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Comparison of news selection and treatment on U.S. TV networks

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**Comparison of news selection and treatment
on U.S. TV networks**

by

Jia-Jing Jien

A Thesis Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
MASTER OF SCIENCE

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Signatures have been redacted for privacy

Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa

1991

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INTRODUCTION

This study examined the differences in news selection and treatment of the early evening newscasts by U.S. TV networks from December 4, 1990, through January 10, 1991.

TV news, especially for those newscasts on TV networks, has become the major news source for Americans. Network television in the United States -- the American Broadcasting Company (ABC), the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS), and the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) -- plays a leading role in presenting national and international news to Americans. To compete with other networks, each TV network has a similar market size, an immense budget, outstanding personnel, advanced technology and sophisticated equipment. It is possible that the competition among the three TV networks would be vigorous. However, a number of studies have found some similarities among the three TV networks in presenting news stories.

Statement of the Problem

Several studies have indicated that the conformity of news content existed in news selection as well as news treatment. Certain types of news gained more attention and emphasis on network TV newscasts. Also, geographical factors have an impact on news selection by news editors. For example, negative news, compared to other news, is more likely to be reported and emphasized in position, length and visual aspects. Dominick (1981), in his study of business coverage on TV networks, found that the coverage across the three networks was similar. Moreover, the negative business news was counted as high as 54%. This ratio

was much higher than the one computed by Lowry (1971) in presenting the percentage of bad news to total news coverage. Lowry found that the ratio of bad news to other news was one to two. No matter what kind of news was reported by the three TV networks, the similarity of their news selection was left no doubt.

In regard to the distribution of national to international news on U.S. network TV, Almaney (1970) reported that international news shown on network TV was most often negative. Both in national and international news content, certain regions are more likely to be reported by TV networks than other regions. It raises the question of what's the difference in news selection by network TV? If a high degree of similarity existed in the contents of newscasts on network TV, how do TV networks treat the same news content? Will the same type of news be treated in the same way?

Objectives

Television news has become the major news source of Americans (Russo, 1971-72). In regard to the news content, the three TV networks seem to be similar to a certain degree. This study compared the news selection and treatment by the three TV networks.

This study will provide recent, practical results of the presentation on the three TV networks of their early evening newscasts. In turn, these findings can be compared to earlier studies to discover changes or possible trends.

The time period chosen in this study ran from December 4, 1990 through January 10, 1991. As said by Warner (1968), there's no typical period for any research insofar as news is concerned. In other words, no matter which period is chosen, some news events occurred.

Rationale

Network TV newscasts play a very important role in the United States. Since they exert such great impact on national and international audiences, numerous studies have been conducted which revealed the researchers' strong concerns about news content and imbalanced presentation on network TV newscasts. They found that the presentations of news content on network TV were consistent. However, only a few studies were focused on the comparison of news selection and treatment by network TV newscasts. The criteria of news selection are some of the most powerful factors to explain the presentation of news contents on network TV. Therefore, this study intended to examine news patterns presented on U.S. TV networks.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Role of TV Newscast

The impact of network TV newscasts on Americans seems to be tremendous. Keogh (1972) estimated that at least forty million Americans each night watch network TV news. For millions of Americans the networks are the sole source of national and international news. As far as international news is concerned, not only in the United States, but in most other countries of the world, newscasts on network TV are the dominant source of international news (Larson, 1979; Stevenson and White, 1980). For many years the three major commercial networks have used a coordinated promotional approach to convince the public that they are the leading sources of international news. All three networks integrate images of the globe or world maps into their New York anchor location sets (Larson, 1988a).

In regard to the importance of international news, Altheide (1982) said that objectivity is very essential in the coverage of international affairs. The audience is less likely to have direct experience with life and issues in these international societies, and is therefore less able to assess the validity of the information it watched. Therefore, geographical and news content imbalance in reporting international news are more likely to distort the image of the foreign country being presented. Although objectivity is the ideal for selecting news items, it is almost impossible for most people to reach it. Rather, the news editors are striving for "fairness" (Keogh, 1972).

The Similarity of Network Newscasts

Many previous studies have shown similarity in presentation for the three TV networks' evening newscasts. For example, when dealing with the topics covered by network TV, Fowler and Showalter (1974) found that each network newscast dealt with topics covered by at least one other network 60 percent of the time. Also, the duplication of story topics, their location in that day's program, and even day-to-day variations in how much emphasis to give a story, on network newscasts, were found similar by Lemert (1974) in his study of content duplication of network TV newscasts.

As mentioned before, competition among networks has existed. However, competition among networks has often been characterized by conformity rather than innovation. As stated by Epstein (1977), "the networks would rather be seen reflecting the 'consensus' story of the day than reporting exclusives (p. 37)." He also found that the networks are sensitive to leading with stories that differ from the competition.

Altheide (1982) found that the networks are quite similar in offering few divergent points of view or topics of focus. Except for the duplication of general news contents, Foote and Steele (1986) found that the conformity of leading stories was much higher than previous studies had shown for content duplication on all stories. Altheide (1982) concluded that the major network newscasts mainly presented the same messages and emphasized the events which were important to Americans. Although network newscasts were considered a "national news service," the information presented by them was only a few limited views on events and issues vital to Americans.

More recently, in production aspects, Carroll (1988) conducted a 16-year comparison of network news production. He found that network news program production seems to have become more alike. Moreover, after 1969, network news programs tended to rely more on visual importation of information in which a slide or electronic graphic message was projected without accompanying anchor voice-over.

Altheide (1982) raised the impact of homogeneous information in network newscasts. He wrote that:

Homogeneous messages by major news channels make it difficult for viewers who rely on these sources of information to discern the multiple realities underlying many issues and events, especially in terms of recognizing journalists' opinions, and then assessing them. When such opportunities are not available on the major media, the divergent perspectives surrounding the original event may be lost on the audience members, who depend on media portrayals for selection, definition and understanding of issues and problems. While all the societal effects of network consonance are not clear, there is reason to hypothesize that influence of the mass media will become more powerful as consonance increases (p. 482).

Buckalew (1969-1970) explained that the similarity was due to the editors being greatly alike in their selection of news stories, in their perceptions of audience and news sources, and in their reading habit and experience.

Another major reason which can explain the similarity of news content is that news values rely heavily on human interest. The editors tend to choose those news items which attract most people's attention. After studying the elements of human interest, Lynch et al. (1968) proposed some categories of human interest. Seven identifiable factors emerged which represent different dimensions of human interest content. They were 1) novelty, 2) leisure, 3) complexity, 4) personalism, 5) adversity, 6) achievement and 7) orderliness.

News Sources and News Treatment

Different news sources can provide different points of view of the same news event. In studying the People's Temple deaths in Guyana and the Iranian Hostage Crisis, Nimmo and Combs (1985) found that public officials were the primary news sources, followed by relatives and friends of crisis victims. The major variance in coverage came by way of depiction of sources. Similarly, Berkowitz (1987) indicated similar results that television news relied heavily on government sources for news information in his study of TV news sources and news channels.

The major networks generally treat coverage of international affairs in similar ways, using similar formats. For example, the proportion of unofficial sources to official sources is approximately 70% versus 30%. The proportion of domestic to non-domestic sources is 83% versus 17%. Overall, the data showed a similar pattern among networks in the status of sources televised in the evening news (Atwater and Green, 1988).

Larson (1988b) stated that a pattern of heavy reliance on routine and informal channels was revealed. U.S. and foreign government officials were the dominant sources when both routine and informal channels were used, accounting for 84.1% of the sources for routine and 78.1% of the sources for informal channels. Moreover, television relies even more than print media on routine and informal channels, with official government sources predominating.

In studying the news sources in network coverage of international terrorism, Atwater and Green (1988) indicated that:

In reporting foreign affairs, television and other mass media have been accused of relying on elite, domestic sources, raising questions about balance, context and perspective in international news reports available in the U.S. (p. 970).

Geographical Bias

Geographical bias has been found in both national and international news coverage on network TV newscasts. In national news coverage, north-eastern areas were the major focus among the three networks. In international news coverage, Larson (1988c) found that television, like other major media, gives heavy coverage to a small number of nations that somehow directly involve American interest. He added that:

. . . Network television shows a similar pattern of attention to the regions of the world. Western Europe, the Middle East and Asia all received relatively high levels of coverage during the 1972-1981 period. They devote by far the greatest effort to covering Western Europe, followed by the Middle East, with Asia a rather distant third. Eastern Europe, including the Soviet Union, Africa and Asia are the "blind spots" in the networks' attempts to provide visual coverage from around the world (p. 36).

Thus, geographical bias on network newscasts became the issue.

The Impression of Visual Aids in TV News

Being an audio-visual medium, television is more powerful in attracting viewers' attention than any other medium. The reason why television news emphasizes the visual is because that is thought to be one way of attracting viewers (MacNeil, 1968a; Comstock, 1980). In order to attract more attention from an audience than its competing rivals, editors believed that good pictures are indispensable for holding viewer interest (Epstein, 1973).

Focusing on the importance of visual aids to TV news, Buckalew (1969) found that stories with video were more likely to be reported by TV news editors than those without it. He concluded that television news editors have a particular sensitivity to visual communications (Buckalew, 1969-1970).

Some studies indicated the function of visual aids is not significant. Sometimes visual aids even disturb an audience's attention in realizing the news story. However, Edwardson et al. (1981) argued that news staff striving for exciting pictures are simultaneously increasing the amount of information that viewers will remember from newscasts. Generally speaking, visual aids have become one of the criteria in selecting news stories by news editors.

Owing to heavy reliance on visual expression of TV news, the significance and background of a story was sometimes given skimpily. MacNeil (1968a) quoted Walter Scott, then NBC board chairman, as saying: "Because television is a visual medium it may scant the background and significance of events to focus on the outward appearance . . . the comings and goings of statesmen instead of the issue that confronts them (pp. 72, 80)." He wrote that "the comings and goings make easy pictures: the issues usually do not. Obviously, most of the energy and organization of television go into getting pictures (MacNeil, 1968b, p. 35)." Edwardson et al. (1976) emphasized that the films added to newscasts usually increased interest as much or more than they increased information gain.

News Values

News has several characteristics, or elements. For news to be news, it must have some of these elements and, in general, the more elements a particular event has, the more news value it has. News value also has impact on newsmen's judgement. Researchers have concluded some characteristics, which help newsmen to judge "important" news rather than ordinary events, as "news value." It also can be said that the more news value the event contains, the more important it becomes.

Larson (1988c) indicated that news values may be thought of as news-selection criteria, those qualities of events determine their selection for broadcast from among the myriad possibilities available to a television news organization. In another sense, news values are guidelines that tell the television journalist what to include, emphasize or omit in the treatment of a particular story.

Charnley (1959) indicated that some criteria were used by the newsmen in their evaluation and selection of news. He wrote that: "Not everything that happens becomes news." He asked the following questions: "Who decides? Why should this event have become news? What makes some events 'better' news than others? How are stories selected? (p. 33)" He concluded that the following criteria are important to newsmen in news evaluation. He also used these criteria to examine the theory and the practices that guide the experienced newsman's evaluation and selection of news.

Evaluating News of Significance: The newsman must first decide which events and information are of primary importance to a large proportion of the people that his medium reaches . . .

Evaluating News of Interest: In order to select news of interest, the newsman must know what people want out of news and why they prefer one kind of news fare to another . . .

Selecting Stories with Human Interest: A strong story in human interest is a story that gives the reader or listener or viewer an immediate feeling of personal involvement in the news situation . . .

News Interest and the Time Element: Time is an element that is always considered in the evaluation and selection of news -- both news of importance and news of interest . . .

Timeliness: A story is timely if it is appropriate to the audience at the time when it is printed or broadcast whether the events or facts it reports are current or not . . .

Seasonableness: Timeliness tied to a period of the year or a season is seasonableness -- timeliness of a special kind. Seasonable stories are those which could be used appropriately at the same time of any year . . . (Charnley, 1959, pp. 35, 39, 41, 47, 48, 49).

Warner (1970) defined the criteria of news selection as: importance to the domestic public, the number of people affected, audience interest, political balance, dramatic quality, freshness and timeliness.

Brook et al. (1980) used the following criteria which have been used by generations of journalists in reporting news, such as audience, impact, proximity, timeliness, prominence, unusualness and conflict as traditional criteria of news value. These factors help reporters and editors judge the news value of a story and determine whether a story is displayed at the top of the front page, tucked away next to the want ads or left out altogether.

Agee et al. (1983) indicated that the newsworthiness of stories -- how many persons read them and with what degree of interest -- varies according to time, place, circumstance and other factors. Research, however, has confirmed what editors have long known -- that the principal qualities that determine the newsworthiness of a story are proximity, prominence, consequence, timeliness and a variety of emotional appeals that may be lumped under the heading of human interest.

Friedlander et al. (1987) used timeliness, conflict, human interest, importance or impact, proximity and unusualness as the criteria to weigh the importance of news.

Researchers have identified a number of values that influence the selection of news by television news editors. They are drama, visual attractiveness, entertainment, size or importance of the story, cultural or geographical proximity, negativity, recency, and involvement with elite nations or individuals. A "good" television news story often contains rising and falling action or spectacular visual

elements that hold audience attention. Other news values include involvement with elite nations or individuals (Larson, 1988c).

Recently, however, criteria of news values have undergone some changes -- and they are still changing. In the past few years, newspapers have devoted more time and space to stories that cannot be judged very well by most of the traditional criteria. Often, they contain no conflict. Rarely do they present anything bizarre or deal with the doings of prominent persons. Many are timeless. Proximity is a factor only in some. Some critics, applying the traditional standards, complain that "real" news is being crowded out by "non-news" or "soft" news. It seems likely, however, that these "lifestyle" stories, as they are commonly called, will retain or increase their new popularity. They possess the most important quality of news -- impact (Brooks et al., 1980). It might be possible that TV newscasts' news values are changing in some aspects.

Generally speaking, the selection of news stories by news editors was based on the editors' perception of news value. Thus, the news selection and news treatment will reflect the editors' priority of news elements.

Structural Functional Theory and Integration

Since the major concerns of this study are the high conformity of news content and imbalance in news selection on TV networks, Structural Functional Theory may be applied to this study. McQuail explained Structural Functional Theory in the following statement (1987):

Axiomatic to this body of theory is the view that a condition of integration is essential to the working of any social system. Without integration there can be no agreement on goals and means and no co-ordinated activity to achieve them. Both "functional" and "normative" integration, according to the

meanings noted above, are indispensable. However, in a complex society there will be a number of different ways for societies to achieve the control and consensus called for and mass media are only one institution among several with overlapping tasks in this respect (p. 92).

The integrations among media institutions have the same tendency to enlarge the power of social control. National media especially tend to present content associated with national interests and values in order to reinforce social values and consensus. On the other hand, McQuail added that:

. . . media are generally found not to offer a reflection of society as it is, but deviate in giving disproportionate attention either to those who exemplify the aspirations of the majority or to those who reject the values of society, usually by way of crime or 'extremist' politics (p. 94).

More precisely, McQuail (1987) indicated that:

Media research has frequently been guided by, or has contributed to, the formulation of media effect as an exercise of informal control or the formation of consensus . . . a few central points can be brought together to illustrate the central tenets of functional theory in respect of social integration. The evidence is to be found in research on media institutions and organizations, media content, audiences and effects (p. 92).

. . . Most content with the largest audiences tends to be conformist in tendency and supportive rather than critical of what may be thought of as dominant values (p. 93).

. . . Research on effects has failed to lend much support to the proposition that mass media, for all their attention to crime sensation, violence and deviant happenings, are a significant cause of social, or even individual, crime and disorganization. The more one holds to a functionalist theory of media, the less logical it is to expect predominantly socially disintegrative effects. . . functional theorists are quite prominent among those who investigate the negative consequences of media, perhaps because they place such importance on integration and have more than usually high expectations of the potentially positive contribution of mass media (p. 94).

Thus, Structural Functional Theory may explain the consensus in news reporting, the emphasis on bad news events, and imbalanced distribution of geographical locations of news stories.

HYPOTHESES

Gatekeeping, which helps editors select news stories, is an important process before the news stories are actually shown on the TV screen. For the limitation of media space, no matter the limited number of pages or air time, only minor parts of news stories are presented. Thus, the news stories appearing on TV networks had gone through the gatekeeping process. The issue here is not the criteria of news selection themselves, but the high similarity of news selection, bad news emphasis and regional imbalance of network TV newscasts (Buckalew, 1969).

Based on the Structural Functional Theory, social integration establishes the conformity of media content and explains the special emphasis on negative news events. Thus, two research questions and ten hypotheses were developed in order to examine the degree of conformity and special emphasis among the three TV networks' evening newscasts.

The research questions were:

(1) What proportion of agreement in reported news topics existed in the early evening newscasts on network television?

(2) What proportion of agreement in news treatment format existed in the early evening newscasts on network television?

According to these research questions, several hypotheses will be examined.

Hypothesis 1: More bad news is shown in international news stories than in national news stories on the three TV networks in the early evening newscasts.

Hypothesis 2: The proportions of national and international news length on the three TV networks are positively correlated in the early evening newscasts.

This hypothesis will be supported when the results support the following conditions.

(1) The proportions of national and international news length shown on the ABC and CBS networks are positively correlated.

(2) The proportions of national and international news length shown on the CBS and NBC networks are positively correlated.

(3) The proportions of national and international news length shown on the ABC and NBC networks are positively correlated.

Hypothesis 3: The news topics shown on the three TV networks in the early evening newscasts are positively rank-order correlated.

Three sub-hypotheses were related to this hypothesis:

(1) The news topics reported by the ABC and CBS networks are positively rank-order correlated.

(2) The news topics reported by the CBS and NBC networks are positively rank-order correlated.

(3) The news topics reported by the ABC and NBC networks are positively rank-order correlated.

Hypothesis 4: The geographical locations of selected news stories on the three TV networks in the early evening newscasts are positively rank-order correlated.

This hypothesis relates to three sub-hypotheses:

(1) The geographical locations of selected news stories on the ABC and CBS networks are positively rank-order correlated.

(2) The geographical locations of selected news stories on the CBS and NBC networks are positively rank-order correlated.

(3) The geographical locations of selected news stories on the ABC and NBC networks are positively rank-order correlated.

Hypothesis 5: The proportions of bad and good news length in each newscast on the three TV networks in the early evening newscasts are positively correlated.

Three sub-hypotheses will be taken into consideration:

(1) The proportions of bad and good news length shown each day on the ABC and CBS networks are positively correlated.

(2) The proportions of bad and good news length shown each day on the CBS and NBC networks are positively correlated.

(3) The proportions of bad and good news length shown each day on the ABC and NBC networks are positively correlated.

Hypothesis 6: The proportions of non-exclusive national and international news length in each newscast on the three TV networks in the early evening newscasts are positively correlated.

Three sub-hypotheses will be examined:

(1) The proportions of non-exclusive national and international news length on the ABC and CBS networks are positively correlated.

(2) The proportions of non-exclusive national and international news length on the CBS and NBC networks are positively correlated.

(3) The proportions of non-exclusive national and international news length on the ABC and NBC networks are positively correlated.

Hypothesis 7: The proportions of bad and good news in non-exclusive news content on the three TV networks in the early evening newscasts are positively correlated.

Three sub-hypotheses will be tested:

(1) The proportions of bad and good news in non-exclusive news content on the ABC and CBS networks are positively correlated.

(2) The proportions of bad and good news in non-exclusive news content on the CBS and NBC networks are positively correlated.

(3) The proportions of bad and good news in non-exclusive news content on the ABC and NBC networks are positively correlated.

Hypothesis 8: The geographical locations of non-exclusive news stories on the three TV networks in the early evening newscasts are positively rank-order correlated.

Some conditions will be present when this hypothesis is supported.

(1) The geographical locations of non-exclusive news stories on the ABC and CBS networks are positively rank-order correlated.

(2) The geographical locations of non-exclusive news stories on the CBS and NBC networks are positively rank-order correlated.

(3) The geographical locations of non-exclusive news stories on the ABC and NBC networks are positively rank-order correlated.

Hypothesis 9: The news topics of non-exclusive news content on the three TV networks in the early evening newscasts are positively rank-order correlated. Some conditions will be present when this hypothesis is supported.

(1) The news topics of non-exclusive news content on the ABC and CBS networks are positively rank-order correlated.

(2) The news topics of non-exclusive news content on the CBS and NBC networks are positively rank-order correlated.

(3) The news topics of non-exclusive news content on the ABC and NBC networks are positively rank-order correlated.

Hypothesis 10: The position emphasis of bad news and good news in each newscast on the three TV networks in the early evening newscasts is significantly different.

METHODOLOGY

Content Analysis

Content analysis was employed to examine the news stories in this study. The definitions of content analysis have differed over time. According to Krippendorff's definition (1980), content analysis is a research technique for making replicatable and valid inferences from data to their context.

Definitions of content analysis reveal broad agreement on the requirements of objectivity, system and generality. Objectivity stipulates that each step in the research process must be carried out on the basis of explicitly formulated rules and procedures. Systematic means that the inclusion and exclusion of content or categories are done according to consistently applied rules. And, generality requires that the findings must have theoretical relevance. Purely descriptive information about content, unrelated to other attributes of documents or to the characteristics of the sender or recipient of the message is of little value.

Sampling Procedure

The time period chosen was from December 4, 1990 through January 10, 1991. A composite week was chosen to record the three major TV networks' early evening newscasts on VHS tapes for analysis. The purpose of this procedure was to form a composite week, from Monday through Friday, within a five-week period. The starting day was randomly selected as Friday, December 14, 1990. Therefore, the following days were Monday, December 17, 1990; Tuesday, December 25, 1990; Wednesday, January 3, 1991; and Thursday, January 10, 1991. Since ABC did not have an evening newscast on Christmas day, 1990, that Tuesday was

replaced by Tuesday, December 4, 1990. Through this procedure, 15 evening newscasts were selected. Except for three commentary and opinion items, 97 (51%) national news stories and 95 (49%) international news stories were included.

Units of Analysis and Variables

Certain variables will be analyzed in this study: (1) date of news story; (2) channel of news story; (3) length of each news story; (4) national or international news story; (5) topic of news story; (6) location of news story; (7) position of news story in each newscast; (8) use of visual aids of news story; (9) length of visual aids of news story; (10) tone of news story; (11) headline of a newscast; and (12) exclusive news or not.

According to the definitions of content analysis, the definitions of units of analysis are critical to the objectivity of the study. The more precise and mutual exclusive the definitions are, the easier to achieve objectivity. The definitions of units of analysis in this study mainly came from previous studies, and some were revised to be more explicit. They were defined as follows.

The individual news story was the basic unit of analysis. A news story was defined as any topic introduced by the anchor person, coupled with any report or reports by other correspondents on the same topic and any concluding remarks by the anchor person (Fowler and Showalter, 1974).

Lengths of news stories and visual aids were coded as total seconds shown on screen. These variables were in interval level.

To identify the meanings of national and international news is the essential issue in the beginning of this study. National news was defined as news events

occurring within the boundaries of the United States and in which no other country is involved (Almaney, 1970). International news was defined as any news story that mentioned a country other than the United States, regardless of its thematic content or dateline (Larson, 1979). This variable, nature of news stories, was in nominal level.

Geographical location of national news was determined according to its state where the news event occurred. In order to group those states into small regions, 50 states were recoded into six regions: Midwest (including: Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, and Wisconsin), North Central (including: Colorado, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota), North Atlantic (including: Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, and West Virginia), South Central (including: Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas), South East (including: Alabama, Washington, D.C., Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia), and Western (including: Alaska, Arizona, California, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming). For international news, according to Larson's category (1988b), the locations were grouped into Western Europe, Middle East, Asia, Eastern Europe, Latin America, Africa, and Canada. U.S.S.R., Australia, and other national and international news locations were added to the variable of geographical location for this study. In order to reduce the number of categories for better statistical analysis, the categories were recoded as: (01) South Central (Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas); (02) Midwest (Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, and Wisconsin); (03) North Central (Colorado, Iowa,

Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota); (04) Southeast (Alabama, Washington, D.C., Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia); (05) Western (Alaska, Arizona, California, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming); (06) North Atlantic (Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, and West Virginia); (07) Other national news; (08) Western Europe; (09) Middle East; (10) Asia; (11) Eastern Europe; (12) U.S.S.R.; (13) Latin America; (14) Africa; (15) Canada; (16) Australia; (17) International Organizations; (18) Other international news. This variable, geographical locations of news stories, was in nominal level.

The categories of news topics as defined by Stempel III (1985), were used in this study. This variable, topics of news stories, was in nominal level. The categories include:

1. Politics and Government Acts: Politics and government acts at local, state and national level.

2. War and Defense: War, defense, rebellion, military use of space, including both foreign and domestic stories.

3. Diplomacy and Foreign Relations: Both foreign and domestic items dealing with diplomacy and foreign relations. Includes the events which are related to diplomacy relations of two or more nations made by the United Nations.

4. Economic Activity: General economic activity, prices, money, labor, wages and natural resources.

5. Agriculture: Farming, farm prices and economic aspects of agriculture.

6. Transportation and Travel: Transportation and travel, including economic aspects.
7. Crime: All crime stories including criminal proceedings in court.
8. Public Moral Problems: Human relations and moral problems including alcohol abuse, divorce, sex, race relations and civil court proceedings.
9. Accidents and Disasters: Both man-made accidents and natural disasters.
10. Science and Invention: Science other than defense related, and other than health and medicine.
11. Public Health and Welfare: Health, medicine, public welfare, social and safety measures, welfare of children and marriage and marriage relations.
12. Education and Classic Arts: Education, Classic arts, religion and philanthropy.
13. Popular Amusements: Entertainment and amusements, sports, TV, radio and other media.
14. General Human Interest: Human interest, weather, animals, cute children and juvenile interest.

In addition to the categories mentioned above, "Environment" and "Other" categories were added to the news topic variable. Environment was defined as that news dealing with environmental or ecological issues. When none of the news stories fit into the above categories, they were coded as "Other."

In order to measure the position emphasis of each news story, each newscast was divided into three segments: the first 10 minutes, second 10 minutes, and third 10 minutes. When the news story cut across two periods, the

story was coded into that segment which received the most story length. This variable, position emphasis of news stories, was in ordinal level.

The number of audio-visual techniques used with each story (narrator only, narrator with remote audio track, narrator with still-line drawing behind, narrator in film, film with narrator voice-over, and interview) served as a variable for the weighting of a given news story (Fowler and Showalter, 1974). Each news story was coded as to how many visual aids were used. Thus, this variable, number of visual aids, was in interval level.

Tone of news stories was divided into two categories: bad news and good news. The categories of bad news, developed by Lowry (1971) and used for this study, were:

1. **Armed Conflict/War:** All stories concerning armed conflict between social groups, nations, or groups of nations. This armed conflict can be as small as a commando unit of a few men or as large as a full-scale war.

2. **International Tension:** All stories of conflict or disagreement between nations (political, diplomatic, economic) where the conflict or disagreement stops short of armed conflict or war.

3. **Social Conflict/Strikes/Riots:** All stories concerning the failure of individuals or society to function in a cooperative, integrative manner. Most often, these events will be intranational in scope, rather than international, and will involve conflict between social groups, rather than between individuals.

4. **Crime:** All stories concerning extra-legal acts not included in Armed Conflict/War, and Social Conflict/Strikes/Riots.

5. **Accidents/Disasters:** All stories resulting from acts of God or unforeseen events which lead to personal injury or destruction of life or property.

6. Other Bad News: All stories not belonging to one of the above five categories.

It should be pointed out that some stories were classified as "Other Bad News" when they certainly would have been bad news to at least some people. For example, stories concerning air and water pollution did not fit one of the five categories outlined above, and were thus, by definition, classified as "Other Bad News." As another example, if the Dow-Jones stock market average had dropped 100 points, this also would have been coded as "Other Bad News." The classification of the categories used in this study was not developed on the basis of how "many people" would develop them, since any news item might be considered "bad" by some people. Instead, it was developed by Lowry (1971) on the basis of 1) the categories of scholars who have studied bad news in the past, and 2) the researcher's own judgements. All stories not belonging to any of the above categories were defined as "Good News" (see Appendix).

Statistical Methods

Several statistical methods were used to analyze the following hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1: More bad news is shown in International news stories than in national news stories on the three TV networks in the early evening newscasts.

This is a one-tailed hypothesis with the independent variable of national and international news, and dependent variables of bad and good news, in nominal level. Crosstabulation, which is suitable for one-tailed and two-tailed hypothesis with nominal variables, was used to test this hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2: The proportions of national and international news length on the three TV networks in the early evening newscasts are positively correlated.

This hypothesis will be supported when the results support the following conditions.

(1) The proportions of national and international news length shown on the ABC and CBS networks are positively correlated.

(2) The proportions of national and international news length shown on the CBS and NBC networks are positively correlated.

(3) The proportions of national and international news length shown on the ABC and NBC networks are positively correlated.

This is a one-tailed hypothesis with percentages of national and international news length, as interval independent and dependent variables. Crosstabulation and Pearson Correlation were used to test this hypothesis. The ratio of national to international news was obtained from crosstabulation of national to international news length by the three TV networks on each day. With the percentages of national and international news length by three network each day, which were interval level, Pearson Correlation was employed to test their correlation among the three networks.

Hypothesis 3: The news topics shown on the three TV networks in the early evening newscasts are positively rank-order correlated.

Three sub-hypotheses were related to this hypothesis:

(1) The news topics reported by the ABC and CBS networks are positively rank-order correlated.

(2) The news topics reported by the CBS and NBC networks are positively rank-order correlated.

(3) The news topics reported by the ABC and NBC networks are positively rank-order correlated.

This is a one-tailed hypothesis with TV networks, as nominal independent variable, and rank order of news topics, as ordinal dependent variable. Crosstabulation and Spearman's Coefficient of Rank-Order Correlation were used to test this hypothesis. Frequencies of each topic shown on each channel were obtained from Crosstabulations of news topics by the three TV networks. News topics in rank order were obtained by rearranging the frequencies from the smallest to the largest. After transforming these frequencies into rank order, Spearman's Coefficient of Rank-Order Correlation was used to test this hypothesis.

Hypothesis 4: The geographical locations of selected news stories on the three TV networks in the early evening newscasts are positively rank-order correlated.

This hypothesis relates to three sub-hypotheses:

(1) The geographical locations of selected news stories on the ABC and CBS networks are positively rank-order correlated.

(2) The geographical locations of selected news stories on the CBS and NBC networks are positively rank-order correlated.

(3) The geographical locations of selected news stories on the ABC and NBC networks are positively rank-order correlated.

This is a one-tailed hypothesis with TV networks, as nominal independent variable, and rank order of geographical locations, as ordinal dependent variable. As mentioned in hypothesis 3, Crosstabulation and Spearman's Coefficient of Rank-Order Correlation were used to examine this hypothesis.

Hypothesis 5: The proportions of bad and good news length in each newscast on the three TV networks in the early evening newscasts are positively correlated.

Three sub-hypotheses will be taken into consideration:

(1) The proportions of bad and good news length shown each day on the ABC and CBS networks are positively correlated.

(2) The proportions of bad and good news length shown each day on the CBS and NBC networks are positively correlated.

(3) The proportions of bad and good news length shown each day on the ABC and NBC networks are positively correlated.

This is a one-tailed hypothesis with proportions of bad and good news length, as interval independent and dependent variables. As used in Hypothesis 2, Crosstabulation and Pearson Correlation were used to test this hypothesis. The ratio of bad to good news by each network was obtained from crosstabulation of bad to good news by the three TV networks. With the percentages of bad and good news length, which were in interval level, Pearson Correlation was suitable to test their correlations.

Hypothesis 6: The proportions of non-exclusive national and international news length in each newscast on the three TV networks are positively correlated.

Three sub-hypotheses will be examined:

(1) The proportions of non-exclusive national and international news length on the ABC and CBS networks are positively correlated.

(2) The proportions of non-exclusive national and international news length on the CBS and NBC networks are positively correlated.

(3) The proportions of non-exclusive national and international news length on the ABC and NBC networks are positively correlated.

This is a one-tailed hypothesis with percentages of national and international news length, as interval independent and dependent variables. Pearson Correlation, which is used to test the hypothesis with independent and dependent variables in interval level, was used to test this hypothesis.

Hypothesis 7: The proportions of bad and good news in non-exclusive news content on the three TV networks in the early evening newscasts are positively correlated.

Three sub-hypotheses will be tested:

(1) The proportions of bad and good news in non-exclusive news content on the ABC and CBS networks are positively correlated.

(2) The proportions of bad and good news in non-exclusive news content on the CBS and NBC networks are positively correlated.

(3) The proportions of bad and good news in non-exclusive news content on the ABC and NBC networks are positively correlated.

This is a one-tailed hypothesis with percentages of bad and good news length, as interval independent and dependent variables. As in Hypotheses 2 and 5, Crosstabulation and Pearson Correlation were used to test this hypothesis. The percentages of bad and good news length by each network was obtained from Crosstabulations of bad and good news by the three TV networks. With the percentages of bad and good news length on the three TV networks, Pearson Correlation was suitable to test their correlations.

Hypothesis 8: The geographical locations of non-exclusive news stories on the three TV networks in the early evening newscasts are positively rank-order correlated.

Some conditions will be present when this hypothesis is supported.

(1) The geographical locations of non-exclusive news stories on the ABC and CBS networks are positively rank-order correlated.

(2) The geographical locations of non-exclusive news stories on the CBS and NBC networks are positively rank-order correlated.

(3) The geographical locations of non-exclusive news stories on the ABC and NBC networks are positively rank-order correlated.

This is a one-tailed hypothesis with TV networks, as nominal independent variable, and rank order of geographical locations, as ordinal dependent variable. From Crosstabulations of the three TV networks and non-exclusive geographical locations of news stories, frequencies of each location were obtained. After transforming the frequencies into rank order, Spearman's Coefficient of Rank-Order Correlation was suitable to test this hypothesis.

Hypothesis 9: The news topics of non-exclusive news content on the three TV networks in the early evening newscasts are positively rank-order correlated. Some conditions will be present when this hypothesis is supported.

(1) The news topics of non-exclusive news content on the ABC and CBS networks are positively rank-order correlated.

(2) The news topics of non-exclusive news content on the CBS and NBC networks are positively rank-order correlated.

(3) The news topics of non-exclusive news content on the ABC and NBC networks are positively rank-order correlated.

This is a one-tailed hypothesis with TV networks, as nominal independent variable, and rank order of news topics, as ordinal dependent variable. From Crosstabulations of the three TV networks and non-exclusive news topics, frequencies of each news topic were obtained. After transforming the frequencies into rank order, Spearman's Coefficient of Rank-Order Correlation was suitable to test this hypothesis.

Hypothesis 10: The position emphasis of bad news and good news in each newscast on the three TV networks in the early evening newscasts is different.

This is a two-tailed hypothesis with position emphasis, as nominal variable, and percentages of bad and good news stories, as interval variable. Crosstabulation was used to test this hypothesis.

Reliability

Reliability is used to test the degree of objectivity of the content analysis. The main idea of reliability is to present similar conclusions when the measurements and procedures are replicated by other researchers. Consequently, the coders, coding instructions, category definitions, units of analysis, and some combination of these must be qualified to a certain degree. For example, the coders should at least have similar education background and be able to code the content independently according to the coding instructions. The coding instructions should be clear enough for these coders as well as subsequent researchers. Thus, researchers can replicate the same study without any question.

Only when these variables were under control, the study turns out an objective content analysis.

To improve the accuracy of content analysis and get some measure of the extent of inter-coder agreement on each of the dimensions, a random sample of the original sample is needed (Scott, 1955). The requirements are that the categories be mutually exclusive and that observations be duplicated on a random sample of the total set of samples being studied.

The coders were two graduate students in the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication with a background in research methods. Only four variables, type of news story, news source, use of visual aids, and tone of news story, required coders' judgement. According to standard procedure in calculating reliability, 10% to 25% of original sample should be reanalyzed by independent coders. Thus, in calculating the reliability of these four items, subsampling of 15% of the newscasts that were chosen from the original sample were independently coded by two trained coders.

The intercoder reliability coefficients, according to Holsti's (Wimmer and Dominick, 1987) coefficient, were 90%, 92% and 95%. These percentages were calculated in the following equations:

$$\text{Reliability of A\&B} = 2M / (N+N) = 2 \times 324 / (360+360) = 90\%$$

$$\text{Reliability of B\&C} = 2M / (N+N) = 2 \times 331 / (360+360) = 92\%$$

$$\text{Reliability of A\&C} = 2M / (N+N) = 2 \times 342 / (360+360) = 95\%$$

A, B, C: A & B are independent coders, and C represents researcher.

M: Total agreement amount of coding decisions.

N: Total amount of coding decisions made (No. of news stories x No. of coding decisions in each news story = 30 x 20 = 360).

FINDINGS

Among the 192 news stories, ABC had 74 (38.5%) news stories; CBS had 57 (29.7%) news stories, and NBC had 61 (31.8%) news stories (Table 1).

Table 1. Distribution of national and international news on the three TV networks

	ABC		CBS		NBC	
	Nat'l	Int'l	Nat'l	Int'l	Nat'l	Int'l
No. of News Stories	36	38	31	26	30	31
% of News Stories	48.6	51.4	54.4	45.6	49.2	50.8

The news topic appearing the most often on network TV was "War and Defense" (34%), the second was "Economic Activity" (15%), and the third was "Politics and Government Acts" (11%).

Geographical locations of news story appearing the most were "Other National News" (21%), "Middle East" (21%) and "Washington, D.C." (18%).

Bad news stories were significantly longer than good news stories (Table 2).

Table 2. Comparison of bad and good news length on the three TV networks^a

	Bad News	Good News
No. of News Stories	150	42
Mean Length (seconds)	104.5	57.5

^aThis table was according to T-test results.

Two-tailed probability=0.000***.

***Significant (p<0.001).

Exclusive news was 48% of the 192 news stories. In other words, 52% of news stories was duplicated by two or more networks.

Regarding visual aids used on bad and good news stories, results showed significant differences (Table 3).

Table 3. Comparison of visual aids of bad and good news stories on the three TV networks

No. of V.A. ^a /Tone	Bad News Stories	Good News Stories
One Visual Aid	52 (34.7%)	28 (66.7%)
Two Visual Aids	18 (12.0%)	4 (9.5%)
Three Visual Aids	41 (27.3%)	9 (21.4%)
Four Visual Aids	39 (26.0%)	1 (2.4%)

^aV.A.: visual aids.

Chi-square: 17.46518.

Significance: 0.0006.

Minimal expected frequency: 4.813.

Cells with expected frequency less than 5: 1 out of 8 (12.5%).

Key Findings

Key finding 1

International news stories were more likely to be bad news than national news on the evening newscast of the three TV networks.

Out of a total of 192 news stories, 158 bad news stories (78%) were found. From Crosstabulations, more bad news was found in international news than in national news stories ($p=0.0012$). The ratio of bad to good news for national news was 68% to 32%, and for international news was 88.4% to 11.6% (Table 4). In

other words, international news contained 20% more bad news than national news.

Table 4. Distribution of national and international news stories on the three TV networks

Nature/Tone	Bad News	Good News
National News	66 (68.0%)	31 (32.0%)
International News	84 (88.4%)	11 (11.6%)

Chi-square: 10.50221.

Significance: 0.0012.

Minimal expected frequency: 20.781.

Cells with expected frequency less than 5: None.

Key finding 2

There were positive correlations in the proportion of national to international news story length of each newscast between network CBS and NBC in the early evening newscasts ($p=0.024$). However, no significant relationship was found between ABC and CBS, or ABC and NBC (Table 5).

Key finding 3

Positive rank-order correlations exist for the selection of news topics between ABC and CBS, CBS and NBC, and ABC and NBC in the early evening network newscasts (Table 6). "War and Defense" was the top news topic on the three TV networks during this period of time. Other categories, such as "Economic Activity", "Politics and Government Acts", "Crime", "Public Health and Welfare", and "Accidents and Disasters" were ranked far ahead of the others.

Table 5. Pearson Correlations of the proportions of national and international news length on the three TV networks

(%)	ABC		CBS		NBC	
	Nat'l	Int'l	Nat'l	Int'l	Nat'l	Int'l
ABC Nat'l	1.0000 p=.					
ABC Int'l	-1.0000 p=.000*	1.0000 p=.				
CBS Nat'l	.3014 p=.311	-.3014 p=.311	1.0000 p=.			
CBS Int'l	-.3014 p=.311	.3014 p=.311	1.0000 p=.000*	1.0000 p=.		
NBC Nat'l	.6879 p=.100	-.6879 p=.100	.8813 p=.024*	-.8813 p=.024*	1.0000 p=.	
NBC Int'l	-.6879 p=.100	.6879 p=.100	-.8813 p=.024*	.8813 p=.024*	-1.0000 p=.000*	1.0000 p=.

*Significant ($p < 0.05$).

Key finding 4

Positive rank-order correlations exist for the geographical locations of news stories between ABC and CBS, CBS and NBC, and ABC and NBC in the early evening network newscasts (Table 7). The top five categories of geographical locations emphasized by the networks were "Other National News", "Middle East", "South East Area" (including Washington, D.C.), "North Atlantic Area" (including New York), and "U.S.S.R."

Table 6. Spearman's Coefficient of Rank-Order Correlation of news topics on the three TV networks

Topic/Network	ABC	CBS	NBC
War & Defense	1.0 ^a	1.0	1.0
Politics & Gov. Acts	2.5	3.5	5.0
Economic Activity	2.5	2.0	2.0
Public Health & Welfare	4.0	5.0	6.5
Crime	5.0	3.5	3.0
Accidents & Disasters	7.0	6.0	4.0
Education & Classic Arts	7.0	13.5	8.5
Environment	7.0	13.5	8.5
General Human Interest	9.0	13.5	14.0
Diplomacy and Foreign Relations	12.0	7.5	14.0
Public Moral Problems	12.0	7.5	14.0
Science & Invention	12.0	9.5	10.5
Popular Amusements	12.0	9.5	6.5
Others	12.0	13.5	10.5
Agriculture	15.5	13.5	14.0
Transportations & Travel	15.5	13.5	14.0

^aFigures shown above represent rank order of news topics on each network.

Rank-Order Correlation between ABC and CBS=2.88, $p=0.004^{**}$.

Rank-Order Correlation between CBS and NBC=2.99, $p=0.0028^{**}$.

Rank-Order Correlation between ABC and NBC=3.29, $p=0.001^{***}$.

**Significant ($p<0.01$).

***Significant ($p<0.001$).

Table 7. Spearman's Coefficient of Rank-Order Correlation of geographical locations of network TV news stories

Locations/Channel	ABC	CBS	NBC
Middle East	1.0 ^a	2.5	2.0
South East	2.5	1.0	3.0
Other National News	2.5	2.5	1.0
Western	4.5	4.0	7.0
U.S.S.R.	4.5	5.5	9.0
Midwest	6.5	7.0	5.0
North Atlantic	6.5	5.5	5.0
West Europe	8.5	14.5	12.0
Africa	8.5	9.5	9.0
North Central	12.0	8.0	5.0
Asia	12.0	14.5	16.0
Latin America	12.0	9.5	12.0
Canada	12.0	14.5	16.0
International Organizations	12.0	14.5	16.0
South Central	16.5	14.5	16.0
Eastern Europe	16.5	14.5	12.0
Australia	16.5	14.5	16.0
Other International News	16.5	14.5	9.0

^aFigures shown above represent rank order of news locations on each network.

Rank-Order Correlation between ABC and CBS=3.69, $p=0.0004^{***}$.

Rank-Order Correlation between CBS and NBC=3.69, $p=0.0004^{***}$.

Rank-Order Correlation between ABC and NBC=3.18, $p=0.0014^{**}$.

**Significant ($p<0.01$).

***Significant ($p<0.001$).

Key finding 5

Positive correlations exist in the proportion of bad and good news length in each newscast of the CBS and NBC networks in the early evening newscasts ($p=0.000$). However no significant relationship was found between the ABC and CBS, or ABC and NBC networks (Table 8).

Table 8. Pearson Correlations of the proportions of bad and good news length on the three TV networks

(%)	ABC		CBS		NBC	
	Bad	Good	Bad	Good	Bad	Good
ABC Bad	1.0000 $p=.$					
ABC Good	-1.0000 $p=.000^*$	1.0000 $p=.$				
CBS Bad	-.2544 $p=.340$	.2544 $p=.340$	1.0000 $p=.$			
CBS Good	.2544 $p=.340$	-.2544 $p=.340$	-1.0000 $p=.000^*$	1.0000 $p=.$		
NBC Bad	-.3086 $p=.307$	.3086 $p=.307$	.9964 $p=.000^*$	-.9964 $p=.000^*$	1.0000 $p=.$	
NBC Good	.2860 $p=.320$	-.2860 $p=.320$	-.9949 $p=.000^*$	.9949 $p=.000^*$	-.9991 $p=.000^*$	1.0000 $p=.$

*Significant ($p<0.05$).

Key finding 6

Significant correlations were observed in the proportion of non-exclusive national to international news length in each newscast between the ABC and NBC networks ($p=0.018$), and the CBS and NBC networks ($p<0.05$), but no significant relationship was found between the ABC and CBS networks in the early evening newscasts (Table 9).

Table 9. Pearson Correlations of the proportions of non-exclusive national and international news length on the three TV networks

(%)	ABC		CBS		NBC	
	Nat'l	Int'l	Nat'l	Int'l	Nat'l	Int'l
ABC Nat'l	1.0000 p=.					
ABC Int'l	-1.0000 p=.000*	1.0000 p=.				
CBS Nat'l	.6980 p=.095	-.6980 p=.095	1.0000 p=.			
CBS Int'l	-.6980 p=.095	.6980 p=.095	-1.0000 p=.000*	1.0000 p=.		
NBC Nat'l	.9042 p=.018*	-.9042 p=.018*	.8762 p=.026*	-.8762 p=.026*	1.0000 p=.	
NBC Int'l	-.9034 p=.018*	.9034 p=.018*	-.8800 p=.024*	.8800 p=.024*	-1.0000 p=.000*	1.0000 p=.

*Significant ($p<0.05$).

Key finding 7

A significant relationship was found in the proportion of bad news and good news in non-exclusive news length for the CBS and NBC networks ($p=0.000$), but no significant relationship was found for ABC and CBS, or ABC and NBC in the networks' early evening newscasts (Table 10).

Table 10. Pearson Correlations of the proportions of non-exclusive bad and good news length on the three TV networks

(%)	ABC		CBS		NBC	
	Bad	Good	Bad	Good	Bad	Good
ABC Bad	1.0000 $p=.$					
ABC Good	-1.0000 $p=.000^*$	1.0000 $p=.$				
CBS Bad	.4161 $p=.243$	-.4164 $p=.243$	$p=.$			
CBS Good	-.4161 $p=.243$	.4164 $p=.243$	-1.0000 $p=.000^*$	1.0000 $p=.$		
NBC Bad	.3744 $p=.267$	-.3745 $p=.267$	.9978 $p=.000^*$	-.9978 $p=.000^*$	1.0000 $p=.$	
NBC Good	-.3744 $p=.267$	.3745 $p=.267$	-.9978 $p=.000^*$	.9978 $p=.000^*$	-1.0000 $p=.$	1.0000 $p=.$

*Significant ($p<0.05$).

Key finding 8

Positive rank-order correlations exist for geographical locations of non-exclusive news stories reported by the ABC and CBS, CBS and NBC, and ABC and NBC networks in the early evening newscasts (Table 11).

Generally speaking, five categories were ranked ahead of the others. They were "Middle East", "Other National News", "South East Area" (including Washington D.C.), "North Atlantic Area" (including New York), and "U.S.S.R."

Key finding 9

Positive rank-order correlations exist for non-exclusive news topics reported by the ABC and CBS, CBS and NBC, and ABC and NBC networks in the early evening newscasts (Table 12).

Table 13 presents the significant rank-order correlations among the three TV networks in news topics and geographical locations of general news content as well as non-exclusive news content.

Key finding 10

The position emphases of bad news and good news are significantly different. In the first ten minutes, 90.3% was bad news, in the second ten minutes, 75% was bad news, and in the third ten minutes, 61.9% was bad news.

From Crosstabulation of bad news and good news by their position emphases, statistics showed that they were significantly different. Over 40 % of bad news (43.3%) was in the first ten minutes, other 39.3 % of bad news was in the second ten minutes, and the rest 17.3 % of them was in the third ten minutes of newscasts. Same results were also found in the position emphasis of non-

exclusive news stories: 48.1 %, 41.8 %, and 10.1 % of bad non-exclusive news were in the first, second, and third ten minutes of newscasts (Table 14, 15).

Table 11. Spearman's Coefficient of Rank-Order Correlation of geographical locations of non-exclusive news stories on the three TV networks

Location/Network	ABC	CBS	NBC
South East	1.0 ^a	1.0	2.0
Other National News	2.0	2.0	1.0
Middle East	3.0	4.0	3.5
Midwest	5.5	8.0	5.5
North Atlantic	5.5	4.0	3.5
Western	5.5	6.0	8.5
U.S.S.R.	5.5	4.0	5.5
North Central	9.5	8.0	8.5
Latin America	9.5	8.0	8.5
Africa	9.5	14.0	8.5
International Organizations	9.5	14.0	14.0
South Central	15.0	14.0	14.5
West Europe	15.0	14.0	14.5
Asia	15.0	14.0	14.5
Eastern Europe	15.0	14.0	14.5
Canada	15.0	14.0	14.5
Australia	15.0	14.0	14.5
Other International News	15.0	14.0	14.5

^aFigures shown above represent rank order of news locations on each network.

Rank-Order Correlation between ABC and CBS=3.85, $p=0.0004^{***}$.

Rank-Order Correlation between CBS and NBC=3.91, $p=0.0004^{***}$.

Rank-Order Correlation between ABC and NBC=3.93, $p=0.0004^{***}$.

***Significant ($p<0.001$).

Table 12. Spearman's coefficient of rank-order correlation of non-exclusive news topics on the three TV networks

Topic/Channel	ABC	CBS	NBC
War & Defense	1.0 ^a	1.0	1.0
Economic Activity	2.0	2.0	2.0
Politics & Gov. Acts	3.0	3.0	3.5
Public Health & Welfare	4.0	4.0	5.5
Crime	5.5	7.0	3.5
General Human Interest	5.5	12.5	12.5
Accidents & Disasters	7.0	5.0	5.5
Diplomacy and Foreign Relations	12.0	7.0	12.5
Agriculture	12.0	12.5	12.5
Transportations & Travel	12.0	12.5	12.5
Public Moral Problems	12.0	12.5	12.5
Science & Invention	12.0	7.0	12.5
Education & Classic Arts	12.0	12.5	7.5
Environment	12.0	12.5	12.5
Popular Amusements	12.0	12.5	7.5
Others	12.0	12.5	12.5

^aFigures shown above represent rank order of news topics on each network.

Z1=Rank-Order Correlation between ABC and CBS=3.26, $p=0.0012^{**}$.

Z2=Rank-Order Correlation between CBS and NBC=3.16, $p=0.0016^{**}$.

Z3=Rank-Order Correlation between ABC and NBC=3.30, $p=0.001^{***}$.

**Significant ($p<0.01$).

***Significant ($p<0.001$).

Table 13. Spearman's Coefficient of Rank-Order Correlation on the three TV networks

Type/Networks	ABC&CBS	CBS&NBC	ABC&NBC
News Topics	$p=0.004^{**}$	$p=0.0028^{**}$	$p=0.001^{***}$
Geographical Locations	$p=0.0004^{***}$	$p=0.0004^{***}$	$p=0.0014^{**}$
Topics of Non-exclusive News Stories	$p=0.0012^{**}$	$p=0.0016^{**}$	$p=0.001^{***}$
Geographical Locations of Non-exclusive News Stories	$p=0.0004^{***}$	$p=0.0004^{***}$	$p=0.0004^{***}$

**Significant ($p<0.01$).

***Significant ($p<0.001$).

Table 14. Distribution of position emphasis of bad and good news stories on the three TV networks

Position/Tone	General News Stories	
	Bad News	Good News
The 1st Ten Minutes	43.3 %	16.7 %
The 2nd Ten Minutes	39.3 %	45.2 %
The 3rd Ten Minutes	17.3 %	38.1 %

Chi-square: 12.96968.

Significance: 0.0015.

Minimal expected frequency: 9.188.

Cells with expected frequency less than 5: None.

Table 15. Distribution of position emphasis of non-exclusive bad and good news stories on the three TV networks

Position/Tone	Non-Exclusive News Stories	
	Bad News	Good News
The 1st Ten Minutes	48.1%	14.3%
The 2nd Ten Minutes	41.8%	47.6%
The 3rd Ten Minutes	10.1%	38.1%

Chi-square: 12.86976.

Significance: 0.0016.

Minimal expected frequency: 3.360.

Cells with expected frequency less than 5: 1 of 6 (16.7%).

Summary of Key Findings

<u>Hypothesis 1:</u> More bad news is shown in International news stories than in national news stories on the three TV networks in the early evening newscasts.	Supported
<u>Hypothesis 2:</u> The proportions of national and international news length on the three TV networks in the early evening newscasts are positively correlated.	Not supported
(1) The proportions of national and international news length shown on the ABC and CBS networks are positively correlated.	Not supported
(2) The proportions of national and international news length shown on the CBS and NBC networks are positively correlated.	Supported
(3) The proportions of national and international news length shown on the ABC and NBC networks are positively correlated.	Not supported
<u>Hypothesis 3:</u> The news topics shown on the three TV networks in the early evening newscasts are positively rank-order correlated.	Supported
(1) The news topics reported by the ABC and CBS networks are positively rank-order correlated.	Supported
(2) The news topics reported by the CBS and NBC networks are positively rank-order correlated.	Supported
(3) The news topics reported by the ABC and NBC networks are positively rank-order correlated.	Supported
<u>Hypothesis 4:</u> The geographical locations of selected news stories on the three TV networks in the early evening newscasts are positively rank-order correlated.	Supported
(1) The geographical locations of selected news stories on the ABC and CBS networks are positively rank-order correlated.	Supported

- (2) The geographical locations of selected news stories on the CBS and NBC networks are positively rank-order correlated. Supported
- (3) The geographical locations of selected news stories on the ABC and NBC networks are positively rank-order correlated. Supported
- Hypothesis 5: The proportions of bad and good news length in each newscast on the three TV networks in the early evening newscasts are positively correlated. Not supported
- (1) The proportions of bad and good news length shown each day on the ABC and CBS networks are positively correlated. Not supported
- (2) The proportions of bad and good news length shown each day on the CBS and NBC networks are positively correlated. Supported
- (3) The proportions of bad and good news length shown each day on the ABC and NBC networks are positively correlated. Not supported
- Hypothesis 6: The proportions of non-exclusive national and international news length in each newscast on the three TV networks in the early evening newscasts are positively correlated. Not supported
- (1) The proportions of non-exclusive national and international news length on the ABC and CBS networks are positively correlated. Not supported
- (2) The proportions of non-exclusive national and international news length on the CBS and NBC networks are positively correlated. Supported
- (3) The proportions of non-exclusive national and international news length on the ABC and NBC networks are positively correlated. Supported
- Hypothesis 7: The proportions of bad and good news in non-exclusive news content on the three TV networks in the early evening newscasts are positively correlated. Not supported
- (1) The proportions of bad and good news in non-exclusive news content on the ABC and CBS networks are positively correlated. Not supported

- (2) The proportions of bad and good news in non-exclusive news content on the CBS and NBC networks are positively correlated. Supported
- (3) The proportions of bad and good news in non-exclusive news content on the ABC and NBC networks are positively correlated. Not supported
- Hypothesis 8: The geographical locations of non-exclusive news stories on the three TV networks in the early evening newscasts are positively rank-order correlated. Supported
- (1) The geographical locations of non-exclusive news stories on the ABC and CBS networks are positively rank-order correlated. Supported
- (2) The geographical locations of non-exclusive news stories on the CBS and NBC networks are positively rank-order correlated. Supported
- (3) The geographical locations of non-exclusive news stories on the ABC and NBC networks are positively rank-order correlated. Supported
- Hypothesis 9: The news topics of non-exclusive news content on the three TV networks in the early evening newscasts are positively rank-order correlated. Supported
- (1) The news topics of non-exclusive news content on the ABC and CBS networks are positively rank-order correlated. Supported
- (2) The news topics of non-exclusive news content on the CBS and NBC networks are positively rank-order correlated. Supported
- (3) The news topics of non-exclusive news content on the ABC and NBC networks are positively rank-order correlated. Supported
- Hypothesis 10: The position emphasis of bad news and good news in each newscast on the three TV networks in the early evening newscasts is different. Supported

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

During the period under study, the Persian Gulf crisis was the major concern in international, as well as national news. Since each study of this type is arranged in advance, it is inevitable to have something happen during the study period. Fortunately, the period for the present study was right before the Gulf War started, January 15, 1991. Thus, the impact of this event on this study should be limited.

As mentioned by numerous past researchers, the major network newscasts essentially present the same messages and emphasize similar events. This study found similar results. The proportion of non-exclusive news was as high as 52%. Most international news was presented in a negative tone by the three TV networks. Bad news made up the majority of newscasts, and received more position emphasis than good news. Moreover, the news topics and geographical focuses were significantly rank-order correlated among three networks, both in the whole newscast and when only the non-exclusive news content was taken into consideration.

In regard to the proportion of international news on networks, 49% was international news which was similar to Almaney's result, 52% (1970). In Almaney's study, he claimed that the high proportion of international news was due to an international crisis on April 15, 1969. Similarly, the large number of international news items found in this study may be also due to another international crisis -- the Gulf crisis.

As found by Dominick (1977), networks covered news happening in certain geographic regions more often than in other geographic regions. Geographic

imbalance also was shown in this study. Except for some news without specific location, Washington, D.C., and the Middle East seem to have been emphasized the most. There is no doubt that Washington, D.C., is focused upon due to its political importance. The Middle East, with its economic advantages and unstable political situation which can influence the world, is also emphasized by most media. The Gulf crisis, which dominated most of national and international news in this period, might be the other reason which brought about the impact on this geographic imbalance.

Epstein (1973) explained geographic balance as one of the major reasons which influence the assignment editor's news selection. He stated that:

To maintain the appearance of national coverage of news events and thus satisfy the requirement of affiliated stations for a national news service, assignment editors are expected to distribute stories between different regions of the country. At the same time, they are supposed to stay within a budget which allows for only a limited number of film crews in a few cities. This dilemma is routinely solved by allocating assignments geographically, according to the whereabouts of the crews. NBC stations five network crews in Washington; therefore five stories a day are expected to be "Washington" stories, and are assigned by a Washington assignment editor working under the supervision of New York. Similarly, since there are three full-time network news crews in Los Angeles, Chicago and New York, and one on a part-time basis in Cleveland, an equivalent number of stories is usually assigned in these cities (pp. 147-148).

Regarding news topics ranked by the three TV networks, high conformity was shown in this study. War and defense, economic activity, and politics and government acts dominated most of the news content in this time period. Why did some news stories, such as news from the Gulf crisis, obtain more emphasis than others? Because these news stories contained more news values than other news stories, such as: timeliness, impact, conflict and unusualness. When a news event

contains such high news values, it will inevitably be reported. Therefore, high conformity in news topics was not only found in general news content, but also in non-exclusive news content.

Obviously, only the ABC network was found more exclusive than the other two networks. It relates to three aspects: 1) news length in national and international news; 2) bad and good news of the whole newscast ; and, 3) bad and good news of non-exclusive news content with other two networks. Significantly, CBS and NBC were more similar than ABC with CBS or ABC with NBC. In other words, the ABC network was different from the other two networks in its presentation.

Similar results were presented by Maines' in 1983. He wrote that: "Researchers discovered several very important differences among the three network newscasts. In general, ABC substantially outperformed CBS and NBC." He raised four reasons to support this point of view. They were: 1) ABC devoted 48% more time to domestic business and economic issues than NBC and 18% more time than CBS; 2) ABC devoted twice the amount of time to economists as sources than CBS, and slightly more than NBC; 3) ABC used business/industry representatives twice the amount of time than either CBS or NBC; and 4) ABC spent over twice the amount of time discussing the causes and implications of the stock-market rally than either CBS or NBC did. Over all, he found only the outcome of ABC was much closer to CNN. His research concluded that CNN was more balanced and less sensational, and roughly comparable to the networks in terms of depth and news priority. Since the presentation of ABC is more similar to CNN and less similar to CBS and NBC, it implies that ABC is more balanced and

less sensational than the other two networks. Therefore, it might explain the ABC's exception to the other two networks.

On the other hand, the competition among networks, and the efforts to present different viewpoints in order to compete with rivals might also explain the exception of ABC, even though its news content was inevitably similar to the other two networks.

Interestingly, in position emphasis of news stories, high similarity was also found on the three TV networks. Bad news items were more likely to be placed in the obvious position, the first or second ten minutes of a newscast. It might be explained as that the bad news occurring in this time period also happens to be important news. It is true that war news usually has tremendous impact on everyone, and these stories were viewed as bad news. Therefore, when most of the news content was dealing with that type of news, it was placed in an important position. However, it is possible that bad news stories always attract the news editors' attention and are more likely to be put in an important position.

Most of the results all tended in the same direction indicating that the three TV networks had a great deal of consonance. According to Robinson and McPherson (1977), reality interpretation is one of the interpretations which can be used to explain the focus of network journalism. Reality interpretation implies that network news is seen wholly -- or almost wholly -- as a valid portrayal of the most important events of the day. In other words, the events shown on three networks are the most newsworthy events of the day. This can also be applied to this study. The high consonance of news topics, geographic locations of news, proportion of bad and good news, and the proportion of national and international news among

the three networks came out the way they did because these news items contained the most news value.

Other than news value, Almaney (1970) used five criteria to explain the selection of TV news stories: 1) importance to the domestic public; 2) number of people affected; 3) audience interest; 4) political balance; and 5) dramatic quality. Actually, news value and the criteria mentioned above were both similar and efficient in explaining the consonance.

On the other hand, the conformity of news treatment by the three TV networks is obviously significant. For example, bad news significantly gained more emphasis than good news. Stone and Grusin (1984) explained that the nature of television appears to favor certain types of bad news because of its fulfilling an insatiable appetite of television for vivid, action-packed pictures. However, news stories relate to the Gulf crisis are the major event happening in this period. These news stories mainly were bad news but important enough to obtain position emphasis. It might be one of the major reasons why bad news stories dominate the major part of news stories in this period of time. Moreover, it might explain why bad news items were longer, appeared with greater frequency, and gained more emphasis than good news items.

In general, the presentations of the three TV networks' evening newscasts were similar in news selection and treatment. When viewed in light of these past findings, the current study's results suggest that network news reporting is focused on similar news events and treats them with similar news judgement. Referring to the Structural Functional Theory, high conformity of news content, bad news emphases and regional imbalance among the three TV networks were supported by the results. From the point of view of society, media can contribute to continuity,

social control, integration and motivation by symbolically rewarding those who conform to the social and economic values and succeed according to them, and by punishing those who do not conform, or who rebel. However, it also reduces different viewpoints and reinforces media's social control.

Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann (1973) noted that consonance across all the mass media is a most effective factor of mass media because it restricts or eliminates selective perception. She stated that:

It is especially important to investigate the combinations of the three elements -- consonance, cumulation, ubiquity -- as an effective factor of mass media. The more selective perception and editorial comment, reinforced by cumulation of periodical repetition in the media -- the more attitudes can be influenced or molded by the mass media (p. 112).

The issue here is to determine whether this outcome benefits the audience or not. Moreover, would the results restrict the selection of news viewing to the audience?

However, the Gulf crisis more or less affected the presentation of news reporting during this period. Therefore, the next investigation should replicate the present study using a constructed week of network newscasts from a year's period. Moreover, as noted by Altheide (1982), the consonance among three TV networks will increase their power of persuading audience opinion.

Another suggestion for further study is to examine the networks' effect on audience in order to find out the degree of consonance among the three TV networks and their influence on the audience. Schramm (1957) concluded the social effects of mass communication as following:

. . . Therefore, mass communication faces a powerful built-in resistance whenever it tries to effect a change in its audiences. This doesn't mean that mass communication has nothing to do with building up the personality resources and group standards by which the individual

resists change. Quite the contrary. The individual learns a great many of the facts he knows from mass media. His concept of the status different individuals hold in society is largely determined by mass media. Many of his tastes have been developed by exposure to popular art and fine art through the mass media. And the mass media have had something to do with the group standards he supports. One of the things we have recently come to understand about mass communication is that it feeds facts and ideas to groups. Actually, it seems to feed the group leaders more than the followers, for research indicates that the leaders are keenly alert to mass communication, particularly in their area of leadership. Mass communication thus provides ammunition and information for the leader. It helps provide a common background of knowledge for all the members. When a message comes to one member or more, it often bounces around the group. It is discussed with the influentials, squared with the group norms (p. 56).

An audience and effect study will provide wider investigation of the networks' influence on the audience, the degree of networks' coping with group norms, and the major differences between networks' presentations.

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APPENDIX: CODING INSTRUCTIONS

1. **ID**, Identification number: (Column 1-3)
_____ (Identification number).
2. **DATE**, Date of news story: (Column 5)
 - (1) Tuesday, Dec. 4, 1990.
 - (2) Friday, Dec. 14, 1990.
 - (3) Monday, Dec. 17, 1990.
 - (4) Wednesday, Jan. 2, 1991.
 - (5) Thursday, Jan. 10, 1991.
3. **CHANNEL**, Channel of news story: (Column 6)
 - (1) ABC.
 - (2) CBS.
 - (3) NBC.
4. **LENGTHS**, Length of news story: (Column 7-9)
_____seconds.
5. **NATURE**, Nature of news story: (Column 10)
 - (1) **National news**: News events occurring within the boundaries of the United states and in which no other country is involved.
 - (2) **International news**: News story that mentioned a country other than the United States, regardless of its thematic content or dateline, was considered an international story.

6. **TOPIC**, Topic of news story: (Column 12-13)

- (1) **Politics and Government Acts:** Government acts and politics at local, state and national level.
- (2) **War and Defense:** War, defense, rebellion, military use of space. Includes both foreign and domestic stories.
- (3) **Diplomacy and Foreign Relations:** Both foreign and domestic items dealing with diplomacy and foreign relations. Includes the events which is related to diplomacy relations of two or more nations made by United Nations.
- (4) **Economic Activity:** General economic activity, prices, money, labor, wages and natural resources.
- (5) **Agriculture:** Farming, farm prices and economic aspects of agriculture.
- (6) **Transportations and Travel:** Transportation and travel, including economic aspects.
- (7) **Crime:** All crimes stories including criminal proceedings in court.
- (8) **Public Moral Problems:** Human relations and moral problems including alcohol, divorce, sex, race relations and civil court proceedings.
- (9) **Accidents and Disasters:** Both man-made accidents and natural disasters.
- (10) **Science and Invention:** Science other than defense related and other than health and medicine.
- (11) **Public Health and Welfare:** Health, public welfare, social and safety measures, welfare of children and marriage and marriage relations.

- (12) **Education and Classic Arts:** Education, Classic arts, religion and philanthropy.
- (13) **Environment:** Environmental and ecological issues.
- (14) **Popular Amusements:** Entertainment and amusements, sports, TV, radio and other media.
- (15) **General Human Interest:** Human interest, weather, animals, cute children and juvenile interest.
- (16) **Other.**

This variable was in nominal level.

7. **LOCATION**, Geographical location of news story: (Column 14-15)

- | | |
|------------------------|--------------------------|
| (01) Alabama (AL). | (16) Kansas (KS). |
| (02) Alaska (AK). | (17) Kentucky (KY). |
| (03) Arizona (AZ). | (18) Louisiana (LA). |
| (04) Arkansas (AR). | (19) Maine (ME). |
| (05) California (CA). | (20) Maryland (MD). |
| (06) Colorado (CO). | (21) Massachusetts (MA). |
| (07) Connecticut (CT). | (22) Michigan (MI). |
| (08) Delaware (DE). | (23) Minnesota (MN). |
| (09) Florida (FL). | (24) Mississippi (MS). |
| (10) Georgia (GA). | (25) Missouri (MO). |
| (11) Hawaii (HI). | (26) Montana (MT). |
| (12) Idaho (ID). | (27) Nebraska (NE). |
| (13) Illinois (IL). | (28) Nevada (NV). |
| (14) Indiana (IN). | (29) New Hampshire (NH). |
| (15) Iowa (IA). | (30) New Jersey (NJ). |

- | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| (31) New Mexico (NM). | (48) West Virginia (VA). |
| (32) New York (NY). | (49) Wisconsin (WI). |
| (33) North Carolina (NC). | (50) Wyoming (WY). |
| (34) North Dakota (ND). | (51) Washington, D.C. (D.C.). |
| (35) Ohio (OH). | (52) Other national news. |
| (36) Oklahoma (OK). | (53) Western Europe. |
| (37) Oregon (OR). | (54) Middle East. |
| (38) Pennsylvania (PA). | (55) Asia. |
| (39) Rhode Island (RI). | (56) Eastern Europe. |
| (40) South Carolina (SC). | (57) U.S.S.R. |
| (41) South Dakota (SD). | (58) Latin America. |
| (42) Tennessee (TN). | (59) Africa. |
| (43) Texas (TX). | (60) Canada. |
| (44) Utah (UT). | (61) Australia. |
| (45) Vermont (VT). | (62) International Organizations. |
| (46) Virginia (VA). | (63) Other international news. |
| (47) Washington (WA). | |

After RECODE for Accumulating into Fewer Categories:

- (01) South Central (AL, LA, MS, NM, OK, TX).
- (02) Midwest (IL, IN, MI, OH, WI).
- (03) North Central (CO, IA, KS, MN, MO, NE, ND, SD).
- (04) Southeast (AL, DC, FL, GA, KY, NC, SC, TN, VA).
- (05) Western (AK, AZ, CA, HI, ID, NV, OR, MT, UT, WA, WY).
- (06) North Atlantic (CT, DE, ME, MD, MA, NH, NJ, NY, PA, RI, VT, WV).

- (07) Other national news.
- (08) Western Europe.
- (09) Middle East.
- (10) Asia.
- (11) Eastern Europe.
- (12) U.S.S.R.
- (13) Latin America.
- (14) Africa.
- (15) Canada.
- (16) Australia.
- (17) International Organizations.
- (18) Other international news.

8. **POSITION**, Position of news story in the newscast: (Column 16)

- (1) The first ten minutes.
- (2) The second ten minutes.
- (3) The third ten minutes.

9. **NUMBER**, Number of visual aids in each news story: (Column 18-23)

- 1) **NARRATOR**, narrator only (Column 18).
 - 2) **REMOTE**, narrator with remote audio track (Column 19).
 - 3) **STILL**, narrator with still line drawing behind (Column 20).
 - 4) **FILM**, narrator in film (Column 21).
 - 5) **FNVOICE**, film with narrator voice over (Column 22).
 - 6) **INVIEW**, interview (Column 23).
- (0) No.
 - (1) Yes.

10. **LENGTHV**, Length of visual aids: (Column 25-27)

_____seconds.

11. **TONE**, Tone of news stories: (Column 28)

(1) **Bad News**: Any news story which is related to any of six categories mentioned below.

- a. **Armed conflict/War** -- All stories concerning armed conflict between social groups, nations, or groups of nations. This armed conflict can be as small as a commando unit of a few men or as large as a full-scale war.
- b. **International tension** -- All stories of conflict or disagreement between nations (political, diplomatic, economic) where the conflict or disagreement stops short of armed conflict or war.
- c. **Social conflict/Strikes/Riots** -- All stories concerning the failure of individuals or society to function in a cooperative, integrative manner. Most often, these events will be intranational in scope, rather than international, and will involve conflict between social groups, rather than between individuals.
- d. **Crime** -- All stories concerning extra-legal acts not included in Armed Conflict/War, and Social Conflict/Strikes/Riots.
- e. **Accidents/Disasters** -- All stories resulting from acts of God or unforeseen events which to personal injury or destruction of life or property.
- f. **Other bad news** -- All stories not belonging to one of the above five categories but have negative impact on people. For example, air pollution, water pollution, economic recession, etc.

(2) **Good News:** All stories not belonging to any one of the above categories.

12. **HEADLINE**, Headline of newscast: (Column 29)

(1) Yes.

(2) No.

13. **EXCLUE**, Exclusive news: (Column 30)

(1) Yes.

(2) No.

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