

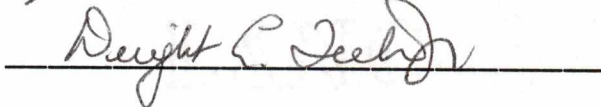
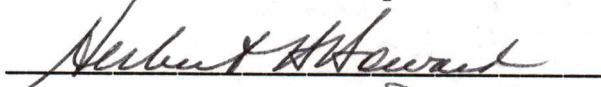
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Dhyana Ziegler, Major Professor

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Date January 6, 1993

Television News Values
in the Knoxville Market

A Thesis
Presented for the
Master of Science
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Robert D. Thomas
May 1993

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ABSTRACT

This research examined the news values of the noon and 6 p.m. newscasts of WATE (ABC, channel 6), WBIR (NBC, channel 10), and WKXT (CBS, channel 8) in Knoxville, Tennessee. Through content analyses conducted in October and November 1992, the research showed the differences among these stations. The differences included the amount of time allocated to various program elements within the newscasts and the variations in the topic, geographic area and timeliness of the news-oriented elements that were aired. The research reflects composite findings over a four-week study and provides breakdowns of the results found during the November ratings period and during a non-ratings period. Average running times and story counts of the stations' first blocks were also calculated.

The research found WATE's newscasts had a significantly greater emphasis on crime/legal actions, fires and accidents than its competitors. WBIR generally devoted the most time to the more proximate geographic areas. WKXT devoted less time to news, especially at 6 p.m. when it aired significantly longer sports and weather segments. The research found the news values of the 6 p.m. newscasts were more similar than during the noon newscasts. The stations appeared to make significant news judgment changes during ratings when viewers were given less crime/legal action, education and public service oriented news and more breaking news and news from the designated market area. It is evident the stations used varied strategies during the ratings period by altering their products in distinct ways.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Across the nation, hundreds of television newsrooms are responsible for the dissemination of information to America's communities. In those small towns or in bustling cities, most people turn to television news as their primary source of information when they want to know what's going on close to home and far away. But every community is not alike, nor are the desires and the needs of the citizens of various communities. As different as those communities are, so are the differences in news values.

News values come into play every day in television newsrooms across the United States. News values are what people see reflected during a newscast because they represent the priorities a station puts on a particular area or kind of coverage. They are major determinants as to whether viewers tune in, remain tuned in, turn the channel to the competition, or turn their television set off. The content and time are what make up news values because television news is constrained by the clock. Thus, the amount of time given to a story directly correlates to its importance.

A newscast's news values are most often determined by a producer who is responsible for deciding the content of the newscast as well as the time devoted to each item.¹ Producers act as editors or gatekeep-

¹Richard D. Yoakam and Charles F. Cremer, *ENG: Television News and the New Technology* (New York: Random House, 1989): 233.

ers who decide what viewers will see — and for how long — and what they won't see. "They [producers] often decide on the issues to be discussed, supervise background research, and help to choose individuals to be interviewed. Additionally, the producer supervises the development of promotional material for the program [and] ensures that the program meets production quality standards."²

The stories selected by producers to be aired by television stations "are a mix of traditional news values and matters of organizational routine or necessity — such as getting a sure visual story with limited resources and under deadline pressure."³

Many factors influence the news values of a television station. These factors include market size, available resources, competition, demands from advertisers, the education and know-how of newsroom personnel, and the need to succeed during the all-important ratings periods.

During ratings periods, television research companies measure audience sizes in each of the nation's television markets. After the "sweeping" of the markets, the companies release their findings which reveal the size of station audiences for all programs. Ratings are reported in points that correspond with the number of viewers watching each program. The release of ratings "books" lets stations know how successful their news operations are in attracting viewers in comparison to others in the market. These "books" also influence future adver-

²Maxine K. and Robert M. Reed, *Career Opportunities in Television, Cable, and Video* (New York: Facts on File Publications, 1986), 45-46.

³Mark D. Harmon, "Mr. Gates Goes Electronic: The What and Why Questions in Local TV News," *Journalism Quarterly* 66 (Winter 1989): 858.

tising rates and the careers of news department talent and personnel. "The importance of their [television stations'] standings during sweeps is hard to overestimate. A winning 'book' can be cause for champagne and roses in executive offices; a losing 'book' can cause heads to roll."⁴

Because of the importance of ratings and sweeps, there is more at stake when deciding which stories to air during those periods because the difference in one rating point could cost a station thousands of dollars in lost revenue or lead to the end of a producer's, a news director's, or a station manager's job.

In their efforts to garner as many viewers as possible, stations often place special emphasis on news productions during sweeps periods. It is not uncommon for stations to utilize heavy promotion, to introduce new talent, to air special series, or to turn the camera on more sensational news — such as crime, fires and accidents — to get viewers' attention. Differences in the way stations conduct themselves during sweeps vary not only from market to market, but also among the stations in a market which have different priorities in covering the news.

Karen S. Buzzard of Northwestern University wrote that ratings developed in the first half of the century as the nation made a broad shift to an economic emphasis. "...[M]anufacturers had more or less perfected the techniques of mechanization and mass production that had occupied them during the previous century, and now turned their attention to the problem of how to move these massive amounts of goods into

⁴Meg Moritz, *Television Studies: Textual Analysis*, eds. Gary Burns and Robert J. Thompson (New York: Praeger, 1989), 125.

the hands of consumers.”⁵ To make sure they were reaching the most people for the dollar, advertisers turned to ratings.

In the 1950s and early 1960s, ratings periods *usually* occurred twice each year at varying times from market to market. “But in the 1960s, the American Research Bureau (now Arbitron) introduced its concept of ‘sweeping’ all local markets during the same time period twice a year.”⁶ In the early 1990s during November, February, May and July, the A.C. Nielsen Co. and the Arbitron Co. measure the audiences in each of the 211 television markets in the United States.

With the use of electronic and diary audience measurement systems, the ratings process continues to evolve as does the world of over-the-air television as it encounters increasingly powerful competition. One of the most significant was cable television which flourished in the 1970s and 1980s, pulling huge chunks of viewers away from the networks. “During their heyday, the networks had commanded 85 to 90 percent of primetime audiences, and a similar share of advertising dollars; by the late eighties their share dropped to 60 to 70 percent.”⁷ “Holding the line” during sweeps weeks is increasingly important to commercial broadcast stations.

Considering the importance of ratings, local television stations often promote or “hype” their newscasts extensively during sweeps when the ratings success of a station hinges on the performance of its news programming. A station’s news department often creates the identity

⁵Karen S. Buzzard, *Chains of Gold: Marketing the Ratings and Rating the Markets* (Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press Inc., 1990), 3.

⁶Moritz, 123.

⁷Buzzard, 142.

for the station and, more importantly, the on-air talent at the station tries to become "friends" or "extended family members" of the viewers who watch them.

With advancements in ratings methods over the past several decades, television newsrooms across the country also have made dramatic advances in the way they produce their newscasts. "Prior to 1960, local television news was produced as a public service. By 1980, news programming accounted for 27 percent of all programming."⁸ Because of its importance, stations can produce as much as 50 percent of all revenue from local news programming. "These trends suggest that local news will continue to play an important economic role at stations for the foreseeable future. However, increased competition for the viewing public in an increasingly congested marketplace may prompt some broadcasters to . . . consider experimenting with differentiated newscasts produced for sub-populations . . ."⁹

In today's television newsrooms, ratings have become one of the most important determinants of the news values emphasized in a news department. News talent and producers are always keeping an eye on ratings and are striving to find ways to improve the numbers. Thus, ratings have a direct effect on news values because the two variables are often times dependent upon — not independent of — one another.

⁸Robert H. Wicks, "Segmenting Broadcast News Audiences in the News Media Environment," *Journalism Quarterly* 67 (Summer 1989): 383.

⁹*Ibid.*

Statement of the Problem

The Knoxville, Tennessee, television market certainly exemplifies differences in the news values of its three television stations which broadcast news. Even though they operate in the same market and have comparable facilities, each of the Knoxville stations' producers has different priorities in producing a newscast. Each day the producers are also not just completing a rundown listing the sequence, time and video to be used with each element of the newscast, they are trying to appeal to viewers and find their newscast's optimal niche among East Tennessee viewers. And those viewers expect to see some differences in the presentation of news among the three stations.

Late in 1992, the only accessible in-depth research available on the performances of Knoxville's television news departments is from ratings data from the A.C. Nielsen Co. and Arbitron Research Bureau. But those data do not reveal what viewers saw during newscasts and only reports who was watching and when. Additionally, little or no research is available publicly on the news values of Knoxville's television newscasts, reflecting the flurry of changes that have and still are taking place among the talent and management of Knoxville's three television news departments

The purpose of this research study is to examine what viewers see when they turn to one of Knoxville's television stations for news, and what those same viewers invariably miss on the other two stations. The goal is to find the differences in everything from how much time was spent on spontaneous news and events taking place outside Knoxville, to

how much time was spent chattering away rather than reading news. The research will examine the news values of each of the stations during the sample period to learn whether viewers essentially received the same information from each station, or to learn how they differed. By analyzing the news values, the study might gain insight into the news strategies being employed by each station.

Significance of the Study

It is expected that each station in the Knoxville market has differences from its competitors — no matter how great or incidental — in the way it approaches news. In addition to management strategies, the producers of the various newscasts also have individual differences in the way they make up their rundowns for the newscasts. Therefore, comparing the way news is approached is crucial to understanding the news values of the Knoxville stations. The study will seek to determine what the differences are, and it will explore whether additional differences occur between a ratings period and a non-ratings period.

The research should be beneficial not only to those working in the television newsrooms in East Tennessee but also to those outside the market. Other markets in the country might find themselves going through changes similar to those that have already taken place in Knoxville, such as a station scaling back its news operation or facing competition from a station that has historically dominated local news ratings.

Finally, the research should be of interest to those who simply want to know more about a television news market and its primary sources of information. While the study will not address the impact of such factors as talent or graphics on ratings, the research will look at what stations cover and present during their newscasts.

Research Hypotheses

The hypotheses guiding this research on news values in the Knoxville market are based on an examination of four fundamental features of the newscasts: program elements, news topics, geographic area of those news topics, and the timeliness of the news topics covered.

H₁: The newscasts of WBIR, which has the largest staff, have more “enterpriser” and spontaneous news coverage than its two competitors. In broadcast news jargon, “enterpriser” means news coverage that shows initiative on the station’s part to seek out different stories or an unique angle to an existing story for inclusion in a newscast.

H₂: WKXT, the newest of the three stations which also has the smallest news staff, has the least amount of enterpriser and spontaneous news coverage.

H₃: The major differences in news values would be mainly between WBIR and the other two competitors, WKXT and WATE.

H₄: The Knoxville stations do not alter their news value judgment substantially during rating periods.

H₅: The stations’ noon newscasts are more similar to each other than the 6 p.m. newscasts.

Definitions of Terms

Designated Market Area — The area that makes up the potential viewing audience of a television market. The Knoxville DMA, as defined by Nielsen Media Research, includes 19 counties in Tennessee and six in Kentucky.

First Block — The first segment of a television newscast from the opening until the first commercial break. For ratings purposes, it is the most important part of the newscast because viewers must watch at least 15 minutes of a newscast to be counted as a viewer during ratings research.

Newshole — The portion of a television newscast devoted to news while disregarding the time spent on sports, weather, commercials, opens, wraps, chat, etc.

News Values — Essentially the types of stories that are emphasized during newscasts. In television, news values are dependent on the amount of time spent on a given subject or story. Producers most often determine the news values because they decide what viewers will see, what they will not, and for how long. News values may often be based on management strategies.

Ratings — Refers generically to audience studies. Ratings points refer to the percentage of available audience.

Ratings Points — The percentage of *all* television households that are tuned to a particular station during a given time period.¹⁰

¹⁰Warren K. Agee, Phillip H. Ault and Edwin Emery, *Introduction to Mass Communications* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1985): 573.

Share — Equals the percentage of households using television that have their sets tuned to a particular station during a given time period.¹¹

Story Count — The number of different stories presented during a newscast or “block.”

Sweeps — Times when the ratings companies conduct research on the viewing audiences in each of the nation’s television markets. In most markets, sweeps happen four times a year in February, May, July and November.

Syndicated Television Show — A program leased by a producer or distributor for broadcast.¹²

Organization of Chapters

Presented in five chapters, this research examined news values in the Knoxville market, chronicled recent developments in the stations’ news departments, and reviewed previous research on the medium and the effects of ratings upon it.

Chapter One serves as an introduction to some of the phenomena affecting news values, such as the availability of resources, manpower and visuals, deadline pressure, market size, competition, and the importance of attracting or serving a particular audience. The purpose and significance of the study are included along with the five hypotheses

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid, 574.

guiding the research. Definitions of key terms used throughout the manuscript are also defined in the chapter.

Chapter Two contains a review of related literature on news values in local television, ratings systems and their impact on local news, and the changes that have taken place during the past decade in Knoxville's television newsrooms.

Chapter Three details the methods used to conduct the content analyses of the noon and 6 p.m. newscasts presented by WATE, WBIR and WKXT. Definitions of the various categories used for coding are included, along with the research delimitations.

Chapter Four presents the research findings which are divided into each time period. Results are first presented for each of the stations over the entire study. A breakdown on the results during ratings and out of ratings periods follows.

Chapter Five examines and discusses many of the mechanisms at work during the study which might have influenced the findings. Also included is a discussion of the results and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

News Values in Local Television News

Television news has an enormous impact on Americans, who place more credibility on the medium than on newspapers.¹³ Although network news has been the subject of aggressive study, local television news has not received such thorough investigation. The effects of local television news on Americans in their communities, however, should not be underestimated. "On a typical evening in a typical market a half-hour of local TV news will have a slightly higher audience than its network counterpart."¹⁴

In "Mr. Gates Goes Electronic: The What and Why Questions in Local TV News," professor Mark D. Harmon examined the gatekeeping effect producers have on what viewers see on newscasts. Harmon found that traditional belief that newspapers have a major impact on what television stations cover is not true. "As revealed in the interviews and confirmed through participant observation, newspapers were the primary source of only seven of the 132 news stories analyzed. Only once did newspapers serve as a secondary source."¹⁵

¹³Burns W. Roper, *Public Attitudes Toward Television and Other Media in a Time of Change* (New York: The Roper Organization Inc., 1985).

¹⁴Harmon, 857-863.

¹⁵Ibid, 860.

Harmon conceded that there is a great deal of similarity in the news content in a newspaper and on television newscasts. "Initially one must remember that news organizations in the same market are working with a virtually identical set of events, actions and statements as potential news stories. Secondly, wire services and network news feeds can lead to a homogenized product. Finally, good television journalists tend to be news junkies. They read many periodicals, listen to radio news and watch the newscasts of their competition."¹⁶

By performing content analyses and observing participants at three Cincinnati television stations, Harmon found the stations relied more heavily upon anticipated news than spontaneous events by 61.5 to 38.5 percent.

In another study, entitled "Market Size and TV News Values," Raymond L. Carroll of the University of Alabama examined the relationship between market size and the types of news items a station pursues.¹⁷ Many people in the news business assume that stations in larger cities have different news values from those in smaller markets. Carroll's research makes readers seriously question this assumption.

Carroll's research is important not only to broadcasting educators and students but also to those involved in the television news industry day-in and day-out. His research should make those practitioners stop to think about their newscasts and discover whether their products' news values correspond to the findings or if their newscasts are distinctly different.

¹⁶Ibid, 861.

¹⁷Raymond L. Carroll, "Market Size and TV News Values," *Journalism Quarterly* 66 (Spring 1989): 49.

Before reaching his conclusions, Carroll analyzed news broadcasts of local network-affiliated stations on weekdays in the early-evening time period during August through November 1986. A total of 161 news programs were analyzed from 57 stations in markets ranging from the second largest to the 193rd.¹⁸

For his study, Carroll specified three broad categories of television markets: large, medium and small. The large markets ranged from the second to thirtieth largest Areas of Dominant Influence. Medium markets ranged between 31 and 70, and small markets were between 100 and 193. After recording each station's newscasts, coders categorized the elements of news the stations covered and how much time they devoted to each element. The author and two graduate students served as the coders with a composite coder reliability coefficient of .92.

The most important finding was that "the significant difference in news coverage appeared to be between major and the other market categories, not between medium and small markets."¹⁹ When comparing the findings for the average number of minutes devoted to a geographical area, Carroll found that major markets generally devote more time to each area. More often than not, medium and small markets corresponded by devoting the same amount of time to each geographic area.

Carroll's research was a test of the tentative conclusions of an earlier study of small and large market news values. Carroll's major findings:

¹⁸Ibid, 51.

¹⁹Ibid, 52

- Small market news programs do not necessarily emphasize locally-oriented, or more proximate items, more than their counterparts in medium and large markets.

- Major market stations devote more attention to features or “nonessential” news. Carroll found major market stations averaged 5.47 minutes on features and soft news. Medium market stations devoted 2.32 minutes, and 1.63 minutes were devoted in small markets. However, it should be noted that major market stations averaged more than 40 minutes for each newscast while the other two market sizes averaged less than 30 minutes.

- Larger market stations devote more attention to stories on controversial issues or unpleasant aspects of community life. This finding was the hardest to test and had the greatest potential for coder error. That is because it relied more on coder opinion than on obvious fact. What is perceived as controversial in one community might not be in another. Thus, for coding this element the coder was forced to make a judgment call which might not reflect the market’s consensus.

- Larger market stations present a greater amount of timely, or spontaneous news because the major market stations averaged 4.57 minutes of fresh news while medium and small markets averaged less than three minutes each.

- Small market news organizations are less enterprising in treating news. The research found those stations devote less than a minute and an half to enterpriser news, while medium market viewers saw an average of two and an half minutes, and those in large markets saw more than four minutes.

Carroll's research findings about large market news values seem quite valid because the large market sample was appreciably larger than the sample size for medium and small markets. Ten markets with 30 stations were studied for the large market category, while *only five markets with 13 stations* were studied for the medium market category. Additionally, only seven markets with 14 stations were studied for the small market data. In fact, one in every three markets was studied in the large market category, while one in eight medium markets and one in 13 small markets were studied. Thus, the information concerning the larger markets is much more reliable because of the larger sample size.

While market size, dominant newspapers in a community, cross media ownership, and other external forces have an impact on news values, so did other forces such as available resources. "Regardless of news judgments, however, resources must be available for gathering information and producing news reports. But, as long as a media organization strives to remain financially viable, resources will be constrained to some extent, so that news selection results from a precarious balance between news judgments and resource allocation."²⁰

Because television newsgathering is much more dependent on technology than newspapers, its content is influenced by what is readily available. That fact is pointed out by Dan Berkowitz in "Assessing Forces in the Selection of Local Television News."

²⁰D. Altheide, *Creating Reality: How TV News Distorts Events* (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage, 1976).

"Interviews found that newswriters saw their news judgments as an important part of building a newscast, but they also understood their final product resulted from the constraints they faced in doing their jobs. Several newswriters saw the ability to cover a story often overrode news judgment."²¹ Thus, station size does have an impact on news values because usually the better equipped stations are in the larger markets.

In "How Local Television Learns What is News," John McManus discussed the relationship between station size and the amount of enterpriser or discovery news. "The greater the station's resources, the more active the discovery. But even at the station with the greatest resources, almost twice as much air time is consumed by stories discovered relatively passively as by highly active means."²² McManus based his conclusions on the measurement of how active news discovery was at three western U.S. network affiliates during three months in 1986 and 1987. McManus concluded that passive newsgathering by local television stations runs contrary to the "watchdog" role that relies on First Amendment protection. He also concluded that the passive media are susceptible to special interest groups wanting to influence public opinion.

Passiveness in the media and similarities in news values among television stations also indicate possible consonance. "Consonance theory suggests that similar media messages transmitted across different

²¹Dan Berkowitz, "Assessing Forces in the Selection of Local Television News," *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 35 (Spring 1991): 245-251.

²²John McManus, "How Local Television Learns What is News," *Journalism Quarterly* 69 (Winter 1990): 672-683.

media channels may influence public opinion and promote consensus."²³ Research by Tony Atwater of Michigan State University examined consonance among television stations in Detroit, Lansing, Michigan, and Toledo, Ohio. After examining the content of 527 stories, Atwater found that half of the stories were identical to stories on other stations in the market.²⁴ The stories most often duplicated dealt with "crime/courts, government/politics, and accident/disaster" coverage.²⁵ Atwater concluded that viewers often get the same information from local television media which could indicate consonance in their communities.

The Effects of Ratings on Local Television News

The history of broadcasting ratings is often confusing because of the different methodologies used to collect data. However, there are two excellent sources about the industry that influences the success of television programming and the careers of those who select it as a career to work. Authors Karen S. Buzzard and Ien Ang have written two of the most comprehensive books on the effects of ratings on television programming. Both books explore the effects on local television news.

Buzzard's *Chains of Gold: Marketing the Ratings and Rating the Markets* takes a comprehensive look at ratings and the system's influence on television. Buzzard begins the work with extensive background

²³Tony Atwater, "Consonance in Local Television News," *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 30 (Fall 1986): 467.

²⁴Ibid, 469.

²⁵Ibid, 470.

information on why audience measurement is important and how it came about. "It is on the basis of ratings that advertising is sold, evaluated, and paid for and, this being the case, it becomes the basis upon which programming decisions are made."²⁶

Subsequent chapters of the book discuss how ratings systems changed in the 1950s with the emergence of the TelePulse ratings system. "In addition to standard rating information on program name, age/sex of audience, and station viewership, TelePulse's interviewers collected qualitative information which no other method could match at this time, such as programming patterns and product usage."²⁷ With this new service, ratings information took on even more significance, because quantitative and qualitative information became readily available to broadcasters and advertisers.

Buzzard's study provides an historical perspective on ratings that helps answer the primary question of how the ratings systems evolved in the United States. Buzzard reached two major conclusions about television ratings:

- Just because computers and new technologies have been introduced to the ratings game, the numbers today do not mean significantly more than the numbers tabulated by hand by early ratings collectors.

- We should not think "because there is an obvious correlation between ratings systems and advertising practices, one is the cause of the other. Advertisers change their minds in reaction to many economic, social, and philosophical changes in our way of life . . ."²⁸

²⁶Buzzard, 39.

²⁷Ibid, 62.

²⁸Buzzard, 171.

British author Ien Ang examined not only the American rating systems but also the techniques used in European countries in his book *Desperately Seeking an Audience*. Ang presents much insight into the concept of what is more important: the public as the market or the market as the public. Ang concluded the question is unanswerable for a business that relies on private financial resources but which is dedicated to serving the public.

Ang examined how audiences are measured and how the entire measuring process influences television and programming. He also looked at the impact of new technologies on television audience measurement, especially the people meter.

The scope of *Desperately Seeking an Audience* is both historical and theoretical. Ang concluded that the "Americanization" of the west-European public broadcasting style will continue, especially at the British Broadcasting Corporation.

Journalism educator Meg Moritz said during ratings sweeps "local stations have followed the lead of the networks, offering a host of special reports as a regular part of the news and then promoting them heavily throughout the market."²⁹ Moritz feels that stations often select subjects for specials that are easily promotable and "journalistic considerations play only a minor part in the process."

One such example is WMAQ-TV in Chicago, which performed the news special act of "piggybacking" already successful network programming during the November 1985 sweeps. "Station research done by Frank N. Magid Associates had indicated that those 18 to 35 years old

²⁹Moritz, 125.

who tuned in heavily to 'Miami Vice' were not staying up to watch the 10 p.m. news."³⁰ To gain those viewers, WMAQ produced a series of reports on "Miami Vice" for its 10 p.m. news. WMAQ was successful with the piggybacking series because its late newscast went from a 22 to 27 or 28 share, the manager of the station's news advertising said.

During other news specials, some topics seem to revolve around the talent at the particular station and whether they can be promoted to appeal to a particular demographic. The topic of relationships in the 1980s was used because the reporter "was young, female, attractive, and black, all desirable qualities from a promotional standpoint."³¹ During other rating periods, WMAQ not only centered series around its talent but also its new equipment:

Other special reports are selected to promote the news department itself and the 'stars' of its shows. In the May 1986 sweeps, for examples, weatherman John Coleman did a five-part series on vacation spots within a day's drive of Chicago. The reports were all delivered live via the station's new satellite newsgathering (SNG) truck.³²

Another example of an effort to boost news ratings was displayed in 1986 when WMAQ had NBC News' Tom Brokaw tape "teases" for broadcast each afternoon for the fifth-place 6 p.m. newscasts on the Chicago NBC affiliate. Moritz's research concluded that stations often select topics for news specials because of their promotional value rather than news value. Another related conclusion is that considerable

³⁰Ibid, 127.

³¹Ibid, 128.

³²Ibid, 130.

thought is given to promotional value, but not to whether viewers are interested in watching the news special. All of Moritz's research on what stations do during sweeps to boost ratings were case studies on NBC-affiliate WMAQ in Chicago. Through personal interviews with directors, reporters, managers and producers, she gained insight into what WMAQ has done to grab people's attention.

However, *Variety* magazine reported that heavy promotion for local television newscasts does not always pay off. KCAL-TV in Los Angeles heavily promoted its three-hour prime time news block for its debut in March 1990. "The Disney-owned station saw its . . . ratings drop in both Nielsen and Arbitron compared with February's results. Disney had invested \$30 million in the news block, backing it with a heavy promotion campaign and big bucks for anchors."³³ The article concluded, from ratings information, that even big promotional campaigns won't guarantee a large audience, and its basis of information comes from ratings books released for the Los Angeles market.

Despite efforts by local television producers to improve ratings, the programming a station airs before local newscasts has a strong influence on the outcome of news ratings. In M.L. Boemer's article "Correlating Lead-in Show Ratings with Local Television News," two major conclusions were made as to what influences local news ratings: viewer loyalty to one station and viewer loyalty to one particular news organization.³⁴ Boemer examined a study which looked at the relation-

³³Jim Benson, "KCAL's Primetime News Block Flops in Debut Ratings Week," *Variety*, 14 March 1990, 34.

³⁴M.L. Boemer, "Correlating Lead-in Show Ratings with Local Television News," *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 18 (Winter 1987): 89-94.

ship between lead-in show ratings for three network affiliates in a major market over a two-year period. Also, Boemer included a secondary analysis of two years of Arbitron ratings over seven ratings periods in the Dallas-Fort Worth market. Boemer's article is an excellent source of information about what factors outside of the newsroom's control can influence ratings.

In 1990, *Variety* magazine explored the effects of lead-in programming in the Los Angeles market. The article says KCBS showed significant losses in its 5 and 6 p.m. newscasts' ratings because of the poor success of its lead-in program, "Geraldo." The data came from Arbitron ratings for the February 1990 sweeps.

In their article "Structural Determinants of the Television News Audience," James G. Webster and Gregory D. Newton isolated three factors to explain "a combined 81 percent of the variation in local news ratings across the U.S.: A station's network news ratings, the lead-in ratings for the local news, and the size of the available television audience."³⁵ In the article, the authors used a correlation study to explore the independent variables that effect local news ratings. The study was based on the February 1986 Nielsen Station Index report, from which 40 markets were randomly selected for examination.

The article "WPLG Dominates Again: 'Eyewitness' Unbeaten" concludes that on-air talent does not necessarily have a major impact on local news ratings. "While WPLG rolled along, WTVJ-TV (NBC) and WCIX-TV (CBS) received first sweeps results following the jump of an-

³⁵James G. Webster and Gregory D. Newton, "Structural Determinants of the Television News Audience," *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 25 (Fall 1988): 381-389.

chorman John Hambrick from WTVJ to WCIX. Apparently, the switch wasn't much of a factor, as neither station experienced a sharp improvement or decline."³⁶

In "A History of Broadcasting Audience Research in the United States," Mark James Banks examined not only former rating techniques but how the process might change in the coming decades. Many of the changes will be brought about by increased fragmentation of the viewing audiences of various programs and television news. While rating services increase sample size and expand the flexibility of their methods, technological advancements will allow the companies to supply data to stations and audiences at faster rates through the use of computers, telephone systems and interactive systems.³⁷

It is clear in some instances that lead-in programming, the performance of the station's network news, viewer loyalty, promotions, the performances of talent, and the running of series were major determinants in ratings success. However, it has also been proven that a strong performance in one of those areas is not always the solution for higher ratings. Ratings are dependent upon many variables, many of which are under the newsroom's control and many of which are not.

³⁶Tom Jicha, "WPLG Dominates Again: 'Eyewitness' Unbeaten," *Variety* 7 March 1990, 52.

³⁷Mark James Banks, "A History of Broadcast Audience Research in the United States, 1920-1980, with an Emphasis on the Rating Services," (Ph.D. Dissertation: University of Tennessee, 1981): 360-361.

Television News in the Knoxville Market

Nielsen Media Research estimated in 1992 there were more than 400,000 television households in the Knoxville Designated Market Area (DMA), making it the nation's sixty-fourth largest. The Knoxville DMA is made up of 19 counties in Tennessee and six across the border in Kentucky.³⁸ Five stations serve the Knoxville DMA: WATE (channel 6), an ABC affiliate; WBIR (channel 10), an NBC affiliate; WKXT (channel 8), a CBS affiliate; WKCH (channel 43), an independent station offering FOX programming; and WKOP (channel 15), a public television station. All five stations are located in Knoxville, the center of commerce, transportation, industry and education in East Tennessee and the state's third largest city.

The past five years have been a period of extraordinary growth, development and change among Knoxville's television stations. The most significant change was the Federal Communications Commission "dropping in" the channel 8 frequency which lead to the creation of WKXT in 1988 and the closing of WTVK (channel 26).³⁹ A year before the move, strong-hold WBIR became the NBC affiliate leaving CBS to affiliate with WTVK and subsequently the new WKXT.⁴⁰

For more than a decade, WBIR has been the leader in news ratings in the Knoxville market while the station's "news programs maintained an audience perception of consistency and continuity due to the

³⁸*Market Data: Knoxville, Tennessee* (Nielsen Media Research, 23 April 1992 to 20 May 1992): 1.

³⁹Jack Lail, "Channel 8 Debuts Dec. 5: WTVK Drops Power in 5-Day Switchover," *The Knoxville News-Sentinel*, 4 November 1988, 1A.

⁴⁰Cynthia Moxley, "Channel 10 to Switch to NBC Network; More Network Changes Possible," *The Knoxville Journal*, 23 June 1988, 1A.

limited on-air changes which occurred.”⁴¹ WBIR’s limited on-air changes are noted in Appendix A. This appendix also specifies the years that the stations’ anchors and news directors joined their respective stations, the news departments’ total number of employees and the number of personnel whose primary responsibilities are producing, reporting or shooting video.

Since the middle of 1979, “WBIR’s lowest share during the local news time periods has never dropped below 44 percent. The WBIR news programs have sometimes had a larger viewing audience than the other two network affiliates combined.”⁴² In July 1992, Nielsen Media Research found WBIR airing the most watched newscasts at noon, 6 p.m. and 11 p.m. In November 1992, *Broadcasting* magazine awarded the station a “blue ribbon” for having the highest rated evening newscast in markets between the sizes of 26 and 100. In the study of Nielsen ratings data from May 1992, WBIR’s 6 p.m. newscast had a rating of 27.5 and an astounding 48 share of the Knoxville market.⁴³

WBIR’s news department was in a period of expansion during 1992, adding weekend morning newscasts and a new afternoon news-entertainment program on weekdays. WBIR has news cut-ins during the “Today” program along with numerous newscasts each day: at 6 a.m., noon, 5 p.m., 6 p.m. and 11 p.m. weekdays; hour-long newscasts on weekend mornings; and 6 p.m. and 11 p.m. newscasts on weekend nights. In 1991, WBIR also began producing five-minute local news

⁴¹Vicki Purifoy, “The WBIR-TV News Department: A Historical Overview and Case Study,” (M.S. thesis: The University of Tennessee, 1987): 4.

⁴²*Ibid*, 3.

⁴³Geoffrey Foisie, “Ratings Up in Top 25 Markets; Newscasts Added in Smaller Cities,” *Broadcasting*, 2 November 1992: 30-32.

segments seen twice an hour on Headline News, a 24-hour news service available to Knoxville's Scripps Howard Cable customers.⁴⁴

Although the WKXT news department is the youngest, it has had the majority of changes during the past two years. At one time, the station devoted more time of its broadcast day to news than the other two stations. Now, it offers the least. "The budgetary ax" in 1991 was responsible for most of the changes at WKXT, such as "chopping at least 10 news staff positions . . . and the elimination of the station's weekend and the 11 p.m. weeknight newscasts."⁴⁵ The catalyst was "recessionary impacts and a slump in advertising revenues," said WKXT general partner Don Bagwell in an interview with *The Knoxville Journal*. The move to air syndicated programming rather than news came seven months after the station shortened its early evening newscast from an hour to 30 minutes.

As researcher J. A. Haldi noted, "If one cannot win with better news, then one can split the viewing audience by scheduling entertainment programming against the news . . . [because] about a third of the audience does not want to watch the news to begin with."⁴⁶ That point was supported by July 1991 ratings data for the Knoxville market. WKXT for the first time surpassed WATE to become the second most-watched station in the market for programming throughout the day. The ratings during existing news blocks also went up, meaning even

⁴⁴Beth Kinnane, "WBIR to Expand Coverage: News Blocks Will Air on Headline News," *The Knoxville Journal*, 25 October 1991, 2A.

⁴⁵Candace McRae, "Channel 8 Cuts Weekend, Late Night Newscasts," *The Knoxville Journal*, 18 April 1992, 1A.

⁴⁶J.A. Haldi, "Network Affiliate Programming," *Broadcasting Programming: Strategies for Winning Television and Radio Audiences* (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 1981), 89.

more people were watching the scaled back news department. According to Nielsen Media Research data, the station's noon news ratings increased 77 percent between July 1991 and July 1992 making WKXT a strong second-place finisher to WBIR. Also, the station's 11 p.m. viewing audience doubled in the July 1991 ratings with the addition of the program "Night Court" rather than late local news.⁴⁷

WKXT was not the only station to drop newscasts in the first part of the decade as several other stations in medium-sized markets did also, like WNWO-TV in Toledo, Ohio.⁴⁸ An editorial in *The Wall Street Journal* voiced a sense of disappointment but not surprise. The newspaper said the low ratings most likely were brought about by viewers who "wish to avoid the nightly assault of fire and catastrophe reports, the emphasis on violence, robbery" and other news topics that consistently find themselves at the top of newscasts. The editorial also focused on the success many stations that made the change soon encountered:

Stations that dropped the late night news in favor of syndicated comedies saw their ratings surge sharply upward. This is not surprising. No one can blame viewers for concluding that "Mama's Family" offers a more comprehensive view of reality than does the local "news."⁴⁹

Even after the round of 1991 budget cuts, WKXT continued to broadcast news during morning cut-ins on the program "CBS This Morning" and at noon and 6 p.m. weekdays.

⁴⁷Beth Kinnane, "For WKXT, Less News is Good News," *The Knoxville Journal*, 27 August 1991, 2A.

⁴⁸"Knoxville TV Drops its Late Night News: It Substitutes Syndicated Entertainment Programming for Newscasts," *Broadcasting*, 13 May 1991, 36.

⁴⁹"Good News," *The Wall Street Journal*, 19 August 1991, A8.

WATE, the first television station in East Tennessee, lead the Knoxville news ratings books during the 1970s before being beat out by WBIR. During the past decade, WATE has made more changes than WBIR, but not as many as four-year-old WKXT. The most noticeable change at WATE was in 1991 when it replaced longtime anchor Sam Brown, who first began anchoring at the station in 1974.⁵⁰ Brown's co-anchor later left the station, and the two were replaced with two faces unfamiliar to East Tennesseans.⁵¹ Brown was hired by rival and third-place WKXT to anchor noon and 6 p.m. newscasts.⁵² WATE's news director, Dave Smith, found himself without a job a year later when the station decided to replace him as well.

In the July 1992 ratings, WATE's noon news finished in third place behind WBIR and WKXT, and it rebounded into second place at 6 p.m. ahead of WKXT. WATE also broadcasts news at 6 a.m., 11 p.m. and during cut-ins on "Good Morning America." On weekends, WATE airs news at 6 and 11 p.m.

Summary

Research shows that there are many differences in the news values found on local television newscasts. Many factors have been examined to find out what influences those differences. Researchers have

⁵⁰Betsy Pickle, "Sam Brown, Channel 6 to Part," *The Knoxville News-Sentinel*, 8 August 1991, 1A.

⁵¹Wayne Bledsoe, "New TV Faces in ET: New Anchor Team to Take Helm at WATE," *The Knoxville News-Sentinel*, 2 January 1992, 1B.

⁵²Robert Womack, "Sam Brown Hired for Channel 8 Job," *The Knoxville Journal*, 25 November 1991, 4A.

found network feeds, wire services, other media, market size, technology, and resources contributed to news value decisions.

It is also evident television stations make changes in their news programming because of ratings. And Knoxville stations are no exception. East Tennessee viewers have watched many ratings induced changes, such as WBIR's adding newscasts, WKXT's dropping them, and WATE's changing anchors. Those were all major decisions — affecting dozens of staffers and thousands of viewers — which were undoubtedly made with an eye on the ratings books. What is unclear, however, is how ratings influence decisions regarding the content of Knoxville's newscasts.

CHAPTER THREE

Research Method

Aimed at discovering the differences in news values and strategies among Knoxville's three network-affiliated television stations, this research is based on a content analysis of the stations' noon and 6 p.m. newscasts. The research method first emerged during World War II when the allies monitored German and Japanese radio content which enabled them "to measure with some degree of success the changes in troop concentration . . ." ⁵³ After that time, content analysis emerged as an important way to examine media content in a systematic, objective and quantitative manner. ⁵⁴ During the content analysis of broadcast media, programs are recorded and the contents coded into various categories. ⁵⁵

For this research, content analyses of the noon and 6 p.m. newscasts of WATE, WKXT and WBIR were conducted during two 10-day periods. The first study period was during October 1992 when the stations were not competing in ratings, and the second period was during the November 1992 rating sweeps.

During the non-ratings period, the 6 p.m. newscasts studied were all presented on weekdays between October 5 and 28 and the noon news-

⁵³Roger D. Wimmer and Joseph R. Dominick, *Mass Media Research: An Introduction* (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1983): 137-138.

⁵⁴F. Kerlinger, *Foundations of Behavioral Research*, 2d ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1973).

⁵⁵Werner J. Severin and James W. Tankard, Jr., *Communication Theories: Origins, Methods, Uses* (New York: Longman, 1988), 20.

casts on weekdays between October 6 and 26. All of the newscasts studied during the second period aired on weekdays between November 2 and 13 during both the Arbitron Research Bureau and the A. C. Nielsen Co. rating sweeps. The content of 120 newscasts presented by the three stations was examined.

Each newscast was timed and logged before content coding began by a team of two coders. The research findings reflect the mathematical means of the coders' determinations. Both coders had earned at least a bachelor's degree in journalism or broadcasting to ensure sufficient knowledge of the field in making determinations. The coding was completed by the thesis author and by a 1991 University of Tennessee broadcasting graduate with television experience. A sample coding sheet used for the research is included as Appendix B.

Coder reliability coefficients have been calculated using a formula developed in 1955 by William A. Scott of then Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan. With results ranging from 0.0 to 1.0, Scott's π "can be roughly interpreted as the extent to which the coding reliability exceeds chance."⁵⁶ A score of 1.0 indicates total coder agreement. For this study, coder reliability coefficients were calculated for each of the categories in which content coding took place: .931 for coding in the program elements categories, .965 in the news topics categories, .982 in the geographic categories and .803 in the areas of timeliness.

⁵⁶William A. Scott, "Reliability of Content Analysis: The Case of Nominal Scale Coding," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 19 (Fall 1955): 321-325.

The categories used for content coding were, in many instances, modeled after or expanded from Carroll's research, "Market Size and TV News Values." The running times of all aspects of the newscasts were first coded into the program element they best represented. There were 12 program elements used for the coding:

Breaking news, which was generally hard news that happened, was released or was uncovered within the past 24 hours.

Situations/continuous, which was hard news that did not fit into the breaking news category. It was often an "on-going process of policy consideration. If underlying implications, policy debate, examination of issues, controversy over how to resolve the thing, or history were made of a report,"⁵⁷ it was coded into this category. Stories that provided background and context, or were considered part of a continuing news event that remained in the news but had minor new developments, such as some trials and campaigns, were included here.

Soft/features were light, human interest stories, interviews or informational segments.

Public service information was time mainly spent on stories, interviews or informational segments in the public interest, despite news value.

Headlines which preceded the first commercial break and mentioned what stories were coming up on the newscast.

Opens and news identifications, which included hearing impaired statements and reverse opens.

⁵⁷Carroll, 51.

Teases for upcoming parts of the show or other newscasts on the station.

Weather, which was time spent on the standard weather segment. Weather-related news airing outside the traditional weather segment was to be coded as either breaking news, situations/continuous, soft/feature or public service information.

Chat/transition, which was time spent changing to the weather, sports or closing segments. This did not include introductions to taped or live segments.

Sports, which was time spent on the standard sports segment. Sports-related news airing outside the traditional sports segment was to be coded as either breaking news, situations/continuous, soft/feature or public service information.

Wrap, which included the anchors' final comments and the time spent on credits.

Commercials, which included both paid and station programming promotions presented during the commercial breaks.

If the element were news-oriented or presented in the form of actual reporting, it was then coded for its geographic area, particular news topic and timeliness. Thus, in general, if the element was coded as breaking news, situational/continuous, soft/feature or public service oriented, coding continued. Exceptions were elements presented in the form of interviews on a soft/feature topic or "spotlight" segment as found on the noon newscasts. If coding continued for the program element, it was next coded for the one news topic it best represented. The 14 news topics used during coding:

Economic/business news, which dealt with private business and the economies of any geographic entity.

Social issues/quality of life, which was news on social issues and policies that were brought into the public's debate or provide insight into problem or concern facing a segment of the population, such as hunger, abortion or gay rights.

City/county government, no matter which town or county's municipal government.

State government: the General Assembly, governor or state agencies.

Federal government, no matter which branch, department or agency.

Human interest items: stories aired for their unusualness, bizarreness or human interest.

Crime/legal action: robberies, burglaries, murders, rapes, court trials, etc.

Fires, included arson unless the story's focus was more crime related.

Accidents: car wrecks, plane crashes, accidental deaths, etc.

Weather-related items meriting coverage in the traditional news segments.

Sports-related items meriting coverage in the traditional news segments.

International: all news from outside the U.S.

Stories were next coded for the area where the story took place, regardless of whether the story took on interest in other geographic areas. The seven geographic areas defined for coding:

Knoxville/Knox County.

The Knoxville metro area, which was made up of Anderson, Union, Grainger, Jefferson, Sevier and Blount counties.⁵⁸

The Designated Market Area, which included Campbell, Claiborne, Cocke, Cumberland, Fentress, Hamblen, Hancock, Loudon, Monroe, Morgan, Roane and Scott counties in Tennessee, and Bell, Harlan, Knox, McCreary, Pulaski and Whitley counties in Kentucky.⁵⁹ Appendix C shows the counties in the Knoxville DMA in map form.

Tennessee, which included all areas of the state outside the Knoxville DMA.

The region, which included all of Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia and the areas of Kentucky outside the Knoxville DMA.

The nation, which included all events outside the region that took place in the United States, its territories or part of U.S. space exploration.

The world, which included everywhere, except the U.S. and its territories.

Finally, stories were coded for their timeliness. Four areas of timeliness were defined for this research:

⁵⁸*Market Data: Knoxville, Tennessee*, 1.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*

Spontaneous news, which comes with virtually no notice such as fires, floods, accidents, and murders.

Anticipated news, which occurs when "news organizations schedule coverage of anticipated events, but cannot control how such events as court hearings, trial decisions, and legislative action unfold. They were scheduled, but not for the benefit of the news media in spite of participants' possible sensitivity to them."⁶⁰

Planned news "such as press conferences, opening nights, ceremonial appearances or other (pseudo) events planned with news media coverage in mind."⁶¹ Presidential campaign stops generally also were categorized as planned news.

Enterpriser news "resulted from initiative in identifying topics that otherwise would not be included in newscasts. These stories were done because the news organization judged the items to be important or newsworthy, not because news people were reacting to ongoing events."⁶²

Additionally, a total running time of each newshole was calculated along with running times of the first blocks. The newshole was essentially the total newscast time minus headlines, the open and news IDs, commercials, sports and weather segments, chat/transition and wraps. The times for the first block included the open, any chat times and the tease ending the block. The average number of stories in the first block also was calculated.

⁶⁰Carroll, 51.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Ibid, 51-52.

The starting point of each news program was determined to be when the headlines or the newscast's opening aired, whichever came first. From that point, commercial breaks were included in the coding and timing. However, when a station aired its headlines during the closing credits of the preceding program, the remaining time in the program's credits was omitted. The coding continued until the station's newscast had a definite ending, which was most often after the credits and copyright information were broadcast.

Research Delimitations

When one of the stations' newscasts was preempted, abbreviated or delayed because of network scheduling, that time period's coding for all three stations was thrown out and an extra day of coding was added to the particular study period. When such event occurred, the extra study day was the same day of the week as the delimited newscasts. The reason for the delimitation was because the study's goal was to examine news values on typical days when news departments were performing under normal circumstances, not when external forces limited or altered one station's news time. This event happened October 7 and 14 when major league baseball delayed the 6 p.m. newscasts on WKXT.

Additionally, if — for any reason — one of the stations did not air its newscast during the regular time period, whether for technical difficulties or local program changes, that day's coding was thrown out and a new day added. This event did not occur during either study period.

The author of the thesis is employed as an associate producer at WKXT. If the author had to serve as the producer of one of the station's newscasts during a study period, the coding for that day was to be thrown out and another day added to the study. This was to ensure that the producer of each newscast was unaware of which days would be used for the study so there would be no conscious effort to alter news value judgment. This happened on October 12 and 14.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

Exploring the news values of Knoxville's television news departments, this study discovered the areas on which the stations placed their greatest and least amount of emphasis during their 6 p.m. and noon newscasts. It also examined the differences in news values when the stations were competing during ratings, traditionally the time when stations put their best effort before viewers who are being measured for demographic and audience data.

The results are divided into four sections. The first two sections reflect the findings concerning the 6 p.m. newscasts and the later two reflect noon newscast findings. Results for each time period begin with research findings for the various categories over the entire study. Next, results for each time period are broken down for the 10 days studied during non-ratings and the 10 days studied during ratings.

In each area, results are given first for the content analysis of program elements and then the topic, geographic location, and timeliness of the news elements are covered. The average time and story count of the stations' first blocks are included at the end of each section.

Composite Findings Concerning the 6 p.m. Newscasts

Apparent major differences existed in the amount of time each of the stations spent on the various program elements during the 6 p.m.

newscasts. The findings in Table 1 indicate WATE placed a greater emphasis on breaking news than its two competitors. While the research shows WATE gave viewers the greater amount of immediate news, WBIR gave viewers more situational/continuous news coverage which would traditionally contain the more in-depth and enterprising reporting. WKXT trailed behind the other two stations giving viewers the least amount of breaking news and situational/continuous reporting. However, WKXT did give viewers significantly more public service oriented information than WATE or WBIR, which spent virtually the same amount of time on this element.

The times spent on the standard weather and sports segments were significantly different among all three stations, with WKXT spending more time on both. More than a minute's difference in time was spent on weather between WKXT and WBIR, to which WBIR devoted the least. WATE had the shortest sports segment, averaging half a minute less than WBIR and nearly an entire minute less than WKXT.

WATE spent the most time trying to entice viewers to continue watching its newscast by spending more time on headlines and teases. The station also spent the least amount of time on the opens/news IDs category. WKXT had the shortest headlines and spent the least amount of time teasing upcoming stories or news programming. However, the significant tease time difference between WKXT and the other two stations might be attributed to the absence of an 11 p.m. newscast which the other stations teased.

Major differences exist in the time spent on commercials with the greatest between WBIR and WKXT. WBIR aired just under six and a

TABLE 1

**AVERAGE TIME DEVOTED TO PROGRAM ELEMENTS
DURING 6 P.M. NEWSCASTS**

	WATE	WBIR	WKXT
Breaking News	4:38	4:02	3:43
Situations/Continuous	4:22	4:44	3:03
Soft/Features	3:18	4:54	3:17
Public Service Oriented	0:50	0:48	1:18
Headlines	0:32	0:26	0:21
Opens/News IDs	0:20	0:22	0:30
Teases	1:08	1:07	0:46
Weather	2:45	2:23	3:39
Sports	3:20	3:48	4:10
Chat/Transition	0:40	0:45	0:42
Wrap	0:33	0:28	0:22
Commercials	7:13	6:28	8:24

half minutes of commercials. WATE aired a little more than seven minutes. With almost eight and half minutes of advertising, WKXT's commercial time was 23 percent more than WBIR and 14 percent more than WATE.

The various news topics covered by the stations were highly varied in some instances. Table 2 indicates WATE's coverage of economic/business news was more than its two competitors' average times combined. WATE also placed significantly greater emphasis on news about unpleasant events, such as crime/legal action and accidents. In the crime/legal action news category, WATE exceeded WBIR's coverage by 44 percent and WKXT's by 94 percent. The time WATE spent on the coverage of accidents was nearly as much as the other two stations' times added together. In the midst of all the unpleasant news, WATE succeeded in placing the greatest emphasis on health and sports-related news.

WBIR devoted the most time to all levels of governmental reporting and human interest items. WBIR placed a significantly greater emphasis on devoting time to education airing the equivalent of WATE and WKXT's time combined.

The only news topic in which WKXT devoted more time than its competitors was in the social issues/quality of life category, although the time was not significantly greater than WBIR's. Compared to the competition, WKXT devoted significantly less time to news during its newscasts. WBIR had the largest newshole, which was three minutes more than WKXT's and more than a minute greater than WATE's.

TABLE 2

**AVERAGE TIME DEVOTED TO NEWS TOPICS
DURING 6 P.M. NEWSCASTS**

	WATE	WBIR	WKXT
Economic/Business	1:08	0:23	0:34
Social Issues/Quality of Life	0:30	1:02	1:13
Education	0:52	1:41	0:40
City/County Government	0:48	1:14	0:56
State Government	0:30	0:33	0:14
Federal Government	1:08	1:51	1:43
Human Interest Items	1:30	2:54	2:30
Crime/Legal Actions	3:28	2:24	1:47
Fires	0:04	0:05	0:02
Accidents	0:26	0:13	0:14
Health	1:54	1:18	1:01
Weather Related	0:00	0:00	0:00
Sports Related	0:51	0:45	0:30
International	0:00	0:01	0:00
Total Newshole	13:07	14:25	11:23

As Table 3 indicates, WBIR devoted more time to all the geographic areas studied with the exception of national news. WKXT devoted the least amount of time to each of the geographic areas, except for national news. While the differences in Knoxville/Knox County and metro news found on WBIR and WATE was insignificant, a significant difference in the amount of "local news" was found on WKXT. In both categories, WKXT offered viewers about a minute less than WBIR.

The differences in designated market news was significant among the stations. WBIR devoted the most time to the DMA, which averaged 39 percent more than WATE and 88 percent more than WKXT. The Tennessee and regional news coverage areas were also more prominent on WBIR, which was the only station to include a world news story in its 6 p.m. newscast.

Spontaneous news coverage received more air time on WATE, as reported in Table 4. WBIR and WKXT offered almost identical amounts of spontaneous news. Significant differences appeared in the amount of time spent on anticipated news among all three stations. Each station relied somewhat equally on planned news. WBIR's newscast contained the most enterprising news coverage, while WATE and WKXT trailed behind.

These findings partially support Hypothesis 1, that WBIR would have the most enterprising and spontaneous news coverage. While WBIR did have the most enterprising reporting, WATE had the most

TABLE 3

**AVERAGE TIME DEVOTED TO GEOGRAPHIC AREA
DURING 6 P.M. NEWSCASTS**

	WATE	WBIR	WKXT
Knoxville/Knox County	7:33	7:37	6:36
Metro Area	1:49	2:03	1:05
Designated Market Area	0:45	1:14	0:09
Tennessee	1:13	1:32	0:51
Region	0:19	0:21	0:08
Nation	1:27	1:37	2:34
World	0:00	0:01	0:00
Total Newshole	13:07	14:25	11:23

TABLE 4

**AVERAGE TIME DEVOTED TO CATEGORIES OF
TIMELINESS DURING 6 P.M. NEWSCASTS**

	WATE	WBIR	WKXT
Spontaneous	1:54	1:37	1:35
Anticipated	5:40	6:46	4:26
Planned	1:10	1:16	1:16
Enterpriser	4:23	4:46	4:05
Total Newshole	13:07	14:25	11:23

spontaneous news. In fact, the research shows WBIR had only marginally more spontaneous news than WKXT, which had the least. The findings in the areas of timeliness support Hypothesis 2, that WKXT has the least enterpriser and spontaneous news coverage.

Table 5 indicates significant differences in the stations' time devoted to the first blocks. The difference between WATE and WBIR was minor, especially when compared to WKXT, which had the shortest first block with the lowest story count. The difference in the first block story counts of WATE and WBIR was insignificant.

TABLE 5
**AVERAGE TIME AND STORY COUNT OF THE
FIRST BLOCKS DURING 6 P.M. NEWSCASTS**

	WATE	WBIR	WKXT
Average Time	10:13	10:59	7:02
Story Count	8.3	8.9	6.7

Breakdown of Findings Concerning the 6 p.m. Newscasts

When the stations competed in the ratings period, viewers found more breaking news on all three early evening newscasts with the greatest difference being on WATE. Table 6 indicates WATE increased its breaking news coverage by 31 percent while WBIR and WKXT followed with more modest increases. WKXT did, however, make a substantial increase in its emphasis on situations/continuous news coverage while WBIR offered significantly less. WATE had a minor increase in its coverage of situations/continuous news. The decrease in soft/feature reporting on WATE and WKXT was insignificant when compared to WBIR's nearly one-minute increase. All three stations became less concerned with news and information solely in the public interest during ratings. Time devoted to the public service oriented category was cut by at least half on all three stations.

The time the stations spent on headlines, teases, weather, sports and wraps reflected minor, if any, changes during ratings. Anchors on WATE and WKXT chatted less during ratings while WBIR's anchors spent more time talking and making transitions. The only noticeable difference in time spent on opens/news IDs was with WATE, which spent one-third less time on the category after eliminating a reverse open. All three stations aired fewer commercials during ratings with the greatest difference on WBIR.

While economic/business reporting remained relatively the same on WATE, Table 7 indicates significant decreases on WBIR and WKXT during ratings. The latter two stations placed much greater emphasis

TABLE 6

**BREAKDOWN OF AVERAGE TIME DEVOTED TO
PROGRAM ELEMENTS DURING 6 P.M. NEWSCASTS**

	WATE		WBIR		WKXT	
	Non-Ratings	Ratings	Non-Ratings	Ratings	Non-Ratings	Ratings
Breaking News	3:47	5:29	3:44	4:19	3:40	3:55
Situations/Continunous	4:13	4:30	5:09	4:19	2:17	3:49
Soft/Feature	3:19	3:17	4:25	5:22	3:29	3:06
Public Service Oriented	1:33	0:07	1:06	0:31	1:52	0:45
Headlines	0:31	0:32	0:26	0:25	0:21	0:20
Opens/News IDs	0:24	0:16	0:21	0:22	0:30	0:30
Teases	1:05	1:10	1:01	1:13	0:44	0:49
Weather	2:49	2:41	2:29	2:17	3:34	3:44
Sports	3:26	3:13	3:47	3:48	4:12	4:08
Chat/Transition	0:44	0:36	0:42	0:48	0:49	0:36
Wrap	0:36	0:30	0:25	0:31	0:25	0:20
Commercials	7:18	7:08	6:40	6:15	8:30	8:18

TABLE 7

**BREAKDOWN OF AVERAGE TIME DEVOTED TO
NEWS TOPICS DURING 6 P.M. NEWSCASTS**

	WATE		WBIR		WKXT	
	Non-Ratings	Ratings	Non-Ratings	Ratings	Non-Ratings	Ratings
Economic/Business	1:09	1:07	0:43	0:02	0:49	0:19
Social Issues/ Quality of Life	0:23	0:37	0:32	1:03	0:42	1:44
Education	1:08	0:34	2:07	1:06	1:08	0:13
City/County Gov't	0:31	1:05	1:49	0:39	0:50	1:02
State Government	0:05	0:55	0:15	0:52	0:22	0:05
Federal Government	1:17	0:59	0:57	2:46	1:05	2:21
Human Interest Items	1:55	1:05	2:25	3:23	2:29	2:32
Crime/Legal Actions	4:29	2:27	3:48	0:59	2:15	1:18
Fires	0:03	0:05	0:04	0:05	0:04	0:00
Accidents	0:20	0:33	0:15	0:10	0:22	0:07
Health	0:50	2:57	0:58	1:38	1:01	1:00
Weather Related	0:00	0:00	0:00	0:00	0:00	0:00
Sports Related	0:31	1:11	0:27	1:03	0:09	0:50
International	0:00	0:00	0:00	0:02	0:00	0:00
Total Newshole	12:40	13:34	14:20	14:29	11:15	11:30

on social issues/quality of life reporting while WATE made a modest increase in the category. The biggest loser during ratings was education news which received less than half its non-ratings air time. Despite cutting the time devoted to education news by 48 percent, WBIR still outpaced its competitors in this category.

City/county government news received more air time on WATE and WKXT during ratings but significantly less time on WBIR. WBIR's city/county government coverage went from a leading 1:49 during non-ratings to a last place 39 seconds during ratings. State government news received much greater emphasis during ratings on two stations, WATE and WBIR, and less on the other, WKXT. Federal government coverage more than doubled on WBIR and WKXT during ratings while it decreased on WATE.

The stations broadcast significantly less crime/legal action news during ratings. Although WATE's crime/legal action coverage decreased by more than two minutes, it continued to emphasize more crime/legal action than its two competitors. In fact, WATE's crime/legal action coverage during ratings was equal to WBIR and WKXT's times combined. WATE was the only station to increase its coverage of accidents during ratings.

Human interest news remained constant on WKXT, decreased slightly on WATE, and increased by nearly a minute on WBIR. The time devoted to health news made a 72 percent increase on WATE which added more than two minutes during ratings. WBIR increased its health news time by 41 percent while WKXT remained constant.

Sports-related news made substantial increases on all three stations. However, all of the sports-related reporting during ratings revolved around the resignation of the University of Tennessee's head football coach.

The newsholes also grew during ratings. While WBIR and WKXT made modest increases in total newshole time, WATE increased its newshole time by almost a minute.

During the ratings period, proximate news received less time on WBIR and WKXT as the stations put a greater emphasis on coverage in outlying areas. Table 8 indicates news from Knoxville/Knox County received significantly less time on the two stations while WATE made a substantial increase. While metro coverage increased on WBIR and WKXT, a significant amount of emphasis was taken away from the area by WATE. WATE did, however, have the largest increase in designated market coverage. For the first time in the study, WKXT's 6 p.m. newscasts began to cover news in the DMA. Despite the other stations' increases, WBIR remained the leader in total time devoted to the DMA category during both ratings and non-ratings.

Tennessee news decreased on all three stations. News from the region remained constant at WATE, decreased slightly at WKXT, and was eliminated completely at WBIR. During the non-ratings period, WBIR had devoted the most time to regional news. National news received significantly more air time on WBIR and WKXT during ratings while it made a moderate decrease on WATE.

Spontaneous news coverage received significantly less time on all three stations during ratings, as indicated in Table 9. The stations re-

TABLE 8

**BREAKDOWN OF AVERAGE TIME DEVOTED TO
GEOGRAPHIC AREA DURING 6 P.M. NEWSCASTS**

	WATE		WBIR		WKXT	
	Non-Ratings	Ratings	Non-Ratings	Ratings	Non-Ratings	Ratings
Knoxville/Knox County	6:37	8:31	8:26	6:48	6:57	6:15
Metro Area	2:22	1:17	1:18	2:47	0:54	1:16
Designated Market Area	0:27	1:04	1:09	1:19	0:00	0:18
Tennessee	1:23	1:02	1:53	1:11	0:56	0:45
Region	0:19	0:19	0:42	0:00	0:10	0:06
Nation	1:33	1:21	0:53	2:22	2:18	2:50
World	0:00	0:00	0:00	0:02	0:00	0:00
Total Newshole	12:40	13:34	14:20	14:29	11:15	11:30

TABLE 9

**BREAKDOWN OF AVERAGE TIME DEVOTED TO
CATEGORIES OF TIMELINESS DURING 6 P.M. NEWSCASTS**

	WATE		WBIR		WKXT	
	Non-Ratings	Ratings	Non-Ratings	Ratings	Non-Ratings	Ratings
Spontaneous	2:15	1:33	2:29	0:46	2:12	0:59
Anticipated	4:51	6:29	6:04	7:27	3:58	4:55
Planned	1:03	1:16	0:43	1:49	1:17	1:15
Enterpriser	4:31	4:15	5:04	4:28	3:48	4:21
Total Newshole	12:40	13:34	14:20	14:29	11:15	11:30

lied more heavily upon anticipated news. While planned coverage remained relatively the same on WATE and WKXT, the time spent in that category more than doubled on WBIR. Both WBIR and WATE became less enterprising during ratings while WKXT made a moderate increase in the category.

As Table 10 indicates, little changed in the time spent on the first blocks during ratings at WATE and WBIR. The most significant difference was at WKXT, which lengthened its first block by more than a minute. Despite the increase in time, WKXT's story count dropped by the equivalent of one story. WBIR's story count also decreased while WATE's remained relatively constant.

TABLE 10

**BREAKDOWN OF AVERAGE TIME AND STORY COUNT OF
THE FIRST BLOCKS DURING 6 P.M. NEWSCASTS**

	WATE		WBIR		WKXT	
	Non-Ratings	Ratings	Non-Ratings	Ratings	Non-Ratings	Ratings
Average Time	10:15	10:12	10:50	10:48	6:31	7:34
Story Count	8.2	8.4	9.2	8.5	7.2	6.2

Composite Findings Concerning the Noon Newscasts

A greater variation existed in the content of the noon newscasts. As Table 11 indicates, WBIR used the most breaking news. The finding partially supports Hypothesis 1 that WBIR would lead this category. Significant differences appear in the amount of time WBIR spends on breaking news when compared to WATE and WKXT. WBIR put a greater emphasis on the situations/continuous coverage area while putting the least on soft/features. WKXT devoted significantly more time to soft/features and public service oriented information than the other two stations.

WKXT spent significantly less time on headlines and teases than the other two stations, while it spent the most time on its opens/news IDs. The differences in time spent on headlines and teases on WBIR and WATE's newscasts were minor.

Only a 14-second range was shown between the time the stations spent on weather, but sports was a different story. WATE averaged a little more than a minute and an half each day while WKXT averaged 41 seconds. WBIR did not include sports in its noon newscasts, with the exception of sports-related news to be discussed later.

WATE spent considerably less time on chat/transition and its wrap than WBIR and WKXT. A significant difference also was shown in the time spent on commercials with a range of more than two and an half minutes. WATE had significantly more commercials than WKXT and WBIR.

TABLE 11

**AVERAGE TIME DEVOTED TO PROGRAM ELEMENTS
DURING NOON NEWSCASTS**

	WATE	WBIR	WKXT
Breaking News	3:50	4:22	3:10
Situations/Continuous	2:05	2:20	1:48
Soft/Features	6:09	4:33	7:46
Public Service Oriented	1:14	0:38	2:18
Headlines	0:39	0:37	0:29
Opens/News IDs	0:17	0:16	0:27
Teases	1:18	1:24	1:05
Weather	3:23	3:34	3:20
Sports	1:32	0:00	0:41
Chat/Transition	0:28	0:48	0:40
Wrap	0:12	0:26	0:25
Commercials	8:57	6:25	7:09

A significantly greater emphasis was placed on business/economic, education, and city/county government news on WBIR, as Table 12 indicates. News on social policies/quality of life issues was much more prevalent on WATE and WBIR than on WKXT. WBIR had marginally more state government news than the other stations. News concerning the federal government, human interest items, and crime/legal action received significantly more time on WATE and WBIR than on WKXT.

Overall, WATE continued the trend of its 6 p.m. newscast by airing the most unpleasant news when the crime/legal action, fires and accidents categories are combined. As with the 6 p.m. results, WATE placed a significantly greater emphasis on health news. WKXT put the greater emphasis on sports-related and international news. WKXT continued to have the least amount of total time devoted to news which was under seven minutes. The stations' newsholes were extremely varied, with WATE having the longest, averaging a little more than 10 minutes.

The more proximate news received considerably less air time on the noon newscasts when compared with their 6 p.m. counterparts. Table 13 indicates WBIR put the greater emphasis on Knoxville/Knox County, designated market area and Tennessee news. WATE lead the metro area, regional and national geographic categories. Although WKXT offered the least news from each of the geographic areas, except for world news. However, the only significant difference found on WKXT was in the national news category. In that category, WKXT offered only half the news WATE offered.

TABLE 12

**AVERAGE TIME DEVOTED TO NEWS TOPICS
DURING NOON NEWSCASTS**

	WATE	WBIR	WKXT
Economic/Business	0:31	0:54	0:21
Social Issues/Quality of Life	0:22	0:19	0:11
Education	0:08	0:16	0:04
City/County Government	0:09	0:21	0:05
State Government	0:11	0:15	0:09
Federal Government	2:43	2:39	1:54
Human Interest Items	1:49	1:41	1:14
Crime/Legal Actions	1:17	1:17	0:56
Fires	0:07	0:05	0:04
Accidents	0:14	0:08	0:15
Health	1:49	0:44	0:36
Weather Related	0:00	0:01	0:00
Sports Related	0:11	0:12	0:19
International	0:30	0:25	0:36
Total Newshole	10:02	9:16	6:46

TABLE 13

**AVERAGE TIME DEVOTED TO GEOGRAPHIC AREA
DURING NOON NEWSCASTS**

	WATE	WBIR	WKXT
Knoxville/Knox County	2:33	2:47	2:04
Metro Area	0:25	0:22	0:13
Designated Market Area	0:15	0:19	0:10
Tennessee	0:38	0:46	0:36
Region	0:39	0:30	0:27
Nation	5:00	4:03	2:35
World	0:33	0:29	0:41
Total Newshole	10:02	9:16	6:46

Table 14 indicates WBIR put the greater emphasis on spontaneous news which supports Hypothesis 1. WKXT offered the least amount of spontaneous and enterpriser news at noon, supporting Hypothesis 2. A significant range was shown in the amount of time spent on anticipated news events with WBIR covering the greater amount. WBIR also relied more heavily on planned news than its competitors. The amount of time spent on enterpriser news is widely distributed, with WATE offering significantly more than either WBIR or WKXT.

Table 15 indicates a moderate difference in running times of the noon newscast's first blocks. WATE had the longest first block and the lowest story count. WBIR's first block was shorter than WATE's, but had significantly more stories. The WKXT first block was the shortest but included a story count higher than WATE's. This research indicates WBIR's newscast tended to have the quickest pace because of the greater number of stories with less time spent per story.

TABLE 14

**AVERAGE TIME DEVOTED TO CATEGORIES OF
TIMELINESS DURING NOON NEWSCASTS**

	WATE	WBIR	WKXT
Spontaneous	1:32	1:42	1:24
Anticipated	3:42	4:31	3:30
Planned	0:52	1:08	0:44
Enterpriser	3:54	1:55	1:08
Total Newshole	10:02	9:16	6:46

TABLE 15

**AVERAGE TIME AND STORY COUNT OF THE
FIRST BLOCKS DURING NOON NEWSCASTS**

	WATE	WBIR	WKXT
Average Time	6:48	6:40	6:19
Story Count	7.7	10.7	8.2

Breakdown of Findings Concerning the Noon Newscasts

Ratings marked significant increases in breaking news and decreases in situations/continuous news on WBIR and WKXT. But Table 16 indicates WATE's increased emphasis on breaking news was more modest along with its decrease in situations/continuous news. WKXT continued to spend the least amount of time on breaking news, again supporting Hypothesis 2. All three stations' newscasts shifted more emphasis on soft/feature items during ratings. As with the 6 p.m. newscasts, public service oriented news and information received drastically less air time during ratings.

The changes in time spent on headlines, opens/news IDs, and weather was insignificant among all three stations. While WATE and WBIR spent approximately the same time on teases, WKXT put significantly more emphasis on promoting upcoming program content. Sports maintained its coverage level on WATE and absence on WBIR, but WKXT cut the time it devoted to sports by nearly half. WKXT also had the most significant change in the time spent on chat/transitions by 12 seconds or 26 percent. The time spent on the programs' wraps fluctu-

TABLE 16

**BREAKDOWN OF AVERAGE TIME DEVOTED TO
PROGRAM ELEMENTS DURING NOON NEWSCASTS**

	WATE		WBIR		WKXT	
	Non-Ratings	Ratings	Non-Ratings	Ratings	Non-Ratings	Ratings
Breaking News	3:41	3:59	3:45	4:59	2:26	3:53
Situations/Continuous	2:10	2:01	2:52	1:48	2:32	1:04
Soft/Feature	5:23	6:54	4:13	4:54	6:43	8:49
Public Service Oriented	2:05	0:23	0:49	0:26	3:25	1:11
Headlines	0:42	0:37	0:36	0:38	0:28	0:30
Opens/News IDs	0:17	0:17	0:16	0:17	0:27	0:26
Teases	1:18	1:19	1:24	1:24	0:57	1:14
Weather	3:20	3:26	3:38	3:31	3:18	3:22
Sports	1:35	1:30	0:00	0:00	0:54	0:28
Chat/Transition	0:27	0:28	0:50	0:45	0:46	0:34
Wrap	0:14	0:09	0:28	0:25	0:21	0:28
Commercials	8:52	9:01	6:34	6:17	7:01	7:18

ated on all three stations. The two stations with the most time devoted to commercials during the non-ratings made minor increases while the station with least had less commercial time. WATE's average commercial time increased nine seconds, WKXT's increased 17 seconds and WBIR's dropped 17 seconds.

The average time spent on the various news topics made significant changes in many of the categories. As Table 17 indicates, WATE more than doubled its emphasis on economic/business news while the other stations remained the same. While social issues/quality of life news received significantly more time on WATE and WBIR, the time devoted by WKXT made a sharp drop from the most during non-ratings to the least during ratings. As with the 6 p.m. newscasts, education news received significantly less air time during ratings on the stations.

WBIR devoted more time to all three levels on governmental reporting during ratings while increasing its time in each category. City/county and state government proceedings received more time on all three stations. Unlike WBIR, its two competitors decreased their time spent on the federal government.

The time devoted to human interest items, crime/legal action and fires decreased on all three stations. The time spent on accidents and health news increased on WATE and WBIR, while WKXT placed less emphasis on the two areas. Sports-related news made a more prominent place on the noon newscasts during ratings with the resignation of University of Tennessee coach Johnny Majors. WKXT spent significantly more time on Majors — the only sports-related news aired during ratings — than its competitors. While WATE and WKXT placed signifi-

TABLE 17

**BREAKDOWN OF AVERAGE TIME DEVOTED TO
NEWS TOPICS DURING NOON NEWSCASTS**

	WATE		WBIR		WKXT	
	Non-Ratings	Ratings	Non-Ratings	Ratings	Non-Ratings	Ratings
Economic/Business	0:20	0:42	0:55	0:52	0:20	0:23
Social Issues/ Quality of Life	0:06	0:37	0:12	0:25	0:17	0:05
Education	0:14	0:03	0:25	0:08	0:06	0:03
City/County Gov't	0:04	0:15	0:10	0:33	0:00	0:10
State Government	0:10	0:13	0:07	0:23	0:00	0:18
Federal Government	2:49	2:36	2:36	2:42	2:07	1:42
Human Interest Items	1:54	1:45	1:57	1:25	1:35	0:54
Crime/Legal Actions	1:34	1:00	1:33	1:01	1:00	0:53
Fires	0:09	0:05	0:06	0:05	0:07	0:02
Accidents	0:13	0:14	0:05	0:12	0:17	0:13
Health	1:37	2:01	0:41	0:46	0:56	0:17
Weather Related	0:00	0:00	0:02	0:00	0:00	0:00
Sports Related	0:07	0:16	0:06	0:18	0:04	0:33
International	0:39	0:22	0:08	0:41	0:52	0:19
Total Newshole	9:56	10:08	9:02	9:31	7:40	5:51

cantly less emphasis on international news during ratings, WBIR moved from the least time devoted on the news topic during non-ratings to the most during ratings.

While WATE and WBIR increased their total time devoted to news, WKXT's newshole decreased significantly during ratings. During that period, WKXT shifted its emphasis to "spotlight" segments while decreasing its newshole by nearly two minutes. WKXT continued to have the shortest newshole, and WATE maintained the longest.

Table 18 indicates WATE and WBIR placed more emphasis on Knoxville/Knox County and metro news during ratings while WKXT's average time remained relatively unchanged. News from the designated market area and the state increased on all three stations. Regional news received significantly less time on each of the noon newscasts. WATE and WBIR's national news coverage remained relatively the same while WKXT cut its time by a third. WKXT and WBIR placed significantly less emphasis on world news while the opposite was true for WBIR.

As with their 6 p.m. counterparts, the noon newscasts gave less emphasis to spontaneous coverage during ratings, as indicated in Table 19. The stations relied more heavily upon anticipated news, with WATE and WKXT more so than WBIR. While planned coverage remained relatively unchanged on WKXT, it dropped sharply on WATE and increased on WBIR. Ratings also marked more enterprising stories on WATE's noon newscasts. WBIR and WKXT devoted significantly less time to enterpriser news.

TABLE 18

**BREAKDOWN OF AVERAGE TIME DEVOTED TO
GEOGRAPHIC AREA DURING NOON NEWSCASTS**

	WATE		WBIR		WKXT	
	Non-Ratings	Ratings	Non-Ratings	Ratings	Non-Ratings	Ratings
Knoxville/Knox County	2:08	2:58	2:40	2:55	2:03	2:05
Metro Area	0:17	0:33	0:15	0:30	0:14	0:13
Designated Market Area	0:13	0:18	0:18	0:21	0:05	0:15
Tennessee	0:29	0:47	0:45	0:47	0:32	0:40
Region	1:00	0:17	0:51	0:09	0:45	0:09
Nation	5:06	4:54	4:02	4:03	3:09	2:02
World	0:44	0:22	0:12	0:47	0:54	0:27
Total Newshole	9:56	10:08	9:02	9:31	7:40	5:51

TABLE 19

**BREAKDOWN OF AVERAGE TIME DEVOTED TO
CATEGORIES OF TIMELINESS DURING NOON NEWSCASTS**

	WATE		WBIR		WKXT	
	Non-Ratings	Ratings	Non-Ratings	Ratings	Non-Ratings	Ratings
Spontaneous	2:04	1:00	2:18	1:06	1:42	1:05
Anticipated	3:24	3:59	3:46	5:16	3:29	3:31
Planned	1:07	0:37	0:47	1:29	0:46	0:41
Enterpriser	3:21	4:32	2:11	1:39	1:42	0:34
Total Newshole	9:56	10:08	9:02	9:31	7:40	5:51

Although the average story counts of the first blocks did not change significantly during ratings, the blocks' average times did. As Table 20 indicates, WATE and WBIR each increased their first block times by about 30 seconds while WKXT's averaged 37 seconds less than during non-ratings.

TABLE 20

**BREAKDOWN OF AVERAGE TIME AND STORY COUNT OF
THE FIRST BLOCKS DURING NOON NEWSCASTS**

	WATE		WBIR		WKXT	
	Non-Ratings	Ratings	Non-Ratings	Ratings	Non-Ratings	Ratings
Average Time	6:34	7:02	6:21	6:59	6:37	6:00
Story Count	7.5	7.8	10.5	10.8	8.0	8.3

CHAPTER FIVE

Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to find the differences in how each station in the Knoxville market approaches news by examining the time allocated to various program elements. In many instances, this research revealed that East Tennessee viewers received three different perspectives of the day's news when they turn on their television sets. It is evident each of the stations places different priorities on where and to what it will send its reporters. By studying the news values during and outside of rating periods, the research aimed to pinpoint whether the stations employed special efforts to increase viewership during ratings or continued to offer essentially the same product.

Five hypotheses were formulated to guide the research. While several of the hypotheses were supported, the majority were not:

- Hypothesis 1 stated WBIR would have the greatest amount of enterpriser and spontaneous news coverage. This hypothesis was supported in half of the results. During its 6 p.m. newscasts, WBIR did have the most time devoted to enterpriser news, but WATE had the greatest amount of spontaneous news coverage. During the noon newscasts, the reverse was true. WBIR had the most time devoted to spontaneous news coverage, while WATE had the most enterpriser news.

- Hypothesis 2 stated that WKXT would have the least time devoted to spontaneous and enterpriser news coverage. This hypothesis was supported. During both time periods, WKXT trailed behind the

other two stations in the two categories. However, the differences in spontaneous news coverage between WKXT and the stations finishing in second place were minor. The differences in enterpriser time between WKXT and the other two stations were much greater.

- Hypothesis 3 stated that the major differences in news values would be mainly between WBIR and the other two competitors. Because the research was divided into numerous categories, this hypothesis was tested on each category.

The findings for the average time devoted to program elements during the 6 p.m. newscasts indicate WBIR and WATE were more similar. In seven of the 12 elements, the stations' times were more similar to each other than with WKXT's. In the types of news topics covered at 6 p.m., WBIR and WKXT put the more similar emphasis on seven of the 13 topics in which time was devoted. In each of the geographic areas covered at 6 p.m. — except world news — WATE and WKXT had the most similar news values. In the area of timeliness, WBIR and WKXT had the more similar average times in two of the four categories.

During the noon newscasts, WATE and WBIR had the more similar times in six of the 12 program elements. In six of the 14 news topics, WATE and WBIR had the strongest agreement, while in six of the other topics WATE and WKXT had the more similar average times. The geographic news values showed a strong agreement between WATE and WBIR in five of the seven categories. In the areas of timeliness, WATE and WKXT offered almost identical amounts of time in three of the four categories.

- Hypothesis 4 stated the stations would not substantially alter their news value judgment during the ratings period. This was not supported. In the four program elements which would include news coverage, at least two of the stations increased or decreased their time by 20 percent during their 6 p.m. newscasts. In every news topic covered, except for fires and weather-related news, at least two of the stations altered their news value judgment by more than 20 percent. In almost half of the geographic categories, news values were altered by more than 20 percent by at least two stations. The average time devoted in three of the four areas of timeliness were substantially changed during at least two of the stations' newscasts.

During the noon newscasts, substantial changes in the time spent of the news-related program elements were found on most of the stations. On at least two of the station, nine of the 14 news topics had time allocations change by at least 20 percent. The change in geographic news values at noon during ratings were not as prevalent, but nonetheless were noticeable. WATE and WBIR substantially altered their news values concerning timeliness in each category, while WKXT did so in two. These findings would support the hypothesis.

- Hypothesis 5 stated that each stations' noon news values would be more similar than the stations' 6 p.m. news values. This was not supported because an analysis of the composite variances of each topic indicates greater dispersion during the noon newscasts than the 6 p.m. newscasts. Total variance, the average amount of dispersion from the mean, for the noon newscasts is 26,744 while the 6 p.m. figure is 25,144.

To better understand the study's results, it is important to consider the breakdown of the stories coded in many of the categories. Partial reason for the increase in breaking news during ratings was because the presidential election took place during the second study period. Most of the events leading up to the election were not coded as breaking news but as situational/continuous coverage. Campaign stops, minor speeches and events related to the election were considered part of an on-going story. Last minute campaign tactics, election results and transition plans were considered breaking news.

While economic/business news plummeted on WBIR and WKXT, it remained somewhat the same on WATE. The majority of WATE's coverage coded in the category during ratings involved an ABC News investigation into poor meat handling at the Food Lion grocery store chain.

Crime/legal action news appeared to receive significantly less emphasis on all three stations during ratings. A large portion of the crime/legal action coverage during the non-ratings period dealt with two events that went unequaled during ratings:

- The findings of four female bodies in East Knox County leading to speculation whether a serial killer was in the area.
- A federal trial concerning a lawsuit brought against paper manufacturer Champion International. In the suit, some 2,600 property owners accused Champion of polluting the Pigeon River causing their property values to drop.

Despite the decrease in crime/legal action coverage during ratings, WATE maintained its greater emphasis when compared to the competition's 6 p.m. newscasts. The research found WATE's

crime/legal action coverage at noon was only one second less than WBIR's. Both in and out of ratings, WATE's newscasts continued to place the greatest emphasis on unpleasant news, such as crime/legal action, fires and accidents. Appendix D denotes the parity in unpleasant and pleasant news coverage among each the stations. At 6 p.m., WBIR had a more pleasant tone to its newscast. Pleasant news was considered the stories dealing with social issues/quality of life, education, human interest items and health. Although some of the topics did not appear to be upbeat, the stories' contents usually examined progress being made to solve a problem, such as many health stories dealing with medical findings. By giving viewers significantly more pleasant news, WBIR's 6 p.m. newscast would tend to leave viewers with a more upbeat feeling than WATE or WKXT's. WATE appeared to have more of a balance between pleasant and unpleasant news at 6 p.m. During its noon newscasts, WATE had the greatest amounts of time devoted to unpleasant and pleasant news.

WATE's significant increase in 6 p.m. health coverage during ratings is largely because of a series of enterprising reports on eye care. WKXT's decrease in noon health coverage was because its "Healthwatch" series was omitted several days during ratings.

As already mentioned, the increased emphasis on sports-related news during ratings centered around the resignation of University of Tennessee football coach Johnny Majors. The non-ratings sports related stories ranged from reaction to the World Series to preparations for UT home football games.

In the geographic area categories, partial explanation for the decrease in Tennessee news on the 6 p.m. newscasts during ratings is because of the Champion International trial. Although the story was of interest to many people in the DMA, it was taking place outside it in Greene County and was coded in the Tennessee geographic area. The average time devoted to the national geographic area might seem rather high on the newscasts, especially the 6 p.m. programs. Many of the stories coded as national were the stations' health news segments which were either syndicated, such as "Dr. Red Duke" on WATE, health reports from somewhere else with Knoxville talent voicing the story or WKXT's "American Discovery" series on inventions.

The differences between timeliness among the three stations are distinct, along with the the stations' differences during ratings. Partial rationale for the decrease in spontaneous coverage and increased anticipated coverage was the types of stories emphasized during ratings. Many special series aired during the period, and those stories were normally deemed situations/continuous. Additionally, the decrease in breaking news also correlates with the drop in spontaneous coverage. It is also important to examine the composition of many of the enterpriser stories. A large percentage of the health reporting, special series, consumer reporting such as WKXT's "Call 8 for Action," and syndicated features were coded as enterpriser. This might create an impression of a significant amount of enterpriser reporting in the Knoxville market, but much of that reporting was the use of syndicated reporting which showed little enterprise on the stations' parts. The use of daily syndicated medical and travel reporting during WATE's noon newscast ac-

counted for a significant amount of its enterpriser news, creating the impression that WATE had significantly more than WBIR and WKXT.

Conclusions

When viewers turned to "Action 10 News," "6 Eyewitness News" or "News 8," they often received varying perspectives of the day's events. Although many of the topics the Knoxville stations covered were duplicated, the emphasis put on those stories was often distinctly different. For instance, the research found WATE showed a significantly greater emphasis on unpleasant aspects of life by airing the most news on crimes/legal actions, fires and accidents. In most instances the same murders, trials, robberies, fires and car wrecks were covered on all three stations, but it was WATE which devoted the most time to the stories. This research suggests WATE's heavy emphasis on unpleasant news might leave its viewers more depressed or apprehensive than uplifted after watching its newscasts.

The research suggests that WBIR might use the strategy of "uplifting" its 6 p.m. viewers who were treated to substantially more pleasant news topics and soft/features than viewers of WATE or WKXT. The research also found WBIR's 6 p.m. composite average times were the highest in each of the geographic areas — except national news in which it spent less time than WKXT but more than WATE — suggesting WBIR gives news consumers the greatest perspective of what's going on close home and far away. The station's noon newscast aired less soft/features and public service oriented news than WATE and WKXT

which put substantially greater emphasis. In exchange, this research found those news consumers saw more breaking news and situations/continuous coverage on WBIR at noon.

During both time periods, the research found WKXT gave viewers less news than WATE and WBIR because of its shorter newsholes. While WKXT normally equaled the competitors' coverage of proximate news, the research concluded WKXT did not keep up with the other stations in covering metro and DMA news. This finding could, in turn, isolate many viewers from outlying areas who seldom saw news from their communities. A direct correlation can be drawn between staff size and a station's emphasis on outlying areas, such as in the metro area and DMA. During both time periods, the stations with the larger staffs — WATE and WBIR — placed a much greater emphasis on those two geographic areas than WKXT.

During the noon newscasts, all three stations' first blocks averaged roughly the same amount of time. However, WATE and WBIR's 6 p.m. first blocks were more similar to each other than with WKXT's. The station's shorter 6 p.m. first block could lead to failed efforts by WKXT in capturing viewers and caring them through the show's halfway mark to its significantly longer weather and sports segments.

The differences in news values were not only evident among the stations but also during the ratings period. The stations altered judgments concerning news topics and the geographic locations where they covered news. At 6 p.m., each station increased its coverage of breaking news while they decreased their time devoted to public service information and commercials. In the news topics covered at 6 p.m., each of the

stations was in unison when they decreased business/economic, education and crime/legal action news. Social issues/quality of life news increased on all three stations. News from the designated market area took on greater priority on each station at 6 p.m. during ratings while news from Tennessee decreased. The stations used similar judgments during ratings when each decreased spontaneous news coverage and increased anticipated coverage. There was more similarity at noon when all of the stations increased breaking news and soft/feature coverage while decreasing situations/continuous coverage and public service oriented coverage. Human interest items, crime/legal action and fires coverage decreased on all three stations at noon during ratings while city/county government, state government and sports related news increased. More proximate news received more air time on each station during ratings when Knoxville/Knox County, designated market area and Tennessee news increased.

The research findings concerning the news values of the Knoxville television stations should be beneficial to those professionals working both inside and outside of those newsrooms. The research indicates to the station's producers, reporters and news directors of each station how their content compares to the competition's content. The research also could provide the stations insight into how to produce different strategies in the future. Outside of the newsrooms, station managers, promotion personnel and advertisers can also use the research to establish the variations in news values during the newscasts. Finally, the research should be beneficial to those people who want to know more about Knoxville television news and how it is sometimes approached in

entirely different ways. Those different approaches could have a significant impact on the stations' audience sizes which influence ratings and, in turn, impact the stations' financial well-beings.

Limitations of the Study

This study limited itself to exploring the news values of noon and 6 p.m. newscasts on weekdays. Because all three news departments did not compete against each other during any other time period, newscasts during other time periods were not studied.

Additionally, this study was conducted immediately before, during and after the 1992 presidential and general election. Replicating the study during a year without a federal election would most likely yield significantly different news values concerning the federal government and national news. Most of the stories studied dealing with the federal government were directly related to presidential campaigns. While the study provides much insight into how much time the three stations spent on the election, those research areas cannot support accurate comparisons to future or previous research conducted during non-election years.

Additionally, all three stations' noon newscasts do not fill the same time period. While WATE and WKXT are given 30 minute time periods, WBIR's news department is responsible for filling 25 minutes. WBIR broadcasts the five-minute feature called "The Heartland Series" from 12:25 to 12:30 p.m.

Recommendations for Further Research

More research into the news values of the Knoxville market would provide better insight into the differences content judgment during ratings when compared to a non-ratings period. In-depth interviews and questionnaires with news personnel from the three stations might provide insight into newswriters' perceptions of their station's news values. This research limited itself to noon and 6 p.m. newscasts, but further research could examine the news values of the stations that have competing newscasts in other time periods, such as weekends, early mornings and at 11 p.m. While examining how news values are related to time decisions, future research could examine how the availability of video influences news judgment. This could be accomplished by also coding whether video was included with the story. Research examining the content of headlines and teases could decipher how stations try to entice viewers to watch their newscasts. Additional research could also examine the news values of the stations' first blocks and which types of stories lead the newscasts. The subjects discussed during the sports segments were not coded separately. A content analysis of the sports segments could examine the emphasis put on events going on in the different sports arenas and playing fields, which might be just as varied as the stations' news values.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A

TABLE 21
COMPOSITION OF NEWS DEPARTMENTS IN 1992-93

	WATE	WBIR	WKXT
Weekday Newscasts	6 a.m., noon, 6 p.m., 11 p.m.	6 a.m., noon, 5 p.m., 6 p.m., 11 p.m.	Noon, 6 p.m.
Weekend Newscasts	6 p.m., 11 p.m.	9 a.m., 6 p.m., 11 p.m.	
Employees	30	47	12
Reporters	6	7	4
Photographers	6	11	2
Producers/Associate Producers	5	8	1
Noon anchors, years they joined their station	Russ Murphy, 1991.	Carl Williams, 1954. Adina Chumley 1991.	Sam Brown, 1992.* Cheryl Masur, 1989.**
6 p.m. anchors, years they joined their station	Rick Benjamin, 1992. Denise Dillon, 1992.	Bill Williams, 1977. Edge Ellis, 1982.***	Sam Brown, 1992.* Cheryl Masur, 1989.**
News directors, years they joined their station	Bob Morford, 1992.	Jim Swinehart, 1983.****	Dick Hall, 1991.
Live trucks	2	3	1
Microwave units	2	3	1
Satellite news vehicles	0	1	0

*Brown anchored at WATE from 1974-81 and 1984-91.

**Masur anchored weekends at WBIR from 1987-89.

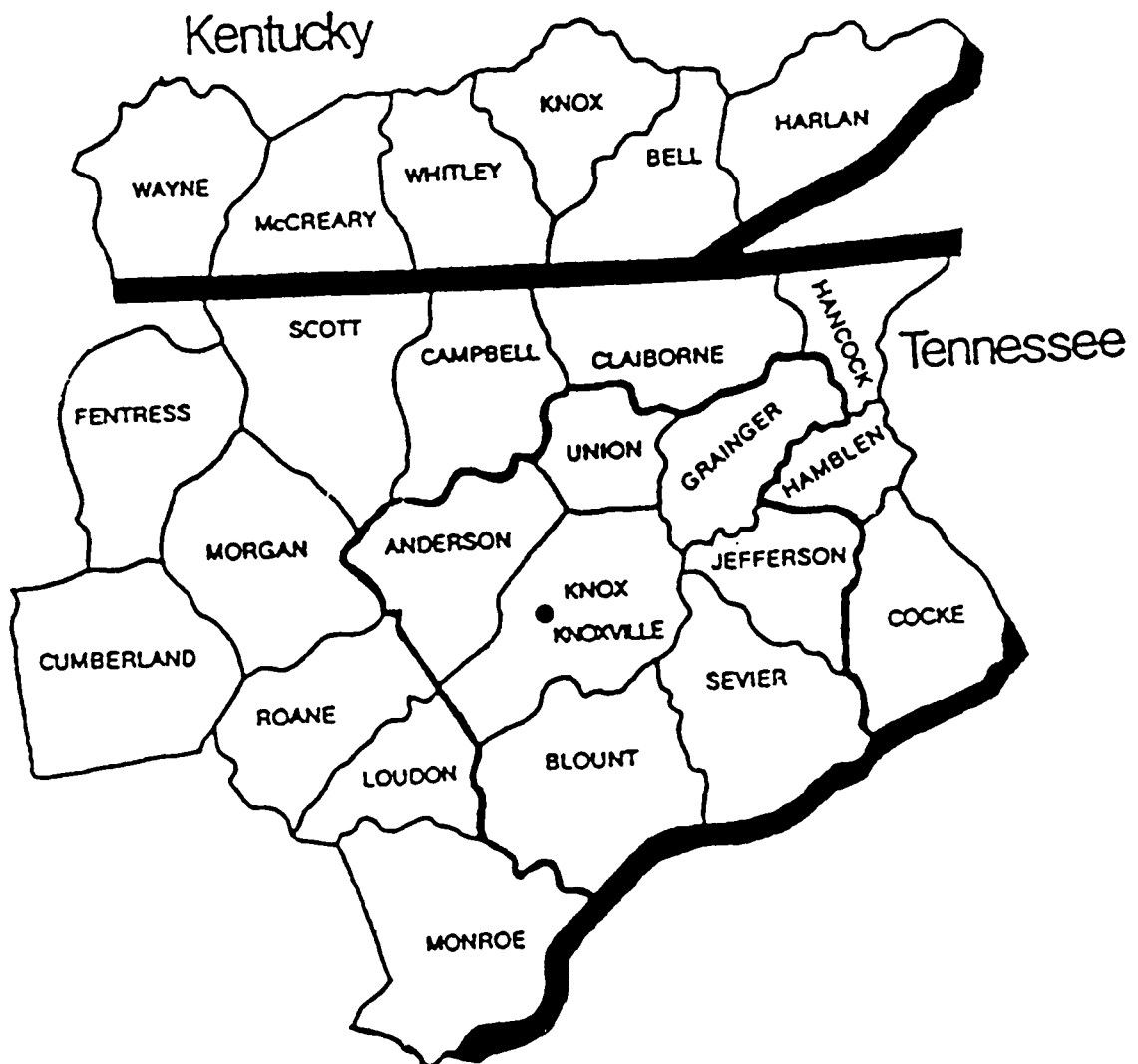
***Ellis worked at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville from 1985-1987.

****Swinehart worked at Frank N. Magid Associates from 1986-89.

Station: WATE channel 6 WKXT channel 8 WBIR channel 10

NOON
SIX
Date:
Coder:

APPENDIX C
Knoxville Designated Market Area



APPENDIX D

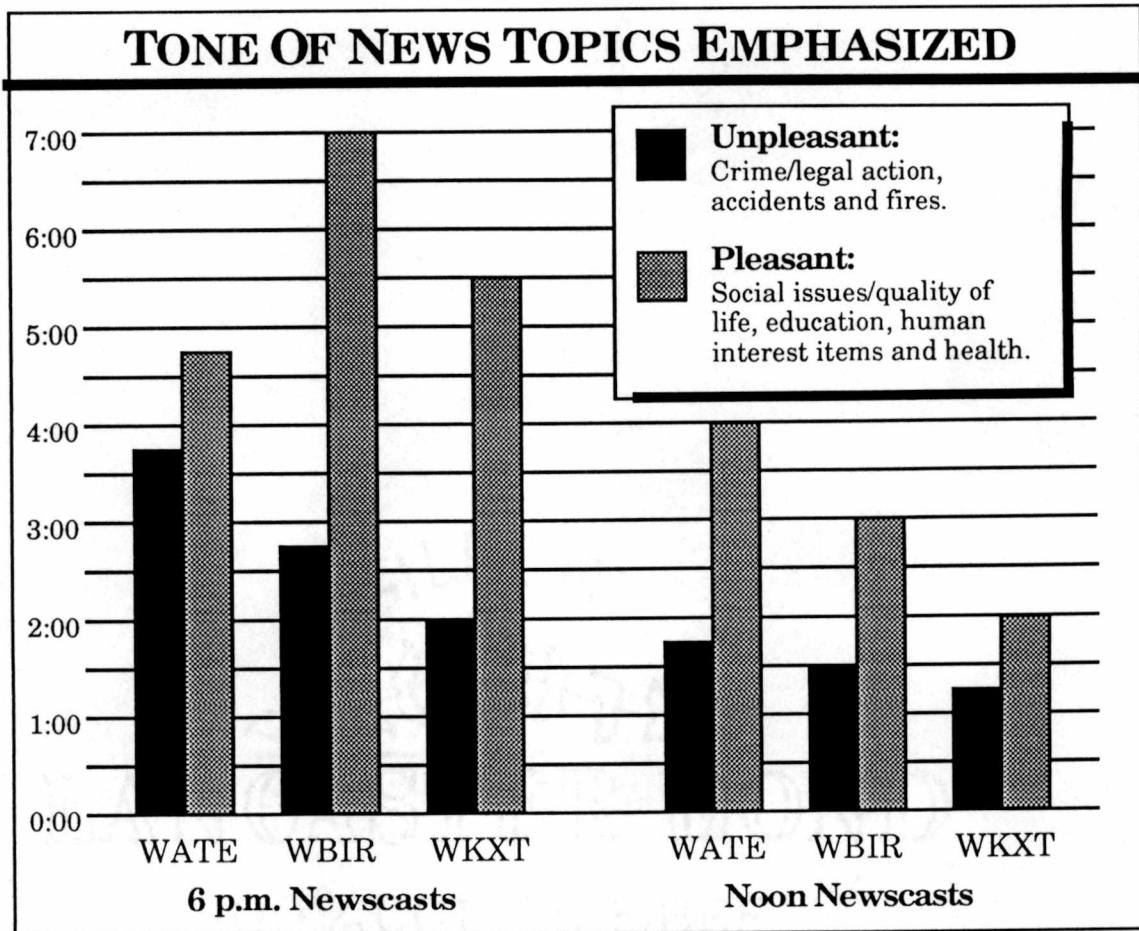


Figure 1: Composite Average Times Spent on News Topic Tone

VITA

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His experience in the field includes serving as editor in chief of USC's student newspaper, *The Gamecock*; working as the President's Intern at the South Carolina Educational Television network in Columbia; and interning at WKXT-TV before being hired as an associate producer at the station.