

A STUDY OF SNARK

IN NEWS MEDIA

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IN NEWS MEDIA

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ii
LIST OF FIGURES	iv
LIST OF TABLES.....	v
ABSTRACT.....	vi
Chapter	
1.INTRODUCTION.....	1
2.LITERATURE REVIEW.....	6
3.PRETEST METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS.....	29
4.EXPERIMENT METHODOLOGY.....	53
5.EXPERIMENT RESULTS.....	63
6.DISCUSSION.....	77
7.CONCLUSIONS.....	96
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	110
APPENDIX I.....	116
How Others Describe the Snark of Gawker Media	
APPENDIX II.....	123
Participant Definitions of Snark	

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
Figure 1. Mean snark index scores by factor category, all 20 news excerpts.....	36
Figure 2. Mean snark index scores by factor category, 8 experiment news excerpts.....	40
Figure 3. Mean engagement reactions.....	64
Figure 4. Mean entertainment reactions.....	66
Figure 5. Mean humor reactions.....	68
Figure 6. Mean credibility reactions.....	70
Figure 7. Mean desire for style reactions.....	72

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
Table 1. Five attributes for the Pretest.....	33
Table 2. 10 Original Gawker News Excerpts, Headlines and Scores.....	35
Table 3. 10 Original NYT News Excerpts, Headlines and Scores.....	35
Table 4. Pretest Mean Statistics, by Factor Category.....	37
Table 5. Pretest Paired-Samples T-Test of Snark Index Scores.....	37
Table 6. The Eight Experiment News Excerpts, Headlines and Scores.....	39
Table 7. Mean experiment news excerpt snark scores	40
Table 8. Repeated measures ANOVA of 8 experiment stories' scores	40
Table 9. The Eight Experiment News Excerpts, Headlines and Scores.....	55
Table 10. Mean Engagement Reactions.....	64
Table 11. Repeated measures ANOVA of the engagement measure.....	65
Table 12. Mean Entertainment Reactions.....	66
Table 13 Repeated measures ANOVA of the entertainment measure.....	66
Table 14. Mean Humor Reactions.....	68
Table 15. Repeated measures ANOVA of the humor measure	68
Table 16. Mean Credibility Reactions.....	70
Table 17. Repeated measures ANOVA of the credibility measure.....	71
Table 18. Mean Desire for Style Reactions.....	73
Table 19. Repeated measures ANOVA of the desire for style measure.....	73

A STUDY OF SNARK IN NEWS MEDIA

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to examine the journalistic tone of snark. How does a snarky news tone affect audience reception among readers of both hard news and soft news stories? Specifically, the study sought to find how snark engaged and entertained readers and how humorous and credible readers found snark. An initial pretest of 41 participants read 20 news excerpts from the gossip news blog Gawker and the *New York Times* and rated them on a snark index of five qualities: wit, aggression, irony, informality, and critique.

The pretest successfully established that a difference in tone existed between the two news sources, based on the snark index, and allowed a subsequent experiment, involving 8 of the 20 news excerpts, to test for effects. In the experiment (N=99), people found snarky stories more engaging ($p<.05$), entertaining ($p<.01$), and humorous ($p<.01$) than non-snarky stories. However, people also found snark less credible ($p<.01$) and reported wanting to read snark less than regular news ($p<.01$). People reported finding soft news more entertaining ($p<.01$) and humorous ($p<.01$) than hard news, and this difference of story type significantly interacted with snark in all measures except entertainment.

The results suggest that snark has incredible power to attract attention. Considering the continuing expansion of Internet news media and increase in soft news coverage, further research needs to address journalistic tone and specifically biting, personality-driven snark.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Consider the word: snark. Snark is a tone, a voice, a label, and increasingly applied to snappish, clever writing. What does the idea of snarkiness evoke? What connotations? This study intended to explore a specific tone that has grown increasingly popular in recent years, even inspiring a book with its name: *snark*. Snark combines many subtle elements and for purposes of this study, comprises the attributes of wit, aggression, informality, irony, and critique. How does a snarky news media tone affect media reception among readers of both hard news and soft news stories? That central question dominates the two parts of this study: the first, a pretest establishing snarky and non-snarky texts based on a snark index (developed from the five attributes of snark), and the 2 x 2 experiment, which tested how snark influenced reader engagement and enjoyment as well as how they perceived snark's humor and credibility. The experiment also tested whether the type of story—hard or soft news—made a difference to newsreaders.

Snark has become a greater issue worth studying due to the state of today's journalism. The function of journalism, before and now, is to inform. But the Internet has brought questions of journalistic form and tone significantly into play. Today's news comes filtered through blogs, news aggregators, references from Wikipedia, YouTube, Tweets, and e-mailed links in addition to newspapers' own online sites. *How you say it* increasingly seems to matter in what amounts to an explosion among the media-converged chattering classes and information accessibility.

This explosion of information has led more and more to references of snark. Anything intelligently sarcastic, snippy, and biting eventually earns the label, especially if the content was posted online. The media's voice is evolving. At no time more dramatically than the present, in late 2009, is the traditional media world shaking on its very foundations due to inherent problems in the journalism business models, the onset of the Internet, and exacerbated by the American economic recession. The tracking website *Paper Cuts* reported that more than 15,471 journalism jobs were slashed in 2008 (Smith, 2009). 72,000 people have been laid off from the media industry from June 2000 to 2006 (Phillips, 2006). In the past year magazines such as *Gourmet*, *Vibe*, *Blender*, *Radar*, and *Cosmogirl* have been shut down. December 2008 revealed even darker signs of trouble: "...the Tribune Company, which owns the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Los Angeles Times*, filed for bankruptcy. The New York Times Company followed" (Gapper, 2008). These problems have extended to the publishing industry, as Random House reorganized to reduce costs, Simon & Schuster laid off 35 people, and Houghton Mifflin Harcourt froze acquiring new acquisitions near the end of 2008 (Rich, 2008).

Why this media crash? The Internet posed the initial great challenge for journalism. As many newspapers moved their content online, advertising dollars did not follow the content in similar measure, which has caused newspapers' advertising revenue to steadily drop in recent years. Advertising on the Internet is less concentrated and rates tend to be cheaper. Major consequences can come from seemingly minor changes to the model—Australian newspapers will lose up to a billion dollars in the next four years given the shift of classified ads online (Schulz, 2008).

But not all has been bleak. Online startups such as Gawker Media, Talking Points Memo, and The Huffington Post are attracting audiences of millions, and they have remained economically viable and even profitable in this media-crunched environment. The high web traffic has led to benefits: during the first half of 2009, Gawker Media's revenues were up 45% as traditional journalism verged on collapse (Denton, 2009). The Huffington Post's "advertising revenue in the third quarter had tripled over the same period in the prior year" in 2008 (Flamm). Gawker merits attention as the most notoriously snarky set of weblogs respinning the news.

Gawker Media was formed in December of 2002 and currently receives 94.9 million visits per month from around the world, in unique total from about 24.6 million different people (Grigoriadis, 2007 and Quantcast, 2009). Gawker Media blogs function as news aggregators, similar to the Huffington Post though focused more on their own snarky voice. Each Gawker site consists of several daily blog posts written by a small, paid staff, regurgitating major news items and gossip while commenting on different trends and affairs in the process.

Gawker's posts tend to be short. As Gawker's founder stated:

...the ideal Gawker item...is something triggered by a quote at a party, or an incident, or a story somewhere else and serves to expose hypocrisy, or turn conventional wisdom on its head. And it's 100 words long. 200 max" (Salkin, 2008).

These posts typically feature a snarky and irreverent editorial tone, casual and quick-witted and keeping to the essentials. Gawker "is a chatty morph of Page Six and the old *Spy* magazine—a must-read for anyone involved in the Gothamite stew of news junkiness, celebrity trash, and bitchy gossip" (Levy, 2004). These sites have covered many different

topics in the past six years, detailing Manhattan media news and gossip in the case of the flagship site as well as women's issues in *Jezebel*, perhaps the network's most nationally recognized website, political issues of Washington D.C. in the recently sold *Wonkette*, pornography in *Fleshbot*, sports in *Deadspin*, science fiction coverage in *io9*, Silicon Valley's developments in *Valleywag*, and more over time. The media network has, in total, had at least 12 different incarnations in different niches operating at the same time.

This network has grown from initial success—"By May 2003, Denton reported on Gawker that the site received more than 20,000 visitors per day and 500,000 page views per month"—to the current 24.8 million unique visitors each month, most appearing to come from the base of journalists, celebrities, and intellectuals entrenched in the media world, particularly around New York City and the coasts in general (Grigoriadis, 2007). Several articles give hints as to Gawker's audience: "...with the media-gossip blog Gawker.com, which I, like most journalists who cover stylish topics in New York, have read almost every day for five years..." (Grigoriadis, 2007); "Journalists tend to read Gawker, the caustic New York media gossip blog, to make sure they're not in it," (Newman, 2007); "Several times a day—oh hell, a dozen times a day—I click my way to Gawker and Wonkette for a couple of minutes of reading that usually elicit more guilt than pleasure" (Schafer, 2004). A collection of quotes about Gawker Media follow this study and can be found in Appendix I to give a sense of the company's evolving voice and media reception.

Although Gawker Media owns many blogs, the focus of this study will be the flagship site Gawker.com. This New York City-based flagship site was among the first in the network and perhaps the most general interest, often with a national emphasis, and tends to be associated with accusations of snark more frequently than any of the other network's sites.

Snark, with its wit and bite, may seem attractive and fun for the casual newsreader. Gawker's voice is the basis for its existence, given the general lack of reporting.

Does that snark hurt the information's credibility, though? One common complaint regarding these Internet start-ups is the lack of their own original, in-depth reporting—the websites serve as portals to and commentary on traditional media. But people still seek out these commentary-laden web portals as much as the original news sources, and the portals profit. News audiences have fragmented. Some people propose that advertising revenues will continue to drift online to these new news start-ups that blend the commentary of blogs with the delivery of information.

Indeed, the founder and publisher of Gawker Media, Nick Denton, has suggested such a future possibility. In October 2008, in a quote virtually amounting to a footnote, Nick Denton said, "Yeah, 2010 will be exciting. When advertising makes its final great shift online and we can afford to hire the journalists we most respect" ("Friday is Always Black," 2008). Denton's quote suggests Gawker may employ more original reporting over time, despite the traditional outsider posturing Gawker usually had assumed. If Gawker eventually moves towards hiring its own legitimate reporters (rather than paid staff bloggers), then the nature of Gawker's voice and its audience engagement will become even more important.

For now, of course, Gawker relies on its snark to draw nearly 25 million visitors a month, the effects of which are worth qualifying and quantifying. What does snark really mean? Do people even find snark more humorous than traditional reporting? Perhaps snarky writing only appeals to people in celebrity gossip, in soft news. The study examined this editorial voice and explored what has made the snarky tone of such a news aggregator so apparently addictive to those with an interest or involvement in the media world and beyond.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Onset of a blogosphere

The modern conception of snark seems to be an outgrowth of the Internet's evolving set of news websites and blogs and rests at the heart of this examination. The real focus of the study, specifically, is the voice of Gawker.com, with the *New York Times* serving as a baseline voice representing the mainstream media. This study draws on scholarship from a variety of fields, yet given the freshness of the blogosphere and the concept of web portals combined with limited research on voice, the literature touching on the specific topic is limited.

The context of the Internet is particularly salient given the crisis-transitional stages the news media has been entering in recent years and particularly the past two years; the Internet has laced all its activity with elements of marketing and branding, even rather explicitly turning individual personality into a brand with the advent of social networking. The Internet has affected the way news media brands itself, too. To that end, utilizing a snarky tone offers identity and entertainment capable of distinguishing a website.

First, a blog, or more formally a weblog, should be defined briefly. Jorn Barger was the first to call his website a "weblog" back in 1997 and two years later in 1999 the first reference to a "blog" appeared ("It's the Links", 2006). As Chafee advised in 1975, the news media cannot and should not be simplified as a monolithic force, and the same is true of weblogs. Starting primarily in the first half of the 2000s, many platforms such as Blogger,

Wordpress, Livejournal, and Tumblr developed and allowed free blogging, which was initially often of a personal nature (Pew, 2006), though Matheson (2004) estimates that half of all blogs deal with public affairs, as Neil Thurman points out in his 2008 journal article in *New Media & Society*, also mentioning the nine million weblogs indexed by Technorati.com in 2008. The 2006 Pew study estimated that 12 million Americans, mostly younger individuals (54% under the age of 30) located in urban and suburban areas, keep blogs and that 95% of bloggers get news from the Internet (but not exclusively).

Blogs features a listing of posts or entries, with allowance for comments on each one. Each post has its own headline and typically some type of visual image and text hyperlinking to other websites. There might be embedded video or, less commonly, audio in the posts. The Gawker layout features the first 25 to 50 words of each post in a vertical stream down the page, and the reader can click on each individual post to see its entirety and all the comments beneath the post. Many academic articles exploring blogs tend to miss what for this study is the heart of the matter. That Internet research often emphasizes personal blogs rather than the minority of professional, staff-run blogs, though the latter are becoming increasingly common. Today many traditional publications even hire their reporters to run blogs, such as Andrew Sullivan's blogging for *The Atlantic*.

Blogs can function as personal diaries, as chroniclers of a niche area of news, as general news aggregators, in the form of group blogs, and in other ways. There exist corporate bloggers for major companies and in the case of Gawker.com, paid staff writers. Different styles and cultural identities emerge among these different types of blogs, sometimes ranging widely depending on the individual.

Increasingly blogs have been folded into journalism and other professional institutions. In recent years, “money flowed in” to the blogosphere, now “subject to market principles” (Carlson, 2009). Blogs have begun increasing the speed of the news cycle and bringing about a new form of accountability, traits which suggest blogs have a part in society’s “journalistic future” (Abrahamson, 2005). Gawker Media gained a far greater of prominence in the last decade with its own snarky, disaffected style, prompting one New York journalist to write that:

...they [Gawker Media’s founder and writers] didn’t exactly invent the blog, but the tone they used for Gawker became the most important stylistic influence on the emerging field of blogging and has turned into the de facto voice of blogs today” (Grigoriadis, 2007).

One journal article called Gawker Media a threat to old-style public interest journalism due to the way Gawker monetizes its stories and relies on rumor (Moore, 2007). In November 2003 (less than a year after Gawker’s founding in December 2002), *New York* magazine noted:

The site—with its withering, sharp-witted Manhattan-centric take on media and celebrity culture—almost immediately captured the attention of the New York (and beyond) chattering classes and has since turned into something approaching a media utility. We *depend*, on it. Everyone from William Safire and Howard Stern to *Time* and, well, *New York* Magazine took notice...

Gawker decreed, by example, that blogs should be not only loquacious but erratic, funny, bitchy, passionate, and obsessive to the point of being a little demented (Dumenco).

The Apotheosis of Snark

Increasingly that tone ascribed to Gawker above has come to be called “snark,” the word at the heart of this study. Often people apply the word to writing online that they find

biting, sarcastic, and a variety of other elements. Gawker's tone is virtually always associated with the word snarky. The definition, naturally, is a loose one because the definition continues to evolve in the public's eye, but this study seeks to pinpoint exactly what elements comprise snark and its journalistic significance. Stephen Glass, a writer who fabricated several articles for *The New Republic* "finds himself increasingly encouraged to write 'snarky, glib, superior' copy and learns that what a journalist is looking for is 'a good story; accuracy's only half of it'" (Shapiro, 2006).

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines snark in the following terms: 1 : crotchety, snappish, 2 : sarcastic, impertinent, or irreverent in tone or manner. The dictionary dates the word's use as an adjective back to 1906 ("from the dialectical British snark, meaning 'to nag, find fault with'"), but time has changed the semantics of snark, with increased usage as well as an apparent change in meaning (Baldwin, 2001). The word, in its current context, would seem to encompass several concepts on its own, including a culture of irony, a concept that has been explored in the tone of men's magazines before.

Applied to blogs and the Internet, the word snark has come to mean witty or cheeky as often as obnoxious. People have been referring to snarky writing for years though, such as in one *American Journalism Review* issue from 1999 that cited "...that snarky impeachment coverage you find in the lifestyle and entertainment sections" (Robertson). Bloggers, according to one journalism professor, simply "stepped into the gap" that the mainstream news had left open, in order to provide "opinionated, snarky, smart" commentary, now available online from individuals such as Andrew Sullivan, Markos Moulitsas, Josh Marshall, Mickey Kaus, Ana Marie Cox, Ezra Klein (Stephens, 2009, 18).

Yet the current incarnation of snark continues to have detractors—David Denby of the *New Yorker* published a book, *Snark*, in January 2009 attacking the culture of snark and what he perceives as its universal history, whether in *Spy* of the 1980s or on Gawker.com today. “Snark is a teasing, rug-pulling form of insult,” wrote Denby,

that attempts to steal someone’s mojo, erase her cool, annihilate her effectiveness, and it appeals to a knowing audience that shares the contempt of the snarker and therefore understands whatever references he makes. It’s all jeer and josh, a form of bullying, except at its highest levels, beggars the soul of humor (*Snark*, 2009, 4).

Denby claims that snarky phrases “have a definite tone, and, for a large audience, they scratch a recurring itch. They draw on what might be called superfluous anger, which presents itself to the snarker and his fans as entirely justified nastiness” (*Guardian*, 2009).

Denby’s interpretation of snark focuses heavily on the element of aggression, and he refers to snark as “failed wit” (*Guardian*, 2009). This interpretation and narrow definition has come under attack in reviews and magazine articles, however. As the reviewer in *New York* magazine wrote:

I enjoy snark. I practice snark. And I hope herein to defend snark....Denby’s book is serious, and wrong, and it deserves an appropriate response...Snark, irony’s brat, flourishes in an age of doublespeak and idiocy that’s too rarely called out elsewhere. Snark is not a honk of blasé detachment; it’s a clarion call of frustrated outrage (Sternbergh, 2009, 1-2).

Other reviewers expressed problems with how Denby attempted to define snark. A *New York Times* critic wrote that snark “is defined by Denby in many ways—so many, in fact, that the creature never materializes as anything more than a shadow on a wall that Denby keeps shooting at yet never hits” (Kirn, 2009).

The best conceptualization of snarkiness comes from the creation of the snark index in this study's pretest, an index that combines wit, aggression, and critique, irony, and informality, all attributes commonly ascribed to the tone. The experiment and index set out to determine whether there is a statistical tonal difference between excerpts from a news source reputed for its apparent snarkiness, Gawker.com, and the traditional *New York Times*.

Links to the magazine world, an issue of voice

Although no prior academic studies have considered snark, studies have examined the changing journalistic tone of magazines over the years. This changing tone is a vital part of how people receive their news, especially given the radical changes of media in recent years. Gawker also merits attention as a news publication because, as a *Wired* journalist noted about the website's early years, "[Gawker founder] Denton's move to professionalize blogs bestowed instant credibility on an unknown single-writer Web site... Denton hadn't merely created a blog, he'd created a brand" (Levy, 2004). Gawker Media has continued its professionalization of blogs throughout the last half decade, part of a wider blogging trend noted in *The Atlantic* (Carlson, 2009).

The journal article "Ironic Discourse: Evasive Masculinity in Men's Lifestyle Magazines" approached the issue of tone from a gender-specific perspective and was published in a 2004 issue of *Men and Masculinities*. The author originally wanted to simply study masculinity in men's magazines such as *GQ*, only to encounter friction at a British professional conference over the intended irony in the magazine content. The resulting paper then dealt with tone in two magazine case studies.

The paper's author, Bethan Benwell, explores what she terms "new lad" masculinity, which in the editorial sense means a voice that displays "...the unrelenting omnipresence of a certain knowingness, self-referentiality, and humor, all commonly glossed as irony" (Benwell, 2004, 3-4). As Wayne C. Booth declares in his book *A Rhetoric of Irony*, "irony has come to stand for so many things we are in danger of losing it as a useful term altogether" as many people have come to use the word beyond its original meaning (1974, 2). Benwell's straightforward reference to self-referentiality, humor, and that "certain knowingness" hit close to the mark when describing the tone of both magazines as well as potentially that of Gawker.com, which appears to have assumed a very similar tone to that of men's magazine writers in its brief online history.

Benwell also makes the important point that objectively identifying irony can be extremely difficult, relying on cues and personal reader knowledge in addition sometimes to knowledge of the publication's own voice and style. In men's magazines, Benwell says, "the elusiveness of irony is compounded by a multivocality at the heart of the relationship between text, writer, and reader," a situation also true of textual discourse online (2004, 11). She cites useful definitions from other scholars, such as Hutcheon's 1994 statement that irony is "the making or inferring of meaning in addition to and different from what is stated, together with an attitude toward both the said and the unsaid" and Winner's 1997 description of the "sheer outrageousness of the ['ironic'] proposition" (12).

The question of how people process these messages and the editorial voice's impact on them comes into play in some of the research conducted on verbal irony. In one study in the *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* entitled "How Sarcastic Are You? Individual Difference and Verbal Irony" (Ivanko, Pexman, and Olinek, 2004), the researchers point out

the different models for processing irony: the direct access model (Gibbs, 1986, 1994), wherein "...ironic utterances are processed by parallel activation of literal and figurative meanings, and the predicted consequence is that literal and ironic utterances should take about the same amount of time to process"; yet the graded salience hypothesis (Giora et al) has argued that "...irony processing involves activation of the literal meaning before the ironic, and then simultaneous consideration of the literal and ironic meanings" (Ivanko et al, 246). Much of this research concerns how and whether people can interpret this style of discourse, however, rather than how they emotionally and intellectually respond to it as a delivery style.

Awareness of such cognitive nuance is important in discussing and considering how demographic factors such as education and age influence the models through which individuals perceive the snarky voice of Gawker Media, a reception likely dependent upon just these sort of models. Those questions would come up in follow-up study and analysis, looking at the extent to which different groups of people even comprehend the humor and personality as the Gawker writers intend it.

The gender issues that Benwell brings up are less germane to the bigger research question at hand with Gawker Media, though the discussion of editorial voice is critically important. When she looks at *Loaded*, *GQ*, and other men's magazines, Benwell discovers that often the irony lays hidden in the meaning and often with no explicit disclaimers; the sense of irony, she clarifies in her conclusion, becomes known through "a cultural acquaintance with the genre and the many responses made about it in the wider media—in other words, the tacit knowledge that the new lad culture and ideals are essentially ironic. In this sense, then, irony is not necessarily integrated into the discourse" (2004, 16).

Here again there exist potential direct parallels with Gawker Media in regards to the common understanding from many media-entrenched people that Gawker is inherently snarky as a genre. Its writers and tone belong to that “essentially ironic” culture. Snark’s irony should be regarded as one of the tone’s attributes. The specific word choice in later questioning, referring to “ironical” rather than simply “ironic,” is based in this research on magazine voice and reflects the broader imbedded culture and tone of irony, rather than referring to any single ironic instance. Emily Gould, a former writer for Gawker.com, used her experiences from Gawker and other blogging to compose a May 2008 feature essay for *The New York Times Magazine*. In this essay, she described the Gawker.com voice as follows:

Confronted with endless examples of unfairness, favoritism and just plain stupidity among New York’s cultural establishment, the Gawker “voice” was righteously indignant but comically defeated, sighing in unison with an audience that believed nothing was as it seemed and nothing would ever really change. Everyone was fatter or older or worse-skinned than he or she pretended to be. Every man was cheating on his partner; all women were slutty. Writers were plagiarists or talentless hacks or shameless beneficiaries of nepotism. Everyone was a hypocrite. No one was loved. There was no success that couldn’t be hollowed out by the revelation of some deep-seated inadequacy.

A personality-driven form of writing

This biting voice of Gawker coincides well with what Richard Burton, editor of the *Telegraph.co.uk* told researchers in a qualitative interview about the cult of personality liable to develop with blogging platforms; Burton’s comments “suggest that the emphasis blogs typically give to the personality of the writer—the messenger rather than the message—may have contributed to their slow adoption by mainstream news sites” (Thurman, 2008,146)

Indeed, at Gawker Media, various writers become virtual household names among certain media circles—Alex Balk, Elizabeth Spiers, Choire Sicha, Jessica Coen, Emily Gould, and so on—and after their time at Gawker, many have proceeded into prime writing and editing positions at magazines such as *New York*, *Vanity Fair*, and the late *Radar*. These bloggers become “chattering-class VIPs” (Dumenco, 2003).

The issue of voice contains the least amount of research conducted, at least within academic journals and relating to news media tone. Even among non-academic analyses, the discussion topic is rarely thoroughly pursued. But “testing the limits of journalistic writing has been taking place for quite a few decades, maybe even forever” (Robertson, 1999). The topic emerged perhaps most explicitly in the so-called “New Journalism” movement of the 1960s and ’70s, pioneered by Tom Wolfe and trumpeting the in-depth, long-form narrative works of Truman Capote, George Plimpton, early Hunter S. Thompson, and Gay Talese, among several others. In his 50 pages of introductory exposition to the 1973 *The New Journalism* anthology, Wolfe writes:

Most non-fiction writers, without knowing it, wrote in a century-old British tradition in which it was understood that the narrator shall assume a calm, cultivated and, in fact, genteel voice. The idea was that the narrator’s own voice should be like the off-white or putty-colored walls...a ‘neutral background’ against which bits of color would stand out. *Understatement* was the thing.

...but the trouble was that by the early 1960s understatement had become an absolute pall. Readers were bored to tears without understanding why. When they came upon that pale beige tone, it began to signal to them, unconsciously, that a well-known bore was here again, ‘the journalist,’ a pedestrian mind, a phlegmatic spirit, a faded personality... (Wolfe, 19)

Wolfe understood the power of branding and of personality. He insisted that this energetic voice, utilizing literary techniques such as character and even theme as well as nonstandard punctuation, did not interfere with objectivity and, in fact, served to engage readers far better than traditional journalism. Although Wolfe spoke primarily of long-form narrative pieces of the magazine and feature tradition and Gawker Media involves brief items of a mere few hundred words, what unites them is that very sense of personality and an attempt to project a magnetic, identifiable persona in the writing. One Master's project in the 1980s did track the disappearance of the "New Journalism" writing among magazines, though that study relied on qualitative interviews and more traditionally journalistic reporting rather than focusing the theoretical nature and significance of the movement (Beuttler, 1984). An essayist suggested that while Tom Wolfe and other New Journalism writers sought the thoughts of their journalistic subjects, "attitude today interjects the thoughts of the writer into the piece" (Robertson, 1999). That attitude, privileging the writer in question, would seem to harmonize with the punchy, critical style of snark.

As one journalism professor wrote earlier this year, the walls between news and opinion seem to be "vestigial remains of an earlier journalism" (Stephens, 2009, 18). Other modern examples of this voice include satirical news programs, specifically the television shows *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*. Those two television programs reflect perhaps most accurately the style of spin and snark that Gawker.com takes to the news, though with fewer accusations of cruelty leveled at the TV shows. Fewer people today name favorite journalists, according to a 2007 Pew study on journalism, and those who do have favorites tend to gravitate towards one with a specific voice, style, and demographic—10% of people named Fox News Channel's conservative host Bill O'Reilly as their favorite and

6% of those under 30 call Comedy Central's Jon Stewart their favorite journalist. The Pew study describes the current media environment as fragmented, and those standing out amid the fragments are those with a distinct, defined voice.

Impact on readers

Distinctive voices may stand out, but how do readers respond to the tone behind them? As one essayist wrote in *American Journalism Review*, the thought of giving journalism an edge inspires a gamut of reactions, from delight about developing writer's voice to horror at stylish subjectivity (Robertson, 1999). Discovering the influence of tone on different types of stories is what motivates this study. What difference does reading a snarky news story or a traditional news story mean for a reader? Does the content of the story matter, hard news versus soft news? Do people want to read more snark? Does the tone engage and entertain them? Is it humorous? Does tone affect how people interpret credibility? Those are central questions of this study.

It may come down to appropriateness of setting, one essayist suggests: "Venue and medium often, but not always, dictate the acceptable level of edge [in journalistic writing]" (Robertson, 1999). Setting becomes even more complicated online, and this issue is compounded by what the researchers have called the "hyperlink culture" (Stafford, Stafford, & Schkade, 2004). The news, researchers say, is indeterminate, and "in the hypertext era, reading information online can lead the web user anywhere" (Stafford et al., 2004, 535). How should people navigate the Internet to find what they want amid the countless websites? Today many Internet users deal with this issue of indeterminate content by finding a jumping-off point from which to approach the news media, often a news aggregator or portal

such as their Yahoo homepage or a Google Reader, where newsreaders see a healthy mix of headlines and blurbs which guide their surfing experience. The Huffington Post operates in much the same way, as an aggregator and selector of news, though with slightly more editorial flair. The Huffington Post applies its own headlines and original commentary to external, linked reporting. Gawker Media takes this model to the extreme, scooping up top relevant news stories but rewriting the blurbs with its own snarky voice.

Gawker's style plucks from many news sources, which can disorient newsreaders about content's origins. Confronted with countless and often perhaps unknown sources, newsreaders face the ethical dilemma of processing the credibility of their news. Yet a 2007 study on newspaper sourcing stated "the question of whether anonymous sources cost credibility may not be easily answered. It may be that readers are more sophisticated in their judgments concerning sourcing than some editors presume" (Smith, 2007, 17). Those findings suggested that readers disliked anonymous sourcing only when the anonymity was a springboard into a personal attack, so perhaps the vagueness of a hyperlinked, connected culture does not affect how readers rate the credibility of news sources.

But credibility is an intellectual assessment and only one part of the newsreading experience. Ultimately, does that hyperlink culture of clicking and navigating affect newsreaders' engagement and satisfaction? A major question in examining the impact of different voices is how engaged readers feel after reading a story as well as whether they want to read more. In the online news marketplace, entertainment often translates into engagement for the reader, an immersion and attachment to the news source.

Traditional media of radio, television, magazines, and newspapers have previously been seen as "not only sources of entertainment but also a means for obtaining information

about everyday life” (Lichtenstein & Rosenfield, 1983, 106). Some recent research in the last decade suggests the Internet has added an additional degree of satisfaction to uses and gratification in the form of social dimension, though this has yet to be fully qualified and determined (Stafford et al., 2004).

Some research suggests that blogs may be the best way to create that social feeling of interactivity. Blogs “represent the best-known form of invitation that writers use to initiate conversations with readers online” (Thurman, 2008, 145). Newsreaders may welcome news blogs for their social stimulation, potentially triggered through a snarky, personality-driven journalistic voice.

Hard News versus Soft News

A snarky active voice may not be welcome in all types of news, however, given its potentially subjective nature. People have distrusted personality-driven writing such as in the New Journalism movement, as cited earlier, and relegated such stylistic writing to lifestyles pages and glossy magazines. One central question and the second independent variable of this study concerns how a news story’s type as hard or soft influences readers and whether that status has an interaction effect with tone. The definitions of hard and soft news have undergone superficial changes in wording over the years, but the underlying definitions have remained consistent. In 1982, the author of *Understanding News* wrote,

...hard stories are characterized by conflict (violence). Soft stories include humor and human interest. The major areas of hard news are: North Ireland, industrial relations (strikes), race relations, crime, ‘single-issue’ campaigns (nuclear power, abortion...), social welfare (education, housing and the NHS), etc. ‘Soft’ news occupies the tailpiece of news bulletins, where the newsleader settles more comfortably, smiles... We’re then

treated to one-armed shepherds and fairy stories by Prince Charles (Hartley).

The author's description is dated but it reflects the significant division between more substantive beats of coverage—involving law enforcement, the economy, politics, and so on—and the human interest ones, which include celebrity coverage, some of the arts, some of the longer, narrative profiles, and those stories that have less immediate stake, typically, in regards to money or security.

One of the recurring themes of media studies of the past two decades has been the fear that hard news reporting—especially original, investigative reporting—is decreasing. Much of this owes to the expense of the reporting, the desires of consumers, and the marketing principles infiltrating journalism: “The consequence is that the networks have moved significantly away from the hard news business...the nightly newscasts, too, have shifted to less reported news of the work of civic institutions to more entertainment and celebrity attraction” (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001, 170).

The type of news, hard or soft, could have great significance in this study because a snarky tone might be better suited to one type than another. Snarky writing has typically been more associated with soft news, such as celebrity coverage and theater reviews, and readers might not report positive reactions to hard news being written in a glib, casual, and potentially mocking tone of snark. One Master's thesis examined the “celebri-fication” of women's magazines and interviewed some of their editors. “We've become a celebrity-driven culture,” one of the editors said (Hendrickson, 2005).

Uses and Gratifications

In the context of this study, uses and gratifications becomes the most theoretically appropriate frame to consider a snarky voice in, though this study has a more specific focus on tone and voice than most uses and gratifications studies do. As Elliot said in 1974, uses and gratifications takes a more “mentalistic” approach, entering people’s minds and making deeper assumptions about how those processes operate with deeper cognitive examination (Lichtenstein & Rosenfield, 1983). This study would not be able to make any such leaps into the individual—the primary focus is on “gratifications obtained” from news story voice, and that gratification here refers to reported reactions rather than cognitive stirrings. Yet the results would essentially offer an important and valid consumer perspective in the evolving news industry marketplace. The focus would be less about the personal gratifications obtained and more about what the individuals think of the language and voice of the news source—in essence, the often overlooked “satisfaction with the media experience. Satisfaction is defined as the emotional response following an experience with a product or service and is influenced by base-level perceptions” (Vishwanath, 2008). Specifically, the best and most relevant related studies concern audience reception towards media.

Past uses and gratifications research has established that news consumers actively select among news sources “based on their ability to gratify their needs for information, entertainment, social interaction, and escapism (e.g., Henke, 1985; Lin, 1993; McDonald, 1990; Parker & Plank, 2000; Vincent & Basil, 1997)” (Diddi & LaRose, 2006). In the Internet age, the relevance of this choice as a consumer act is even more important. The news media industry is incredibly unstable and the transition from print advertising to online

advertising has hurt many traditional print publications. Publications now typically offer their content for free online, attempt to reap advertising dollars from embedding advertisements in the webpage, and often barely scrape by. Gawker Media claimed to be turning a profit in fall 2008, according to the network's founder (Denton, 2008). Electronic consumer models must uncover the ways in which people use and negotiate their way through the Internet (Stafford et al., 2004).

One relevant deeper question behind this issue of tone asks why readers of news seek out a filter and commentary site such as Gawker to read their news. Why not just focus on the *New York Times'* online site, for instance, or the *Washington Post's* or even CNN.com? Much media uses and gratification research in the past has dealt with the choices make when seeking out news. Of course, much of that past research emphasized the audience choices among different print and broadcast items, not fully taking into account the massive choice in online news readerships (and viewerships, given streaming online news video), especially near the end of the new millennium's first decade.

Nature of the Gratifications

The language of news gratification has changed dramatically in recent decades, given the evolution in information consumption and delivery. In the 1980s, uses and gratifications researchers sought to show how newspaper subscriptions (specifically looking at Sunday subscriptions versus weekday) resulted in surveillance of the surrounding world, diversion from the surrounding world, and interaction with the surrounding world (Towers, 1986). The media saturation of the present day has rendered that analysis, from both the reception and the delivery standpoint, inadequate.

In general, people appear to derive “convenient recreational diversion” from reading newspapers, a feeling the Internet enhances: “Accessing electronic news rather than print journalism can enhance escape from the repetitive, adding novelty of content” (Wilson, 2005, 399). The authors of these studies, primarily dealing with focus groups, focus on the significance of play for readers of Internet news. The fluid, link-laden nature of the Internet changes the limitations on narrative that existed in traditional print journalism.

Signs indicate that these visual and brand trademarks are especially significant online. One 2003 study brought together two Malaysian focus groups to receive feedback on how these individuals responded to reading and navigating news sites online (Wilson, Hamzah & Khattab, 2003). The researchers discovered that a much greater degree of interactivity accompanies reading online journalism and that people’s reactions to it differ. They like the ability to choose and focus online, though typically consider print newspapers to be more comprehensive. The consumption of the news is balanced with the reality that “...going online as a means of accessing information functional in everyday life can also be playful distraction...” and the attractiveness of news websites potentially reflects that (Wilson et al., 2003, 534). Reading news online and surfing the Internet can be more akin to a game at times, allowing for much more activity on the part of the media consumer. Those factors would need to be seriously considered in future studies, which could take into account the presence of a commenting function, hyperlinks, and readers’ awareness of news source.

As a result, gratification from today’s online media seems to be much more loose than that derived from traditional narratives. “Mid-narrative hypertext links on a webpage inviting ‘travel’ to other items can mean stories being half-read, a cursory attention to content. Readers lose interest in the accuracy of anticipated outcomes, in their projections of

narrative development” (Wilson, 2005, 403). Some members of the study’s focus group commented that when reading traditional print journalism, they found the style cramped and their attention lost amid the columns.

The conclusion of that study suggests that searching through news on the Internet constitutes play but in a profound and serious way, achieved in maturity. Given the fragmented narratives and nature of web searching and surfing, the element of voice again achieves potentially new importance. Voice is the hinge around which readers swing through the plethora of websites and what links them to one another.

The Internet’s Contribution to “Liquid Journalism”

The Internet has opened up that world of choice in a more dynamic way. In the Malaysian focus groups, the participants expressed their awareness that different newspapers have different priorities, an awareness of what the researchers termed the “ideologically-infected (or inflected) narrativial accounts of the world which sustain the status quo” in online newspapers, an awareness of which seems perfectly fitting for a new media world in which Gawker Media can rise and thrive (Wilson et al., 2003, 536).

This drift away from few elite central news sources that position themselves as “objective” has been recognized in professional essays of media criticism. This concentration of media power in corporate hands had, in and of itself, already been a significant change to which news rooms were still adjusting, as marketing and editorial agendas have collided in recent decades (Klinenberg, 2005). In the *International Journal of Communication*, Mark Deuze writes that:

...traditional role perceptions of journalism influenced by its occupational ideology—providing a general audience with information of general interest in a balanced, objective, and ethical way—do not seem to fit all that well with the lived realities of reporters and editors, nor with the communities they are supposed to serve (2008, 848).

That reality suits the active choice the Internet provides news consumers as well as with the prominent use of news portals to access articles from a variety of sources in the news industry. In the essay, Deuze highlights the individual, the liquid nature of the concepts “journalism” and “citizen” as well as the monitorial, selective focus that people now take to the table as they negotiate the “mediapolis” confronting them.

Deuze also brings up a telling point about the state of the media today: “it [traditional journalism] does not seem to be able to engage the consumer-citizen in a meaningful way” (2008, 860). This cognitive dissonance extends to the journalists themselves. According to some statistics, 62% of journalists working at national media outlets said that journalism is heading in the wrong direction compared to 51% in 2004, according to a recent issue of the *Columbia Journalism Review* (Anon, 2008). In that same table, 48% of those journalists said that dividing their time across the print and Web helps their work overall. Journal articles have come forth with a more critical eye towards the mainstream media, “criticized in recent years for its overzealousness in the increased pursuit for tabloid stories, or in the case of the War in Iraq, a distinct lack of zealotry in the pursuit of the links between 9/11 terrorists and Iraq” (Champlin & Knoedler, 2008). The definition of what constitutes a journalist is increasingly blurred in this new environment. In 2007, political comedian Jon Stewart ranked as America’s fourth most admired journalist (Pew). Incidentally, much of Gawker.com’s content criticizes and comments on mainstream with just this same sort of dubiousness, and

as a writer for the *American Journalism Review* noted as early as 2002, “blogging has its roots in media criticism” (Seipp).

And since its inception, blogging has potentially affected the format of online newspapers, as alluded to earlier. Though adapting to the interactive content occurred slowly at first, potentially owing to a schism between journalists and bloggers, major newspapers’ websites often reflect the converging media atmosphere. According to a content analysis of 105 U.S. daily newspaper websites, “online newspapers are not implementing a majority of blog-based features; they are however, implementing some of the most important – specifically free archives and permalink” (LeBel, 2005). Since that 2005 paper, the blog elements have only increased among online newspapers. The *New York Times* features a vibrant comments section among its online news stories, as well as informal blogs dealing with subjects such as alcohol and literature. Its website contains streaming video on the homepage. The various anchors of cable news networks, such as CNN’s Anderson Cooper, have their own blogs. All these online elements help contribute to the interactivity mentioned in the Malaysian focus groups (Stafford et al, 2004) and the liquidity Deuze refers to in today’s journalism (2008).

The blurred lines between traditional journalism and online writing may also impact the credibility of the writing, which this study sought to examine. Credibility has often been discussed in relation to online content and in print writing style. In the late ’90s, people such as Sandra Mims Rowe, editor of *The Oregonian*, worried about the influence of flair and considered edgy writing could damage credibility; Rowe had “launched a credibility initiative while president of the American Society of Newspaper Editors” in 1997 (Robertson, 1999). Many prior studies considered credibility as a multidimensional index of

fairness, comprehensiveness, accuracy, and believability (Cassidy, 2007), the same index this study used in its central experiment, outlined later in the methods and results chapters. As more media moves online and more people access their news online, the question of online news presentation and credibility comes strongly into play. Past research has shown that people judge the credibility of online content as they do content offline in the same ways (Cassidy, 2007).

The ultimate result, increasingly, is dynamic news presentation across a variety of media. In one uses and gratifications study of CNN's *Anderson Cooper 360*, the researchers noticed the existence of the online broadcasts and other devices intended to spread the program. "Today's audiences constantly monitor the media environment, often accessing news and events using multiple gateways," says the researcher (Vishwanath, 2008, 18), referring to a changing landscape of media motives. In this case, television remained the primary gateway for news but that the audience's connection with the network remains active through "multiple modalities." The trick, according to this study, is maintaining brand identity across the media.

This multi-method approach to disseminating the news underscores the reality that media are undergoing radical changes in format and delivery across the board. Journalism is widely acknowledged to be transforming to adapt to new media, or at least many of the leaders in the field are attempting to do so. In 2009, many newspapers have their own accounts on Twitter. Other newspapers play around more with multimedia or delivering news via text message. Journalism schools are establishing programs of "convergence journalism," intended to unite broadcast, radio, photo and print journalism in the new media context.

Yet in this changing media landscape, one topic given surprisingly very little academic consideration is voice and tone, and this study hopes to shift that focus. Earlier this year, a journalism professor from NYU argued for a new model of journalism, “with more informed, more interpretive, more explanatory, even more impressionistic or opinionated takes on current events” and where “evenhandedness might no longer be a dominant value” (Stephens, 2009, 4). The voice delivering the news, in the present echo chamber of online news, is exceedingly relevant when looking at the various models of journalism emerging. A study of snark in today’s news media sought to address precisely that broader issue.

CHAPTER 3

PRETEST METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

Research Question: How does a snarky news media tone affect media reception among readers of both hard news and soft news stories?

Need for an experimental method

How does a snarky news media tone affect media reception among readers of both hard news and soft news stories? The research question considers media reception and falls under the broader uses and gratifications research. To answer the study's research question, the concept of snark needs to be defined and identified. The question of snark can and should be approached in several ways, but an experiment was the most appropriate method for drawing distinction between traditional and snarky tones and measuring the effects on readers.

A pretest helped establish the former (the definition of snark, the basis for one of the study's independent variables) and an experiment was the method capable of establishing that a relationship exists between tone and reader response, which seems like potentially the most critically important element in the discussion. That relationship is at the heart of everything that follows. The pretest sought to identify snark, and the experiment proceeded to quantify snark's effects on readers.

Eventually, other methods, particularly qualitative ones, will be important to demonstrate why people experience the reactions they do. The experiment of this study

allowed for a limited qualitative response—an open-ended question about the participants’ perceptions of snark. But this question only scratches the surface of the work that could be done. Some other relevant methods will include focus groups, where the nuance and complexity of news tone can be explored, and one-on-one interviews with newsreaders. A well-designed content analysis would also be helpful in examining the news tones of many different media outlets, such as the *New York Times* or Fox News, and for explicitly outlining the types of voice differences that characterize, for instance, magazines and newspapers.

But the existence of snark and its relationship to readers first needed to be established and quantified in an experiment. Experiments allowed for the testing of several dependent variables. The study took into account the story type—hard news or soft news—as a second independent variable, further outlining and narrowing the types of effects that snark may have on readers—and in what context. This method allowed for greater experimenter control, manipulation of independent variables, controls, and the ability to establish potentially significant cause and effect.

Pretest design: Isolating tone from news source

The first step to research was identifying snark. Snark, in the context of this study, is a tone through which information is delivered. The concept of snark comprises several dimensions, and for purposes of this experiment, a snark index was formed to capture the five primary attributes of snark: aggression, wit, critique, informality, and irony.

Snark was examined specifically in relation to its presence in news media. In the context of this study, news media refers broadly to any organized, staffed establishment, whether traditional print or online, which transmits news to readers. The content dispersed to

readers may be either original reported content or simply stylistically repackaged from other sources, as is increasingly common online.

The goal of the pretest was to establish differences in news tone. To accomplish this, people were shown 20 news headlines and excerpts, each bound from 150 to 200 words, and asked to rate the degree to which each news excerpt's tone was witty, aggressive, formal, ironical, and critical on a 10-point scale. The size of the excerpt, 150-200 words, was chosen first to limit the variation in news excerpt size, and second, because the majority of Gawker's blog posts are rather short and fall in that range (Salkin, 2008). The size also gives the participant readers enough text to assess tone, which people may not be able to properly do if examining a text with fewer than 150 words.

Of these 20 news excerpts, 10 came from the *New York Times*' website and 10 came from Gawker's flagship website, Gawker.com, infamous for its snark (see Appendix I for descriptions of Gawker's snarky tone over the past decade). Of each set of 10 news excerpts, 5 news excerpts contained hard news and 5 contained soft news, so ultimately there were four categories: five soft news stories from Gawker, five hard news stories from Gawker, five soft news stories from the *New York Times*, and five hard news stories from the *New York Times*. All 20 news excerpts came from 2008, were bound from 150 to 200 words, and can be read in their entirety at the end of this chapter.

In the pretest, in which participants rated the news excerpt's attributes, the participants were shown the following definitions to consult. The attribute's definitions were excerpted from Random House Unabridged Dictionary and Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, curbed to show relevant definitions relating to news tones. The choice of attributes for the snark index arose from the popular conceptions of snark (Dumenco, 2003;

Grigoriadis, 2007; Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2009; Salkin, 2008; Sternbergh, 2009) as well as from past literature (Benwell, 2004; Stephens, 2009). Snark's potential connection to certain magazine tones led to the choice of ironical; repeated reference's to snark's biting qualities and maliciousness justify aggressive, also reflected in snark's dictionary definition as "snappish"; snark has virtually always been classified as coming from a place of intelligence or cleverness, which explains witty; the combination of the last two traits suggests the next element, critical, in which snark takes a questioning, skeptical perspective on subjects at hand; and the colloquial loose nature of the tone suggests that informal would be an ideal measure. Snark's dictionary definition of "irreverent" supports both the informal and critical attributes. References to these traits can also be found in several media descriptions of snark and specifically Gawker's voice and found throughout the Introduction and Literature Review chapters, as well as in Appendix I.

The pretest asked participants to measure formality rather than informality because there would have been confusion in assigning a higher number to higher informality (akin to a double negative, if 10 were the most informal). Thus, asking about formality was more appropriate, though the formality score was flipped in order to include the informality measure in the snark index score.

Table 1. Five attributes for the pretest

WITTY: amusingly clever in perception and expression

AGGRESSIVE: characterized by or tending toward unprovoked offensives, attacks, invasions, or the like; militantly forward or menacing. Also, vigorously energetic, esp. in the use of initiative and forcefulness

FORMAL: following or according with established form, custom, or rule; done in due or lawful form; characterized by punctilious respect for form; of, reflecting, or noting a usage of language in which syntax, pronunciation, etc., adhere to traditional standards of correctness and usage is characterized by the absence of casual, contracted, and colloquial forms

IRONICAL: pertaining to, of the nature of, exhibiting, or characterized by irony or mockery: an ironical compliment; an ironical smile. Using or prone to irony: an ironical speaker.

CRITICAL: discerning; involving skillful judgment as to truth, merit, etc.; judicial; inclined to judge severely and find fault

Methods of participant recruitment and pretest administration

The 41 participants involved in the study's pretest were recruited from journalism classes at the University of Missouri, with the permission of the classes' professors. The majority of participants came specifically from broadcast journalism classes.

This pretest took participants no more than 30 minutes to complete. The experiment was conducted on computers to facilitate the data collection. Conducting the study in a university computer lab was also important because many people read news, especially snarkier news, online, and the computers keep that factor consistent in the study. The questions and news excerpts were administered to participants through the website Survey Monkey.

After the 41 participants rated the attributes of the 20 news excerpts, a snark index score was calculated for each of the 20 texts. To calculate the score, add the individual

attribute ratings (1-10) for the attributes Aggressive, Witty, Ironical, and Critical, then flipping the Formality score. The initial 0-50 score was doubled to consider the scores on a 100-point scale. Higher scores correspond with higher levels of snark in the tone.

Pretest results

The pretest's 20 news excerpts consisted of five news stories from each of the four factor categories: Gawker hard news, *New York Times* hard news, Gawker soft news, *New York Times* soft news, as shown in Tables 2 and 3 below. Participants' ratings in the pretest generated the 20 scores of the snark index. The snark index scores were intended to confirm an innate tonal difference based on the index's five attributes. A higher score indicates more snark.

These 20 snark scores were first examined considering solely the presence or lack of snark within all 20, and then a second analysis was conducted on the 4 highest and 4 lowest scoring news excerpts to set up the experiment that followed.

Table 2. 10 Original Gawker News Excerpts, Headlines and Scores

News Excerpt Headline	Snark Index Score
-----------------------	-------------------

Gawker Hard News

1. "Jews Are Conscienceless Thieves, Says Anti-Defamation League Boss"	56.54
2. " <i>Obama's Blago Report Drops in Two Hours!</i> "*	68.88
3. " <i>Utahns Furious as Senator Befriends John Forte</i> "	66.24
4. "Renault Can Shut Down Magazines in France"	62.63
5. "Iraq Is So Yesterday; Everyone's Doin' The Abu Dhabi!"	64.34

Mean Gawker Hard News Score: 63.7327

Gawker Soft News

1. " <i>OMG, The Sexiest Hills Ever?</i> "	67.71
2. "New Theatre Show Will Make You Uncomfortable Yet Happy, Just Like Theatre People Themselves"	55.12
3. " <i>On TV the Rich Get Richer, And We Keep Watching</i> "	67.17
4. "Doris Lessing Knows the Meaning of Life But is Just Withholding It"	52.20
5. "The NYT's Art Coverage: 'Cronyism'?"	56.29

Mean Gawker Soft News Score: 59.6976

Mean Gawker Score Overall: 61.71

Table 3. 10 Original NYT News Excerpts, Headlines and Scores

News Excerpt Headline	Snark Index Score
-----------------------	-------------------

New York Times Hard News

1. "Keeping Wary Eye on Crime as Economy Sinks"	36.78
2. " <i>Increase in Heroin Use Leads to Proposed Laws</i> "*	29.61
3. "Obama Seeks to Clarify His Disputed Comments on Diplomacy"	32.15
4. "Attacks Imperil Delicate U.S. Role Between Rivals"	31.95
5. " <i>Poverty Rates Decline in New York</i> "	31.17

Mean New York Times Hard News Score: 32.33

New York Times Soft News

1. "Hope for a Racist, and Maybe a Country"	55.85
2. " <i>A Literary Critic Drops His Ax and Picks Up His Pen</i> "	37.90
3. " <i>Buying into the Vineyard Lifestyle</i> "	29.85
4. "On a Barren Isle, Gift of the Gab and Subversive Charm"	49.07
5. "On Reality Shows, Love's Retreads Need Dates, Too"	61.07

Mean NYT Soft News Score: 46.75

Mean NYT Score Overall: 39.54

* In the case of Gawker, italicized scores refer to the highest scoring (IE, snarkiest) two news items in each five-item category, and in the case of the *New York Times*, italicized scores refer to the lowest scoring (IE, least snarky) two news items in each five-item category. These eight items, four at the extreme low and four at the extreme high, became the news items used in the experiment.

Analysis of Pretest Results, Tonal Differences Established

The pretest successfully identified snark. Six paired-samples T-tests established that a difference in tone exists between news stories from Gawker and from the *New York Times*. This difference, quantified in this pretest, reflects snark. The appropriate statistical tests are detailed below.

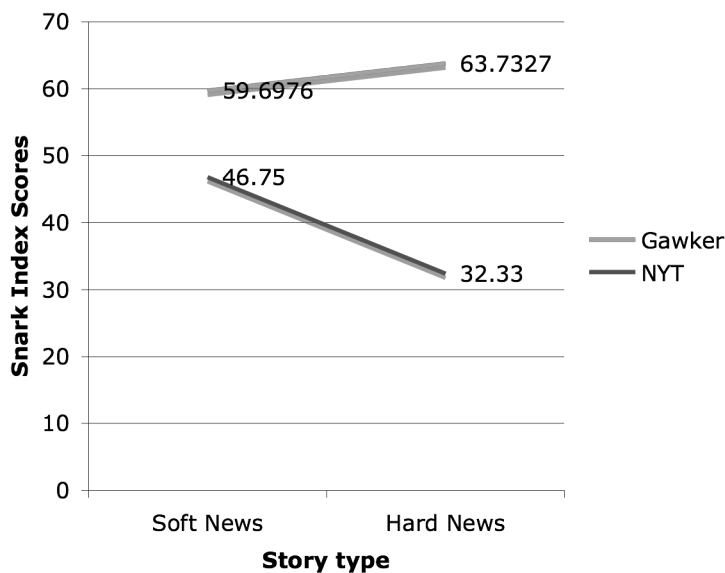


Figure 1. Mean snark index scores by factor category, all 20 news excerpts

Table 4. Pretest Mean Statistics, by Factor Category

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Pair 1	All Gawker	61.7122	41	11.11477
	All NYT	39.5415	41	9.03850
Pair 2	Gawker Hard News	63.7268	41	11.57703
	NYT Hard News	32.3317	41	11.27933
Pair 3	Gawker Soft News	59.6976	41	11.64879
	NYT Soft News	46.7512	41	9.44932
Pair 4	All Soft News	53.2244	41	9.67297
	All Hard News	48.0293	41	8.18786
Pair 5	Gawker Soft News	59.6976	41	11.64879
	Gawker Hard News	63.7268	41	11.57703
Pair 6	NYT Soft News	46.7512	41	9.44932
	NYT Hard News	32.3317	41	11.27933

Table 5. Pretest Paired-Samples T-Test of Snark Index Scores

		T	df	Significance (2-tailed)
Pair 1	All Gawker- All NYT	12.377	40	.000
Pair 2	Gawker Hard News- NYT Hard News	12.605	40	.000
Pair 3	Gawker Soft News- NYT Soft News	9.528	40	.000
Pair 4	All Soft News- All Hard News	5.114	40	.000
Pair 5	Gawker Soft News- Gawker Hard News	-3.834	40	.000
Pair 6	NYT Soft News- NYT Hard News	8.957	40	.000

Finding 1: Gawker overall was snarkier than the *New York Times*, based on a snark index comprised of wit, aggression, critique, irony, and informality ($p < .01$)

Finding 2: Gawker hard news is snarkier than the NYT's hard news, with a greater difference (31.395 points) in mean scores ($p < .01$).

Finding 3: Gawker soft news is snarkier than NYT's soft news, but the difference between their scores is far less (12.946) than when comparing the news sources overall (22.171) and comparing hard news from the two news sources (31.395) ($p < .01$).

Finding 4: All soft news is inherently snarkier than hard news, but not by much (a 5.195 difference between the two story types) ($p < .01$).

Finding 5: Gawker soft news is actually perceived as slightly less snarky (4.029 points' difference less) than Gawker hard news ($p < .01$).

Finding 6: NYT's soft news is much snarkier than NYT's hard news (14.4195 points more), a difference much more pronounced than the difference between Gawker soft news and Gawker hard news ($p < .01$).

Selecting the 8 stories for the experiment

Previous comparisons focused on all 20 news excerpts involved in the pretest, but one key element of the pretest was to identify which 8 stories would work best in the subsequent experiment, designed to test for reader effects. The analysis of all 20 pretest news excerpts suggests that story type interacts with story source in the snark scores, with snark manifesting more significantly in NYT soft news than hard news and visible in Figure 1. This interaction would become a confounding variable in the following experiment and needs to be removed, which the experiment did by reducing the number of test stories from 20 to 8.

To properly isolate the tone snark as a factor, independent of story source or type, the four snarkiest and four least snarky stories were selected out of the twenty news excerpts. Of the four snarkiest, two remained hard news and two remained soft news. The hard and soft

news categories were also preserved in the four least snarky stories. This allowed story type as well as story tone to be assessed in the subsequent experiment.

The eight news excerpts used in the experiment are featured in Table 6. These texts represent the snarky extremes, the highest in the case of Gawker and lowest in the case of the *New York Times*.

Table 6. The Eight Experiment News Excerpts, Headlines and Scores

News Excerpt Headline	Category Snark Index Score	Excerpt Score
<i>Snarky Hard News (Gawker)</i>	67.56	
1. "Obama's Blago Report Drops in Two Hours!"		68.88
2. "Utahns Furious as Senator Befriends John Forte"		66.24
<i>Snarky Soft News (Gawker)</i>	67.44	
1. "OMG, The Sexiest Hills Ever?"		67.71
2. "On TV the Rich Get Richer, And We Keep Watching"		67.17
<i>Non-Snarky Hard News (NYT)</i>	30.39	
1. "Increase in Heroin Use Leads to Proposed Laws"		29.61
2. "Poverty Rates Decline in New York"		31.17
<i>Non-Snarky Soft News (NYT)</i>	33.88	
1. "A Literary Critic Drops His Ax and Picks Up His Pen"		37.90
2. "Buying into the Vineyard Lifestyle"		29.85

Repeated Measures ANOVA on the 8 experiment stories' scores

The 8 experiment news excerpts were intended to illustrate the tonal divide between Gawker and *New York Times* stories, and to help show this, a 2 x 2 repeated measures

ANOVA was run to compare the two factors of story source and story type.

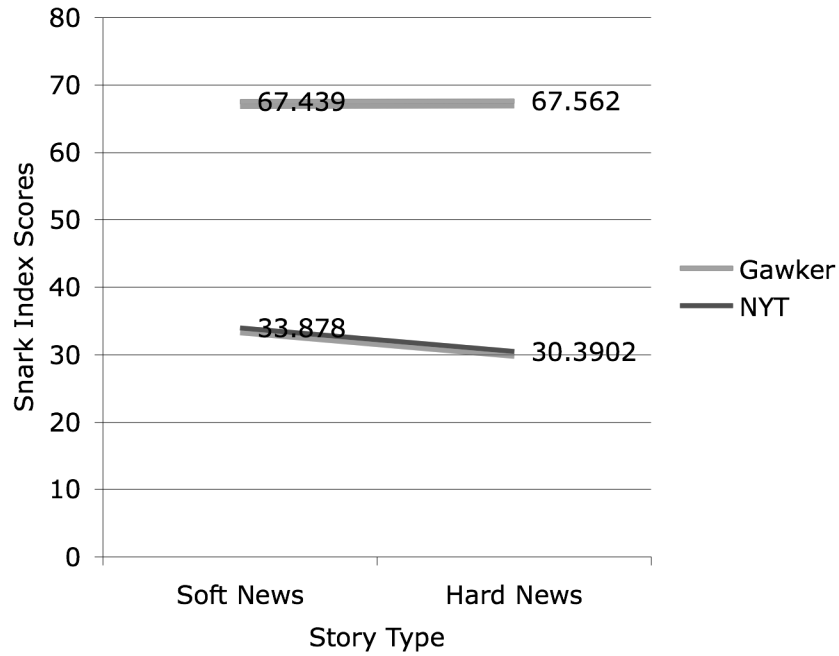


Figure 2. Mean snark index scores by factor category, 8 experiment news excerpts

Table 7. Mean experiment news excerpt snark scores

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Gawker Soft News	67.4390	41	12.92101
Gawker Hard News	67.5610	41	14.38932
NYT Soft News	33.8780	41	14.15132
NYT Hard News	30.3902	41	13.23986

Table 8. Repeated measures ANOVA of 8 experiment stories' scores

	F	df	Significance
Story Source	161.114	(1,40)	.000
Story Type	2.251	(1,40)	.141
Story Source x Story Type	2.502	(1,40)	.122

The 2 x 2 repeated measures ANOVA showed that only story source had a significant impact on the snark index scores of the 8 experiment news excerpts ($F(1,40)=161.114$, $p<.01$). This effect is quite large and appears to have been successfully isolated within these 8 news excerpt texts, which show no effect from story type and no interaction effect between the two variables. The snark index scores function as the stories' tone in the independent variable of the experiment. This large effect from story source on snark index scores can, for purposes of this study's design, be now be safely seen as an effect on story tone. Thus, in the experiment, Gawker should be seen as synonymous with snark and the NYT synonymous with traditional non-snark.

The twenty original news excerpts

Below are the twenty news excerpts used in the pretest study. They are listed divided by factor category: Gawker Hard News, Gawker Soft News, NYT Hard News, NYT Soft News. They were presented to the 41 participants in a random order, completely stripped of any identifying marks. Participants saw the headline in bold, the article text, and nothing more. Original italics and misspellings were preserved. Story date, word count, and the news excerpt's snark index score have been included in the list below.

Gawker Hard News

1. Headline: "Jews Are Conscienceless Thieves, Says Anti-Defamation League Boss"
Story date: December 24th, 2008
Word Count: 175
Snark Index Score: 56.54

Bernie Madoff's alleged \$50 billion swindle was a Jew-on-Jew crime. Jewish investors and charities lost a bundle. Now they suffer disgrace of having another anti-Semitic evil-banker stereotype. And Jewish media watchdogs are not helping!

"We're not immune from having thieves and people who engage in fraud," Abe Foxman, the national director of the Anti-Defamation League told the *New York Times*. "Why, because he happens to be Jewish, he should have a conscience?"

Well, yes, that's kind of the point, according to other Jewish people interviewed by the *Times* about Madoff's impact on Jewish people. Someone raised in the Jewish community ought to have a conscience:

There is a teaching in the Talmud that says an individual who comes before God after death will be asked a series of questions, the first one of which is, "Were you honest in your business dealings?" ... The full scope of the misdeeds to which Mr. Madoff has confessed in swindling individuals and charitable groups has yet to be calculated, and he is far from being convicted

2. Headline: "Obama's Blago Report Drops in Two Hours!"

Story date: December 23rd, 2008

Word Count: 168

Snark Index Score: 68.88

Later this afternoon, Barack Obama's office will release its report on his staff's contacts with disgraced Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich. Then they will all *skip town*.

They're releasing the report on the internal investigation late in the afternoon on December 23, when only orphans and undocumented workers and drug addicts are still paying attention to the news instead of huddling by the fire surrounded by loved ones, imbibing massive, controversy-numbing quantities of mulled wine. (Also people are stuck at the airport. The holidays!)

Also Barack Obama is in Hawaii, not answering questions and attempting to get reporters drunk. And once the report drops incoming Chief-of-Staff Rahm Emanuel, who talked with Blago and John Harris about the Senate appointment, will be *in Africa*.

This is a serious attempt at burying a report (oh of course Pat Fitzgerald didn't want them to release it last week, right, we understand) considering that it's an *internal* report that will make sure to point out that no one did anything even vaguely improper.

3. Headline: "Utahns Furious as Senator Befriends John Forte"

Story date: December 22nd, 2008

Word Count: 188

Snark Index Score: 66.24

Senator Orrin Hatch is one of those easily caricatured figures of cartoonishly prudish conservatism, so naturally everyone back home in Utah is now furious with him for *associating with black criminals*.

It began with the news of the commutation of producer and rapper John Forte's sentence for intent to distribute cocaine, a trumped-up charge with a long mandatory sentence. Bush commuted Forte's sentence after lobbying by Carly Simon! Forte will be released from prison today! Christmas miracle! Thanks also, it turns out, to lobbying from Orrin Hatch!

This is how how Hatch's hometown paper headlined that news: "Hatch: Convicted cocaine dealer a 'genius'" Hah. Ha ha ha.

Here are what his constituents say, writing into the *Salt Lake Tribune*.

"Orrin Hatch has absolutely no moral compass. To all the drug dealers doing business across the street from the local elementary school playground or in the high school parking lot, sleep well at night because Sen. Hatch believes you pose no risk to society if you don't actually use the methamphetamine or crack cocaine you're selling to our children.

What is it with Sen. Orrin Hatch and drug dealers?

4. Headline: "Renault Can Shut Down Magazines in France"

Story date: July 16th, 2008

Word Count: 190

Snark Index Score: 62.63

The government of France has officially forfeited all the liberal cred it's earned over the past 500 years: yesterday, French prosecutors raided the office of an auto magazine, confiscated its computers and files, and arrested a reporter for the crime of publishing a scoop. A scoop about autos, the subject of the magazine! Because in France, freedom of the press must take a back seat to the concerns of the almighty Renault corporation.

Renault complained to *the police* because the magazine, *Auto Plus*, "published pictures and details of a new model not due to be launched for another three years." I call that a hell of a scoop. Three years in advance! Such things are criminal matters in France. By contrast, in the greatest country on earth (USA), leaks like this are routine, and it's the company's god damn problem to track down leakers. (Unless you're talking about Apple and the Think Secret blog). Renault says they were just getting a little assistance:

"It kills creativity, you may as well just give our models to the newspapers and our competitors. What's the point of doing any research?" a spokesman said.

5. Headline: "Iraq Is So Yesterday; Everyone's Doin' The Abu Dhabi!"

Story date: October 13th, 2008

Word Count: 171

Snark Index Score: 64.34

Everybody, quick, open an office in Abu Dhabi! The oil-rich desert metropolis is opening a new "media hub" consisting of bizarre, bubble-like office buildings, and major news outlets are rushing in. CNN is opening a whole new bureau there! And they'll be joined by the FT, the BBC, Reuters, and some book publishers. How the hell did a city that got its first paved road in 1961 suddenly become the place where news networks simply have to *have* their Middle Eastern headquarters? By offering reporters more cool futuristic offices, and fewer car bombs:

Abut Dhabi took its billions in oil wealth and, through sheer force of will and money, made itself into a default location for news outlets to situate themselves. CNN, for example, can now cover the Middle East exclusively *from* the Middle East, while staying safely in the lap of luxury. Invest more in Baghdad, where the news is? Or invest in a state-of-the-art new facility in Abu Dhabi, which has far more world-class restaurants and fewer I.E.D.'s?

Gawker Soft News

6. Headline: "OMG, The Sexiest Hills Ever?"

Story date: October 14th, 2008

Word Count: 198

Snark Index Score: 67.71

What is *The Hills*? Is it comedy? Is it tragedy? Is it some Paula Vogel dream play mix of the two? I'm not quite sure. This season of the MTV Los Angeles reality gloop is continuously mystifying, as it strikes chords of utter falsehood and mundanity one minute, and then little trillings of truth and feeling the next. It's like we're teetering between two concert venues, one where KT Tunstall is warbling tonelessly, the other where Joni Mitchell is pouring her scratched heart out all over the stage. Know what I'm saying? No? Oh, who cares.

Oh to be a fly nowhere on those walls. You don't need to be, anyway! There are the cameras. There they are swirling around Audrina and her latest boy, an Australian lad named Cody or Colin or Colt or Cobalt or Coxswain or Catastrophe or Carlsbad Caverns or Crispix or something. You see, Audy is sad about Justin Bobby, the lurking on-again-off-again feet to her perpetual doormat. So she's decided to step out with other fellows, namely this boy from Oz with tattoos and who did nice things like look her in the eye and show up for scheduled dates. Just imagine!

7. Headline: “New Theatre Show Will Make You Uncomfortable Yet Happy, Just Like Theatre People Themselves”

Story date: March 10th, 2008

Word Count: 157

Snark Index Score: 55.12

The Battery's Down, a new musical internet series (you get it through your YouTube emails or some such beep boop) is about (and for) a very specific brand of theatre person that, actually, exists somewhere in *all* theatre people: the musical theatre geigh. The series follows Jake (played by Jake Wilson, a Michigan grad naturally), an aspiring actor facing the miseries and injustices of the New York audition process. Its two episodes have so far featured passable songs ("You Should Be In That", in particular), decent acting (with some fun Broadway guest stars!), and some genuinely funny theatre in-jokes. But more importantly, it's a warm, if at times off-putting (Jake is a straight... *right*), paean to those strange theatre maniacs, whose numbers seem to be ever-dwindling; fun, well-intentioned, wildly vain and insecure folks who got drunk at your normal kids college party, belted a song with that lonely girl in the corner, then vomited everywhere. Remember them???

8. Headline: “On TV the Rich Get Richer, And We Keep Watching”

Story date: September 4th, 2008

Word Count: 181

Snark Index Score: 67.17

In this time of economic woe, those of us stranded in the middle and lower classes aren't circling the wagons, trying to protect what little stake we've left. Instead we're looking at those people far across the income gap—the fantastic private jet-having super rich—congratulating and emulating them and waving them to greener shores while we stand dumbly on the docks. Or so argues Alessandra Stanley in a *Times* trend piece today, using the new hyper-moneyed *90210* as a springboard.

You see those kids aren't just rich like they might have been on such a show thirty years ago, with a sports car and a nice haircut. In this "new," cash-obsessed post-Reagan era, your typical rich kids are *Aaron Spelling rich*. With like private planes and hugely expensive birthday parties and \$800 just-because! friend presents. Even the new kids in town—fresh from storied rube-mill Kansas!—don't live in a humble shack. No, they live in a big stucco mansion with their prodigal rich kid dad, their fashionista mother, and their boozy former actress of a grandmother. That's the new poor!

9. Headline: “Doris Lessing Knows the Meaning of Life But is Just Withholding It”

Story date: October 20th, 2008

Word Count: 166

Snark Index Score: 52.20

Famously cranky *Golden Notebook* author Doris Lessing is 89 and frankly doesn't give a rat's that she won last year's Nobel Prize for Literature. She likes to talk about how she's burned out on writing and loves to complain—and is therefore our favorite Old. This Sunday, Lessing wrote an essay about her typical day for the *Times* of London: "When I'm not talking, I read." And everyone, irritatingly, thinks she knows the meaning of life:

After my morning lie-down I read the *Telegraph* and *The Independent*, then I might scribble a few letters. The fact is that ever since I won the Nobel, all I do is talk — whether I know anything about the subject or not. I once gave a talk at a university in New York. At the end, a girl asked: "Now, Mrs. Lessing, tell me the meaning of life." I replied: "What makes you think I know it?" She said: "Come on. Don't be like that. Don't hold out on us."

10. Headline: "The NYT's Art Coverage: 'Cronyism'?"

Story date: September 5th, 2008

Word Count: 169

Snark Index Score: 56.29

Do arts organization have an unhealthy relationship with the *New York Times*? Probably! Tyler Green wrote in the Arts Journal blog about how the NYT and art institutions deals with art news: "In return for receiving stories first, the NYT provides coverage... If the NYT doesn't discover major arts news stories first, it doesn't report on them." Well, yeah—otherwise, it's just kind of embarrassing. While reporting on a story about the National Gallery of Art, he noticed that everyone was holding or keeping off-record the information about their latest major project: "the NGA's chief spokesperson wanted the Villareal item to debut in the NYT."

This week, as NYT reporter Carol Vogel returned from her annual August sabbatical, all kinds of news suddenly, magically appeared in the Times: Ann Temkin's promotion and a Braque acquisition at MoMA, the National Gallery of Art Villareal. (Collusion made obvious: Even after MoMA and the NYT announced the news on NYT.com, MoMA refused to send a writer a press release on the Temkin appointment.)

New York Times Hard News

11. Headline: "Keeping Wary Eye on Crime as Economy Sinks"

Story date: October 9th, 2008

Word Count: 186

Snark Index Score: 36.78

It is the question on the minds of New Yorkers, once they stop pondering the fate of their 401(k)'s: If the city's economy sinks to depths not seen in decades, will crime return with a vengeance?

Expert opinions differ, but the question is hardly illogical. The last time stocks on Wall Street fell hard, in 1987, crime was exploding, and the city saw historic highs in murders in the following years.

Before that, the fiscal crisis of the 1970s helped lead to the abandonment of neighborhoods, failing schools and startling crime rates: robberies built through those years to a high in 1981, when there were 107,495 of them, for an average of 294 a day. (Last year's total reported robberies, 21,787, was the lowest figure in modern history.)

"Every recession since the late '50s has been associated with an increase in crime and, in particular, property crime and robbery, which would be most responsive to changes in economic conditions," said Richard Rosenfeld, a sociologist at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. Typically, he said, "there is a year lag between the economic change and crime rates."

12. Headline: "Increase in Heroin Use Leads to Proposed Laws"

Story date: December 12th, 2008

Word Count: 178

Snark Index Score: 29.61

Prompted by a surge in heroin use on Long Island, county legislators have proposed laws to notify school districts and other groups about arrests for heroin possession and sales.

But the Nassau-Suffolk County School Boards Association opposed the initial drafts of the legislation, arguing that they overstepped the counties' authority to impose legislation on school districts and put too much burden and liability on the schools.

The Suffolk bill has been revised as a result and would now result in monthly notification on a Web site while also mapping where heroin arrests take place.

But in Nassau, Legislator David L. Mejias of Farmingdale is pushing ahead with his bill, which would immediately notify school districts and selected other groups of heroin-related arrests.

The bills — to be called the Natalie Ciappa Law in Nassau and Natalie's Law in Suffolk — were named after an 18-year-old Massapequa resident who died of a heroin overdose in June at a party in Seaford. The Nassau Legislature will vote on its measure Dec. 15; the Suffolk Legislature, on Dec. 18.

13. Headline: "Obama Seeks to Clarify His Disputed Comments on Diplomacy"

Story date: May 29th, 2008
Word Count: 198
Snark Index Score: 32.15

With his experience and leadership credentials under sharp criticism, Senator Barack Obama and his advisers are trying to clarify what has emerged as a central tenet of his proposed foreign policy: a willingness to meet leaders of enemy nations.

In an interview on Wednesday, Mr. Obama, of Illinois, sought to emphasize, as he and his aides have done continually over the last few days, the difference between avoiding preconditions for talks with nations like Iran and Syria, and granting them automatic discussions at the presidential level.

While Mr. Obama has said he would depart from the Bush administration policy of refusing to meet with certain nations unless they meet preconditions, he has also said he would reserve the right to choose which leaders he would meet, should he choose to meet with them at all.

The issue presents one of Mr. Obama's biggest political and policy tests yet as he appears headed toward a general-election contest against Senator John McCain of Arizona: How to continue to add nuance to a policy argument that he views as a winning one, without playing into a fierce round of accusations that he is either shifting positions or appeasing the enemy.

14. Headline: "Attacks Imperil Delicate U.S. Role Between Rivals"
Story date: November 29th, 2008
Word Count: 168
Snark Index Score: 31.95

As evidence mounts that last week's attacks in Mumbai may have originated on Pakistani soil, American officials' aggressive campaign to strike at militants in Pakistan may complicate efforts to prevent an Indian military response, which could lead to a conflict between the bitter enemies.

In December 2001, when Pakistani militants attacked India's Parliament, and again this summer, when militants aided by Pakistani spies bombed the Indian Embassy in Afghanistan, the Bush administration used aggressive diplomacy to dampen anger in New Delhi.

This time, however, the Indian government might not be so receptive to the American message — and that could derail the coming Obama administration's hopes of creating a broader, regional response to the threat posed by Al Qaeda and the Taliban. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has already faced months of criticism from political rivals in India about his government's decision not to respond forcefully to past acts of terrorism, and domestic anger over the carnage in Mumbai has increased the pressure on his government to strike back.

15. Headline: “Poverty Rates Decline in New York”

Story date: August 26th, 2008

Word Count: 178

Snark Index Score: 31.17

Bucking a national trend, New York City’s poverty rate declined in the year that ended July 1, 2007, the Census Bureau reported on Tuesday. New York was also one of only 12 states that recorded a significant decline in the poverty rate.

Median household income edged up in New York from 2006 to 2007, but barely budged in New Jersey and was even flatter in Connecticut. In the city, income rose the most in the Bronx (5.4 percent), but fell in Staten Island.

New York’s gap between rich and poor, already the highest of any state, grew from the previous year. The top fifth of earners accounted for more than 53 percent of the income; the bottom fifth took home less than 3 percent.

In fact, New York was one of only two states (Missouri was the other) with at least one county (the Bronx, with 27.1 percent, and Brooklyn, with 21.9 percent) among the 10 most populous with the highest poverty rates in the nation and another among the 10 with the lowest (Nassau, with 4.4 percent).

New York Times Soft News

16. Headline: “Hope for a Racist, and Maybe a Country”

Story date: December 12th, 2008

Word Count: 179

Snark Index Score: 55.85

Twice in the last decade, just as the holiday movie season has begun to sag under the weight of its own bloat, full of noise and nonsense signifying nothing, Clint Eastwood has slipped another film into theaters and shown everyone how it’s done. This year’s model is “Gran Torino,” a sleek, muscle car of a movie Made in the U.S.A., in that industrial graveyard called Detroit. I’m not sure how he does it, but I don’t want him to stop. Not because every film is great — though, damn, many are — but because even the misfires show an urgent engagement with the tougher, messier, bigger questions of American life.

Few Americans make movies about this country anymore, other than Mr. Eastwood, a man whose vitality as an artist shows no signs of waning, even in a nominally modest effort like “Gran Torino.” Part of this may be generational: Mr. Eastwood started as an actor in the old

studio system, back when the major movie companies were still in the business of American life rather than just international properties.

17. Headline: “A Literary Critic Drops His Ax and Picks Up His Pen”

Story date: April 27th, 2008

Word Count: 187

Snark Index Score: 37.90

After a touch football game on a recent Saturday in Prospect Park, and an impromptu post-game salon on Don DeLillo, Keith Gessen warily brought up the subject of his own debut novel, “All the Sad Young Literary Men.”

Having scored three touchdowns for his victorious squad, Mr. Gessen, an author and editor, announced that this game would be his last of the season, as he was about to resume his book tour.

Some of the athletes — a literary agent, a blogger, Mr. Gessen’s roommate — already knew of this impending departure; others were surprised by the news and its implication that Mr. Gessen’s literary pursuits were actually serious.

“I didn’t even know he had this whole thing,” said Dan Lichtenberg, a bond trader who met Mr. Gessen in January. “We just played football.”

Mr. Gessen, 33, boyishly handsome and possessing the self-assurance of a writer twice his age, has never had an easy relationship with literary fame, even as he has gradually amassed it. In confident, forceful criticism written for publications like *The Nation* and *The New Yorker*, Mr. Gessen has been unsparing in his assessments.

18. Headline: “Buying into the Vineyard Lifestyle”

Story date: September 5th, 2008

Word Count: 189

Snark Index Score: 29.85

Gareth and Barbara Genner assumed they would eventually buy a vacation home in Italy. They had family in Milan and enjoyed touring some of their favorite Italian wineries. It was a good way to keep their cellar in Atlanta growing with hard-to-find wines.

And then there was reality. While owning a house in Italy would be fun, it wasn’t practical. They already had three vacation homes scattered across the United States, and didn’t always have time to visit them that often. Italy would be an even bigger stretch.

Instead, they brought Italy to Georgia. For \$1.2 million, they had a replica Italian villa built at Montaluce Winery and Estates, a new home and vineyard development in Dahlonega, Ga.,

about an hour north of Atlanta. The three-story house, painted the same tinge of orange as Tuscan farmhouses, is set among rolling hills of vineyards they say resemble those of Umbria.

“We bluntly wanted to recreate the feeling we had in Italy,” said Mr. Genner, 49, a former managing director of an educational consulting firm and currently president of an Atlanta preparatory school. “Once you’re there, you believe you’re in Tuscany.”

19. Headline: “On a Barren Isle, Gift of the Gab and Subversive Charm”

Story date: December 22nd, 2008

Word Count: 189

Snark Index Score: 49.07

For those of you for whom an annual reading of “A Christmas Carol” is as welcome as a two-ton fruitcake, the Atlantic and Druid Theater Companies have provided a savory alternative. That’s the fine imported Irish revival of Martin McDonagh’s “Cripple of Inishmaan,” which opened Sunday night at the Linda Gross Theater, offering its own salty variation on that sugarplum Tiny Tim. He is called Cripple Billy, and like Dickens’s beloved tot, he is sickly, misshapen and deeply wistful. I can promise you, though, that he isn’t about to say, “God bless us, everyone.”

Any work by Mr. McDonagh, the theater’s reigning master of gory Irish gothic, would seem an unlikely choice as a cheering cup of wassail. But Garry Hynes’s first-rate production of this 1997 comedy about a Hollywood fever epidemic in rural Ireland in 1934 emanates a hearthside warmth and coziness that could well seduce theatergoers put off by the Grand Guignol of McDonagh fare like “The Pillowman” and “The Lieutenant of Inishmore.” Be warned, though: This *is* a play by Mr. McDonagh, which means that sentimental warmth can suddenly scorch and coziness turn claustrophobic.

20. Headline: “On Reality Shows, Love’s Retreads Need Dates, Too”

Story date: July 21st, 2008

Word Count: 186

Snark Index Score: 61.07

There are many reasons you wouldn’t want your son bringing home someone like Jo De La Rosa, and they aren’t confined to her appearance on two reality shows, the most recent of which, “Date My Ex: Jo & Slade,” sends you straight to a milk bath to dissolve all the grimy residue.

An entitled whiner first seen on “The Real Housewives of Orange County,” Jo wasn’t technically a housewife: she ultimately broke things off with her live-in fiancé, Slade Smiley, and while her notion of housework was broad enough to accommodate wearing a French maid’s costume it never expanded into actually dusting the mantles.

Jo, who is in her 20s, was a Madame Bovary with a spray tan: she felt stifled in Orange County, with its gates and clubs and 40-something social politics. So she took her dreams of freedom to Los Angeles and recorded her own feminist anthem: “U Can’t Control Me,” the message of which has now been undermined by “Date My Ex: Jo and Slade,” a show that puts her ex-fiancé in charge of finding his replacement. (It starts Monday on Bravo.)

CHAPTER 4

EXPERIMENT METHODOLOGY

Design

The experimental study is a 2 (story tone: snark or non-snark) x 2 (story type: hard news or soft news) model. The experiment consisted of a computer-administered questionnaire that displayed 8 news excerpts of 150-200 words, questions about each excerpt, and questions about the participants' demographic information. The experiment's independent variables were measured within groups to attain greater power from a modest sample size. The study's goal was to find how a snarky journalistic tone affects media reception among readers of both hard news and soft news stories.

Variables

Story tone (the presence or lack of snark) and story type (soft news or hard news) were the two independent variables examined in the study's central 2 x 2 experiment. The study's dependent variables comprised five participant reactions to the news excerpts: participants' 1)level of engagement, 2)level of ascribed entertainment, 3)level of ascribed humor, 4)level of ascribed credibility, and 5)desire to read more or less of the style. The two independent variables of story tone and story type were evaluated within groups.

The experiment procedure and news excerpts

The pretest helped create the independent variable of story tone (snark or non-snark) and is included in Chapter 3 of this study. The 8 experiment news excerpts were selected based on the snark index scores from the pretest to highlight the difference in news source tone. These 8 news excerpts represent the snarky extremes, the highest in the case of Gawker and lowest in the case of the *New York Times*. Their headlines and snark scores are shown in the following table. Reducing the number from 20 news excerpts to 8 was done to emphasize the tonal divide and avoid a confound from story type, a reduction which also gave participants more time to answer questions about their reactions and demographics. Participants still rated multiple stories per condition, which strengthens the data, and avoided fatigue from processing too many news stories and questions, which would have threatened the accuracy of their self-report.

The pretest included a 2 x 2 repeated measures ANOVA testing the snark index scores of only these following 8 news excerpts, considering the variables of story source (Gawker versus NYT) and story type (soft news versus hard news). The ANOVA successfully showed that the only significant effect on snark index scores was story source ($p < .01$), with no significant effect from story type and no interaction effect between the two factors. This is ideal for the experiment—the test showed that story tone was the one significant variable affecting the scores of the experiment’s 8 news excerpts. Consequently, story source can be, for purposes of the experiment, considered as story tone. This test can be found in greater detail near the end of Chapter 3.

Participants saw the news excerpts’ headline in bold, the article text, and nothing more. Original italics and misspellings were preserved.

Table 9. The Eight Experiment News Excerpts, Headlines and Scores

News Excerpt Headline	Overall Snark Index Score	Excerpt Score
<i>Snarky Hard News (Gawker)</i>	<i>67.56</i>	
1. "Obama's Blago Report Drops in Two Hours!"		68.88
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1. "A Literary Critic Drops His Ax and Picks Up His Pen"		37.90
2. "Buying into the Vineyard Lifestyle"		29.85

The experiment's questions

The experiment's five dependent variables (engagement, entertainment, humor, credibility, and desire for style) came from a series of 1-10 and 1-5 point questions following each news excerpt. One of the experiment's five central measures, credibility, was formed from an index of four other measures. The credibility index was composed of the following four measures: fairness, believability, accuracy, and comprehensiveness (Cassidy, 2007). The calculation of Cronbach's alpha is a common statistical method for testing a conceptual index's internal reliability and the degree to which its component attributes correlate. A score below .3 is considered weak and above .7 considered strong. In this experiment, the mean Cronbach's alpha for the credibility index was .89. Individual news excerpts' Cronbach's

alphas for the credibility index ranged from .816 to .942, which indicates that the credibility index was strong and reliable throughout the study.

After participants read all eight news items and answered those questions, there were questions of a demographic nature, asking about gender, age, and seeking information about level of education in order to provide descriptive data about the participants. Questions asked about their average method of news consumption and what types of news they prefer, specifically asking how long the participant spends on a computer daily, a checklist of what news sources he or she consults in a given week, and about what categories of news appeal to them most. Another question asked about the size of the community in which the participant was raised; anecdotal evidence suggests snark might be an affect of education and city life, and this question addressed that possibility.

Beyond anecdotal evidence, webtracking data has supported that much of this descriptive data may be relevant influences on Gawker readers. The media company Quantcast shows that a major concentration of Gawker readers live in big cities (New York, London, Los Angeles, and Chicago), are young adults, male, and hold college degrees (2009), so community size, age, gender, and level of education are particularly important to note.

An open-ended final question concluded the experiment and asked the participants how they would define the word snark and what their opinion is of snark in the news. This open-ended question was meant to shed light on any potential outliers and provide richer data for the discussion. Many answers provided insight into the perception of an ambiguous word and tone. This qualitative element will be discussed with more depth in the discussion chapter and Appendix II.

The questions themselves can be found below. The following eight questions were asked after each of the eight news excerpts and constitute the experiment's five dependent variables. Then came the series of questions about demographic information.

On a scale of 1 to 10, how engaged did you feel with the above text (10 as the greatest level of engagement and 1 as the least)?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Judging on this excerpt, on a scale of 1 to 10, how accurate would you estimate the news source to be (10 as the greatest level of accuracy and 1 as the least)?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

On a scale of 1 to 10, how entertaining did you find the above text (10 as the greatest level of entertainment and 1 as the least)?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Judging on this excerpt, on a scale of 1 to 10, how comprehensive would you estimate the news source to be (10 as the greatest level of comprehensiveness and 1 as the least)?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Judging on this excerpt, on a scale of 1 to 10, how fair would you estimate the news source to be (10 as the greatest level of fairness and 1 as the least)?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

On a scale of 1 to 10, how humorous did you find the above text (10 as the greatest level of humor and 1 as the least)?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Judging on this excerpt, on a scale of 1 to 10, how believable would you estimate the news source to be (10 as the greatest level of believability and 1 as the least)?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Would you want to read more news stories written like this?

- *Strongly agree
- *Agree
- *No strong reaction either way
- *Disagree
- *Strongly disagree

Demographic Questions (asked after participants read through the 8 texts)

In what range does your age fall, in years?

- *18 to 22
- *23 to 26
- *27 to 35
- *36 to 50
- *Older than 50

What is your sex?

- *Male
- *Female
- *Other

What is your highest level of education?

- *Less than high school
- *Some high school
- *High school graduate
- *Some college
- *College graduate
- *Post-graduate

On average, how long are you on a computer daily? (Not while working)

- *Less than 1 hour
- *About an hour
- *1 to 3 hours
- *3 to 5 hours
- *5 to 7 hours
- *7 to 10 hours
- *More than 10 hours

Out of the following news sources, how many do you consult in a given week? Please check all that apply:

Newspapers (Print) _____
Magazines (Print) _____
Cable News (CNN, Fox, MSNBC) _____
Local Broadcast News _____
Newspaper Websites _____
Magazine Websites _____
Blogs _____
Other _____

Please rate the following categories of news from 1 to 4, starting with the category that appeals to you most:

Arts
Business
Celebrity
Politics
Other? _____

How you describe the size of the community in which you were raised for the majority of your childhood?

Village
Town
Small City
Medium City
Large City
Other _____

And finally, how would you define the word snarky and what is your opinion of snark used in the news?

Recruitment for the experiment's participants

The experiment included a larger sample of 99 people. The experiment's participants were recruited from University of Missouri journalism classes, with permission from the classes' professors. The 99 students participated in the experiment via an online questionnaire through SurveyMonkey.com but did so in a controlled university computer lab, with a researcher present to monitor the environment. Participants signed up for specific times to come to the computer lab and signed a consent form before taking the questionnaire.

The experiment lasted about 20 minutes and presented the eight news excerpts with questions to test the participants' perceptions of the news excerpts and to gather descriptive information about the participants' demographics. After participants viewed the texts and answered the questions about their satisfaction, they were thanked and left.

Descriptive information about the experiment's participants

Of the 99 participants in the experiment, 89.9% fell between the ages 18 and 22, 67.7% were female and 32.3% were male, and 85.9% had completed some college education. Roughly half (49.5%) reported spending 1 to 3 hours on a computer every day, nearly a quarter (23.2%) spent 3 to 5 hours on a computer daily, and a little more than 10% spent more than 5 hours on a computer every day. A majority of 64.6% reported coming from a medium- or large-sized city.

The majority of participants reported checking cable news (67.7%) and newspaper websites (69.7%), although only a little more than half (53.5%) report checking print newspapers. Print magazines fare slightly better (56.6%). Nearly half of participants (49.5%) still consult local broadcast news, and more than a third (37.4%) check magazine websites, blogs, and the radio for their news.

Participants were also asked to rank, from 1 to 4, their favorite topics of news coverage, given the choices of Arts, Business, Celebrity, and Politics, with the option to write in an additional choice. Participants preferred soft news options, with 33.3% favoring arts and 27.3% favoring celebrity news coverage as their number one choices. Only 11.1% ranked business number one, and 26.3% ranked politics number one. Write-in choices consisted of two mentions of sports, two mentions of international news, one of local news, and one of environmental science issues.

Analysis of results

The two independent variables of snarkiness and story type were simultaneously tested for participant effects through five repeated measures ANOVAs, examining each factor's influence as well as testing for an interaction effect. The experiment tested for five main reactions: participants' engagement with each individual story, the level of entertainment derived from the news story, participants' assessment of the source's humor, participants' judgment of the source's credibility (based on a multidimensional credibility index of accuracy, fairness, comprehensiveness, and believability, Cronbach's $\alpha=.89$), and whether the participant wants to read more stories written in such a style.

CHAPTER 5

EXPERIMENT RESULTS

The Experiment: Effects of Snark and Story Type

The pretest quantified a difference in tone—in snarkiness—between Gawker and the *New York Times*. This successful identification of snark allowed the study to proceed to an experiment considering the study’s central research question: How does a snarky news media tone affect media reception among readers of both hard news and soft news stories? With the presence of snarkiness established, it became time to test for snark’s effects as well as those of story type (hard or soft news). In the experiment, participants saw eight of the original 20 news items. The criteria in selecting the eight news items focused on highlighting the two distinct concentrations of tone: the four snarkiest Gawker texts (two from hard news, two from soft news) and the four least snarky NYT texts (two from hard news, and two from soft).

Participants answered questions about each news excerpt after reading the excerpt, which were presented to the participants in a random order. The questions were described in the Methods chapter and featured in their entirety in Chapter 4, the news excerpts at the end of Chapter 3.

Tests of the Experiment's Five Measures

Measure 1: Engagement

A 2 x 2 repeated measures ANOVA was calculated to compare the engagement scores based on both independent variables. The different engagement means are featured in Table 10 and the results of the ANOVA test in Table 11.

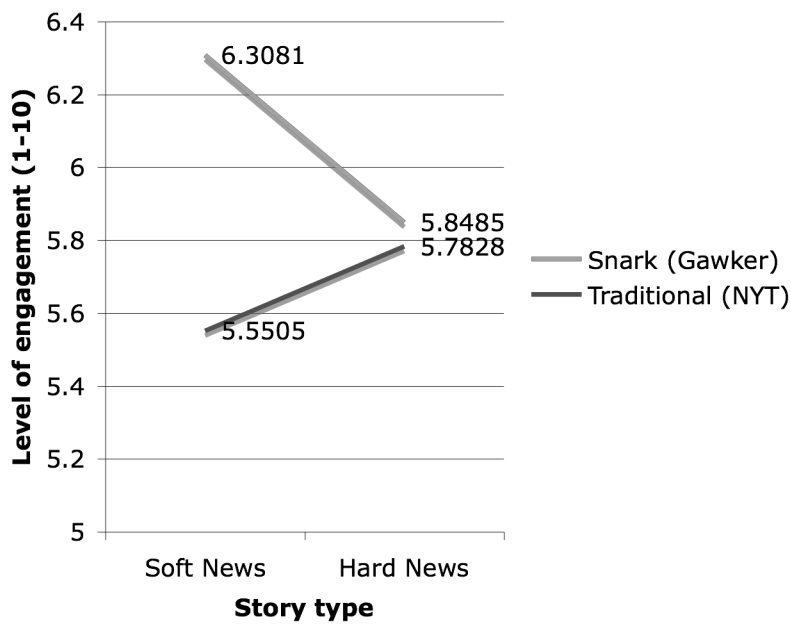


Figure 3. Mean engagement reactions

Table 10. Mean engagement reactions

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Engagement-Gawker Soft News	6.3081	99	2.23573
Engagement-Gawker Hard News	5.8485	99	2.02592
Engagement-NYT Soft News	5.5505	99	1.73082
Engagement-NYT Hard News	5.7828	99	1.73082

Table 11. Repeated measures ANOVA of the engagement measure

	F	df	Significance
Snark	5.398	(1,98)	.022
Story Type	.531	(1,98)	.468
Snark x Story Type	5.173	(1,98)	.025

Snark had the greatest impact on participants' level of engagement ($F(1,98)=5.398$, $p<.05$). Snarky soft news engaged participants the most, with a mean ranking of 6.3081 out of 10. Both snarky hard and soft news engaged people more than traditional news.

Although there was no engagement main effect from story type, the story type did have an interaction effect with snark ($F(1,98)=5.173$, $p<.05$). Story type influenced how snark affected engagement—in the case of NYT stories, hard news increased engagement, and in the case of Gawker stories, hard news decreased engagement. A paired samples t-test between the Gawker mean engagement scores confirmed there was a significant difference between them ($t(98)= 2.037$, $p<.05$).

Measure 2: Entertainment

A 2 x 2 repeated measures ANOVA was calculated to compare the entertainment scores based on both independent variables. The different entertainment means are featured in Table 12 and the results of the ANOVA test in Table 13.

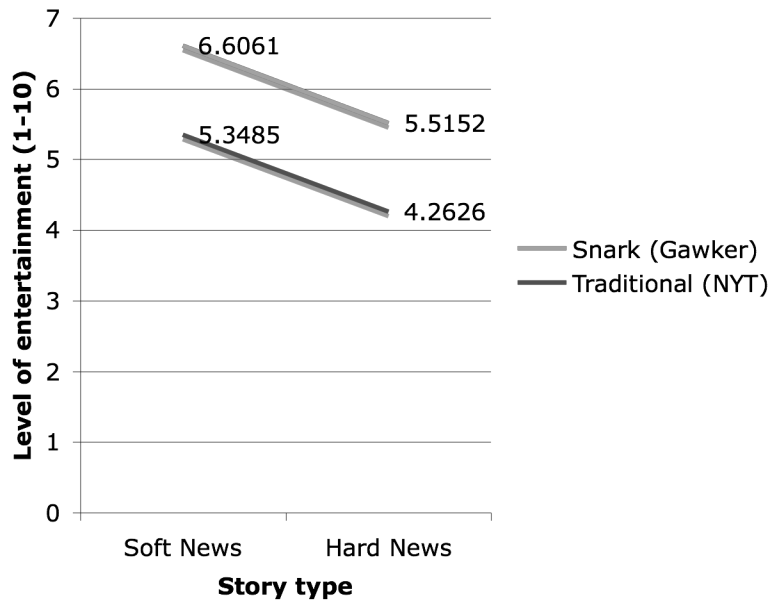


Figure 4. Mean entertainment reactions

Table 12. Mean Entertainment Reactions

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Entertainment-Gawker Soft News	6.6061	99	2.20189
Entertainment-Gawker Hard News	5.5152	99	2.10739
Entertainment-NYT Soft News	5.3485	99	1.72090
Entertainment-NYT Hard News	4.2626	99	1.90507

Table 13. Repeated measures ANOVA of the entertainment measure

	F	df	Significance
Snark	43.431	(1,98)	.000
Story Type	46.288	(1,98)	.000
Snark x Story Type	.000	(1,98)	.988

Again, snark had the greatest impact on people's level of entertainment, with mean entertainment scores far higher than both non-snark scores ($F(1,98)=43.431$, $p<.01$). Snark is more entertaining than non-snark.

Story type had an even greater effect on people's entertainment ($F(1,98)=46.288$, $p<.01$). Soft news stories were significantly more entertaining than their tonal counterpart stories, whether Gawker soft news ($t(98)=4.682$, $p<.01$) or NYT soft news ($t(98)=4.837$, $p<.01$). Soft news is more entertaining than hard news.

No significant interaction effect for snark and story type was found.

Measure 3: Humor

A 2 x 2 repeated measures ANOVA was calculated to compare the humor scores based on both independent variables. The different humor means are featured in Table 14 and the results of the ANOVA test in Table 15.

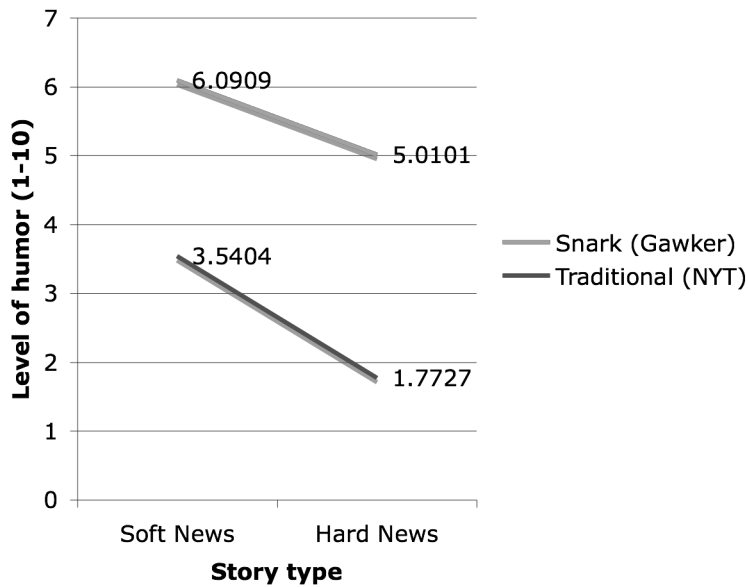


Figure 5. Mean humor reactions

Table 14. Mean Humor Reactions

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Humor-Gawker Soft News	6.0909	99	2.26595
Humor-Gawker Hard News	5.0101	99	2.30459
Humor-NYT Soft News	3.5404	99	1.83180
Humor-NYT Hard News	1.7727	99	1.70574

Table 15. Repeated measures ANOVA of the humor measure

	F	df	Significance
Snark	160.973	(1,98)	.000
Story Type	82.844	(1,98)	.000
Snark x Story Type	4.912	(1,98)	.029

Snark had the greatest impact on how humorous people found the news excerpts ($F(1,98)=160.973$, $p<.01$). People rated both Gawker's hard news and soft news far more humorous than the hard and soft news from the NYT. People found Gawker's soft news the funniest ($m=6.0909$, $sd=2.26595$) and NYT's hard news the least funny ($m=1.7727$, $sd=1.70574$).

But story type also had a large effect on how people perceived the news' humor ($F(1,98)=82.844$, $p<.01$). People rated soft news stories to be funnier than hard news stories.

A significant interaction between snark and story type was also found ($F(1,98)=4.912$, $p<.05$). Here, people found NYT hard news far less funny than NYT soft news, a difference more profound than that between Gawker hard and soft news.

Measure 4: Credibility

A 2 x 2 repeated measures ANOVA was calculated to compare the credibility scores based on both independent variables. The different credibility means are featured in Table 16 and the results of the ANOVA test in Table 17. The credibility measure was formed from an index of four other measures (fairness, comprehensiveness, accuracy, and believability) with a Cronbach's alpha of .89.

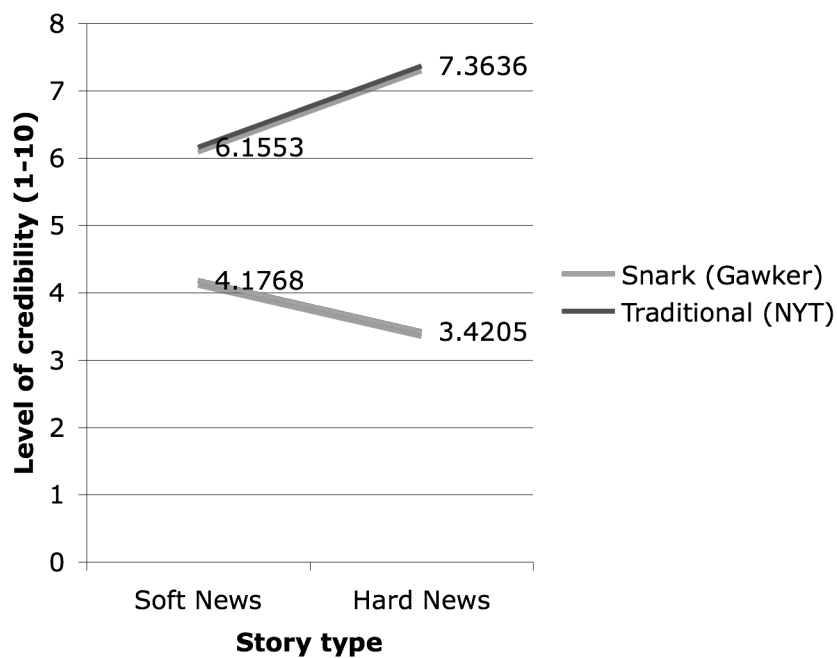


Figure 6. Mean credibility reactions

Table 16. Mean Credibility Reactions

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Credibility-Gawker Soft News	4.1768	99	1.70075
Credibility-Gawker Hard News	3.4205	99	1.68997
Credibility-NYT Soft News	6.1553	99	1.64005
Credibility-NYT Hard News	7.3636	99	1.44897

Table 17. Repeated measures ANOVA of the credibility measure

	F	df	Significance
Snark	226.965	(1,98)	.000
Story Type	3.509	(1,98)	.064
Snark x Story Type	93.133	(1,98)	.000

Snark had the greatest and most debilitating effect on the news excerpts' perceived credibility ($F(1,98)=226.965$, $p<.01$). All Gawker stories were rated far less credible than New York Times stories, with Gawker hard news the least credible ($m=3.4205$, $sd=.68997$) NYT hard news the most credible ($m=7.3636$, $sd=1.44897$).

Although story type alone did not register a significant effect, the interaction between snark and story type had a rather strong effect ($F(1,98)=93.133$, $p<.01$). This came from the high credibility of NYT's hard news compared to its soft news, a difference greater than what divides Gawker's soft news and hard news. Story type interacts with snark such that traditional hard news is seen as more credible than traditional soft news while snarky hard news is seen as less credible than snarky soft news.

Measure 5: Desire for style

A 2 x 2 repeated measures ANOVA was calculated to compare the desire for style scores based on both independent variables. Unlike the prior four measures, this measure only rated items from 1 to 5 instead of 1 to 10. The question asked whether participants would like to read more of the given tone, with 1 signifying strongly agree, 3 signifying no strong reaction either way, and 5 signifying strongly disagree. Higher scores above 3 suggest that readers did not want to read more of that style, while scores below 3 suggest readers want to read more of the style. The different means are featured in Table 18 and the results of the ANOVA test in Table 19.

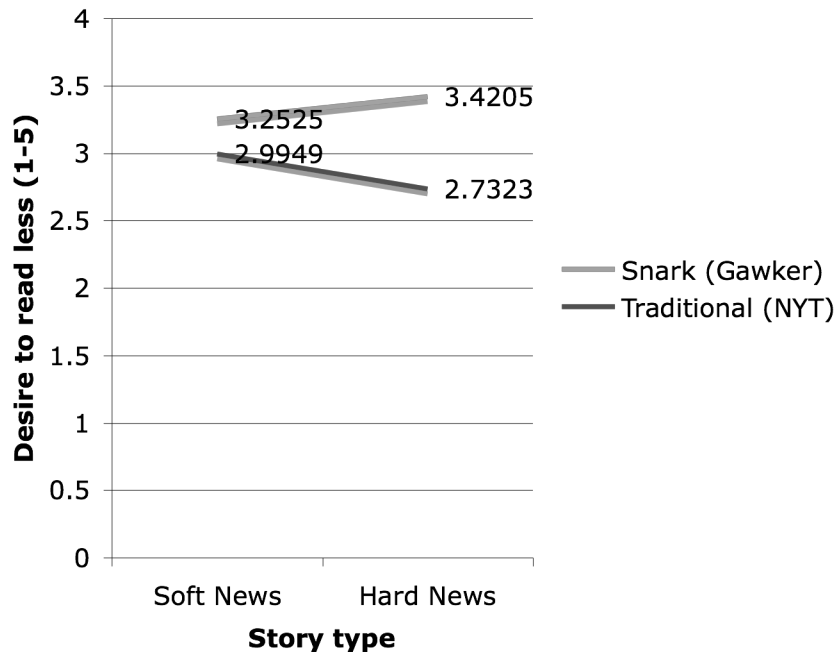


Figure 7. Mean desire for style reactions

Table 18. Mean Desire for Style Reactions

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Read Less-Gawker Soft News	3.2525	99	.91019
Read Less-Gawker Hard News	3.4205	99	.94322
Read Less-NYT Soft News	2.9949	99	.71248
Read Less-NYT Hard News	2.7323	99	.82781

Table 19. Repeated measures ANOVA of the desire for style measure

	F	df	Significance
Snark	26.400	(1,98)	.000
Story Type	.086	(1,98)	.770
Snark x Story Type	16.742	(1,98)	.000

Snark had a significant effect on readers' desire to keep reading the style and caused readers to report not wanting to keep reading snark ($F(1,98)=26.400$, $p<.01$). Readers of non-snark NYT stories, on the other hand, had a slight desire to keep reading that traditional style.

Story type interacted with snark significantly in this measure ($F(1,98)=16.742$, $p<.01$). The interaction caused readers to be more turned off by Gawker's hard news than its soft while readers were more attracted to the tone of NYT's hard news than its soft.

Story type had no significant effect on its own.

Findings from the Experiment Tests

The five repeated measures ANOVA tests showed the effects of the two variables simultaneously and found many significant main effects and interactions. The IV of story tone displayed a powerful effect in every measures test on its own, and story type displayed major effects in two of the five measures. Given these tests, the following two findings can be stated:

Finding 7: Story type and story tone interact significantly in four ways. Hard news caused people to engage with traditional news more and with snarky news less ($p < .05$), to find traditional news more drastically un-funny than with snarky hard news ($p < .05$), to assess traditional news as more credible and snarky news as less ($p < .01$), and to want to read snark less and traditional news more ($p < .01$).

Finding 8: People found snarky stories more engaging ($p < .05$), entertaining ($p < .01$), and humorous ($p < .01$) than non-snarky stories. However, people also found snark less credible ($p < .01$) and reported wanting to read snark less than regular news ($p < .01$).

Finding 9: People reported finding soft news more entertaining ($p < .01$) and humorous ($p < .01$) compared to hard news.

These two findings capture the main, critical effects of the two IVs, snark and story type, but there should be closer examinations of the means within each category. There are two reasons for this. First, snark displayed an overpowering effect across all the tests, and in doing so, made it hard to consider the means within each factor category. Second, the repeated measures ANOVAs found interaction effects between the IVs for four of the five tests, all except entertainment.

Thus, the means from subcategories were simply compared in the following findings, often reflecting the sentiment of the two prior findings but with more nuances. The strong

significant effects throughout the five repeated measures ANOVAs justified running protected dependent t tests.

Finding 10: People found snarky hard news more entertaining ($p < .01$) and humorous ($p < .01$) than traditional hard news, but again, found snarky hard news far less credible ($p < .01$) than traditional hard news and wanted to read less of it in comparison ($p < .01$). Traditional NYT hard news earned the highest credibility ratings overall (7.364 mean on a 10-point scale). People were equally engaged with snarky and traditional hard news—no difference emerged.

Finding 11: Yet with snarky soft news, people were more engaged ($p < .01$) in addition to finding snark more entertaining ($p < .01$) and humorous ($p < .01$) than non-snarky news. Again, people found snark less credible ($p < .01$) and wanted to read less of its style ($p < .01$)

Finding 12: Comparing hard and soft news stories from just Gawker, people found its snarky soft news more engaging ($p < .05$), more entertaining ($p < .01$), more humorous ($p < .01$), and interestingly, more credible ($p < .01$) than its hard news. They had a stronger distaste for the snarky hard news style compared to its soft news ($p < .01$).

Finding 13: Among the non-snarky NYT stories, people found soft news stories more entertaining ($p < .01$) and humorous ($p < .01$), less credible ($p < .01$), but again, seemingly counter intuitively, wanted to read less of NYT soft news' style ($p = 0.013$). People did not experience any difference of engagement when reading NYT's hard and soft news excerpts.

All these findings, from both the pretest and experiment, will be discussed more in-depth in the following Discussions chapter.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

Unpacking the concept of “Snark”

It is first important to recall the study’s central research question: How does a snarky news media tone affect media reception among readers of both hard news and soft news stories? The discussion chapter will seek to consider the ways in which this question was successfully answered within the results chapter as well as discuss the limitations of these findings and explain nuances that may account for parts of the data.

Again, recall the study’s questions, as outlined early on: How does one define snark? Does the content of the story matter, hard news versus soft news? Do those factors interact? Do people relate to the snark? Does the tone engage and appeal to them? Is snarkiness a matter of taste? Does it affect how people interpret credibility?

To answer these questions, a pretest was developed around 20 news excerpts, which quantifiably linked story source to snark for purposes of the experiment. After this was accomplished, a 2 (story tone: snark or non-snark) x 2 (story type: hard news or soft) experiment was conducted, considering five dependent variables (engagement, entertainment, humor, credibility, and desire for style). This discussion will seek to find answers to these questions and state the study’s findings.

Controls

For purposes of this study, the news excerpts were stripped of any marks identifying the news source. Participants saw only the headline and text, black words on a white background. Anything more would have revealed the news source's brand and potentially bias the participants in their reactions. Those identifying markers included design, color schemes, and the appearance of the news source's webpage—anything that would have alerted readers to whether their news comes from the *New York Times*, a blog, or elsewhere.

Those branding factors lay outside the province of this experiment, which focused exclusively on snark and story type, but are potentially important elements to consider in future studies. People can become very familiar with reading news items online in a certain setting—the proportions and fonts of a homepage, the position of bylines and formatting details, the colors. These elements collectively form an online news media brand for the reader, and its presence can influence how a person interprets news media tone and reacts to content. The Internet is an interactive platform with virtually limitless websites for people to view. The literature did not always consider how the visual context and brand of the news source influence people's choices.

The study also limited itself to the tones of only two news sources, Gawker and the *New York Times*, and the 20 specific news excerpts falling between 150 and 200 words each. Future studies will need to expand their selection of news sources and experiment with a variety of tonal indices to properly assess tone more broadly. This study should also be repeated with news excerpts from only one news source—drawing both snarky and traditional tones from the *Times*, for instance—to eliminate the possibility that other confounds exist within news source differences. On a practical level, choosing those news

excerpts would be far more challenging because a news publication is unlikely to vary its own tone substantially enough to make the comparisons done in this study. Yet, given certain NYT snark index scores from the pretest, it may be possible, at least when comparing soft news stories.

Identifying snark: A review of the pretest

The pretest sought to capture the tonal difference between the news sources Gawker and the *New York Times*, and the study succeeded in doing so with significant results across the board at the .01 level. Statistically, tests on the snark index scores of 20 news excerpts revealed the following:

- **Finding 1:** Gawker overall was snarkier than the *New York Times*, based on a snark index comprised of wit, aggression, critique, irony, and informality.
- **Finding 2:** Gawker hard news is snarkier than the NYT's hard news, with a greater divide in mean scores (31.395).
- **Finding 3:** Gawker soft news is snarkier than NYT's soft news, but the divide between their scores is far less (12.946) than when comparing the news sources overall (22.171) and comparing hard news from the two news sources (31.395).
- **Finding 4:** All soft news is inherently snarkier than hard news, but not by much (a 5.195 difference between the two story types).
- **Finding 5:** Gawker soft news is actually perceived as slightly less snarky (4.029 points' difference less) than Gawker hard news.

- **Finding 6:** NYT’s soft news is much snarkier than NYT’s hard news (14.4195 points more), a difference much more pronounced than the difference between Gawker soft news and Gawker hard news.

Overall findings point to Gawker as a news source that always yields higher, snarkier scores. Soft news also seems to be snarkier across the board, a difference in tone which becomes especially notable in traditional news sources such as the *New York Times*.

The majority of scores harmonize with expectations and intuitive belief about snarkiness. Gawker has always been called snarky, and these tests simply confirm snark as a combination of wit, aggression, critique, irony, and informality. The lowest scoring texts all came from the *New York Times*. The least snarky of all were the decidedly unplayful NYT hard news stories, with headlines such as “Increase in Heroin Use Leads to Proposed Laws” (29.61) and “Poverty Rates Decline in New York” (31.17). Soft news stories from the *New York Times* are far warmer (“Buying Into the Vineyard Lifestyle,” “A Literary Critic Drops His Axe and Picks Up His Pen”) and that lightheartedness led to more snark. Snark seems to emanate from playfulness, and as such, inherent to a greater or lesser degree in soft news.

Despite the distinct score concentrations among each category, some of the 20 news excerpts were outliers when compared to their categories. Soft news NYT stories, for instance, averaged a snark index score of 46.75, but one story scored far higher and exceeded the scores of several Gawker news excerpts at 61.07. But what was the headline of this soft news stories? “On Reality Shows, Love’s Retreads Need Dates, Too.” The story discussed reality TV and did so in a tone noticeably reminiscent of Gawker’s online style. Here is a sample of the tone:

Jo, who is in her 20s, was a Madame Bovary with a spray tan: she felt stifled in Orange County, with its gates and clubs and 40-something social politics. So she took her dreams of freedom to Los Angeles and recorded her own feminist anthem: “U Can’t Control Me,” the message of which has now been undermined by “Date My Ex: Jo and Slade,” a show that puts her ex-fiancé in charge of finding his replacement. (It starts Monday on Bravo.)

This blasé combination of wit and aggression (a flip comparison as “a Madame Bovary with a spray tan”) are present. The headline alone suggests tongue-in-cheek ironical informality that follows (...“Orange County, with its gates and clubs and 40-something social politics”...). This news excerpt seems decidedly critical of its subject, Jo. All these factors of the snark index considered, it makes sense that this NYT soft news story ranks as snarky as any Gawker text. Gawker’s tone was intentionally designed as a more Internet-attuned version of the NYT’s Sunday Styles, so this—in addition to higher snark scores for all NYT soft news stories—makes sense in light of that fact. If anything, this example reinforces the notion that the experiment is measuring a tone, snark, rather than simply news source. Snark is by no means confined to any one news source, and the *New York Times* does contain Gawker-level snark among some of its pages.

One overall category result does break from conventional wisdom, however: Gawker’s soft news registered as less snarky than Gawker’s hard news by 4.029 points. This belies other results, such as the NYT’s snarkier soft news. If soft news is naturally snarkier, shouldn’t Gawker’s hard news stories be less snarky than its soft news stories? This difference was statistically significant at the .01 level, although the tonal difference remains the smallest out of the six combinations. Why would Gawker hard news be snarkier? Perhaps snark, with its irreverent aggression and informality, its humorous wit and ironic discourse,

stood out more prominently when framed against political scandals and international economic issues (“Utahns Furious as Senator Befriends John Forte,” “Iraq Is So Yesterday; Everyone's Doin' The Abu Dhabi!”). The possibility also exists that Gawker’s hard news stories happen to contain more of the snark attributes in its multidimensional index—that these hard news stories happened to be wittier, more aggressive, more informal, ironical, critical. The serious nature of hard news could easily draw out higher ratings in critique and aggression categories because the tone is more bitingly playful.

Of course, this initial part of the study intended to accentuate the natural tonal differences between Gawker and the *Times*, which the pretest accomplished successfully. The research found snark, both as an element of news source as well as an implicit element of soft news.

Setting up the experiment

That discovery of snark helped make the subsequent experiment possible. Now the study could consider the effects of snark and the underlying question: How does a snarky news media tone affect media reception among readers of both hard news and soft news stories?

To do this, preserving the tonal difference between the news sources was critical. The factor categories were reduced from 5 per category to 2 to allow for more in-depth questioning of participants, making a new total of 8 news excerpts. Selection was based on the highest scores from Gawker and the lowest from the NYT to help create the maximum tonal rift possible. The experiment also called for the research to remove the interaction

effect between story source and story tone, which the change from 20 news excerpts to 8 accomplished.

This selective reduction of stories was double-edged. On the one hand, the narrowed categories did accentuate tonal differences and brought out snark as a significant factor, independent of story type. The downside was that the four categories no longer represented the spectrum of hard and soft news but merely samples of hard and soft news. Gawker's hard news category contained only political news now, and television news stories dominated its soft news category. Snark simply registered the strongest in those two topics, political news and television. In the NYT stories, the least snarky hard news stories were dry, nuts-and-bolts stories about heroin laws and poverty, the hardest of hard news. The NYT soft news contained light narrative pieces about a novelist and about a couple's vineyard proclivities.

The categories maintained their essence as hard and soft news stories in the experiment, but might not have represented all-encompassing suggestion of hard or soft news. Much of this dilution arose from practical limitations, the reality that participants could likely not sustain reading much more than 20 news excerpts in a pretest and continue to reliably rate each excerpt, and later to rate much more than 8 in addition to the greater quantity of questions. Additional testing should be done in the future to consider other news excerpts and see if repeated results are similar.

Considering the Five Reactions to Snark

In the experiment, participants saw these eight news excerpts and rated their reactions to each excerpt. The experiment tested for five central reactions: participants' engagement with each individual story, their level of entertainment, their assessment of the news

excerpt's humor, their judgment of the source's credibility (based on a multidimensional credibility index of accuracy, fairness, comprehensiveness, and believability), and whether the participant wants to read more or less stories written in such a style.

Repeated measures ANOVAs tested both IVs simultaneously to find out what effects each IV projected and how their effects interacted. Statistical analysis of these effects offered the three following findings, central to the study's research question.

- **Finding 7:** Story type and story tone interact significantly in four ways. Hard news caused people to engage with traditional news more and with snarky news less ($p > .05$), to find traditional news more drastically un-funny than with snarky hard news ($p < .05$), to assess traditional news as more credible and snarky news as less ($p < .01$), and to want to read snark less and traditional news more ($p < .01$).
- **Finding 8:** People found snarky stories more engaging ($p < .05$), entertaining ($p < .01$), and humorous ($p < .01$) than non-snarky stories. However, people also found snark less credible ($p < .01$) and reported wanting to read snark less than regular news ($p < .01$).
- **Finding 9:** People reported finding soft news more entertaining ($p < .01$) and humorous ($p < .01$) compared to hard news.

The above three findings are the three most important of the experiment and reflect the core analysis of this study. An examination of means allowed for the additional findings to be drawn from the data:

- **Finding 10:** People found snarky hard news more entertaining ($p < .01$) and humorous ($p < .01$) than traditional hard news, but again, found snarky hard news far less credible

- ($p < .01$) than traditional hard news and wanted to read less of it in comparison ($p < .01$). Traditional NYT hard news earned the highest credibility ratings overall (7.364 mean on a 10-point scale). People were equally engaged with snarky and traditional hard news—no difference emerged.
- **Finding 11:** Yet with snarky soft news, people were more engaged ($p < .01$) in addition to finding snark more entertaining ($p < .01$) and humorous ($p < .01$) than non-snarky news. Again, people found snark less credible ($p < .01$) and wanted to read less of its style ($p < .01$)
 - **Finding 12:** Comparing hard and soft news stories from just Gawker, people found its snarky soft news more engaging ($p < .05$), more entertaining ($p < .01$), more humorous ($p < .01$), and interestingly, more credible ($p < .01$) than its hard news. They had a stronger distaste for the snarky hard news style compared to its soft news ($p < .01$).
 - **Finding 13:** Among the non-snarky NYT stories, people found soft news stories more entertaining ($p < .01$) and humorous ($p < .01$), less credible ($p < .01$), but again, seemingly counter intuitively, wanted to read less of NYT soft news' style ($p = 0.013$). People did not experience any difference of engagement when reading NYT's hard and soft news excerpts.

Again, many people expressed preferences that, on an intuitive level, make sense. The biting, playful nature of snark would naturally be more engaging, entertaining, and humorous. Its intrusive and subjective nature would also, naturally enough, make news readers more suspect of the news source's credibility. Snark caused significant main effects

in all five of the dependent variable measures and had significant interaction effects with story type in four of the five measures.

Snark interacted with story type to influence readers' engagement, for instance. In soft news, people found themselves more engaged with snark than with non-snark, yet that never mattered in hard news. Why the difference? On the one hand, it seems as though hard news should cause greater levels of engagement because people might associate hard news with importance. But as described in other parts of this chapter, people had the greatest problems with snarky hard news—the lowest credibility score, the greatest objection to reading more of the writing style. Those factors may have been strong enough in the case of snarky hard news to lower the engagement score.

The most intriguing result concerns people's desire to read more or less of a particular style. People overwhelmingly reported not wanting to read more of snark in significantly higher numbers than their desire for not reading more traditional news reporting. This seems counter intuitive, given that people report that snark is often more entertaining and humorous, and in the case of soft news and overall, more engaging than the traditional news tone.

Theoretically, one reason may concern people's inherent self-esteem and consequently self-report. People may see snarky news like junk food: fun, tasty, but in the end, bad for the healthy newsreader. People's own enjoyment of snarkiness may be a reaction they regard as ethically bad and to be avoided despite potential pleasures, like reality television and casinos. Such beliefs may influence the self-reported data.

Story type's impact was minimal on its own, based on the repeated measures ANOVAs. According to Finding 9, soft news was more entertaining and humorous overall,

independent of story tone. Soft news' inherent entertainment and humor reinforces the notion that soft news is more lighthearted and naturally more inclined towards snark, as the index scores of the pretest suggested with the higher NYT soft news stories. Snark's main effects tended to be more powerful than story type's, though story type often interacted significantly with snark to influence people's responses. Interaction effects colored four of the five reaction measures.

Story type's impacts seem stronger and more apparent when limiting the analysis to one news source, Gawker or NYT. Again, whether snarky or not, soft news was reported to be more humorous and entertaining than hard news. When looking at Gawker alone, its snarky soft news was considered more engaging, and interestingly, more credible than its hard news. Perhaps people considered snark and soft news topics to go hand in hand, which led them to see more credibility in snarky coverage of television programs. Applying snark to serious topics, such as political scandal, may seem disrespectful, and consequently, less worthy of reader trust. Given all these positive reactions to snarky soft news, it is no great surprise that people want to read more snarky soft news than snarky hard news.

Most reactions remained similar among the tests of traditional, non-snarky stories from the *New York Times*. People found NYT's soft news stories more humorous and entertaining, though also less credible, compared to its hard news stories.

Credibility involved one of the most powerful interaction effects between story tone and story type ($p < .01$). Again, this may involve people's associations and expectations regarding news tone. A snarky tone, despite lacking inherent objectivity, seems appropriate

to a reader applied to those soft news topics. In traditional (particularly American) news, where objectivity and distinctly non-snarky language is privileged above subjectivity and flair in the arena of public trust, people perhaps associate credibility with the bare facts, such as the spare style of hard news stories. This would explain why soft news Gawker stories have higher credibility ratings than hard news Gawker items, yet the NYT soft news items have lower credibility ratings than NYT hard news items. The key is appropriateness of tone to subject matter, particularly regarding reader expectations.

Broader Conclusions Regarding the Five Central Reactions and their Validity

Of the five measures, several gave important and significant results. The most notable results were the three measures of entertainment, humor, and the credibility index of fairness, believability, accuracy, and comprehensiveness. Those three measures—entertainment, humor, and credibility—were especially impacted by the independent variables of story tone and story type. The IVs also often affected readers' engagement with the news excerpts. The responses to all variables tended toward the mean, but the independent variables still caused noticeable and consistent differences.

Several notable results emerge when glancing broadly at the data. Traditional hard news, for instance, registered as not funny at all, scoring 1.773 on a 10-point humor scale, whereas its credibility ranked the highest at 7.364. Could those two variables be connected? People likely associate credibility with seriousness; the low humor may naturally correlate

with high credibility. Inversely, though to a lesser degree, snarky soft news received high humor marks, 6.091 out of 10, and low credibility marks of 4.177.

The two factors of snark and story type also had a powerful interacting effect in how readers interpret the news source's credibility. No matter the story type, snark always elicited significantly lower marks of credibility. But considered by story source, hard news written in traditional NYT style yielded higher credibility scores than traditional NYT soft news (though both NYT scores received high credibility marks than Gawker's). The opposite was true with the low credibility scores of snark, where snarky hard news ranked as less credible than its soft news.

Interestingly, the news excerpts inspired different levels of humor and entertainment, which suggests that the two measures are, while similar, truly different. While readers rated traditional hard news to have that devastatingly low humor, 1.773, they rated its entertainment a more generous 4.263 out of 10. Across all the tests, the entertainment scores are often 1 to 2 points and sometimes as many as 4 points higher than the humor scores.

Despite the variance between humor and entertainment, the measures seemed to correlate across the board. For instance, people found both Gawker's and the *Times*' soft news more entertaining and more humorous than its hard news. Gawker stories were seen as more humorous and entertaining than NYT stories in every test. Whenever people found something more humorous than an alternative, they also found it more entertaining, which is natural enough. The values for derived entertainment always happened to be higher than derived humor scores though. Why? One possible explanation is that "humor" refers to a

more visceral, intense enjoyment, a reaction of laughter, while “entertainment” is more cerebral and more naturally in line with reading news stories. People find news stories more entertaining than humorous, in general, because of the semantics. A news story is mentally stimulating (entertaining) rather than laugh-out-loud funny (humorous). That would explain why across all tests, entertainment scores are higher than humor scores despite their clear correspondence. Never did a news story provoke a notoriously high entertainment score and receive a low humor score. The concepts are linked.

Engagement only registered as significant in about half the experiment’s cases. People were most significantly engaged when reading snarky soft news, statistically higher than snarky hard news and traditional soft news. Again, the story type (soft news) goes hand in hand with story tone (snark), according to conventional media practices and reader expectations, so it makes sense that people were most engaged when reading snarkily-penned soft news. This explains the interaction effect of engagement ($p < .05$).

The most complicated of the five reactions questions was likely “Would you want to read more news stories written like this?” The question offered readers the chance to respond on a 5-point scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, No strong reaction either way, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree (the first assigned the numerical value 1 and the last the value 5, for those consulting the tables in the previous chapter). The question differed from other measures, being 1-5 rather than 1-10, and its choices (“Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree”) do not semantically match up with question asked (“Would you like to read more news stories written like this?”). The response choices likely should have been along the lines of “Very much” to “Not at All.” These issues concern the design of the question and may have

impacted the responses of the participants. That possibility of distortion remains unknown, however. The question's design should likely be revised if used in subsequent studies to include a change in response wording and likely to make the choices on a scale of 1-10 rather than 1-5 to maintain question consistency.

Again, many answers to the "Do you want to read more stories like this?" question tended toward the mean response of 3 ("No strong reaction either way"). But take a look at the responses to snark and then traditional NYT stories. The average response to snark always fell on the side of wanting to read less (above 3) and the average response to traditional NYT news always fell on the side of wanting to read more (below 3).

That consistency points to one common belief: snark is a turn-off for readers, or so readers say. Earlier in this chapter, there was the suggestion that readers may regard snark as candy, whereas the NYT is more akin to a fruit basket, which would explain why snark's powerful positive responses in engaging, entertaining, and provoking humor in readers fail to cause readers to report wanting to read more snark. The participants' background may also have influenced this response. Participants had been recruited from University of Missouri journalism classes, and as such, had underwent journalistic ethics training and may have been predisposed to reject a nonobjective snarky tone offering the news.

The question "Would you want to read more news stories written like this?" also experienced a significant interaction effect between the two IVs, and a point of interest concerns snarky news stories. The response to both Gawker's hard news and soft news turned readers off (IE, the means fell above 3), but the mean of snarky hard news was .222 points higher on the 5-point scale, 3.475 compared to snarky soft news' 3.253. The greater negative reaction to snarky hard news may again concern appropriateness of tone—people

might not want to read serious news delivered in a flip fashion. Then again, the difference was a small one and the common reaction to reading either type of snark was mildly negative. The presence of snark far outweighs whether the story covers hard or soft news.

Revisiting the Word Snark and the Experiment's Qualitative Element

A central issue imbedded in this study's research question is the definition of snark. The study defined snark as a combination of wit, aggression, critique, irony, and informality, and the results uphold that snark index in analyzing the two news sources. Snark, however, remains a young word more common in circles of media criticism and is still in the process of spreading to mainstream. To examine common understanding of the word snark, a minor qualitative element was integrated into the study.

Concluding the experiment was a question asking participants to define the word "snarky" and consider its role in the news. People were allowed to write whatever they wanted to, without any limited experimenter choices. The experiment had an N of 99, and the 99 responses can be read in their entirety in Appendix II. Responses may have been influenced because the majority of participants studied journalism at university, which suggests many of the participants owned laptops and had a healthy diet of online news.

About a quarter of respondents explicitly stated they did not know what snarky meant. Several others gave responses that were clearly off-base ("I would define snarky as false, ridiculous information," "threaten to society through websites using information") or perhaps a mistaken definition of the word narc ("sneaking around or being secretive," "an adjective to describe someone or something that is sneaky, or secretly spying, or snooping around for hidden information...a snark could be useful to uncover hidden information and

get the ‘real story,’” “someone who gets the news through undercover work. A snark is the person who is being snarky...”). Several people properly defined snark as a tone but seemed to define it as more negative than much current usage would support (“coniving or up to no good,” “using underlying meaning and wordage to trick someone”). Those strongly negative assessments, citing maliciousness and cruel intentions, are more akin to the snark definition of the *New Yorker’s* David Denby. Several suggested that snark meant that reporters took a clear side and injected bias into their stories, which is understandable; snark is certainly more subjective than traditional writing.

Many responses, however, cited exactly the qualities identified by the snark index and offered many comments that harmonize with the analysis earlier in the chapter. All the attributes of the snark index were directly referenced in some way: “Witty language,” “sarcastic with a tinge of humour,” “nasty and critical,” “off hand, underhanded comments,” “a little pompous and critical of other’s work,” “an attempt at biting, critical and/or ironic humor,” “tongue-in-cheek.” The comments often used the words sarcasm and biting. People associated the tone with political attacks, satire, “over-the-top news pundits and celebrity gossip shows” such as Keith Olbermann.

People reacted to the idea of snark in different ways, some attacking the tone while others receptive to it. One person said snark “ruins the news” for him or her. This, of course, differs greatly from the person who wrote, “I do love snarkiness because I am VERY snarky!!”

Snark undermined the journalism’s credibility, according to many of the 99 responses. One person said snark “seek[s] to undermine the credibility of a supposed truth.” Another said “its presence in a news story borders on zero-sum with credibility” and still a

third—referring incidentally to two of the five tested reactions—said, “I think the use of snark in news makes it more entertaining sometimes, but takes away their credibility.” Others agreed: “Scarcasm could be entertaining but I don't think it is accurate to have in a news report.” Still another said snark “doesn't make news sources seem credible” and others talked of its “entertainment value.” Snark is “fun to read.”

Those responses reflect the data and conclusions of the study. The study's findings discussed how snark did quantifiably cause readers to be more entertained while negatively impact the news' credibility. These quantitative sentiments reflect the qualitative intuitions of the study's participants.

Finally, the participants also expressed many of the same theories about the appropriateness of tone depending on the context as expressed earlier in the discussion chapter. One person said snark was “okay if it used in an opinion column” but “unprofessional in most news,” a sentiment that many others echoed. One person explicitly referred to its inappropriateness in hard news, a view supported by the study's analysis: “In a column, or perhaps a blog, it [snark] would be perfectly acceptable and maybe even add something to the content. But in hard news stories it would detract from the news value by adding unnecessary opinion.”

Two quotes in particular provided enlightened, even-handed commentary about snark's use in news: “I might define snarky as some ‘gotcha’ reporting, like what we saw with the Hatch story and the Blago story. However, I enjoy those stories a lot. Getting down to the truth of the matter (although both articles had their biases), but getting down to the personal common-folk talk (with some snark) is entertaining and engaging. A nice substitute from the AP style, boring, ‘we report, you decide’ news.” This quote speaks to the natural

divide between the “boring” traditional style and snark, and again spoke directly, if unintentionally, to two of the study’s central measures of entertainment and engagement. Most economically insightful was the following: “Journalists should use snark like a chef uses habanero peppers... sparingly and only on the right dishes.” The right dishes, of course, would likely be the soft news, the blogs, and other avenues in which people derived strong enjoyment values based on this study.

Again, the full list of 99 responses can be found in Appendix II of this study.

Answering the Research Question

How does a snarky news media tone affect media reception among readers of both hard news and soft news stories? A snarky news media tone engages people more, entertains them, provokes a response of humor, yet destroys credibility and makes people want to read less of the style, especially in the case of hard news. As such, snark works well with soft news, where humor and entertainment always come out stronger anyway, whether the source is snarky or not. Snarky writing combines wit, irony, aggression, critique, and informality.

These are strong conclusions that can be drawn from the research’s results. In the following Conclusions chapter, the study will consider the broader theoretical and practical context of the findings, additional limitations of the study, and suggestions for future work.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS

Research for this study led to several significant conclusions regarding the definition of snark, its effects on readers, and how snark interacts with particular types of stories that cover hard and soft news. These findings fit within a broader fabric of studies, both as part of the uses and gratifications research in communication and with practical relevance for those practicing in the field of journalism and helping to design new financially feasible models of journalism. This chapter addresses those issues as well as the study's broader limitations and recommendations for further research.

On reliability and validity

The study dealt with several measures that are difficult to quantify and even properly qualify, snark chief among them. The first major question to consider: did the study reliably measure snark?

In this study, snark was defined as a conceptual index comprising wit, aggression, critique, irony, and informality. Applied to 20 news excerpts, the index revealed several significant differences ($p < .01$) when comparing the 10 Gawker news stories and the 10 New York Times stories. How reliable was the scale though? The calculation of Cronbach's alpha is a common statistical method for testing a conceptual index's internal reliability and the

degree to which its component attributes correlate. A score below .3 is considered weak and above .7 considered strong. Calculating the mean Cronbach's alpha for each of the 20 snark scores yields 0.587.

With a mean Cronbach's alpha of .587, the snark index captured the correlation of its component attributes with minimum adequacy, but given the exploratory nature of this study, the score is sufficiently high to warrant attention and further study. Multiple individual news excerpts had Cronbach's alphas above .70 and 14 of the 20 news excerpts had Cronbach's alphas above .60.

The snark index's composition also differed from many traditional conceptual indices. To compare within this study, consider the credibility index. The experiment's credibility index measured four attributes—believability, fairness, comprehensiveness, and accuracy. Those four measures naturally fall in line with one another to create the stronger measure of credibility, with a mean Cronbach's alpha close to .89, and to achieve that strong correlation, the four measures approach redundancy in their similarity. If a news story is rated accurate, it is almost inevitably believable.

The snark index's five measures are anything but similar. How drastically different are the measures of aggression and wit, ironic discourse and critique? No natural overlap exists among the snark index measures individually, intentionally. Given the nature of this exploratory snark index, an extremely high Cronbach's alpha would be just as suspect as a low one. Snark's tone does not demand equally correlating high measures of all five attributes for each news excerpt. Snark is characterized by the general presence of these five attributes

rather than their exact match at a certain level. A snarky news item could easily register as 10 in wit, 7 in aggression, 9 in informality, and 6 in irony, and should still be considered quite snarky. With that in mind, a mean Cronbach's alpha of .587 could be considered successful in isolating the general presence of those five attributes and sufficiently significant to reexamine and refine the study's snark index for further, deeper study.

Reinforcing this conclusion are the several statistical tests conducted in the pretest and the experiment, which found significant differences at the .05 and more often .01 level between snark index scores as well as reaction measurements from Gawker and the *New York Times* stories. These tests confirmed quantifiable differences between two news sources that already, on an anecdotal, qualitative basis, differ greatly on account of their snarky and non-snarky news tones. The stories fall into two distinct score concentrations based on news source, which further suggest that the experiment reliably measured snark.

The study's validity also needs to be assessed. First, the selection of test groups may have influenced the validity in these experiments. The participants were mostly undergraduate journalism students at the University of Missouri. As such, many of the participants likely owned laptops and read great amounts of news online, two factors which could have made participants more receptive to snarkiness. The participants' journalism background could have also instilled them with ethical training that caused them to reject the idea of snark as a journalistic tone when asked whether they wanted to read more of the style.

A regression threat may have affected results of the pretest and study, in which participants tended to give scores close to the mean. In spite of that, however, a plethora of

statistically significant comparisons and differences were outlined, which suggests that construct validity was maintained throughout both pretest and study. Construct validity also benefited from the methodology of the pretest, which called for each participant to be given a sheet with definitions of the five attributes of the snark index. This sheet of definitions gave participants common definitions to consult when considering the measure of concepts such as “Aggressive” and “Witty.”

The study’s internal validity is unlikely to suffer from a threat of history. The news excerpts were all taken from 2008 in order to keep them fresh. Snark seems to rely on several cultural cues, so the source texts needed to be relatively recent. But the passage of time may affect how people culturally define the word snark and use its tone.

Other elements may have interacted to influence the participants’ reactions in the experiment. The study has focused exclusively on story tone (snark/non-snark) and story topic (hard/soft news), but stories from Gawker and the *New York Times* had other features that may have distinguished them. The use of punctuation, presence of spelling or grammar mistakes, the use of the first-person, and other idiosyncrasies may have influenced the participants’ reactions, though the snark’s attributes five attributes sought to encompass the majority of them (for example, differences in punctuation style ideally would have been considered an element of the news excerpt’s formality ranking).

Results in relation to current academic literature

Although past research conducted on the specific tonal difference is sparse, this study's findings fit with much of the established literature on the topic. Snark's tone, quantifiably established, seems to capture the qualities of its index, all of which were previously described in academic and popular literature.

Much of the literature on tone concerns magazine writing, however. Literature emphasized the ironic discourse of men's magazines such as *GQ* and *Loaded*, imbedded irony inherent in the medium (Benwell, 2004), which has evolved into one of the elements of modern online snark, included in the tone's index. Interestingly, ironic discourse was previously associated with men's magazines in particular and "new lad" masculinity, whereas in this study, snark attracted women more than men. Of course, this may not be any cause for dissonance—women account for nearly a quarter of *GQ*'s readers and may respond to new lad masculinity the same way they do to snark (Conde Nast, 2009). Based on this study, it is impossible to characterize snark as either particularly masculine or feminine. Snark quite likely represents a new tone, laden more heavily with aggression and other attributes than the ironical tone of men's magazines discussed in prior studies.

Tone is primarily important because it can influence why people read certain news sources, a major issue given the choices of the Internet. Past Internet research illustrated the problems of the "hyperlink culture" and the way newsreaders now seek jumping-off points online to connect with news (Stafford et al., 2004). What this creates, in essence, is a competition between jumping-off points online, a competition for the attention of

newsreaders. Will readers access their news from Google Reader or Yahoo News, Gawker or the *New York Times* ' homepage, CNN.com or the BBC? Those with an interest in literary news need only visit blogs such as BookNinja.com, MaudeNewton.com, or ALDaily.com to find a daily compilation and breakdown of literary news. This study has shown snark and soft news to be enjoyable for newsreaders, given their high ratings of engagement, entertainment, and humor. Thus, snark and soft news have an advantage in attracting attention.

The benefits of snark, however, contrast with the disadvantage of low credibility. What counts more with readers: the humor and entertainment value of news or the impression of credibility it lends? The study may have already offered an answer in another of the questions. In the experiment, people reported not wanting to read more snarkiness while wanting to read more of traditional *New York Times* reporting. People reported this in spite of their positive ratings of snark's engagement, entertainment, and humor. This suggests that people want to read more objective news rather than snark, and that traditional news styles still inspire loyal readers. Then again, those responses come from self-reporting, which may not reliably reflect people's real behavior. People may consciously feel that the traditional, familiar objective reporting style is better and that they want to read that more, but does that reported impulse translate into clicking follow-through online? The noblest *Times* fans in the world may still find themselves reading Perez Hilton's celebrity gossip when they come into the office at 8:30 in the morning. Those same people who said they favored the *New York Times* ' style in the study may privately prefer celebrity news on their own time.

After all, snark did amuse newsreaders more, and past literature also supports the notion that going online “as a means of accessing information functional in everyday life can also be playful distraction” (Wilson et al., 2003). According to these more recent uses and gratifications studies, reading news online involves play and social interactivity, which the personality of snark may often help deliver to a large percentage of newsreaders sifting through content online. Snark may fulfill deep gratifications of newsreaders in the fractured, decentralized environment of the Internet. Snark becomes the amusing, human voice amid the scores of news websites and consequently warmer and far more capable of creating a sense of social interactivity with newsreaders than traditional, more serious newspaper tones—or as one research participant in this study phrased it, “AP style, boring.”

The transformational nature of journalism also complicates the analysis of snark. The toll on snark’s credibility may be a temporary consequence of changing styles on the Internet rather than a more permanent consequence of the style. In other words, people only doubt snark delivers credible news because they are not used to snark delivering credible news, given the traditional voice of journalism. Mark Deuze’s concept of “liquid journalism”—in which people’s traditional perceptions of journalism and voice are changing to fit new Internet-specific uses and gratifications—speaks to the inadequacy of old models to satisfy newsreaders. That traditional voice “does not seem to be able to engage the consumer-citizen in a meaningful way,” a statement which harmonizes well with this study’s findings (Deuze, 2008). This study found that people engaged more with snarky news than non-snarky traditional news.

These positive, stimulating reactions inspired by snark seem to coincide well with soft news and potentially celebrity gossip. Past journalism research has found that our culture

has become much more celebrity-driven in recent years (Hendrickson, 2005). Yet that impression has not been consistent throughout journalism research and commentary. A writer named John Morton dismissed the general idea. “Celebrity journalism is merely a variant of sensationalism, and it has always been fodder for the media,” Morton said, referring to penny presses and celebrity coverage in the initial decades of the 20th century (Morton, 1997). Furthermore, a Pew Research Center study found that interest in tabloid news has not substantially increased throughout the last 20 years, with Celebrity Scandal ranked lowest in interest (Robinson, 2007). Still, there seems to be more and more celebrity news surrounding Americans these days, and whether on cable news, the Internet, or in print, the lines between traditional journalism and tabloid coverage grow increasingly grey. Last year, for instance, the Associated Press announced plans to increase their celebrity and entertainment coverage and add 21 employees in Los Angeles, New York, and London to help achieve those goals and meet, as one A.P. director said, “overwhelming demand from customers and members for coverage of celebrity, movies and music” (Finke, 2008).

What of this seeming discrepancy, then, between the feast of celebrity news and the reported appetite? It may concern self-report and suggest weaknesses in the Pew study. People know celebrity news is fluff and, in a survey, would not be inclined to report that they follow celebrity news closely. Celebrity news may be seen as junk food in the same way that a snarky tone is, and this discrepancy may resemble the one in the study, where people report not wanting to read more of Gawker’s snarky style despite reportedly enjoying it more. Regardless of people’s publicly stated good intentions, their private instincts may drive up both snark and softer or celebrity coverage online.

Practical considerations of snark

One way to consider the study's snark index—comprising wit, aggression, critique, irony, and informality—is to look at the five attributes as elements of personality infused in the writing. Snark charges writing with personality in the same way that Tom Wolfe's New Journalism did fifty years ago and in the decades since. Both styles have broken from standard objective news tones (“that pale beige tone...a faded personality”) with the goals of engaging and entertaining readers, though New Journalism appeared to operate best in magazine long-form and snark in blog short-form (Wolfe, 1973). The subjective charm of both lively news tones also has suffered from the same opportunity cost: lower credibility. This study's findings show that snark continues the rebellion against century-old objective news tones, but the tonal rebellion of snark is more attuned to the present context of the Internet. Again, of course, the rebellion has pushed for more personality in the writing, with its attendant damaged credibility.

As the traditional publishing gatekeepers fall, the Internet has become a populist environment in which snark can finally have a home. Online, snarky news aggregators have not had to worry much about credibility; their concern is attracting eyes, hits for their websites, and the entertainment, engagement, and humor pulls of snark make it a powerful and natural discursive tool for the Internet.

The passage of time may force some of the larger aggregators such as The Huffington Post and Gawker to flatten the tone's personality and emphasize credibility to compete, but there is no sign of that yet. There is also no evidence within this study that a snarky news tone actually correlates with less truthful news; the finding is that snarky news tone leads to

an impression of less credible news. These larger commercial aggregators could easily emphasize their credibility—their truth and accuracy—while maintaining the same generally snarky tone.

The lower credibility, as borne out anecdotally and within this study quantifiably and qualitatively, seems to have no impact on the growth of snark in the media. The presence of the tone and the notoriety of the word appears to increase, evinced online, in print and in David Denby's book. Why the explosion of snark? On a practical level, there seem to be three main reasons.

First and quite simply, if snark does engage entertain people more, as this study has found, those reasons likely account for much of its new prominence. Distractions abound in the last decade, and snark is a delightful distraction. Snark is humorous, and people like to laugh.

The second reason comes from a broader societal shift in elite media tastes of the past half-century. Earlier research pointed to ironic discourse in men's magazines, and consequently, that ironic tendency was included as an attribute in the study's snark index. The notion of cultural irony has broader and more important implications. Its integration into Western culture has manifested in several ways, including in Post-Modernism, in self-aware writers such as David Foster Wallace and Don DeLillo, and in television, perhaps emerging initially in sitcoms such as *Seinfeld* and continuing in more recent mockumentary comedies such as *The Office* and *Arrested Development*. A certain attitude permeates these works, that same knowingness, wit, and humor alluded to in earlier research about the voice of men's

magazines. The attitude seems to capture a post-Modern meta-awareness about the culture that precedes the given work. The attitude plays upon those expectations, privileging a mixture of kitsch, cleverness, cultural trivia and ennui wedded to high-mindedness, and often a less traditionally sentimental narrative that lends a new sense of authenticity. Irony has existed forever, but a full ironic culture never flourished until the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st. Its prevailing mood among the educated class, combined with the populist information explosion of the Internet, has helped to naturally elevate a tone such as snark.

Third, several broader changes in media have been allowing to snark to thrive. In the last two decades, media outlets have increased their soft news coverage of entertainment and celebrity news, such as in the Associated Press's decision to increase its entertainment and celebrity coverage last year. This study showed a connection between soft news and snark, and as soft news becomes a bigger part of people's news diet, snark has likely accompanied it. One consequence of increased info-tainment and soft news coverage likely means more snark entering mainstream news coverage.

Regardless of the reasons for its popularity, snark is now a distinct outgrowth of journalism and should not be ignored. Perhaps the biggest question is: what role should snark play within journalism? There are ethical dimensions to the issue. Over the course of the last century, the field of journalism has developed and enforced a series of principles about how to deliver news to people. Fifty years ago, journalism referred to something concrete—to magazines, newspapers, radio, and broadcast television. A change occurred throughout the

last thirty years. People suddenly could receive information from a zine, from cable channels, from any countless number of websites. Such freedom has given the average person greater power in dispensing information, and thus principles and definitions of journalism weaken. Deuze's liquid journalism emerges. The cracks in old media's foundations partly explain how snark and personality-driven writing returned to characterize news coverage but also force us to reassess what snark means ethically.

First, consider the quantified reactions to snark shown within this study. Snark entertains and engages and people find it more humorous than other news. Yet are those desired virtues in journalism? It seems positive for journalism to engage its readers, but entertainment and humor seem entirely outside the traditional ethical role of journalism in society. Its chief role has been to inform, objectively. If anything, entertainment qualities in journalism have often been characterized as threatening, the idea of "info-tainment" a cheapening of journalistic integrity.

Snark also caused two negative reactions. People did not want to continue reading the style, and snarkiness hurt credibility. Thus, as a basis for journalism, snark appears to have only one central virtue, which is its greater ability to engage readers. However, that virtue of engagement has a caveat—snark's engaging quality appears to derive mostly from an interaction with soft news.

As such, perhaps snark functions best as an arm of soft news, in line with people's common expectations about tonal appropriateness. The tone of snark shares roots with magazine writing and media criticism and its witty, biting filter seems best applied to less

serious topics. This study has shown how snark can be intensely distasteful to people when found in hard news and strongly damages its credibility, much more than in soft news.

Yet many snarky websites, which frequently mark a jumping-off point on the Internet for newsreaders, combine hard and soft news in their coverage. Those people reading snarky hard news should bear in mind the weak credibility and consult other sources on the Internet for a fuller perspective about the hard news issue at hand. Snarky news aggregators, with their tendency to please without appearing credible, seem likely to pose a major problem if people consulted only those websites. But if the snarky news stays as one choice of many in a reader's news diet, the snark potentially becomes a positive and entertaining filter for the original news, a filter containing both opinion and entertainment. Snark can be seen as similar to *The Daily Show* or other satirical perspectives on the news.

Recommendations for future research

Past academic research suggests that additional elements associated with online snarky news tones, such as the ability to comment on blog posts and click hyperlinks, helps engage readers. Further study should integrate those elements into their experimental designs to test for their effect on newsreader engagement and other reactions. Future research on snark should also experiment with news excerpts from different sources beyond Gawker and the *New York Times*. It may be possible, for instance, to replicate the study with snarky soft news excerpts from the *New York Times*, given the higher snark index scores of one or two isolated *Times* stories. Doing so would remove the confounding factors of drawing from two

news sources. This study strongly connects snark with news source, and future research will need to continue to isolate tone in order to study its composition and effects.

The study also suggested that level of education, age, and daily hours of computer usage impacted reception to snark, but the study failed to flush full conclusions due to the limited sample size, consisting mostly of undergraduate students. Future experiments should attain diverse samples to consider these demographic elements.

Deeper qualitative study should examine audience reception to snark as well as the motivations of those who write it. Do they see themselves as journalists? Bloggers? How do purveyors of snark see their audience and themselves? An in-depth rhetorical analysis of the different constructions of snark would also be appropriate.

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APPENDIX I

How Others Describe the Snark of Gawker Media

The following several quotes were compiled to help give a sense of how media perceived the news-gossip website Gawker's beginnings and evolving voice. Gawker serves as a central component in this analysis of snark, and these quotes can help provide perspective. This seems especially important given the limited knowledge of Gawker away from America's big cities and coasts. The quotes, a select few, were included to shed light on Gawker's changing identity over the past decade.

Gawker, Manhattan Media News and Gossip

~Gawker.com, December 2008

New York City-based Gawker is a chatty morph of Page Six and the old *Spy* magazine—a must-read for anyone involved in the Gothamite stew of news junkiness, celebrity trash, and bitchy gossip.

~Steven Levy, "How Can I Sex Up This Blog Business?", *Wired*, June 2004

Current obsessions/topics of interest include but are not limited to, urban dating rituals, Cond Nastiness, celebutantes, Hamptons gauche, real estate porn, ironic hipster couture, fantasy

skyscrapers, downwardly mobile i-bankers, Eurotrash infestations, loathesome literati, no-ropes social climbing, pomp, circumstance, and other matters of serious import. Gawker was named to Entertainment Weekly's 2003 "IT list", one of Time magazine's "Top 50 Websites" for 2003, a "Best Media Blog" (2003) by Forbes, and a "Best of Breed" online news site by the New York New Media Association.

~"About Elizabeth Spiers [Gawker founding editor]," Gawker.com,
February 21st, 2003

They [the founders of Gawker] didn't exactly invent the blog, but the tone they used for Gawker became the most important stylistic influence on the emerging field of blogging and has turned into the de facto voice of blogs today.

~ Vanessa Grigoriadis, "Everybody Sucks," *New York*, October 15th,
2007

Journalists tend to read Gawker, the caustic New York media gossip blog, to make sure they're not in it.

~Andrew Adam Newman, "Gawker Kerfuffle, in Plain View," *The New York Times*, October 15th, 2007

Denton (4:59:53 p.m.): think of gawker as nyt Sunday Styles, but with much lower threshold for a story

~Nick Denton, founder and publisher of Gawker Media, in an instant message to a prospective writer, “The Gawker Job Interview,” *New York Times*, January 12th, 2008

One of the interesting/dangerous things about Gawker is that it tries and often succeeds in taking an outsider position on things....What’s more, those outsiders are not in essence reporters or analysts: in keeping with the current ethos of the web, they are aggregators. They take a sense of things that’s floating in the atmosphere—and into their email tip boxes—and formulate it into posts. But is it correct to say that this sense of things they’re sensing is coming from the underground, in even my very broad definition? I don’t know. Mostly not. But a little bit.

~Keith Gessen, novelist and magazine publisher, on his tumblr, July 2nd, 2008

Gawker Media would be fourth largest newspaper group online...[Says more about the newspaper industry's challenge, than anything else.]

~Nick Denton, founder and publisher of Gawker Media, in September 2007 comparing Gawker Media’s 6.6 million unique views per month in a graph showing Gawker Media just behind the views for the NYTimes.com, USAToday.com, and the WashingtonPost.com and exceeding the views of the LATimes.com and WSJ.com, quoted in *Advertising Age*

But everyone reads Gawker—or anyway everyone reads it when it’s making fun of them. And the comments are the best part...And the thing is, Gawker is a significant cultural phenomenon, like it or not. And it’s incredibly resilient: the fact that it continues to chug along despite being abandoned by two of its best writers is a testament to the fact that it’s got its own momentum, it fulfills some kind of deep social need...If anything I’m guilty of not reading enough Gawker. I only read it when it makes fun of me. That’s dilettantism. Really I should be sitting on there all day defending everyone. In fact the government should have a grant for that. An NEA grant.

~Keith Gessen, novelist and magazine publisher, on his tumblr, June 12th, 2008

Gawker Media is an online media company founded and owned by Nick Denton based in New York City. It is considered to be one of the most visible and successful blog-oriented media companies. As of April 2008, it was the parent company for 12 different weblogs, including Gawker.com, Defamer, Fleshbot, Deadspin, Lifehacker, Gizmodo, Consumerist, io9, Kotaku and Jezebel.

~Wikipedia entry of “Gawker Media,” December 7th, 2008

... let me share a story about my experience with the media-gossip blog Gawker.com, which I, like most journalists who cover stylish topics in New York, have read almost every day for five years....Like most journalists, I tend to have a defeatist attitude about Gawker,

dismissing it as the *Mystery Science Theater 3000* of journalism, or accepting its vague put-downs under the principle that any press is good press.

~Vanessa Grigoriadis, “Everybody Sucks,” *New York*, October 15th,
2007

Only a few months after its official launch, Gawker was already a media industry phenomenon of some importance. By May 2003, Denton reported on Gawker that the site received more than 20,000 visitors per day and 500,000 page views per month.

~Carla Blumenkranz, “Gawker, 2002-2007,” *n+1*, December 3rd, 2007

Visits per Month US: 65,859,917 Global: 94,878,557

~Quantcast tracking of the network monthly traffic of “Gawker
Network” as of October 27th, 2009

“THE ideal Gawker item,” Nick Denton, the owner of Gawker Media, wrote in an instant message last month to a prospective hire, “is something triggered by a quote at a party, or an incident, or a story somewhere else and serves to expose hypocrisy, or turn conventional wisdom on its head...And it’s 100 words long...200 max...Any good idea can be expressed at that length.”

~ Allen Salkin, “Has Gawker Jumped The Snark?”, *The New York Times*, January 13th, 2008

...N+1, a culture journal, followed with a thoroughly researched essay noting how Gawker's voice has changed with successive editors, descending from a homespun blog that smartly sniped about editors like Tina Brown and Anna Wintour, whose prominence arguably opened them to sarcastic comment, to its current state as a cruel behemoth, eviscerating low-level editors and people's children.

Through all of the years, changes in editorship and complaints about inaccuracies, traffic still grew. According to statistics available through a link on Gawker and older statistics provided by a former Gawker employee, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to avoid Mr. Denton's wrath, the site logged about 700,000 page views in August 2003, the last month of the founding editor, Elizabeth Spiers. A year later, there were 2.8 million pages views, which grew to 5.4 million in August 2005 and to almost 9 million in August 2006.

One thing was constant: many of those page views were being generated by members of the news media. As messy and mean as Gawker could be, it was an addiction to many journalists, obsessively clicking in search of the diversion that fresh gossip about colleagues and their bosses offered from the toil of reporting and editing the news.

~ Allen Salkin, "Has Gawker Jumped The Snark?", *The New York Times*, January 13th, 2008

Confronted with endless examples of unfairness, favoritism and just plain stupidity among New York's cultural establishment, the Gawker "voice" was righteously indignant but comically defeated, sighing in unison with an audience that believed nothing was as it seemed and nothing would ever really change. Everyone was fatter or older or worse-skinned than he or she pretended to be. Every man was cheating on his partner; all women were

slutty. Writers were plagiarists or talentless hacks or shameless beneficiaries of nepotism. Everyone was a hypocrite. No one was loved. There was no success that couldn't be hollowed out by the revelation of some deep-seated inadequacy.

~Emily Gould, former Gawker editor, "Blog Post Confidential," *New York Times Magazine*, May 25, 2008

Several times a day—oh hell, a dozen times a day—I click my way to Gawker and Wonkette for a couple of minutes of reading that usually elicit more guilt than pleasure. If you've yet to visit these blogs, imagine them as the twin offspring of a date-rape incident between Drudge Report and the original Spy magazine...despite the demonstrable talent that goes into both sites, they insist on handing out rote poundings to their subjects with a monotonous sadism that makes few distinctions among worthy and unworthy targets...

~Jack Schafer, "The Heaving Pukes Who Write *Gawker* and *Wonkette*," *Slate*, March 11th, 2004

APPENDIX II

Concluding the experiment was the question below, which asked participants to define the word “snarky” and consider its role in the news. People were allowed to write whatever they wanted to, without any limited experimenter choices. The experiment had an N of 99, and the 99 responses can be read below in their entirety, unedited. Any misspellings or grammar mistakes are their own. Further discussion of this qualitative element is featured near the end of the discussion chapter, Chapter 6.

“And finally, how would you define the word snarky and what is your opinion of snark used in the news?”

1. threaten to society through websites using information
2. Snarky is a way of presenting information with an obviously poor attitude. Snark in certain circumstances, such as editorials or pieces that are supposed to be satirical is acceptable. In other kinds of news, it should be avoided.
3. I have no idea what snarky is. It sounds like it would be a word for something made up in the news, relatively mean?
4. To be honest, I don't know how to define snarky. I do feel however, that it would be a great word to use in the news because it is such a colorful and unique word that will keep reader/viewers engaged.

5. I would define snarky as a demeaning tone. Sometimes journalists get snarky when they have a strong opinion on a topic. I enjoy reading opinionated editorials, but I'd prefer less snark in my everyday news consumption.
6. It means to be sarcastic. I think sarcasm is used a lot in opinion pieces (editorials) and critical reviewing.
7. I would define the word snarky as an adjective describing someone who is sharp critical and rude. I have never heard that word used in the news.
8. I would say that it's usually used negatively, to describe someone who's being particularly sassy or rude because they think they're better than someone else.
9. I have no heard of the term snarky, but if I were to take a guess it would snarky would refer to a witty, sarcastic tone of voice.
10. I have no idea what that is!
11. I would define snarky as a rude way to state something, close to a mocking tone. I think the use of snark in news makes it more entertaining sometimes, but takes away their credibility.
12. I don't know what snarky means. Sounds like it would mean something similar to snobby.
13. Using sarcasm in the speech... Sarcasm could be entertaining but I don't think it is accurate to have in a news report
14. I would define the word snarky as attempting to bring down public figures or individuals in the media by making side comments or injecting bias into a piece that may go under the radar to the average viewer or reader. My opinion is the snark should only be used

in the news with two people representing their opinions on both sides, not just one figure lashing out at another.

15. when I hear the word snarky, I think of sarcasm and someone trying to make me think they're right simply because, with the way they represent the OTHER side of the story, I'd have to be an idiot to NOT believe their side. Snark is good and bad. But I think if you're going to use it, you should make it obvious that you're not being fair.

16. Snarky is a little childish and also passive aggressive. Its off putting if not used correctly. Some bloggers are snarky but that is their shtick. When journalists use it inconsistently then it becomes a problem.

17. Snarky is commentating in a way that comes off as harsh and judgmental. This can include remarks that may reveal a bias toward the subject whether that be positive or negative. Snark I feel in the news is a way to grab a readers attention and maybe add humor and make the subject light. I feel this can be effective but should not be used for our everyday updates on the news.

18. I associate snarky with sarcastic remarks used in a negative way. Snark in the news is appropriate in certain media outlets, such as blogs or publications like online news source "The Onion", but I don't think it should be used in newspapers, TV news, or news magazines.

19. Snarky is harsh biased news. It belongs on opinion columbs and no where else in news.

20. It's very harsh and mostly criticizing.

I think News should having more "gray" areas, talking in the middle and having multi-faced of comments, and should be fair. So, I don't think being snarky in the news is a good idea.

21. Irrogant, biased. Snark is a biased and irrogant way of reporting on things. It can be seen a lot.
22. drama
23. I really don't know the exact definition of snarky, nor do i know how to use it in the correct context. But, I'm assuming it means a put down or a lie?
24. Snarky can also be defined by cynical, sarcastic, someone who is not an optomist but not entirely a sadist. Snarky is fun to read because it isn't just your usual boring story with the facts. I often look for snarky in my gossip blogs because it makes them oh so entertaining! I don't look for that in real news stories because that shows some biased and therefore that's not good journalism. I do love snarkiness because I am VERY snarky!!
25. Snarky is kind of like rude. It is very opinionated and doesn't worry about the feelings of others. I do not like snark used in the news because it tries to create a bias amongst news readers/watchers. It ruins the stories for me.
26. I think that snarky means kind of sinical writing. The writer is writing in a way that has no real value, just rude opinion.
27. I would define snarky as mocking or sarcasm in an almost malicious way. I n my opinion, snark is used mostly in celebrity news and politics during descriptions or break downs of character.
28. overly mean in a sarcastic way. I do not like snark
29. Snarky to me has a negative connotation to it, whether that is right or wrong. Snark when it comes to news might bring good ratings on television, but it is not necessarily good journalism. Unfortunately though sometimes good journalism gets pushed aside for the ratings and what sells to the public taste

30. Snarky? I have never seen that word but it seems like it carries a bad context.
31. Snarky is being pompous, rude, and "holier-than-thou." I'd rather snark not be used in news at all.
32. I would define snarky as ignorant and un-informed. Snarky in the news is not beneficial and does not inform the public of the truth.
33. Conceded
34. I don't know what snarky is but it sounds like a negative word that would be used in the news. Snark in the news sounds like stories or gossip that people might make up to put in the news that isn't true.
35. snark i would say is when someone thinks they are clever and uses it to comment on someone else (usually a public figure). I think it's tacky, and unless someone agrees with you from the very beginning people are likely to quit reading it or strongly disagree (and maybe write you hate mail)
36. negative connotation, as someone who snaps at another.
37. This could be totally wrong, but when I hear "snarky," I think of something that has an attitude. In the news, snarky could be seen as a news reporter only giving one side of the story or only showing what opinions they think matter.
38. I think it means taking a side. In the news reporters can sometimes be biased and not look at the whole picture & it makes for an unfair story.
39. Snarky may be described as finding negativity in stories. Some news outlets believe that this is crucial to finding the real story, while others use it from an activist standpoint. It can be both good and bad.

40. In a negative sense. The word snarky in a news context makes me think of sneaky or crafty, something not positive.
41. I would define snarky as false, ridiculous information. Well done media and news should not have snark involved.
42. I have no idea what snarky means.
43. I would define the word snarky describes someone who gets the news through undercover work. A snark is the person who is being snarky.
44. I have no idea what snarky means, but used in the context of the media I would guess bad journalism. Personally, I believe there is a lot of bad reporting going on.
45. Snarky seems to refer as coniving or up to no good. I don't think snark should be used in the news and that reporters to do it stir up emotions in their readers.
46. Snarky would be an undercutting way of using words in a satirical way to get the last laugh. I think news should steer clear of being snarky.
47. Snarky sounds harsh, and I have no clue what it means.
48. I actually don't know what the word snarky means. I would guess it would be something like sarcastic and if that's the case I don't really like it in the news. I'd rather just get the facts and be done with it.
49. Snarky has very negative connotations, such as a reporter who is trying too hard to criticize or nitpick. Snarky means that there is criticism with an edge, something that is used entirely too much in the news, especially on all cable networks.
50. A certain type of of humor that pokes fun at people? I like snark in the news.
51. I would dfine snarky as fasle news or news that does not seem legit. I think that it is very important to have good sources and give reliable information the your audiences so that

your news source is continually watched. Ideally, snark should never be found in news sources.

52. I might define snarky as some "gotcha" reporting, like what we saw with the Hatch story and the Blago story. However, I enjoy those stories a lot. Getting down to the truth of the matter (although both articles had their biases), but getting down to the personal common-folk talk (with some snark) is entertaining and engaging. A nice substitute from the AP style, boring, "we report, you decide" news.

53. "Snarky" would be exemplified by the article about the Utah senator. It is a decidedly negative and critical tone that leaves no room for opinions other than the one the writer holds. It should not be taken as a serious news source.

54. I'm not really sure how I would define snarky. I guess I would use it to describe a person who's kind of slimy and rude, a person that you wouldn't easily trust. My opinion of snark in the news would I guess be that snarky writers who put too much of their own opinion in their stories, when not appropriate, gets annoying.

55. I would define the word snarky as kind of vicious and snippy. I think snark is appropriate in blog or opinion pieces but not much else.

56. I would define "snarky" as an adjective to describe someone or something that is sneaky, or secretly spying, or snooping around for hidden information. In the news I feel at times a snark could be useful to uncover hidden information and get the "real story." However, on a whole I feel like "snark" is a negative connotation and should only be used in cases where important information is being held at the cost of the people or society.

57. I would define the word snarky as being deceitful and sneaky. My opinion of snark used in the news in many times a video is not objective and is not complex.

58. snarky is most relatable to sneaking around or being secretive. I don't think that this word is proper to use in the news because a lot of people are unfamiliar with it and it can easily be replaced

59. I define snarky as elusive and tricky. It is a way of using underlying meaning and wordage to trick someone. In the case of the news, a snark would be someone who exploits the news to bring their own agenda or bias into the medium.

60. snotty and kind of arrogant. Usually used when someone is being opinionated and i don't think it needs to be in the news.

61. Snarky sounds like rude or sarcastic. Snark in the news should not be overly used.

62. I have no idea.

63. Snarky is nasty and critical of other people and what they do. In editorial content it may be ok, but snark should be kept out of news stories in most cases.

64. I would describe snarky has an undercutting and degrading tone. It makes news more entertaining, so I'm fine with it.

65. I have no idea what snark is.

66. These are all just guesses but I would define it as being kind of snotty I guess. I've never heard that word before but it sounds like being matter-of-fact. I can't really have an opinion of it in the news because I have absolutley no idea what it means.

67. I do not know how to even define the word snarky. I have never heard it used before. I would guess that it would mean cynical or sarcastic, but that is entirely a guess.

68. I would define "snarky" as sarcastic, non-objective commentary. It is something I don't mind on a blog on on E!, but I'd rather not have it as part of my official news source. It doesn't make for excellent journalism.

69. To me snarky means like snippy or ill-mannered. I don't feel like it would be an appropriate word for a news report, considering it seems like an opinionated word.

70. I am not familiar with this term.

71. I associate the word snarky with over-the-top news pundits and celebrity gossip shows who used distasteful and unsophisticated humor and arguments to convey very little worth to an audience completely void of intellect. If they get snarky, they write or speak like they're God and the words coming from their mouth of brilliant. Even though I like Keith Olbermann, he has a tendency to go on editorial rants that I consider snarky.

72. The word snark in my opinion has a negative connotation to it. The news portrays a snark as someone that is doing something they were not supposed to be doing.

73. ??????????

74. Snarky is quippy or opinionated. When a writer is snarky or snarks, I feel like he/she is stepping out of place, out of bounds, and saying something offensive/inappropriate/untasteful. It is definitely in the eye of the beholder but snarky is something unappealing.

75. A person is snarky when they have an overblown assessment of their own ability to be ironic. They try too hard for dry wit and end up sounding slightly pouty and irrelevant.

76. Is that something that is biting?! Like something someone would say if they were being sarcastic? To be honest, I don't really know what it means, so I can't say either way how I feel about it being used in the media!!

77. i dont know what that means...

78. snarky=satiric and sarcastic, mocking; snark used in the news makes for a more sensational feel to the story and doesn't make news sources seem credible.

79. I'm not 100 percent sure what snarky means but if I had to guess I'd say it means to be cranky or upset or agitated. I think it's a different word to use in place of the others I described. I think it applies to audiences and they prefer writing that has some kind of entertainment value to it in order to be interesting enough to read.

80. Haha, what an odd question.

"Snarky", by my definition (before looking it up), means to have a sarcastic or arrogant tone to your writing/verbal language.

Dictionary.com says it means, "snark·y (snär'kē)

adj. snark·i·er, snark·i·est Slang

Rudely sarcastic or disrespectful; snide.

Irritable or short-tempered; irascible."

Guess I was pretty close.

I think snark is okay if it used in an opinion column, but using it elsewhere is unprofessional and shows bias.

81. No opinion. Dumb question.

82. Bitchy. Snark in the news would be an unethical coverage of a story.

83. Sarcastic tone or manner, no opinion

84. a combination of sarcastic and nasty. Journalists should use snark like a chef uses habanero peppers... sparingly and only on the right dishes.

85. Snarky would be something that is a little pompous and critical of other's work and I don't think it should be used in general stories and it should be well supported by facts if used in opinion pieces

86. I would say snarky is kind of a mix of snooty and sarcastic. Someone is being snarky when they are trying to seem superior or more intelligent than whatever they are talking about. Generally, in news coverage I would say using snark is not a good idea, because it adds a level of opinion that is not acceptable in hard news. In a column, or perhaps a blog, it would be perfectly acceptable and maybe even add something to the content. But in hard news stories it would detract from the news value by adding unnecessary opinion.

87. Snark would be an attempt at biting, critical and/or ironic humor--on the part of the author--to juxtapose opinion with fact, reflect dissatisfaction, or otherwise seek to undermine the credibility of a supposed truth.

Snark lowers the level of discussion no matter how successfully it is used. Its presence in a news story borders on zero-sum with credibility.

88. biting or cutting? almost TOO honest? I think that snark in the news tends to sound a bit like sarcasm. I don't like it; it's editorializing. Just give me the facts. That's all I need. I can form my own opinion. I don't need yours (news writer)...

89. In your face, something to be left to op-eds

90. Snarky is a tongue-in-cheek way to make biting comments

91. Snarky is getting unverified "dirt" on someone and using conjecture to sway opinion. My opinion of snark is that it should always be avoided in effort to tell all sides of a story to be fair to the news consumer.

92. When I hear snarky I think of off hand, underhanded comments. I feel like a lot of the political analysts make snarky comments about their opposing party members when on television.

93. snarky--- unreliable?

a snark in news may be a source that isn't honest or doesn't deliver the true facts

94. Snarky? I have no idea.

95. Snarky is a flippant approach to news that makes fun of those in it.

96. Snarky, hmm....sounds like a negative word. Reminds me of the word shark only applied to people. Snarky people can be cold like politicians on a bad hair day. Example: The South Carolina Governor was a snark toward the reporter after dodging a question about his extra-marital affair.

97. i would define the word snarky as personally objective, cynical and sarcastic with a tinge of humour. I think using snark in news is really subjective, however, it is deemed less reliable.

98. Witty language generally stating an opinion or making reference to an analogy... I think it should be used very minimally and very carefully in the news.

99. not sure...