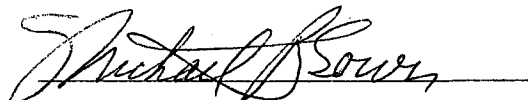


To The Graduate School:

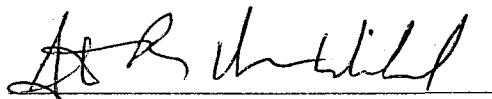
The members of the Committee approve the thesis of Jacob Anfinson presented on July, 25, 2006.



Michael Brown, Chairman



Conrad Smith

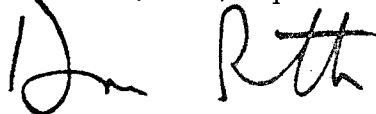


Steven Van Winkle

APPROVED:



Kenneth Smith, Head, Department of Communication and Journalism



Don Roth, Dean, The Graduate School

Anfinson, Jacob P., Effects of the New Media vs. the Old Media On Political Trust and Political Cynicism, M.A., Department of Communications, August 2006

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of the new media versus the old media on political trust and political cynicism. This study also examined whether or not the effects of cultivation are seen in the development of political trust and political cynicism. A questionnaire consisting of two scales, as well as several demographic questions, was used in a survey research design. The first scale was a political trust scale that measured the level of trust that participants have in the political system. The second scale was a political cynicism scale that measured the level of cynicism that participants have towards the political system and process. The questionnaire was comprised of the two scales, as well as several demographic questions, was administered to 103 students from the freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior classes at the University of Wyoming.

EFFECTS OF THE NEW MEDIA VS. THE OLD MEDIA
ON POLITICAL TRUST AND POLITICAL CYNICISM

by
Jacob P. Anfinson

A thesis submitted to the Department of Communications and The Graduate School of
the University of Wyoming
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS
in
COMMUNICATIONS

Laramie, Wyoming
August, 2006

UMI Number: EP25416

INFORMATION TO USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleed-through, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

UMI[®]

UMI Microform EP25416

Copyright 2008 by ProQuest Information and Learning Company.

All rights reserved. This microform edition is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.

ProQuest Information and Learning Company
300 North Zeeb Road
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1 Literature review.....	3
Old Media and New Media.....	3
Political Trust.....	12
Political Cynicism.....	14
Cultivation Theory.....	16
Chapter 2 Method.....	20
Participants.....	20
Procedure.....	20
Instrument.....	20
Background Questions.....	20
Political Trust.....	21
Political Cynicism.....	21
Chapter 3 Results.....	24
Sampling and Analysis.....	24
Reliability.....	26
Research Question One.....	26
Research Question Two.....	27
Research Question Three.....	28
Research Question Four.....	29
Additional Findings.....	30
Chapter 4 Discussion.....	35
Conclusions.....	35
Discussion.....	41
Limitations and Implications for Future Research.....	45

LIST OF TABLES

Table One: Reliability Statistics For Political Trust Scale.....	26
Table Two Reliability Statistics For Political Cynicism Scale.....	26
Table Three: Effect of Old Media, New Media and Hybrid Media on Political Trust Pearson Correlations.....	27
Table Four: Effect of Old Media, New Media and Hybrid Media on Political Trust Spearman's rho Correlations.....	27
Table Five: Effect of Old Media, New Media and Hybrid Media on Political Cynicism Pearson Correlations.....	28
Table Six: Effect of Old Media, New Media and Hybrid Media on Political Cynicism Spearman's rho Correlations.....	28
Table Seven: Effect of Frequency of Media Exposure on Political Trust Pearson Correlations.....	29
Table Eight: Effect of Frequency of Media Exposure on Political Trust Spearman's rho Correlations.....	29
Table Nine: Effect of Frequency of Media Exposure on Political Cynicism Pearson Correlations.....	30
Table 10: Effect of Frequency of Media Exposure on Political Cynicism Spearman's rho Correlations.....	30
Table 11: Effects of Gender, Age, Year in School, Political Party, and Political Orientation on Political Trust and Political Cynicism Pearson Correlations.....	32
Table 12: Effects of Gender, Age, Year in School, Political Party, and Political Orientation on Political Trust and Political Cynicism Spearman's rho Correlations.....	33
Table 13: Effects of Voting on Political Trust and Political Cynicism Pearson Correlations.....	34
Table 14: Effects of Voting on Political Trust and Political Cynicism Spearman's rho Correlations.....	34

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix A: Instrument	56
------------------------------	----

Introduction

The effects of the media on the political attitudes of the electorate have long been a focus of social science researchers in both the fields of communication and political science. Through the study of media effects on political attitudes, it is believed that we can predict the voting trends of said electorate, explain the reasons behind voter apathy and other problems associated with democracy, and even figure out ways to coerce the public into becoming more participatory in government. These objectives have been met through the work of previous social scientists (Kazee, 1981; Bucy & Gregson, 2001). This research has been beneficial in examining these topics through the media that were prevalent in the periods in which these studies were conducted. Most studies focus on media effects as they relate to specific media such as television (Kazee, 1981), radio (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 1998), and newspapers (Bromley & Curtice, 2004). This research proposed to continue the tradition by examining how different television news programs influence political attitudes. Very little research has explored how different programs within a single media affect political attitudes. Thus, this paper examined the effects on political trust and political cynicism of what has been termed “the new media,” such as *The Daily Show with John Stewart*, as opposed to the effects of “the old media,” such as *The NBC Nightly News with Brian Williams*, on these same two attitudes (Bucy & Gregson, 2001). The objective was to determine if there is, indeed, a difference in the effects of the new media and the old media on political trust and political cynicism, and if so, what those differences were.

This objective is important because people are receiving their political information from the media in new ways. With the advent of cable and satellite television, people are moving away from news sources that have traditionally existed, such as the ABC, NBC, and CBS news divisions, and are now turning to alternate channels to stay informed on the political developments of the day. These new channels offer news, but with a twist. These channels offer news in a way that focuses more on entertainment and less on substance. The news is presented in a diversionary manner that attempts to hold the attention of the audience. If this is true, how does an entertainment bias affect the political attitudes of people who are watching those programs? Will this entertainment bias create more political cynicism in the populace? Will it create less political trust? At the same time, we know that the old media, with its focus on substance, has created political cynicism in viewers while at the same time reducing political trust (Aarts & Semetko, 2003). We do not know, however, how the effects of that political cynicism and political trust relate to the new media. Are the effects more or less? In addition, does the amount of time spent watching either the old media or the new media have an effect on the amount of political cynicism or political trust reported by the viewer? This study will try to answer these questions and, hopefully, will provide researchers with some insight on how they conceptualize political trust and political cynicism in a world of constantly evolving new media.

Chapter 1

Literature Review

In order for us to understand the implications created by the effects of the old media and the new media, as well as the frequency of viewing of the old media and new media, on political trust and political cynicism, we must first study previous research that has examined these variables, i.e. new media, old media, political trust, political cynicism, and cultivation theory, independently.

Old Media and New Media

Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (1998) conducted research on the effects of the media on political attitudes focusing on the difference in these effects via how they were delivered to the public. They examined the effects of television and radio as opposed to the effects of newspapers on political attitude. This examination of the effects of the different types of media as opposed to different programs within the same media has been the main focus of study on the topic in the social sciences. The focus has been on the effect of different forms of media (television, radio, newspapers, and the internet) on political attitudes rather than on the effect of the different contexts of media within the same media form, such as a new political forum on television. There is research indicating that form is not the most important factor. Newton (1999) found that it is not the form of the media that matters in how people receive their political information, but the content of that media.

Television has been the focus of much of the research that examines the effects of the media on political attitudes done over the last half century. Aarts and Semetko (2003)

found that television, and television news specifically, was associated with a growing apathy about politics among those studied. This finding was consistent with the earlier research of Michael Robinson (1976), who found that network television news screening was linked with “political malaise” and a diminished perception of political trust and competence among those who viewed watched network news. This is noteworthy because McClure and Patterson (1976) deduced that television is accessed by more voters than any other source of political information, including newspapers. The Roper Organization (1975) also discovered that television is becoming progressively more relied upon as a supplier of political information among the citizenry.

Bucy & Gregson (2001) classify the media studied above as old media. The old media were those mediums that provided political information through a traditional format, such as newspapers, radio, and television programs specifically focusing on political topics. The old media includes traditional news programs such as any of the nightly news broadcasts on the broadcast networks (ABC, CBS, and NBC). This old media is the basis of most research.

While the definition of the old media is generally taken for granted by scholars, and therefore not frequently committed to paper, a definition of the old media can be derived from C.E. Ball’s (2004) definition of the new media. Ball defined the new media as “texts that juxtapose semiotic modes in new and aesthetically pleasing ways and, in doing so, break away from print traditions so that written text is not the primary rhetorical means” (p. 405). This statement suggests that the new media uses a variety of available signs and symbols, such as humor, in an effort to tease the senses in ways that cannot be accomplished using traditional print means. The new media, to an extent, is then defined

in opposition to the existing traditional media. The old media, while attempting to accomplish the above through the use of visual aids, is still rooted in the tenets, such as neutrality and objectivity, which were established under the dominance of the print media.

Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, and Signorielli (1982) wrote, "Competition for the largest possible audience at the least cost means striving for the broadest and most conventional appeals, blurring sharp conflicts, blending and balancing competing perspectives, and presenting divergent or deviant images as mostly to be shunned, feared, or suppressed. Otherwise, no matter how skewed or off-center a view might really be, it should be 'balanced' by more 'extreme' manifestations, preferably on 'both sides,' to make its presentation appear 'objective,' 'moderate,' and otherwise suitable for mass marketing," (p. 105). This is an example of what the old media, or broadcast network news, strives to do in presenting information to the public. They are appealing to the least common political denominator, and in doing so, they endeavor to not offend anyone's sensibilities or challenge their attitudes. The new media, however, do not ascribe to the above tenets. Rather, they exist to inform through confrontation. The new media hope to inform by bludgeoning their audience with information that may challenge their beliefs and attitudes. The new media has a more obvious political position that is absent in the old media.

Hill and Holbrook (2005) propose "that current theories of media and politics do not sufficiently account for the impact that non-news sources of political information have on public opinion and that previous research has potentially underestimated media effects by use of an overly strict definition of politically relevant media" (p. 278). By

suggesting this, Hill and Holbrook open up a new realm of possible study that compares and contrasts the old media with the new media, while asking the question of what exactly is encompassed by the definitions of entertainment and information and if there is a notable difference in their effect on people's political attitudes.

Hill and Holbrook (2005) also point to a shift in how the public receives their news and information related to politics. It is no longer limited to the evening newscasts, but now includes non-traditional formats such as late-night talk shows, late-night variety shows, cable television, and pseudo-news shows.

Bucy and Gregson (2001) have done considerable research on the new media and have found that there is a "political interactivity" that is achieved through the new media in which people feel as if they have an investment in the proceedings. There is responsiveness to the new media in which viewers feel as if they have input into the political system even if that input is not real but perceived. This could be achieved through the existence of a live studio audience which acts as a sort of proxy for the viewers that cannot be there in person. It is also achieved through the host, who viewers may identify with more than they do a traditional news anchor on any of the broadcast networks. The host is viewed as one of "us" rather than one of "them."

Political entertainment television is "set in the casual atmosphere of an informal conversation or comedy skit, political entertainment television relies on interpersonal humor, insider gossip and banter with celebrities and other high-status guests – frequently politicians – to foster a sense of parasocial involvement or illusion of intimacy with media personae" (Horton & Wohl, 1956, p. 215).

Based on Ball's (2004) definition of new media, the case can also be made that the new media is somewhat postmodern in nature. This claim suggests that the new media does not exist in a pure form, but in a blurring of entertainment and politics. The new media may look, feel, and act like the old media, but the new media does not observe the same boundaries. It borrows liberally from the various components that make up the old media. What we then get is a pastiche which, according to John Duvall (1999), is "the effect of a transformation from a society with a historical sensibility to one that can only play with a degraded historicism" (p. 375). Pastiche is also a "strategy of connecting fragments of culture for generative or critical purposes" (Calafell & Delgado, 2004, p. 6). Ono and Sloop (1995) also claim that pastiche involves "elements of popular culture torn out of context for the explicit purpose of constructing new effects" (p. 23), and it "challenges mainstream discourse" while producing new ways of talking about ideological issues (p. 24). Pastiche, therefore, is one of those creative or generative forces whose course of action uses fragments of existing culture to purposefully create a new way of talking about political issues.

New media examples of political entertainment television shows (Bucy and Gregson, 2001) include Comedy Central's *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* which will be used in this study as an exemplar of the new media. The new media has given political entertainment television an even stronger presence. *The Daily Show with John Stewart* has been identified as a liberal-themed show by several critics, including Human Events (2005). Other examples of political entertainment television shows include HBO's *Real Time with Bill Maher*, as well as Fox News's *The O'Reilly Factor* and *Hannity and Colmes*, which will all be used in this study as exemplars of the new media.

Fox News's *The O'Reilly Factor* has been accused of having a conservative bent by many critics, including Newsweek (2001).

An example of a traditional political news show is *The NBC Nightly News with Brian Williams*, which will also be used in this study as an exemplar of the old media. *The NBC Nightly News with Brian Williams*, and other shows of its kind, have been identified as unbiased by many critics, including in an article by John Corry (1991).

For the purposes of this study, network newscasts, as well as any television program which is not postmodern in nature, such as the *BBC News*, *Oprah*, NBC's *The Today Show*, NBC's *Saturday Night Live*, and CNN's *Crossfire*, are being utilized as exemplars of the old media. While *Oprah*, *Saturday Night Live*, and *The Today Show* may seem as if they include the characteristics of the new media, i.e. interviews, entertainment, etc., they fall under the banner of the old media because of their commitment to an old television format that audiences are familiar with. Even *Saturday Night Live*, which is nothing but entertainment, would be considered old media because of its lack of postmodernism. *Saturday Night Live* is clearly an entertainment program and has never presented itself as a newscast, with the exception of the satirical "Weekend Update" segment each week. Nobody mistakes *Saturday Night Live* for a news program, and they do not present themselves as such. Having said that, it is noteworthy to mention how many people get a portion of their news from a show like *Saturday Night Live*. Many individuals would not know that a presidential debate had taken place if it were not for a parody of that debate on *Saturday Night Live* the following Saturday. The old media knows what it is and is straightforward in its presentation of itself to its audience.

What, then, are the characteristics of the network newscasts, and the non-postmodern television programs, that make up the old media and help to differentiate them from those programs associated with the new media? One characteristic of network news is the relatively small window of time with which they must work to present the news. The average length of a network newscast is 30 minutes, excluding commercial breaks. This small amount of time makes it difficult for the networks to spend substantial time on any one story. This has led to a reduction in the length of sound bites on network newscasts.

Writing of the length of network news sound bites, Lowry and Shidler (1995) say that “the shrinking network TV sound bite... probably couldn’t have shrunk much more” (p. 40). This phenomenon can be detrimental to network newscasts because the new media, while also fixed for time, have more time that they can dedicate to allowing newsmakers to speak and be heard through interviews and longer sound bites, as well as through the rather non-fixed format of the show. A network newscast cannot dedicate an entire episode to one story or idea, while the new media has allowed itself, or perhaps built into itself, the flexibility to do just that if they see fit. This is a partial example of how the new media is able to compete with the established traditional media. They can do what the old media cannot.

Another characteristic of the network news is that it is seen as being too frequently the bearer of bad news. Former U. S. Vice-President Spiro Agnew, who, considering his background, is a dubious source, though one who echoes the sentiments of many politicians, claimed “that network news unfairly highlighted dissent, confrontation, irrationality, and violence” (Comstock & Cobbey, 1978, p. 55). While this

charge has yet to be proven, it is a view that is held by many media watchdogs. If Agnew's claims are true, then the network newscasts could be seen as responsible for many of the negative political attitudes held by viewers of those newscasts, if they do indeed have negative political attitudes. What about those in the new media, though? Are they more or less negative in their "coverage" of news stories? Will they have a greater or lesser effect on the political attitudes of their viewers?

Even if the above is true and the network newscasts are negative in nature therefore affecting the attitudes of their viewers, studies have shown that the networks would not do anything about it. According to Michael J. Robinson (1978), "Network news organizations tend to ignore statements and studies about effects, almost as if it were a matter of policy to do so" (p. 210). This is but another characteristic of the network news and the old media. They are heavily resistant to change, especially any change that affects their format. Is this true of the new media, as well? It is not certain, and it will not be determined through this study, but it is an interesting question and one that may deserve some study of its own.

Another aspect of the old media is its ability to agenda-set and prime its audience. Iyengar and Kinder (1987) said that "the power of television news... appears to rest not on persuasion but on commanding the public's attention (agenda-setting) and defining criteria underlying the public's judgments (priming)" (p. 117). Through the results of agenda-setting and priming, the old media can influence what we do think or know about and what we do not. If the old media depict the president as trustworthy or the government as unworthy of cynicism, the viewer will follow along as those underlying criteria determined by the old media come to mind.

While most studies have focused on the negative aspects and effects of the old media, it is worth noting that “television news glorifies democracy” (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987, p. 132). If this is true, then the old media could also be accused of being complicit, as the Fourth Estate, in not presenting a view of politics, politicians, or the government that is too cynical for fear of damaging that democracy which they hold so dear.

Other studies have found “that exposure to...news makes viewers less likely to hold public officials accountable” (Iyengar, 1991, p. 2). This is also a somewhat confounding finding, considering that most studies indicate that the news is responsible for diminishing political trust and growing political cynicism. It could be interpreted, however, as an indication that the public’s distrust and cynicism is relegated to governmental institutions, rather than those officials who make up those institutions. This finding only addresses the old media, and it is unclear whether or not this finding would also be true of the new media.

In conclusion, we can see that based on previous research the content of the media is more important than the form and that the old media is associated with a growing political apathy, malaise, and diminished perception of political trust. We also see that television is accessed by more voters than any other source of political information and is becoming more relied upon by voters for their political information. Several of the aforementioned studies suggest that previous inquiries into voters’ reliance on television news for their political information have focused on the old media when, in fact, the new media serves a similar educational purpose. According to previous research, the old media appears to be fixed and unbiased, while the new media is somewhat unbound by these conventions that are ascribed to by the old media. The old media is also fixed,

brief, and responsible for agenda-setting and priming. The old media lionizes democracy and lessens viewers' perceptions in regards to public official accountability. Based on all of the above and the belief that there is a difference in the old media and the new media, the current study will attempt to determine what effects those differences have on political trust and political cynicism. Having examined the old and the new media, let's now look at political trust.

Political Trust

Kazee (1981) wrote that "the potential for the media to act as an agent of attitude change-or manipulator of such change-is greatly enhanced" (p. 517) in today's media-saturated society. The media do have the potential to affect the attitudes of the public whether it be the amount of political trust or political cynicism that people have based on how they receive their political information.

Political trust has been defined as a basic evaluative orientation toward the government (Stokes, 1962). It is founded on how well the government is operating according to people's normative expectations (Miller, 1974).

There has been a decline in political trust over the years that has been attributed to the more antagonistic role played by the media in their relationships with political figures (Patterson, 1993). This suggests that the media do affect the political attitudes of the public through its reports, but it has also been shown that the type of media exposure, such as newspaper reading or television viewing, plays a role in the amount of political trust that the public has towards the government (Kazee, 1981).

Moy and Pfau (2000) established that exposure to U.S. network news has a negative effect on trust in U.S. government institutions, but it is not known if any of the new media also contribute to this negative effect on trust.

Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1995) have also found that through the media “we come to distrust those who choose to make their careers in public service” (p. 3). So, not only do we distrust the institutions that make up our government, we also distrust those who earn their living by representing the electorate in the government. Those who earn their living this way would include U.S. Senators, U.S. Representatives, as well as the President of the United States and his Vice-President. This definition could also be expanded to include any and all state, county, and city officeholders.

The effects of the media on political trust are somewhat confounding because of the contrast in the level of trust that the viewing public has towards the media, or more specifically, the network news. Network news is seen as credible and reliable by those who are regular viewers (Adams, 1978), and, therefore, trustworthy. As Iyengar and Kinder (1987) wrote, “We Americans trust television news; we see it as authoritative” (p. 1). This “trust [in the media] begets more trust” (Barnouw, 1978, p. 2). This finding suggests that the media and, again, more specifically, the network news, must present public officials and the institutions that they represent in a non-trustworthy light. If the media are untrusting, would not we as viewers be, as well?

In sum, the literature review shows that the media do indeed have an effect on political trust. What is in question is just how much of a role the media play and if there is a difference between the old media and the new media in their affect on political trust. Therefore, the research question is derived as follows:

RQ1: Is there a difference in the effects of the old media and the new media on political trust?

In conclusion, we see from previous research that the media do, indeed, have the potential to affect political trust. This potential has been realized as a more antagonistic media, which is trusted by its viewers, has caused a decline in the amount of political trust in the populace. Having examined political trust, let's now look at political cynicism.

Political Cynicism

The way in which the media report on politics has served to cultivate a cynicism in the public that has wide-ranging repercussions for the ways in which citizens participate in government (Bromley & Curtice, 2004). This cynicism has led to low voter turnout in elections, as well as a growing apathy towards government in general.

This growing apathy has been addressed by Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1995), who wrote that the "media... is increasingly peeling off a band of citizens who turn from independence to apathy, even antipathy, toward our political institutions" (p. 1). Apathy is one thing, but the media's ability to foster antipathy in the news-viewing electorate is troublesome. It suggests that the media could be responsible for breeding outright contempt towards the government through its reporting techniques. This effect could produce several negative consequences for democracy, several of which have already been addressed by Bromley and Curtice (2004).

Dekker, Nuus, and Schyns (2004) defined political cynicism as “an individual’s attitude, consisting of a deep-rooted conviction of the inherent evilness of politicians, political institutions, and/or the political system as a whole” (p. 3).

This growing cynicism is thought to be a by-product of the tone with which the media reports on political figures and their actions (Barnett, 2002; Franklin, 1997). Aarts and Semetko (2003) also suggest that the media contribute to political cynicism through a style of reporting that lessens political knowledge and participation in the political process. The style of reporting that is referenced by Aarts and Semetko (2003) is further elaborated on by Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1995), who said, “By constantly questioning the sincerity and motives of politicians, journalists add to Americans’ cynicism about their own government” (p. 154). The watchdog role of the press that the old media ascribes to has aided the development of a public that is cynical towards their public officials and the institutions that those officials represent.

There is a concern among social scientists about escalating levels of political cynicism in highly developed democracies (Dekker, Nuus, & Schyns, 2004, Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995). If the media plays a role in this political cynicism, as the literature suggests they do, we must identify the contexts that cultivate this cynicism. Are those contexts limited to the old media or are they present in the new media, as well?

In sum, the literature review shows that political cynicism is a problem that has been exacerbated by the media and the techniques they employ in their reporting. In this instance, what is not known is how much the new media affects political cynicism and if there is a difference in the amount of cynicism created by the old media and the new media. Therefore, the research question is derived as follows:

RQ2: Is there a difference between the effects of the old media and the new media on political cynicism?

In conclusion, we see from previous research that the television media's reporting techniques and tone have led to growing apathy, antipathy, and low voter turnout which, in conjunction with the media's watchdog role, has led to escalating levels of cynicism in highly developed democracies. Having examined political cynicism, let's now look at cultivation theory.

Cultivation Theory

Cultivation theory has been, and continues to be, a prominent and significant theory in the field of communications and may help us understand why media can build distrust and cynicism. According to Vergeer, Lubbers, and Scheepers (2000) "...cultivation theory states that exposure influences people to perceive the world in a certain manner" (p. 130). The exposure to which they make reference is the exposure to some form of media and the message contained within that media. In other words, the more a person is subjected to a certain media message, the more likely they are to accept that message as reality and incorporate it into their world view.

According to George Gerbner (1998), "...television has become the primary common source of socialization and everyday information (mostly in the form of entertainment) of otherwise heterogeneous populations," (p. 177). While other media forms can serve as cultivators in society, the reliance of the populace on television for their information, i.e. news, offers that medium up as the most crucial for study.

For example, it has been determined that those people who are heavy viewers of television are more inclined to subscribe to the belief that violence affects members of our society in greater numbers compared to those who are considered light viewers of television (Gerbner, Gross, Signorielli, and Morgan, 1980, p. 713). The distinction between heavy viewers and light viewers of media messages is important in the study of cultivation. Usually, this distinction is measured according to number of hours of television watched during an average day (Gerbner, 1998). For the purposes of this study, those who watch their preferred news program either daily or several times a week will be considered heavy viewers, while those who watch weekly, several times a month, and occasionally will be considered light viewers.

Hawkins and Pingree (1982) determined that cultivation effects could be delineated into two “orders.” The effects that are produced by the first order are those effects which cause people exposed to the media to overestimate the incidences of certain things, such as number of violent crimes or police officers, in the “real” world. The effects of the second order are those effects that form people’s “global reactions to the real world such as perceptions, attitudes, feelings, and values” (Potter, 1994, p. 6). The effects of the second order are noteworthy because of the inclusion of “attitudes” among the reactions attributed to cultivation theory. If attitudes are formed through the heavy viewing of television, such as news programs, then political attitudes, such as trust and cynicism, could be cultivated, as well.

Potter’s (1994) description of second order effects is consistent with the findings of Gerbner et al (1980). Gerbner et al (1980) found that “adolescent heavy viewers also tend to express mistrust in people and to express the belief that people are selfish” (p.

714). This finding suggests that those people who are heavy viewers of television are more likely to be untrusting of people. Since politicians are people, one could assume that heavy viewers of television, especially those who are adolescent, would be more inclined to show distrust in politicians and the political process.

The effects of persistent exposure to certain media messages are greater when they are contained within the framework of entertainment programs (Vergeer, Rutten, & Scheepers, 1996). This would suggest that those programs that serve primarily to entertain rather than inform, such as *The Daily Show with John Stewart*, would serve to exacerbate further the amount of cultivation that takes place on its audience.

In addition to the amplified effects of exposure to entertaining media messages, Gerbner et al (1980) wrote, "Entertainment [is] the most informative and educational force of any culture" (p. 709). The combination of entertainment's ability to inform, educate, and cultivate further suggests that those news programs that make up the new media would have more of an effect on the attitudes of those who watch those programs on a more frequent basis than those who do not watch those programs on a regular basis. It also suggests that the old media, which exists to inform rather than entertain, may not have as great an affect on the attitudes, political or otherwise, of those who frequently view those programs.

In sum, the literature review shows that, according to cultivation theory, the effects of the media can have an impact on the attitudes of those who are subjected more frequently to the messages contained within that media. This is even more pronounced in the event that the messages are delivered within the context of an entertainment program. Therefore, the research questions are derived as follows:

RQ3: Does the amount of exposure to the media have an effect on political trust?

RQ4: Does the amount of exposure to the media have an effect on political cynicism?

In conclusion, we see from previous studies that heavy exposure to the media, specifically television, can influence the perceptions, values, feelings, and attitudes, including trust, of those who are exposed to that media. The effects on attitude of the media are heightened when they are found in entertainment programs on television because entertainment programs not only entertain but inform and educate.

Chapter 2 Method

Participants

This study recruited 103 students of various age groups, class standings, genders, and political affiliations at the University of Wyoming. The study used a convenience and purposive sample that was drawn from several available Communication and Journalism classes at the university. The study was conducted at various times throughout the spring semester of 2006 in various classrooms on the campus of the University of Wyoming.

Procedure

Students were asked to voluntarily participate in a survey for a master's thesis at the University of Wyoming. The experimenter administered a questionnaire (see Appendix A) to those students who agreed to participate in the study. None of the students who were given the opportunity to participate in the research refused to do so. The students were given an unlimited amount of time to complete the questionnaire. Upon individual completion of the questionnaire, the experimenter collected the questionnaire from the students by hand.

Instrument

Background questions. Participants were asked demographic questions about their age, gender, major, year of school, political party affiliation, political orientation, and whether or not they voted in the last election and why. They were asked to identify

which television news programs they would prefer to watch to obtain their political information. The television news programs that were offered as choices to the participants were *The Daily Show with John Stewart*, *The O'Reilly Factor*, *BBC News*, *Oprah*, *Real Time with Bill Maher*, *The NBC Nightly News*, *The Today Show*, *Saturday Night Live*, *Crossfire*, and *Hannity and Colmes*. In order to situate subjects into the categories of viewers of new media, viewers of old media, and viewers of a hybrid of old and new media, it was determined by the researcher that the responses of the subjects would be coded according to what television news programs they watched, with those who watched only new media programs being given a score of one, those who only watched old media were given a score of two, and those who reported watching both the new media and the old media were given a score of three. The participants were told that they could select more than one program. Additionally, the participants were asked to identify how frequently they watch their preferred news programs, such as daily, several times a week, weekly, several times a month, and occasionally.

Political trust. This variable was measured using the Political Trust Scale (Gibson, 2004). This scale consists of three items. Participants were asked about their political attitudes using a 5-point Likert scale for the first question, which asked "How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Politicians commonly take unfair advantage of the system for their own benefit?" The second question, which asked "How widespread do you think corruption such as bribe taking is amongst politicians in the United States?" asked participants about their political attitudes using a 4-point Likert scale. The final question in the scale asked participants "Some people say that federal politicians know what ordinary people think. Others say that federal

politicians don't know much about what ordinary people think. Where would you place your view on this scale from 1 to 5?" The Political Trust scale was developed for The Australian Survey of Social Attitudes and was made available by the Australian Social Science Data Archive (2003). Cronbach's alpha coefficient based on standardized items is 0.707 for the Political Trust Scale thereby signifying that the reliability for the scale had been satisfied at an acceptable level.

Political cynicism. This variable was measured by the Political Cynicism Scale (Schyns, 2004). This scale consists of four items. Participants were asked about their political attitudes based on a 5-point Likert scale for three of the questions, which asked "How much of the time do you think can you trust the government in Washington to do what is right?," "Do you think that people in the government waste a lot of the money we pay in taxes, waste some of it, or don't waste very much of it?," and "Do you think that quite a few of the people running the government are a little crooked, not very many are, or do you think hardly any of them are crooked?" The scale also asked a question that utilized a 3-point Likert scale. That question is "Would you say that the government is pretty much run by a few big interests looking out for themselves or that it is run for the benefit of all people?" This scale has been utilized by social science researchers for more than five decades and is based on questions asked in the American National Election Survey (NES, 2000). Cronbach's Alpha coefficient based on standardized items was .61 for the data gathered by the NES in 1998, .59 for the data collected in 2000, and .59 for the data collected in 2002. These numbers point to a low level of internal consistency for the scale, but that could be caused by the small number of questions that the scale

employs. Since this scale is widely used and regarded as the standard for measuring political cynicism, it was utilized for this study.

Chapter 3 Results

Sampling and Analysis

The current study collected a sample (N=103) of respondents from undergraduate students in communication courses at the University of Wyoming. Convenience sampling, as well as purposive sampling, techniques were utilized following the researchers inability to find a statistically significant number of respondents in the variable that examined year in school. The original convenience sample did not include enough respondents in the junior and senior classes so purposive sampling was executed. Respondents ranged in age from 18 to 39 years of age with a mean age of 20.78 years (SD=3.408). There was one subject who did not provide an age. The sample was comprised of 41.7% males (n=43) and 55.3% females (n=57) with three participants not specifying a gender. The sample was made up of 35.9% freshman (n=37), 23.3% sophomores (n=24), 25.2% juniors (n=26), and 15.5% seniors (n=16). All participants provided a year in school. The sample was also comprised of 43.7% Republicans (n=45), 23.3% Democrats (n=30), 17.5% Independents (n=18), and 6.8% Others (n=7). Three respondents failed to identify which political party they were a part of. In identifying their political orientation, 53.4% of the sample saw themselves as “Conservative” (n=55) and 40.8% saw themselves as “Liberal” (n=42). There were six participants who did not provide their political orientation. Seventeen and a half percent of the sample identified the new media as their preferred method of news viewing (n=18), 56.3% identified the old media as their preferred

method of news viewing (n=58), and 21.4% identified a combination of the old and new medias as their preferred method of news viewing (n=22). Five respondents did not specify a preferred method of television news viewing. In watching their preferred news program, 13.6% of the sample watched daily (n=14), 23.3% watched several times a week (n=24), 12.6% watched weekly (n=13), 4.9% watched several times a month (n=5), and 44.7% watched occasionally (n=46). One participant did not specify how frequently they watched their preferred news program. When asked whether or not they had voted in the last presidential election, 59.2% of respondents replied in the affirmative (n=61), while 39.8% replied that they had not (n=41). One respondent did not specify whether they had voted or not. The sample's mean score on the political trust scale was 7.00 (SD=1.883), and the sample's mean score on the political cynicism scale was 9.52 (SD=2.609).

Data were analyzed using SPSS 13.0 for Windows. To determine the effect respondents' preferred television news program viewed and frequency of viewing of preferred television news program had on political trust and political cynicism, simple linear correlations were created using Pearson and Spearman's rho correlations. The Pearson and Spearman's rho correlations were conducted to determine if any of the independent variables (television news program viewed and frequency of viewing) had a significant effect on the dependent variables (political trust and political cynicism). There were no significant correlations or results found in regards to the effects of the independent variables on the dependent variables.

Reliability

The reliability of the measurement instruments was analyzed. The three political trust items (first set of items one through three, see Appendix A) had a reliability of .637 (Cronbach's Alpha) (see Table One) and the four political cynicism items (second set of items one through three, see Appendix A) had a reliability of .704 (Cronbach's Alpha) (see Table Two).

Table One: Reliability Statistics For Political Trust Scale

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.637	3

Table Two Reliability Statistics For Political Cynicism Scale

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.704	4

Research Question One

Research question one asked if there was a difference in the effects of the old media and the new media on political trust. To test RQ1, a simple linear correlation (see Table Three), as well as a nonparametric correlation (see Table Four), was conducted to determine the effect that the independent variable (viewing of old media or new media or a combination of the two) had on the dependent variable (political trust).

Respondents' viewing habits had no significant effect on political trust ($r=.018$, $p=.865$) ($R=.052$, $p=.616$).

Table Three: Effect of Old Media, New Media and Hybrid Media on Political Trust Pearson Correlations

		TV Show
Political Trust Scale	Pearson Correlation	.018
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.865
	N	97

Table Four: Effect of Old Media, New Media and Hybrid Media on Political Trust Spearman's rho Correlations

			TV Show
Spearman's rho	Political Trust Scale	Correlation Coefficient	.052
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.616
		N	97

Research Question Two

Research question two asked if there was a difference between the effects of the old media and the new media on political cynicism. To test RQ2, a simple linear correlation (see Table Five), as well as a nonparametric correlation (see Table Six), was conducted to determine the effect that the independent variable (viewing of old media or new media or a combination of the two) had on the dependent variable (political cynicism).

Respondents' viewing habits had no significant effect on political cynicism ($r=.049$, $p=.636$) ($R=.042$, $p=.685$).

Table Five: Effect of Old Media, New Media and Hybrid Media on Political Cynicism Pearson Correlations

		TV Show
Political Cynicism Scale	Pearson Correlation	.049
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.636
	N	97

Table Six: Effect of Old Media, New Media and Hybrid Media on Political Cynicism Spearman's rho Correlations

			TV Show
Spearman's rho	Political Cynicism Scale	Correlation Coefficient	.042
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.685
		N	97

Research Question Three

Research question three asked if the amount of exposure to the media has an effect on political trust. To test RQ3, a simple linear correlation (see Table Seven), as well as a nonparametric correlation (see Table Eight), was conducted to determine the effect that the independent variable (amount of exposure to the media) had on the dependent variable (political trust).

Respondents' frequency of viewing had no significant effect on political trust ($r = .036$, $p = .724$) ($R = -.017$, $p = .865$).

**Table Seven: Effect of Frequency of Media Exposure on Political Trust
Pearson Correlations**

		TV Viewing Frequency
Political Trust Scale	Pearson Correlation	-.036
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.724
	N	101

**Table Eight: Effect of Frequency of Media Exposure on Political Trust
Spearman's rho Correlations**

			TV Viewing Frequency
Spearman's rho	Political Cynicism Scale	Correlation Coefficient	-.029
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.771
		N	101

Research Question Four

Research question four asked if the amount of exposure to the media has an effect on political cynicism. To test RQ4, a simple linear correlation (see Table Nine), as well as a nonparametric correlation (see Table 10), was conducted to determine the effect that the independent variable (amount of exposure to the media) had on the dependent variable (political cynicism).

Respondents' frequency of viewing had no significant effect on political cynicism ($r = -.012, p = .905$) ($R = -.029, p = .771$).

**Table Nine: Effect of Frequency of Media Exposure on Political Cynicism
Pearson Correlations**

		TV Viewing Frequency
Political Cynicism Scale	Pearson Correlation	-.012
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.905
	N	101

**Table 10: Effect of Frequency of Media Exposure on Political Cynicism
Spearman's rho Correlations**

			TV Viewing Frequency
Spearman's rho	Political Cynicism Scale	Correlation Coefficient	-.029
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.771
		N	101

Additional Findings

In addition to my research questions, I collected demographic information from the sample. This demographic information was then correlated with political trust and political cynicism in an attempt to generate data for possible future research. To test these demographic questions, simple linear correlations (see Table 11), as well as nonparametric correlations (see Table 12), were conducted to determine the effects that the independent variables (gender, age, year in school, political party, and political orientation) had on the dependent variables (political trust and political cynicism).

Respondents' gender had no significant effect on political trust ($r=-.089$, $p=.382$) ($R=-.054$, $p=.592$) or political cynicism ($r=.089$, $p=.380$) ($R=.097$, $p=.341$).

Respondents' age did have a significant negative effect on political trust ($r=-.324$, $p=.001$) ($R=-.351$, $p=.000$) and political cynicism ($r=-.306$, $p=.002$) ($R=-.298$, $p=.002$), which suggests that, as one advances in age, respondents develop less political trust and more political cynicism.

Respondents' year in school did have a significant negative effect on political trust ($r=-.426$, $p=.000$) ($R=-.418$, $p=.000$) and political cynicism ($r=-.296$, $p=.003$) ($R=-.273$, $p=.005$), which suggests that, as one advances from one grade level to the next in college, respondents develop less political trust and more political cynicism.

Respondents' political party did have a significant negative effect on political trust ($r=-.261$, $p=.009$) ($R=-.309$, $p=.002$) and political cynicism ($r=-.353$, $p=.000$) ($R=-.412$, $p=.000$), which suggests that those who selected "Other" as their political party will have less political trust and more political cynicism than those who selected "Independent" as their political party who will have less political trust and more political cynicism than those who selected "Democrat" as their political party who will have less political trust and more political cynicism than those who selected "Republican" as their political party.

Respondents' political orientation did have a significant negative effect on political trust ($r=-.425$, $p=.000$) ($R=-.446$, $p=.000$) and political cynicism ($r=-.507$, $p=.000$) ($R=-.529$, $p=.000$) which suggests that those who selected "Liberal" as their political orientation will have less political trust and more political cynicism than those who selected "Conservative" as their political orientation.

Table 11: Effects of Gender, Age, Year in School, Political Party, and Political Orientation on Political Trust and Political Cynicism Pearson Correlations

		Political Trust Scale	Political Cynicism Scale
Gender	Pearson Correlation	-.089	.089
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.382	.380
	N	99	99
Age	Pearson Correlation	-.324(**)	-.306(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.002
	N	101	101
Year in School	Pearson Correlation	-.426(**)	-.296(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.003
	N	102	102
Political Party	Pearson Correlation	-.261(**)	-.353(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.009	.000
	N	99	99
Political Orientation	Pearson Correlation	-.425(**)	-.507(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000
	N	96	96

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 12: Effects of Gender, Age, Year in School, Political Party, and Political Orientation on Political Trust and Political Cynicism Spearman's rho Correlations

			Political Trust Scale	Political Cynicism Scale
Spearman's rho	Gender	Correlation Coefficient	-.054	.097
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.592	.341
		N	99	99
	Age	Correlation Coefficient	-.351(**)	-.298(**)
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.002
		N	101	101
	Year in School	Correlation Coefficient	-.418(**)	-.273(**)
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.005
		N	102	102
	Political Party	Correlation Coefficient	-.309(**)	-.412(**)
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.000
		N	99	99
	Political Orientation	Correlation Coefficient	-.446(**)	-.529(**)
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000
		N	96	96

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

In addition to the above demographic questions, I collected data on whether or not respondents had voted in the previous presidential election. This information was then also correlated with political trust and political cynicism in an attempt to generate data for possible future research. Simple linear correlations (see Table 13), as well as nonparametric correlations (see Table 14), were conducted to determine the effects that the independent variable (whether or not respondents had voted in the previous presidential election) had on the dependent variables (political trust and political cynicism).

Respondents' recent voting history had no significant effect on political trust ($r = -.002$, $p = .984$) ($R = -.007$, $p = .947$) or political cynicism ($r = .005$, $p = .964$) ($R = .011$, $p = .914$).

Table 13: Effects of Voting on Political Trust and Political Cynicism Pearson Correlations

		Political Trust Scale	Political Cynicism Scale
Vote	Pearson Correlation	-.002	-.005
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.984	.964
	N	101	101

Table 14: Effects of Voting on Political Trust and Political Cynicism Spearman's rho Correlations

		Political Trust Scale	Political Cynicism Scale
Spearman's rho	Vote	-.007	-.011
	Correlation Coefficient	.947	.914
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.947	.914
	N	101	101

Chapter 4 Discussion

Conclusions

All four of the research questions that were examined in this study (is there a difference in the effects of the old media and the new media on political trust or political cynicism and does the amount of exposure to the media have an effect on political trust or political cynicism?) produced no significant results that would suggest that there is a difference in the effects of the old media or the new media on political trust or political cynicism or that the amount of exposure to the media has an effect on political trust or political cynicism.

The general demographic makeup of the participants in the study was of a conservative, Republican, freshman female just under the age of 21.

The current study's findings seem to contradict the findings of Aarts and Semetko (2003) who found that television news was associated with a growing political apathy, as well as the findings of Michael Robinson (1976) who indicated that television news is responsible for diminishing political trust and a "political malaise." Based on the mean scores on the political trust and political cynicism scales, the sample did not demonstrate a strong lack of political trust or a high amount of political cynicism. Overall, the sample did demonstrate a better than average amount of political trust, which had a possible low score of three and a possible high score of 14, with the mean amount of political trust for the sample being 7.00. The sample also reported a less than average amount of cynicism, which had a possible low score of four and possible high score of 18, with the mean amount of cynicism for the sample being 9.52. This suggests that, while the sample is not particularly trusting of the government, they also are not particularly distrusting of the

government, either. The results also suggest that, while the sample is not particularly cynical towards the government, they also are not particularly optimistic about the government, either.

There were differences among the sample in regards to political trust and political cynicism when the means of those who watched the old media, the new media, and a combination of the two were examined independently. The highest amount of political trust was reported by those who watched only the old media as they had a mean score on the Political Trust Scale of 6.86 (SD=2.039). The second highest amount of political trust was reported by those who watched only the new media as they had a mean score on the Political Trust Scale of 7.11 (SD=1.811). The lowest amount of political trust was reported by those who watched a combination of the old and new media as they had a mean score of 7.18 (SD=1.736). The lowest amount of political cynicism was reported by those who only watched the new media as they had a mean score on the Political Cynicism Scale of 9.33 (SD=2.449). The second lowest amount of political cynicism was reported by those who watched only the old media as they had a mean score on the Political Cynicism Scale of 9.56 (SD=2.550). The highest amount of political cynicism was reported by those who watched a combination of the old and new media as they had a mean score on the Political Cynicism Scale of 9.73 (SD=2.865). These results suggest that solely relying on either the old or new media for political information may not create as much political cynicism or lack of political trust as that which is created when both are watched in conjunction with one another by a viewer. There are several possible explanations for this effect. First, those who watch both the old and the new media may be treated to several sides of an issue, including conflicting information, which may serve

to create confusion and the feeling that someone is not telling the truth. Those who watch both the old and the new media may also be better or, at least, more informed about political issues. By being more informed, those viewers may feel as if they know enough to know that someone or something is unworthy of trust or worthy of cynicism. There appear to be some factors that prevent the old media and the new media from truly differentiating themselves when it comes to effect on political trust and political cynicism. Perhaps the new media may differ significantly from the old media in some ways, but the new media does not appear to be different enough in ways that would serve to affect political trust and cynicism. They may not treat political issues as differently as previously thought. Also, perhaps because the new media liberally borrows some of the characteristics of the old media, such as looking like a news show in the case of *The Daily Show*, they may not be dissimilar enough to produce significant results. Perhaps the old media and the new media are limited in their ability to significantly present all of the facets of a story or issue which, in turn, leaves viewers not informed enough to develop political mistrust or political cynicism. Perhaps under these circumstances, ignorance truly is bliss.

The results of the current study may support the work of Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, and Signorielli (1982), who wrote, "Competition for the largest possible audience at the least cost means striving for the broadest and most conventional appeals, blurring sharp conflicts, blending and balancing competing perspectives, and presenting divergent or deviant images as mostly to be shunned, feared, or suppressed. Otherwise, no matter how skewed or off-center a view might really be, it should be 'balanced' by more 'extreme' manifestations, preferably on 'both sides,' to make its presentation appear 'objective,'

‘moderate,’ and otherwise suitable for mass marketing,” (p. 105). While I believed that the old media would be guilty of falling into the trap of appealing to the lowest common denominator in its news broadcasts, I did not believe that the new media would succumb to the temptation to appeal to the lowest common denominator because of their focus on their niche audience. It could be argued, however, that since both forms of media are reliant upon broadcast standards, as well as advertising dollars, they are both at the mercy of those outside influences that force their content into already set parameters. What those parameters are is unknown. Those parameters may or may not include the way in which politicians and the institutions that they represent are portrayed, which could have a negating effect on the attitudes of the viewing public.

Hill and Holbook (2005) suggested that existing social science theories do not account for the effect of political information sources that are not news based on public and political opinion. The current study attempted to account for those non-news based sources of information on political information through the category of new media and found little to no difference in their effect on political or public opinion.

In their work, Comstock and Cobbey (1978) cited former U. S. Vice-President Spiro Agnew, who claimed “that network news unfairly highlighted dissent, confrontation, irrationality, and violence” (p. 55). This may still be a true statement as the current study did not account for the overall content of the information provided by the old media or the new media; however, even if this statement is true, the current study did not find any reason to believe that it has a significant impact on the amount of political trust or political cynicism reported by those who view the news through either the old media or the new media.

According to results obtained by Iyengar and Kinder (1987), "... television news glorifies democracy" (p. 132). While Iyengar and Kinder's work was confined to network newscasts, the results of the current study, which support the results obtained by Iyengar and Kinder, would suggest that, perhaps, the new media is also responsible for the exaltation of democracy. I am not suggesting that this is either good or bad, but, if true, would serve to keep the erosion of political trust and the strengthening of political cynicism at a minimum. Those newscasts that took part in the glorification of democracy, whether old media or new media, would either balance those stories that led to negative attitudes towards the government with stories that lift up the government in the eyes of a viewer or they would purposefully slant their coverage to deify those institutions that make up a democracy.

Iyengar (1991) also found "that exposure to...news makes viewers less likely to hold public officials accountable" (p. 2). This is an interesting, and possibly confounding, finding as it relates to the current study. If this is true, and the findings of the current study do give it some credence, then the political trust scale and the political cynicism scale may not have been the best scales with which to correlate the effects of the old media and the new media. The reason for this statement is that the questions posed by the political trust scale and the political cynicism scale are public-official based. If television news, or non-news sources, has an effect on the way in which viewers hold politicians accountable, then the study would have been better served had the questions that comprised the scale been designed with political institutions in mind rather than those who comprise the institutions.

The current study's results also seem to contradict the findings of Patterson (1993), Kazee (1981), Moy and Pfau (2000), and Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1995) who all found that there has been a decline in political trust over the years that has been attributed to the more antagonistic role played by the media in their relationships with political figures. I am not arguing that there has not been a decline in political trust over the years, I am arguing, however, that the results of the current study suggest that the media's role in this decline may be overstated. The results produced by this survey suggest that there may be other factors that play a larger role in the declination of political trust than the role played by the media.

The results of the current study also contradict, or at least give pause to, the findings of Bromley and Curtice (2004), who found that the way in which the media report on politics has served to nurture a cynicism in the public. Again, I am not arguing that the media is not responsible for a growth in political cynicism. I am arguing that the effect of the media on political cynicism seems to be greatly exaggerated according to the results obtained through the current study.

Barnett (2002), Franklin (1997), Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1995), and Aarts and Semetko (2003) all found evidence of a growing political cynicism that they felt was caused by the negative tone of media reports relating to politics. The results of the current study once again seem to contradict the previous findings. The current results do not contradict the claim that the media takes a negative tone in reporting on politics; however, the results do contradict the claim that the negative tone has an effect on the amount of cynicism generated by the media's reporting.

The results of the current study also contradict the findings of Hawkins and Pingree (1982) who in their discussion of second order effects of cultivation purport that those who are heavy viewers of the media are more apt to have their attitudes affected by that media. According to the results of the current study, the frequency of viewing of the media had little to no effect on the political attitudes, specifically trust and cynicism, of those sampled.

The above also throws into question the findings of Gerbner et al (1980) who also found that adolescents who are heavy viewers of the media are more likely to be untrusting of people. Again, trust was measured by the political trust scale in the current study and no significant results were found to support the claims of Gerbner et al.

The current results of the study also contradict the findings of Vergeer, Rutten, and Scheepers (1996), as well as Gerbner et al (1980), who found that the effects of continual exposure to certain media messages are larger when they are enclosed within the framework of entertainment programs. According to the results of the current study, there was no significant difference in the effects of the new media, which are generally entertainment-based, on political trust or political cynicism as compared to the effects of the old media on those same attitudes.

Discussion

The current study's findings do, in part, support the contention of Iyengar and Kinder (1987) that television news reaffirms already established feelings and attitudes of viewers. By finding no significant difference between the old media and the new media on political trust or political cynicism, the results not only reaffirm the findings of

Iyengar and Kinder as they relate to their subject of study, network news, or the old media, the results also suggest that the findings of Iyengar and Kinder could be applied to the new media, as well. The findings of the current study also suggest that viewers seek out those television news sources that will reaffirm the beliefs, values, and attitudes that they already hold.

In their book “News That Matters,” Iyengar and Kinder (1987) devise an agenda-setting hypothesis that states that “those problems that receive prominent attention on the national news become the problems the viewing public regard as the nation’s most important” (p. 16). While I believe that the hypothesis should be amended to change the word “problems” to issues, these findings are important to the current study. The current study’s failure to find a significant difference between the effects of the old media versus the new media on political trust or political cynicism could be based on the fact that, while the new media is distinct in their presentation of news, the issues that are covered by the new media are not that different than those that are covered by the old media. The old media, it could be argued, not only sets the agenda for what viewers think about, they also set the agenda for the stories that the new media concentrates on. For example, if there is a story of major impact as determined by *The NBC Nightly News* or any of the other network news broadcasts, that story will more than likely be covered by *The Daily Show with John Stewart*, as well. While the new media is different from the old media in some regards, these do not appear to affect political trust or political cynicism.

In addition to television news, personal experience is also a determining factor in the attitude formation of the viewing public (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). It could be hypothesized that the people in Wyoming, including the sample that comprised the

current study, have had positive personal experiences with those politicians that represent them and are satisfied with the way they govern. They know these people. The populace may have met, or at least seen, these politicians because of Wyoming's small population and, therefore, they may have formed a more favorable view that influences their trust and cynicism levels rather than any television newscast, whether it is the old media or the new media. Additionally, the current study's sample is predominantly Republican while living in conservative times. They may just be a satisfied group.

Gerbner et al (1980) wrote, "Television is today's central agency of the established order and as such serves primarily to maintain, stabilize, and reinforce-not subvert-conventional values, beliefs, and behaviors" (p. 707). These findings may also explain why the current study found no significant results. Television buttresses the status quo and, therefore, furthers the civic lessons taught in American schools. Those civic lessons tell adolescents that the government can be trusted and that the government has given us no reason to be cynical.

Television is now the greatest socialization agent in the United States. Gerbner (1998) describes this phenomenon, writing about "the cultivation of shared conceptions of reality among otherwise diverse publics" (p. 178). These "shared conceptions" would also provide an answer as to why the current study found no difference between the effects of the new media compared to the old media on the attitudes of political trust and political cynicism. The "shared conceptions" by "diverse publics" would indicate that the political attitudes of those who were regular viewers of television would be similar amongst even those who receive their information through different means, such as the old media and the new media.

One of the main reasons why no significant results were found in regards to research question three and research question four may be contained within Gerbner's (1998) findings that "amount of viewing was far more important than specific exposure to news" (p. 188). Since the mean amount of viewing time by the sample was 3.44 (SD=1.571) which correlates to just between weekly and several times a month, the sample did not experience enough cultivation to demonstrate any effect on their political trust or their political cynicism.

"Cultivation is both dependent on and a manifestation of the extent to which television's imagery dominates viewers' sources of information" (Gerbner, 1998, p. 182). Perhaps the sample that was drawn for the current study was not dependent enough on television for their information. Perhaps those who participated in the current study were more dependent on newspapers, radio, parents, or friends for their political information. If this were true, it would help to explain why no significant results were found in regards to cultivation theory.

When looking at the results of the current study, the concept of pastiche (Duvall, 1999) could be one of the underlying reasons for finding no significant results. For a postmodern audience, the news that they receive from the new media will be just that, news. A postmodern audience, which is, admittedly, a niche audience, does not respect the boundaries that were created and are still maintained by the old media. The new media may also be confusing the audience with what is news and what is not. If the line between news and entertainment has been blurred by postmodernism to the point where they are now indistinguishable, this could be problematic for the future of network news and the old media.

Finally, no significant results may have been found in regards to the research questions posited by the study because of a flawed, or overreaching, definition of the new media by Bucy and Gregson (2001). Bucy and Gregson (2001) suggest that the elements that constitute the new media, such as political interactivity, are new developments in an advanced television media age. However, a look back through history shows us that political interactivity through entertainment television is not as new as they believe. For example, Edward R. Murrow interviewed numerous politicians on CBS's *See It Now*, but he also interviewed celebrities such as Liberace, thus blurring the lines between news and entertainment. In addition, Republican candidate for president of the United States Richard Nixon appeared on NBC's *Laugh-In* and Gerald Ford, George H. W. Bush, Al Gore, Al Sharpton, Ralph Nader, Steve Forbes, and Rudy Giuliani, as well as a slew of other politicians, have all appeared on NBC's *Saturday Night Live*, and Bill Clinton famously played the saxophone on *The Arsenio Hall Show* while campaigning for president in the early 1990's. The blurring of the line between politics, news, and entertainment on television would appear to be as old as television itself.

Limitations and Implications for Future Research

There were many limitations to the current study that could have affected the results; however, the most significant limitation in the current study was the number of subjects (n=103) that were used to comprise the sample. While some purposive sampling was used in an attempt to generate roughly equal numbers of participants across grade levels, it would have been much more beneficial to use purposive sampling to generate more subjects who fit into the categories of

viewers of the new media, the old media, and a combination of the old media and new media. The current study boasted only 18 subjects who identified themselves as preferring only the new media when it came to receiving their political information, 58 subjects who identified themselves as preferring only the old media when it came to receiving their political information, and 22 subjects who identified themselves as preferring both the new media and the old media when it came to receiving their political information. These numbers are not large enough, save the number of subjects who received their political information from the old media, to generate any significant results without a very large affect on political trust and political cynicism being present.

Purposive sampling would also have been beneficial to conduct in regards to frequency of preferred news program viewing. The current study was comprised of only 14 subjects who watched their preferred television news program daily, 24 subjects who watched their preferred television news program several times a week, 13 subjects who watched their preferred television news program weekly, five subjects who watched their preferred television news program several times a month, and 46 subjects who watched their preferred television news program occasionally. Again, the numbers across categories, save those who watched their preferred news program occasionally, are not hefty enough to generate significant results unless the affect on political trust and political cynicism is very great.

Participants in the current study were allowed to give multiple responses to the question that allowed them to identify which television news programs they watched to

obtain their political information. Future studies may want to think about using a forced choice format in which participants can only pick one television news program in examining this question. It is difficult to say how or if the multiple responses influenced the results of the current study but, by forcing a choice amongst participants, we may be able to determine which type of media, new or old, was most responsible for politically informing each participant.

In attempting to find out if there was a link present between frequency of viewing and political trust and political cynicism, the current study drew from the ideas put forth by cultivation theory. Cultivation theory, however, breaks down heavy viewers as compared to light viewers of the media through the amount of time viewers watch television on the average day. The current study modified this approach by categorizing heavy viewers as those who watch their preferred news program either daily or several times a week and by categorizing light viewers as those who watch their preferred news program either weekly, several times a month, or occasionally. The reason that the specifics defining heavy viewers and light viewers were changed was because of my belief that very few people would be heavy viewers of news programs based on a scale that measured how frequently they watched news programs on an average day. With that said, future studies would benefit from applying the more rigorous definition of heavy versus light viewership that is currently associated with cultivation theory.

Another limitation of the current research that is related to cultivation theory is the belief that cultivation is cumulative. Gerbner (1998) wrote that “the development (in some) and maintenance (in others) of some set of outlooks or beliefs can be traced to steady, cumulative exposure to the world of television” (p. 180). The subjects who

participated in the current study may not have been exposed to their preferred news program for a long enough period of time for the effects of cultivation to have set in. This is especially true for those who solely relied upon the new media for their political information. The new media may not have been available for a long enough period of time for cultivation to have affected the respondent's political attitudes.

Gerbner et al (1980) also felt that cultivation "effects cannot be measured with regard to any single element or program seen in isolation" (p. 710). This is a holistic view of television that puts medium effects (television) in opposition to program effects (distinct shows). This study focused on program effects or, more specifically, style effects created by postmodernism. It would appear from the results of the current study that these effects are minimal at best. Additionally, the above implies that the effects of television viewing on political attitudes are much less important than other factors that are present in the outside worlds of the sample population. As evidenced by the additional findings of the current study, other factors do play a role in determining someone's attitude on political trust and political cynicism. Age, year in school, political party belonged to, and political orientation all seemed to have more of an affect on the political attitudes of the sample than those news programs that they viewed, along with the frequency of said viewing.

A significantly glaring limitation of this research is the lack of a content analysis of the programs that comprised the categories of new media and old media. Having found no significant difference in the ability of the new media or the old media to affect political trust or political cynicism, it seems obligatory to ask if, perhaps, an in-depth, thorough content analysis is necessary to determine if the content of the new media and

the old media are distinct enough to warrant independent study or comparison. There may be differences between the two forms of media, but they may not be dissimilar enough in their ability to influence viewers.

Finally, because undergraduate students were sampled in university classrooms, it is possible that the environment affected the subjects' replies to the questions posed by the instrument. Those who participated in the study may have felt the need to exaggerate their feelings about the questions asked in order to conform to the environment that was created through discussion and participation in classroom discussion. The students may also have felt pressure to provide the researcher with the "answers" that they felt the researcher wanted if they felt that they could extrapolate the hypotheses from the instrument.

Based upon the findings of the current study, future research would obviously benefit by addressing the limitations that were discussed previously in this chapter. However, future research could also examine the relationship between political trust and political cynicism and the additional findings of this study. This study found that there is a relationship between political attitudes and age, year in school, political party, and political orientation. What, then, is it about age and year in school that lead to a diminished sense of political trust or a rise in political cynicism among respondents? It could be argued that those who are older, as a rise in age or grade level indicate, are more cynical and untrusting towards the political process because of a cumulative effect of living through times in which the government, its institutions, and its members have been unworthy of trust and deserving of cynicism. For those who have lived through, or are intimately familiar with, Vietnam, Watergate, Iran-Contra, and Monicagate, it would

seem rather foolish to hoist trust upon the government. Those people have had too many negative experiences to not be cynical. Also, what is it about political party and political orientation that affect political trust and political cynicism? Usually, one's political orientation is in agreement with their political party, i.e. Republicans are conservative. Republicans, whose platform argues for smaller or limited government, are, therefore, more likely to be mistrustful of that which it is in opposition to. Democrats, who see no problem with a vast government, would be less likely to be cynical of that which they have helped to create. These variables, age and grade level and political party and orientation, are closely related variables that lend themselves to additional study. These variables also seem like a better predictor of political trust and political cynicism than preferred television news program or frequency of viewing.

Another avenue of future research could focus on the voting patterns of college students in Wyoming. The current study found that 59.2% (n=61) had voted in the last presidential election, while only 39.8% (n=41) had not. More importantly, among those who did not vote in the last presidential election, 60.9% (n=25) said that they were too young to vote in the last presidential election, indicating that more would have participated had they been of age. Also, 4.8% (n=2) of the participants in the current research indicated that their reason for not voting was because they were not U.S. citizens. These results point to a very large voter turnout amongst eligible college students in Wyoming. Is this because, as has been previously pointed out, the sample was comprised mostly of Republicans? In Wyoming, which is strongly Republican in their voting tendencies, those who are Republican may want to be amongst those who

voted for a winner. This desire could be partly responsible for the large number of voters in the past presidential election.

In conclusion, the current research did not find any evidence to indicate that viewing of the old media or the new media affects political trust or political cynicism. Also, the current study did not find any evidence to indicate that cultivation had any affect on political trust or political cynicism. If these findings are accurate, they just may imply that the difference between the messages of the old media and the new media are not as diverse as previous research (Bucy & Gregson, 2001; Hill & Holbrook, 2005) found them to be.

References

- Aarts, K., & Semetko, H. (2003). The divided electorate: Media use and political involvement. *The Journal of Politics*, 65, 759-784.
- Adams, W. C. (1978). Network news research in perspective. In W. Adams, & F. Schreibman (Eds.), *Television network news: Issues in content research* (pp.11-46). Washington, D.C.: School of Public and International Affairs, George Washington University.
- Ansolabehere, S., & Iyengar, S. (1995). *Going negative: How attack ads shrink and polarize the electorate*. New York: The Free Press.
- Ball, C. E. (2004). Show, not tell: The value of new media scholarship. *Computers and Composition*, 21 (4), 403-425.
- Barnett, S. (2002). Will a crisis in journalism provoke a crisis in democracy? *Political Quarterly*, 73, 400-408.
- Barnouw, E. (1978). Foreword. In W. Adams, & F. Schreibman (Eds.), *Television network news: Issues in content research* (pp.1-3). Washington, D.C.: School of Public and International Affairs, George Washington University.
- Brenton, S. (2005). Public confidence in Australian democracy. *Democratic Audit of Australia*. Retrieved October 28, 2005, from <http://democratic.audit.anu.edu.au/BrentonConfidenceMay05.pdf>
- Bromley, C., & Curtice, J. (2004). Are non-voters cynics anyway? *Journal of Public Affairs*, 4, 328-337.
- Bucy, E. P., & Gregson, K. S. (2001). Media participation: A legitimizing mechanism of mass democracy. *New Media & Society*, 3, 357-380.
- Calafell, B., & Delgado, F. (2004). Reading Latina/o images: Interrogating Americanos. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 21 (1), 1-21.
- Comstock, G., & Cobbey, R. E. (1978). Watching the watchdogs: Trends and problems in monitoring network news. In W. Adams, & F. Schreibman (Eds.), *Television network news: Issues in content research* (pp.47-64). Washington, D.C.: School of Public and International Affairs, George Washington University.
- Corry, J. (1991). TV news & the neutrality principle. *Commentary*, 91 (5), 24-27.
- Dekker, H., Nuus, M., & Schyns, P. (2004). A conceptual and empirical evaluation of

political cynicism. Retrieved October 27, 2005, from <http://www.politologischinstituut.be/PE2004/documents/11SchynsNuusDekker.pdf>

- Duvall, J. N. (1999). Troping history: Modernist residue in Frederic Jameson's pastiche and Linda Hutcheon's parody. *Style, 33* (3), 372-390.
- Franklin, B. (1997). *Newsak and the media*. London: Arnold.
- Gerbner, G. (1998) Cultivation analysis: An overview. *Mass Communication & Society, 1* (3/4), 175-194.
- Gerbner, G., Gross, L., Morgan, M., & Signorielli, N. (1982). Charting the mainstream: Television's contributions to political orientations. *Journal of Communication, Spring*, 100-127.
- Gerbner, G., Gross, L., Signorielli, N., & Morgan, M. (1980). Television violence, victimization, and power. *American Behavioral Scientist, 23* (5), 705-716.
- Gibson, R. (2003). The Australian survey of social attitudes, 2003 [computer file]. Canberra: Australian Social Science Data Archive, The Australian National University.
- Hawkins, R. P., & Pingree, S. (1982). Television's influence on social reality. In D. Pearl, L. Bouthilet, & I. Lazar (Eds.), *Television and behavior: Ten years of scientific progress and implications for the eighties* (Vol. 2; pp. 224-247). Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- Hetherington, M. J. (1998). The political relevance of political trust. *American Political Science Review, 92*, 791-808.
- Hibbing, J. R., & Theiss-Morse, E. (1998). The media's role in public negativity toward Congress: Distinguishing emotional reactions and cognitive evaluations. *American Journal of Political Science, 42*, 475-498.
- Hill, T. G., & Holbrook, R. A. (2005). Agenda-setting and priming in prime time television: Crime dramas as political cues. *Political Communication, 22*, 277-295.
- Horton, D., & Wohl, R. R. (1956). Mass communication and para-social interaction: Observations on intimacy at a distance. *Psychiatry, 19*, 215-229.
- Iyengar, S. (1991). *Is anyone responsible? How television frames political issues*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Iyengar, S., & Kinder, D. R. (1987). *News that matters*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

- Kazee, T. A. (1981). Television exposure and attitude change: The impact of political interest. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 45, 507-518.
- Lowry, D. T., & Shidler, J. A. (1995). The sound bites, the biters, and the bitten: An analysis of network TV news bias in campaign '92. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 72 (1), 33-44.
- McClure, R. D., & Patterson, T. E. (1976). Television and the less-interested voter: The costs of an informed electorate. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences*, 425, 88-97.
- Miller, A. H. (1974). Rejoinder to "comment" by Jack Citrin: Political discontent or ritualism? *American Political Review*, 68, 989-1001.
- Moy, P., & Pfau, M. (2000). *With malice toward all: The media and public confidence in democratic institutions*. New York: Praeger.
- Newton, K. (1999). Mass media effects: Mobilization of media malaise? *British Journal of Political Science*, 29, 577-599.
- Ono, K., & Sloop, J. (1995). The critique of vernacular discourse. *Communication Monographs*, 62, 19-46.
- Potter, W. J. (1994). Cultivation theory and research: A methodological critique. *Journalism Monographs*, 147, 1-34.
- Patterson, T. (1993). *Out of order*. New York: Knopf.
- Robinson, M. J. (1976). Public affairs television and the growth of political malaise: The case of "The Selling of the Pentagon." *American Political Science Review*, 70 (June 1976), 409-432.
- Robinson, M. J. (1978). Future television news research: Beyond Edward Jay Epstein. In W. Adams, & F. Schreibman (Eds.), *Television network news: Issues in content research* (pp.197-212). Washington, D.C.: School of Public and International Affairs, George Washington University.
- Roper Organization (1975). *Trends in public attitudes toward television and other mass Media: 1959-1974*. Report, April 1975.
- Stokes, D. E. (1962). Popular evaluations of government: An empirical assessment. In *Ethics and bigness: Scientific, academic, religious, political, and military*, ed. Harlan Cleveland and Harold D. Lasswell. New York: Harper and Brothers. 61-72.

- Ten liberals to watch in 2005. (2005, February 14). *Human Events*, 61 (6), 3.
- Thomas, E. (2001, February 12). Life of O'Reilly. *Newsweek*, 137 (7), 28-31.
- Vergeer, M., Lubbers, M., & Scheepers, P. (2000). Exposure to newspapers and attitudes toward ethnic minorities: A longitudinal analysis. *The Howard Journal of Communications*, 11, 127-143.
- Vergeer, M., Rutten, P., & Scheepers, P. (1996). Cultivation theory in a changed media landscape. An overview of earlier studies and a test for a medium-sized city. *Tijdschrift voor Communicatiewetenschap*, 24, 120-151.

Appendix A: Instrument

By taking this survey, you will become part of a study that I am conducting for my master's thesis at the University of Wyoming. This survey is completely voluntary and you have as much time as you need to complete it. This survey is not looking to identify individuals and you will be granted complete anonymity. Please answer all questions as honestly as possible. Your time is greatly appreciated. Thank you.

Gender (circle one): Male Female Age: _____

Year in school (circle one): Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior

Do you identify yourself as (circle one): Republican Democrat Independent Other

Which of the following terms best describes you (circle one): Conservative Liberal

In obtaining your news from television, would you prefer to watch:

The Daily Show with John Stewart

The NBC Nightly News

The O'Reilly Factor

The Today Show

BBC News

Saturday Night Live

Oprah

Crossfire

Real Time with Bill Maher

Hannity and Colmes

How often do you watch your preferred newsprogram?

Daily Several Times a Week Weekly Several Times a Month Occasionally

Political Trust (please circle your answer for the first 2 questions and fill in the blank for the 3rd question):

1. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Politicians commonly take unfair advantage of the system for their own benefit?

Strongly agree; Agree; Neither agree nor disagree; Disagree; Strongly disagree

1

2

3

4

5

Did you vote in the last U. S. Presidential election (circle one)? Yes No

If not, why?
