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Trust in the Media: How Broadcast Format Influences Viewers of Morning Versus Evening Television Broadcasts

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Trust in the Media: How Broadcast Format Influences Viewers of Morning Versus Evening
Television Broadcasts

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements of the Renée Crown University Honors Program at
Syracuse University

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Honors Capstone Project in Broadcast & Digital Journalism

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Abstract

This study tests whether the format of a television broadcast can affect how a viewer perceives news. Because the style, production and personality of news anchors are different for morning news shows and evening newscasts, viewers might experience different levels of trustworthiness, fairness, and balance between the formats. In today's media landscape, how a viewer perceives a newscast is extremely important, as network and local news broadcasts compete with social media as a source of news and information. This study considers the relevant literature on this subject, and then employs a quasi-experimental design to explore how viewers perceive morning and evening news anchors, the trustworthiness of the information, and comprehension of facts. It concludes that viewers of evening news formats are more likely to trust the anchors and the information they deliver. The findings can provide insight into how news companies should divide their resources in the future.

Executive Summary

This study examines the different ways news consumers perceive morning and evening news programs. To explore this topic, survey participants were exposed to one of the two news programs, both produced by CitrusTV, Syracuse University's student-run television newsroom.

Respondents answered questions before and after viewing a short video clip. The questions explored whether the information the news anchors presented could be considered accurate, fair, balanced and trustworthy. Both video clips concerned President Trump's tariffs on China in 2018. The anchors presented the same information, just in different ways.

The morning show, Juice and Java has a more relaxed feel to its presentation. The anchors dress more casually, present the facts of a story, and then have casual banter about the topic. The evening show, Talking Points, is a serious political show. The hosts have a more formal on-camera appearance, present the facts of the story, and often bring in analysts to discuss stories further.

Significant findings derived from a survey and quasi-experiment involving 128 participants include:

- Viewers of the evening news programs were more likely to trust the anchors and the information they delivered.
- More than 32% of the viewers of the morning show found the broadcasters' explanation of Trump's tariffs was unfair, compared to only 11% of viewers of the evening show.
- However, over 45% of viewers of both programs reported that they agreed with the hosts' statements that Trump's tariffs could be considered a "hard move."

- The format of how the information is presented did not have an affect on a viewer's comprehension of the story.

For reasons discussed later, these results may not be generalizable. But they nonetheless offer insight into how the presentation of news can affect perception of trust, and how the topic can be more rigeriously explored in the future.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Understanding the different ways viewers respond to morning television broadcasts versus evening television broadcasts is crucial to understanding the future of television news. The media, especially in recent times, is under fire for being unfair and biased. The phenomenon that refers to the tendency of individuals to perceive media coverage as biased is called the hostile-media effect. In our hybrid world where people have more liberty to choose which news sources they're going to pay attention to, fairness and trustworthiness are key.

This study is motivated by the following questions:

- What news programming formats do viewers trust the most?
- How do different show formats affect the trustworthiness of anchors?
- Are people more likely to remember facts about a story they see on a morning show opposed to the evening news?
- How does gender, ethnicity, and a person's political affiliation affect their view of a broadcast?

To explore these questions I developed a survey a survey to ask news viewers their opinions of various news formats. I then randomly assigned those viewers to watch one of two different segments from CitrusTV's programming. CitrusTV is Syracuse University's fully student-run television studio. It supports 10 regularly scheduled shows that can be viewed on Orange Television Network or online at CitrusTV.com.

The results were different than what I would have originally hypothesized. I thought the more casual morning format would elicit more trust. But I found that 58% of the group that viewed the evening newscast clip found the information to be fair, opposed to 45% of the

morning show viewers. I did not find a difference in comprehension between the two formats. More study will be needed to fully understand how format affects trustworthiness.

Chapter 2

Methodology

I used the survey software, Qualtrics, to conduct this survey. A group of five people were selected to take the survey before it launched to ensure all the questions made sense. The survey was then sent out to students at Syracuse University through different avenues, such as Facebook and email. The survey questions can be found in the appendix. I used two segments from CitrusTV's shows *Juice and Java* and *Talking Points*. The former is the studio's morning news show, which keeps students up to date on local, national, and international news and also includes lighter feature segments. The latter is the studio's political talk show, two hosts that act as moderators, debaters, and news anchors. The segments I chose to use both discuss the potential trade war with China. In the *Juice and Java* clip, a male and female host update viewers on the latest information on the tariff dispute between China and the U.S. Then, the hosts both offer commentary. In the *Talking Points* clip, one male host updates viewer on the latest information on the tariffs. Then he is joined by his male co-host and two male commentators to discuss the trade situation.

Chapter 3

Results

This survey found that viewers of the evening news program, *Talking Points*, were more likely to trust the anchor and the information delivered. Over 32% of viewers of the morning

program, Juice and Java, found the broadcasters' explanation of Trump's tariffs unfair, compared to only 11% of Talking Points viewers.

I also wanted to determine if a viewer's political affiliation influenced whether they believed the coverage to be unfair. Fifty-three percent of the viewers of the evening show identified themselves a Democrat, 17% said Republican, and 30% were in another party or did not specify a political party. Over 53% of the respondents who reported the Talking Points explanation as unfair were Democrats. Looking at the viewers of the morning show, 42% were Democrats, 20% were Republicans, and 38% identified as a different party or did not belong to a party. Over 60% of the respondents who reported the Juice and Java hosts' explanation as unfair were Democrats. Democrats were more likely to report the broadcast as unfair, compared to Republicans and members of other political parties. Democrats also slightly favored the evening news format, opposed to the morning show. Republican viewers did not show preference towards one format over the other.

Male viewers of both the morning show and the evening show were more likely than female viewers to report the broadcast as unfair. However, both men and women were more likely to report the morning show explanation as unfair, rather than the evening show. White respondents were also more likely than minorities to report a broadcast as fair.

38% of respondents who watched the evening show clip reported they do not regularly watch television news programs, compared to 45% of respondents who watched the morning clip. Respondents who reported that they watch the news regularly, were more likely to also report they trusted the anchors and the information delivered.

In both shows, the hosts expressed a view that increasing tariffs was a "hard move" by President Trump. After watching the clip, respondents were asked if the Chinese tariffs were a

hard move by President Trump. 48% of viewers of the evening show agreed with the hosts' view that the tariffs were a hard move, while 58% of morning show viewers agreed. Therefore, morning show viewers were more likely to agree with the anchors' opinion comments, compared to evening show viewers.

Another factor this study examined was how broadcast format affects viewer comprehension. In both broadcasts, the hosts explained that the tariffs on China were going to equal \$150 million. After watching the selected clip, viewers were given a multiple-choice question that asked the amount of the tariffs. 54% of evening show viewers selected the right answer, compared to 52% of morning show viewers. Therefore, we can conclude that broadcast format did not have a significant effect on the viewer's ability to comprehend the facts of a story.

Chapter 4

Study Limitations

There are limitations to note with this study. As this survey was conducted on a college campus, the majority of respondents were between the ages of 18-23. While the survey was distributed to the entire campus, over 64% of respondents were female. I also would have liked a more even pool of Democrats, Republicans, and third-party members. 45% of respondents were Democrats, 18% were Republicans, and 36% were either not registered to a political party or a third-party member. Also, only 28% of the respondents were minorities.

I chose to use CitrusTV shows, opposed to national network broadcasts so I could have more control of the content of the clips. However, because I used clips from broadcasts that air on the Syracuse University campus, and most of the respondents were Syracuse University students, it is likely that some of the respondents could know the anchors personally. The

anchors of both broadcasts are current SU students. This should be taken into consideration when reviewing the data about the trustworthiness of the anchors.

Another factor that would be difficult to measure in this survey is the gender of the anchors of each show. The morning show had both a male and female anchor, while the evening show had only males. It would be interesting to examine whether gender played a role in more respondents viewing the evening anchors as trustworthy.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Scholarly research shows network evening newscasts have a greater audience than network morning shows (Pew Research Center). This supports my conclusion that anchors of evening news program are more trusted by viewers. Viewers trust the information these anchors present more than information presented by morning news anchors. I presented evidence that shows viewers of morning programs are more likely to see a broadcast as unfair, compared to viewers of evening programs.

Political affiliation also played a role in how the broadcast format affected a viewer. Democratic viewers of both the morning show and the evening show were more likely than Republicans to report the broadcast as unfair. Democrats also favored the evening show format over the morning show, while Republicans did not show favor to either format.

I also report evidence that, among individuals who watch the news regularly, there's an increased trust in the anchors and the information they deliver. Opinion also plays a role in broadcasts that allow their hosts to speak freely about topics. I found that viewers of the morning show were more likely to agree with the hosts' opinion that the high tariffs were a "hard move"

by President Trump. Therefore, we can conclude that viewers are more likely to agree with personal comments from morning news anchors, opposed to evening news anchors.

My findings further suggest that the format of the broadcast does not affect a viewer's ability to comprehend the information delivered. Only 50% of viewers of both morning and evening broadcasts were able to correctly answer a viewer comprehension question. This shows that the producers and hosts of both shows are not effectively relaying information to the viewer, since half of the viewers were not able to give a correct answer. Comparatively, high trustworthiness of evening news anchors offers an opportunity for the evening news broadcast to improve their performance in a time where more and more people are getting their news from social media. This may allow network and local broadcasts to remain relevant, despite the increase popularity of social news platforms.

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Appendices

Example of survey distributed

Thank you for taking this survey! Your responses **are anonymous as we do not ask for your name. The data collected will be used as part of** an honors capstone at Syracuse University.

The survey should only take you under 10 minutes to complete. Answer the short series of questions on the first page, and then click the arrow button at bottom right to watch a short video. Then click the arrow again to answer the final series of questions. Please be sure to click the arrow one last time to ensure your responses are submitted and recorded.

If you have any questions about this survey or would like to receive the results, please email Rebekah Castor at rlcastor@syr.edu

1. Please specify your gender.
 - Male
 - Female
 - Other
 - Prefer not to share

2. What category best represents your race/ethnicity?
 - White
 - Hispanic or Latino
 - Black or African American
 - Native American or American Indian
 - Asian or Pacific Islander
 - Other

3. What's your age?

4. Please specify your political affiliation
 - Republican
 - Democrat
 - Other Party
 - I don't identify with a party
 - Prefer not to share

5. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
The information anchors read on the news is trustworthy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
The information anchors read on the news is fair	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The information anchors read on the news is accurate	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The information anchors read on the news is balanced	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Morning news anchors are trustworthy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Evening news anchors are trustworthy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

6.



Consider the image above. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
The anchor in the photo appears trustworthy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

7.



Consider the image above. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
The anchor in the photo appears trustworthy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

8. When do you watch the news?

- Morning
- Afternoon
- Evening
- Throughout the day
- I do not watch the news

9. How informed are you on Chinese-USA relations?

- No knowledge
- Little knowledge
- Average knowledge
- Above average knowledge
- Extensive knowledge

10. For question 10, respondents were randomly assigned to 1 of 2 videos. The videos used in this survey can be viewed by going to these Youtube links.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6BwyZby8-UY>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w_MY6eDREfU

11. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
The information the anchors read was trustworthy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The information the anchors read was fair	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The information the anchors read was accurate	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The information the anchors read was balanced	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The anchors were trustworthy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

12. What is the total cost on the United States tariffs on trade for China?
 10 billion
 50 billion
 150 billion
13. Do you believe the tariffs on China are a hard move by President Trump?
 Yes
 No
 Unsure
14. Do you think the hosts' explanation of President Trump's tariffs is fair?
 Yes
 No
 Unsure
15. Understanding you only watched a short clip, would you trust these hosts to deliver fair and balanced news stories?
 Yes
 No
 Unsure