Is “Fake News” the New News?

The Effect of “The Daily Show” on Media and Political Knowledge

Heather Avenson
Reasons to Study

- “Indecision” campaign coverage
- National Annenberg Election Survey
- Presidential Candidates
“It’s [The Daily Show] a great way of reaching younger audiences who don’t watch traditional news shows. When you’re meeting with voters, you’ve got to keep them amused as a way of keeping them interested” – John McCain
Some Praise for “The Daily Show”

- Peabody Awards: 2000 and 2004 for “Indecision” Campaign Coverage
- TV Critics Association Award: 2003 for “Outstanding Achievement in News and Information”
- Exposure to *TDS* increases attentiveness of people who normally don’t watch the news
And Some Criticism for “The Daily Show”

• While Presidential candidates may benefit while appearing on TDS, relentless skewering may do more harm than good
• TDS breeds cynicism
• Inflated sense of political knowledge
What does it all mean?

- Are people who watch either *The Daily Show* and/or *Colbert Report* more politically knowledgeable than those who do not?

- Do people who watch these programs also get their news from other sources?
Pew Data

Political Knowledge Index

- Least Informed
- Little informed
- Somewhat Informed
- Most Informed

Do you watch "The Colbert Report"?

Count

Regularly | Sometimes | Hardly ever | Never
BSU Survey

Political Knowledge Index

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Do you watch "The Colbert Report"?
Pew Data

Do you watch "The Daily Show with Jon Stewart?"
BSU Survey

Political Knowledge Index

- none right
- one right
- two right
- three right

Count

Do you watch "The Daily Show with Jon Stewart"?
Out of 62 students:

- 35 watch CNN
- 29 watch NBC
- 22 watch MSNBC
- 21 watch FOX News
- 20 watch ABC
- 18 watch CBS
- 12 watch CNBC
- 6 watch “other” (most often BBC)
Out of 62 students:

- 19 use social networking sites as a source for news
- 35 read newspapers
- 35 listen to news radio
Out of 72 students:

- 38 watch CNN
- 32 watch FOX News
- 31 watch NBC
- 23 watch MSNBC
- 22 watch ABC
- 20 watch CBS
- 13 watch CNBC
- 5 watch other (most often BBC)
Out of 72 students:

- 26 use social networking sites as a source of news
- 36 read newspapers
- 42 listen to news radio
Focus Group

- Male, liberal, regular voters
- Don’t necessarily have prior knowledge
- “The Daily Show” and “Colbert Report” are “good at pointing out flaws”
Periodicals

- The Economist
- Foreign Affairs
- Newsweek
- Utne Reader
Other Programs

- “NBC Nightly News”
- “The Rachel Maddow Show”
- “Countdown with Keith Olbermann”
- “The Newshour with Jim Lehrer”
Conclusion

- Results somewhat inconclusive
- Does suggest that “The Daily Show” and “Colbert Report” viewers are more informed