

POLITICAL REPORTING IN THE AGE OF INFOTAINMENT

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Introduction

The effects of infotainment have been felt by the news industry since politicians started appearing on talk shows and comedy shows, hoping to humanize themselves to the voting public. One of the earliest examples was in 1968 when presidential candidate Richard Nixon appeared on “Rowan and Martin’s Laugh-In” (Xenos 198). Even earlier than that, John F. Kennedy appeared on the “The Tonight Show” with Jack Paar in 1960.

But with the 24-hour news cycle and the Internet drawing the public away from traditional forms of news, infotainment has become even more prevalent during the past 30 years. Infotainment can be seen easily on television, with programs such as “The Daily Show” and CNN’s “RidicuList” with Anderson Cooper; however, infotainment in terms of print journalism has not been studied as in-depth. This research not only looks at infotainment in print journalism but more specifically how it affects political journalists.

Literature Review

Moy, Xenos and Hess in their 2005 article “Communication and Citizenship: Mapping the Political Effects of Infotainment” define infotainment as the convergence of news and entertainment. The paper states that in recent years news

programs started developing more elements of entertainment, and entertainment programs started to disseminate the news. The term “infotainment” is largely used in reference to entertainment programs that have elements of news (Moy et. al. 2005, 113). “Soft news” and “infotainment” are often used interchangeably in research on this topic. Soft news includes sensationalized stories, human-interest stories, and stories that focus more on entertainment over serious hard news content (Jebril et. al., 106). An example of a news station covering soft news would be the media circus surrounding the trial of Casey Anthony, the young Florida woman who was charged with and acquitted of killing her young daughter or the flurry of news coverage that focuses on First Lady Michelle Obama’s haircut or wardrobe. For the purpose of this research, infotainment will be used as a type of soft news.

Grondin defines infotainment as “televised entertainment news” (Grondin, 347). Jebril, Albæk, and de Vreese define infotainment as “blurring the line between news and entertainment” (Jebril et. al, 105). This research will use the Jebril, Albæk, and de Vreese definition of infotainment. This research will also use the Oxford English Dictionary definition of entertainment as a derivative of “entertain” to mean to “provide with amusement or enjoyment,” (Oxford 475). “Infotainment” will be used in terms of news coverage, with a primary purpose of informing, possessing qualities aimed at amusing news consumers, and entertainment sources, with a primary purpose to provide viewers with enjoyment, adding in hard news content.

“News” is defined by Oxford as the “newly received or noteworthy information, especially about recent events” (Oxford 960). However, this definition

also encompasses “soft news.” For the purposes of this research, news is defined as what is traditionally considered “hard news.” Lehman-Wilzig and Seletzky best sum up the difference between the two types of news:

[Hard news] usually involves political (domestic and international), economic or social topics. ‘Hard’ news demands immediate reporting due to its importance and short lifespan (continuing stories tend to follow shortly) ... ‘hard’ news enables — almost demands — accompanying commentary and analysis, whereas ‘soft’ news involves gossip, local scandal (of the social, not the political type), and human interest stories, all having little ramifications beyond their immediate circle. (Lehman-Wilzig and Seletzky 38)

Atkinson says there has been a shift away from the more traditional news formats to a format that emphasizes storytelling with conversational dialogue, instead of the Edward R. Murrow style of monologue journalism (Atkinson 102). He contends this current model of journalism is unstable and continuing to function in this format will lead to a less informed citizenry, and, in the end, democracy will suffer (Atkinson 123).

As Gunter and Uribe found in an analysis of British tabloids between 1991 and 2001, that on average only 27.7 percent of space was devoted to hard news. In another study conducted in 2004 in the U.S., researchers found more than half of the stories that ran on the front pages of newspapers were soft news stories, which was almost a 43 percent increase from only three years prior (Weldon, 36). This shows that hard news is given less space in print publications.

Within the past 30 years, there has been an increase in the number of news sources where people can get their news. News networks between 1956 and 1996 grew from four to nine. Until 1986, there were four broadcast networks: PBS, ABC, NBC and CBS. Not counting DuMont, which ceased operations in 1956 (Poynter). FOX launched in 1986, joining the three network news giants. Between 1980 and 1996, cable news channels were developed. The first was CNN in 1980, followed by its sister channel, Headline News. Ted Turner's CNN changed the face of television news, turning it into a 24-hour service. Following his lead were NBC's cable news networks CNBC and MSNBC and FOX's cable news network, Fox News (Federal Communications Commission).

Although daily newspapers have decreased in number, from 1,745 in 1980 to 1,382 in 2011, the Internet has provided an immeasurable amount of news sites (National Newspaper Association). Additionally, news/talk radio stations have increased from 1,682 stations in 1999 to 3,984 in 2012 (Arbitron).

According to Neijens, this increase in channel options and news sources, largely developing in the 1990s, led to the development of what is called "infotainment" (Neijens 1998, 149). Moy writes that the rise of infotainment can be attributed to the need for television programs to combat low ratings (Moy, 113). There is little consensus among other researchers as to when infotainment began and what exactly caused this new genre to develop. Xiaoxia Cao from the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania agrees with Moy's explanation (Cao, 26).

Infotainment can refer to talk shows such as the now off-air “The Oprah Winfrey Show”; which covered the 2008 presidential race, soft news stories such as humanizing exposés on politicians; Anderson Cooper’s “RidicuList,” which is a humorous summation of news events presented at the end of his CNN news program “Anderson 360” or comedy programs that focus on news such as Comedy Central’s “The Daily Show,” which is a 30-minute program that discusses big news sources with humor.

History.

Infotainment started as a slow progression but sped up drastically in the 1990s. Schudson wrote about a 1998 report from the Committee of Concerned Journalists that said there has been a decline in news coverage of policy issues in exchange for coverage of scandals since 1977 (Schudson 1001).

For decades, there were only three networks on television through which people could get their news. Now, there are countless avenues for news, including online news sources, social media, blogs, and myriad other television stations (Baum 92). In 2008, when applications for smartphones became available from Apple, consumers were then able to access news sources from their cellphones and later tablets, either by accessing the news website or accessing an application downloaded to the device.

According to Neijens, this increase in channels and options for news has led to an increase in infotainment (Neijens 149). News outlets have to try harder to get viewers to tune in amid the array of choices. Many news sources have increased their content to cover softer issues. Bennett writes in a content analysis study

between 1980 and 1999, sensationalism (dramatization and hype of a news story) increased from 20 percent to 40 percent of all news content. However, there are other reasons for this shift, more so than just the pressure of competition.

Infotainment is less expensive to produce (Kovach 295). It is cheaper to produce a talk show where pundits discuss the issues as opposed to journalists reporting, researching, and delivering news in a traditional format (Kovach 173).

Familiarity breeds content. Meaning consumers and advertisers tend to be happier with things they are familiar with. As a result, news organizations keep their same audience to keep their same advertisers (Ritzer 373). Lastly, they focus on quantity over quality because quantity is easily calculated (Ritzer 374).

According to Atkinson,

This approach values backstage management and management skills over policy and professional skills and promotes assembly-line production practices, cost-effectiveness, market research, and quantifiable performance targets. From the commercial viewpoint, broadcasting is just like any other delivery system with inputs and outputs, where quantity is cheaper and easier to defend than quality and where risk avoidance maximizes proven topics, treatments, and forms. (Atkinson 105)

Atkinson summarizes this data as “mcjournalism.” The term is a play on the fast food restaurant McDonald’s that is known for producing food quickly and inexpensively. “Mcjournalism” is a fast way to produce a cheap product to get more advertising (Atkinson 108).

Politics.

As news producers decrease serious content, entertainment programming has taken up the role of covering serious topics or politics. Neijens says politicians who go on entertainment television shows, such as “The David Letterman Show” or “The Daily Show,” are representative of this change in television, not a change in politics (Neijens 162). One of the first instances of a politician using the entertainment format as a way of reaching a broader audience was Richard Nixon appearing on the popular 1960s/70s sketch comedy show “Laugh-In” (Xenos 198). This opened the gate for politicians to use these types of outlets to show off their personalities, such as Bill Clinton playing the saxophone on “The Arsenio Hall Show” in 1992 when he was running for president (Xenos 199).

Politicians who agree to go on infotainment shows, such as “The Daily Show,” “The Colbert Report,” “Late Show With David Letterman,” and “The Oprah Winfrey Show,” do so for specific reasons.

In a content analysis of interviews with politicians on talk shows, Shutz found that because politicians rely on public support to get re-elected, they are conscious of whether audiences like them (Shutz 213). As a result, politicians try to “gain approval” through their television appearances by humanizing themselves to the public (Shutz 218). There is also the idea that not only will appearing in this format possibly make a politician look more human, but it also gives him or her a new platform.

Baum is a leading researcher on infotainment. Through content analysis of talk shows, traditional news and campaign coverage, he concludes that if politicians want to reach viewers who do not watch hard news, they have to reach them

through nontraditional means where those other viewers would be more likely to see them (Baum 230).

“The Colbert Report” with Stephen Colbert airs on Comedy Central four nights a week immediately following “The Daily Show.” Colbert introduced a segment called “Better Know a District” where he interviews a member of Congress (Baym 360). In a textual analysis from the show’s debut in 2005 through the midterm elections in 2006, Baym looked at how this segment has affected the political landscape. He found that in 2006, all 27 of the members of Congress who agreed to be featured on “The Colbert Report” got re-elected. Causation has not been proven in this case, and as of 2012 Congress has a 90 percent re-election rate (Bloomberg). However, one of the guests, Congressman John Hall, did credit his appearance on the show with his re-election (Baym 359).

“Doing the show was a way to put a face, and a joke, to my name — and a way for my constituents to see me in something other than an opponent’s 30-second attack ad,” said U.S. House Representative Lee Terry (R-Neb.) (Baym 365). Baym asserts these appearances play an instrumental role in bringing awareness to politicians who, though little-known, have an impact on people’s lives (Baym 373). In fact, only 29 percent of people can name their representative, which he says is a symptom of faltering citizen engagement (Baym 360).

Xenos, Hess, and Moy looked at the 2000 Annenberg Election Survey to try to gauge how viewers feel about politicians after they appear on these television shows. They found that people who watch these shows do judge political candidates based on their personalities more so than nonviewers (Xenos 205). A poll

administered by the Pew Research Center determined 47 percent of viewers under 30 got some of their 2000 presidential campaign information from a late-night infotainment show (Xenos 199).

International.

This shift to infotainment is not unique to the United States; in fact, it is an international development. Gunter and Uribe produced a quantitative content analysis of two major British weekly tabloids, which traditionally in Britain have been sources of legitimate hard news: *The Sun* and *The Mirror*. They looked at the range of topics, form, and style of coverage. They found that less space is devoted to news, and there has been a decrease in international news. Articles have decreased from 320 words to 160 words from 1982 to 1997 with pictures per page increasing in that time (Gunter and Uribe 389). Overall, an average of 66.8 percent of total news content was soft news with visuals increasing to 35.8 percent of the page, up from 29.2 percent (Gunter and Uribe 393).

Kees noted that Europe is “uncritically” following this softer format (Kees 319), but Kees doesn’t think it is a serious issue at home or abroad. He did a six-week content analysis of news programs in The Netherlands and found that almost all news programs had factors of entertainment in their topics, style, or format (Kees 327). He also found qualities of news in entertainment and qualities of entertainment in news (Kees 328), but he does not see infotainment as ever becoming the only form of information, nor does he think the current levels are detrimental to society (Kees 329).

Kees believes infotainment will only become a problem if politicians start strictly sticking with infotainment programs as a way to reach an audience but avoid tough questioning. He points to Clinton who frequented infotainment programs in 1992 for just that reason. If this becomes a wide-spread campaign strategy, instead of just practiced in a few cases, then the role of journalists holding policy makers accountable will become diminished, and that should cause worry (Kees 330).

Research Question

One question guided this research: What are the biggest challenges and consequences of the changing landscape of political reporting in a day of infotainment? The purpose of this research is to find out if print journalists, specifically those who cover politics for major political publications or news bureaus based in Washington, D.C., think their work and sector of industry have been affected by infotainment. And, if it has, how so? Additionally, how has reporting changed since the beginning of their careers?

Methodology

Structured and semi-structured interviews were used as the research method for this analysis. Structured interviewing was used for two interviews, Dan Balz and A.B. Stoddard due to time constraints. Both reporters answered the 21 questions through email. The other eight interviews were conducted over the phone. This allowed for follow-up questions and more explanation with certain questions and responses. The parameters of structured and semi-structured interviews, as explained by Fontana and Fey, state that a structured interview does

not allow room for conversation and follow-up, as opposed to a semi-structured interview that does (Fontana and Frey, 363).

The interviews that were conducted over the phone were recorded and transcribed. Those transcripts are available in the final project appendix.

All of the subjects interviewed were political reporters for large print publications or news bureaus and are based in the Washington, D.C., area. All of the subjects but two, Alex Rogers and Jonathan Martin, have been working as professional journalists for more than 20 years. They were able to speak to the changes they have seen in the industry since the beginning of their careers. Rogers was able to speak to the industry now as he entered it in 2012, right out of college, and Martin addressed political reporting as someone who transitioned from working in politics to covering politics. All of the subjects were currently working in journalism with the exception of one subject, Paul West, who retired from *The Baltimore Sun* in 2013. James Barnes no longer works full time at *National Journal* and is a contributor at CNN.

The eight semi-structured interviews left room for follow-up questions and background information on the participants. However, the two structured interviews did answer all 21 research questions. Additionally, they were both high-profile journalists, and a wealth of information about them is available for independent research. Two women, Susan Page and A.B. Stoddard, and eight men were interviewed.

Interview Subjects.

James Barnes was a political reporter for *National Journal* from 1987 to 2010. He has been working as a journalist since 1984 and got his start at “CBS News” in New York in its election unit. He now works as a contributing editor for *National Journal* and a consultant for CNN.

Dan Balz has been a reporter for the *Washington Post* for 35 years. He began covering national politics in Washington and nationwide when he joined the *Post*.

George Condon is the White House correspondent for *National Journal*. He began working there in 2009. He started working as a journalist in 1971 and has been covering national politics since 1975. Before *National Journal* he worked for the *San Diego Union-Tribune* and Copley Press.

Mike Dorning is a White House correspondent for *Bloomberg News Agency's* Washington bureau. He has had that job for four years, previously working at the *Chicago Tribune* for 19 years. He has been working as a journalist since 1986 and has been covering national politics for the past 17 years.

Charles Lewis is a senior editor for the Washington Bureau of Hearst Newspapers, which owns 15 daily newspapers across the country. He began working there 24 years ago and has been a journalist for 46. He has been covering national politics for 31 years.

Jonathan Martin has worked for *The New York Times* as a national political correspondent for six months. Previously he worked at *Politico* and in politics before joining *The New York Times*. He began working as a journalist eight and a half years ago.

Susan Page is the Washington Bureau Chief for *USA Today*. She has been a journalist since receiving a graduate degree from Columbia University in 1974. She has been covering national politics since 1979.

Alex Rogers is a reporter for *TIME Magazine's* Washington Bureau. He graduated from Vanderbilt University in 2012 and previously worked for *The Tennessean*.

A.B. Stoddard is a columnist and associate editor for *The Hill* newspaper, which focuses largely on the United States Congress. She has been working as a journalist since 1990 and has been covering national politics since 1994.

Paul West is a recently retired journalist for the Washington Bureau of Tribune Co., which owns eight daily newspapers nationwide. He began working for *The Baltimore Sun* in 1985 as a political reporter before Tribune Co. acquired the newspaper. He has been working as a journalist since 1973 and covered national politics from 1978 until he retired in 2013. In 2010 he became the national political correspondent for the entire chain of Tribune Co. newspapers.

Findings

In depth interviews with some of the most prominent political journalists in the county were focused on finding out what were the biggest challenges and consequences of political reporting in a day of infotainment, taking into account the massive changes that have occurred in society and in the journalism industry during the past 30 years.

The interview questions and responses can be broken down into four categories: technology and the 24-hour news cycle, the decline of journalists as

gatekeepers, media sensationalism and opinion journalism, and the impact of infotainment and soft news.

The longevity of many of the interview subjects' careers allows them to offer insight into how the industry has changed around them since they began working as journalists. This also allows them to see how and when, from their perspective, infotainment became a part of the industry and whether and how it affected them.

Eight of the 10 journalists interviewed have been working in the industry for more than 20 years. They have witnessed many changes in the industry in that time.

Technology and the 24-Hour News Cycle.

One of the biggest changes in the news industry involves the 24-hour news cycle and technology, such as the Internet. The Internet has had a fundamental impact on the news media. According to Washington Bureau Chief for *USA Today*, Susan Page:

The biggest [change], I think, reflects technological changes which have sped up the news cycle a lot and also that there are many more avenues for people to get political information, [consumers] expect it a lot faster, and people have a lot more access to things that you're covering. ... It's faster and more transparent than it was when I started.

Charles Lewis of Hearst Newspapers also spoke of the change in technology as being one of the biggest changes in the industry, making reporting better than it used to be. "Our tools for information gathering have expanded by virtue of technology to an amazing degree," said Lewis. "The technology has helped us as reporters immeasurably and has changed our jobs for the better, making it easier to

be more accurate, comprehensive, and to see stuff otherwise we may not have time to see.”

As an example of this new kind of information gathering, George Condon referred to an article he was working on about the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington. Condon is a White House correspondent for *National Journal*.

“Somebody better than I at social media could use it to find people who were actually at the march in ’63,” he said. “It’s just one way of broadening your reach.”

Access to sources is not the only benefit of the Internet for journalists. Although content online can seem fleeting, the Internet can be a good place to continue a conversation, especially after a story has run in print. A newspaper has limited space and cannot run the same story multiple times, but a website can keep a topic alive long after newspapers with similar content has been discarded. Paul West, who is a retired national political correspondent from the Washington Bureau of Tribune, Co., used the example of campaign fact-checking to illustrate this point.

It’s always been standard process, at least over the past 20 or 30 years, for news organizations to take a look at campaign commercials and try to examine the validity of the claims being made and what the candidates are trying to do. And those sorts of things before the Internet, those sorts of fact checking or whatever you want to call them — ad watch is something people sometimes called it — that would run one time in a newspaper and you know it might say, ‘candidate so and so is running this very misleading ad that makes all these claims that aren’t true, and here’s what the real truth is, and here’s the stuff that the candidate’s doing.’ And that particular critical item

would run one time in a newspaper ... and the ads would run hundreds of times on the television for weeks and weeks. The impact of the critical analysis would be pretty small. Now that you have these various fact checking organizations and fact checking sites and fact checking websites, of news organizations or of independent organizations, I think that stuff has a little more salience in this particular era.

Although reporters feel the Internet has enhanced some aspects of their jobs, it is a double-edged sword. The Internet and social media have made reporting easier and better but have also put pressure on reporters to produce more content.

Jonathan Martin, a national political correspondent for *The New York Times*, spoke of how technology has changed political reporting, speeding up the production and consumption of political news. News consumers expect constant updates, and content producers have to keep up with demand. A daily newspaper no longer just puts out news once a day, but it is generally also engaged in social media and updates its website constantly with breaking news and developing stories. West doesn't see this necessarily as a bad thing, as long as reporters are still given the time to produce traditional content.

If you're telling a reporter that they need to spend more time on Twitter or more time blogging stuff online that is aimed mainly at building an audience, that takes time away from what they could be otherwise doing that might be more valuable in the end to the public, such as investigative reporting or more in-depth analysis or digging up something that nobody else knows about as opposed to recycling stuff just to get eyeballs.

More news outlets and the need for more coverage have sped up deadlines. According to Mike Dorning, a White House correspondent for *Bloomberg News Agency*, journalists now write more stories per day and have more deadlines.

In the short time Alex Rogers has been working as a political reporter for *TIME* Magazine, he has already seen a change as a result of digital news in that journalists write a story to attract a wider audience. It's no longer just a focus on print circulation; it's also a need to get views on the website, articles shared, and a following on social media. *National Journal* political reporter James Barnes agrees:

It's all about the clicks. There was a time when reporters felt much more insulated. That may have been good or bad. Most serious reporters at mainline organizations had a sense that they had to please their editors and get some feedback from colleagues and readers. But, right now they understand their compensation is based on how many clicks does your server gets. How many hits do you get.

Another way the Internet has affected reporters is through the inundation of "news" online. Traditional news sources adhere to standards of professionalism and objectivity, but online standards vary widely. There are many reputable online news websites that do not have a print counterpart, such as *Politico*, but there are many more that are blatantly biased and inaccurate and lack accountability. Lewis expands on this point:

There are so many gradations of product. Thirty-four years ago there used to be 10 news outlets in your life — and in my life. Now with the Internet there are hundreds, thousands. The Internet has made it limitless. ... Drudge [the

moderator of an online 'news' website] and I have nothing in common. And yet people call him a journalist. They call me a journalist. Drudge and I have nothing in common. And, that's an example of a different approach to our work. I caution you not to squeeze everyone or points of view into a single mold. It may have been possible 34 years ago. It's not remotely possible now.

While the Internet has given news consumers unlimited options for accessing content, other media sources have expanded as well. During the past 35 years, television news networks have tripled (FCC), and news/talk radio stations have increased 137 percent (Arbitron). Newspapers have seen a 20 percent decline, however (National Newspaper Association).

Before 1980, Condon recalls, there were three major news networks: CBS, ABC, and NBC. Newspapers, radio, and those three news outlets were the only options for news consumers.

If you go back when Jimmy Carter was president, you had no Internet, you had the three networks. You did not have CNN, you did not have MSNBC, you did not have FOX, you didn't have transcript service. There wasn't CSPAN ... So, newspapers and TV were it. You didn't have all of the things you deal with today, news organizations like *Politico* and social media, which is so important now, certainly didn't exist then. It's been a tremendous change.

Any journalist who began working before 1980 and continued to work even at least into the 1990s would see a big difference in the media landscape. This increase in outlets has undoubtedly affected everyone.

An increase in outlets, however, does not translate to an increase in news companies. As news sources have increased, media companies have been consolidating. In 1983, 50 companies owned 90 percent of the media outlets in the U.S. But through mergers, acquisitions, and buyouts, that number has shrunk to six. These six companies are Comcast, News Corp, Disney, Viacom, Time Warner, and CBS. This means the fewer than 300 executives who run these companies control almost all of the mainstream media consumed in the U.S. (Business Insider).

In the same way an increase in outlets does not equal an increase in news companies, an increase in airtime and Web space does not equal an increase in news or an increase in quality.

When a news outlet has 24 hours a day to fill, often that content is repetitive. Columnist and associate editor for *The Hill* A.B. Stoddard said the current format of 24-hour news has had a negative impact on the quality of news. That time is usually not filled with analysis, but with speculation, punditry, repetition of programs or segments that aired at an earlier time, or variations of the same topic in segment after segment.

Decline of Journalists as Gatekeepers.

Journalists have been the gatekeepers of information. Throughout history they have had access to politicians and newsmakers, and the means of mass distribution of information. As gatekeepers, they shape the public conversation and decide what is important and worth reporting and what is inconsequential or frivolous. "Newspaper editors used to be sort of gatekeepers, they had a lot of

control,” said Condon. “If it was their judgment something wasn’t a story, it wouldn’t be written.”

But this new varied, vast, and digital landscape has taken some of the power away from traditional news outlets and put it in the hands of the newsmakers themselves.

In terms of political reporting, the increase in news outlets has given politicians an opportunity to be selective to whom they grant an interview. Although most of the journalists interviewed are able to secure interviews with the desired politicians because of the prominence of the outlets they work for, they do recognize an increase in the level of difficulty. “I think there is a lot more competition for interviews now,” said Page. “There are many more outlets that politicians can use to reach an audience. There’s ethnic media, there’s entertainment sources like ‘The Daily Show’ that politicians go on now. I think it’s become — the competition has become fiercer generally for news organizations.”

Dorning agreed, saying that because the media world has become more fragmented, politicians can choose which venue to go to.

Lewis said part of that decision involves where the outlet falls in the pecking order. He noted that when he worked for *The Associated Press*, his calls to national politicians were returned faster than they are now that he works for Hearst. Condon had a similar experience.

When I was at Copley, we certainly had no problem getting interviews with local politicians. You get the governor of California, the governor of Illinois, the governor of Ohio. We had papers in those three states, and you certainly

could get the mayor, the congressman, and so on. But you weren't going to get the speaker of the House; you weren't going to get the Senate majority leader. I would get called on the press conferences, but I wasn't going to get many exclusive interviews with the president of the United States. At *National Journal*, we can get, we've had one exclusive interview with President Obama, had a couple with President Bush, the second President Bush, and before that with other presidents. But it isn't so much who you work for, it's what the president and his people believe works for them.

But sometimes the smaller news outlets have better luck, even with securing an interview with the president. Condon talked about how difficult it has been for even the big newspapers to get an interview with President Obama, but the president gave many interviews to local TV stations in Ohio during his 2008 and 2012 campaigns. "He did one recently with *The New York Times* — it was the first one that President Obama has done with *The Times* since he became president," said Condon. "... In almost six years — five years — of being president, one interview with *The New York Times*. That ties them with the *National Journal*."

He said the White House staff is smart enough to know that an interview with a news outlet in Cleveland has a better chance of reaching the key voters in Ohio and the president is likely to get easier questions.

President Obama is a notoriously difficult interview to get for newspapers. In the six years President Obama has been in office, he has granted interviews to *USA Today*, *Washington Post*, and *Bloomberg News*, but that is compared to the three interviews President Bush gave to *The New York Times* between 2001 and 2005.

President Obama was called “the least newspaper-friendly president in a generation” by *Washington Post’s* Paul Farhi in a February 2013 article titled, “Obama keeps newspaper reporters at arm’s length.” He wrote that television allows the president to tailor his message without the filter that comes with print interviews.

However, Barnes said it’s not always the politicians but also the people around them who can be difficult when trying to get an interview. Barnes said advisors and staff don’t want the politician to be exposed to tough questions and they are more cautious today than they have been in the past two decades. Another aspect of this is the 24-hour news cycle.

There is certainly the proliferation of media. Politicians and press secretaries understand the dilemma they get in if they grant interviews to one news organization and not another. And I think 20, and certainly 30 years ago, you had fewer news organizations competing, sending in those interview requests. Now you’ve got such a proliferation of media outlets, and probably it’s harder for the individual politician or the press secretary to know, to really be familiar with all these news organization or media outlets, let’s call them, and it’s easier to be safe and to turn down requests than to grant requests. ... I think some politicians are leery about being part of the 24/7 news cycle.

Dorning said that because traditional media have fewer consumers compared to all other outlets (such as the Internet), it has become harder for mainstream political journalists to get access to the top newsmakers. And he is right.

According to the Pew Research Center, the percentage of people reporting that they read a print newspaper yesterday has fallen from 41 percent in 2002 to 23 percent in 2012. The number of people now getting their news online has surpassed TV and print newspapers. And online, the outlets are plentiful. With the decline in consumers of traditional news outlets, it's no surprise politicians can and do turn to social media and talk shows to get their messages out. "John Dillinger was asked once why he robbed banks, and he said, 'Because that's where the money is,'" said Condon. "Well, why do you go on 'Jay Leno'? Why do you go on 'Arsenio Hall,' why do you go on 'Oprah Winfrey'? Because that's where the voters are."

Lewis agrees. He said that politicians agree to work with those types of media outlets "because the politician is dealing with the same kind of fragmented market that I am and they are trying to reach all fragments that they can and they will deal with those different media outlets that address the different fragments, the different niche audience that they feel they should be in touch with."

Martin has also seen access to politicians decline, saying they have become more guarded in the past 40 years because of staffs who want to, as he said, "manage the news." This management of the news is a form of circling the wagons around public figures to protect who comes into their camp and what comes out of it. Political camps exert more control now over how, when, and where to distribute their message. Members of Congress are still accessible on Capital Hill, though, if a journalist can grab them for an interview in the hallways, said Rogers and Dan Balz. But that is not always an option. "Politicians today are far more guarded than they once were, as are the people who advise them," said Balz. He has been a reporter for

the *Washington Post* for 35 years. "As a result, they are less willing to do interviews ... Politicians today prefer to exercise control over interviews, when possible. Still, many make themselves available on a regular basis."

Dorning agrees that to some extent it is difficult to get interviews with politicians, but he says the problem is nothing new. "I think it's always been challenging in some ways to get interviews with politicians," he said. "To some extent, the media world is more fragmented, and they can choose the venue they can go to."

West also said the decline in access to politicians to be the biggest change he has seen in the industry since the beginning of his career. He said politicians and their advisers have more ways to get their message out to the public without using reporters.

The changes in communications methods have had an impact on the relationship between reporters and their sources in national politics; specifically, there has been less and less. It's not a straight line, but if you graphed it on a chart, it would be a jagged line, in my opinion, going down. The amount of access journalists get to candidates. ... When you're talking about politics you have to sometimes separate out presidential politics from other types of politics because presidential politics are by their nature different and have their own sets of rules. But [there is] basically, less and less contact between reporters and candidates, and campaigns and candidates finding more and more ways they think they can use to get

around having to deal with reporters as intermediaries. And [they] instead channel messages to voters and the public without going through reporters.

Journalists are no longer the gatekeepers they used to be, but is this a bad thing? Is there a problem with politicians bypassing the press? While of course reporters want these interviews so they can produce content based off this access, West thinks this change is a precursor to a bigger problem.

Politicians and candidates and their advisers and office holders have concluded that they just don't need to do this (deal with reporters). As time goes on, I think there's a real risk to democracy having this distance between politicians and candidates and the press. After all, the job of the reporter is to act as surrogate for the voter or the public. It's a way of distancing yourself from the public, which is inherently anti-democratic.

Media Sensationalism and Opinion Journalism.

Another aspect of the current media landscape is the prevalence of sensationalized content and partisan rhetoric. Stoddard thinks one of the bigger changes in the industry has been the focus on political fights and partisanship. Some news outlets reinforce the political beliefs of their viewers, without an attempt to expose them to additional information that might challenge those preconceived political perspectives. Additionally, news stories frequently focus on partisanship as a news topic, using commentary to discuss the partisan decisions and perspectives of newsmakers.

Barnes talked about the prevalence of commentary over straight news.

“I think there is less an emphasis on actual reporting and more emphasis on commentary and thinly reported analysis,” he said. He explained that when he started in the industry in the 1980s, journalists identified with their publication and were concerned with unbiased reporting and quality analysis. Now, journalists think that in order for them to succeed, they need to look out for themselves instead — focusing on their personal brand over the publication.

“And I think the way some people go about creating that individual brand is to be edgy and provocative,” he said.

Balz said the shift toward sensationalism and partisan coverage is a result of a larger number of news outlets covering politics. This, he said, has led to broader coverage but with less substance.

In other news outlets, Dorning sees more opinion journalism, which is easier and cheaper to produce. He said journalists are now under more financial pressure than before. This pressure might be what is leading to more sensational content, and that content drives consumers. The more eyeballs a news outlet can get, the more advertising revenue it can generate. Advertisers invest in the audience, not the content. Softer news focused on entertainment over substance might be a means to an end, if it works.

“[The entertainment expansion into news] can have a positive effect if it creates a larger audience for political coverage generally,” said Balz. “But that’s not a given.”

None of the journalists interviewed considered their publications to be sources of partisan news coverage.

The Impact of Infotainment and Soft News.

The political journalists interviewed do see infotainment and soft news in their industry, and sometimes that is due to the nature of the story. "Politics is more partisan and polarized so coverage of it tends to be more focused on the fight," said Stoddard. "There is more political gamesmanship than legislating these days so we tend to write more about politics than policy."

However, sometimes soft news coverage can be due to the topics news outlets choose to cover. Barnes said that there is more reporting on sensational and trivial matters, such as the failed presidential hopes of billionaire Donald Trump that garnered heavy coverage during the 2012 presidential campaign. He said that articles about Trump get more hits online than articles about serious political contenders, such as Indiana Governor Mitch Daniels.

Balz identifies infotainment clearly in the industry as a whole. "I would say that there is a greater infusion of popular culture into political reporting today than there was a generation ago," he said. "That's not necessarily a bad thing, but the risk is that too much attention is paid to trivia, gossip, or events that have little relevance."

Page does not see entertaining news content as anything new. She points out that for years entertainers have provided political information and news organizations have been looking for a way to effectively engage the public. However, she does think there is "a bigger intersection between the two worlds than there used to be."

The literature supports her perspective. Xenos (2006) writes about Richard Nixon appearing on the popular sketch comedy show “Laugh-In” in the 1960s when he was running for president. Additionally, a news organization trying to find the most interesting way to produce content is nothing new. It’s the increase in the intersection during the past 20 to 30 years that makes infotainment so interesting.

Martin said he has seen a bit of an increase in the industry with entertainment and digital media. He connects it largely to the Internet, which became widely accessible in the 1990s and exploded after the millennium.

If you consider the Internet to be a form of entertainment as opposed to information, if you consider unique page views or clicks to be a form of ratings, then I think you can make an argument that there has been more of a focus on that in recent years than there was in the past. There is now, unfortunately, but inevitably, more pressure on journalists to do their part to help their news organization get more viewership online. I think that’s regrettable, and I don’t think that’s something that’s gonna go away or that can be reversed. But it’s certainly if it’s not a fad at the moment, it’s certainly something that’s been around for a few years and doesn’t show any signs of going away.

However, Lewis doesn’t see infotainment as much of a problem at all. He sees a separation between entertainment and news from where he is in the industry. Additionally, the outlets he consumes don’t have characteristics of infotainment, he says, citing the “PBS NewsHour.”

This judgment that infotainment and soft news have not completely taken over the news media in this country is consistent among the journalists interviewed. Many journalists have been able to avoid dealing with it altogether, and like Lewis, don't see it as part of their jobs or everyday life. They identify it and actively choose to not engage. Although they do not engage with it, it affects them as they work to avoid it.

One effect of infotainment, so subtle that many journalists might not even notice it, is how topics that wouldn't have even been covered in the past are considered big news now. An example, Condon said, was a gaffe made by former Vice President Spiro Agnew.

There are things that wouldn't have been written 40 years ago that are written now. One of the first times we saw that things were changing, and it flows out of Watergate and Vietnam, Spiro Agnew when he was running for vice president. On the press plane, there was a *Baltimore Sun* reporter that was Japanese, whom he had known from his days as governor of Maryland, and Agnew made a joke of 'is the fat Jap asleep?' and even 10 years earlier, nobody would have written that about a private joke the vice president made on the plane. ... It was written and Agnew had to apologize and it caused a thing. What's happened is, is politicians no longer feel they're safe around reporters, there's much less things being kept on background or off the record. There were reporters who knew that John F. Kennedy was a womanizer. That certainly wasn't written. It would be written today.

Although coverage of presidential infidelity is nothing new, Condon sees this change in what is considered newsworthy as something that has even affected the bigger newspapers in the county.

West also spoke to the idea that politicians don't feel as safe with reporters as they used to. But it's not the reporters so much as the technology. With social media, catching candid moments with a politician can be ratings gold.

I think there is an increasing belief by candidates and their advisers that they don't have to subject themselves to interviews or they don't have to take the risk of agreeing to an interview or they don't want to take the chance — there's been a lot written about this — of mingling with reporters in informal situations for fear that something's going to get said and immediately get tweeted or somebody's gonna be there with a cellphone camera, a smartphone camera, and it's gonna show up on YouTube.

Even Condon, who believes infotainment has not affected his work or reputable publications, can see how the type of coverage has changed.

"[Infotainment has] affected them in the sense that a story that they wouldn't have run 10 years or 20 years ago, they run now," he said.

Page said the bigger publications she focuses on, such as *USA Today* and *The New York Times*, are largely devoid of infotainment. In fact, she doesn't recognize too much of a change in how the major print publications cover news. She sees infotainment as more of a broadcast issue than a print issue.

Martin agrees with Page, saying that when it comes to focusing on hard news over fluff, print is better off than television. "I think [infotainment has] dumbed

down the coverage,” he said. “There’s less time and dedication to doing quality reporting about politics and politicians on TV.”

Barnes agreed that infotainment is more prominent in television, but that doesn’t necessarily mean that newspapers are completely off the hook.

I’m not sure. It’s not as easy for them to put on infotainment. I think watching TV is more passive than when people read. And, infotainment lends itself more to broadcast and the Web, which is having videos increasingly. When I say I feel that infotainment has eroded traditional news standards, I think that it not only affects cable TV, it can also affect print journalists in major newspapers.

Barnes said that because major newspapers have an online presence, you want to be seen as edgy or provocative. This leads to more clicks online and more readers.

It can be hard for a reporter for a big, national newspaper to see their own publication as a source of infotainment or soft news, but even a big paper can have a history that points away from hard news content.

One aspect of the impact of infotainment that should be discussed is the ability for hard news and soft news to coexist within the same news organization. “I think there is a constant effort to balance the two, but I know at the [*Washington Post*], we put a higher priority on news rather than entertainment in our political coverage,” said Balz. “A good news organization can do both and always has done both, but the balance is important.”

True, feature stories and soft news are taking over the front pages of newspapers across the country, but some publications have figured a way to engage audiences and produce soft news without giving up the hard news slots.

This is largely made possible because of the news website. Most midsize and large newspapers have a website that is updated more regularly than a print edition is produced. The website has more space and can hold more content, so publishers don't have to give up the hard news stories to make room for the features. Such is the case with *TIME* Magazine. As Rogers pointed out, with the NewsFeed section on *TIME's* website, *TIME* staff can post articles that do not fit with the traditional, hard news print format.

"Since we've been able to expand online, we've been able to enhance our ways of telling the same story," he said. The content that is put on the NewsFeed section of the website is more of a hodgepodge of content that is not as hard-hitting as some of *TIME's* other content, but it is shorter, easier to share online, and attractive to readers.

Rogers said he doesn't feel infotainment has affected the pages of *TIME* Magazine because readers can turn to *TIME* for the hard news and then go online for the soft.

Condon agreed, saying it is possible for one publication to have it all: fluff and hard news.

[*The National Journal's*] bread and butter is policy and serious. But that doesn't mean we can't also write a story about presidential pets or presidential vacations; you're covering the whole person. And you can do

both. We have a website, we have the *National Journal Daily*, which is aimed at Congress, and we have the magazine every week. You can do the whole thing. There's no pressure to drop the serious at all.

So though the Internet has put more pressure on journalists to produce more content, it has made it possible, for at least some publications, to keep their print product focused on more serious news topics.

The interview subjects generally agreed that the publications and media companies they work for have not been seriously affected by infotainment.

"I don't feel like [infotainment] is affecting me personally," said Page. Although she didn't want to say unequivocally that it has not affected her or her publication at all, she also couldn't definitively say it has. "And I am having trouble thinking of an example of how it's affecting what we do at *USA Today*."

Balz can see a slight effect on his reporting as a result of the technological changes but not so much infotainment. "I don't think it has had a huge effect on the way I do my reporting," he said. "I continue to try to cover politics in many of the same ways I always have."

Dorning said at *Bloomberg*, there is not a push to focus on the personal lives of politicians; however, he did say there was more of a push for that while he was working for the *Chicago Tribune*.

Most of the journalists interviewed have worked for more than one publication. Because of this, they've been able to see firsthand how the focus of their work can change depending on the news outlet. In addition to their desire to produce the best content possible because of a dedication to the tenets of the craft,

journalists also have to produce work that is in line with the ideals of the publication(s) for which they work. Luckily, these reporters have been able to avoid the pressure to produce softer news.

Barnes said at *National Journal* he has not felt too much change in reporting or coverage as the industry has changed. Lewis said the same of Hearst, and West said the same of Tribune Co., except a slight pressure to get more online viewership of stories. Stoddard sees a difference because of the 24-hour news cycle. As a result of this change, her publication will cover the political battles that have become so prevalent.

The subjects also don't perceive much pressure from readers or editors to focus on the personal lives or the human aspects of politicians as a way of making news stories more entertaining. Instead, reporting on those qualities, they say, is just good journalism. "I do think the personal side of politicians is an important thing to explore, especially when someone is running for president of the United States," said Page. "I think when someone is running for president, you need to give your readers a 360-degree understanding of them. And that involves who they are personally, how they relate to people, as well as their policy position."

Stoddard doesn't usually focus on these qualities, but said, "Politicians are human, like the rest of us, so sometimes that becomes a story."

Although Balz is not pressured to focus on the personal lives of politicians, he does see that the topic has become more prevalent.

There is far more attention paid to the personal lives of politicians today than there was when I started in journalism. I think the tipping points came in the

mid-to-late 1980s. Since then, politicians have recognized that private lives are public lives, particularly for someone running for president. This, however, reflects general changes in society, in which much more attention is given to personality reporting, whether in the arts or entertainment or politics. ... In all our coverage of presidential candidates, we are trying to draw as full a portrait as possible. So, the degree to which the 'human aspect' of a candidate is relevant, we include those. I think that's true of biographical writing generally. Readers want and deserve to see a complete portrait of the people who want to be president.

In order for a news consumer to make the most informed decision of who to vote for, he or she needs to see a full picture of the candidate. Sometimes this involves who the candidate is married to, where he or she comes from and any trouble in the person's past. These points can have a strong impact on the candidate's standing with the public and is actual news. Lewis said it is important for journalists to let the public know the background of the people they are voting for.

This is certainly not infotainment. This goes back to — I would say — the change in reporting culture that was brought by the Vietnam War and Watergate, where the personal character of our leaders suddenly emerged as the roadmaps to public policy, the explanation for public policy, the explanation of their behaviors suddenly became more newsworthy because of the policies they were pursuing. Suddenly people were psychoanalyzing President Nixon. ... Suddenly you are way off policy and you're talking about

human characteristics. And, they are news-driven. Lyndon Johnson, what made him want to go to war in a losing cause that everybody in the country could see, almost, as a losing cause? What in his background led him to this fanatical mission that took the lives of 58,000 Americans? Who is this person? These are news values that are explained by the investigations into the personality and human background of our leaders. That's not infotainment.

It's important for journalists to present a candidate as a complete person, more than just a person running for office. And it's not always the journalist who chases this information.

Rogers made the point that it's the politicians who sometimes want to focus on their own human aspects when speaking to the public because they want people to know they had lives before they were elected to office. "Most of the politicians will emphasize how they're outsiders trying to change a broken system," he said.

Conclusion.

The biggest challenges and consequences of the changing landscape of political reporting in a day of infotainment vary depending on the news outlet and media platform a journalist works for. But there are some changes that have universally affected journalists and how they perform their jobs, the biggest one being the Internet. And for print journalists who cover politics for these large newspapers and news bureaus, there seem to be fewer challenges to securing interviews and less pressure to produce soft news. Although the journalists say they are able to get interviews with politicians, this could be due to the prominence of

their publications. Lewis pointed out that the reputation and location of the newspaper itself plays a role in how quickly interview requests are filled. For example, *The Houston Chronicle* might not get a quick response to an interview request sent to the White House, but a request sent to the governor's office is generally fulfilled quickly.

However, political figures are finding ways to circumvent journalists' role as gatekeeper. With the multitude of avenues for message dissemination, not only are consumers shopping around for desired outlets, but so are politicians. Politicians and their staff have become more guarded and don't have to deal with journalists. They are able to get their message to the masses through the Internet, social media, and through selected news outlets.

Additionally, the journalists largely said that infotainment didn't affect them, but the act of recognizing it and then consciously avoiding it, in itself, is an effect.

Although there were differing opinions on the effects of infotainment and their severity and consequences, the biggest changes these journalists have seen are the increase in news outlets, the 24-hour news cycle, and the Internet. Technological changes and the use of digital communication have made reporting easier but have also changed how journalists do their job. The 24-hour news cycle and the Internet have sped up the production and consumption of news, and the increase in news sources have reduced the role of journalists as gatekeepers while leading to an increase in competition. This increase in competition for consumers and advertising dollars has led to an increase in infotainment and soft news as a way to gain and entertain consumers.

Political news consumers have so many options now to receive the news; journalists understand they are not the gatekeepers they used to be. Before the 1980s, there were fewer TV and radio stations and no Internet. The public relied on journalists to give them information. Now, anyone can start a news website or blog. You no longer have to be an educated journalist hired at a news outlet in order to disseminate the news. Journalists still serve a vital function because people still rely on the reputation for accuracy that traditional news outlets have, regardless of how the news values have shifted over time.

Print journalists see infotainment prevalent in their industry, with more coverage of trivial matters and personal and human aspects of politicians. There is more emphasis on commentary, opinion, politics, and Web traffic. However, there is a difference in opinion of when this happened. Whether it has been an ongoing progression during the past several decades or came about with the Internet, print journalists are seeing it more.

One of the biggest revelations is that though infotainment is prevalent in the news media, the journalists at these news outlets do not feel the pressure to engage in infotainment. They say that the important topics are still being covered.

Publications such as *The New York Times*, the *Washington Post* and *USA Today* are not pushing their political reporters to produce humanizing materials for the purpose of Web clicks. Reporters are bringing in personal, human qualities of subjects into their writing now more than before in an effort to show a more complete picture of the candidate in order to give voters the information they need to make an informed decision.

Infotainment is prevalent, but if a publication actively works to focus on hard news qualities, the reporting will be largely devoid of infotainment qualities. But even with the political news articles themselves not having factors of infotainment and soft news, soft news stories are becoming more prevalent.

Research suggests infotainment has become a part of the news media in the U.S. and abroad. Political journalists at some of the top newspapers and news bureaus in the U.S. agree infotainment has made its way into journalism; however, they generally are not pressured by their publications to participate in it. Although advances in digital communication and an increase in news outlets have led to some problems, such as a faster turnaround for news production and opportunities for growth, such as a bigger platform to reach consumers, for now these reporters are not feeling the heat.

This research is important for a few reasons. First, the mission of journalism is to give the public the information they need to be informed about and participate in a democracy. Political reporting is crucial because it focuses on the people and the offices that govern our country and represent the American people. Without political knowledge, the public cannot make an informed decision when voting or participating in government. Therefore, understanding the pressure the political journalists face in terms of performing their job is important.

Second, infotainment is a double-edged sword. It can be the dumbing down or the softening of news, but it can also be the way to get more people to consume news. The ideal situation would be for news to focus on the serious news topics in a straightforward manner and people would be willing to watch and read it because

either they want to or it's the only option. That was the case before the Internet and before the 24-hour news cycle. News has always included human-interest stories, entertainment stories, and other forms of soft news, but its primary function was to inform the public about the important topics of the day. Condon, West, and many of the other journalists interviewed who have been working in the industry for more than 20 years agreed.

Now, the increased coverage and great number of media outlets not only give the policymakers a choice in where to go to disseminate their message but also the news consumers a choice in how, when, and from where to receive it. This freedom has had an effect on how many in the industry present news.

What this research shows was largely in line with the literature. Infotainment is a well-known part of the industry, and politicians willingly choose to participate in it in order to show their personalities and hopefully make the audience like them, as reported by Shutz (1995). Politicians also engage in infotainment to avoid harder questions, as Kees (1998) said Clinton did when he ran for president in 1992. This is important because Kees's research was published in 1998, when the Internet and even some of the 24-hour news stations were still in their infancy (Fox News, MSNBC, and "The Daily Show," all debuted in 1996). Since 1998, the United States has had four presidential elections. As a consequence, much of the older research is outdated.

A big takeaway from this research is that large news outlets are actively working to focus on hard news values. As a result, they fight the influence of infotainment if possible.

Journalists entering the print field, or who are currently working in it, have to fight the desire to write stories to get Internet clicks and focus on the traditional news values, which prefer facts over fluff and sensationalism. Not all print journalists work for a venerable news organization such as *The New York Times* or the *Washington Post*. So if a news organization isn't focused on hard news, it's up to the journalists to try to steer it in the right direction and to do what needs to be done to keep it afloat and put out a superior product. The future of journalism will depend on the perseverance of the people producing it and their ability to do so. Paul West summed it up the best:

Whether you get [news] on a piece of paper, whether you get it on a tablet, it's almost insignificant at this point. What's important is the quality of the journalism, the caliber of the people who produce it, the seriousness by which they produce it, and their ability to make enough money to continue to do it into the future. ... I just think it's all about keeping and maintaining an audience that will provide you with the resources to continue to do the most important thing you do, which is, as we discussed earlier, the watchdog function of journalism, whether it's exposing wrongdoing in government or letting people know more about the people who want to be our leaders.

In addition to politicians avoiding certain news outlets, the most alarming change, as West pointed out, is the separation between politicians and the press. The implications of this separation could be journalists having more difficulty holding politicians accountable, and having the access necessary to ask them the important and often hard questions. Journalists will always be able to write about

politicians but losing the opportunity to question them directly could be detrimental to the public who rely on journalists to perform the watchdog function.

Optimistic findings of the research show that the biggest newspapers in the country are still focused on the hard news that this country needs. Although journalism is in a transition, as long as outlets that have been tested time and again to be reliable and nonpartisan can survive, the public will always have a place to go when mudslinging and jokes become too much and they just want the facts.

Future Research.

Many of the reporters interviewed for this research said a big issue is how politicians are being more cautious when choosing which outlets to grant interviews to and don't have to face some of the harder questions. That by itself should be studied more in depth.

The best way to study this would be to not only interview journalists about this topic specifically but also interview politicians, press secretaries, and communication directors to get an idea of how they choose which publications to grant interviews to.

More research should be done on a broader scale about politicians' aversion to certain news outlets and where the future of journalism is headed based on the changes the industry has seen.

A few questions that should be answered with more research include: Which news outlets get the highest number of interviews with national candidates during an election season? How has the access for the top news outlets changed since the

1980 presidential election? What are the specific reasons politicians and their staffs have for refusing an interview with national publications?

A point raised by Stoddard about the focus on politics over policy is also an interesting change that should be investigated more in depth. Exactly how much coverage in the past few elections was focused on the cat-and-mouse race over the actual government and policy changes spearheaded by the candidates?

A content analysis into print and television news coverage during the past few election cycles would be effective in answering that question.

Possible Publications for Submission.

The best publications for this research to be published are the ones that focus on political communication. The three most fitting are: "American Political Science Review," "American Journal of Political Science," and "Political Communication." These journals all focus on politics and how it relates to other fields. The most fitting for this research would be "Political Communication."

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