I FEAR I5 TEASE		
17	TEASE		
A	SNOWBOARD STUNT		
B	CLOSE		
	COMMERCIAL		
18	CAR THIEF CAUGHT		
19	SNOWBOARD STUNT		
20	TEASE		.
A	SPORTS		
	COMMERCIAL		
21	SPORTS		

Lead Coder Sheet: News Story Content and Presentation Coding.

	WEEK: 3		KATU	THURS	FEB 5, 2004	DUR. 1
P	**SUBJECT**	**TIME**	**CONTENT**	**NOTES**	**PRES.**	**NOTES**
1	TEASE					
A	WX					
2	OPEN					
3	TEASE					
A	DOG POISONINGS					
4	DOG POISONINGS					
5	PDX SHOOTING PLEA					
6	SICK SCHOOL					
7	WX DISASTER RELIEF					
8	WA SALES TAX					
9	MULT CO TAX					
10	PGE SALE					
11	CARLIE FL KIDNAP					
12	TEASE					
A	SNOWBOARD STUNT					
B	PRESCRIPTION PRICE					
C	SALEM SCARE					
D	WX					
	COMMERCIAL					
13	PRESCRIPTION PRICE					
14	SALEM SCARE					
15	WX					
16	I FEAR I5 TEASE					
17	TEASE					
A	SNOWBOARD STUNT					
B	CLOSE					
	COMMERCIAL					
18	CAR THIEF CAUGHT					
19	SNOWBOARD STUNT					
20	TEASE					
A	SPORTS					
	COMMERCIAL					
21	SPORTS					

Appendix B

Coding Definitions

Coded Content Categories

Please note if more than one category applies. If applicable, please indicate if the story is local (Portland, OR metro area/SW Washington state), regional (OR or WA), national (US), or international.

Government/policy/politics: legislation, political process, policy problems, policy actions, campaign, vote, political strategy, political maneuvering, election news, election results, legal issues

Military, terror, or war-related stories. Include political violence here.

Crime – indicate location (local, regional, national, or international) and type of crime (ie celebrity/entertainment, military, health, etc) if applicable.

Business, Commerce, Economy – business or money-related stories.

Accidents and disasters: natural or manmade. Weather-related, car accidents, fires, etc.

Science/discoveries

Entertainment: includes arts, fashion, travel, food, radio, television, film, celebrity (please specify)

Health/safety/news you can use – diet trends, personal health, tips, "news you can use" (recalls, road closures, etc.)

Education/school stories

Feature – Personality- or "interesting story"-centered, as opposed to specific news event centered.

Sports news story – airing outside of designated sports segment

Weather news story – airing outside of designated weather segment

Other Local, Regional, National, or International News – please explain

Other News – please explain

Other show segments (not coded for content):
Sports, Weather, Commercial, Other - explain

Coded Presentation elements

Only code these elements if they are transitions from one story or segment to another, including transitions into and out of non-coded segments (but not within the non-coded segments). Do not count the fade into/out of a commercial break as a transition. Do not worry about effects within packaged stories, or within vo-sots. Do describe transitions between anchors, reporters, pieces of video, and fullscreen graphics. Please feel free to note anything else that catches your eye.

These may be combined with other audio or video elements. Please note combined elements. These elements may not be present within every story. There may also be more than one element per story.

VIDEO ELEMENTS

Wipes – electronic effect that pushes one picture on/another off the screen

Dissolves – gradual transition from one picture to the next with brief overlap

White flash – wipe transition that mimics the effect of a camera flash

Opens (animations – moving title pages) to a story or segment

Closes (animations – moving title pages) to a story or segment

Split-screen/ "split box": screen divided into 2 or more parts, with each part showing a different image
   Please specify:
   -   people in split
   -   video in split
   -   both
   -   how many splits there are (2split, 3split, 4split)

Map fly – video or reporter appears from a location on a map and is pulled forward to full screen. Please specify whether a person or video is pulled from the map.

Page peel – a special type of wipe, in which one piece of video folds over like a piece of paper to reveal a new image.

Other – please describe

AUDIO ELEMENTS

Code all specified audio elements presented during the news, including during packaged pieces and vo-sots. There may be more than one audio element present in a story. There may also be instances were there are none of these elements in a story.

Sound effects – audio other than ambient sound, reporter/anchor voice, music

Music – within a story or within a segment

Other added audio – please describe