

Changing Media Markets in Europe and Abroad

New Ways of Handling Information and Entertainment Content

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2.1 The Editorial Gap Between Ideal and Real: Do Television News Editors/Journalists Broadcast What They Believe Their Audience Wants?

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In an age when news media producers are ratings-oriented do they produce what they believe their audience wants? This exploratory study looks at the gap between TV editors' professional news production goals and the final result, in light of news production exigencies—based on news and current events programs on Israel's main commercial vs. public channel. Forty editors, anchors and senior journalists answered a questionnaire (consisting of 17 news goals derived from audience focus groups) and then were interviewed in-depth. The overall finding: A very large gap exists between what the editors would like to show and what in fact is broadcast. The major explanatory factors of this "explanatory gap" are: visual content needs; time pressure; budgetary constraints; logistic difficulties. Not much difference was found between the public and commercial channels.

Introduction

Ever since White's groundbreaking research (1950) into editorial gatekeeping, numerous studies have emerged in the broad field of Media Production in general, and News Production specifically. The basic question of this field of study remains quite simple: How and why does the news end up looking as it does on the page, radio or TV screen?

Among the important variables influencing news production is the set of news goals that practitioners—senior journalists, anchors, editors, etc.—believe should be the basis for what is (pr)offered to their audience. This is the central endogenous factor behind the final product, standing in counterpoint to the numerous exogenous factors impinging on the news producer. However, as Bantz noted: "[...] the incompatibilities of factors such as

professional norms and business norms result in conflict" (1985, p. 225). Other researchers (Schlesinger, 1978; Tuchman, 1979) have highlighted the tension between news goals and other environmental forces such as "time pressure". While all legitimate and useful, none of these studies have attempted to quantify the gap between what editors would like to produce and the real news product of their efforts. Thus, to put it simply, the central question of the present article is being empirically tested for the first time: To what *extent* are news editors able to produce and present the news as they see fit (i.e. in accordance with their intended news goals)—and if not well, what accounts for the gap?

For this purpose, White's study is almost irrelevant for two reasons. First, the media environment today is far more competitive and business-oriented than in the past (McManus, 1994). Second, his "Mr. Gates" was the sole decision-maker in that mid-size city newspaper, so that what Mr. Gates felt should be included was in fact inevitably published. However, radio and especially television (as opposed to newspapers) involve a much greater amount of organizational complexity overall as well as for *each* news item reported, involving relatively limited resources of time, equipment and manpower. Thus, it is to be expected that some "editorial gap" will be found between what electronic news editors and senior practitioners (e.g. anchors) would like to present and what they actually do broadcast. The real question, therefore, becomes: How *large* is that gap in practice?

We say "in practice" because it may well be that in an ideal-type state of news production—where the news professionals freely decide what to present without taking into account internal or external exigencies—the editorial gap could well be even *larger* than what a study such as ours might find. The reason is simple: as Breed (1955), Sigelman (1973), Shoemaker (1991), and others have noted, the news goals (as well as the professional criteria) of journalism professionals over time undergo a measure of change as a result of working within a specific organizational setting with its own ethos and objective limitations. Such a socialization process will tend to move a newsperson's goals in a more "realistic" (from the organization's perspective) direction, and away from an "ideal" set of news goals with which the journalist may have started out.

Literature Survey

News production has been amply researched over the past few decades. Tuchman (1973) and Epstein (1979) delineated the complex of organizational processes, noting that news becomes an event not only because of intrinsic characteristics but because a journalist is in the right place to report it. Thus, all editorial units attempt to routinize the work in order to maximize the limited journalistic and technological resources at their disposal.

The editorial role is no less critical. On the one hand, here too organizational goals are important (Paterson, 1997; Shoemaker, 1991) but so are personal ideas and perceptions of audience wishes (Chang & Lee, 1992; Dimmick, 1979). Gans (1979) added to this the general socio-philosophical ethos of the specific country that shapes which stories fall within acceptable boundaries of public discourse. Shoemaker (1991) also highlighted ethos but focused more on *journalistic* ethos that gives priority to news that legitimately undercuts or criticizes the reigning social or political order as an act of national self-correction.

Without getting into what were the specifics of such a professional ethos, Breed had argued much earlier that the journalist's colleagues were the central influence: "Instead of adhering to societal and professional ideals, he [the journalist] re-defines his values to the more pragmatic level of the news room group" (1955, p. 335). In short, Breed believed that journalistic socialization is more a matter of social influence than of philosophical-professional indoctrination.

If one's colleagues form the human circle of influence, work conditions and exigencies constitute a constraining organizational and technical environment for the journalist and editor. Regarding television news, such constraints are organizational and logistical in nature (Epstein, 1979), the latter including length of news program, deadline, source reliability and level of visualization (Gans, 1979; Shoemaker, 1991). But above all, most dominant are budgetary limitations, given the high cost of filming (camera crew), equipment and the editing process (McManus, 1994). Finally, TV news must take into consideration legal and regulatory restrictions.

While Breed focused on the influence of colleagues in the newsroom, the hyper-competitive media environment of the past two decades in a multi-media world has led to another phenomenon: Journalists looking over

their shoulder to see what the competition is doing (Brosius & Eps, 1995; Paterson, 1997). In other words, the race to keep up with the competition, the need to ensure that nothing important has been missed, leads not to increasing news diversity but rather to greater news homogeneity under the rubric of "market-driven journalism" (McManus, 1994; Underwood, 1998).

As a result, market research has become *de rigueur*, with the news becoming a "commodity" like any other product to be sold, fitting the market's demands or those of special interests willing to help produce the product (PR professionals) or pay its way (advertisers). As Beam (2001) discovered regarding newspaper editors, this whole approach has led them to believe that they know what their audience wants. However, he found no evidence that such market-driven journalism pays off with higher circulation, thus placing a question mark over their belief that they "know" their audience.

This question has become more important over the past two decades because of the growing privatization of the electronic media in Europe and elsewhere. Even in the U.S. where public radio and television have always been somewhat weak, they have suffered a continuing, steady decline of late because of their elitist and non-socially involved approach (Ouellette, 2002).

In any case, if in the 1940s and 1950s (Lasswell, 1948; Merton, 1949), the focus of research attention was on Media Research—e.g. media production and influence on the audience—due to the belief that the relationship was skewed in the direction of the former, the focus has shifted from the 1960s onwards to Audience Research—what the audience does to select, filter and comprehend media content. In the forefront of this shift was the general theory of uses and gratifications, based on an approach positing the audience as an active participant in the communications process, seeking functional uses and cognitive/affective gratifications from the media (Katz, 1959). Katz and others developed a long list that included information, emotional gratification, entertainment, escapism and others (Katz, Gourevitch, & Haas, 1973; Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974). Later on, others further expanded and refined the list to include, for example, such things as social conversation (Levy & Windahl, 1984). In the present research study, these were used as the basis of our audience focus group discussions and development of 17 news-viewing goals.

From a communications theory perspective, it would seem therefore that the situation has been turned on its head. The more recent waves of theory and research have highlighted the active nature of the audience (in choosing contents and in the way it perceives the contents chosen) and the *reactive* behavior of the producers (in order to ensure high viewership ratings etc.)—a “transactional approach” (Renckstorf & McQuail, 1996, p. 7). However, given the media’s need to hit the content target (audience) in a multi-channel, hyper-competitive environment, a somewhat new ensuing question emerges: What do media (news) producers try to do when they are aware that the audience is pro-active, and how successful are they? The latter question can be approached from two directions: a) success with the audience—what the ratings tend to show us; b) success as measured by the ways producers’ *attempt* to attain high ratings and the *actual* contents as they perceive it. It is to this latter question that the present article addresses itself.

From a macro-theory perspective, this does not mean that the pendulum should be shifted back to media-centered research as opposed to audience-centered work. Rather, it is to suggest that the two approaches can be fruitfully combined. By looking closely at what the audience says it wants and then seeing whether and to what extent its goals are understood, and then provided, by the producers, we can close an open loop. Our methodology—based on news editor questionnaires, interviews and on-site observation—is designed to understand the linkage.

The Israeli Television News Context

Israeli general television (henceforth, Channel 1) was inaugurated in 1968 as a quasi-governmental, or *state*, medium under the more general organizational umbrella called the *Israel Broadcasting Authority* (IBA). Channel 1 was based financially on a mandatory license fee. Its Board of Directors consisted of political appointees, but the professional staff was hired as part of the civil service. From the start, however, while maintaining a relatively high level of professionalism, Channel 1 was beset by varying degrees of political pressure, depending on the government, its relationship with the Chairman of the Board, and the collective public and political strength of the Board’s members (Caspi & Limor, 1999, pp. 145-149).

The nightly news program, "Mabat", was extremely popular, usually being viewed by 70% (!) of the general public on any given evening. Nevertheless, pressure grew through the 1980s to add a commercial channel, and in 1993 it finally went on the air (henceforth, Channel 2). While owned privately—by three different licensees, each broadcasting two days a week (Saturdays were periodically rotated between them)—it too is under the watchful eye of a public body: The Second Channel Authority, comprising mostly public figures, selected by elected officials. Thus, while formally less tied to the ruling government, Channel 2 has still been mildly encumbered by political strings attached (Caspi & Limor, 1999, pp. 151-154).

Most interesting of all is that each of Channel 2's three private licensees do not independently run their own news division. Rather, Channel 2's news division is run as a consortium of all three licensees, with certain requirements mandated by law.

Compared to Channel 1, Channel 2's news program has a somewhat different look and tone: shorter items, more graphics, more color, and a proclaimed intent to present more popular types of subject matter. Indeed, its audience is younger but the ratings competition has seesawed between the two channels with a clear advantage to Channel 2 over the last few years. It has successfully raided Channel 1 for some of its stars but many have decided to stay in Channel 1 because of its perceived greater "gravitas". If there is one very significant difference between the two it is in the complete rigidity of Channel 1's internal unionized bureaucracy ("civil service" etc.) compared to Channel 2's more laissez-faire, individual contract approach—a function of its commercial, profit-oriented nature.

Research Hypotheses

H1a: A large number of significant differences will be found between editors of commercial news programs in comparison to their state channel counterparts regarding *ideal* news goals. In line with Powers' findings (1994) regarding issues covered differentially on Danish TV, we specifically hypothesize that the former will emphasize affective and entertainment goals; the latter, informational goals. Explanation: Given that the audiences of these two types of channels have different educational levels—public channel viewers are better educated and older—it is hypothe-

sized that the news goals of each channel's editors will reflect these differences to a certain degree. While we are aware of Van Snippenburg's anomalous (and unexplained) findings regarding a *negative* correlation between education and information (1994, pp. 118-123), our hypothesis here rests on logic and especially on the general perception in Israel that higher education translates into greater information-seeking by the audience—thus the news editors' differential goals for their respective audiences.

H1b: Few significant differences will be found among editors of commercial news programs compared to their state channel counterparts regarding the *actual* production of news goals.

H2: In light of greater funding, a much smaller number of significant *gaps between ideal and real/actual news goals* will be found amongst senior, editorial news workers working in *commercial* TV compared to those at *state* TV. Explanation: As a result of the different funding basis, Israel commercial TV has somewhat more resources at its disposal that should enable its news producers to broadcast programming hewing relatively closely to their professional, ideal news goals. In contrast, state TV suffers from more restrictive budgetary and manpower limitations, thereby undermining the news editors' capacity to produce news in consonance with their program-content goals.

Methodology

40 news professionals were interviewed and given two, almost identical, closed questionnaires to complete in the interviewer's presence—each in one sitting. The research population included *all* news editors and many of the anchors and senior journalists producing the nightly news programs for Israel's Channels 1 and 2, as well as the early evening news program of Israel Educational TV seen on Channel 1. The interviews focused on the question of the objective limitations within their work environment: budget, manpower, time, coordination, logistics, equipment, censorship, regulations, etc. These will form the basis of our discussion regarding the reasons for our findings.

In order to produce the most compact but relevant list of news goals for the questionnaire, we earlier led seven focus groups comprising a cross-

section of Israel society: Jewish academics working in the free professions; Arab-Israeli B.A. students; lower educated, Arab village workers; academic, city-dwelling, Russian immigrants; local government workers in a non-academic certificate studies program; public service, non-academic secretaries; and two groups of Jewish-Israeli B.A. students. The initial baseline of news goals was taken from earlier Uses and Gratifications studies (Katz & Gourevitch, 1973; Katz et al., 2000); through the panelists' discussions we were able to whittle the larger number of goals down to a manageable 17 (see Tables 2.1.1-2.1.3 below), as many were deemed not relevant anymore, while a few others (Peace Process; Israeli Minorities) were added. A further difficult decision was made for reasons of brevity and manageability: combining pure news programs with current events programming in the same questionnaire. Finally, we removed several original news "gratifications" that while germane to the media as a whole, were not relevant to television specifically. Again, the central justification for basing the list of editors' news goals on audience focus group answers is that both in preliminary discussions and especially in the later in-depth interview stage, virtually all the editors claimed (many times quite forcefully!) that the major criterion underlying their work is "to give the audience what it wants". Whether, and to what extent, they succeeded in doing so is the subject of a different article. For the present, it can be stated that the list of news goals is not necessarily the ones the editors would have chosen in the "best of all news production worlds" free of economic and other constraints, but rather this is in fact a "proxy" list, i.e. what they feel the audience wants to receive from them and what they must supply.

The first questionnaire was designed to elicit the editors' *ideal* (proxy) news goals; in the second questionnaire they were asked to register what they *actually* produce. Each editorial respondent was asked to score each goal on a scale of 5 ("very important" or "complete implementation", depending on which questionnaire) to 1 ("totally unimportant" or "not dealt with"). Whenever we found a gap between the two questionnaires regarding the score on any specific question, we immediately asked the respondent to explain the source/reasons for the gap between "ideal" and "real"—in almost all cases the "real" score being lower than the "ideal" one.

Afterwards, we statistically analyzed our findings and, among other things, compared the results between the staff of "state" Channel 1 and their counterparts in "commercial" Channel 2.

Finally, in order to more fully understand the objective circumstances and limitations on news production, one of the researchers spent an entire month observing the newsroom of Channel 1 and a week each observing the editorial staff at work on two current events programs (the late afternoon *Good Evening* news magazine; the primetime political talk show *Politikah*).

Findings

We start by looking at the ideal goals of Israel's state television and commercial television editorial staffs.

As one can see from Table 2.1.1, overall H1a was not validated. Only four goals exhibited a statistically significant difference between the editors of the two channels. This is hardly a large number—approximately 25%. However, within this small number we do find some evidence of the direction of the hypothesized result. Three of them (#1, 5, and 10) are “hard news”/informational, and here *state* Channel 1 scored higher than *commercial* Channel 2; the fourth (#13) is strictly “soft news”/affective, with Channel 2 scoring far higher than its competitor. Thus, despite the lack of numerical support for H1a, some of the discrete results indicate that there is at least a small measure of difference between these two groups of news editors.

The picture regarding H1b is quite similar, but in this case such an outcome validates our hypothesis. In only 3 of the 17 goals was there a statistically significant difference between the two channels' editors regarding the perceived news product. This suggests that similar (albeit not identical) exogenous pressures do take precedence over endogenous news goals. One should add, though, that once again in the very few indicators that exhibited a significant difference, these could be explained in light of the different “mandate” of each channel. The one goal where state Channel 1 had a significantly higher score was #1—“covering various social groups”—something to be expected of a channel that in principle “represents” the entire nation. On the other hand, #3 (daily, useful info) and #13 (famous people stories) reflect two goals that one would expect from a commercial channel: the first a very utilitarian goal (not news per se, but useful information) and the second providing entertainment.

Table 2.1.1

Differences between "ideal" news goals of Channel 1 (state TV) and Channel 2 (commercial TV) news editors

News goals	Channel 1 (avg.)	Channel 2 (avg.)	PV	T
1) Present characteristics of social sub-groups	4.66	4.00	0.03*	2.32
2) Criticize government policy	4.53	4.66	0.59	-0.53
3) Provide useful information for daily life	3.35	4.11	0.10	-1.69
4) Point up mistakes in national security	4.73	4.88	0.50	-0.67
5) Provide updated information regarding other nations around the world	4.00	3.00	0.04*	2.15
6) Raise public morale through good news	1.64	1.92	0.56	-0.58
7) Serve updated info on the activity of Israel's secret services	3.73	4.20	0.33	-0.98
8) Expand knowledge about political issues	4.40	4.29	0.73	0.34
9) Provide info on new developments in science, medicine and technology	3.80	3.50	0.48	0.71
10) Provide info on the peace process	5.00	4.55	0.02*	2.43
11) Provide info about bad news	4.42	4.72	0.33	-0.98
12) Show pretty pictures of interesting people and sites	2.84	2.60	0.44	0.78
13) Tell stories about important people	2.00	3.37	0.00*	-2.81
14) To entertain	1.81	2.54	0.22	-1.26
15) Provide subjects for social discussion	4.08	4.44	0.46	-0.75
16) Broaden one's knowledge base	3.23	3.80	0.06 ⁺	-1.17
17) Provide info to advance personal matters (of the viewers)	3.23	3.73	0.31	-1.02

Notes. * $p \leq 0.05$; ⁺ just above significance.

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could be explained in light of the different "mandate" of each channel. The one goal where *state* Channel 1 had a significantly higher score was #1—"covering various social groups"—something to be expected of a channel that in principle "represents" the entire nation.

Table 2.1.2

Differences between "real" (actual) news goals of Channel 1 (state TV) and Channel 2 (commercial TV) news editors

News goals	Channel 1 (avg.)	Channel 2 (avg.)	PV	T
1) Present characteristics of social sub-groups	3.92	3.06	0.04*	2.22
2) Criticize government policy	3.92	4.53	0.11	-1.65
3) Provide useful information for daily life	2.84	3.88	0.03*	-2.27
4) Point up mistakes in national security	3.64	3.37	0.50	0.68
5) Provide updated information regarding other nations around the world	3.21	2.51	0.09	1.76
6) Raise public morale through good news	1.83	2.00	0.67	-0.43
7) Serve updated info on the activity of Israel's secret services	2.66	2.64	0.96	0.05
8) Expand knowledge about political issues	4.35	4.00	0.30	1.06
9) Provide info on new developments in science, medicine and technology	3.35	2.77	0.17	0.18
10) Provide info on the peace process	4.71	4.35	0.16	1.44
11) Provide info about bad news	4.21	4.52	0.20	-1.31
12) Show pretty pictures of interesting people and sites	2.76	2.18	0.28	1.11
13) Tell stories about important people	1.76	3.00	0.01*	-2.64
14) To entertain	1.70	2.23	0.29	-1.08
15) Provide subjects for social discussion	3.40	3.68	0.52	-0.65
16) Broaden one's knowledge base	3.23	3.21	0.97	0.04
17) Provide info to advance personal matters (of the viewers)	3.35	3.30	0.92	0.11

Note. * $p \leq 0.05$.

On the other hand, #3 (daily, useful info) and #13 (famous people stories) reflect two goals that one would expect from a commercial channel: the first a very utilitarian goal (not news per se, but useful information) and the second providing entertainment.

Table 2.1.3

*Differences between "ideal" and "actual" news goals
TV news editors from both channels together (N = 40)*

News goals	"ideal" (avg.)	"actual" (avg.)	PV	T
1) Present characteristics of social sub-groups	4.33	3.48	0.00*	5.25
2) Criticize government policy	4.60	4.16	0.00*	4.59
3) Provide useful information for daily life	3.77	3.43	0.01*	2.76
4) Point up mistakes in national security	4.81	3.50	0.00*	6.54
5) Provide updated information regarding other nations around the world	3.51	2.85	0.00*	4.11
6) Raise public morale through good news	1.77	1.92	0.57	-0.56
7) Serve updated info on the activity of Israel's secret services	3.96	2.65	0.00*	4.39
8) Expand knowledge about political issues	4.34	4.16	0.13	1.54
9) Provide info on new developments in science, medicine and technology	3.63	3.03	0.00*	5.00
10) Provide info on the peace process	4.75	4.51	0.03*	2.24
11) Provide info about bad news	4.59	4.38	0.00*	3.32
12) Show pretty pictures of interesting people and sites	2.60	2.44	0.01*	2.70
13) Tell stories about important people	2.73	2.44	0.01*	3.02
14) To entertain	2.18	2.00	0.06 ⁺	2.02
15) Provide subjects for social discussion	4.30	3.57	0.00*	4.96
16) Broaden one's knowledge base	3.53	3.33	0.05*	2.08
17) Provide info to advance personal matters (of the viewers)	3.50	3.33	0.08	1.80

Notes. * $p \leq 0.05$; ⁺ just above significance.

When we turn to H2 involving a comparison of ideal and real goals among *all* the editors of both channels taken *together* (Table 2.1.3), a significant difference was found between "ideal" and "real" in 13 of the 17 goals. Dividing up the respondents by respective TV channel, we find that Channel 1 had 9 news goals exhibiting a significant difference while Channel 2 had 11 such value gaps. However, as the sample for each channel was relatively small (approximately 20), when we combined them into a larger sample (40 professionals), it became somewhat easier to derive statistical significance for an additional two goals, i.e. 13 altogether.

Thus, Hypothesis 2 was not only disproved, but the reverse was found to be the case (albeit in weak fashion): there are more significant ideal/real gaps among *commercial* TV news editors (11 of 17 goals) than there are among their *state* channel counterparts (only 9 of 17 goals). However, as noted above, the central point here is that in both channels the editors are not producing the type of news programming that they feel they should. Why this should be so will be analyzed in the Discussion section below.

Discussion

We start with the most striking finding of this study: How does one explain the fact that by their own self-perceived account, these 40 editors feel that in three-quarters of the news goal indicators, the editors do not supply their audience with the proper measure that they would prefer? Our in-depth interviews, conducted immediately after the respondents filled out the two questionnaires, help to provide some answers.

First is what can best be described as a "mediagenic requirement"—what the "language" of the specific medium demands. In the case of *television* news, the primary demand is visual footage (Shoemaker, 1991). As Yaacov Aylon, then the anchor of Channel 2 news, put it ruefully: "I am a victim of pictures. A story without pictures will die rather quickly." Channel 1's veteran editor and anchor, Emanuel Halperin, agreed: "If we have a picture, we have a story; if we have a dramatic picture—it will reach the screen. Visual impact is what drives us." This does not mean that without news footage the story will not make it on the air. Uri Paz, who heads the news desk at Channel 2, differentiates between hard news and soft news. If the latter has no fresh visuals it will not be shown, but if the former is an

important item then other means of "fill" will be utilized: background graphics, a chart, or even an archival slide.

A related mediagenic exigency is lack of access to the source or to vital information—especially problematic for television given the "heavy" nature of production equipment. TV news almost always demands a *crew*—at least a reporter and accompanying cameraperson. In short, the picture is both the greatest strength and biggest weakness of TV news.

Indeed, this is also the source of a third, related, mediagenic factor: the time it takes to produce a news item. While all media have deadlines, the TV deadline is more draconian if only because it takes longer to produce a filmed news segment than to pen an item for the newspaper (not to mention that there is only one major news program each evening on each channel). Even after the filming is complete, there is a need for editing, voiceover and other aspects related to TV news production that lengthen production time. The final mediagenic factor is the live news item from the field (radio has a similar problem). On the one hand, Israel political leaders have become adept at manipulating broadcast news by scheduling "important" press conferences or other events at 8:00 or 9:00 PM (the news programs' starting times for Channel 2 and Channel 1 respectively). This entails an almost complete loss of editorial control—except for the decisions whether to broadcast the event and when to shut the camera. Thus, again a TV advantage is turned on its head: Televised immediacy also leads to the negation of editorial gatekeeping, with the news staff mostly frozen in place.

The second major category involves "institutional exigencies"—exogenous and endogenous. Regarding the former, for especially sensitive issues Israeli Army censorship is a major consideration. There is little actual overt censorship today in Israel because the editors have internalized the rules of the game and do not wish to be stuck half an hour before air-time with a four-minute hole in the news program as a result of the censor demanding changes at the last moment. Thus, both in news selection and in the way certain subjects are presented, a gap emerges between what the editors would ideally like to do and what they are forced (or force themselves) to do. Indeed, if one looks at goals #4 and #7—the two subjects dealing with national security and the security services—one finds that for both channels 1 and 2 they provide the largest gaps (by far!) of any of the other 15 indicators tested.

Another institutional factor is budgetary (Epstein, 1979; McManus, 1994). As Oshrat Kotler, an anchorwoman at Channel 2, states plaintively: "We suffer from a shortage of manpower and a lack of equipment. Resource scarcity hinders our professionalism." This may sound surprising as her channel is commercial, but given the relatively low rates that can be charged for TV commercial time in a state with a population of only 6.6 million (over 2 million of which speak a mother tongue other than Hebrew), and a prime time nightly audience for the channel of barely 1.5 million, advertising income—and concomitantly the budget—is of necessity relatively modest. Indeed, the news budget for Channel 2 (based on advertising) is not all that much larger than state Channel 1's news allotment (dependent largely on payment of the mandatory TV license fee). Moreover, for a small country, Israel generates a huge amount of "real" news, so that the news staff and infrastructure are all the more stretched by the constant ebb and flow of events.

Finally, there is one other aspect that combines several of the above. Compared to newspapers that can easily hire freelancers and stringers—and thus cover a much wider geographical area and a broader cross-section of society—television news with its bulky (and expensive) equipment cannot do so (certainly not so easily). As a result, the nightly news program consists entirely of the output of full-time workers. Even worse, the number of such journalists (including camera professionals) is far lower than the number of reporters on staff at the average newspaper, for TV news programs fill but half an hour of news time, compared to tens of pages in the daily paper. In addition, the extremely limited number of TV crews necessitates very early decision making (usually late morning) as to where they will be sent, so that there is extremely limited flexibility in covering breaking news (Israeli news channels must cover an area the size of New Jersey or Holland—not just one locality or even a metropolitan area).

Altogether, then, there are quite a number of factors circumscribing the work of television news editors. With at least one hand tied behind their back, it is obviously extremely difficult for them to provide their respective audiences with the type and style of coverage that they would like.

Regarding the specific results of H1a and H1b, some of the above factors are relevant here as well, in addition to others. Why are the *ideal* goals of the editors in both channels so similar? To begin with, we question to what extent Channel 2 editors have any direct knowledge regarding their

audience's taste in news. No in-depth focus group work is carried out regarding specific aspects of televised news and the audience's reaction to them. Instead, Channel 2 has concentrated exclusively on the ratings game—obviously a very gross measure of audience satisfaction. News editors of both channels, therefore, are in the same situation—blindly assuming that their audience wants this or that news item or goal. In addition, there may be a more specifically Israeli factor at work here: Almost all the senior news editors at Channel 2 received their early training and experience from Channel 1 (again, the only TV channel from 1968 to 1993): Shalom Kital (Channel 2's Director-General of News), Nissim Mishal (host of the channel's leading political interview program), Gadi Sukeinik (main anchorman), Roni Daniel (defense reporter), Rina Mazliakh (political affairs reporter), and others.

Thus, their early and formative socialization process—as is the case throughout the world in every area of life—could not be easily changed (if at all) once they began working in a different news milieu for (possibly) a different audience. Indeed, to the extent that they were able to change somewhat the same may well have occurred amongst the Channel 1 editors who remained behind, but who began reading the (newly) competitive writing on the wall. In other words, for reasons of self-respect if nothing else, workers in a *state* channel can also (to a limited extent) change their editorial perceptions to take greater account of audience needs and desires—thereby moving closer to the specific goals of the commercial channel. One small indication of this in Table 2.1.1 is the lack of statistical significance in the difference between the two channels regarding ideal goal #15: “to entertain”.

If the lack of difference between the editors regarding *ideal* goals was somewhat unexpected, not so the same finding regarding *actual* goals broadcast. The majority of exogenous and endogenous factors discussed above pertain almost equally to both state and commercial television: need for visual footage, lack of easy access, deadline (time) constraints, loss of editorial control with live coverage, censorship, and shortage of resources. True, these do not have to lead ineluctably to a similar outcome, but given the similar starting point of the two editorial groups' list of goals comparable exigencies will tend to bring about a very similar news product.

Finally, as to the question why the editors of the *commercial* channel should exhibit a couple of *more* ideal/real goal gaps (and not a few *less*)

than their *state* channel counterparts, we can only speculate at this stage. One possibility: It might be that commercial TV news workers have a heightened sensitivity to the need for giving their specific audience what it wants, and thus these editors feel more acutely the gap between what they would like to provide and what they actually do present to the audience. State channel workers have a more "collective-national" perspective, serving the country as a whole, and somewhat less of a selective, audience-oriented, "ratings mentality". They therefore might feel less frustrated in not providing what they feel should be provided.

A second possibility is related to the first: the average age of Channel 1 editors is far older than for the upstart Channel 2. Age and work experience can breed a false self-confidence regarding what the audience wants and/or to what extent the editor is providing it. Alternatively (and conversely), long experience can enable the news editors to become more acquainted with the news goals of their audience. In the Israeli case, as we have noted earlier, both the audience and the news editors of Channel 1 are older, so that there has been far more time to develop a mutual familiarity—compared to the situation in which Channel 2's younger editors are less familiar with their younger viewers, some of whom might not have yet consolidated their preferred news goals. However, one should not make too much of a mountain out of our specific molehill finding: Again, Channel 2 editors displayed 11 gaps as compared to 9 ideal/real gaps among Channel 1 editors—hardly a big difference.

Conclusion

Overall, it is clear from the present study that the state television vs. commercial television "divide" is not very great regarding editors' ideal and actual news selection/presentation. The responses of both sets of editors were quite similar for ideal and real goals, respectively. As a result, we also found that the gap between ideal and real goals was widespread for both sets of editors, in essence meaning that they uniformly feel deficient in not providing what they believe their audience wants.

As a result, we conclude that *general* exogenous and endogenous factors, mediagenic and institutional constraints, are the underlying foundation for such an ideal/real gap—far surpassing elements unique to commercial

TV news compared to state TV news. It is the specific medium and its environmental characteristics that determine what editors will consider necessary as well as the extent to which they (don't) succeed in producing the desired result. While we found some indication of slight differences between state and commercial editorial goals (ideal and real), in the final analysis "the medium is (indeed) the message"—not just from the audience's standpoint as McLuhan argued, but from the news producers' perspective as well, as we must conclude from the evidence of our study.

Having said that, there is still much to be done. For one, future studies ought to test whether the "ideal" goals expressed by news editors are "proxy" (as they claimed and we assumed in this study) or "personal" (intrinsic professional journalism goals). As noted in the Methodology section, we discovered that the editors chose "ideal" goals that they felt the *audience* wanted, i.e. through an act of professional self-abnegation our editors looked to the audience in determining their own "ideal" responses. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with such an approach, if one views the news-person as a professional technician providing a *service* on demand, and not someone *educating* the public as to what to it should be viewing. However, it would be of interest to investigate whether journalists' news norm choices would be different if asked to ignore (for the moment) audience taste and wishes.

Another interesting line of inquiry is to compare news goal gaps between programs that serve larger vs. smaller audiences. As noted in the Discussion section, budgetary constraints (manpower and equipment) are a serious impediment to editorial work. One assumes that the larger the viewing audience the larger the budget, with a concomitant smaller gap between intentions and results.

A third possibility: given the slightly more "entertainment"-orientation ("infotainment") of current events programs, it might be useful in future studies to separate the news category from current events, to see just how much of a news goal difference exists between the two genres.

Finally, we have not touched on the philosophical question of whether editors should indeed consider audience taste as the paramount influence on what they do. Given that the news is not only a *cultural* artifact but even more important, an essential *political-democratic* product, the question remains as to whether the public should be given only what it wants or also what it *needs*. Indeed, a final explanation of our findings can be drawn from

the fact that, as we saw earlier, Channel 2 news is not directly owned by each of the three private licensees but rather is a consortium of all three—and thus somewhat shielded from purely commercial considerations. Thus, if indeed it works more like a public utility than a purely commercial channel, it is little wonder that its editors' responses are so similar to those of the state channel editors! However, this also means that in order to validate the overall finding here—that no major difference exists between commercial and state TV editors' news goals—further studies in other countries must be conducted among commercial channels in which the news department is run along *purely* profit-oriented lines. For now, however, our findings and tentative conclusions are provocative enough: No matter in what environmental, organizational and political situation they find themselves, most TV news editors are equally frustrated because of the specific (and in part, unique) demands of the medium that don't afford them free editorial rein.

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