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Local news on radio and television : a study of San Jose, San Francisco, and Oakland

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**Local news on radio and television: A study of San Jose, San
Francisco, and Oakland**

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San Jose State University, 1991

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LOCAL NEWS ON RADIO AND TELEVISION:
A STUDY OF SAN JOSE, SAN FRANCISCO, AND OAKLAND

A Thesis
Presented to the Faculty of the
Department of Journalism and Mass Communications
San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science

By
Thomas C. Letts
December, 1991

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ABSTRACT

LOCAL NEWS ON RADIO AND TELEVISION: A STUDY OF SAN JOSE, SAN FRANCISCO, AND OAKLAND

by Thomas C. Letts

This study introduces a new method of evaluating the content of radio and television newscasts. It then takes data gathered with the new method and examines local coverage by 14 San Francisco Bay Area stations. The research method modifies established work in the hope of developing a complete but manageable way of assessing content. It is designed to show a station's commitment to covering its own city and county of license, with a general hypothesis that most stations largely ignore their own communities in an effort to attract wider audiences.

Stations were grouped in various ways, and the groups were then compared statistically in an effort to ascertain the tendencies of different types of stations at different times of day. Data showed few significant differences in content among comparison groups. Coverage of central city was found to be low, but coverage of issues was found to be fairly high. Comparisons of statistical tests for various content types indicated the new research method worked as intended.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Are broadcast journalists doing their job the way it ought to be done? That's becoming one of the central media questions of our time. It is undeniably subjective. (Who sets the standard; who defines what ought to be done?) It is also a question not thoroughly studied. Data evaluating radio and television news are fragmented, consisting of isolated studies on individual or closely clustered markets, spanning two decades. Most of what has been done has focused exclusively on television news. Perhaps more important, only a small handful of researchers have tried to come up with a method by which broadcast news can be evaluated both quantitatively and qualitatively on a station-by-station or network-by-network basis.

This research project has two purposes. First, it is designed to advance the search for a workable, universally-applicable method by which newscasts can be evaluated for content. To that end, a new evaluative model, producing a score for each newscast based on content type and geographical area covered, is demonstrated. Second, it is intended to provide an evaluation of various Bay Area radio and television news departments, based on the content of newscasts aired on randomly selected days. The emphasis of the study will be on coverage of local issues and events, and the evaluative method reflects that priority. The method is not designed to show whether any single newscast is good or bad; as a measure only of air time devoted to certain types of content, it reflects a news department's philosophy on covering local issues. A conclusive analysis of a given newscast's quality or a news department's performance cannot be attempted until uniform

standards are set. That is not likely soon, if ever.

Nevertheless, this study found a general lack of commitment to local issues among the 14 stations observed. None of the 14 emphasized issues in their own cities of license, and 12 of them virtually ignored them. Part of this was a result of the Persian Gulf crisis; Iraq invaded Kuwait during the latter half of the study period, and the U.S.-led troop build-up drew a high volume of coverage on the local stations. But the lack of city issue coverage before the crisis was clear, even more on television than on radio.

The lack of city issue coverage was consistent with the study's second major conclusion -- that while some of the stories vary from station to station, overall content is fairly generic. Content was compared in six different breakdowns, based on medium, day part, and station format. Few statistically significant differences were found in the volume of coverage given collectively to either hard issues or the stations' own cities of license. Obviously, the Gulf crisis contributed to this. But the crisis occupied less than half of the study period, and coverage of it, while extensive, did not preclude stations from devoting large amounts of time to other news items.

The method of assessing the stations successfully reflected the type of coverage they provided. In comparing various pairs of categories (AM radio vs. FM, for example), tests for statistically significant differences in content almost always yielded the same results as the same statistical tests on average scores earned under the evaluation system. That agreement of statistical test results demonstrates the evaluative method does what it is designed to do: reflect how much a given station or group of stations covers local issues.

This study confirmed some earlier research about, for example, the consonance of news among stations in the same

market, and because it drew on earlier work on assessing radio and TV newscast content, the methodology's success demonstrates the earlier efforts were well-grounded and generally workable. It is hoped this new research will help lead to the development of a universally accepted means of evaluating broadcast news content -- a method that will allow the public to know more about how the news media are serving it.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviews key data from studies relating to broadcast journalism. Issues covered in this review include:

- 1) defining news (the "product"),*
- 2) the audience and the communication process,*
- 3) editorial decision-making (gatekeeping),*
- 4) defining what "local" is, and*
- 5) methods for evaluating newscast content.*

Overview

The public's growing reliance on television for news makes it even more important to find a way to assess how well TV news serves its booming audience. The numerous studies of how much TV people watch are irrelevant here; the credibility people give to TV news is the primary focus. The data are well-established, resulting from research more than a decade old. Studies in Detroit (Abel & Wirth, 1977) and Grand Rapids, Michigan (Reagan & Zenaty, 1979) found adults who regularly read the newspaper and watch TV news give TV far more credibility. Adams (1978) blasted those who criticize TV news as being sensational, claiming the appearance of sensationalism may arise from numerous examples of it by only a few stations. Other work supports that notion, showing similarities in content among different media. A study of New York City's three largest papers and three major network TV affiliates, Dominick, Wurtzer, and Lometti (1975) found no major difference in the percentage of "hard news" each medium covered each day. And Wilkins, analyzing coverage of the huge Christ-

mas, 1982 blizzard in Denver, found proportionately more "hard news" stories about the storm on TV than in the papers (1984).

None of those studies conclusively assessed general broadcast journalism performance. But all of them had a common thread: they focused on local news media. Local media are far more difficult to assess as a group, since there are so many broadcasting stations and printed publications from coast to coast and border to border. A key issue in developing a method for assessing local news coverage is how to account for the unique nature of each community. An important distinction must be made between the societal/geographic definition of a community and the media's definition of it.

News As a Communication Process

THE "PRODUCT"

Journalism research during the past 20 years has been marked on occasion by researchers' criticisms that the audience is the all-powerful force determining how reporters and editors decide what to cover. Altheide (1976) wrote that ratings tell TV journalists not only whether they're doing a good job, but also whether their work is better than their competition's. Davison, Boylan, and Yu (1982) noted an influx of consultants to TV stations. McQuail (1987) made a similar observation and concluded, "The news mechanism depends ultimately on receiver interest" (p. 292). Indeed, McQuail wrote that media content may have to be called a commodity -- echoing Altheide, who defined news as a product, presented for specific purposes and distinguished from other forms of knowledge by its immediacy.

From where in the news organization that definition comes has not been pinpointed. But Breed (1955), Ettema, Whitney, and Wackman (1987), and others have suggested it comes from upper management. In fact, Ettema, Whitney, and Wackman asserted that writers are taught a product image to be maintained and upheld in all their stories. Lewis (1984) noted a difference between television and newspapers in how the product image emphasis affects news writers.

While the print reporter is conscious that he should be writing bright and grabby news leads and that his copy should be clear and well-written, he does not have the feeling that the entire newspaper enterprise rests on his solitary talents. However, in television news, the prevailing ethos is that one slip, one miss will lead the viewer to that Other Station, from whence he will never return. (p. 6)

Ettema, Whitney, and Wackman argued the focus on product image has stifled journalists' search for truth. They further claimed this has led to a broad uniformity of content mirroring "the social structures and values of its political-economic context" (p. 765). Atwater has used data from the Detroit, Toledo, and Lansing markets to show consonance in local TV news. He found "unique" stories -- stories only one station in a market uses -- got 39% of all air time devoted to "hard news" and 85% of all air time devoted to "soft news" (1983). He also found about half of all local news items in each market aired on at least two stations (1986). Some of the consonance probably results from agreements in news judgment, but Atwater's data appear to lend credibility to Levy's concept of "disdained news" (1981), defined as news journalists do not want to report but feel compelled to report because of competitive pressures.

Many people may think of "competition" as a concept for business, not journalism. But there are at least two types

of competition in journalism. One is among reporters vying for "scoops." The other is at the management level, as more and more radio and TV stations merge their business and news functions. Charles E. Wright (1988) and others have noted serving the public interest goes beyond providing quality newscasts. One radio executive, Wayne R. Vriesman, pointed out (1988) that a station can use local remote broadcasts and charity fundraisers to maintain a level of what it deems to be public service. And a Vermont station manager argues the news department must not be independent of the rest of a station.

... the news department at the normal radio station is bad news -- expensive, unnecessary, downright counter-productive, at least in the minds of the 1980s deregulated broadcaster.

When news is off in its own orbit, news can be all those things. But when news becomes one with programming, sales, and community involvement, ... it becomes part of a tremendously powerful entity -- good radio. Has it ever occurred to you that a unique sale at a local car dealership, a special or unusual deal at the furniture store, or a truly new service at the local bank is news ...? (Davis, 1988, p. 117)

Those may be dubious forms of public service, but they and similar approaches are becoming more common. Eisenberg (1990) pointed out how the deregulation of the broadcasting industry during Ronald Reagan's presidency caused many stations either to drop their news departments or to adopt business approaches to running them. He quoted several Bay Area station executives, news directors, reporters, and anchors, many of whom expressed concern about the state of TV news.

"Deregulation has de-emphasized public service," admits KTVU news director Fred Zehnder. "It's been a disastrous thing for the public." (p. 100)

[KPIX editorial and public affairs director Nancy Graham] admits ... "fewer issues are being addressed" in special public affairs programs. (p. 100)

KRON anchor Evan White is blunter still. "Broadcast journalism is going down the tubes. We're not doing news

anymore, [sic] we're doing *infotainment*: crime, sex, scandal, celebrity gossip, and cutesy animal stories. It's become just a formula to build an entertainment audience." (p. 93)

"Infotainment is crowding journalism out," says Belva Davis, highly regarded city hall reporter for KRON "News, in the sense that we understood it a decade ago, isn't on the drawing board; it's not even in the development stage." (p. 93)

Eisenberg also pointed out deregulation has changed the nature of station ownership, not just news content. One of the regulations the FCC revised was the so-called Anti-Trafficking Rule, which required TV station owners to operate for three years before selling. The result, he wrote, was a series of high-priced, leveraged buyouts of stations that forced the new owners "to look at broadcasting from a strictly financial point of view" (p. 110).

Data have also been collected to show the influence of competitive pressures on specific types of news reporting. Sood, Stockdale, and Rogers (1987) used anecdotal evidence to show this influence on coverage of disasters. They studied coverage of five disasters, noting how downed communications and other on-scene damage made it difficult to coordinate coverage from the main office. They showed how staffers on the scene used their own enterprise to try to get the story in print or on the air first.

Meanwhile, Madlin (1985) used interviews with news executives and reporters to show how investigative reporting has gained importance in maintaining or boosting ratings. Perhaps the most telling statement came from reporter/anchor Don Shelby of WCCO-TV, Minneapolis/St. Paul: "News management and the audience are about to decide whether success and profitability mean more entertainment or more journalism" (p. 54). But Eisenberg noted some stations may try to gain ratings points through better journalism, as news directors decide audiences

may not want infotainment. One study has already found newspapers will increase local news content to retain readers and advertisers as local competition increases or as papers from neighboring areas try to move in (Lacy, 1988). And studies of broadcasting have found that local TV news tries to win back audiences through, essentially, product differentiation (Powers, 1988) and that technological advances such as microwave units and satellites have caused stations to increase local coverage to set themselves apart from their "competition" (Bernstein et al., 1989).

The Bernstein study, however, found evidence that stations are lengthening their newscasts but not increasing local content. Bernstein speculated that some large stations may have been using advanced technology to report more world and national news, setting themselves apart that way rather than through increased local coverage. If that's the case, those stations may have been avoiding local news deliberately, because one survey has found the median size of TV news departments doubled between 1972 and 1985 (Stone, 1986). That trend may be reversing itself, however. Eisenberg (cited above) found anecdotal evidence of Bay Area news departments stretching their resources thinner and thinner.

... news departments are striving to do more with less. This increased output is being achieved, many news staffers say, at the expense of quality and substance. Reporters are pushed to cover more stories, leaving them little opportunity for journalistic enterprise. Local news producers [and, presumably, assignment editors and bureau chiefs] are also relying more on stories supplied by syndicated news services, and even handouts furnished by self-interested corporations. (p. 102)

And the newspaper. It is commonplace for news departments, under pressure from management to have "all the news," simply to rewrite newspaper articles without checking the facts or attempting to update them.

THE AUDIENCE

One could legitimately ask what is so wrong with reporting the news with an eye towards the audience, the people the news is supposed to benefit. Although quite a bit has been written and said about the influence of competition on news judgment, the perception of audience has received only moderate direct attention. Hewitt and Houlberg (1986) conducted a crossover study of the attitudes of radio and television station managers and news editors. They found competition with other stations was regarded as more important than whether the news was geared towards a specific audience. Overall, their survey showed no appreciable difference in attitudes between radio and television. But few similar efforts, if any, have ever been made to gather hard data about attitudes within the news organization and to compare results within one medium and among more than one.

Most audience-related research has been heavily theoretical. It began with Lasswell, who noted the receiver's role at the end of the communication act (1948). Charles R. Wright (1986) echoed this and amplified it into a complex series of steps, each with several options. Severin and Tankard emphasized a "tripartite relationship of media, audience, and society" (1988, p. 325). Such theoretical research is useful in evaluating media performance because it helps determine what an audience actually does with the news it gets. However, theoretical research does little to suggest whether the audience should play into the news media's thinking, for the purpose of evaluating the news.

Rouner (1987) offered two approaches to studying TV news-viewing behavior. One, the "effects" method, presumes people watch TV by force of habit. The other, "uses and gratifica-

tions," deemphasizes message content and total viewing time in favor of studying individual psychological traits. Rouser claimed both approaches were flawed in that they relied on personality trait assumptions that could not be generalized.

Graber has been able to develop a much more workable description of what an audience wants. She wrote that the uses and gratifications approach does help explain viewing behavior, asserting people pay attention to news of use to them (1984). Other news, she wrote, is ignored because it isn't useful or is repetitive to what has already been reported. Graber also referred to the concept of cognitive balance, which people try to maintain by seeking out information that supports or reassures them and by avoiding information that disturbs them, threatens them, or conflicts with their own knowledge, attitudes, or feelings. The concept is analogous to the ways Lasswell (1948) and Defleur and Ball-Rokeach (1989) described how society protects itself against outside influences such as the media. Graber also developed a three-factor approach to determine incentives for people to learn or not to learn from media messages. The three factors are the format and substance of the message, the concerns of the audience, and the circumstances in which the receiver hears the message -- including his lifestyle, prior learning, interest in news, and cynicism toward or trust in the media.

The importance of both the substance of a message and the format in which it's conveyed was reinforced by Woal (1986), who studied casual listening to all-news radio. He looked at the "newswheel" programming schedule many all-news stations employ to ensure such items as traffic reports and stock market updates air at the same times each hour. Woal concluded that because of the newswheel's consistency and familiarity to listeners, the audience tunes in because of the news's form, not its substance. Wulfemeyer (1983) studied strictly

substantive interest and found audiences wanted issue-oriented news more than other types of news -- and wanted all types of news more than sports or weather.

GATEKEEPING AND AGENDA-SETTING

What, then, is this nebulous, boundless, multi-faceted phenomenon we call "news"? Besides being called a commodity (McQuail, 1987) and a product (Altheide, 1976), it has been described as "edited reality" (McCombs & Shaw, 1977) and "an organizational product, born of routines" (Whitney, 1982).

Whatever it is, routines, as Whitney noted, have been shown to play an integral role in news gathering and dissemination. Both White, who coined the term "gatekeeper" (1950), and Snider, who followed White's work (1967), noted the heavy influence of daily routines on decision-making by reporters and editors. Tuchman (1973) found newspaper editorial staffs relied heavily on set policies and routines when dealing with breaking stories. Berkowitz, who studied network television affiliates and compared his data to similar research on local and national newspapers (1986), concluded TV news relies more heavily than newspapers do on experts, officials, and "routine news channels."

Altheide (1976) probably went into the most depth on the issues of routines and pre-packaged news. Noting a news event such as the Watergate break-in "may become interesting and socially significant after a lot of people know about it," he argued "TV news coverage molds public events" and "alters many social situations by changing everyday life" (pp. 26, 27). This is particularly evident, he said, in the volume of news events pre-planned for the media's convenience, because assignment desks consider their own scheduling concerns along with a story's importance.

But the choice of stories is only part of it. Altheide argued correctly that the angle a reporter takes on a story is often determined before he or she sets foot out of the newsroom -- guaranteeing the story will have a slant that could affect audience opinion of the issue or event. And because news reporters, even those with the highest integrity, cannot simply shut down their personal opinions at work, stories can be subtly biased. In short, Altheide found truly objective journalism is undermined in several ways.

... current news practices treat events as though they have objective qualities independent of the motives, purposes, and understandings of the people involved. The world of commonplace occurrence is not approached with uncertainty, but is instead conceived and then molded through news procedures in order for it to be reported on. (p. 24)

Institutionalized angles like conflict are the most commonly used [in reporting a story], but other meaningful contexts are available. Angles may originate in recent national developments, local happenings, and other concerns.

... Still another source of angles is the newscast itself. A reporter [Altheide observed] covered a story on an alternative theory of creation set forth by a religious group. Even though he emphasized that the group's position was somewhere between Darwin and the biblical view, the reporter was instructed by the producer to include something about Bibles (although none were mentioned during the interview) because the "lead" to the next story was about "welfare cheaters swearing on a stack of Bibles." (pp. 74, 75)

The "routine news channels" Berkowitz described have been shown to come in all lengths. Gans (1979) showed the extensive gatekeeping hierarchy governing news from overseas, using his own observations of how editors pass stories up what might be called the "ladder" on their way to publication or broadcast. Bailey and Lichty (1972) had already explained that stories and photos may be handled by several gatekeepers overseas before they even reach the main office in this country.

Sigal (1973) and Tillinghast (1980) examined the conflict that can occur among competing interests within one newsroom. Sigal introduced the concept of the "three-way split" of front-page space among international, national, and local and state items. This framework can override the personal influence individual employees have been shown to exert on the final news product (Davison, Boylan, & Yu, 1982; Ettema, Whitney, & Wackman, 1987).

Although Sigal studied only two newspapers, the New York Times and the Washington Post, his observation is crucial. He concluded the three-way split is designed not to ensure good coverage of local, regional, national, and world news, but rather to appease reporters and editors at each of the desks -- all of whom want their stories on the front page. Such artificial divisions of news content can profoundly affect what the public learns. Stories are ranked in their order of importance within a given category, and only in unusual cases is the basic format suspended. Since broadcast journalism is seen as being nothing but the front page, it would be useful to know whether such policies as the three-way split exist in radio and TV newsrooms.

Buckalew has shown how some broadcast gatekeepers do place value on the local nature of the news they cover. In studies of television news editors (1970) and radio news editors (1974), Buckalew found the proximity of a news event to be among the top considerations of broadcast gatekeepers. Buckalew surveyed news editors at 12 Midwestern television stations of various sizes and in various markets. He separately surveyed editors at 29 Western radio stations of various sizes and markets. In each survey, editors were observed at work, and the stories they used on the air were analyzed for content according to six categories: significance/impact, presence of conflict, prominence in recent news, proximity/lo-

cality, timeliness, and visual appeal. For obvious reasons, the last category was used only in analyzing TV news. Buckalew also analyzed all news items each editor received, including those not aired. Using total story input as his base criterion, he found timeliness to be the top consideration in television, while timeliness and proximity were roughly equal as the most important factors in radio.

Hewitt and Houlberg (1986) pointed out another important consideration for the broadcast gatekeeper. They called it the "time-linearity" of newscasts -- the fact that most radio and TV news departments air several newscasts a day. Those stations want their newscasts to sound fresh, so stories producing no new developments either are killed quickly or -- if important enough to warrant frequent repetition -- are played lower in newscasts as time passes. Television, despite having fewer newscasts than radio, faces the same problem: how to give its follow-up reports a fresh look. It is common for stations to spend a moment towards the end of one newscast telling their viewers what to expect on the next newscast.

Davison, Boylan, and Yu (1982) pointed out the heavy emphasis on the breaking story. They wrote that since the news is so event-oriented, slow-moving "events" often go unnoticed. They cited the post-World War II migration of Southern blacks to the North -- a mass move of great cultural significance that got relatively little attention in the media. They also cited an example given by Tuchman (1978a, p. 193):

A reporter covering the women's movement in 1975 told an interviewer, "I could see things changing, but it was hard to put my finger on it and say to the metropolitan desk, 'This is what's happening'" (p. 103).

The recent coverage of the world's environmental problems has been named as another case in point.

... some of the most ominous hazards we face -- such as global warming and ozone depletion -- have been dec-

ades in the making and will be years in manifesting themselves fully. That they are gradual rather than sudden processes makes them no less deadly. They just don't yield daily photo opportunities tailored to the eye-blinking attention span of the media. How do you take a picture of the earth getting hotter?

(Hertsgaard, p. 16.)

But Davison, Boylan, and Yu also recognized that gatekeeping involves more than day-to-day news judgment. They noted the increasing impact of public relations firms and pointed out how news releases are sometimes targeted to reporters or editors who may be particularly receptive.

In this capacity, however, the reporter or editor may not be acting strictly as a gatekeeper. McCombs and Shaw (1977) asserted convincingly that gatekeepers are also agenda-setters for political and societal discussion of issues. McCombs and Shaw stated people learn two types of things from the media: factual information and that information's importance. They reasoned people respond most readily to current events -- events about which they learn from the media. They were also quick to acknowledge that not even television news can take the place of, for example, attending your city council's meeting in person. "Perhaps more than any other aspect of our environment," they wrote, "the political arena ... is a secondhand reality" (p. 7).

Standard news coverage is not the only means by which McCombs and Shaw argued people learn from the media. They also said people learn about how government works by constantly seeing government news. Thus, the media not only help shape opinions but also help form general conceptions of government are formed, as well. This may be the most critical facet of media agenda-setting, and it could frequently involve no intent of the media to create a false perception. Lasswell wrote of "the popular image of international politics as chronic, intense conflict and little else" (1948, p. 94). He

claimed that image is perpetuated by the media, which, in their endless search for a "scoop," feel no compunction about putting a sensational twist on a mild event such as an international conference. Graber argued (1984) the public doesn't blindly accept everything it sees and hears, saying people accept guidance from the media of their choice. That's an important check against the notion of all-powerful media.

All of this brings us back to the desk of the individual gatekeeper who receives a press release targeted specifically at him. If this release leads to a story, then who, as Barkin asked in 1987, is the agenda-setter? Who has initiated the coverage of this matter? And, perhaps most important, how do mass communicators in the broad sense perceive their own roles and responsibilities?

Local News: What Is Local?

Determining what "local news" is requires treatment of several issues. Chief among them is the question of whether to accept the geographer's or the journalist's definition. Many large newspapers and broadcasting stations maintain bureaus outside the central city, enabling them to cover news first-hand over wider areas than they otherwise could. Some even dispatch reporters and photographers to major events hundreds of miles away from the home office. It is necessary to decide whether those types of stories qualify as local news.

Barkin asked what makes local TV news local. To find an answer, he then posed a series of follow-up questions. He placed heavy emphasis on a sociological definition of "community," suggesting the community must be considered as a geo-

graphical unit. a microcosm, a sphere of practical knowledge, an independent social system, and the object of close personal attachments. He also wanted to know what conceptions of their communities the media give to the public:

-- Is the community portrayed as a site for change?
As a set of traditions?

-- In what sense do local institutions become personifications of the city itself?

-- Are central city and suburb portrayed as separate constituencies or as reflections of one another?

-- Are different communities invested with their own unique traits?

-- Is there any media boosterism?

From the standpoint of trying to evaluate media coverage of local communities, Barkin's query about the relationship of central city and suburb appears to be the most critical. In a thorough examination of Pennsylvania TV news (1980), Adams discovered that trying to cover the many types of governments and communities within one market can be a nightmare. In the Pittsburgh market alone, he found 698 different local governments (a term he didn't define but which presumably means anything from cities and counties to fire districts). This web of jurisdictions covered 12 counties in Pennsylvania, three in West Virginia, and one each in Ohio and Maryland. In that setting, Adams studied how three Pittsburgh television stations tried to cover local news.

... the difficulties of dealing with hundreds of municipalities is especially obvious. [In one instance,] dozens of area school districts were faced with strikes or threats of strikes. Unable to isolate them all, KDKA spotlighted [sic] two Then, in an attempt to at least recognize the seriousness of the situation in other communities, the anchorman quickly read lists of dozens of districts with introductions such as "talks are continuing in ..." and "settlements were reached in ...".
(pp. 262-263)

Adams' conclusion: "Local television news appears unlikely to provide genuine sustained coverage outside of the central city" (p. 264).

If we accept that as true, then how do we define local news? Or do we adopt a more normative viewpoint that -- theoretically, at least -- demands the media make the effort to cover the suburbs as well as the central city? Before tackling the question of news itself, we must determine what "local" is. Ryu (1982) argued for consideration of four elements: who produces the news, where it is reported, when it's reported, and the commercial operations of the medium. His definition was made for television only, but it must be considered for all media if it is to serve as a standard. It clearly has problems. The relationship of who produces the news and where it is produced is logical. But when the news is produced is irrelevant. As Barkin (1987) pointed out, locality is a geographic term unrelated to time. Buckalew (1970, 1974) equated it to proximity, a separate category from timeliness in his list of criteria for radio and TV news gatekeepers. Ryu's fourth element, the commercial operation of the station, holds merit for overall evaluative purposes, because it allows stations to be examined for what they do given their financial resources. But it does nothing to help define what "local" means.

Another key issue in all this is "localization" of major national and international news (Barkin, 1987). That could mean one of two things. A station could find a local angle or effect from such a story. Or, if it has the wherewithall, it could send reporters and photographers to the scene. From the Bay Area's perspective, two good recent examples of this are the major earthquakes in Coalinga and in Mexico City. After each event, the large radio and TV stations, along with many newspapers, sent reporters and photographers to the

scene, even though the stories' direct impact on the Bay Area seemed tenuous at best. Of course, many Bay Area residents followed those stories out of concern for the people in the earthquake areas; that may have been especially true for Santa Clara County's Mexican-American population after the Mexico City quake. But the interest there was an emotional one. The quakes probably affected many people's lives in that way. But except for people with relatives in the quake areas, the disasters probably affected very few people's livelihoods -- their cost of living, the quality of their environment, the school systems, etc.

The Mexico City quake illustrated another issue -- the presence of news bureaus in faraway areas. The San Jose Mercury-News maintains a Mexico City bureau, allowing it easier access to news and sources there. As with any bureau, some of its stories directly affect the central city, and some do not. Because bureau reporters work for the papers or stations back in the local community, are their stories defined as "local," even if they may not have any apparent local impact? The best approach is probably to take each story on a case-by-case basis, but the matter should be researched further.

Research and Research Methods

WHAT IS NEEDED

If local broadcast journalism is to be assessed properly, researchers must come up with a uniform standard. Beyond defining what "local" is, they must resolve nagging issues that have hindered the search for conclusive answers. For one thing, Barkin (1987) wrote that content analyses of TV news

have focused on the networks and have largely ignored local news. And the singular attention to television must end. Fewer radio stations maintain news departments now than before deregulation, but the decline is probably not terminal because of the public's need for up-to-date information even when a TV set is unavailable. Only one study (Woal, 1986) has dealt with all-news radio, and that was not a content analysis. Hewitt and Houlberg (1986) recognized the lack of attention to radio news and the lack of simultaneous studies of radio and television in the same market.

Another key issue in evaluating broadcast journalism is whether it should be compared simultaneously to newspapers. The majority has chosen against such comparative studies. Berkowitz (1986), Lancaster (1985), and Dominick, Wurtzer, and Lometti (1975) are the noteworthy exceptions. But most research, as Hewitt and Houlberg (1986) noted, has been one-dimensional, focusing on television (Adams, 1978, 1980; Buckalew, 1970; Roberts & Dickson, 1984; Ryu, 1982; Wulfemeyer, 1982). In most cases, no specific reason has been given for not using radio and/or newspapers in addition to television. The best exception to that rule was a study by Singletary and Lipsky (1977), who focused on TV news for a study of accuracy in reporting. There was, perhaps, less need for comparison in that instance.

In addition, the gatekeeping studies of radio and TV news editors (Buckalew, 1970, 1974) should be updated and expanded to cover as many markets as possible, with content analyses in those same markets following up the gatekeeping research. Kueneman and Joseph Wright called for more research on how various factors such as competitive pressures affect coverage of disaster and civil disturbances (1975). And Weaver and Gray (1980) suggested new research on how technology affects journalism.

TECHNOLOGY'S PLACE

Victorian "objectivity" is giving way to the relativism of the electronic age. Words have lost their hard edges in the age of the audio-visual. A world of facts is dissolving into a factless world overloaded with information, dominated by images.

- Anthony Smith (1980, p. 325)

News directors evidently realize the implications of Smith's statement. Conrad Smith, who surveyed 174 news directors on technology's influence on news content (1984), received far more responses of negative influence than of positive influence. The influence is unquestionable, though not necessarily negative in all cases. Lancaster (1985) studied newspaper and television coverage of the separate trials of two suspects in an Indianapolis murder case. Cameras were allowed in the courtroom for only one of the trials. Lancaster found more coverage both in print and on the air of the trial in which cameras were allowed -- despite the fact that much of the same evidence and many of the same witnesses were used at both trials. It should be pointed out, however, that Lancaster found a greater decline in newspaper coverage than in TV coverage of the trial at which no cameras were allowed.

As mentioned earlier, some broadcast news departments, especially larger ones, are using technology to set themselves apart from others in their markets. Electronic News Gathering (ENG) and Satellite News Gathering (SNG) are standard equipment for a growing number of stations. A study of one Florida station (Cleland & Ostroff, 1988) found the station's SNG capability affected daily assignments and other decision-making. That was because the station belonged to a consortium of stations around the state that exchanged stories and raw information via satellite. The station being studied felt

obligated to contribute to and use stories from the consortium. That supports Altheide's contention that routines and pre-selected angles bias many TV news stories.

But the new technology with perhaps the greatest effect on TV news -- and certainly the one getting the most scholarly attention -- is cable. It stands to reason cable would affect viewership of broadcast TV news; network and, in many areas, local cable TV news would dilute the audiences for over-the-air stations, and the wide variety of non-news cable programming would compound the effect. Two studies confirm this (Grotta & Newsom, 1982; Webster, 1984), and a third shows households with cable may be more inclined to disdain watching local news in their own cities in favor of stations from "distant" communities (Hill & Dyer, 1981). That does not necessarily mean, however, that cable's arrival means the end of local, over-the-air TV news. Studies have found that cable news in some areas supplements but does not supplant broadcast TV news (Becker, Dunwoody, & Rafaeli, 1983) and that cable TV news may affect neither people's desire for local news nor their local news viewing habits (Henke, et al., 1984).

Cable's growing presence in TV news may lead to a marriage of cable and over-the-air TV news. In 1989, San Francisco's commercial, network-affiliated KRON (Channel 4) and public station KQED (Channel 9) tried but failed to set up a local, all-news cable channel.

[S]imilar ventures [were] already in operation on Long Island, New York; in New Orleans, Louisiana; and [in] Orange County in Southern California. ... Although the KRON-KQED deal fell through, the move was clearly an attempt by Channel 4 to embrace cable in order to protect its profits and its future in the local market.

(Eisenberg, p. 108)

Since then, KRON has developed a relationship with Cable News Network, in addition to retaining its NBC affiliation. San Jose's KICU (Channel 36) and other stations pick up CNN Head-

line News; San Jose's all-news KLIV radio (1590-AM) uses CNN Headline's audio for the bulk of its programming, running its own local news within the network's format.

Which brings us to the question of whether technology should play a role in evaluating media performance. Roberts and Dickson (1984) said technical quality should be one criterion for evaluating broadcast news quality. But that goes to the issue of presentation, not content. The technical issue involves pictures and sounds. If visual images and/or the corresponding audio are to be evaluated and made part of a content analysis, it would necessitate the creation of parallel but differing standards for radio and television. That could pose a problem in defining what news is by suggesting in a sort of McLuhan-like fashion that the medium is part and parcel of its own content.

Nevertheless, the reality is that pictures tell much of the story in print and on television. Lewis wrote that television "is operating on two levels at once: the verbal and the visual" (1984, p. 5). And Graber (1987) stated bluntly that most researchers fail to make the distinction between television and radio, fail to account for pictures. Graber has gone further than anyone else in attempting to codify the visual content of TV news. Her "Gestalt coding" system is a complex method of setting pictures in their context, not just identifying their content. It considers several factors: the prevailing political context; the story lead and anchor editorializing, if any; the audio/visual message; and the interactive effect among episodes within one story and among all stories in a particular newscast. It is grounded in the premise that viewers simplify what they see and hear into a few useful bits of information. And Graber also recognized linkages between viewer learning through the spoken word and viewer learning through pictures. She concluded viewers look for key elements

of the picture, based on the spoken "instructions" in the script the anchor reads.

DEVELOPING AN EVALUATIVE MODEL

Researchers have come up with several different methods of assessing radio and TV news content. Most have involved a series of categories of such things as hard news and features. Some of those methods have assigned weights to their categories, measuring the total time spent in each area, figuring percentages of total air time, and multiplying each percentage by the weight assigned to that category. That yields a score for a given newscast, allowing it to be compared against other newscasts. Another issue is whether visuals should also be evaluated. Graber insists they should be, because they help tell the story. But after his studies of television (1970) and radio (1974), Buckalew concluded the use of visual criteria hindered the comparison of radio and TV journalism.

Graber, of course, would vehemently disagree. So would Roberts and Dickson, who in 1983 developed one of the few comprehensive systems now on record for evaluating local broadcast news. Their so-called News Quality Index considered four factors: 1) news substance, 2) technical quality, 3) the relationship between public preference for story subjects and the time devoted on air to those subjects, and, curiously, 4) the ratings of the news, sports, and weather anchors. They acknowledged omitting factors such as accuracy of reporting and the funding a news department receives from its station. But their system is geared more towards a balanced analysis not based purely on how much air time something gets. The News Quality Index also doesn't account for standards of journalistic excellence, and the use of anchor ratings suggests some

emphasis on audience preferences; both facts contradict the authors' later conclusions (1984) that standards of journalistic excellence should be part of a formula for determining quality and that audience data should not.

Wulfemeyer (1982) developed another complex evaluative system by using audience data to assign weights to each category of news or other programming he identified. His data suggest some method must be devised to classify the content of newscasts under relatively simple headings -- and then to determine and account for, for lack of a better term, the "usefulness" of what falls into each category. The catch is that Wulfemeyer used a survey of audience preferences to assign weights to each category, a flaw he recognizes and explains as being the most objective way of weighting newscast content for importance. Under his system, the percentage of a newscast devoted to programming in each category is calculated; that percentage is multiplied by the weight assigned to that category; and then those products, what you might call the "scores" for each category, are summed.

These methods, while probably imperfect, are nevertheless complex enough to deal with the broad issues of news quality and local coverage. McQuail (1987) had given societal normative criteria: freedom and independence, order and solidarity, diversity and public access, cultural quality, and objectivity and information quality. But those issues involve the *climate* for media performance rather than media performance itself. Evaluating how the media cover their own communities requires a system of the type Wulfemeyer developed, along with a method for determining the degree of "localness" of each story. One possible means of achieving that goal lies in Adams' study of Pennsylvania television news (1980), in which each news item was coded for the locality or region it covered. Bernstein's effort to replicate and extend Adams' work

(1989) used similar categories related to the market being studied (see Table 1). A matrix system needs to be developed to account, on one hand, for a story's general subject matter and, on the other hand, for its area of impact.

CATEGORIZING THE NEWS

Researchers have taken two different approaches to identifying different types of news content. A few have used general terms. Buckalew used the gatekeeping criteria of significance, normality, prominence, locality, timeliness, and visual appeal (1970, 1974). Robert R. Smith took a simpler approach, classifying stories as coverage of pre-planned events, coverage of spontaneous events, commentary on pre-planned events, and commentary on spontaneous events (1979).

More often, though, stories have been grouped not according to the nature of the event and the angle of coverage, but by general subject type. Roberts and Dickson (1984) used only

Table 1

Adams' and Bernstein's Areas of Impact

<u>Adams</u>	<u>Bernstein</u>
1. Central city of mkt.	1. Central city of mkt.
2. County or equivalent area w/o jurisdiction.	2. Central county of market.
3. Other cities within same market.	3. Rest of mkt. outside central county.
4. Rest of state or state in general.	4. State.
5. Other states or cities therein.	5. Regional.
6. Nation/world.	6. National.
	7. International.

three categories: hard news, commercials, and "banter" -- ad-libs between anchors or involving reporters live in the field or in the newsroom. Wulfemeyer also used banter as a classification for time used during a newscast. His other six were issue-oriented news, entertainment items, commercials, sports, weather, and unexpected events. He defined unexpected events as accounts of individual acts of sex, crime, or violence, with no mention of issues that may be related to the acts. Adams (1978) expanded that definition for his category of "sensationalism and human interest" (pp. 692, 694-695). Adams used only four categories, the other three being government and politics, economic and community news, and world and national news. Ryu (1982), using Adams' work as a guide, eschewed world and national news as a separate category, combined "government and politics" and "economic and community news" into one category called "public affairs," and made separate classes out of weather and sports. Finally, Dominick, Wurtzer, and Lometti (1975) used 13 categories: hard news of the day's events, features, human interest stories, commercials, show open/close, sports, weather, financial news, editorials, promos and teases, interaction (banter), reviews, and "fill time." One category none of those researchers listed, at least not by name, was "soft news." Turow (1983) insisted that type of news can contain deep societal implications and deserved more study. However, he never adequately defined "soft news."

Summary of Existing Data

Although there has been ample study of individual television markets or closely-clustered markets, few researchers

have sought to broaden studies over wide areas; fewer still have accounted for radio in evaluating broadcast journalism. Numerous examples exist of researchers trying to make broad statements based on data from single markets. It is a major flaw in the body of knowledge on how well radio and television news departments serve their communities. Although several markets from many parts of the United States have been examined, those studies have spanned so much time -- more than two decades -- that data from the older studies cannot be compared meaningfully to data from the more recent research.

In addition to the absence of breadth and depth in existing research, there has never been a successful attempt to create a coding system that will not only identify the main subject of a story or other piece of programming within a newscast, but also evaluate its importance. At the very least, researchers must deemphasize audience research and attempt to set broad standards of journalistic excellence, standards with which most broadcast and print newspeople will agree.

Those people's input must be obtained in this endeavor, and at least one effort has already been made to that end. A 1988, open-ended survey of 85 television news directors and 70 broadcast journalism educators showed writing, good visuals, accuracy and ethics, and covering important news were high priorities for both groups (Hayes & Mitchell, 1989). That's a good start, but it may not be reliable. The researchers sent 816 surveys, getting back only 155 usable ones for a response rate of 19%. Many news directors said they didn't fill out the survey because they lacked the time to respond to all the research questionnaires they received each year. Somehow, that problem must be overcome.

CHAPTER 3

HYPOTHESES

Although observations were made for individual stations, this study focused on characteristics of the broadcast news media collectively. Stations were observed at different times of the day in the hope of shedding light on the type of content a viewer or listener would be likely to get at those times, depending on the type of station an individual chooses. The broadest comparison is simply between radio and television. Each medium, however, was broken down into various sub-comparisons, such as AM radio vs. FM radio or early evening television vs. late evening television. This allowed study of how news is approached on different media at different times and under different station formats.

Expected Findings

HYPOTHESIS #1: RADIO vs. TELEVISION

No significant content difference -- and little difference of any sort -- was expected between all radio and all television.

Even though TV gets much more criticism than radio for being too "ratings conscious," television news spends more time on hard news than radio does, simply because it has more resources for local coverage. It tends to have more for all kinds of coverage, in fact. This study relied on percentages of air time devoted to each type of news, and the proportions

were expected to be about the same. If anything, TV news was expected to have more coverage of city, county, and regional news by virtue of its generally larger news departments. TV was also expected perhaps to have more event-oriented and feature stories as a result of its constant search for visually interesting news.

HYPOTHESIS #2: SINGLE-NEWSCAST
vs. MULTIPLE-NEWSCAST TELEVISION

Stations doing more than one newscast each evening were expected to show significantly higher local news content than stations doing only newscast each evening.

One key issue is format, and stations doing several newscasts each day can be expected to put out substantially different content than stations doing only one newscast each evening. This comparison was expected to provide clues into how stations, especially those with larger news departments, use their resources. Stations that do only one newscast each evening tend to lack the resources to do more, either because they don't want to do any more or because they cannot afford it. They usually put fewer reporters in the field than the larger stations do -- and have less local news as a result.

HYPOTHESIS #3: EARLY-EVENING vs.
LATE-EVENING TELEVISION, ON STATIONS DOING BOTH

On stations doing newscasts in the early and late evening, there was expected to be a significantly greater amount of coverage of issues, events, and police/fire/court news in the early evening than in the late evening.

That type of news tends to be fresher in the early evening, and the presence of national network news alongside

those stations' early-evening reports usually dictates less world and national coverage in the stations' own newscasts at that time of day.

HYPOTHESIS #4: AM vs. FM RADIO

FM radio was expected to have significantly more features and "people" news and a significantly lower percentage of issue- or even event-oriented news than AM radio.

This comparison was expected to provide one of the study's sharpest differences in content. In general, FM radio is programmed much more with music and entertainment in mind. Its news programming, therefore, tends to sound more like the afore-mentioned "infotainment" than legitimate news.

HYPOTHESIS #5: ALL-NEWS vs. NON-ALL-NEWS RADIO

No significant differences were expected between the content of all-news radio and that of other stations.

Although most all-news stations have much larger news departments and can devote much more time to news reporting than other stations, the all-news stations also tend to spend a lot of time on traffic and weather reports, sports, and financial news. This dilutes their main news coverage. As a result, all-news stations were actually expected to have a lower aggregate percentage of city, county, and regional news than other stations, although the difference was not expected to be statistically significant.

HYPOTHESIS #6: MORNING vs. EVENING RADIO

No significant content difference was expected between morning and evening radio news.

Five of the seven stations in the study aired newscasts in both morning and evening drive time, and collectively their content was expected to show a great deal of consistency from morning to evening.

Expectations of Methodology

This study's methodology, explained in the next section, was designed to show how much a station emphasizes local news. It is a matrix system, with an item's content type logged on one axis and the item's area of impact (city, state, etc.) on the other axis. Categories on each axis are weighted, with emphasis placed on coverage of issues and on coverage of all types of news close to home. The score it yields for a given newscast are based on the percentage of total air time devoted to each category of content and area of impact. The higher the score is for a newscast or group of newscasts, the greater the percentage of time should be for issue-oriented news and for coverage of central city and central county.

The methodology was evaluated by conducting t-tests for the groupings of stations named in the previous section (radio and TV, AM and FM radio, etc.). For each pair of groupings, three areas were tested: coverage of issues, coverage of city news, and average newscast scores. If the research matrix had worked as expected, the three t-tests for each pair of groupings would have yielded similar results.

HYPOTHESIS #7: METHODOLOGY CHECK

When the difference between average newscast rating scores for any pair of station groupings listed in hypotheses

1-6 is found to be statistically significant, significant differences will also be found in city coverage and issue coverage for the same pair of groupings.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

Study type

This study was primarily descriptive, although somewhat exploratory in nature. Its goal was to examine radio and television stations cross-sectionally for local news content, as well as to test a new evaluation system. The study aimed both to describe the quality of local news coverage and to suggest a better means of evaluation.

The new evaluation method was applied to data collected from seven radio and seven TV stations. Newscasts were recorded on a staggered schedule, two or three at a time. For television, five days of early evening newscasts and five other days of late evening newscasts were recorded, representing a constructed week over a two-month period. For radio, five days of newscasts were recorded during morning drive time (7-8 a.m.), and five other days of newscasts were taped during evening drive time (5-6 p.m.). Weekends were excluded. This approach allowed for the fact that some TV stations ran only 30-minute newscasts, some ran only hour-long newscasts, and some did both. It also allowed for the different news formats on radio; all-news stations program their news hour-to-hour, and music stations vary the lengths of their newscasts, so each radio station was recorded for one hour at a time. Non-news programming and any traffic, weather, or other reports outside regularly scheduled newscasts were disregarded.

A fundamental premise of this research method is that days when a lot of major news happens are the easiest days for any news department -- the busiest, perhaps, but the easiest on which to put together "newsy" newscasts. The true test of

a news department is how well it does on "average" and "slow" news days, which make up the bulk of the calendar. Accordingly, should a major local story calling for unusually comprehensive coverage break on or shortly before one of the preselected evaluation days, the day on which the story breaks and all subsequent days during which the story is covered in depth by the media in general are removed from consideration as evaluation days. Under this method, all evaluation days lost for this reason would be replaced by randomly selected new days -- within the study's original time frame, if possible.

During the latter part of the study period, the Bay Area media did devote an extraordinary amount of time to a single matter, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the U.S.-led deployment of troops in response. This certainly warranted a great deal of coverage, but, although there were local angles, it was not a local story. Therefore, the study proceeded on schedule after the invasion. The conflict's impact on local coverage will be discussed later.

All of the television stations and some of the radio stations in this study were selected deliberately, and the rest of the radio stations were chosen at random. This was to ensure the inclusion of both Bay Area network-affiliated all-news radio stations (KCBS and KGO), its network-affiliated television stations (KRON, KPIX, KGO, and KNTV), and the major independent TV stations serving the San Francisco and San Jose areas (KTVU, KOFY, and KICU). For logistical reasons, North Bay stations that could not be received in the South Bay were not included. Since the list of non-randomly selected stations included seven television stations but only two radio stations, five more radio stations were selected at random, but with the intention that the final list of seven stations consist of at least three AM and at least three FM stations and be broken down geographically in the same way as the tele-

vision stations were (see Table 2).

Evaluative System

The evaluation system deals simultaneously with two issues, the type of content and the area it impacts. In essence, the system is a much-expanded version of that used by Robert R. Smith (1979), who used a two-by-two matrix with "pre-planned events" and "spontaneous events" on one axis and "coverage" and "comment" on the other axis. With this basic idea in mind, this new system blends the techniques of Wulfemeyer (1982), Adams (1980), and Barkin (1987) to create a complex set of categories, assigning each its own weight and multiplying the percentage of air time devoted to each category by the weight factor assigned to that category. This method, similar to Wulfemeyer's, should yield data that show

Table 2

Breakdown of Stations Studied

<u>City</u>	<u>Radio</u>	<u>Television</u>
San Jose	KLIV KWSS-FM	KICU KNTV
San Francisco	KCBS KGO KIOI-FM KKSF-FM	KGO KOFY KPIX KRON
Oakland	KNEW	KTVU

fairly accurately the comparative strength of each station in covering local news.

DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

Following are the definitions of terms used to describe each category of news and area of impact, along with the rationale for the weightings in each content category and area of impact. The point values for each correspond to the values for each on the matrix in Table 3. The values are additive, not multiplicative.

Content Type

"Issue-oriented news" is news about any matter of direct impact on a large number of residents of a given area. It is not necessarily tied to a specific event, although it could result from a city council meeting, a congressional hearing, a news conference, or some similar occurrence. Examples of subject matter in this category are the cost of housing, the crime rate, education, and transportation.

(Wt.: 5 -- the highest -- because this type of news usually affects the most people in the greatest way.)

"Event-oriented news" involves coverage of a single event -- anything from a summit meeting to a space shuttle launch -- in which the coverage focuses on the event, not on whatever issues may be related to it. Stories in this category must have enough "hard" news value not to be placed in the "feature" category.

(Wt.: 4, because issues are not central to this type of story.)

"Police/fire/court news" includes any story about a crime, a fire, a natural disaster, or any other single event -- with no discussion in the story of a larger issue such as public safety. It also includes any follow-up report dealing with matters such as the prosecution of a criminal suspect or the investigation into a fire or accident.

(Wt.: 3, because this type of news can have broad impact, even though the event's direct effect may be limited to a small number of people.)

"One Family's Story stories" are reports about a particular family, group, or individual dealing with a larger issue. This category is included to recognize that reporters sometimes focus on a small piece of a larger story for the sake of illustration. Stories fall into this category if the larger issue is largely or completely ignored.

(Wt.: 2, for ignoring a larger issue, even though it may be a sidebar to a story about the issue.)

"Features" are, in essence, all other news stories. They consist of non-hard news subjects explored in a creative or in-depth manner, as well as humorous pieces and other "fluff".

(Wt.: 1, because well-done features can be amusing, uplifting, or thought-provoking.)

"People News" is news about well-known figures who make news because of their status, even though what they do may not make news if done by the average citizen. A good example is the extensive coverage when Zsa Zsa Gabor stood trial for allegedly slapping a Beverly Hills police officer. This category includes the "gossip" or "people" sections some stations include in their newscasts.

(Wt.: 0, because news about celebrities and

other well known figures almost never has a direct effect on anyone in the viewing and listening public.)

"Specialized reports" are done by experts in their field and pertain to issues of broad concern, such as medicine and consumer matters. This is the so-called "news you can use" category.

(Total wt.: 5, for being useful information but usually fairly soft and timeless.)

"Traffic" involves only a station's regularly scheduled reports on current commute conditions. News reports on such things as the closure or reopening of a major highway after an accident, landslide, or other occurrence are classified under "event-oriented news".

(Total wt.: 4, for being immediate, useful, but event-oriented information.)

"Weather" includes only regularly scheduled weather forecasts. News reports about blizzards, tornadoes, and such are classified as "event-oriented news."

(Total wt.: 4, for being immediate, useful, but event-oriented information.)

"Sports" is defined as that portion of a newscast set aside regularly for sports, as well as stories done by news reporters about major sporting events or sports figures the news department chooses to cover as general news. Stories about cities working to acquire or keep franchises are included in this category unless they focus on economic or other domestic issues related to having or losing such franchises. Stories covering those issues fall into the category of "issue-oriented news".

(Total wt.: 2, for being mainly entertainment.)

"Financial news" consists of regularly-scheduled stories concerning business and industry, such as corporate activity and stock market reports.

(Total wt.: 2, because it's aimed at investors.)

"Banter" consists of live promos or teases, as well as adlibs in which no new information is given about a news item.

(Total wt.: 0, for having no informational value.)

Areas of Impact

"City" is the station's city of license. Stories in this category must affect primarily the city.

(Wt.: 5, as the most local area.)

"County" includes all parts of the county in which the station's city of license is located, except for the city of license itself.

(Wt.: 4, because some parts of some counties are many miles from the central city.)

"Regional" involves coverage of a story affecting some or all of the general area in which the station is located. For the purpose of this system, a region extends for 30 miles in all directions from the station's city of license and also takes in all territory of counties that fall partially within that 30-mile radius. That includes all cities within those counties. For example, since the northernmost part of Santa Clara County lies within 30 miles of San Francisco, the entire county and all cities therein are defined as being within San Francisco's region. And since the most proximate points

of San Jose and San Francisco are about 30 miles apart, San Francisco is within San Jose's region.

This category was devised with the Bay Area in mind, but it is hoped it will be applicable elsewhere.

(Wt.: 3, in recognition of how issues in one community can impact other areas.)

"World and national" is self-explanatory, except that stories about matters in individual states that nevertheless have potentially major national implications (such as abortion issues) can be classified as "national". This category also includes stories about matters that may directly affect a station's local community but which do not identify that impact.

(Wt.: 2, to recognize these stories' impact.)

"State news" involves news of general statewide impact.

(Wt.: 2, in recognition thereof.)

"Rest of state" covers all individual cities, counties, and other areas within the state but outside the station's own region.

(Wt.: 1, for possibly having statewide interest but being of central importance to another region.)

"Other states" involves news affecting another part of the country.

(Wt.: 0, for having minimal local impact.)

EXPLANATION OF MATRIX

In this matrix system, content types and areas of impact are given weights on their respective axes. For the first six content types (Issue-oriented News through "People" News; see Table 3, next page), the values are added to those for the corresponding areas of impact; for the other content types, areas of impact are not considered. If a given item overlaps two or more areas of impact, it is placed in the more local area for purposes of coding (Adams, 1980).

For each item, the total weight is multiplied by the percentage of air time it took out of all items coded. This method, similar to that employed by Wulfemeyer, will yield scores for each station on a scale of 0 to 1,000. A score of 1,000 would mean the station devoted all its time outside of commercials to issue-oriented news about the station's city of license. A score of 0 would mean the station spent the whole time in banter and gave no meaningful information to its audience. Since this study is the first application of this method, there is no established "good" score.

For example, a story examining budget problems in Butte County, California, would have been coded as an Issue-oriented story (5 points on the Content axis) in another part of the state (1 point on the Area of Impact axis). If it lasted exactly one minute, and if the total newscast time was 25 minutes (not counting commercials, open, and close), it would have occupied 4.00% of the newscast. Multiplying 4.00 by the sum of the point values for the story ($5 + 1 = 6$) yields a score of 24.00 for that item.

If that item had been followed by a two-minute weather report, we would have multiplied 8.00 (the percentage of total air time the weather report occupied) by 4 (the matrix' value

for a weather report, for which there is no Area of Impact value), yielding a score of 32.00 for that item. We would repeat the process for each item until the entire newscast is accounted for. We would then add up the scores for all the individual items to find the score for that newscast.

Table 3

Diagram of Evaluative System

CONTENT TYPE (Weights)	AREAS OF IMPACT (Weights)						
	Cty (5)	Cnty (4)	Rgnl (3)	St. (2)	Wld/ nat. (2)	Rst/ st. (1)	Othr st. (0)
Issues (5)	10	9	8	7	7	6	5
Events (4)	9	8	7	6	6	5	4
Police/fire/ courts (3)	8	7	6	5	5	4	3
"One family's story" (2)	7	6	5	4	4	3	2
Features (1)	6	5	4	3	3	2	1
"People" (0)	5	4	3	2	2	1	0
Spec. rep.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Traffic	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Weather	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Sports	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Financial	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Banter	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Admittedly, this system is not the ideal way to assess overall news department performance. Its goal is to indicate a station's philosophy and commitment to covering its own community. It does not consider, for example, a station's specific format and the resources devoted to its news department. This issue is important -- especially in radio, in which stations with very limited news formats must by necessity treat stories differently than do stations that spend more time on the air with news. In addition, writing and technical quality, accuracy and completeness of reporting, and success or failure in "getting" all the important stories of the day are not considered in this study. Some of those issues can and should be addressed later; others, such as accuracy, may be too difficult or too cumbersome to assess. Some of these may not be central to the issue of local news coverage, because they may not shed any light on a station's news philosophy.

This study focused strictly on a newscast's item-by-item content. Only air time devoted to the actual local newscasts is counted; music, commercial time, and network news are not considered. The categories are defined below. Stations were assessed based on their aggregate performance on ten randomly selected days, although the evaluation method is designed to allow assessment of any single newscast.

Data were collected by simultaneous recording of newscasts on different stations. This posed a logistical problem, but it was the only accurate way to reflect the comparative strengths and weaknesses of different stations in the same market. One-hundred seventy-five newscasts were coded, covering more than 55 hours of air time, not including commercials.

CHAPTER 5

STUDY FINDINGS

This section reports what was learned about the 14 stations observed in this study. Discussion includes:

- 1) local news coverage,*
- 2) general content, including issue coverage,*
- 3) lead stories and other signs of priorities,*
- 4) station banter and self-promotion,*
- 5) the great similarity in content, and*
- 6) the success of the evaluative system.*

In this study, the matrix system described earlier did what it was designed to do: reflect whether stations made priorities of covering their own cities and the issues that affect them. Although issues received a good deal of coverage, news of the central city did not. In fact, even news of the Bay Area in general did not appear to be a high priority for the stations studied. Lead stories illustrated that problem most clearly; news of issues in the central city rarely began newscasts during the study period, and those city issues did not appear often even among newscasts' top three stories.

There was also a disturbing amount of wasted time. Many stations, notably in television and all-news radio, routinely teased upcoming news items, had their anchors banter among themselves to "humanize" their newscasts, and engaged in sometimes blatant self-promotion. Although much of the banter and teasing took no more than a few seconds at a time, the time spent on them tended to take up a substantial portion of a typical newscast.

Stations' frequent banter and sparse coverage of city

news were unfortunate, but the volume of issue-oriented news was a strength. There were several examples of high-quality, in-depth journalism, although most of it involved issues of general importance such as insurance and the economy. Although stations often try to set themselves apart with their news coverage, the study found more similarities than differences in overall content.

Local News Coverage

When journalists talk about the qualities they respect in their colleagues, the ability to localize a story is often cited. Broadcast assignment editors, for example, can sometimes be heard lamenting their reporters' lack of initiative to come up with original story ideas or to find new angles on what's already in the news. Those editors -- who are largely responsible for decisions on what to cover each day -- presumably want those local angles and fresh local stories. But either their definition of "local" is quite broad or their product reflects no such priority.

All 14 stations studied in this project are in large cities -- San Jose, San Francisco, and Oakland. All three cities face myriad issues ranging from crime to economic development. As do all cities their size, they offer their news media ample opportunity for stories. If covering those issues were truly a priority for the hometown broadcast newsmedia, this study would have found more emphasis on it at the beginning of newscasts. Yet only three of the 175 newscasts observed led with stories about issues in a station's city of license. Only 19 items on city issues were among the first

three stories of their respective newscasts, a rate of 3.7%.

Ironically, city issues often don't get higher play on radio and TV because of one of those media's greatest advantages -- their immediacy. Radio and television have the powerful ability to report the news whenever they want, and in times of emergency, they interrupt their regular programming to do so. On normal days, they often still feel compelled to lead with whatever is happening at the time, the day's breaking news -- far more immediate but usually far less important than the issues covered later.

During the study, there did seem to be a pattern of stations putting the breaking ahead of the more important. KCBS radio, for example, led its 5 p.m. news hour one Tuesday (7/3/90) with reports on fires east of Gilroy and in south San Jose, both at the perimeter of its regular coverage area. The next item was about the San Francisco budget, a central issue in KCBS' own city. At 6 p.m. the same day, KNTV-TV led with a shooting in East Palo Alto, in a neighboring county, and waited until item #5 to report on funding issues for its own county's social service programs. Two days later, KGO-TV led its 6 p.m. newscast with a report on a San Jose arsonist -- and followed it with the latest on *San Francisco's* homeless. Twelve days after that (7/17/90), KGO played a follow-up report on a bombing that wounded two members of the environmental group Earth First! ahead of news about San Francisco's police officer shortage and the replacement of the city's earthquake-damaged Embarcadero Freeway. And on 7/30, KGO chose to put the ouster of New York Yankees owner George Steinbrenner, a coup in Trinidad, a massacre in Liberia, and several other items before its report on San Francisco's budget. The budget update was lengthy (two minutes, 14 seconds), indicating the station felt it had news value. But it didn't run until right after the first commercial break. A similar

situation occurred once on KOFY TV, which on 8/16 put San Francisco's new crime statistics after reports about such things as the reopening of fire-damaged Yosemite National Park and a Sacramento child custody battle whose central issue was the mother's smoking.

But coverage of city issues did not simply lose out to breaking stories when producers assembled their newscasts. In an apparent effort to give their newscasts broader audience appeal, stations often put local stories after related state, national, or world news. The Gulf crisis' effects on the Bay Area, for example, almost always came after the latest developments in the Gulf region itself. One evening, KPIX ran a fairly long (1:54) story on the crisis' effects on the Silicon Valley in the second half of its 6 p.m. news hour. In the first half, with the rest of the gulf coverage, was a story on a free gasoline giveaway sponsored by two local radio stations. Sometimes playing down the local angle is appropriate, but doing so during the early evening, right before or right after the network news, can make the world and national stuff seem repetitive. That's one of the last things broadcasters want to be.

Many decisions on the order in which to play related stories are simple matters of news judgment, although perhaps based on what the audience's desires are perceived to be. Many journalists of the 90s look on violence, politics, and so-called human interest items as "sexier" than issues such as budgets. That may explain why KGO radio led one 7 a.m. news hour (7/20/90) with a story about how a San Jose police officer saved a family and its house, followed with the arrest of a San Leandro man for a crime in Florida, and then updated the legislative stalemate on the long-overdue state budget. It may also explain why, in a roundup of budget matters, KCBS chose one afternoon (7/26) to put a story about the budget-

related political pressure on an East Bay assemblyman ahead of the new state budget's impact on San Francisco, the central city. The budget roundup followed a set of three stories on the death of drummer Brent Mydland of the world-famous, Bay Area-based rock group The Grateful Dead.

The push for wider audience appeal goes beyond the issue of how stories are arranged each time. There is sporadic anecdotal evidence that stations sometimes deliberately ignore their own cities in trying to generalize a story. In one story on the effect of state budget cuts, KRON referred to San Francisco only as "one Bay Area county" and did not discuss the cuts' impact on San Francisco. Another time, KGO-TV spent 3:35 on two stories investigating the Bay Area housing market. The first item lasted 3:07 and focused on Contra Costa County; the trailer spent 28 seconds on San Francisco.

Overall coverage of the central city was more common on television than on radio (see Table 4). But combined coverage of central city and central county tended to occupy a good deal less time than coverage of surrounding counties; some stations, notably those in San Francisco, had more than 50%

Table 4

Concentrations of City and Regional News Coverage

	Pct. of All Items		Pct. of All Time	
	<u>City news</u>	<u>Reg. news</u>	<u>City news</u>	<u>Reg. news</u>
Radio	5.25%	14.94%	6.07%	14.87%
	(72 items)	(205 items)	(53:27)	(130:51)
	(Radio items = 1372)		(Radio time = 880:02)	
TV	9.13%	21.04%	7.99%	18.78%
	(148 items)	(341 items)	(185:11)	(435:02)
	(TV items = 1621)		(TV time = 2317:05)	

more coverage of regional news than of their own cities and counties combined. Some of this is a function of news department size; San Jose's smaller news departments lack the manpower to do much reporting far from home, while the San Francisco stations maintain several bureaus around the Bay Area and can put additional reporters or crews into the gaps when it's deemed necessary. Doing that, however, leaves less to cover the central city and spreads a news department over a large area. In the long run, that can make coverage superficial everywhere.

Stations sometimes play up regional stories their own reporters do not cover. Through such things as barter arrangements with other stations, stations get information, interview footage, and, for television, video of stories they cannot cover themselves. Sometimes those wind up as lead stories. KNTV led its 5 p.m. newscast on 7/30 with the shooting of a highway patrol officer in Contra Costa County, followed with a police shooting near Fremont and the search for a missing Berkeley girl, and only then went to a San Jose arson investigation. KGO-TV led its 8/6, 6 p.m. newscast with details on an Oregon wildfire before going to a San Jose child rape and a follow-up on the same highway patrol shooting.

The Gulf crisis was certainly one reason city news was deemphasized. But 112 of the newscasts studied (64%) aired before the crisis, and the priority even then was not on the central city. In fact, city issues made up an even lower percentage of the overall story count (3.0%) than of the items at the head of the newscasts (3.7%). And city coverage was not emphasized greatly. City news of any kind led only 8% of all newscasts -- and only one of 80 newscasts on late-afternoon radio and early-evening TV combined.

Even if a station does not send a reporter to cover news outside its home county, the effort to cover it can take up

reporters' time. Sometimes it becomes a reporter's assignment for the day. As the Gulf crisis unfolded, stations sometimes had a reporter spend an entire day following events overseas and then report live on the set during the newscast. When U.S. troops were mobilized to respond, the Bay Area media kept track of the naval units based at Alameda and at Moffett Field in Mountain View, and they frequently sent reporters to Fort Ord in Monterey County to cover what happened to the troops stationed there. That was the closest base to the Bay Area from which large numbers of ground troops could have been sent to the Gulf, and it became a "local" angle on the crisis, even though Monterey County otherwise got little personal coverage from San Francisco, Oakland, or even San Jose stations.

That again raises the question of what "local" is. In reality, it may be whatever a news organization decides. That decision, however, is often based on business rather than geography or journalism. Stations try to cover a wide area in the hope of attracting more viewers and listeners. A news item that is "too local" may be played down or ignored (see Table 5). And while many decisions of news judgment observed during this study were indisputable, those involving related stories affecting different areas indicated the priority goes to what might have broader appeal. Stations were certainly

Table 5

Local Lead Stories

	<u>City news</u>	<u>Regional news</u>	<u>Issue news</u>
RADIO	9/100 (9.00%)	22/100 (22.00%)	47/100 (47.00%)
TV	5/75 (6.67%)	24/75 (32.00%)	20/75 (26.67%)

willing to play up their coverage of issues; 47% of radio's and 26.67% of television's lead stories were issue-oriented. But news of the central city began only 9% of the newscasts on radio and 6.67% on TV. By contrast, regional news led off nearly two-and-a-half times more often on radio (22%) and almost five times more often on television (24%). Clearly, however it defines "local," Bay Area broadcast journalism's priorities are not at home.

Overall Content

The amount of local news coverage at a given station is largely a result of management decisions and policies. Reporters, at least some of whom do agree with those policies, are not directly involved. The quality of broadcast reporting can be quite good, and when a station chooses to address hard issues, the result is often journalism at the highest

Table 6

Concentrations of News Content by Subject

	<u>Iss.</u>	<u>Evt.</u>	<u>P/F/Ct</u>	<u>OFStry</u>	<u>Fea.</u>	<u>Peo.</u>
<u>Radio:</u>						
% of items	23.25	11.73	12.76	1.97	7.29	4.52
% of time	22.71	7.59	10.99	1.85	8.39	3.57
<u>TV:</u>						
% of items	28.07	13.08	20.11	4.81	12.28	5.37
% of time	26.05	7.08	14.37	4.71	9.68	2.59

(Percentages are as a function of all items and total air time.)

level. KRON and KGO TV were noteworthy in this regard during the study period. KRON once spent more than seven minutes on an investigative piece on insurance discrimination, and on another day it aired a nearly three-and-half-minute piece on California's "let it burn" policy toward fighting some wild-fires, tying the story to coverage of major fires in Yosemite Park. KGO did a piece of better than four minutes on alternative fuels, tying it to the early stages of the Gulf crisis. It also devoted 4:47 on another newscast to a look at California's economy. About three weeks later, KGO radio spent roughly three-and-a-half minutes discussing the state's economy. All were good examples of useful, appropriate stories on important but not entirely local issues.

Issues were by far the single most common type of news reported during the study (see Table 6, previous page). They received more than twice the coverage of events such as parades and demonstrations, although the ratio could have been higher if some of the stories coded as events had been covered for the issues to which they related. There is no standard that would allow those volumes of issue-oriented news to be classified as good, bad, or something between the two. But the fact that issues got much more coverage than any other category indicates the media are willing to commit some resources to cover them.

That commitment is reflected in the volume of issue-oriented stories high in the newscasts coded (see Table 7, next page). The gulf crisis accounted for some of that; most stations made the crisis and its related issues and events their ongoing lead stories. It's impossible to know whether other issues would have received equivalent coverage had there been no crisis, but it's likely there would have been some dropoff.

Although broadcasting's emphasis on issues appeared fair-

ly solid, there were occasional glaring exceptions. A telling sign during the study period was on Saturday, July 28 -- which was not a data collection day but which nevertheless gave a glimpse of Bay Area television's news priorities. That evening at 11 p.m., KRON, KPIX, and KNTV led with reports on a highway patrol shooting in Contra Costa County, while KGO-TV led with the passage of the state budget after the longest legislative impasse in California history -- not a local story in and of itself, but a matter of great importance that had been covered extensively all month. All four stations had both items, but three put the issue-oriented one after a breaking story away from the central city and county.

It is also worth noting that much of the issue coverage involves no news gathering but rather rewriting copy and processing audio and video from networks, wire services, and the like. On the 14 stations in this study, world and national stories nearly outnumbered city, county, and regional items combined; there were almost two-and-a-half times as many stories on regional matters as on city affairs, taking up close

Table 7

Coverage of Issues Leading Newscasts

	<u>Lead stories</u>		<u>1st, 2nd, or 3rd stories</u>	
RADIO	47 of 100	(47.00%)	122 of 289 -a	(42.21%)
TV	20 of 75	(26.67%)	85 of 225	(37.77%)

a- KLIV's afternoon newscasts sometimes consisted of just one or two short items. As a result, the radio total for 1st, 2nd, and 3rd stories does not equal three times the number of lead stories.

to twice as much air time (see Table 8). The high proportion of world and national items did not, however, carry over to the volume of air time they consumed -- indicating, as one might expect, that stations tend to go into more depth on local news than on world and national affairs.

One other drain on news departments' resources was their coverage of sports as news -- or, in some cases, their failure to cover sports as news. Several different sports items appeared in newscasts being studied -- covered by news reporters but with little or no mention of whatever impacts the sports item might have on the local community. Sometimes these were errors of omission: KGO-TV led one 11 p.m. newscast by reporting the Oakland A's might move but without discussing the potential economic and other ramifications, and KICU led once with the latest developments in the effort to bring the football Raiders back to Oakland, again with little information on impacts. Other cases involved sports stories that simply belonged in the sports segment -- notably the Steinbrenner

Table 8

Overall Story Count, All Stations Combined

	<u>Items</u>		<u>Time</u>	
World/national	813	(27.16%)	670:41	(20.98%)
Regional	546	(18.24%)	565:53	(17.70%)
City	220	(7.35%)	238:38	(7.46%)
County	60	(2.00%)	60:22	(1.89%)
Others	1,354	(45.24%)	1,661:33	(51.97%)
TOTALS -a	2,993	(100.00%)	3,197:07	(100.00%)

a- Percentages are rounded and do not add up to 100.

ouster, which appeared prominently on several Bay Area stations the day it happened. One notable exception to that trend was coverage of the South Bay's ongoing effort to attract the San Francisco Giants. Almost every story about it addressed news issues such as traffic and economics; those stories were coded as issues.

Its sports nature may not have been the chief reason the Steinbrenner story was played up as much as it was. Steinbrenner was and is well-known, outspoken, controversial. That brought him media attention until he left the Yankees. He was a personality, and some stations like to cover personalities. In the study, "people news" was more common on radio, especially on FM. But TV news departments also spent time on it; KOFY had a regular "people" segment, along with a nightly trivia quiz and almanac that ran going into or coming out of commercial breaks. It wasn't alone in regularly setting aside time for lighter items. It is common for radio and TV newscasts to end with "kickers" -- light, often humorous stories designed to end the broadcast on an upbeat note. KPIX, in fact, has regularly been ending its Friday 11 p.m. newscasts by naming and showing what it judges to be the week's most outrageous supermarket tabloid headlines.

Banter and Self-Promotion

Kickers allow news anchors -- and, they hope, their audiences -- to finish with a smile. Stations like to "humanize" their newscasts, and that's one way to do so. Another way, at least to humanize the anchors, is to allow some bantering among anchors and/or reporters during a newscast. Dominick, et al. (1975), Roberts & Dickson (1984), and Wulfemeyer

(1982) correctly noted how the bantering that goes on in many U.S. news studios can affect a newscast. Sometimes it's only for a few seconds at a time and is quite innocent, but it can disrupt a newscast, and the time all the banter consumes can add up to a significant amount. The effect is compounded by

Table 9

Banter, Teases, and Self-Promotion (TV and All-News Radio)

	<u>Number of Items</u>		<u>Amount of Time</u>	
	Banter	Total	Banter	Total
All-news radio (mornings)	185 (31.46%)	588	38:44 (10.98%)	352:44
All-news radio (evenings)	211 -a (34.25%)	616	54:42 -a (14.17%)	385:55
ALL TV	735 (31:29%)	2,349	219:37 (9.48%)	2,317:05
~ Early TV	421 (32.36%)	1,301	130:26 (9.69%)	1,346:44
~ Late TV	138 (26.80%)	515	30:54 (7.22%)	427:54
Single- newscast TV	176 (33.02%)	533	58:17 (10.74%)	542:27
Multi- newscast TV	559 (30.78%)	1,816	161:20 (9.09%)	1,774:38

~ On stations doing both.

a- Evening all-news radio totals include 5 items occupying 12:30 of air time on KGO on a station-sponsored gas giveaway brought on by price hikes related to the Persian Gulf crisis.

the time stations spend teasing upcoming news segments or later newscasts -- or simply engaging in self-promotion.

Taken together, the banter and teasing occupied an average of almost 2 minutes, 56 seconds of every TV newscast coded in this study. And they took up an average of 4 minutes, 40 seconds of every hour studied on all-news radio stations KCBS and KGO (see Table 9, previous page).

The banter had different characteristics on radio and TV. The all-news radio stations frequently used three-to-five-second reminders of when certain reports would air (such as, "Traffic and weather together every ten minutes on KCBS Newsradio 74."). Although another news story -- or even another detail on an existing item -- would not fit into such a small time slot, the total time taken up by banter, teases, and self-promotion would be enough for one in-depth report or a few shorter stories each hour. In television, the banter usually took the form of either teases or smalltalk on the set about a just-aired or about-to-air story or segment. The smalltalk usually didn't last long, but teases of upcoming segments sometimes ran close to one minute before the commercials began. And a station would occasionally go to an extreme. The worst case of overteasing came during KPIX's 5 p.m. newscast on 7/30/90, when anchor Kate Kelly spent 2 minutes, 15 seconds teasing a series she would begin the next day on a camping trip she took with her sister in Alaska. The copy frequently told viewers, "You'll see (such and such)."

One likely reason KPIX went so far with the tease and the series was that it knew no one else in the market would be doing anything like it. It knew it had an "exclusive" -- a major accomplishment to some in the industry. Stations -- and occasionally, networks -- like to say when they have something they think no one else has. KPIX, for instance, led one news-

cast during the Gulf crisis with an "exclusive" interview with a Kuwaiti sheik studying in the Bay Area; at the end, the anchor said, "Now the major developments." Another time, KPIX claimed its cameras were on the scene first as the mayor of Sunnyvale arrived at city hall to surrender himself to face child molesting charges. It then went to an "exclusive" story about abuse of handicapped parking permits in San Francisco, a follow-up to a story from the previous day that made several references to what "we told you" in that first story. It was good, issue-oriented reporting clouded by self-promotion.

Not all claims of exclusive stories are accurate. On July 17, KOFY and KRON each claimed to have the first television interview with one victim of the Earth First! bomb blast. Not even the networks are immune to the conflict. On a Sunday near the end of the study period, a day on which data were not being collected, ABC television claimed to have exclusive video of helicopters and tanks taken the day Iraq invaded Kuwait; CNN Headline News had the same pictures the same day.

But by far the worst case of self-promotion came during KGO radio's 5 p.m. news hour on August 10. Its third item was a live report by its South Bay Bureau chief from a San Jose service station where KGO was picking up the tab for gas. The item was followed by live interviews with people waiting in line who spoke to the station's anchors on their car phones. A second KGO reporter did a story about a similar KGO-sponsored giveaway in Oakland to complete the segment. Counting banter between anchors, it lasted an astounding 7 minutes, 12 seconds.

Testing the Hypothesis
(The Generic Broadcast News Media)

Even though individual stations try to get exclusives and use other means to set themselves apart from the "competition," their news products seem to resemble each other much more than they differ (see Table 10). The similarities this study found exist from medium to medium, from format to for-

Table 10

Percentages of Total Air Time
Devoted to Issues and to City News

	<u>Issue News</u>	<u>City News</u>
Early radio	22.27	4.96
Late radio	18.22	5.92
AM radio	22.41	5.80
FM radio	24.83	7.98
All-news radio	20.84	6.31
Non-all-news radio	27.86 -a	5.42
ALL RADIO	22.71	6.07
ALL TELEVISION	26.05	7.99
- Early television	29.71 -b	7.86
- Late television	17.89	8.21
Single-newscast television	23.38	8.15
Multi-newscast television	26.86	7.94

- On stations doing both.

a- $t(10) = 2.295, p < .05.$

b- $t(6) = 4.631, p < .01.$

mat, and from day part to day part. Accounting for all those comparisons, few statistically significant differences were found either in local coverage or in what type of content was reported. The data suggest Bay Area broadcast news departments, despite their efforts to set themselves apart from the rest, employ a rather generic philosophy of journalism. That supports Hewitt and Houlberg (1986), who found no appreciable difference between the attitudes of radio station managers and news editors and their television counterparts.

This study appears to support the conclusions of two other researchers. The preference radio and especially television showed in this study for putting breaking news ahead of issue-oriented news parallels Buckalew's findings that a story's timeliness was the top consideration for television news editors (1970) and one of the top two for radio editors (1974). In a way, the rather generic nature of content in this study may support Atwater's findings (1983) that most news items appear on more than one station in the same market. That is a somewhat tenuous comparison, because Atwater's study involved specific news items; the conclusions from this study are based on an assessment of general content type. Nevertheless, the similarities of coverage among the Bay Area media were fairly clear.

Statistical tests and simple comparison of raw data showed the data supported some but not all of this study's hypotheses. As expected, television had higher concentrations than radio of local news and of all types of features; television spent greater percentages of time on issues in the early evening than in the late evening; and all-news radio's frequent traffic, weather, and sports reports caused it to have lower concentrations of all types of news than stations with other formats. Contrary to expectations, early-evening television did not use its hour-long newscasts to cover local

news more thoroughly than it could in its half-hour, late-evening programs.

TEST OF HYPOTHESIS #1: RADIO vs. TELEVISION

As expected, television had a higher percentage of local news (7.99% city news; 29.03% city, county, and regional) than radio (6.07%; 21.85%; see Table 11, next page). TV also had higher concentrations of issue coverage and features. But the differences were not statistically significant. The only comparison that came close was in combined city, county, and regional coverage (percentages reported above); that test produced a t -value of 2.077 when 2.080 would have shown significance. Television also had a much higher concentration of features (9.68% to radio's 8.39%); there was no significant difference in the percentage of time spent on features, but television had a significantly higher concentration of feature items (12.28% to radio's 7.29%; $t(21) = 3.143$, $p < .01$).

The only expectation not fulfilled was in event coverage, in which radio had a slightly higher concentration. With that exception, and considering no statistically significant differences were expected anywhere between these two categories, the hypotheses comparing all radio and all television were generally supported.

TEST OF HYPOTHESIS #2: SINGLE-NEWSCAST vs. MULTIPLE-NEWSCAST TELEVISION

Contrary to the hypothesis, television stations that run more than one newscast each evening do not necessarily use the extra air time to cover more local news than their counterparts that do only one newscast each night. The study found a slightly higher total concentration of city, county, and

regional news on stations doing multiple newscasts (29.80%) than on single-newscast stations (26.51%; see Table 11). But

Table 11

Percentages of City, County, and Regional Coverage

	<u>City</u>	<u>County</u>	<u>Regional</u>
Morning radio (Cumulative)	4.96	1.11 (6.07)	12.59 (18.66)
Evening radio (Cumulative)	5.92	.50 (6.42)	14.01 (20.43)
AM radio (Cumulative)	5.80	.92 (6.72)	14.85 (21.57)
FM radio (Cumulative)	7.98	.81 (8.79)	15.04 (23.83)
All-news radio (Cumulative)	6.31	.14 (6.45)	15.32 (21.77)
Non-all-news radio (Cumulative)	5.42	3.03 (8.45)	13.63 (22.08)
ALL RADIO (Cumulative)	6.07	.91 (6.98)	14.87 (21.85)
ALL TELEVISION (Cumulative)	7.99	2.26 (10.25)	18.78 (29.03)
~ Early-evening TV (Cumulative)	7.86	2.21 (10.07)	21.85 (31.92)
~ Late-evening TV (Cumulative)	8.21	2.59 (10.80)	12.33 (23.13)
Single-newscast TV (Cumulative)	8.15	2.13 (10.28)	16.23 (26.51)
Multi-newscast TV (Cumulative)	7.94	2.30 (10.24)	19.56 (29.80)

~ On stations doing both.

taken together, stations running only one nightly newscast devoted proportionately more air time (8.15%) to city news than did multi-newscast stations (7.94%; see Table 10, p. 61). None of the differences were statistically significant. The data were surprising because stations doing multiple newscasts tend to have larger news departments. Theoretically, that should mean they spend much more time on local news -- even including regional content, for which many stations keep news bureaus. One explanation is that more people are needed to run so many newscasts, and a lot of the extra personnel go into technical and other support areas.

**TEST OF HYPOTHESIS #3: EARLY-EVENING vs.
LATE-EVENING TELEVISION, ON STATIONS DOING BOTH**

TV news devoted a significantly higher amount of time to covering issues in the early evening than in the late evening ($t(6) = 4.631$, $p < .01$; see Table 10). That was hypothesized. The higher concentration in the early evenings was probably a result of the extra time available to treat issues in depth in the early evening. The four stations studied that did newscasts in the early and late evenings had one to two hours in the early evening but only 30 minutes in the late evening. The late newscasts also had higher concentrations of sports coverage, as stations took the time for scores and highlights of late games. Those were usually four-to-five-minute sportscasts, about the same length as the early-evening sports segments, but they took up much larger shares of the late newscasts.

All other hypotheses for this comparison were unsupported by the data. Contrary to expectations, late-evening newscasts actually had higher concentrations than early evening programs of event-oriented news and of crime, fire, and other "police

blotter" stories. Surprisingly, the late evenings also had slightly higher concentrations of city news. That may have been because stations sent their evening news crews to city council and other government meetings and to other community events. That would also account for the lower concentration of regional news in the late evening (12.33%) than in the early evening (21.85%; see Table 11).

TEST OF HYPOTHESIS #4: ALL-NEWS vs. NON-ALL-NEWS RADIO

The data supported the hypothesis that all-news radio would have lower overall percentages of all six types of news stories -- issues, events, police/fire/court news, "one family's stories," features, and people news. In fact, the difference in issue-oriented news was statistically significant ($t_{(10)} = 2.295$, $p < .05$; see Table 10). That supported the hypothesis to a greater degree than expected.

What it means is that if "news" is defined narrowly -- as only the coverage of issues, events, and so forth -- then the term "all-news radio" is largely a misnomer. Many all-news stations spend a great deal of time doing regular traffic and weather reports, as well as other items which may not be news in the conventional sense but which are important information many people might want or need to know soon after tuning in. During the study, San Francisco all-news stations KCBS and KGO gave high priority to that kind of information, especially traffic reports. As a result, only about half of their air time outside of commercials and network news was occupied by reporting of conventional news. That was not unexpected, but it was surprising to see how much lower the concentration of standard news coverage was on all-news radio as compared to other types of stations.

All-news radio's lower concentrations of standard types

of news coverage do not mean it reports less news than other types of stations. To the contrary, KCBS and KGO spent about twice the air time doing so during the study period, because they had much more room to do whatever they pleased than stations doing three-to-five-minute newscasts twice an hour. The significant difference in issue coverage does, however, indicate stations' collective news priorities. All-news radio spent more than 70 minutes (10.87% of all air time) doing features and people stories. Banter and self-promotion took up more time than features and people news did -- an average of four minutes, 40 seconds of each news hour (a total of 93 minutes, 26 seconds, or 12.65% of air time). Clearly, there was more time for KCBS and KGO to cover issues had they wanted to.

The volume of local coverage was roughly equal between all-news radio and stations with other formats. Non-all-news stations, however, had a slightly higher aggregate concentration of city, county, and regional news (see Table 11). The all-news stations had slightly higher percentages of city news and regional news, but when city and county news were combined, non-all-news stations had higher concentrations. That is important because San Francisco, where KCBS and KGO are based, is a city and a county in one. In this study, many San Francisco stories involving what might have been "county-type" matters elsewhere were coded as city stories unless they clearly did not involve the city. Even though two of the non-all-news stations studied were also in San Francisco, that coding policy should have caused the all-news stations to have extra city news volume. Their volume of city news was higher, but the difference was not statistically significant.

TEST OF HYPOTHESIS #5: AM vs. FM RADIO

As expected, FM radio placed much more emphasis during the study period on "infotainment" such as features and people news. It had more than twice the percentages of those types of news than AM radio had. However, FM also had almost twice as high a concentration of event-oriented news and a somewhat higher percentage of city news than AM had. The opposite had been hypothesized.

The results are somewhat misleading, as they are skewed by one of the three stations studied, KIOI. That station frequently ran event stories and features produced by its own reporters, and it occupied 27.84% of its air time with features and people news, almost twice the percentage of KWSS and more than four times the volume of KKSF. In fact, each of the three FM stations in this study had a very distinct news approach. KIOI relied heavily on interviews, short sound bites, banter with the disk jockey, and an upbeat delivery. KWSS and KKSF newscasts were almost entirely straight copy; KWSS used more features and more by-play between newscaster and disk jockey, while KKSF was rather straightforward and heavily issue-oriented (more than 35% of air time). That may contradict the idea that radio and TV news content tends to be generic, but most generalizations have exceptions, and news on FM radio often reflects a station's entertainment programming.

TEST OF HYPOTHESIS #6: MORNING vs. EVENING RADIO

Whereas television news content changed from the early evening to the late evening, radio news remained rather constant from morning to evening. As was hypothesized, no sig-

nificant differences were found between morning and evening drive times in any type of radio news content, and the only potentially significant change in area of impact was in the volume of world and national news. That type of news occupied 20.75% of morning drive time radio newscasts, compared to 13.89% in evening drive time. The Persian Gulf crisis probably accounted for some of that difference; overnight in the Bay Area was daytime in the Middle East, and morning newscasts helped catch up Bay Area residents on the Gulf's latest developments. In addition, some stations, notably KCBS, ran regular national news features, primarily from their own networks. That content was coded as part of the study, although hourly network news was not.

CHAPTER 6

EVALUATION OF METHODOLOGY

The matrix system this study has introduced is not a brand new way to evaluate broadcast news content. Nor is it a complete way to determine how good a specific newscast or group of newscasts is. Nor is it the simplest method ever introduced. But it did prove in this study to be manageable and effective.

This system's advantage over previously developed methods is its two detailed axes. Either axis can be used independently to assess just the subjects or areas a newscast covers, or they can be employed together to produce a content "score" for any single newscast or group of newscasts. In this study, evaluating the matrix involved conducting a series of t-tests on data for each pair of station groups listed in the Hypotheses. One t-test dealt with city news, a second involved issue-oriented news, and the third compared the average rating scores the matrix system yielded. That could have posed a problem if the tests were being used to search for significant differences in various types of content, because doing multiple t-tests on the same data calls for a significant difference to be shown at a higher significance level than single tests require. But such significant differences were sought only in the data analysis (as reported in Chapter 5).

Instead, this methodology check sought similar findings of significance or lack thereof in the three t-tests for each hypothesis pairing. Thus, in a given pairing, if t-scores for city news and issue news were high enough to reach the .05 level of significance, the t-score for the rating scores should have done the same. The goal was not to find statistically significant differences, but merely to find *parallel*

results within each pairing. That would have confirmed the matrix did its job of producing scores reflecting how much time the stations in question spent covering hard issues and news close to home.

The actual t-tests bore out that expectation. Similar results were shown in tests performed on percentages of city news and issue news and on average scores under this research method's matrix system. Those t-tests were done for the six category pairings, such as AM vs. FM radio, listed in the hypotheses (see Chapter 3). The fact that the three t-test results for each pair of groupings tended to parallel each other indicates the matrix system accomplished its goal.

Comparing the Data

The 14 stations observed in this study were grouped into six pairs of categories for the purpose of comparing news under different formats, at different times of day, and so on. Because the evaluative method was intended to reward stations emphasizing local, issue-oriented news, it was expected any pair of categories for which the difference between average newscast scores was statistically significant would also show significantly different percentages of issue news and city news. That expectation was fulfilled, and the research method succeeded.

As mentioned above, three tests were performed on each of the six pairs of station groupings discussed in the hypotheses. Although statistics were kept on the number and percentage of items in each type of content, the methodology assessment relied on percentages of air time because the newscast scores for each station were functions of air time. Individual story count was not considered in the t-tests,

which utilized each station's overall percentages (n = the number of stations in each category).

The test results were similar within each pairing. Only three of the 18 tests indicated significant differences, and a fourth test came close (see Table 12). Two of the three that showed significant differences were for the same pair of

Table 12

Comparison of t-test Results to Evaluate Methodology

	<u>Percent of air time</u>		<u>Avg.</u>
	<u>Issues</u>	<u>City news</u>	<u>Scores</u>
Morning radio	22.27	4.96	457.02
Evening radio	18.22	5.92	454.76
(Sig. diff.?)	(no)	(no)	(no)
AM radio	22.41	5.80	456.20
FM radio	24.83	7.98	455.83
(Sig. diff.?)	(no)	(no)	(no)
All-news radio	20.84	6.31	404.29
Non-all-news radio	27.86	5.42	481.97
(Sig. diff.?)	(yes) -a	(no)	(no)
ALL RADIO	22.71	6.07	456.08
ALL TELEVISION	26.05	7.99	451.12
(Sig. diff.?)	(no)	(no)	(no)
~ Early-evening TV	29.71	7.86	479.98
~ Late-evening TV	17.89	8.21	422.27
(Sig. diff.?)	(yes) -b	(no)	(yes)
Single-newscast TV	23.38	8.15	451.10
Multi-newscast TV	26.86	7.94	451.12
(Sig. diff.?)	(no)	(no)	(no)

a- $t_{(10)} = 2.295$, $p < .05$.

b- $t_{(6)} = 4.631$, $p < .01$.

categories, early-evening and late-evening television; the significant differences were for issue-oriented news and average newscast scores. The third affirmative test result came in the comparison of issue-oriented reports on all-news radio and non-all-news radio, and the test showing a nearly significant difference was for average newscast scores for that same pair.

For assessing this research method, that "borderline" result was the most significant of this study. All-news radio stations were shown to air a significantly lower percentage of issue-oriented news than stations with other formats, yet all-news radio had a slightly higher percentage of city news. In a manner of speaking, the *t*-test for average newscast scores fell in the middle. The same type of thing happened in the comparison of early-evening and late-evening TV news. Even though late-evening TV had a slightly higher percentage of city news, the percentage of issue-oriented news in the *early evening* was so much greater than in the late evening that the test for average newscast scores also showed a significant difference (see Table 12, previous page).

One discrepancy should be explained, as it seems to contradict the *t*-test results. In average newscast scores, the only statistically significant difference was found in comparing early-evening and late-evening television -- even though the arithmetic difference between average newscast scores for that pairing ($479.98 - 422.27 = 57.71$) was less than the difference between average scores for all-news radio and non-all-news radio (77.68). The discrepancy occurred because the variance around the scores was also smaller.

Using the Method

This evaluative method's matrix system makes it rather complex, but it proved to be manageable during the study period. It requires a good deal of simple math, but it does not consume much time after each newscast has been coded; completing tabulations required anywhere from a minute or two for a five-minute radio newscast to perhaps 20 minutes for an hour of all-news radio. Doing tabulations for a one-hour television newscast generally took a few minutes less because all-news radio had more items per hour.

Defining terms and applying them consistently is an important issue for future research. Many stories do not fall clearly into one category. There are many gray areas, and it's advisable for future researchers to keep past coding sheets handy when going through newscasts, so they can refer to past coding decisions to maintain consistency. It would be inadvisable to design new evaluative models that utilize more categories than that used in this study, because adding categories could make the system unmanageable. The greatest need is for researchers and industry professionals to agree on what constitutes, for example, an issue-oriented story as opposed to an event-oriented one. There also needs to be agreement on what types of content evaluative methods should reward.

This evaluative matrix was designed to reward local, issue-oriented news because the research project was intended to study that kind of news. The similarity of results in t-tests on the six category pairings shows the matrix worked effectively. It can be adapted to research on many types of reporting as a means of assessing overall newscast content. By itself, this matrix and others like it cannot determine a

news department's overall effectiveness; parallel research on the same content would be needed for such an undertaking.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Radio and TV stations spend a lot of time and resources telling the public how good they are. Promotion is necessary for any business, and broadcasting is no exception. But is what Bay Area stations promote worth boasting about? Sometimes, yes. KNTV claimed during this study that it had "more local news," and it did have more coverage of its own city and county than any other radio or TV station in the study, including TV stations with up to one hour more news each evening than KNTV. Sometimes, no. KIOI boasted, "We've got a nose for news" -- and gave as an example a story about a major grocery store chain's new home delivery program, a story of dubious news value which probably resulted not from a reporter using good instincts but from a corporate news release.

Bay Area broadcast journalism is not as good as its most loyal supporters claim. It is not as bad as its worst critics insist. It occasionally shows a commendable willingness to go into some depth on issues such as insurance or the economy, and it generally does tackle issues, although it doesn't emphasize them as consistently as it should. But it has a major problem: almost all stations are unwilling to cover their own homes. Not unable, but unwilling. Stations with large news departments devote little time to their own cities. In this study, 14 stations averaged only 1.25 (8.00%) city news items and about one minute, 22 seconds (6.53%) of city coverage per newscast. Even giving "local news" its broadest definition by including regional matters, those 14 stations averaged 4.72 local items (27.60%) and four minutes, 57 seconds (23.65%) of local coverage per newscast. That's with an average newscast length of about 20 minutes, 56 seconds -- not including com-

mercials and other announcements.

Think about that. Covering the Bay Area in 4:57 -- enough time to read no more than a few pages of the newspaper. Covering a city the size of San Jose, San Francisco, or Oakland in 1:22 -- less than it takes to read one long article. After his study of Pittsburgh television news (1980, cited earlier), Adams asserted, "Local television news appears unlikely to provide genuine sustained coverage outside of the central city" (p. 264). Given the lack of time Bay Area radio and television spent on local news in this study, there appears to be some question as to whether coverage can be adequate even *within* the central city.

The research method employed in this study has shown effectively the lack of local news on Bay Area radio and television. It is now necessary for research to find out why this is so. Studies such as Hewitt and Houlberg's (1986) or even Buckalew's (1970, 1974) need to be replicated and refined to pinpoint the reasons for such low local coverage. Hewitt and Houlberg's work on the "time-linearity" of broadcast news is especially relevant here. More work like it may help determine why this study found city news led only one of 80 newscasts in the late afternoon/early evening but led 11 of 80 in mornings and late evenings combined. It would also be useful to explore the role and effectiveness of news bureaus, which allow stations to cover more news away from the central county but whose presence takes the place of reporters or news crews that could be working closer to home.

The concept of "time-linearity" can be taken to a greater extreme in future studies. Research on how newspapers, radio, and television follow-up their initial reports could shed more light on their news philosophies by determining the types of stories to which resources are committed over the long term. Radio and television's reliance on newspapers for story ideas

and rewrite material would be a useful extension of research into gatekeeping, accuracy, and ethics. And it might also be worthwhile to see if the "three-way split" Sigal (1973) and Tillinghast (1980) found in newspapers is employed in broadcast newsrooms.

There has also been concern about whether television news executives spend too much energy on logistics and technology and not enough on basic journalism.

Television's greatest failure is in its role as an arena, a forum of candidates. Broadcasters spend millions of dollars and hundreds of hours to provide computer graphics to demonstrate the returns from every precinct. They use hundreds of hours of air time with commentary and analysis, but they spend little time simply turning the cameras on the candidates and allowing the candidates to explain their views.

(Minow, 1988, pp. 22-23)

Indeed, news managers meeting in San Jose for 1990's international convention of the Radio Television News Directors Association spent the bulk of an hourlong forum on election coverage discussing technological issues and sharing tips on getting precinct results faster. Little time was spent on covering the campaign.

Although political coverage has been a fairly popular subject for researchers, it is far too narrow to be useful in assessing overall radio and TV news quality. It is also a special circumstance, the kind of news many broadcast journalists say makes their industry shine. They point out coverage of disasters such as the Loma Prieta earthquake or the recent Oakland Hills fire as examples of radio and television at its best. But the vast majority of days in a newsroom are not extraordinary; they're decidedly average. It's on those days that journalists, regardless of medium, face their truest test. It's on those days their work must be tested.

Research has made progress toward a workable test for

just those days, but existing research must be broadened to fill in gaps and coordinated to be made acceptable. Adams' work (1980) on the geographical area of news impact must be refined so as to create a workable and meaningful definition of "local." Barkin's point that a local community is a unique geographic entity (1987) must play a key role in making this definition. Researchers must be careful not to oversimplify their criteria while at the same time keeping their own classifications and definitions manageable. But of paramount importance is the issue of unity and continuity. Someone must coordinate new research efforts, pull together existing data, and synthesize it into one package on which future studies can build. Both radio and TV must be studied equally, the role of visuals on TV must be settled, and -- above all -- news must be recognized as a single entity that knows no specific medium.

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APPENDIX

(Average Newscast Rating Scores)

There is no established "good" score under this matrix system. Newscast scores in this study were most commonly in the 400s. KLIV radio registered the two highest scores, 732.08 and 675.87; KGO had the lowest, 204.04. That demonstrates clearly how methods such as this cannot be used to assess overall newscast quality; KLIV's high-rated newscasts were very superficial, consisting of brief, straight copy stories.

At this stage of the matrix' use, it would be inappropriate to declare what a "good" score is. But a subjective standard for content only might be a score of 500 or better, with 600 or better being excellent. In this study, newscasts scoring in the mid-500s or better almost always had fairly high issue content along with -- and usually including -- substantial coverage of the central city.

	AVERAGE SCORES			
	<u>Early morning</u>	<u>Late afternoon/ early evening</u>	<u>Late evening</u>	<u>OVERALL</u>
KCBS radio	435.60	434.60		435.10
KGO radio	399.55	347.42		373.49
KIOI radio	387.86	478.33		433.10
KKSF radio	529.53	--		529.53
KLIV radio	582.90	531.38		557.14
KNEW radio	436.07	482.08		459.08
KWSS radio	427.60	--		427.60
KGO TV		508.86	433.45	483.72
KICU TV		--	465.50	465.50
KNTV TV		464.43	458.99	462.62
KOFY TV		--	441.50	441.50
KPIX TV		467.34	363.43	432.71
KRON TV		479.27	433.22	463.92
KTVU TV		--	446.29	446.29