

ENTERTAINMENT MEDIA'S SATIRICAL EFFECTS ON TEENAGE AND ADULT
ATTITUDES OF POLITICAL NEWS ORGANIZATIONS

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Entertainment Media's Satirical Effects on Teenage and Adult Attitudes

of Political News Organizations

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ABSTRACT

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This study explored the effect of satire in persuasion by comparing attitude changes between adults and teenagers. It revealed that satire was effective in changing attitudes and that satire had a greater effect on changing teenage attitudes than adult attitudes. In this study, participants rated the trustworthiness and competency of political news organizations and then watched comedic segments from entertainment media that satirized the political news organizations. After the satirical segments, participants re-evaluated the trustworthiness and competency of political news organizations. The satire proved to be effective in negatively changing the perception of trustworthiness and competency among political news organizations, and teenage attitudes had greater change than adult attitudes. The factors involved in attitude change were analyzed, and suggestions for future research were also offered.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The effects of satire and humor on persuasion have been of interest to students of rhetoric since the days of Aristotle. In the 21st century, the effects of satire and humor may be of even greater interest due to the amount of entertainment media available to the public. Late night comedians, television programs, films, YouTube, blogs, and more are available to anyone virtually at any time. Moreover, the content of entertainment media is not always just for a laugh (Starr, 2008).

Oftentimes, the content of entertainment media incorporates social or political messages. These messages often use humor in an attempt to persuade—to change a person’s attitude or a person’s behavior. As this study will show, previous attempts to analyze the effects of satire on persuasion have not been of much value; either the results were null or statistically insignificant. However, previous studies may not have targeted the best audience for humorous persuasion: teenagers. While adults may have formed attitudes that are quite resistant to a few jokes on late night television, teenagers may be learning about social and political issues for the first time. Studies have suggested that young adults often question the teachings of their environment (Howell, 2009). Generally speaking, humor more so than hard news will attract a teenage audience (Colletta, 2009). Therefore, a study that explores the effects of satire and humor on teenagers’ attitudes of political media may meaningfully contribute to the field of communication.

Statement of Problem

Traditionally, the news media, including local and nationwide news and local and national newspapers, have been the primary source of political information. In the 21st

century, however, voters are turning more and more to entertainment media for political information (Kim & Vishak, 2008). Communication scholars generally agree that entertainment media possess great potential to significantly influence politics (Baum, 2005). One study revealed that 16% of Americans regularly watch *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, a political comedy show, 17% of Americans watch Fox News regularly, and 14% of Americans regularly watch PBS News Hour (Pew Research Center, 2008). More specifically, *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* captures a younger audience; over 60% of youth have stated that they learn about politics through entertainment media such as *The Daily Show* (Pew Research Center, 2004).

Moreover, researchers have claimed that entertainment media are strongly influential in developing political attitudes. Since entertainment media manipulate the emotions of the audience on experiential knowledge, entertainment media may be more effective in establishing intense political attitudes (Gamson, 1999). Late night entertainment media in particular have the ability to politically motivate viewers who in general may be less politically engaged than the average news media viewer (Baum, 2002).

Contemporary research specifically suggests that *The Daily Show* has the ability to manipulate the attitudes of its audience and influence political discourse (Young, 2008). *The Daily Show* may be a positive contribution to late night media in its ability to stimulate political interest among individuals who generally may not be heavily involved in politics (Baum, 2003). It may also be important to note that studies also suggest that regular *The Daily Show* viewers have a higher level of political knowledge than frequent viewers of news media (Daily Show viewers knowledgeable about presidential campaigns, 2004).

Another element that makes Jon Stewart's program unique is that Stewart does not claim to be neutral and often shares his specific views on policy. For example, Stewart has argued in support of gay rights, universal health care, eliminating tax-cuts for the upper class, and withdrawing from Iraq (Kurtz, 2004). Although Stewart has claimed that he should not be taken seriously as a news commentator, politicians, news media and his audience do take him seriously. Stewart has said, "I have not moved out of the comedian's box into the news box. The news box is moving toward me" (Winant, 2010).

In addition, Stewart has appeared on the cover of *Newsweek* and has been cited as one of the most influential figures in recent presidential elections (Behav, 2009). In 2004, *The Daily Show* won the Television Critics Award for Outstanding Achievement in News and Information, a remarkable award in the sense that this entertainment news program won over programs such as *60 Minutes*, *Frontline*, *Meet the Press*, and more (Warner, 2007). His audience doubled in just four years and nearly one third of individuals under thirty, who are the least likely to follow the general news media, have watched his program (Pew Research Center, 2006). Perhaps even more importantly, studies reveal that people do learn something from watching the show. Among adults in general, 26% claimed to have learned facts about politics or politicians by watching *The Daily Show*; however, when it comes to those under thirty, 56% percent claimed to have learned something (Pew Research Center, 2004).

Although Stewart claims he should not be taken too seriously, his audience obviously learns about the political process from watching his show. Studies have shown that when an informational source humorously critiques his or her own credibility, the

source actually gains credibility from the audience's perspective (Baumgartner, 2007). Thus, Stewart is viewed as a more credible source due to the fact that he humorously defames his own credibility.

At the core of the show, Stewart uses satire to reveal the hypocrisies in the political system and news media. Communication research has illustrated that humor has persuasive power in that a humorous appeal is more likely to grab the audience's attention than a non-humorous appeal and that humor has the ability to strengthen the likeability of the sender, which in turn makes it more likely that the audience will agree with the sender (Behav, 2009). Contemporary democratic theory emphasizes two core concepts: 1) Public discourse is composed of diverse voices that will stimulate ideas and 2) the discourse will be rational (Warner, 2007). However, any individual who watches the news media is well aware that while the political system may or may not be composed of diverse voices, the discourse is often far from rational. Stewart's popularity and success is in large part due to a comedic discussion of the irrational political behaviors and discourse in contemporary society.

After more than a decade of satire, Jon Stewart revealed a major objective in hosting *The Daily Show*. Stewart argued that the media should not be about the left versus the right; the political fight in news media organizations should be about corruption versus non-corruption. In October of 2010, Jon Stewart, assisted by Stephen Colbert, hosted the Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear in Washington D.C. The rally attracted over 150,000 people, and Stewart used humor to reveal his perspective on the nation's political problems. In the end, his message was primarily a critique of the news media and included

hope that the two political parties are able to work together. At the rally, Stewart said, “When we amplify everything, we hear nothing.” In an interview with MSNBC news host Rachel Maddow, Stewart said, “In 12 years, I’d earned a moment to tell people who I was” (Williams, 2010).

Stewart’s primary message focuses on corruption versus non-corruption in the political systems and news media organizations, and he reveals elements of corruption through satire. Thus, Stewart’s program offers an opportunity to explore the ability of satire to change attitudes. Ultimately, this project seeks to reveal the effect of *The Daily Show*’s satire on teenage attitudes of political media. Specifically, this study will analyze how Stewart’s satire affects the competence and trustworthiness of political news organizations. Competence consists of several elements including level of intelligence, level of training, and level of expertise. Trustworthiness also consists of multiple categories including honesty, honor, morality, ethics, and genuineness (McCrowskey & Teven, 1999).

Rationale for Study

As the literature review will reveal, previous satirical studies of classroom speeches and humorous messages have not been consistent in findings. The rationale for this study is to use an expert source of satire in a controlled environment where participants understand the satire and the intention of the satire. The study attempts to develop the proper conditions necessary, as learned from previous studies, to gather more accurate results.

Generations of individuals have assumed that satire is persuasive, but most research has not produced sufficient quantitative data to support the claim that satire is persuasive

(Pokorny & Gruner, 1969). Past research has demonstrated that a satirical speech supporting a thesis does not significantly change audience's attitudes (Gruner, 1965). Audience members view the satire as humorous but not persuasive. Past research has further indicated that the inclusion of satire in an otherwise direct speech does not dramatically increase the speech's effectiveness, but if audience members know in advance that the content of the material is satirical, slight increases in argument effectiveness have been detected (Pokorny & Gruner, 1969). Most past research examining the effects of satire on message effectiveness question the relevance of satirical contribution. Consequently, much research on the effects of satire has gone unpublished due to questionable or statistically insignificant results (Markiewicz, 1974; Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004).

The flaws in the above mentioned studies provide rationale for further exploration of the persuasiveness of satire. The most obvious flaw that needs to be addressed is that audiences need to understand satire and understand when a persuasive message is intentionally satirical. Additionally, the satire should come from a generally successful source. When a researcher is measuring the effects of satire in a student speech, the researcher must take into account that the content and delivery of an individual speech are certainly factors that affect the persuasiveness of satire. Therefore, to fully evaluate satire, the persuasive messages must be derived from expert sources, senders that have the ethos to develop and deliver the message. Considering the popularity of Stewart's *The Daily Show* and the fact that the program has earned eight consecutive Emmy Awards as of 2010, Stewart's satire makes for a significantly more credible persuasive source to be analyzed.

Current research also suggests that there is little evidence that humor enhances persuasion, but still entertainment media often engage in social commentary that potentially influences millions (Nabi, Moyer-Guse, & Byrne, 2007). The traditional argument is that humor may distract the listener from any serious context of the message. Contemporary research further establishes four arguments regarding humor: humorous messages often attract more attention than non-humorous messages, humor does not affect comprehension but it may not enhance comprehension, humor increases the likeability of the source, and humorous messages are generally no more or less effective than non-humorous messages (Weinberger & Gulas, 1992). When an individual already agrees with a particular message or point of view, humor reinforces that idea. Most researchers have given up on the idea that satire can actually change an individual's point of view. Studies throughout the 20th century have examined the effects of humor on persuasion, and most results have been disappointing, revealing little effect (Gruner, 1991). However, studies have not tackled the effects of humorous persuasive message among teenagers.

Teenagers in particular are drawn to humorous programs: *South Park*, *Tosh.0*, *Family Guy*, and so many more. A program like Jon Stewart's has the potential to send serious messages embedded in humor to an audience that may otherwise never be interested in the subject. Additionally, teenagers in particular form attitudes based upon environmental factors; they will often reflect the attitudes of their family, their community, their schools, and their churches (Howell, 2009). Adults of course also reflect the attitudes of their environment, but the primary difference is that older adults as a generalization are more dogmatic in their particular opinions, are not as attracted to humorous messages as

teenagers, and are less likely to change as a result of a humorous message (Markiewicz, 1974, Gruner, 1991, & Howell, 2009). As a result, the satirical messages from successful sources like Stewart may have a greater effect on a younger audience that as a generalization is more attracted to humorous messages, is less dogmatic in their opinion, and is more likely to change as a result of humorous messages.

Significance to the Discipline

The effect of satire on persuasion has thus been questioned and challenged in communication research. Markiewicz (1974) challenged work that did not include a serious message control group. Markiewicz questioned the value of studies that revealed persuasive effects of satire if a serious message was not similarly tested and used for comparison. However, Markiewicz further suggested that perhaps appropriate conditions to measure the effect of satire have not been created. Markiewicz suggested future research must include less complex topics and topics more conducive to humor. Furthermore, the humor must not interfere with comprehension and the atmospheres for future tests should vary as well. For example, the atmosphere should be more than just that of an individual student's persuasive speech.

Although students may incorporate satire in a persuasive speech, audiences may be more easily distracted and less able to comprehend if a non-expert source is delivering the satirical message. Gruner (1965) used the Thurstone attitude scale to measure the effectiveness of satire in a persuasive speech to a group of students. The students were not told the speech was going to be satirical, and Gruner's measurements produced insignificant results as to the effect of satire. Following up on this initial experiment,

Pokorny and Gruner (1965) modified the test by informing the audience that the speech would be satirical. Evidence suggested that a greater shift in attitudes took place but that the shift was still insignificant. Researchers have since tested similar hypotheses and have concluded similar results. Therefore, either satire is not all that effective in persuasion or researchers must heed Markiewicz's (1974) advice to dramatically and systematically vary the factors in the testing environment. In other words, the audience must know what they are looking for; the audience may be less aware of what they are looking for in terms of individual student persuasive speeches, but it is more likely the audience will be more aware of what they are looking for when entertainment media are used as opposed to non-expert student satire.

Furthermore, in contemporary society, comedians are generally seen as trustworthier than politicians. In fact, comedians are perceived as the truth-tellers because comedians exist outside of political organizations. According to Wagg (2002), there has been an increasing penchant for comedians to weigh in on political events. Perhaps this penchant for comedy illustrates the success of *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*. More than just a one time satirical speech, Jon Stewart reaches over two million viewers on a daily basis. Due to the rate of television viewing in the 21st century (four hours a day) and the penchant for comedy, it is time to reexamine the effect of satire on persuasion, particularly with a younger audience.

Generally, past research concludes that while humor attracts attention, humor's influence on message processing and persuasion are still open for debate (Nabi, et al., 2007). The elaboration likelihood model (ELM) suggests that humor is a peripheral factor;

in other words, humor may reduce information processing and the message is not the center of focus (Weinberger & Gulas, 1992). However, if people are more motivated to listen to humorous messages then the message may be processed centrally and not peripherally due to the increased motivation (Nabi, et al., 2007). Still to the contrary, other researchers argue that the nature of humor forces the audience to follow the plot or joke. The audience waits for the outcome or punch line if humor is the primary focus instead of analyzing the reliability and validity of the message (Slater & Rouner, 2002). Another theory argues that humor reduces counterarguments. When an audience is processing the information of the message and enjoying the humor of the message, the audience is less likely to develop counter-arguments and thus accepts the message as valid and true (Nabi, et al., 2007). All in all, an analysis of entertainment media's use of satire and humor and the effects of satire and humor on teenagers' attitudes of political media may meaningfully contribute to the communication scholarship.

General Areas to be Studied

One of the most ongoing satirical elements of *The Daily Show* is Jon Stewart's criticism of Fox News. The slogan for Fox News is "fair and balanced," but Stewart repeatedly illustrates Fox News is a strictly conservative news program and is neither fair nor balanced. Stewart has criticized liberal programs in similar fashion, such as MSNBC (Jarvis, 2010). Although it could easily be argued that Stewart is also not fair and balanced, Stewart does not claim to be so, as do the major news networks. In general, this study will reveal the ability of *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart's* satire to affect teenagers' attitudes of political news media. Teenagers' attitudes of major political media networks'

level of competence and level of trustworthiness will be specifically tested. This study will also reveal any differences of persuasive effects on attitudes between teenagers and adults.

Definitions of Key Terms and Concepts

The key terms and concepts that are important to this study include level of competence, level of trustworthiness, satire, and persuasion. For the purpose of this study, competence is defined as the level of perceived intelligence, training, expertise; trustworthiness is defined as the level of perceived honesty, honor, morality, ethical standards, and genuineness (McCroskey & Teven, 1999). Satire is a form of humor designed to promote change by focusing on hypocrisies (Colletta, 2009). Persuasion is the manipulation of attitudes for the purpose of controlling behavior (Howell, 2009).

Delimitations

Naturally, the convenience samples of the audience make for delimitations. Although more than 100 teenagers were tested, this number is far from representing the entire teenage population. However, the results contribute to the body of knowledge communication researchers have for persuasion, satire, and teenage perceptions. The sample adult population was also be a convenience sample. Adults were recruited from the local community, so the study relied on those adults willing to participate. However, the specific adult population of this study may provide even greater interest in the results, as the adults the study recruited were the parents of the teenagers in the test group.

Other delimitations result from the nature of satire. As earlier demonstrated, studies on the effectiveness of satire have had very limited results. Markiewicz (1974) criticized studies on satire that did not include a serious message control group. Due to the nature of

this study, finding a serious message similar to the satirical message would be difficult. Stewart's program is unique in his criticism of media networks in general, whereas the media networks focus more on the specific politicians, political ideas, and policies of political parties. In addition, testing a serious message would require separate teen and adult audiences in order to differentiate the effectiveness of a satirical message versus a serious message. The purpose of this study is not to specifically compare the effectiveness between satirical and serious messages; the purpose of this study is to test the effectiveness of satirical messages on teenagers and compare those results to the effectiveness or lack thereof to an adult audience. Although the sample population is limited to a general community and may not be representative of all the people, the fact that the teenagers and the adults come from the same community may provide greater insight to the issue. After all, whether teenagers in the same community react different or similarly to their parents, the field of satire and persuasion will be enhanced by such a comparison.

Organization of Thesis

The remaining thesis will be organized into several chapters. Chapter Two will provide a preview of conceptual framework, a literature review, hypotheses, and further explanation of research questions. The third chapter will include a methods section, including further explanation of participants, procedures, and instruments. The fourth chapter will present the results including the mean score of all variables in the pre-survey, the mean score in all variables in the post-survey, and the differences between teenagers and adults and Republicans and Democrats. The fifth chapter will discuss the results, focusing on statistically significant findings and the meanings and implications of all

results. The sixth chapter will conclude the thesis and provide an overall summary of the entire project.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The key elements of the literature review that are relevant to this study include an understanding of the similarities and differences of humor, satire, and parody; the relationship between humor and persuasion; previous studies of *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*; and perceptions of news media. Humor, satire, and parody need to be explained in the context of *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, and the first section of the literature review defines the concepts and reveals how Stewart's program utilizes the concepts. The second part of the literature review explores previous studies on the effects of humor on persuasion. Some studies reveal that humor has promise in manipulating attitudes, while other studies argue that humor is generally insufficient to change behavior. The third section of the literature review analyzes previous studies on *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, specifically in terms of substance versus humor. The fourth section of the literature review explores perceptions of news media, specifically whether serious news media are more influential than entertainment media.

Humor, Satire, and Parody

Communication scholars have often suggested that humor may enhance persuasive messages, particularly in terms of political messages (Markiewicz, 1974). Humor can be defined as, "a faculty as specifically human as speech or moral responsibility [which] appears to be specifically evolved to give us the power of sifting the true from the false" (Lorenz, 1966). One definition of humor from *the Random House Dictionary of the English Language* is that "humor consists principally in the recognition and expression of incongruities or peculiarities present in a situation or character. It is frequently used to

illustrate some fundamental absurdity in human nature or conduct” (2009). Lorenze (1966) further noted, “Laughter produces, simultaneously, a strong fellow feeling among participants and joint aggressiveness against outsiders. Sigmund Freud also added insight to the aggressive use of humor: “by making our enemy small, inferior, despicable, or comic, we achieve in a roundabout way the enjoyment of overcoming him” (Hobbs, 2007). All of the above definitions of humor illustrate the principles of entertainment media represented in shows such as *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*: a medium to separate fact from fiction, a method to illustrate absurdities in individuals and groups, a means of providing community among viewers, and a way to ostracize the hypocritical politicians and politics in contemporary society.

Moreover, in terms of political messages and specifically the messages from *The Daily Show*, humor is most often channeled through the use of satire or parody. Satire is one element of persuasion that is often confused with parody. Some scholars suggest that the purpose of satire is to entertain and also to persuade (Gruner, 1965). Others suggest that the primary function of satire is to instruct and not to entertain; in this context, the humor is serious (Hobbs, 2007). Examples of satire from *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* are abundant. In an episode on November 15, 2010, Stewart made a video montage titled “It Gets Worse.” The video montage modeled the popular “It Gets Better” anti-bullying campaign directed at gay youths. However, Stewart’s specific video was speaking directly to John McCain. Prior to the video, Stewart ran a series of clips that featured McCain speaking about the military’s “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy. In the clips, which covered several years, McCain said he would reverse the policy if military leaders agreed that such

a reversal was in the military's best interest. Stewart then showed videos of military leaders saying exactly what McCain claimed he needed to hear. Then Stewart showed more videos of McCain changing his story and holding firm to his belief that "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" should not be changed. In response to the hypocrisy, Stewart then did what he does best: satire. The satirical clip showed *The Daily Show* correspondents and other actors telling McCain "It gets worse" if McCain does not change his view and support the removal of "Don't Ask; Don't Tell."

Satire may be confused with parody, but the true purpose of parody is to ridicule and criticize the entire subject in a contradictory manner (Kreuz & Roberts, 1993). Parody is ridicule, and Stewart's program includes plenty of parody or humor designed to get a laugh but that does not have a true purpose for change. For example, after the 2010 mid-term elections, Stewart's program congratulated Republican John Boehner, who would become the new speaker of the house, as the first orange person to ever hold such a high position of power. Stewart showed pictures of Boehner as he said this statement, making it clear that Stewart was inferring that Boehner used spray tan and self-tanning products. As opposed to parody, satire is a form of humor, but the purpose of satire is beyond laughter. Satire uses laughter as a weapon to promote change (Colletta, 2009). *The Daily Show* focuses on mix of political satire and parody to explore a wide range of political policies and figures.

Humor and Persuasion

Several studies have tested the effects of humor on persuasion. One study, for example, analyzed a message from comedian and actor Chris Rock and found that the

humor not only was successful in providing a persuasive effect immediately after the message but also over the course of several weeks. The reason for such evidence is described as a sleeper effect. Although the message may have been perceived simply as humorous at first, the humorous nature of the message made the information more memorable and thus engaged the audience at a higher level. In fact, this particular study revealed that respondents discussed humorous messages more so than non-humorous messages, thus providing some validity for the use of humor in persuasion (Nabi, et al., 2007). After all, even if a humorous message may not have a greater persuasive value than a non-humorous message, the fact the receivers may discuss humorous messages more provides reason to believe that humor may have a greater long-term effect than non-humor. The memorable nature of humorous messages is further evidenced through commercial advertisements. Studies in the 1970s suggested that 42% of American commercials use humor (Markiewicz, 1974). 73% of advertisements in the 2009 Superbowl incorporated humor, and the most popular and memorable commercials all used humor (Kinde, 2009).

Earlier studies, however, state that the effectiveness of humor in persuasion is not significant or that humor has not been tested in the appropriate conditions (Markiewicz, 1974). Markiewicz's close examination of studies examining the effects of humor concluded that future tests should cover less complicated topics and include an atmosphere more conducive to humor. The very nature of Jon Stewart's program enhances the humorous atmosphere, and the topic of general news media competency and trustworthiness seems more appropriate to satire than some of the specific persuasive topics Markiewicz explored such as the reasons individuals should wear safety belts. In other

words, the media, specifically through the talents of Stewart, may be satirized in significantly more comical and more easily understood methods than that of Markiewicz's safety belts.

Reviews of other studies provide additional insight to the study of humor and satire on attitudinal change. Powell (1978) argued that individuals with low involvement in the issues might be attracted to the discussion of the issues in satirical forms. Once again, entertainment media have the ability to acquire an audience that is not typically interested in more serious messages. However, Powell further concluded that individuals who had greater knowledge about the topics that were satirized were able to understand the satire more easily. On one hand, individuals not interested in serious message gain exposure to the issues through the use of satire and humor, but those individuals focus more on the joke than the message. In short, in order to fully understand the point of the satire, Powell argued that one must already have a foundation of knowledge about the topic. Additionally, O'Quin and Aronoff (1981) tested humor as a social influence and concluded that "humor may be a powerful agent of change in everyday life" (p. 355). O'Quin and Aronoff further claimed that there is not one single formula to make humor successful in terms of persuasion, but that humor does possess the power to influence social issues and opinions.

Although it appears that older studies may be more critical of the effect of satire, current studies tend to be more confident in the use of humor. Hobbs (2007) argued that humor is not all fun in that it has a serious purpose to reveal hypocrisy. Hobbs analyzed the use of humor with lawyers in the courtroom and concluded that humor is particularly

effective at pointing out ridiculousness. In Powell's study, defense attorneys used humor to emphasize the ridiculous arguments of the prosecution. By making the opposing viewpoints look ridiculous and hypocritical, the defense attorney manipulated the jury into siding with the defense. The jury then viewed the case as a joke, which made it much easier to reject the claims of the prosecution. Perhaps Jon Stewart's humor will also reveal the ridiculous and hypocritical nature of certain media programs, which may cause an audience to significantly question their competency and trustworthiness.

Substance versus Humor

Besides the persuasiveness or lack of persuasiveness of humor, serious individuals have recognized the necessity of appealing to entertainment media. Baum (2005) concluded that politically unaware Americans watch more entertainment media than serious news media. More specifically, Baum stated that such individuals are more likely to cross party lines and vote for candidates that they find more likeable. Even if they are unaware of the issues, the mere presence of politicians on entertainment programs may increase their likeability. Baum further argued that politically aware individuals are not as likely to vote for someone due to likeability and are not as likely to cross party lines. Baum's studies reveal an opportunity for manipulation among politically unaware individuals. In the study of Stewart and teenage attitudes, it will be interesting to see if younger viewers, who as a generalization may be less politically aware than older audience members, are more likely to change their opinions of media than the older control group.

Other studies have specifically explored the content of *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, and awareness of the content of the show is relevant to this study. Interestingly,

analysis of Stewart's program has revealed that there is more humor than substance in the thirty-minute program, but the substance of specific news stories is equal to the substance of the same stories found on serious news programs (Fox, Koloen, & Shain, 2007). In other words, Stewart's program may cover less news overall, but the news stories that are covered contain a relatively equal amount of substance when compared to serious news. Serious news programs simply cover more stories, while Stewart's show focuses on fewer stories.

Fox, Koloen, and Shain (2007) further showed that regular viewers of *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* were able to answer more questions correctly regarding political campaigns than regular viewers of serious news. One possible reason that regular viewers of Stewart's program can answer more political questions correctly than regular viewers of serious news may be that the use of humor increases retention. Furthermore, the Fox, Koloen, and Shain (2007) study also argued that younger viewers have less dogmatic social and political attitudes than older viewers. Older viewers are less likely to change their minds on political issues than younger viewers.

Since *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* generally also attracts more younger viewers than older viewers, the program may have more influence than serious news programs give it credit. Logic dictates that if older viewers are more dogmatic and more likely to watch serious news programs, then the serious news programs simply reinforce the social and political views audience members hold. However, by reaching a younger audience that holds fewer crystallized opinions, Stewart's program possesses the potential—for better or for worse—to change the opinions of its audience.

Perceptions of News Media

Opposite that of Fox, Koloen, and Shain's findings, other studies argue that serious news media have more influence. The findings of Kim and Vishak (2008) stated that serious news media have a greater influence in political and issue learning than entertainment media. However, Kim and Vishak's study included multiple entertainment media such as *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno* and *The Late Show with David Letterman*. Certainly, if a study includes multiple entertainment media sources, the results will be very mixed. Programs like *The Tonight Show* and *The Late Show* are not political in nature; those programs are much more focused on general comedy and celebrity interviews. *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* is specifically a political and social comedy program. It is fair to say that the news media in general may have a greater influence on political and issue learning than entertainment media in general. Obviously, an individual will be likely to learn more about social issues from a serious news program than from watching *Saturday Night Live*. Again, Stewart's program is unique from other entertainment media in that it is specifically a political and social comedy program, and studies such as Fox, Koloen, and Shain's (2007) that focus just on *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* and do not include general entertainment media have revealed that Stewart's audience is well-informed about political and social issues, even more so than serious news audiences on average.

Other studies support this claim as well. In a content analysis of *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, it has been noted that Stewart presents substantive content through humorous methods of challenging the substantive claims of news media, politicians, and

individuals in power, backing up his arguments through the strategic use of video clips that reveal the hypocrisy in our political and social systems (Warner, 2007). In a comparison of late night entertainment media, one study revealed that Stewart's audience was significantly more informed than any other entertainment media audience (Baek & Wojcieszak, 2009). Stewart though has repeatedly insisted that he should not be taken too seriously, calling himself a "sundae bar" and at one time even stating that the show that comes on prior to his is a show about puppets making prank phone calls (Warner, 2007, p. 31). However, Stewart's consistent humility allows him to remain in the medium of comedy, and audience members can formulate their own opinions on the news stories that Stewart satirizes.

Other studies have revealed specific attitudinal changes after exposure to *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*. In a study that tested audience attitudes regarding the 2004 U.S. Presidential race, exposure to the show resulted in a significant decrease in favorability toward President Bush. Although *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* covered both the Democratic National Convention and the Republican National Convention, viewer favorability only decreased significantly for Bush and not for Democratic nominee John Kerry. The study factored in variables such as partisanship and ideology but the only significant result was a decrease in favorability for President Bush (Morris, 2008).

Of further interest, Morris (2008) compared entertainment media programs including *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, *The Late Show with David Letterman*, *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno*, and *the Late Late Show with Conan O'Brien*. Only Letterman's and Stewart's audiences had decreased favorability of President Bush, but

Stewart's audience had more significant results. Morris also concluded that Stewart was not biased in his coverage of the 2004 Presidential campaigns; Morris simply concluded that any uneven criticism may have been warranted and that there was more content to satirize with President Bush than Democratic nominee John Kerry.

General Research Focus

Most literature reviews conclude that individuals who are not generally interested in politics can increase political knowledge through entertainment media exposure. Specific studies of *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* argue that Stewart's use of humor increases knowledge retention on political and social issues, thus making his audience more accurately informed than audiences of serious news. Historically, studies of the effects of satire on persuasion have produced limited results, but Stewart's talented use of humor has revealed the potential to change an audience's political and social attitudes.

The present study seeks to examine the effects of satire on teenage attitudes. Based upon previous literature, this study predicts the following:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): The Daily Show with Jon Stewart's satire on news media will change an audience's perception of the level of competence of news organizations.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): The Daily Show with Jon Stewart's satire on news media will change an audience's perception of the level of trustworthiness of news organizations.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): The Daily Show with Jon Stewart's satire will affect teenager perceptions more than adult perceptions.

Hypothesis 4 (H4): The political demographic of the participant will correlate to the participant's responses.

Summary

Although humor and satire have been explored in previous studies, a literature review of those studies suggests uncertainty that humor and satire have significant persuasive effects. This study does not seek to compare satirical messages to serious messages. This study seeks to analyze satire's ability to cause attitudinal change and compare the changes between teenagers and adults. Younger audiences may be more susceptible to humor and satirical manipulations than older audiences. Since entertainment media generally attract a younger audience, entertainment media programs warrant analysis. This study will use an award-winning satirical program, *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*. Participants will rate news programs such as Fox News and MSNBC in terms of competency and trustworthiness. Then the participants will watch a series of segments from *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* that satirize the news organizations. Participants—the test group of teenagers and the control group of adults—will re-evaluate the news organizations' levels of competency and trustworthiness. The prediction is that Stewart's satire will cause change in attitudes, but the most significant changes will be derived from the teenage audience.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

In this study, the overall perception of competence of news organizations will be determined by individual responses to the organization's perceived level of intelligence, training, and expertise. The overall perception of trustworthiness will be determined by a combination of perceived values of honesty, honor, morality, ethics, and genuineness. This study will have individuals rate the competence and trustworthiness of Fox News, MSNBC, and *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*. Then individuals will watch several segments of Stewart's satire that specifically satirize Fox News and MSNBC and again rate the competence and trustworthiness of all programs.

The independent variable consists of various segments from *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*; the segments will be satirical messages revealing hypocrisies of news media. The dependent variable will be attitude, specifically the attitude as to the competency and trustworthiness of particular news media organizations. Participants will reveal their attitude on the competency and trustworthiness of news organizations prior to watching the satirical messages, and then participants will rate the value of competency and trustworthiness again after watching the satirical messages. The teenage audience comprises the experimental group. Since several studies in the past have measured the effect of satire on adult audiences, this study is interested in the effects of satire on a younger audience. Therefore, an adult audience will comprise the control group. Both groups will be given the same measures and watch the same satirical messages. The results will be evaluated to determine a variety of factors, but one primary factor of interest is whether teenagers are more easily manipulated through satire and humor than adults.

Participants

Participants in this study were 101 high school students enrolled in communication classes in a rural Midwestern high school (101 students enrolled in communication classes). The students in this study are 99% Caucasian, ranging from 15 to 18 years old with a relatively equal balance between males and females. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. A demographic portion of the survey indicated specific age, gender, ethnicity, political orientation, and familiarity with each program. The study required IRB approval as well as parental and administrative approval for all minors involved. Detailed permission slips following IRB guidelines were sent home to parents, and parental signatures were required for minors to participate. Administrative approval from the high school was also obtained in order for the study to take place at the specific Midwestern high school.

Participants also included approximately 50 parents of the students, which represented the control group. The study recruited parent volunteers, and the parents completed the same surveys and watched the same segments. The results between the test group and control group were analyzed to determine if the satire on *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* had a greater effect on teenagers than adults.

Procedures

One forty-five minute classroom period was devoted to the study. At the beginning of class, the researcher passed out a survey with two parts (see Appendix A). The first part asked participants to evaluate the competency of Fox News, MSNBC, and *The Daily Show*. The second part asked participants to evaluate the trustworthiness of Fox

News, MSNBC, and *The Daily Show*. Participants then watched five segments from various *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* episodes specifically satirizing Fox News, MSNBC, and the news media in general (see Appendix B). After the five segments, participants received a clean copy of the same survey, re-evaluating their perceptions of the competency and trustworthiness of Fox News, MSNBC, and *The Daily Show*. Results were then compared and tested for statistical significance and reliability using a paired t-test.

Instruments

Participants completed the McCroskey and Teven (1999) competency and trustworthiness survey (see Table One). The McCroskey and Teven survey is a credibility survey designed to evaluate subjects such as educators and politicians. The survey lists opposite adjectives with a seven number Likert-type scale. For example, in evaluating competence, the scale lists the two adjectives “intelligent” and “unintelligent” separated by the numbers one through seven. Participants are asked to circle the number that most closely matches their perception, and the closer the number is to the adjective, the more confidence the participant has in his or her evaluation. Therefore, a one close to intelligent is a very confident perception, while a seven close to unintelligent is a very confident perception of unintelligence. In the trustworthiness evaluation, participants also rate several adjective pairs, such as “unethical” or “ethical,” also separated by seven numbers.

In previous studies using the competence and trustworthiness survey in the context of evaluation politicians and classroom instructors, researchers report Alpha reliabilities of .85 for competence and .92 for trustworthiness (McCroskey & Teven, 1999). The high

reliability of previous studies provides confidence for reliability in the current study. The particular survey uses scalar reliability to test consistency by incorporating oppositely worded questions. The study used a paired t-test through Minitab to analyze the statistical significance of the pre and post surveys. Finally, the results of the teenagers and the results of the adult group were compared to measure if the satire of Stewart's program had a greater effect on teenagers than audiences and on other variables such as political orientation. The instruments provided empirical evidence to support the hypotheses and also provided insight to the additional research questions.

CHAPTER 4. PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

During one regular high school class period, student participants were given a survey. Participants rated the competency of Fox News, MSNBC News, and *the Daily Show with Jon Stewart* based upon their perceptions of the programs' intelligence, training, expertise, information, competency, and brightness. Participants then rated the trustworthiness of the same programs based upon their perceptions of the programs' honesty, trustworthiness, honor, morality, ethics, and genuineness. The surveys used a Likert-scale and participants circled a number between one and seven; paired adjectives (such as honest or dishonest) were located outside of the numbers. The closer the number to the adjective, the more confident the participant was in his or her evaluation. Surveys also collected demographic data such as age, ethnicity, political orientation, gender, and frequency in which they had previously watched each program.

The surveys were collected, and participants then watched five segments from *the Daily Show with Jon Stewart* that specifically satirized Fox News and MSNBC. After watching these segments, participants completed the survey again. The surveys were collected and analyzed using a paired t-test.

During an evening hour on the same day, adult participants completed the same experiment. In the following results section, the overall changes in perception of each program are presented. The changes are also analyzed via specific demographics such as the changes in adults compared to teenage participants and the changes in Republicans compared to Democrats. The results section will first present data from pre and post

surveys from all participants, then the data to compare adult versus teenage changes, and finally the data to compare changes between Republicans and Democrats.

Results

A paired t-test analysis provided results in several categories: overall changes in total participant attitude, differences in changes between adults and teenagers, and differences in changes between Republicans and Democrats. *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart's* satire proved to be statistically significant in negatively changing participant perception of the trustworthiness and competency of both Fox News and MSNBC News. The show's satire also proved to be statistically significant in positively changing participant perception of its own competency and trustworthiness.

Pre-surveys conducted prior to watching *the Daily Show with Jon Stewart* rated Fox News' competency as fairly high, and post-survey data reported nearly a one point negative change in each category (see Table 1). A 95% confidence interval shows that the change is statistically significant. Similarly, pre-survey data rated Fox News' trustworthiness as fairly high, and post-survey data demonstrated a statistically significant change in the network's trustworthiness after participants had viewed the Jon Stewart's satirical segments criticizing the network (see Table 2).

Not only did the mean of all participants' perception of Fox News' trustworthiness and competency change, but a comparison between teens and adults and Republicans and Democrats yields interesting results as well. The mean difference in change in all Fox News competency and trustworthiness factors for teenage participants is 0.9828 whereas the mean difference in change for all adult participants is 0.7678. The mean difference in

Table 1: Fox News' Competency

Fox News Competency	Intelligent (1)- Unintelligent (7)	Untrained (1)- Trained (7)	Inexpert (1)- Expert (7)	Informed (1)- Uninformed (7)	Incompetent (1)- Competent (7)	Bright (1)- Stupid (7)
Participants pre-study mean	2.94	5.26	5.12	2.76	4.91	3.0
Participants post-study mean	3.83	4.68	4.33	3.56	4.16	3.98
Confidence interval (CI) for mean difference	(-1.132, -0.581)	(-1.132, -0.581)	(0.549, 1.033)	(0.549, 1.033)	(0.497, 0.993)	(-1.216, -0.732)
Teens pre-study mean	3.01	5.34	5.29	2.69	4.89	2.99
Teens post-study mean	3.89	4.60	4.37	3.49	4.04	4.05
CI for mean difference (teens)	(-1.259, -0.503)	(0.412, 1.053)	(0.412, 1.053)	(-1.163, -0.421)	(0.521, 1.182)	(-1.375, -0.745)
Adults pre-study mean	2.88	5.14	4.82	2.86	4.96	3.00
Adults post-study mean	3.73	4.82	4.26	3.72	4.41	3.84
CI for mean difference (adults)	(-1.205, -0.481)	(-0.109, 0.737)	(0.166, 0.971)	(-1.392, -0.328)	(0.187, 0.911)	(-1.218, -0.468)

change for the same factors for all participants who identified themselves as Democrats is 0.792 compared to the mean difference in change for participants who identified themselves as Republicans at 0.741. Furthermore, all of the changes in perception of Fox News, as noted in Tables 1 and 2, are negative changes; in other words, viewer perception

Table 2: Fox News' Trustworthiness

Fox News Trustworthiness	Honest (1)- Dishonest (7)	Untrustworthy (1) - Trustworthy (7)	Honorable (1)- Dishonorable (7)	Moral (1)- Immoral (7)	Unethical (1) Ethical (7)	Phony (1) Genuine (7)
Participants pre-study mean	3.27	4.77	3.24	3.26	5.10	4.82
Participants post-study mean	4.31	3.65	4.31	4.00	4.07	3.78
Confidence interval (CI) for mean difference	(-1.305, -0.813)	(0.837, 1.398)	(-1.325, -0.819)	(-0.993, -0.498)	(0.777, 1.315)	(0.777, 1.315)
Teens pre-study mean	3.36	4.80	3.29	3.31	5.18	4.78
Teens post-study mean	4.47	3.50	4.38	4.06	3.99	3.67
CI for mean difference (teens)	(-1.433, -0.785)	(0.917, 1.697)	(-1.432, -0.746)	(-1.087, -0.418)	(0.885, 1.491)	(0.752, 1.468)
Adults pre-study mean	3.10	4.71	3.12	3.14	4.96	4.92
Adults post-study mean	4.10	3.92	4.14	3.84	4.17	3.96
CI for mean difference (adults)	(-1.369, -0.631)	(0.460, 1.109)	(-1.369, -0.671)	(-1.054, -0.358)	(0.357, 1.173)	(0.563, 1.358)

of factors such as intelligence, honesty, and ethics worsened.

Similarly, all participants reported negative changes in perception for MSNBC News (see Tables 3 and 4). Teenage participants had a mean change of 0.9953 for all competency and trustworthiness factors for MSNBC News. Adults had a mean change of

0.9330. Republicans had a mean change significantly greater than Democrats; Republican mean change is 1.110 for MSNBC compared to 0.796 for Democrats.

The only program to have positive change is *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*. Participants, on average, rated the program initially lower in competency and trustworthiness than Fox News and MSNBC. The post-surveys for *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* not only indicate positive change but also had higher average rating on trustworthiness and competency than Fox News and MSNBC (see Tables 5 and 6). The positive change in perceptions of *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* is significantly higher for the teenage audience. The average mean in change for all competency and trustworthiness factors for teenagers is 0.6827 compared to 0.1737 for adults. The average mean change for Democrat participants for all competency and trustworthiness factors is 0.4125 compared to 0.3887 for Republicans.

In addition, it is interesting to note that familiarity with each individual program did not influence results. The surveys also asked participants to list the regularity in which they have watched Fox News, MSNBC News, and *the Daily Show with Jon Stewart*: never, rarely, sometimes, or regularly. Regular viewers of each program on average had similar attitude change to those who rarely or never watched each program.

Summary

The results illustrate that the mean participants' perceptions of the competency and trustworthiness of Fox News and MSNBC weakened after watching the satirical segments from *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*. The results also provide data that reveal mean changes in perception of Fox News and MSNBC were greater for the teenage participants

Table 3: MSNBC News' Competency

MSNBC News Competency	Intelligent (1)- Unintelligent (7)	Untrained (1)- Trained (7)	Inexpert (1)- Expert (7)	Informed (1)- Uninformed (7)	Incompetent (1)- Competent (7)	Bright (1)- Stupid (7)
Participants pre-study mean	2.85	5.37	5.26	2.86	5.04	2.86
Participants post-study mean	3.71	4.70	4.26	3.67	4.04	3.97
Confidence interval (CI) for mean difference	(-1.192, -0.651)	(0.417, 0.955)	(0.758, 1.228)	(-1.082, -0.552)	(0.752, 1.248)	(-1.349, -0.835)
Teens pre-study mean	2.64	5.26	5.33	2.65	5.17	2.70
Teens post-study mean	3.62	4.79	4.42	3.39	4.13	3.87
CI for mean difference (teens)	(-1.342, -0.618)	(0.398, 1.068)	(0.615, 1.206)	(-1.097, -0.369)	(0.736, 1.343)	(-1.492, -0.848)
Adults pre-study mean	3.24	5.14	5.14	3.24	4.80	3.20
Adults post-study mean	4.06	4.51	3.94	4.24	3.86	4.16
CI for mean difference (adults)	(-1.220, -0.427)	(0.157, 1.098)	(0.802, 1.590)	(-1.347, -0.653)	(0.490, 1.393)	(-1.407, -0.514)

than the adult participants. Politically, the results also illustrate that the participants' party affiliation correlates to mean changes for specific networks: less change for Republicans

Table 4: MSNBC News' Trustworthiness

MSNBC News Trustworthiness	Honest (1)- Dishonest (7)	Untrustworthy (1) – Trustworthy (7)	Honorable (1)- Dishonorable (7)	Moral (1)- Immoral (7)	Unethical (1) – Ethical (7)	Phony (1)- Genuine (7)
Participants pre-study mean	3.06	4.86	3.11	3.19	4.92	4.98
Participants post-study mean	4.08	3.85	4.31	4.12	4.00	3.89
Confidence interval (CI) for mean difference	(-1.261, -0.726)	(0.777, 1.236)	(-1.436, -0.982)	(-1.163, -0.731)	(0.679, 1.162)	(0.830, 1.357)
Teens pre-study mean	2.91	5.06	2.91	3.02	5.08	5.11
Teens post-study mean	3.95	3.95	4.20	4.00	4.22	4.01
CI for mean difference (teens)	(-1.392, -0.688)	(0.802, 1.416)	(-1.575, -0.999)	(-1.259, -0.701)	(0.545, 1.172)	(0.773, 1.431)
Adults pre-study mean	3.43	4.45	3.49	3.53	4.61	4.75
Adults post-study mean	4.31	3.67	4.51	4.39	3.59	3.67
CI for mean difference (adults)	(-1.290, -0.474)	(0.455, 1.114)	(-1.395, -0.644)	(-1.214, -0.511)	(0.636, 1.403)	(0.615, 1.542)

and Fox, less change for Democrats and MSNBC, greater change for Republicans and MSNBC and greater change for Democrats and Fox News.

Moreover, the results provide data that the only positive mean change in perception was in the trustworthiness and competency of *the Daily Show with Jon Stewart*. In

Table 5: *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart's* Competency

Daily Show Competency	Intelligent (1)- Unintelligent (7)	Untrained (1)- Trained (7)	Inexpert (1)- Expert (7)	Informed (1)- Uninformed (7)	Incompetent (1)- Competent (7)	Bright (1)- Stupid (7)
Participants pre-study mean	3.25	5.00	4.63	3.18	4.79	3.33
Participants post-study mean	2.57	5.51	5.13	2.55	5.20	2.67
Confidence interval (CI) for mean difference	(0.366, 0.982)	(-0.760, -0.261)	(-0.740, -0.253)	(0.297, 0.965)	(-0.678, -0.145)	(0.380, 0.953)
Teens pre-study mean	3.19	5.20	4.85	3.14	4.95	3.39
Teens post-study mean	2.36	5.80	5.39	2.17	5.47	2.39
CI for mean difference (teens)	(0.454, 1.206)	(-0.894, -0.298)	(-0.824, -0.261)	(0.530, 1.406)	(-0.849, -0.194)	(0.646, 1.354)
Adults pre-study mean	3.36	4.60	4.19	3.28	4.47	3.21
Adults post-study mean	3.00	4.94	4.60	3.32	4.66	3.21
CI for mean difference (adults)	(-0.184, 0.907)	(-0.808, 0.127)	(-0.885, 0.076)	(-0.488, 0.403)	(-0.660, 0.277)	(-0.446, 0.446)

addition, the teenage participants had greater mean change than adult participants, and Democrats had greater mean change for Stewart's program than Republicans.

These results will be discussed in the context of this study's four hypotheses in the next chapter. The results will also be discussed in the context of the literature review and

Table 6: *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart's* Trustworthiness

Daily Show Trustworthiness	Honest (1)- Dishonest (7)	Untrustworthy (1)- Trustworthy (7)	Honorable (1)- Dishonorable (7)	Moral (1)- Immoral (7)	Unethical (1)- Ethical (7)	Phony (1)- Genuine (7)
Participants pre-study mean	3.62	4.24	3.81	4.14	4.18	4.28
Participants post-study mean	3.10	4.72	3.38	3.81	4.50	4.88
Confidence interval (CI) for mean difference	(0.287, 0.762)	(-0.708, -0.214)	(0.171, 0.681)	(0.071, 0.596)	(-0.569, -0.055)	(-0.847, -0.344)
Teens pre-study mean	3.46	4.34	3.62	4.05	4.29	4.45
Teens post-study mean	2.73	5.09	3.10	3.54	4.76	5.21
CI for mean difference (teens)	(0.421, 1.026)	(-1.048, -0.441)	(0.193, 0.850)	(0.170, 0.851)	(-0.786, -0.151)	(-0.786, -0.151)
Adults pre-study mean	3.96	4.04	4.19	4.32	3.98	3.96
Adults post-study mean	3.83	3.94	3.96	4.34	3.98	4.21
CI for mean difference (adults)	(-0.238, 0.493)	(-0.287, 0.500)	(-0.168, 0.636)	(-0.411, 0.368)	(-0.441, 0.441)	(-0.743, 0.232)

the implications the results have in the context of persuasive and satirical communication studies.

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION

The discussion of the results begins in the context of the four hypotheses of this study: H1) *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart's* satire on news media will change an audience's perception of the level of competence of news organizations, H2) *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart's* satire on news media will change an audience's perception of the level of trustworthiness of news organizations, H3) *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart's* satire will affect teenager perceptions more than adult perceptions, and H4) The political demographic of the participant will correlate to the participant's responses. In the framework of the hypotheses, the discussion reveals statistically significant results that support the hypotheses.

The discussion then contributes insight to general persuasive and satirical communication studies. Reflecting back upon the literature review, methodology, and previous studies, the discussion focuses on both previous criticism and support of satire. The discussion adds to the body of knowledge on satire and persuasion and youth and adult attitudes and perceptions.

Discussion

This study finds statistically significant results in satire's ability to change attitudes. *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart's* satire affected every factor of trustworthiness and competency of political news organizations among all demographics. This study provides evidence that satire is successful in persuasion and that age factors and political affiliations will affect satire in the context of political messages.

The results confirm hypothesis 1: *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart's* satire on news media will change an audience's perception of the level of competence of news organizations. Competence was tested by the audience's impression of news networks' intelligence, training, expertise, information, competency, and brightness. In each of these factors for both Fox News and MSNBC, the mean rating changed to a greater negative perception after watching Stewart's satire.

The results also confirm hypothesis 2: *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart's* satire on news media will change an audience's perception of the level of trustworthiness of news organizations. Trustworthiness was test by the audience's impression of news networks' honesty, trustworthiness, honor, morality, ethics, and genuineness. Once again, in all factors, the mean perception changed to a greater negative perception after watching Stewart's satire.

The specific satirical segments from *the Daily Show with Jon Stewart* focused on hypocrisy and bias in hyper-partisan news networks. Stewart has stated that his show is not about the left versus the right. His show is about corruption versus non-corruption through satire, and he has further argued that major news networks should focus on corruption versus non-corruption instead of liberal versus conservative. He has applauded news segments such as Anderson Cooper's "Keeping Them Honest," and at the same time has questioned why such a segment as Cooper's is unique in that honesty and trustworthiness should be fundamental principles of all news organizations (Williams, 2010).

This study also confirmed hypothesis 3: *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart's* satire will affect teenage perceptions more than adult perceptions. Previous research suggests

that young adults often question the attitudes formed under environmental factors and may be more susceptible to persuasive influences (Howell, 2009). This study confirms that idea since teenage participants had greater average mean changes in attitude when combining all factors than the adults in this study. As a generalization, it has been argued that adults are more dogmatic in their opinions and are less likely to change; it has also been argued that young adult audiences will be more attracted to humor than adult audiences (Markiewicz, 1974; Gruner, 1991). Although teenage participants had greater change on average, there were specific factors in which the adult audiences had greater change, which may challenge hypothesis 3. Adults had a slightly greater shift in perception on Fox's intelligence and MSNBC's expertise and ethics. Although youth changes were greater than adult changes on average, this study may challenge previous ideas that youth are more easily persuaded in general than adults and more easily persuaded through humor than adults.

Beyond being persuaded through satire, an interesting result discovered in this study is the difference in perception of humor between adults and teenagers. Although both audiences yielded statistically significant results in attitude change, the two audiences viewed the source of the humor very differently. In general, the teenage and adult audiences initially rated Stewart's program as much less competent and trustworthy than Fox News and MSNBC. After the study, both audiences rated Stewart on average as more trustworthy and competent than Fox News and MSNBC; however, the difference in the change was far greater with the teenage audience. The changes in perception of Stewart among teens were at least twice as great and sometimes up to ten times as great as the adults. Even though the adults were persuaded by Stewart and even though the adults

concluded he may be more trustworthy and competent than Fox News and MSNBC, the adult confidence in the level of his trustworthiness and competency was significantly lower than the teenage audience. It can be concluded that both adults and teenagers can be significantly manipulated by satire; however, teenagers will have a more favorable impression of the source of the satire than adults on average.

In the results of this study, Democrats and Republicans shifted their attitudes on the trustworthiness and competency of Fox News and MSNBC after Stewart revealed the hyper-partisan context in which their news is framed. In the political climate of the 21st century, this study illuminates a fundamental human need for competent, trustworthy news sources. Regardless of one's political affiliation, Republicans and Democrats in this study had less confident views in the trustworthiness and competency of Fox and MSNBC after watching *the Daily Show with Jon Stewart*.

Specifically, the study also confirms hypothesis 4: The political demographic of the participant will correlate to the participant's responses. Although the perceptions of Fox News and MSNBC from Democrats and Republicans worsened after the study, Democrats had a greater change in perception of Fox News than Republicans, and Republicans had a greater change in perception of MSNBC than Democrats. Democrats also had a more significant positive impression of *the Daily Show with Jon Stewart* after the study than Republicans. In the satirical segments used in the study, Stewart criticizes Fox for a hyper-conservative bias and criticizes MSNBC for a hyper-liberal bias. Even though Republicans were influenced by Stewart's criticism of Fox News and had weaker confidence in Fox's competency and trustworthiness, Republicans may have been more reluctant to change than

Democrats due to the fact that Stewart presented Fox in the context of a conservative bias. Similarly, even though Democrats had weaker confidence in MSNBC's competency and trustworthiness after Stewart's criticism, Democrats may have been more reluctant to change in their perception of MSNBC than Republicans due to the fact that Stewart presented MSNBC in the context of a liberal bias.

This study also contributes to communication scholarship on persuasive research. In the 20th century, many communication studies did not produce sufficient quantitative data to support a claim that satire is persuasive (Pokorny & Gruner, 1969). Pokorny and Gruner (1969), however, provided insight into future satire studies by finding that satire is slightly more effective if the audience knows the material is intentionally satirical and if the audience understands satire. This study builds upon Pokorny and Gruner's argument, as the participants understood in advance that *the Daily Show with Jon Stewart* was a late-night entertainment media program that used satire to humorously criticize the political environment. The changes in attitude in this study could be argued to be more than "slight"; the results reveal a nearly one point mean attitude change after only five short satirical segments.

Previous studies provided a foundation for this study beyond the fact that the audience should at least know when persuasive content is intentionally satirical. When presented with insignificant results, it was argued that satire must come from an expert source, more than an undergraduate student's speech at the very least (Markiewicz, 1974; Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004). Jon Stewart's success with his program and the statistically

significant results in this study validate that Stewart is an expert satirist and that an expert source does indeed enhance the effectiveness of satire.

Markiewicz's (1974) criticism of satire specifically criticized the testing environment, and in light of insignificant results at the time, argued that the appropriate conditions to measure satire had not been created. Markiewicz's primary suggestions for future research were to use humor that did not interfere with comprehension and use topics that were conducive to humor. Markiewicz essentially argued that either satire was not effective in persuading an audience or that the appropriate testing environment had not been created. Heeding Markiewicz's advice, this study used humor from an expert source that did not interfere with comprehension. This study further contributes to persuasive research by providing evidence that satire is successful in persuading an audience when appropriate testing conditions have been established.

Summary

In general, this study contributes quantitative support that satire is effective in manipulating attitudes. On average, all participants had weaker perceptions of the competency and trustworthiness of the political news organizations that were explored in this study. More specifically, the comparison of changes in attitude between adults and teenagers reveals insight. Teenagers had greater changes not only in more negative perceptions of the political news organizations than adults, but teenagers also had a significantly more favorable impression of the humor and satire of *the Daily Show with Jon Stewart* than adults. The political demographic, as was hypothesized, also affected the

results of the study depending on the political affiliation of the participant and the political bias of the news organization.

The results of the study illuminate satire's ability to successfully persuade, and the method of the study also reveals the importance of an appropriate testing environment. Studies focusing on satire may have more significant results when using an expert source, when the audience understands if a persuasive message is intentionally satirical, and when the humor does not distract from audience comprehension of the specific message. Overall, the study reveals that satire is effective in persuasion, communication studies of satire have the potential to contribute greater insight to the field of persuasion, and individuals—regardless of age or political demographic—appear to have a need for greater competency and trustworthiness from news sources.

CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In the 21st Century, individuals receive news from a variety of diverse sources: traditional news programs, late night entertainment media, Twitter, Facebook, blogs, and much more. Many traditional news sources and certainly many Internet sources present the news in a specific framework that enhances the narrative the news source wants to be true. Whether a news source is liberal or conservative, political news organizations present information in a specific context. Competency and trustworthiness of news organizations are put at risk when sources do not reveal a full context for a news story or spin the story only within a specific political framework.

As a consequence of hyper-partisan news sources such as Fox and MSNBC, late night entertainment media programs have significant potential to influence perceptions of politics and news sources. This study focused on one example, *the Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, which runs a nightly program that regularly criticizes the traditional news media. Although the program uses comedy to entertain its audience, the program presents news sources, political ideas, and many social issues through a satirical perspective that illuminates bias, corruption, and hypocrisy.

In the context of communication research and scholarship, several studies have explored persuasion, satire, and attitude with mixed results. Many studies in the late 20th century presented insignificant or questionable results. Due to the increasingly popular late-night entertainment programs such as *the Daily Show with Jon Stewart* and *the Colbert Report*, this study revisited satire through the context of a successful and relevant entertainment media program. Entertainment media programs certainly have different

demographics in terms of viewership, so it is also relevant and meaningful to analyze satire in the context of comparisons between teenagers and adults and Republicans and Democrats.

To contribute to the understanding of humor, satire, persuasion, and attitude specifically in the context of teenagers versus adults, this study created an experiment where participants completed a survey on their perceptions of the trustworthiness and competency of Fox News and MSNBC. Participants then watched several satirical segments from *the Daily Show with Jon Stewart* and completed the same survey a second time. The changes in perceptions were analyzed using a paired t-test, and the analysis revealed statistically significant results.

Stewart's satire affected every demographic on average. Mean changes among all participants were significant, and participants possessed weaker perceptions of the competency and trustworthiness of Fox News and MSNBC. The average changes among teenagers were greater than the average changes among adults, and teenagers had a significantly greater positive perception of *the Daily Show with Jon Stewart* than the adult population after watching the segments presented in the study. The age demographic provides insight into satire and persuasion. As a generalization, teenagers are more likely to be manipulated through humor and are more likely to have a positive impression of the humorous source than adults.

Directions for Future Research

There are some limitations to this study that future research would benefit from noting. First, the participants could be more diverse. The study used 100 teenage

participants and 50 adult participants. The study for teenagers was conducted during high school classes so it was easier to recruit volunteers. Extra-credit was awarded to students who recruited a parent or adult to participate in an evening study. If more adults could have been recruited, ideally one for each teenager, then the study might have provided better information.

Beyond the number of participants, increased diversity may contribute to more insightful results. The study was conducted in a rural, conservative community. With the exception of a few participants, virtually everyone was Caucasian. Moreover, only 20 of the participants (youth and adult) identified themselves as Democrats. Over 50 participants identified themselves as Republican. The study could yield more insightful results in a community with more diverse political orientation and ethnicity.

Previous studies on persuasion also criticize studies on satire that do not have a serious message control group. Although the results of this study provide evidence that satire is effective, there was no control group to determine whether or not satire is more effective than a serious message. Future researchers could benefit from having a serious message control group. For example, a future study could incorporate a serious message control group that watches segments from Anderson Cooper's "Keeping Them Honest" and have a satirical message group that watches clips on the same subjects from entertainment media. The comparison between the two could certainly provide interesting data for satirical and persuasive studies.

Future studies could also incorporate message comprehension. An advanced study could not only compare the effects of persuasion between serious message groups and

entertainment media message groups, but future studies could also include a comprehension and understanding survey to add to persuasive scholarship as to whether or not satire or serious messages are better understood and remembered.

In terms of coding data for more diverse results, future research could also measure data via the frequency participants have watched each program. For example, data could be analyzed from those who watch Fox News or MSNBC News regularly to those who rarely watch Fox News or MSNBC News as well as those who watch *the Daily Show with Jon Stewart* regularly or rarely.

Future research could also examine perceptions in terms of short-term periods to long-term periods. Much insight could be added to this research if the same participants were tested again on their perceptions of news media a month or a year after the study to test attitude retention.

Regardless of the limitations and many noteworthy future possibilities, this study confirms the hypothesis that Jon Stewart's satire affects perceptions of the trustworthiness and competency of news media. The study further illustrates that teenagers and adults perceive humor differently and are affected by satire in different ways. The study also confirms that political affiliation affects participant perception of political news media.

Summary

Satire has a rich history in rhetoric and communication, and appropriate experiments and careful research make satire a relevant and interesting research component for contemporary communication scholars. Media in the 21st century are as diverse as the human population. Networks, as illustrated in the study, can be very biased and shape

news to fit a particular narrative or framework that helps the news networks achieve their goals. The entertainment media are further ripe with humor and satire that criticize and ridicule political and social events. Although several past studies of satire may have produced insufficient results, this study shows that satire is effective when tested in appropriate conditions.

Researchers interested in satire need look no further than the internet or mass media to find a plethora of sources. Analyzing the effectiveness and influence of satirical sources has the potential to shed great light not just on persuasion but also on the social and political context of the current time. When a program such as *the Daily Show with Jon Stewart* can develop years worth of content simply criticizing the news media and political climate of the current time, it reveals some insight into the conflicted, divided, and often misinformed people of today.

Quantitative research, similar to that used in this study, can illuminate the influence or lack thereof of such satire. Researchers see very specifically the changes of attitude and perception, and it is clear that Stewart's satire has the ability to change attitude and perception of virtually all demographics. More than simply the general effect of satire, it is noteworthy to consider satire with different variables and demographics. Teenagers and adults, Democrats and Republicans, diverse ethnicities, frequency of watching particular shows, and other variables can provide unique formats through which to study satire. Results can add to the body of communication knowledge regarding attitude formation, susceptibility to influence, and various perceptions.

Regardless of previous studies, this study argues that satire is an effective and important tool in persuasion. Satire is a useful tool in illuminating hypocrisy and corruption. When hypocrisy and corruption proliferate in a political and/or news climate, satire and humor may be more important than ever in attracting audiences so that members of society are better informed and have an opportunity to see news and politics through different perspectives.

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APPENDIX A. SURVEY INSTRUMENT

McCroskey and Teven's Competence and Trustworthiness Survey (1999)

Instructions: Please indicate your impression of **Fox News** by circling the appropriate number between the pairs of adjectives below. The closer the number is to the adjective, the more certain you are of your evaluation.

Competence

Intelligent 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Unintelligent

Untrained 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Trained

Inexpert 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Expert

Informed 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Uninformed

Incompetent 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Competent

Bright 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Stupid

Trustworthiness

Honest 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Dishonest

Untrustworthy 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Trustworthy

Honorable 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Dishonorable

Moral 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Immoral

Unethical 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Ethical

Phony 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Genuine

Instructions: Please indicate your impression of **MSNBC News** by circling the appropriate number between the pairs of adjectives below. The closer the number is to the adjective, the more certain you are of your evaluation.

Competence

Intelligent 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Unintelligent

Untrained 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Trained

Inexpert 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Expert

Informed 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Uninformed

Incompetent 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Competent

Bright 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Stupid

Trustworthiness

Honest 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Dishonest

Untrustworthy 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Trustworthy

Honorable 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Dishonorable

Moral 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Immoral

Unethical 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Ethical

Phony 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Genuine

Instructions: Please indicate your impression of *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* by circling the appropriate number between the pairs of adjectives below. The closer the number is to the adjective, the more certain you are of your evaluation.

Competence

Intelligent 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Unintelligent

Untrained 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Trained

Inexpert 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Expert

Informed 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Uninformed

Incompetent 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Competent

Bright 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Stupid

Trustworthiness Honest 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Dishonest
 Untrustworthy 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Trustworthy
 Honorable 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Dishonorable
 Moral 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Immoral
 Unethical 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Ethical
 Phony 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Genuine

Demographic information: Please check the most appropriate box

Gender: Male ___ Female ___

Age: 14- 17 ___ 18-29 ___ 30-39 ___ 40-49 ___ 50 and older ___

Ethnicity: Caucasian ___ African-American ___ Hispanic ___ Asian ___
 Pacific Islander ___ Other ___

Political orientation: Democrat ___ Republican ___ Independent ___
 Other ___ Unknown ___

How often have you watched:

The Daily Show ___ Never ___ Rarely ___ Sometimes ___ Regularly

Fox News ___ Never ___ Rarely ___ Sometimes ___ Regularly

MSNBC News ___ Never ___ Rarely ___ Sometimes ___ Regularly

APPENDIX B. METHOD RESOURCES

The Daily Show with Jon Stewart video clips

Title of segment	Air date	Subject	Website
Fox News vs. Jon Stewart	April 2010	Fox News	http://www.salon.com/news/politics/war_room/2010/04/21/stewart_goldberg
Are you ready for some midterms?	October 2010	Fox and MSNBC	http://www.thedailyshow.com/watch/thu-september-9-2010/are-you-ready-for-some-midterms---msnbc-s-political-narrative
Comment on Keith Olbermann	Jan 21, 2010	MSNBC	http://www.thedailyshow.com/watch/thu-january-21-2010/special-comment---keith-olbermann-s-name-calling
Queer and Loathing	Oct 13, 2009	Fox and MSNBC	http://www.thedailyshow.com/watch/tue-october-13-2009/queer-and-loathing-in-d-c-
Obama lunch with GOP	Feb 1, 2010	Fox and MSNBC	http://www.thedailyshow.com/watch/mon-february-1-2010/q---o