

Spring 2017

In Colbert We Trust: Teenagers and Comedic Persuasion

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IN COLBERT WE TRUST: TEENAGERS AND COMEDIC PERSUASION

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Journalism and Mass Communications

San José State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science

by

Peter George Kistler

May 2017

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The Designated Thesis Committee Approves the Thesis Titled

IN COLBERT WE TRUST: TEENAGERS AND COMEDIC PERSUASION

by

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ABSTRACT

IN COLBERT WE TRUST: TEENAGERS AND COMEDIC PERSUASION

by Peter George Kistler

In this study, high school students were exposed to either a comedy or conventional television news editorial segment, and each video's persuasive effect was compared with the other. The sample consisted of 271 high school students from Valley Christian High School in San Jose, CA, a majority of whom were juniors and seniors. Students were separated into sample groups; one group viewed a *Colbert Report* editorial and guest interview focused on the concept of net neutrality, while the other group viewed an *All In with Chris Hayes* editorial and guest interview focused on the same subject. Both sample groups were administered an online survey before and after viewing the video. These students interpreted conventional news as being more intelligent and dependable but less interesting and engaging. The students enjoyed the humor of satire but did not interpret it as being a respectable or trustworthy mode of receiving news information. Finally, the students viewed the media figures as either being knowledgeable and trustworthy or as being likeable; they did not view any of the media figures they saw in the video as having all three qualities. These results could be useful to those studying media effects, framing, and satire in the news. It could also apply to pedagogical studies of technology and media in the classroom.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to take this opportunity to thank those individuals who have played an important role in helping me to complete this thesis.

First, I would like to thank my thesis committee, Dr. Craig, Prof. Guerrazzi, and Dr. Fosdick, for helping me get across the finish line, even though several years have elapsed since I first started the program.

Second, I would like to thank the administration, faculty and students of Valley Christian High School, who agreed to let me study this topic on their campus. Special thanks to Jennifer Griffin, Julie Wilson, and Klemen Kotar.

Third, I would like to thank my friends and family for providing me with moral support, and specific guidance on the mathematical side of things. Special thanks to Lisa Ryan and Todd Boyden.

Finally, and most importantly, I would like to thank my wife Lindsay, who has been a constant source of support and encouragement in the years it took to get here. This is for you.

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Introduction and Rationale

Purpose of the Study

In last decade or so, the news-focused comedy talk show genre has risen to become a powerful cultural force. Shows like *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, *The Colbert Report*, *Real Time with Bill Maher*, and *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver* have drawn millions of viewers both on traditional television and on the internet. According to a 2007 study conducted by the Pew Research Center for People and the Press, 16% of Americans watched *The Daily Show* on a regular basis at the time, numbers comparable to mainstream news programs on FOX News and PBS. This same report included the fact that respondents voted Jon Stewart as their fourth-most admired journalist, despite the fact that Stewart is a comedian. The way that satirical hosts like Stewart and Colbert subvert the “talking-head” news genre is not only humorous but has also caused many viewers to shift their respect and trust away from traditional news outlets and bestow their confidence on shows whose primary mission is ostensibly to make those viewers laugh. Does the humorous nature of the shows disqualify them from being considered “serious” and significant? We hypothesize that the humorous format of the show increases its power of persuasion over the audience and that this effect is intensified in younger audiences – specifically those in high school.

We hypothesize that politically oriented comedic editorial and interview segments, as exemplified by Comedy Central's former show, *The Colbert Report*, has a greater chance of changing audience positions, attitudes, and trust than a traditional news media editorial and interview segments, as exemplified by MSNBC's *All In with Chris Hayes*. Programs

of such influence and cultural force deserve to be examined for their larger impact on society. A significant amount of literature has been written about these programs, theorizing about their influence, and their potential harm or benefit to civic life. This study adds more information to the debate, providing additional results. This topic is significant because it addresses the effects of political comedy on young people and the broader implication of “soft news” on a new generation of media consumers.

Problem Statement

The purpose of this study was to determine whether news editorial presented in a humorous format is more persuasive to high school students than news media presented in a more conventional format. Specifically, this study focused on a group of 271 private high school students from San Jose, California. The study determined the effect that each type of news viewing had on the audience’s ability to express a consistent position on a policy issue and the relative increases in audience confidence. Finally, this study also measured the teenage audience’s reactions to hosts and guests of each type of show.

The research questions are as follows:

1. Is there a significant difference in how effectively each type of news editorial video changed the respondents’ position to align with the rhetorical position of the video?
2. Is there a significant difference in the way that each type of news editorial educates or confuses its audience? Which video creates more consistency of position after viewing?

3. Does viewing each type of editorial increase audience members' confidence in their knowledge of the subject addressed by the news editorials? Which editorial instilled a higher degree of confidence in its audience?
4. Are there significant differences in the ways that respondents perceive and report the hosts and guests of each type of show as being (1) knowledgeable, (2) trustworthy, and (3) likeable? Is there a significant difference in the way the audience perceives each host according to these three metrics? Is there a significant difference in the way the audience perceives each guest according to these three metrics? Is there a significant difference in the way the audience perceives each host and guest relative to each other, according to these three metrics? The goal is to see which host and guest set is able to capture the audience's trust best, with the assumption that people are more likely to be persuaded by individuals they trust and like.

To explore these aspects of persuasion, respondents were asked to respond to survey questions online, watch one of two videos, and finally, respond to more survey questions online.

Succeeding chapters review the research pertinent to theories about the effects of media, news, and political humor, describe the methods and procedures followed to obtain the data, report the results and findings of the study, and interpret the findings for meaning and significance. The appendix presents the survey questions used in this study.

Literature Review

The literature reviewed in this section can be separated into three general categories: generalized media effects theories, theories more specifically related to the effect of “soft news,” and theories related to the effect of comedy news, including *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*.

Media Effects Theories

The theoretical foundation for this study is rooted in theories of media effects as well as those of the media construction of reality. It draws from the hypodermic needle theories of Harold D. Lasswell, the two-step flow model of Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955), and the limited effects model of Lang & Lang (1953). It also touches on gate keeping, agenda setting, media frames, and priming.

Framing, priming, and agenda setting have traditionally been grouped under the banner of cognitive media effects (Scheufele, 2000). Iyengar and Kinder (1987) noted that psychology provides us with the information processing perspective, namely, that the world is too big and too complex for individuals to know and understand fully. Thus, what we think we know is often a reflection of media representation of the world outside our own experience. As McCombs and Reynolds (2002) found, “Public opinion... responds not to the environment, but to the pseudo-environment constructed by the news media”(p. 2) Not only that, but the average media consumer cannot pay attention to everything and instead prefers general rules, shortcuts, and rules of thumb (Scheufele, 2000). Priming and framing are ways that mass media establish these shortcuts for their audiences.

Since the 1930s, researchers have observed the media's influence on our thinking and behavior. Mass media are used as a guide for how we function in our daily lives and the basis on which our views of the world are shaped (Johnson-Cartee, 2005). They argued that the media are not neutral; certain messages and symbols are chosen. People do not experience information through participation or firsthand experience. Instead, the media content that we absorb is shaped and focused by the newsgathering processes and by outside forces (Johnson-Cartee, 2005). In other words, media are constructed, and we in turn use our personal and social processes to interpret that constructed depiction into a reality of our own.

Our knowledge is structured around a conceptual environment created by the mass media (Johnson-Cartee, 2005). Joseph Tarrow (1992) characterized the media's construction of reality as a product of various power roles in media industries competing over limited resources. However, different researchers have focused on different aspects of those power roles. According to Tarrow (1992), the producer power role is key, as the producer has the last say about content. Fortunato (2005) theorized that the allocation of resources is a type of media routine, which in turn shapes content and thus a particular audience. Johnson-Cartee (2005) focused on the actors who are part of the social construction of news. She named the news promoter and news assembler as the primary content formers. However, Tarrow (1992) focused on creators and publics and their particular power within these roles. Similarly Johnson-Cartee (2005) identified the news consumer as one who bases his or her knowledge on the news assembler's construction, but she specifically emphasized the meanings that news assemblers attach to the content.

News assemblers, she wrote, provide the mosaics of meanings in which news consumers ultimately craft their own public meanings (Johnson-Cartee, 2005).

DeFleur (2009) expanded on these ideas by explaining the dependency theory as a mutual interdependency among the mass media, their audiences, and society. This interdependency is expressed by the fact that the news narrative style is in itself a message and reflection of the audience. (DeFleur 2009). News narratives are constructed with the news consumer's desires in mind (Johnson-Cartee, 2005). Fortunato (2005) wrote that mass media organizations monitor the behavior of the audience and that media routine itself is ultimately dictated by the readers' or viewers' expectations. Although advertisers write the check, they pay only for that content that attracts an audience; thus, according to Fortunato (2005), the audience is the most influential constituency group.

Turrow (1992) built on this principle by identifying the power of the gatekeeper and power roles. Johnson-Cartee (2005) and John Fortunato (2005), on the other hand, delved deeper into the importance of the inner workings of the journalist, with Fortunato (2005) theorizing routine as a predictor of content. Denis McQuail's (2005) findings supported this view, emphasizing that society and author are essential but that it is the organizational goals and settings that are the unseen, yet vital backdrop to content decisions. Johnson-Cartee (2005) identified this backdrop as news conventions, while Fortunato (2005) identified it as mass media routines, but both identify the similar effects these norms have on news content. Johnson-Cartee (2005) also observed that content is affected by the influence of community, professional values, and the professional organization, all exerting their meanings on the journalist. News conventions, she wrote,

distort the news story and the raw materials from which the audience creates its own realities.

Fortunato (2005) asserted that media routines were inextricably linked to the audience. Decades before, Kurt and Gladys Lang's revolutionary case study of General MacArthur's Parade telecast demonstrated that objective reality was only secondary to what TV producers considered to be viewers' expectations. Reality was manipulated and distorted to the point that the portrayal became a deception (Lang & Lang, 1971).

Fortunato (2005) concluded that mass media content decision makers must first understand their audience so that effective routines can be established. Routines, as a vital determiner of content, are the means by which a media organization defines itself as a brand. Predictable behavior, he concluded, helps to predict audience behavior, and thus ties the audience to the brand.

Johnson-Cartee (2005) prioritized individual ideological biases as being key. However, she was primarily focused on the way that news construction is characterized by strategic rituals and common news values. According to her, most of the time, the audience is not cognizant of the values expressed or implied by the news. They forget that what they read and see is carefully chosen. She proposed that news values will mirror what news assemblers believe to be desired by the audience. Walter Lippmann (1997) famously wrote that news and truth are not the same thing, and that a newspaper is a result of selections. According to him, objective standards do not exist, only conventions.

Priming can have a huge impact on which issues people are able to view and integrate into their view of reality. McCombs (2002) defined priming as "the selection of a

restricted number of thematically related attributes for inclusion on the media agenda when a particular object is discussed.” However, it must be understood that priming only provides a context by which other issues are judged; it does not, as Bernard Cohen so famously remarked in 1963, tell people what to think - only what to think about (Cohen, 1993).

Framing is a slightly different concept. Schufele (2000) addressed media frames and audience frames. Media frames, he argued, are the organizing themes or storylines that media use to help the audience make sense of events they report. Audience frames are the clusters of ideas and shortcuts that the audience uses to keep track of what they see in the media. Of course, it is assumed that audience frames are strongly influenced by media frames over time. For example, because television news lends itself well to an episodic format, media frames commonly reflect a disconnected and non-contextual view of the world. This media frame, Pavlik (2001) argued, has negative effects on the social reality. He offered his belief that episodic framing influences audiences to view the world as disconnected, non-contextual, favorable towards the status quo, and accepting of stereotypes.

Johnson-Cartee (2005) emphasized the role of framing in the promotion of a preferential version of reality. She proposed that frames are the organizing principles which work symbolically to structure the social world, and that the way something is framed, be it positive or negative, strongly influences the way the audience evaluates the content. Framing is capable of creating a version of reality for the audience by organizing a comprehensible interpretation of facts (McQuail, 2005). What we know as our political

reality is part of multilayered and multidirectional process of social construction (Fortunato, 2005). The Langs' study was one of the first to show that the reality portrayed by the news could be in complete contradiction to reality itself (Lang, 1971). Their study of news distortion and the subsequently established pseudo-environment concluded that flawed beliefs provided the basis for public opinion (DeFleur, 2005). DeFleur continued this line of reasoning by emphasizing that individuals experience personal and subjective meanings from a depicted reality. McQuail (2005) wrote that it is unlikely that the news will ever match an "average of reality."

In his analysis of *60 Minutes*, Richard Campbell (1991) explored the ways that news producers construct a version of the news by using mythic narrative patterns and metaphor to construct the content. He observed that, for the audience, a sense of reality is constructed through the narrative process, which produces a constructed map to negotiate the world. McQuail (2005) wrote that a narrative framework provides the logic behind the human urge to make sense of facts. This narrative form is appealing because it reinforces the dominant myths of society; it reaffirms an ideology. Johnson-Cartee (2005), terming this "narrative fidelity," viewed this obsession with narrative patterns as a type of standardization in framing. She concluded that such journalistic rituals ensure that large parts of the social world are systemically excluded from representation in the media, and as a result, our sense of reality is shaped incompletely and inaccurately.

The social construction of reality theory was enhanced by Jack Lule's 2002 case study of journalism playing a mythological role in society. Symbolic interaction and dramatism, like narrative, can evoke a certain ideological response from the reader. These

recent studies were interesting offshoots of Walter Lippmann's observations of the unintentional distortion of reality by the press, and the way that the press creates our personal understandings of the world with its warped non-truths (Defleur, 2005). The central issue lies in the fact that people unwittingly form false images about the attitudes and behaviors of people, and they act upon those images as if they were real (Johnson-Cartee, 2005).

It is tempting to give media priming and framing too much credit. As McCombs and Reynolds (2002) asserted, "the public mind is not a blank slate waiting to be written on by the mass media" (p. 4). Lang and Lang (1981) differentiated between content and salience. They went on to comment that, although media recognition of a topic can add a dimension to the audience frame, the individual is also affected by other factors, such as personal experience. McCombs and Reynolds (2002) distinguished between obtrusive issues (issues people experience personally) and unobtrusive issues (issues people only know about through the media). Many studies suggest that audience frames are strongly affected by media frames when the issue is unobtrusive but are only marginally affected in the case of obtrusive issues. As Lang & Lang (1981) observed, just because an issue receives heavy coverage in the media does not mean that people are more strongly influenced by it. It depends heavily on the topic being covered. In this study, the framing used by *The Colbert Report* is one of entertainment and comedy, while the framing used by the traditional editorial program is not primarily entertainment oriented. However, part of the appeal of *The Colbert Report* is that it uses the vocabulary and rituals of

conventional news as a method of satire, calling into question the legitimacy of traditional news.

“Soft News” Theories

For theories more specifically applicable to *The Colbert Report*, it is helpful to begin first with Walter Lippmann's framing and agenda-setting theories of the 1920s.

Lippmann's theories revolved around the press' ability to shape public opinion with the ways they chose to communicate the news (Lippmann, 1997). While traditional news media choose to frame their stories according to journalistic standards of format and objectivity, *The Colbert Report* actively seeks to disrupt those norms through the vehicle of satire. Kreuz and Roberts' 1993 paper on the subject provided a detailed discussion of the nature of satire. Kreuz and Roberts (1993) defined satire as “the ridicule of a subject to point out its faults.” They went on to observe that satire is often used as a defense mechanism, either to protect the satirist from an oppressive authority or in the case of *The Colbert Report*, professional norms.

The second specific theory to consider is Michael J. Robinson's work on the link between negative media coverage of politics and increased public cynicism, coined by Robinson in 1976 as “video malaise” (O’Keefe, 2008). Since that time, several scholars have added to and appended their own theories to his, including Bennett, Rhine, Flickinger, and Bennett, whose 1999 work expanded the list of video malaise victims to include the media itself. They contended that as the 24-hour news cycle becomes dominant and media becomes more pervasive, more air-time is dedicated to media coverage of other media. According to Bennett et. al. (2009), media itself is becoming a

victim of a cynical backlash caused by its own negative coverage. Mutz and Reeves (2005) went on to comment that the lack of civility so commonly seen on soft news programs like talk shows also contributes to video malaise. Discourteous broadcast behavior, Mutz and Reeves theorized, violates viewers' expectations of interpersonal politeness, making them uncomfortable and cynical of politics and news media in general. It must be understood however, that while this conflict can cause audience cynicism, it can also increase audience interest. It seems that conflict can make an audience cynical, but also keep them involved; Mutz and Reeves characterized this as a negative trend.

The third specific theory focuses on the role of humor as a potentially persuasive and rhetorical force. In his original German article "Wit and politics: An essay on laughter and power," Hans Spier (1975) expounded on the ability of political humor to challenge entrenched power structures, such as media and government. Oquin and Arnoff (1981) wrote about humor's ability to change an individual's attitude and evaluation of an unpleasant task, as well as its ability to reduce tension between opposing sides. Finally, Young (2008) wrote about humor's cognitive ability to bypass audience scrutiny, and reduce the likelihood of counterargument. This particular factor is important in my examination of *The Colbert Report's* popularity and ability to change previously held audience beliefs. Another researcher, Odysseus (2001) discussed how our western enlightenment paradigm elevates the objective and scientific above all other paradigms. This may help to explain the level of controversy and vitriol that *The Colbert Report* has

stirred, as it challenges the journalistic value of dispassionate objectivity valued by western society.

The relationship between media and civic engagement has been a topic of study for communication scholars for decades. In the past, these studies largely focused on print media, and its ability to influence public opinion. Yet, as Natharius (2004) found, our society has shifted from what he calls a linear perceptual process, or literacy, to a holistic perceptual process, or visuality. As early as 1998, Bennett wrote that only 12% of young people under 30 years old receive their news from daily newspapers. As our society moves away from literacy, broadcast media becomes an increasingly important subject of study, especially in regards to civic engagement.

Chaffe and Kanihan (1997) suggested that an uninformed and disconnected audience will turn to the television as a source of easily understood knowledge, noting that television more often focuses on political candidates as individuals, rather than proponents of policies. They went on to find that, at least in 1997, newspapers remained the destination of those assiduous citizens seeking more detailed information. It was Chaffe and Kanihan's (1997) opinion that rather than being competitive forces, visual and literary news are in fact complimentary.

While conventional, or “hard” news media has been an important source of news since its inception, a new form of media is beginning to eclipse it: so called “soft news.” This genre includes talk shows, infotainment, and late-night comedy. Examples include *The Today Show*, *60 Minutes*, *Saturday Night Live*, *The Daily Show*, *Last Week Tonight*, and the now defunct *Colbert Report*. The same 1998 study by Bennett reported that only

14% of young people under thirty years old received their daily news from any kind of traditional news media. The remainder either don't follow news, or receive their news from these “soft news” programs. Many researchers wonder what effect, if any, this shift to soft news has upon a new generation of viewers. Does soft news have the ability to measurably change political attitudes? Does it make audiences more or less knowledgeable than those who watch hard news? Does it make them more or less persuadable?

Several studies have been done, attempting to answer the question of attitudes, often with contradictory results. A 2005 study by Baum suggested that those voters who are less engaged in politics are more likely to “like” candidates after they see them on soft-news programs, and will even switch their previously held sides to vote for the candidate with whom they now identify. This suggests that soft news does in fact have the ability to change audience attitudes. However, a 2006 study by the same researcher (Baum and Jamison) suggested that those same “inattentive” viewers rely on soft news programs to guide them in their voting behaviors, most often reinforcing their already held beliefs. This result suggests that soft news has only a limited ability to shift attitudes. A 2009 study by Avery suggested that those who are already inclined to be trusting, such as young people, reported an increased trust in politics and media with increased exposure to news coverage. However, those who were not already inclined to be trusting showed no increase in trust with exposure. These results leave no conclusive picture of the effect of soft news on audience attitudes; some indicate a correlation, and others deny it.

What about audience political knowledge? Pasik, Kenski, Romer, and Jamieson (2006) argued that increased media use correlates with increased political awareness, which in turn leads to an increased involvement in civic activity. The only caveat to this finding is that an overabundance of media exposure reverses this trend. Kim and Vishak (2008) asserted that while soft news and infotainment can increase an individual's ability to process political knowledge, it does not help audiences retain that knowledge. They concluded that conventional news media, not entertainment, are more effective at instilling lasting audience retention and memory when it comes to political knowledge. Brewer and Cao (2006) observed that candidate appearances on soft news programs during the 2004 presidential election likely increased the audience's political knowledge of those candidates. However in this case, a marked effect was only noticed for late-night programs, and not morning shows. It was Brewer and Cao's (2006) opinion that such results validate the influence of soft news as being significant, and not as some researchers suggest, trivial.

Political Comedy

Most of the following studies suggest that there is a relationship between political comedy viewership and increased knowledge. This relationship, however, is complicated. A study by Baek and Wojcieszak (2009) claimed that while late night comedy can increase the political knowledge of its viewers, it only increases knowledge on broad and easy topics, and then, only for politically inattentive viewers. In this same vein, Hollander (2005) wrote that while late night comedy can assist with knowledge recognition, it does not actually help the audience remember and retain much political knowledge.

Several other studies deal with the link between political comedy and audience attitudes. Some, like Hoffman and Thomson (2009) claimed that adolescent viewers of late night comedy show a clear increase in civic participation and a feeling of political efficacy. Many politicians have bought into this idea, attempting to use political comedy programs as platforms to launch campaigns and sway public opinion. Coleman, Kuik, and van Zoonen (2009) conducted a series of interviews with British and Dutch politicians who appeared on political comedy shows, inquiring about their motivation for doing so. The major reasons reported by the politicians were the desires to increase their visibility, communicate a specific message, and to confirm their “human touch” with their constituencies. Another study by Schutz (1995) reported that politicians on talk shows do their best to appear “worthy, successful, and innovative” (p. 211). Obviously, many politicians believe in the effectiveness of political comedy shows in shaping public opinion. Several studies support this opinion. Again, Brewer and Cao (2006) wrote that candidate appearances on late night comedy shows during the 2004 presidential primaries resulting in increased audience knowledge about and liking for that candidate, as opposed to no increase for morning show appearances during the same period. Feldman and Young (2008) went further, indicating that 2004 presidential candidate appearances on late night comedy not only increased audience knowledge of that candidate, but also resulted in an overall increase in political interest and involvement. In contrast to this view, however, Young asserted in his 2004 study that there was no perceivable link between late night political comedy viewership and candidate ratings. However, it seems that after a few years, he may have changed his mind. In a provocative statement, Young

and Tisinger (2006) suggested that late night political comedy, once thought to be the enemy of traditional news media, can actually be an ally. This article offered evidence that late night political comedy can actually compliment news journalism by awakening audience interest, and then funneling viewers towards hard news.

Finally, it will be useful examine the literature that deals specifically with *The Daily Show*, a show very closely related to and directly responsible for the *Colbert Report*. The major issues that are discussed in the literature are as follows: How does the audience view comedy news shows like *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*? Does viewership increase involvement or cynicism? Is it more persuasive than “hard news?” Is it journalism? Achter (2008) viewed *The Daily Show* as a much-needed challenge to the normalizing orthodoxy of traditional news media. By using the format and language of the news, but twisting it so as to be absurd, Achter argued that *The Daily Show* shows the audience the farce of journalism's assumed legitimacy. He observed that the comedic nature of news satire exposes the news, revealing it to be a mere theatrical production, rather than an objective and accurate reflection of events. This viewpoint is solidly based in the theories of Lippmann and media construction of reality.

The host of *The Daily Show*, Jon Stewart, is a popular media figure, as is Steven Colbert of the *Colbert Report*. Surprisingly, these shows tested well with conservative as well as liberal audiences. A study by Lamarre, Landreville, and Beam (2009) showed that many conservative viewers interpreted the satirical criticism of liberal figures and policies by *The Daily Show* as earnest political opinion. Baumgartner and Morris (2009) asserted that these viewers missed the secondary meaning of the show's satire, believing

the show's ideology to match their own. This can be attributed to several factors. First, an audience's pre-existing ideology can prime their interpretation of the show. Secondly, people like to laugh. Raney (2004) wrote about the tendency of audiences to identify with a media character and to interpret all information about that character to reinforce their desire to like that character. In this case, the audience desired to like Steven Colbert and Jon Stewart, and thus interpreted their shows whichever way enabled them to continue their enjoyment of the product. However, Jon Stewart has never made any secret about his political leanings (Trier, 2008). Neither did his show. According to Morriss (2009), a textual analysis of *Daily Show's* coverage of the 2004 political conventions showed a noticeable bias against the Republicans. While Republicans were attacked for policy issues and character flaws, Democrats were more gently ridiculed for being physically unattractive. Neither *The Colbert Report*, nor *The Daily Show* conformed to journalistic ideals of objectivity; and, according to some authors, this was the key to their success.

Trier (2008) attributed a great deal of *The Colbert Report* and *The Daily Show's* success to their mockery and violation of journalistic rules and conventions. He mentioned three examples of this: quote selection, detournment, and objectivity. First, while traditional news will ignore a politician's mistaken, bumbling, and rambling statements, the hosts of these shows chose to focus on them in order to emphasize an overarching thesis; that politics are absurd. Secondly, the shows re-edited conventional news film in a process called detournment, which re-appropriates existing material to discover new meanings within them. Colbert and Stewart often engaged in a sort of dialogue with leaders through edited news clips, again exposing the absurdity of the

subject in question. Finally, neither Colbert nor Stewart pretended to be objective about the stories. Not only were their political views apparent, but their main approach to their subjects were characterized by satirical and incredulous viewpoints. To stave off accusations of bad journalistic practice, Colbert and Stewart always insisted that what they did was not in fact news, but comedy. Whether this claim is disingenuous or not, it proved to be an effective shield against journalistic condemnation.

Regardless of these denials, there are some that view these shows as not only journalism, but a new and transcendent form of it. Baym (2005) defended *The Daily Show* in glowing terms. He argued that, regardless of Stewart's denials, the show was not fake news. It was, instead, an inevitable result of media convergence. He viewed *The Daily Show* as a blend of journalism, entertainment, and common public discourse. He went on to say that Jon Stewart revived the long dormant “critical inquiry” form of journalism, noting that Stewart's focus was not on simply reporting news, but questioning the underlying logic of policies and leaders. Baym (2005) also viewed the show as a forum for deliberative democracy; a venue in which citizens and leaders could rationally discuss policy. He interpreted this trend as a revival of civic interest and involvement, and *The Daily Show* as having a positive influence on democracy.

There are, however, significant criticisms leveled at shows like *The Colbert Report*, and *The Daily Show*. The first of these criticisms involves young people's decision to rely on “fake news” programs as a source of news over real news programs. Cao (2008) observed that young and educated viewers reported gaining the majority of their knowledge about the 2004 presidential primaries from *The Daily Show*. According to

Baumgartner and Morris (2006), viewers of *The Daily Show* reported an increased confidence in understanding the complex mechanisms of politics. Compared with previously examined studies that suggested that such learned knowledge is not significant, such a claim may be meaningless. However, if *The Colbert Report* and *The Daily Show* viewership did increase political confidence, it is quite possible that traditional news media was the beneficiary of a newly curious and confident demographic, eager to seek out deeper political knowledge.

On the other hand, it is also possible that *The Colbert Report* and *The Daily Show* were merely the beneficiaries of a failing traditional news media. Baym (2005) suggested that viewer migration to “fake news” shows does not reflect a reduction of viewer intelligence, but is actually a result of lowered quality in mainstream news sources. Hariman (2007) agreed, pointing out that while Colbert’s and Stewart’s shows found humor in pointing out the absurd, it is the mainstream news media that is in fact trafficking in the absurd by failing to fulfill their original dialectic purpose. Fox, Koloen, and Sahin (2007) gave an example of this in their study, which compared *Daily Show* coverage of the political conventions in 2004 to mainstream coverage of the same event. A textual analysis showed that *The Daily Show* reported more humor than substance, but that major networks also reported more hype than substance. In a final analysis, Fox et. al. concluded that major news networks only report as much, or less substantive news than a “fake news” entertainment program on Comedy Central. This raises the question; is network news even worth saving?

The second charge is that *The Colbert Report* and *The Daily Show* had an unhealthy cynical perspective on politics, and imparted this cynicism to its viewers. Critics worry that such heavy cynicism could result in political detachment and a lack of political efficacy. According to Baumgartner and Morris (2006), *Daily Show* viewers reported more cynicism towards leaders, political systems, and news media than non-viewers. Holbert, Lambe, Dudo, and Carlton (2007) commented that viewers of *The Daily Show* reported a reduction of gratification while subsequently watching network news. Not only did they crave the entertainment and humor of *The Daily Show*, but they also reported an increased level of disgust, disinterest, and distrust towards network news media and politics in general.

Some authors come to the defense of Steven Colbert and Jon Stewart on this issue. Baym (2007) and Archer (2008) viewed this cynicism as instrumental in exposing an important flaw in politics as well as news media; the emphasis of the spectacle over deliberation. By intentionally creating a vacuous spectacle on their fake news show, *The Colbert Report* and *The Daily Show* condemned the pernicious and widespread use of vacuous spectacle on the real news programming. In addition, Cao and Brewer (2008) theorized that no political knowledge can be bad knowledge. As people become more politically aware, regardless of fear or cynicism, they have the basic tools needed to involve themselves in change. In fact, as Cao and Brewer theorized, increased anxiety and a sense of sharing community, even built around a critical television show, can motivate people to political action. Hariman (2007) defended Jon Stewart as being not a cynic, but an astute observer of the natural absurdity of public life. Hariman argued that

these shows, which exposed the fallibility of leaders and democratic systems, actually made that democracy stronger rather than weaker. In his view, traditional news media's failure to assume this role makes their coverage irrelevant and absurd. All of these authors viewed the comedy news effect as being not one of cynicism and detachment, but of increased political knowledge and involvement.

Summary

An examination of theories of media effects re-affirms the principle that media viewership can have a profound effect on the way viewers understand the world. In addition, the literature supports the idea that the framing device used to present this information is extremely influential in the way an audience conceptualizes a particular topic or idea. However, the established literature is more mixed in its conclusions regarding the effects of “soft news” programming and political comedy on its audience. While most of the research supports the idea that “soft news” and political comedy have some effect on the positions and knowledge of the audience, the degree and quality of this change is uncertain, as is the duration of its potential effects. This study and thesis attempt to add further information to this debate by introducing new information on the effects that “soft news” and political comedy have on high school students.

Method

This chapter includes a description of the study design, the sample, the way concepts were operationalized, the method of data collection, data analysis, and a statement about generalizability. Appendix A includes the survey given to the students.

Study Design

The method chosen for this study is, at its core, an experimental design with a strong cross-sectional survey component. The purpose of this study is to compare the media effects of two different types of news editorial in order to determine if there is significant difference in the way that teenagers perceive, react to, and are persuaded by them. To measure this difference, one group of respondents was asked to respond to a conventional news editorial, and another group was asked to respond to a comedy news editorial. The experimental design is appropriate for this goal; those who viewed the conventional news video function as the control group and those who viewed the comedy news video function as the experimental group. However, because audience reaction and attitudes cannot be measured through external observation alone, survey questions were administered before and after each video to measure initial audience attitudes, and to observe changes in these attitudes as a result of viewing each type of video. The combination of experimental and survey design is the best way to study and measure subjective media effects as comparatively, and as accurately as possible.

Hypotheses

The general purpose of this study is to examine how different methods of framing can alter the media effect of persuasion on high school students. The two specific types of

media framing chosen are identified in this study as conventional news editorial and comedy news editorial. This study hypothesizes that comedy news framing will have a more pronounced persuasive effect on its high school audience than its conventional news counterpart.

Conventional news editorials are typified by the types of short segments often aired by the major broadcast networks, in which a host, from behind a desk of some kind, examines a problem or issue, advocates for a specific policy explicitly or implicitly. This host then interviews an expert or commentator who provides his or her own perspective and advocacy on the same issue. These segments usually last between 5-10 minutes, and are almost always accompanied by graphics, video, or textual prompts. The host usually possesses an implicit position on the issue, but does his or her best to maintain the appearance of journalistic neutrality, instead allowing the guest to express a more explicit position or advocate for a more specific policy. Examples of these conventional news editorials can be found commonly on news networks, such as MSNBC, Fox News, and CNN. For the purposes of this study, a segment from *All in with Chris Hayes*, produced by MSNBC, has been chosen as the control group video, as it embodies the essential characteristics of the conventional news genre.

Comedy news editorials, by contrast, are a relatively recent phenomenon. Although NBC's *That Was the Week That Was* pioneered the form in the early 1960s, and continued with the "Weekend Update" segment on its venerable comedy show, *Saturday Night Live* beginning in the 1970s, it didn't truly blossom until the early 2000s with the advent of *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, and *The Colbert Report*, both aired on

Comedy Central. While these shows appeared to follow many of the same norms of their conventional counterparts, including the time limit, desk, graphics, and guest/host interview, they usually followed these conventions merely for satirical purposes. In fact, these shows not only mocked and ridiculed the folly and vice of their subjects and topics, but by following these news conventions imperfectly, they managed to subvert them, intentionally questioning their implicit authoritative nature. By aping the mannerisms of conventional news narrative, they called into question the very validity of this framing device. In addition, this type of editorial has the added goal of being amusing and engaging to its audience. For the purposes of this study, a segment from *The Colbert Report* has been chosen as the experimental group video, as it embodies the essential characteristics of the comedy news genre.

Because this study examines the different ways that media framing affects persuasion, it is essential to define what persuasion is and how we can measure it. In this study, persuasion is measured and operationalized according to the following four elements:

1. Agreement: Persuasion will be measured by increased audience adherence to the stated or implied position of the video.
2. Consistency and Confusion: Persuasion will be measured by the how well the audience members actually understand the topic and how consistent they are when expressing their position on that topic.
3. Increase in Confidence: Persuasion will be measured by the degree of confidence the audience feels in their ability to understand the topic, and express it to others.

4. Host/Guest Ethos: Persuasion will be measured by the audience's impressions of the host and guest according to three criteria: knowledgeable, trustworthy, and likeable.

Data Collection

The subjects for this study were 271 high school students who were attending Valley Christian High School in San Jose, California. I am an English teacher at this school, which gave me access to this pool of subjects. These students were recruited from the student body by several methods, including in-class announcements by willing colleagues, the distribution and display of information flyers, and several appeals made through the daily video announcements broadcast to the school.

In advance of the study, I gained the cooperation of willing teachers who agreed to read a recruitment script during class sessions, explaining the project to the students, and asking if they would consider becoming involved. The scripts emphasized to the students that the study was completely voluntary, and that participation would not positively or negatively change to their grade in the class. The teachers then distributed the student assent and guardian consent forms to be signed, and gave them a schedule which detailed the dates and times of the sessions they could choose to attend. These teachers also made the forms and schedule available on their teacher website for students to download and print at home. In addition, an item was placed in the daily school announcement, reminding interested students of the sessions that were available for them to attend. However, after the initially scheduled research sessions had concluded, the study was still far short of its goal of 250 respondents, which were necessary to provide the 95%

confidence level that is standard for survey results. In fact, after the first round of research sessions, only 34 responses had been gathered.

To respond to this difficulty, a shift of strategy was implemented. Instead of scheduling designated research sessions during which groups of students were given the survey and watched the videos en masse, students were allowed to drop by the research room on a rolling basis, and were instructed to watch the videos individually, using headphones to listen to the audio. This method proved to be much more effective, and within a few weeks, the study met and surpassed its goal of 250 respondents, ending with a total of 271.

Before they were allowed to participate in the study, students were required to submit their signed forms to me. If their parents declined to let them participate, or they forgot the form, they were not allowed to participate in that particular session. However, they were encouraged to return and participate later, after they had obtained the necessary signatures. Students who were 18 years old at the time of the study were only required to sign and submit the student assent form.

The data were collected by the means of survey questions on Google forms, a free online survey application that allows the user to construct, administer, and analyze online survey results. The survey questions can be found in Appendix A. Google forms recorded the survey responses and populated a spreadsheet in Google sheets, another free online tool available to Google users. From there, the data were analyzed for relevant trends. All of the data were collected and stored online, and were password protected, utilizing Google's standard security measures.

Participating students were asked to open their iPads and navigate to the online google survey via a link that was written on the whiteboard. Students who encountered difficulty transcribing or accessing the link from the whiteboard were sent the link directly to their school email accounts, which usually solved the issue. The students were required to sign in to their school-hosted Google accounts before they could access the survey, in order to ensure that no student could log in and take the survey multiple times, which could skew the validity of the data. However, email identifiers were not collected by the survey, in order to preserve the students' anonymity.

Students were then verbally instructed to answer the questions in the first half of the survey as honestly and accurately as they could. These questions collected some demographic information as well as their television viewership habits, their attitudes towards comedy news, and their awareness of and attitude towards the issue of net neutrality. Most of the questions were posed as a five point Likert-scale response to a statement, with optional responses ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree."

After they completed the survey, they were directed to pause the survey and watch one of two videos: "FCC Makes the Internet a Utility" by *All In with Chris Hayes* on MSNBC on February 5, 2015, or "End of Net Neutrality" plus the subsequent interview with Tim Wu, by *The Colbert Report* aired on Comedy Central on January 23, 2014. The choice of video was randomized according to whichever video had the least amount of respondents at that specific point. Students were also verbally instructed that, while a survey would be administered after the video, it would not be a "memory test."

Both clips are roughly the same length and follow a similar format: the host explains the issue with a monologue, then discusses the issue with a knowledgeable guest. Both segments focus on the issue of net neutrality, an issue that most high school students should find relevant to their own lives, especially those at Valley Christian HS, a tech-savvy school in the heart of Silicon Valley. However, this issue is not strongly associated with a particular political perspective, and provides the opportunity to test for persuasive efficacy without a strong pre-existent partisan bias.

Both segments feature a host who is relatively youthful, Caucasian, male, and bespectacled. The Comedy Central video briefly uses clips from mainstream media reports, while the MSNBC video briefly uses clips from *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver*, a comedy news show aired on HBO. Both videos reference the New Jersey Governor Chris Christie related lane-closing scandal of September 2013. These similarities help to control for many variables, allowing the two clips to function in more or less direct contrast as a result of format and focus.

After viewing the video, the students were asked to complete the second half of the survey. They were again verbally prompted to be as honest as they could be, and reminded that this survey was not a “memory test.” These questions were relatively similar to the questions in the first half of the survey, with the omission of demographic questions. The questions were again posed as a five point Likert-scale response to a statement, with optional responses ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” The major addition to this part of the survey included a section asking students to

evaluate the hosts and guests of each video according to three criteria: Knowledgeable, Trustworthy, and Likable. The complete text of the survey can be found in Appendix A.

When students completed the second half of the survey, they were thanked for their time, and allowed to leave the classroom.

Data Analysis

In order to measure the relative persuasive power of each type of video, this study distinguished four different elements of persuasion to be tested and compared:

Agreement, Consistency and Confusion, Increase in Confidence, and Host/Guest Ethos.

To support the general hypothesis that comedy news editorials were more persuasive than conventional news editorials, this study tested the following four supporting hypotheses:

1. Agreement: More students changed their position to agree with the rhetorical stance of the comedy news editorial than the conventional news editorial. To measure this, students were asked to respond to four statements on the issue of net neutrality before and after each video, responding to these statements on a five point Likert scale, ranging from “I strongly agree” to “I strongly disagree.” This study hypothesized that more students changed their responses from not agreeing to agreeing with the position expressed in the comedy video than the non-comedy video. If a statistically significant increase can be shown between the percentages of students who changed their answers to agree after watching the comedy news editorial compared to the conventional news editorial, this hypothesis can be considered supported.

2. Consistency and Confusion: More students demonstrated a more consistent understanding of their own position on the issue of net neutrality after watching the comedy news editorial than the conventional news editorial. To measure consistency, the four questions that were asked before and after each video were paired according to their theme. For the first pair, students were asked to use a five point Likert-scale to respond to the following statements: “Net neutrality is good for America” and “Net neutrality is a threat to free speech.” A consistent position on net neutrality would dictate that a student agrees with one of the statements and reject the other, as it is unlikely that a policy can be a threat to free speech, yet still be good for America. For the second pair, students were also asked to use a five point Likert-scale to respond to the following statements: “Internet providers should have the right to set prices for their own products” and “The internet should be regulated like a utility.” Again, a consistent position would dictate a rejection of one statement and an acceptance of the other. To measure confusion, the percentage of students who maintain or select the “unsure” option after the video were compared with the percentage that chose “unsure” before viewing the video, but changed to another position afterwards.
3. Increase in Confidence: More students increased in confidence in their knowledge about net neutrality after having watched comedy news editorial than the conventional news editorial. To measure this, students were asked the same two questions before and watching the video, and evaluate their confidence on a five point Likert scale, ranging from “not at all confident” to “very confident”. These

questions are “How well informed do you feel about the issue of net neutrality?” and “How confident are you that you could explain the concept of net neutrality to a friend or family member?” This hypothesis can be accepted if a statistically significant increase can be shown between the percentages of students who reported feeling more confident in their knowledge of the topic after watching the comedy news editorial.

4. Host/Guest Ethos: More students evaluated the host and guest of the comedy news editorial as being more personally persuasive than the host and guest of the conventional news editorial. The persuasiveness, or ethos, of the host and guest is measured by three criteria: knowledgeable, trustworthy, and likeable. After watching the video, the students were asked to evaluate the host and guest according to these three qualities, in the form of a question such as “In your opinion, how knowledgeable was Chris Hayes, the host?” The students were asked to respond to these questions using a five point Likert scale, ranging from responses such as “not knowledgeable” to “very knowledgeable.” This hypothesis can be accepted if a statistically significant percent of students evaluate the host and guest of the comedy news editorial as being more knowledgeable, trustworthy, and likable than their conventional news counterparts.

Demographics

The sample group was composed of 271 high school students from Valley Christian high school in San Jose, California. These students ranged in age from 13- 18. The entire

high school is composed of approximately 1600 students, characterized by a diversity of culture and ethnicity, as would be expected of a school in the Silicon Valley. That being said, Valley Christian is a demanding private school, and while many students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds receive funding to attend the school, a majority of students come from families with access to financial resources. However, the most important factor for this study is the students' technological competency and access; every student in the school is required to own and utilize a tablet computer as an instructional tool. This means that the study can assume a certain baseline of technological and media savvy in its 271 subjects.

Demographic information was collected on four major categories: gender, grade, academic track, and television viewing habits.

Gender: Of the 271 students surveyed, 143 of them were female and 128 were male. That means a ratio of 52.8% to 47.2% respectively. This near even distribution of genders closely resembles the population at large.

Grade: Almost 90% of the 271 students surveyed, were upperclassmen. This heavy skewing towards older students was likely caused by the fact that this age group has more free periods during which to participate in the study. While this particular proportion was unexpected, it is not considered crucial to the results of the study. The results can still be generalized to the population who attends high school during the normal four-year period. However, it may be worth specifying that these are results are particularly reflective of those students who are in their last two years of high school.

Academic Track: Almost 60% of students surveyed reported taking AP or honors level English courses. Valley Christian high school is high performing school, so this proportion is not unusual for the general population. The rationale for this demographic question was the idea that students learn about rhetoric and persuasion in their English classes, and that those students taking advanced English classes would be more sophisticated consumers of the persuasion in the editorial videos. However, because it became evident that no such connection could be made without an entirely new study and focus, the results of this question were excluded from the study.

Television viewing habits: The students were asked to estimate how many hours of television they consume each week, being verbally instructed that the concept of television should include all video they consume, whether on a traditional television or on the web. However, just like the question about academic track, it was concluded after the study that connecting TV viewership to the persuasive effect of these videos was outside the scope of this study.

Findings

To support the general hypothesis that comedy news editorials will be more persuasive than conventional news editorials, this study tested the following supporting hypotheses:

1. Agreement: More students will change their position to agree with the rhetorical stance of the comedy news editorial than the conventional news editorial.
2. Consistency and Confusion: More students will have a more consistent understanding of their own position on the issue of net neutrality after watching the comedy news editorial than the conventional news editorial.
3. Increase in Confidence: More students will feel an increase of confidence in their knowledge about net neutrality after having watched the comedy news editorial in comparison to the conventional news editorial.
4. Host/Guest Ethos: More students will evaluate the host and guest of the comedy news editorial as being more personally persuasive than the host and guest of the conventional news editorial. The persuasiveness, or ethos, of the host and guest will be measured by three criteria: Knowledgeable, Trustworthy, and Likeable.

Agreement

The first hypothesis to be tested was that students who watched a comedy news editorial would change their positions to agree with its rhetorical stance at higher rates than those who watched a conventional news editorial. This hypothesis was tested in two primary ways: examining the percentage of students who changed their answers to

“agree,” and examining the percentage of students who changed their answers from “neutral.”

Increase of “agree” response. First, the percentage of students who agreed with each video’s rhetorical stance before viewing the video was compared to the percentage who agreed with that rhetorical stance after viewing the video. The key indicators of agreement were identified as responses of “partially agree” or “strongly agree” to four statements that aligned with the video’s position. If, after watching, the percentage of students who partially or strongly agreed with these statements increased from the percentage who partially or strongly agreed with it before, agreement with the video has increased. Figure 1 demonstrates the growth in the percent of students who agreed with the MSNBC video.

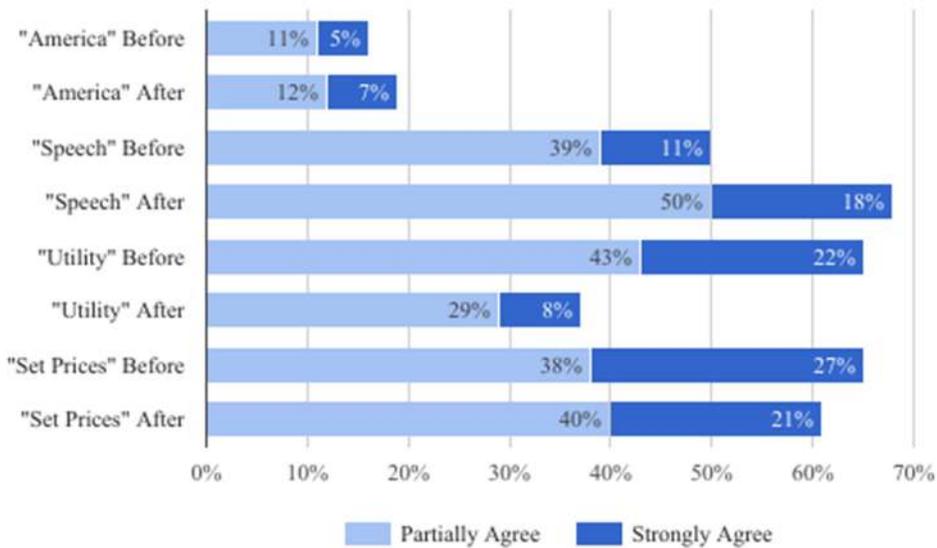


Figure 1. MSNBC: Changes in agreement for all four questions. This figure illustrates the percent of students who agreed with each question before watching the MSNBC clip compared with those who agreed after watching it.

Figure 2 demonstrates the same type of information for those who watched the *Colbert Report* video.

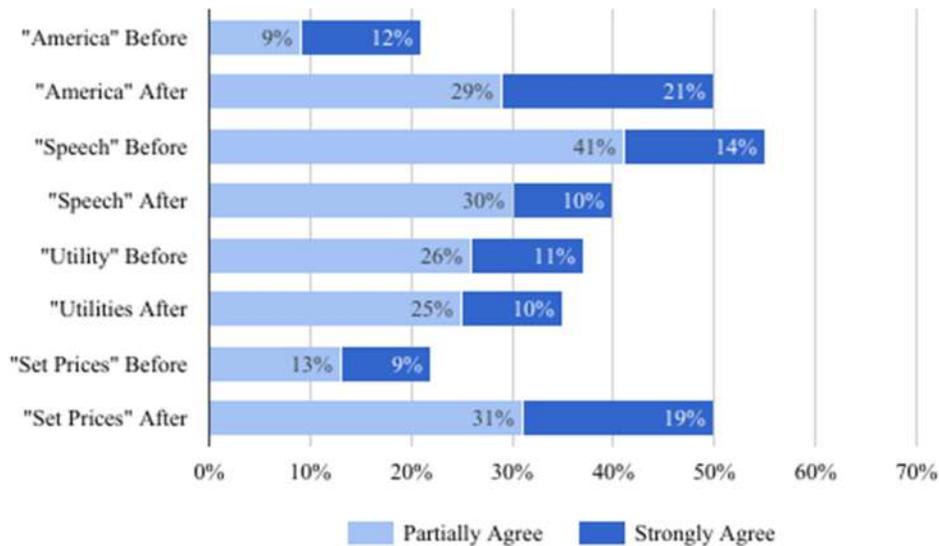


Figure 2. Colbert: Changes in agreement for all four questions. This figure illustrates the percent of students who agreed with each question before watching the Colbert Report clip compared to those who agreed after watching it.

These figures display a great deal of data, so it will be useful to break down the data from each question and compare the change of agreement for each video. When students were asked to respond to the first statement, “Net neutrality is good for America,” they were being asked to respond to a very broad or impressionistic statement about this policy’s impact on the country. As Figure 3 shows, a noticeably higher percentage of students agreed with the statement after watching the Colbert video than the MSNBC video.

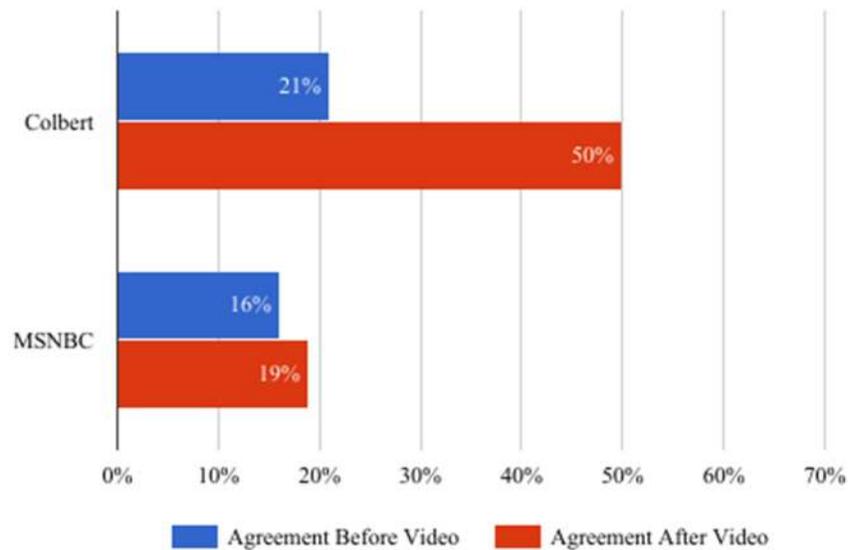


Figure 3. “NN good for America” question: Change in agreement. This figure illustrates the percentage of students who agreed with the statement “Net Neutrality is good for America.” After watching a clip, more students who watched the Colbert Report agreed with the statement than those who watched MSNBC.

The second statement that each sample group was asked to respond to was “Net neutrality is a threat to free speech.” Again, this statement is a fairly generalized impression of how this policy would affect the United States. Also, this question was framed opposite of the previous question in order to avoid false positives if students were merely choosing the “agree” options for every question. When the data were analyzed, the responses for this question were reverse scored so that they reflected the videos’ rhetorical stances and the previous question’s orientation. As Figure 4 shows, the difference between each video is much less marked, with Colbert actually losing 15% of those who agreed initially, and MSNBC gaining 18%. However, there is a much higher level of agreement overall, which may indicate that students felt more comfortable offering an opinion on a definite and familiar issue, such as free speech.

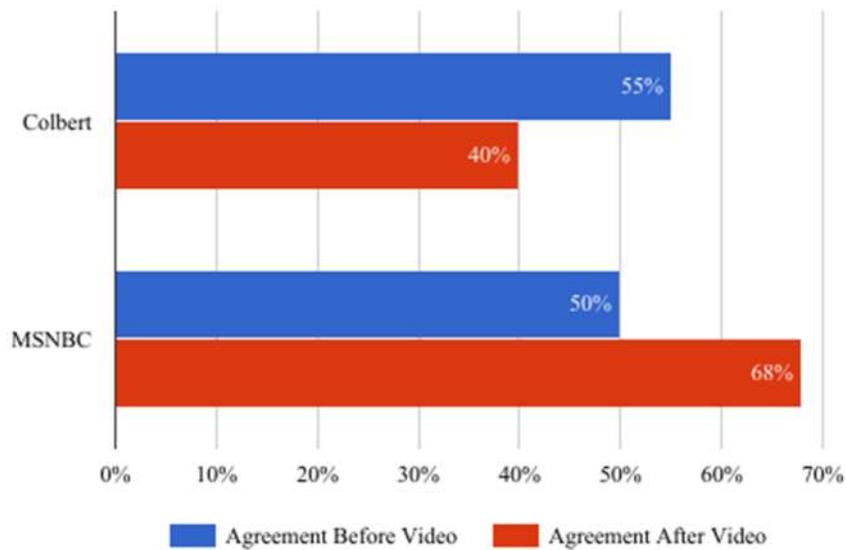


Figure 4. “Free speech” question: Change in agreement. This figure illustrates the percentage of students who agreed with the statement “Net Neutrality is [not] a threat to free speech.” These results were reversed scored. Many students agreed with the statement before watching the video.

The third statement that each sample group was asked to respond to dealt with a less generalized and more policy specific statement: “The internet should be regulated as a utility.” This statement is designed to be more complicated than the previous two, and requires a more sophisticated comprehension of the concepts from the videos. Figure 5 shows the results of this question.

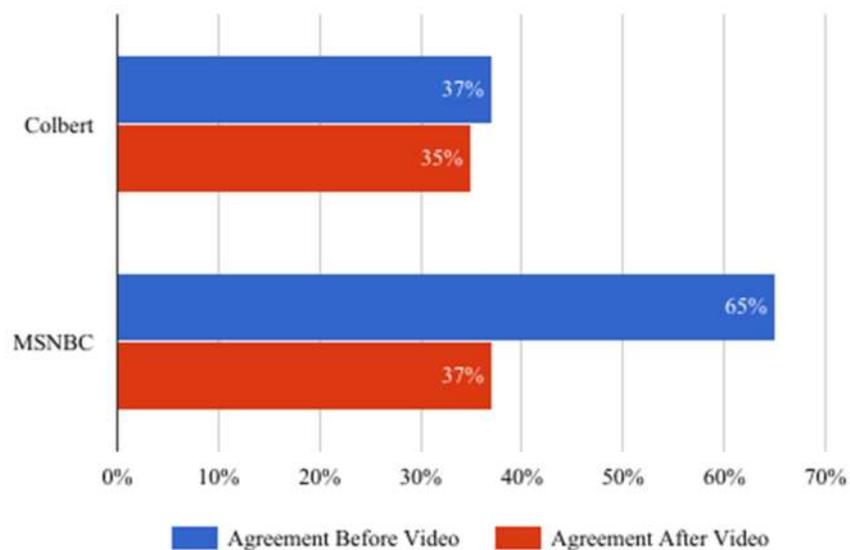


Figure 5. “Utility” question: Change in agreement. This figure illustrates the percentage of students who agreed with the statement “The internet should be regulated as a utility.” Because the “before” results are so different for each video, it is difficult to reach any useful conclusions on this point.

The percentage of “agree” response from those who watched the Colbert video did not change noticeably before and after viewership. In contrast, there was a large negative shift in those who watched the MSNBC video, but this is largely due to the fact that 65% of those respondents reported agreeing with the statement before watching the video. This initial response is much higher than that of the Colbert group, which is unusual, because it cannot be directly attributed to any known independent variable. The reason for this is unclear, but it does call into question the validity of any conclusions reached with the data on this question.

The fourth statement that each sample group was asked to respond to was also a more specific policy statement, and like statement two, was framed inversely to the previous statement, and for the same reason. The resulting responses were reverse scored in order

to align them with the videos and the rest of the statements. This fourth statement was “Internet providers should have the right to set prices for their own products.” Again, this statement is complicated, and requires more mature comprehension. As Figure 6 shows, Colbert shows a much higher increase in the percentage of students who agreed after the video, while those who watched MSNBC stayed relatively stagnant, even reducing by a bit.

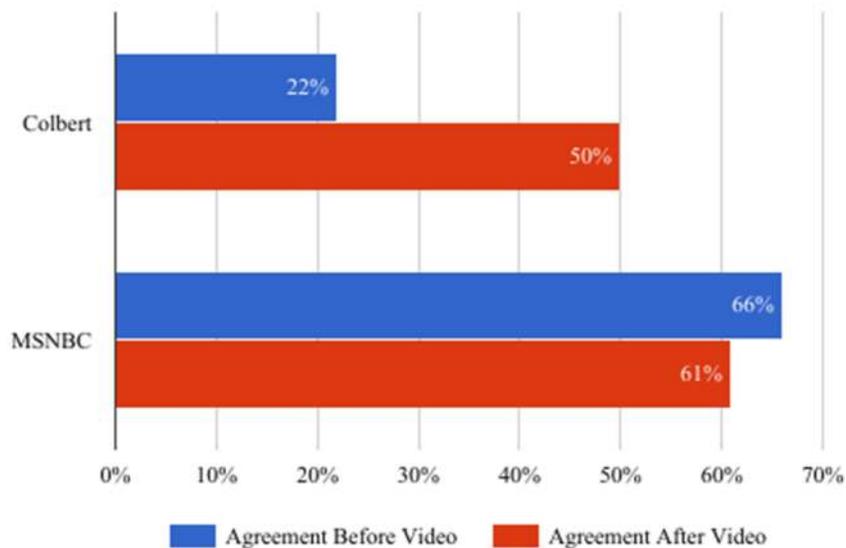


Figure 6. “Set prices” question: Change in agreement. This figure illustrates the percentage of students who agreed with the statement “Internet providers should have the right to set the prices for their own products” before and watching each video. These results were reversed scored. Because the “before” results are so different for each video, it is difficult to reach any useful conclusions on this point.

It is possible, however, that this result is also suspect, due to the fact that an abnormally higher percentage of those who watched MSNBC agreed with the statement initially, compared to those who watched Colbert.

Reduction of “unsure” response. Secondly, the concept of agreement was measured by the percentage of students who changed their responses from “unsure/neutral” to something else after having watched the video. While this indicator doesn’t measure

“agreement” in the conventional sense, it does measure the degree to which students who were previously unsure of their position were motivated by the video to take a particular position. Figure 7 shows the percentage of each type of response before and after watching the Colbert video.

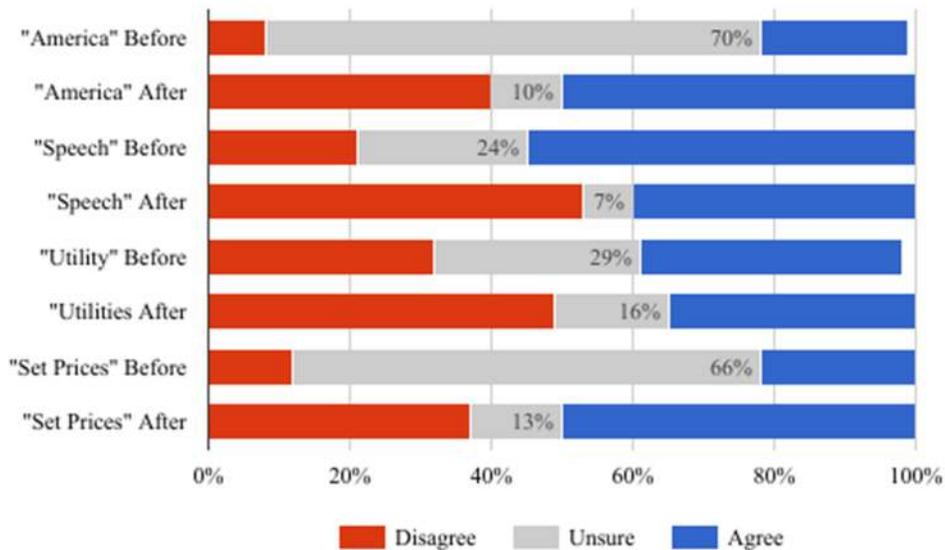


Figure 7. Colbert: Change in “unsure” responses. This figures illustrates the percentage of “unsure” responses before and after watching the Colbert video. All “agree” responses have been combined, as have all “disagree” responses. All percentages have been rounded to the nearest integer.

What can be observed is that across all four questions, the percentage of students unsure of their position on each issue reduced noticeably after watching the video, which is to be expected. After watching the video, students who were unsure of their position felt more empowered to hold a position, whether positive or negative.

The important question, of course, is whether the reduction in number of “unsure” students is measurably different between the two videos. If so, it would indicate which video was more effective at prompting students to take a position, whether positive or

negative. This factor, while not “agreement” in the traditional sense, can be classified as rhetorical efficacy in that it reduced confusion and a lack of surety on the part of the audience. In comparison, Figure 8 shows the percentage of each type of response before and after watching the MSNBC video.

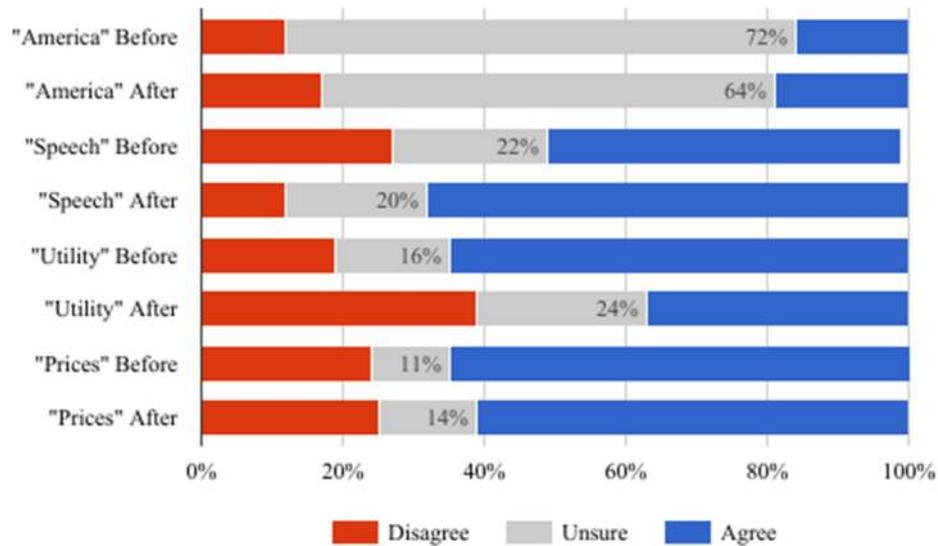


Figure 8. MSNBC: Change in “unsure” responses. This figures illustrates the percentage of “unsure” responses before and after watching the MSNBC video. All “agree” responses have been combined, as have all “disagree” responses. All percentages have been rounded to the nearest integer.

As Figure 8 demonstrates, students were much less likely to change their position from “unsure” to another response. In fact, on the latter two statements, the percentage of students who reported being “unsure” actually increased marginally after the video. However, it is also worth noting the initial percentage of students who reported being unsure on the fourth statement - “Cable companies should (not) have the right to set their own prices” - was much lower than the corresponding bracket for the Colbert report, so it is difficult to determine if the difference of change between the two is meaningful.

The conclusions for this hypothesis are mixed. When asked to respond to the prompt “Net neutrality is good for America,” those who watched the Colbert report were far more likely to change their answer to agree, and were also far more likely to change their answer from “unsure” to something else, indicating that the video did a better job of persuading its audience, or at the very least, clarifying the audience’s position on the topic. However, on the other three statements, the results are mixed.

On “Net neutrality is (not) a threat to free speech,” MSNBC actually saw a higher increase in “agreement,” but Colbert saw a higher increase in students who switched from “neutral” to some other answer. This suggests again that Colbert was better at clarifying the positions of its viewers better than MSNBC, even if it was not as good at convincing them to agree.

On “The internet should be regulated as a utility,” the results are initially misleading. At first glance, it appears that the Colbert video not only caused a measurably greater increase in agreement but also a greater decrease in “unsure” responses than MSNBC. While this is true, it is possible that this disparity is caused by an abnormally large percentage of MSNBC respondents who agreed with this position before they watched the video. In reality, the percentage of students who agreed with the videos and the percentage who reported being “unsure” after watching the videos are about the same between the two videos. However, the large initial “agree” response makes it appear as a drop in agreement, and an increase in “unsure.” For this reason, this data are inconclusive.

On “Cable companies should (not) have the right to set their own prices,” the results seem to favor Colbert, but with some reservations. There is a very noticeable increase in the percentage of “agree” responses and an equally noticeable decrease in the percentage of “unsure” response for Colbert. The responses for MSNBC, however, remain relatively stable. However, this is because the initial “agree” response level was unusually high, and “unsure” response level was unusually low. This condition remained relatively constant before and after the video.

Consistency and Confusion

The second hypothesis of this study is that a higher percentage of students would develop more consistent understanding of their own position on the issue of net neutrality after watching the comedy news editorial than the conventional news editorial. This hypothesis was tested in two ways. First, for each video, the percentage of students who express a consistent position before viewing the video was compared to the percentage who did so afterwards. This measures the degree to which each video helped the student to express positions that are consistent with their own responses. Second, for each video, the percentage of students who completely flipped their response after watching the video was compared to the percentage who maintained an “unsure” answer before and after. If the percentage of those who changed or flipped their responses in each category is greater than the percentage that maintained confusion, than that video can be said to be more persuasive than confusing.

Consistency. To measure an increase in consistency of position, students were asked to respond to two sets of paired statements before and after the video. The first set of

paired statements dealt with net neutrality's generalized impact on the U.S. These statements were: "Net neutrality is good for America" and "Net neutrality is a threat to free speech." A student with a consistent position should agree with one of these statements and disagree with the other. Net neutrality can hardly be a threat to free speech, and yet still be good for America, as the right to free speech is a fundamental element of the American ethos.

The second set of paired statements dealt with net neutrality's specific impact on the U.S telecommunication sector. These statements were: "The internet should be regulated as a utility" and "Internet providers should have the right to set their own prices." Again, a student with a consistent position should agree with one of these statements and disagree with the other. One of the defining characteristics of a utility is that it is subject to public control and oversight, which precludes it from having the right to set its own prices.

Students who responded as "unsure" both before and after watching the video were excluded from this indicator. Being unsure about a topic does not indicate consistency of position; it indicates a lack of position or a lack of knowledge. That particular indicator will be explored in the next section. Figure 9 displays the percentage of students who were considered to have a meaningfully consistent position before and after watching the Colbert video.

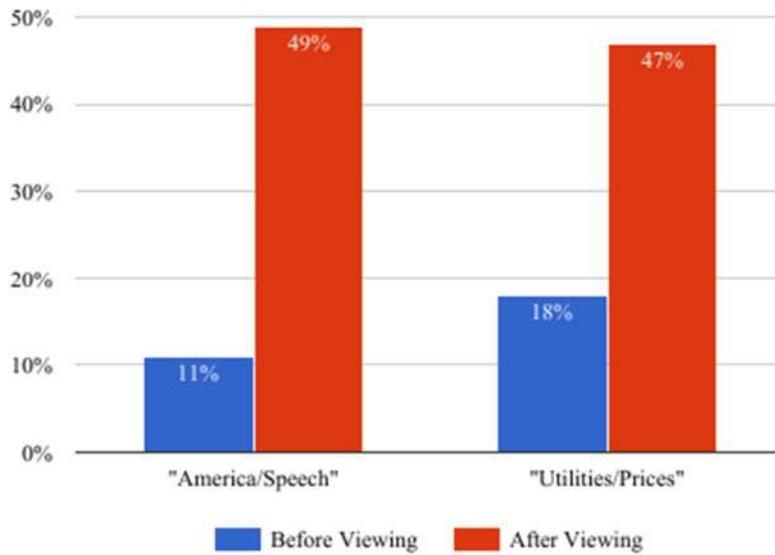


Figure 9. Colbert: Growth in position consistency. This figure illustrates the percentage of consistent responses measured before and after watching the Colbert video. All “unsure” responses have been excluded.

An increase in consistency was observed for both paired statements, with a greater increase in the first paired set due to a low initial degree of consistency. In comparison, Figure 10 displays the percentage of students who were considered to have a consistent position before and after watching the MSNBC video.

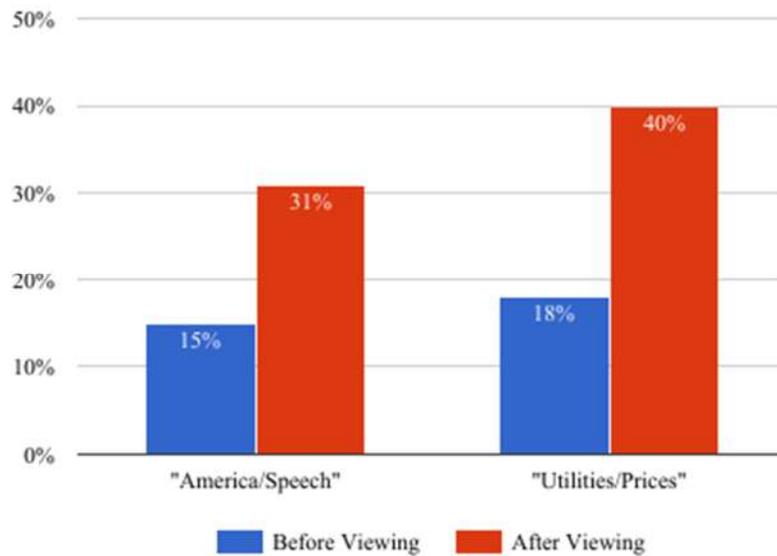


Figure 10. MSNBC: Growth in position consistency. This figure illustrates the percentage of consistent responses measured before and after watching the MSNBC video. All “unsure” responses have been excluded.

Again, an increase in consistency was observed for both paired statements after watching the MSNBC video. Those who watched the Colbert video reported a greater increase of consistency overall, and especially on the second set of questions. However, this was largely due to the fact that initial consistency on the second set of paired statements was almost twice as high for MSNBC respondents as it was for Colbert respondents. For this reason, in terms of consistency, no substantial difference can be observed between the effects of these two videos.

Confusion. While the previous measuring method excluded responses which remained neutral throughout, this measuring method focuses on them. It is assumed that a student who initially chose an “unsure” response to a statement, and retains that same response after watching the video, is a student who for whom the video did very little to

clarify the issue, and can be said to be “confused” by it. In addition, a student who expresses a position before the video, but changes it to “unsure” after the video, can be classified as “very confused”. Both levels of confusion are contrasted by those students who changed their responses from “unsure” to “disagree” or “agree.” This type of student will be defined as one who is “convinced.” While in reality, both types of students may be equally unsure of the actual meaning of the video, the convinced student was activated by the information, while the confused student was either intimidated or baffled by it.

Figure 11 demonstrates the ratio of convinced students to confused students after watching the Colbert video.

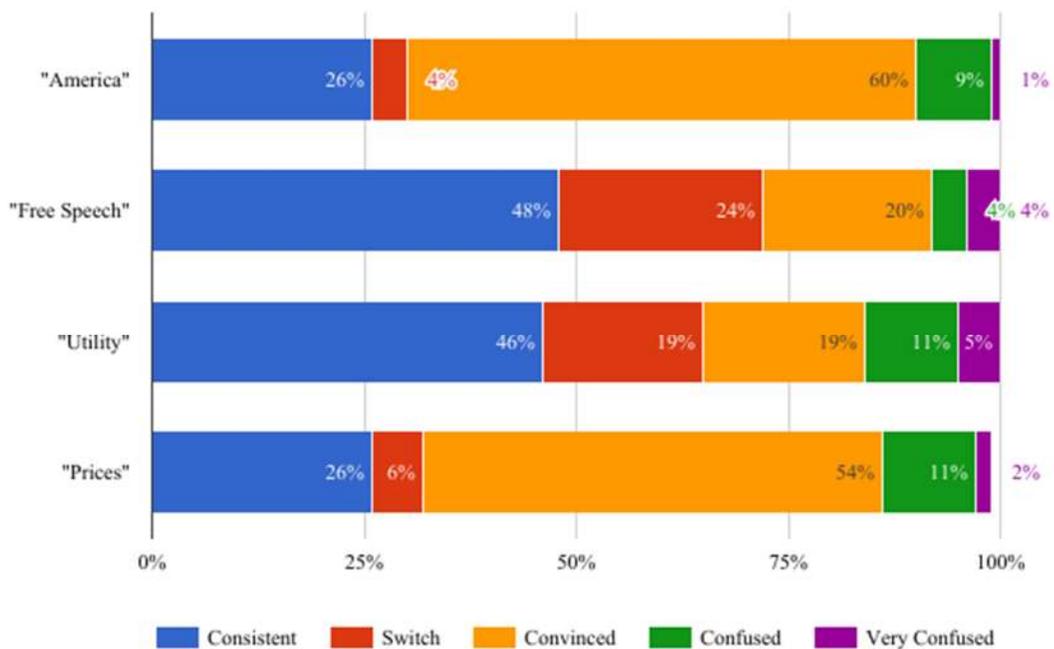


Figure 11. Colbert: Types of position confusion. This figure illustrates the types of confusion measured after watching the Colbert video. Those who were initially unsure, and then chose a position after watching the video are “convinced.” Those who remained unsure before and after the video are “confused.” Those who chose a position, and then became unsure are “very confused.”

After watching Colbert, a fairly consistent percentage of students either remained or became confused by it, ranging between 8% and 17% depending on the question. The percentage of students who became “very confused” by switching from a position to “unsure” is very low after watching Colbert – between 1% and 5%. However, the percentage of students who were “convinced” by the video varied significantly from question to question, ranging from 19% to 60%, with a mean of 38.25%. In contrast, Figure 12 demonstrates the ratio of convinced students to confused students after watching the MSNBC video.

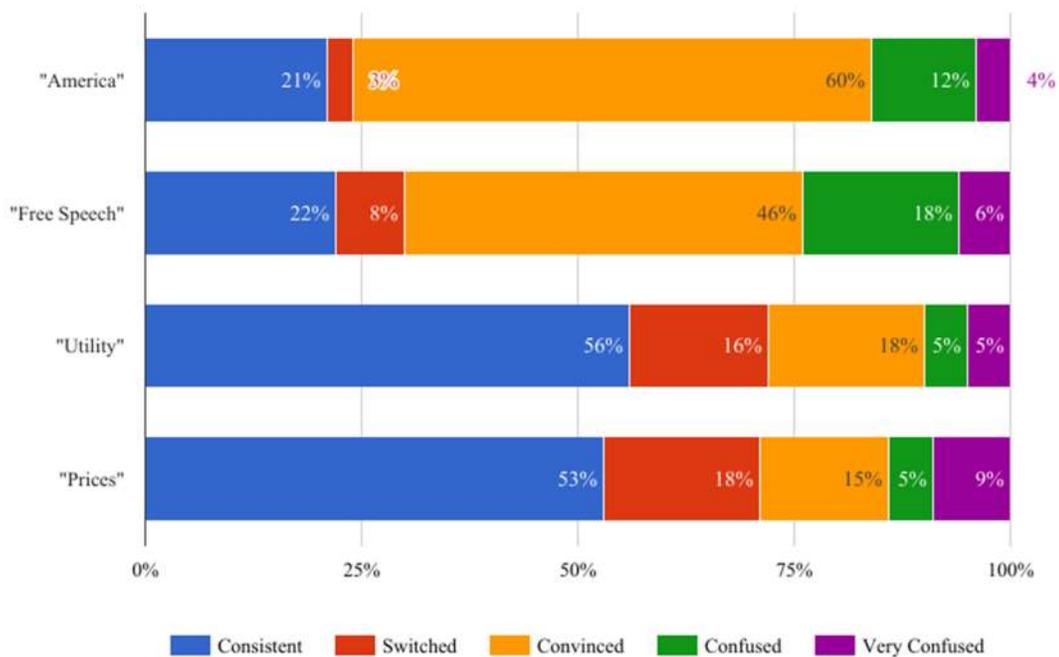


Figure 12. MSNBC: Types of Confusion. This figure illustrates the types of confusion measured after watching the MSNBC video. Those who were initially unsure, and then chose a position after watching the video are “convinced.” Those who remained unsure before and after the video are “confused.” Those who chose a position, and then became unsure are “very confused.”

After watching MSNBC, the percentage of “confused” responses for each question varied somewhat more than Colbert and were a bit higher overall, ranging from 11% to 24%. Also, the percentage of students who became “very confused” after watching MSNBC was noticeably higher than those who watched Colbert – ranging from 4% to 9%. However, the percentage of students who were “convinced” by the video varied from question to question about the same amount as Colbert, ranging from 15% to 60%, with a mean of 34.75%.

Increases in Confidence

The third hypothesis of this study is that more students will feel an increase in confidence in their knowledge about net neutrality after having watched comedy news editorial than the conventional news editorial. This hypothesis was tested fairly simply, by asking students to respond to the following questions before and after watching each video: “How well informed do you feel about the issue of net neutrality” and “How confident are you that you could explain the concept of net neutrality to a friend or family member?” Both questions are intended to measure confidence, but in slightly different ways. The first question asks students to respond about their feelings of knowledge, while the second asks about their confidence in their ability to articulate that knowledge to another person they know. Figure 13 shows the percentage of students who reported an increase in confidence after watching Colbert.

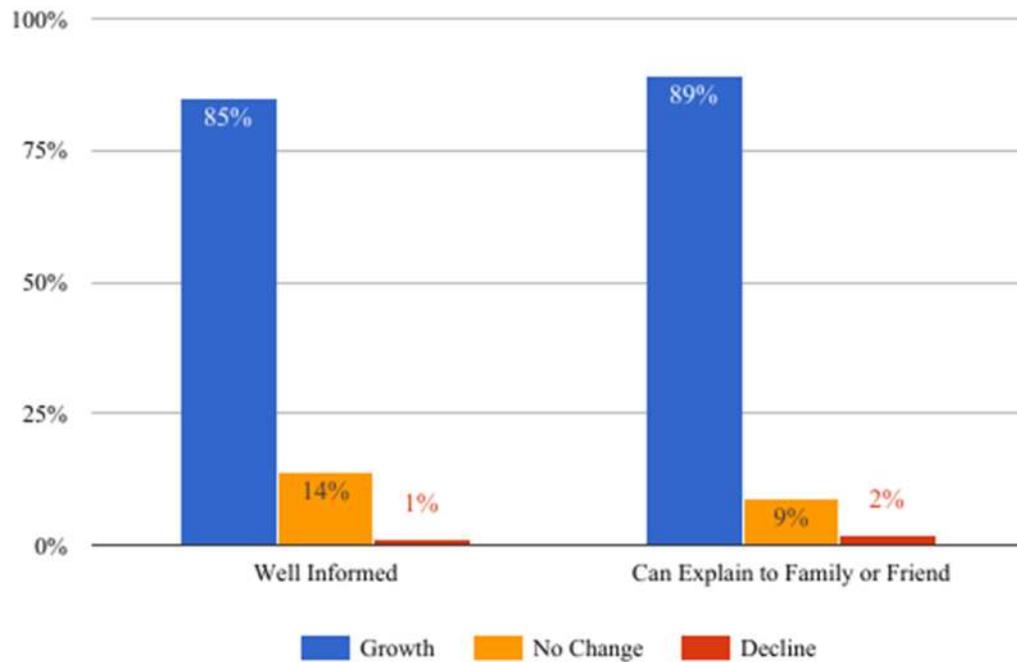


Figure 13. Colbert: Confidence increase. This figure illustrates the percentage of students who felt better informed about net neutrality after watching the clip, compared with those who felt more able to explain the concept to a family member or friend. Percentages have been rounded to the nearest integer.

As Figure 13 demonstrates, the percentage of students who reported feeling an increase in confidence after watching the Colbert video is very high, with a slightly higher percentage of students reporting increased confidence in their ability to explain net neutrality than those who reported feeling well informed. Figure 14 shows the percentage of students who reported an increase in confidence after watching MSNBC.

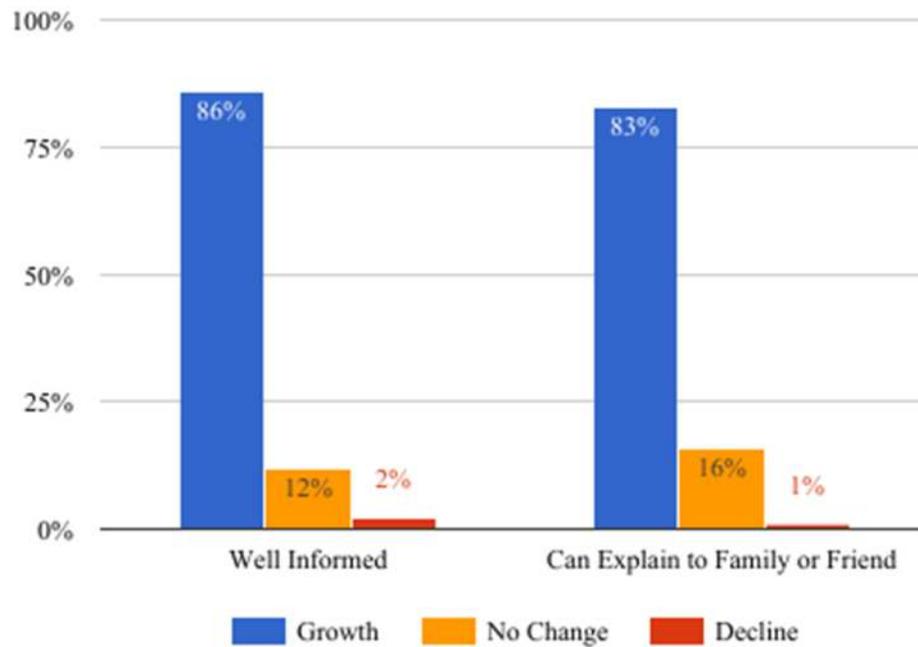


Figure 14. MSNBC: Confidence increase. This figure illustrates the percentage of students who felt better informed about net neutrality after watching the clip, compared with those who felt more able to explain the concept to a family member or friend. Percentages have been rounded to the nearest integer.

While the percentage of students who reported a growth in feeling “well-informed” is almost identical between both videos, the percentage of those who reported a growth in feeling “able to explain to a friend or family member” is more than 5% higher in those who watched Colbert than MSNBC. Not only that, with MSNBC, the “being well informed” score is about 3% higher than the feeling of “ability to explain,” while with Colbert, it is the exact inverse. Those students reported “being able to explain” at about 3.5% higher rates than “feeling well informed.”

Host/Guest Ethos

The fourth and final hypothesis of this study is that more students will evaluate the host and guest of the comedy news editorial as being personally persuasive than the host and guest of the conventional news editorial. Specifically, it was predicted that students would report that host Steven Colbert and guest Tim Wu are more knowledgeable, trustworthy, and likeable than MSNBC host Chris Hayes and guest Susan Crawford.

To measure this, students were asked to rate their assigned host and guest according to these three qualities. Figure 15 shows the ethos ratings for each host compared with each other. These ratings were submitted to a chi-square test, and the differences between all three pairs was found to be significant.

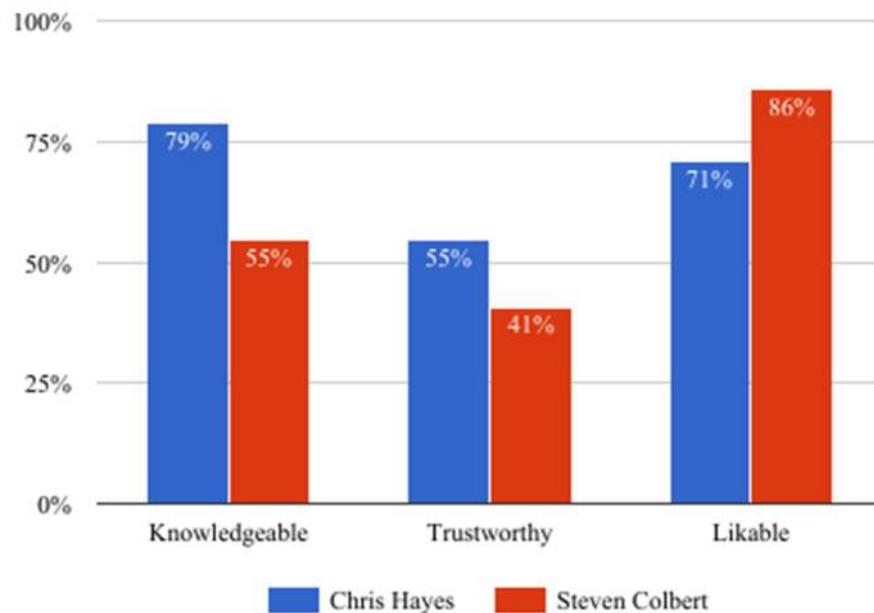


Figure 15. Host vs. host ethos ratings. This figure illustrates the percentages of students who agreed that each of the hosts (Chris Hayes or Steven Colbert) were knowledgeable, trustworthy, or likeable. Percentages have been rounded to the nearest integer.

As this chart indicates, Chris Hayes was considered about 24% more knowledgeable and 14% more trustworthy than Steven Colbert. This disparity may be explained by the way that the teenage audience may have interpreted Steven Colbert's satirical character. As part of his satirical editorial during the video, Colbert pretends at times not to have a firm grasp on the particulars of net neutrality, in order to mock the arrogant ignorance of some conventional news editorialists. Apparently, many students took this farce at face value, and interpreted him as being less knowledgeable. In contrast, Chris Hays' quick and direct delivery style, coupled with his sophisticated vocabulary likely gave students the impression that he is in fact knowledgeable.

In addition, during the segment, Steven Colbert pretends to switch his position from supporting net neutrality to opposing it, as a result of an implied, yet staged, threat by the cable companies to suspend his show. It is possible that this apparent willingness to switch positions on net neutrality was taken at face value, and interpreted as a lack of trustworthiness. In contrast, Chris Hayes was rated 24% less trustworthy than he was knowledgeable, which is actually a larger disparity between these two ratings than that of Steven Colbert. Apparently, many students perceived him as being knowledgeable without being trustworthy, perhaps reflecting a pre-existent political bias, or a negative reaction inspired by intimidation or confusion. However, because he did not obviously switch his position mid video, as Colbert did, he was still rated as being more trustworthy than Colbert.

In contrast, Steven Colbert was considered about 15% more likeable than Chris Hayes. During the video, Colbert displays his trademark wit and charm as he embodies

his outrageous TV host character. Chris Hayes also rated very high on the likeability scale, just not as high as Colbert. The data show that students viewed both hosts as being charming, and neither as being particularly trustworthy, but that the host for the conventional news editorial was seen as being more knowledgeable.

Next, the ratings of each guest were compared with each other. Figure 16 shows these ethos ratings. These ratings were submitted to a chi-square test, and the difference between the “likeable” pair was found to be statistically significant; the differences between the “knowledgeable” and “trustworthy” were not.

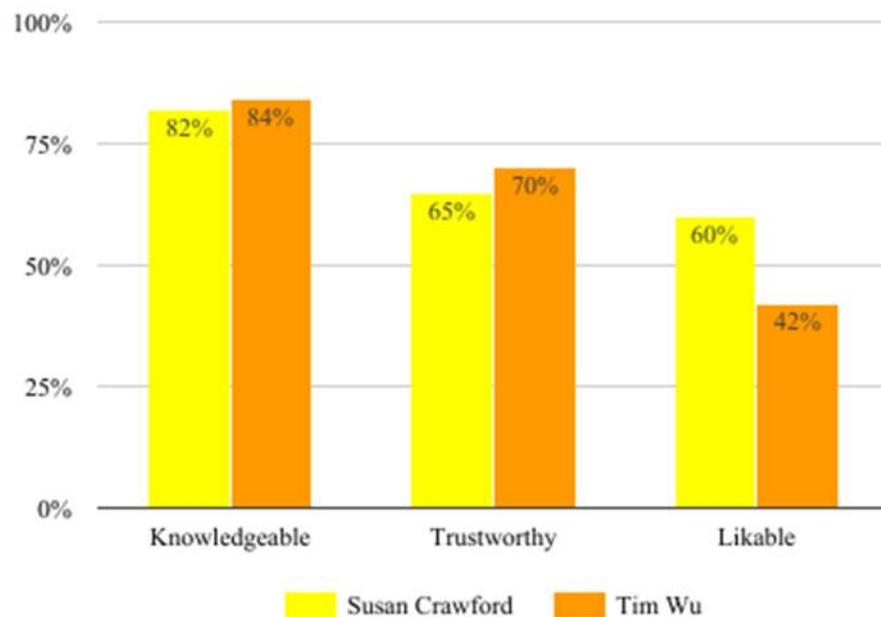


Figure 16. Guest vs. guest ethos ratings. This figure illustrates the percentages of students who agreed that each of the guests (Susan Crawford or Tim Wu) were knowledgeable, trustworthy, or likeable. Percentages have been rounded to the nearest integer.

Both guests were essentially perceived to be equally knowledgeable and equally trustworthy. While both of these scores are very high, and both actually surpass the

scores of their respective hosts in both categories, the “knowledgeable” ratings are significantly higher than the “trustworthy” ratings. This perception may be a function of the role that a guest usually fulfills on a news editorial show: the expert witness. As the host asks questions of the guest, and the guest answers them confidently and in detail, the guest’s ethos as a knowledgeable source grows in the mind of the teenage audience, particularly if the audience doesn’t understand everything that knowledgeable source is saying. The constructed nature of the show may be lost on the audience, and they may easily forget that the host is only asking the guest the questions which will provoke an entertaining or informative answer.

The only statistically significant difference found in the way the audience evaluated each guest is found on the “likable” rating, where Tim Wu is rated as being about 17% less likeable than Susan Crawford. The reason for this difference is not entirely known, but it is possible that it was affected by the way each host interacted with his guest. While Chris Hayes treated his guest with enthusiasm, agreement, and respect, Steven Colbert treated his guest with mock belligerence, satirizing the style of many partisan interviewers on conventional news shows. It is possible that students mistook Colbert’s aggressive tone as being serious, and felt cued to dislike Tim Wu the same way that they believed that Colbert did.

Next, the ethos ratings of the host and guest of *The Colbert Report* were compared with each other. Figure 17 shows these ethos ratings, which were submitted to a chi-square test, and the differences between all of the pairs were found to be statistically significant.

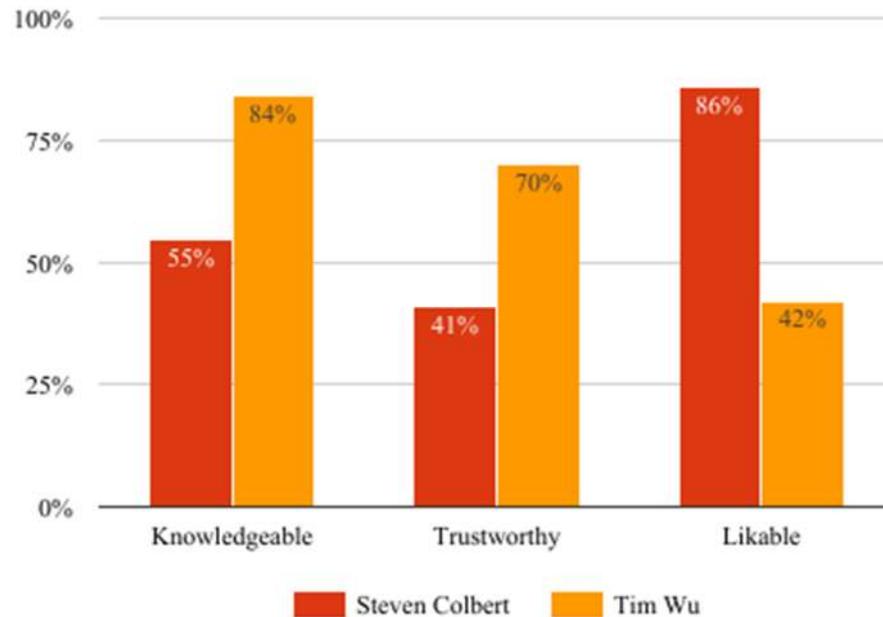


Figure 17. Colbert: Host vs. guest ethos ratings. This figure illustrates the percentages of students who agreed that host or guest (Steven Colbert or Tim Wu) were knowledgeable, trustworthy, or likeable. Percentages have been rounded to the nearest integer.

According to this data, Tim Wu was considered about 29% more knowledgeable and 29% more trustworthy than Steven Colbert, but Colbert is considered a huge 44% more likeable than Tim Wu. It is interesting to note that in this instance, students did not find it contradictory to dislike Tim Wu, and simultaneously respect his knowledge and trust his intentions. The opposite is also true. Students did not respect or trust Colbert, but found him to be vastly more likeable. This result is interesting, because it contradicts a basic assumption of this hypothesis – that students would like those media figures who they felt to be knowledgeable and trustworthy. This data seem to suggest otherwise; it suggests that for these students, these concepts can be profoundly decoupled.

Finally, the ratings of the host and guest of *All in with Chris Hayes* were compared with each other. Figure 18 shows these ethos ratings.

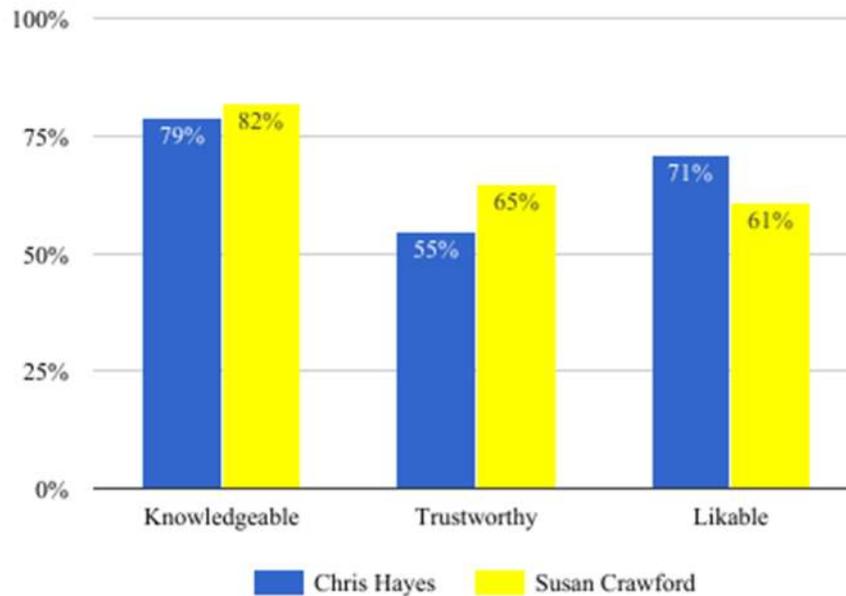


Figure 18. MSNBC: Host vs. guest ethos ratings. This figure illustrates the percentages of students who agreed that host or guest (Chris Hayes or Susan Crawford) were knowledgeable, trustworthy, or likeable. Percentages have been rounded to the nearest integer.

These ratings were submitted to a chi-square test, and none of the differences between the pairs were found to be statistically significant, with the exception of the first set. While Hayes and Crawford were evaluated as “knowledgeable” by essentially the same percentage of students, they were rated in significantly different ways. While Hayes was rated as “very knowledgeable” by only 24% of the students surveyed, Crawford was rated as “very knowledgeable” by 47% of the students, which is almost twice as many. This difference is shown to be statistically significant, supporting the idea that many students perceived Susan Crawford as the consummate “expert witness,” outstripping the strength

of her host's knowledge rating by a significant margin. However, taken as single category, a basically equal percentage of students rated each individual as being knowledgeable at some level.

The remaining two measures of ethos were not shown to be significantly different from each other, indicating that across all three measures, student's impressions of the guest and host of *All in with Chris Hayes* were essentially similar. This could indicate that the harmonious relationship presented by the guest and host on this show contributed towards a situation where their ethos ratings were evaluated in concert with each other. This directly contrasts with the disparate ratings received by the guest and host of *The Colbert Report*, who, due to the satirical format of the show, and Steven Colbert's mock-belligerence, established a more adversarial relationship. It's possible that this element of host and guest harmony contributed as much to audience reaction as its conventional format.

After being asked to evaluate each host and guest, students were asked the following question: "How likely is it that you would spend time watching other segments of this show?" This question was designed to measure the students' holistic impressions of each show, including the level of engagement provoked and entertainment provided. Figure 19 displays these results, which were shown by a chi-square test to be significant.

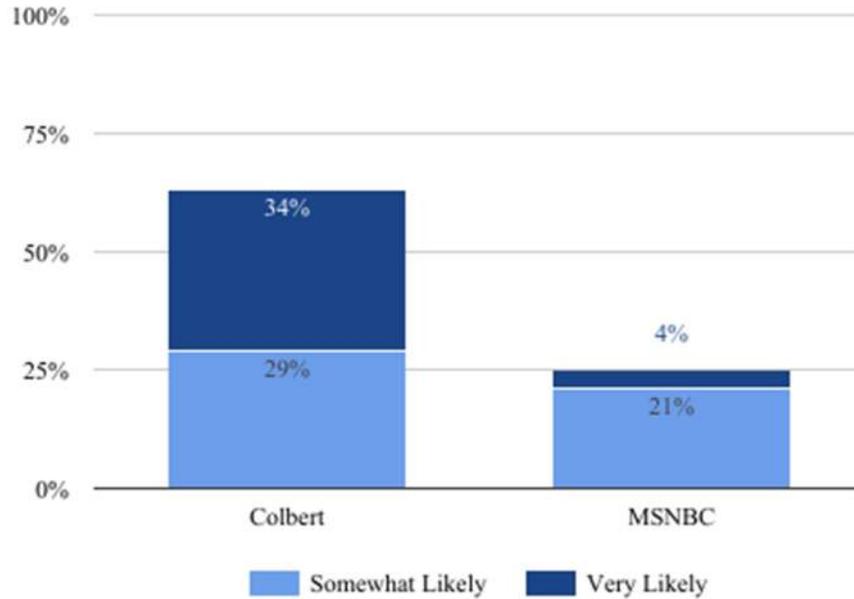


Figure 19. Percentage likely to watch each show again. This figure illustrates the percentages of students who said they would be somewhat or very likely to spend time watching other segments of each show. Percentages have been rounded to the nearest integer.

Almost 63% of respondents indicated that they would watch further segments of *The Colbert Report*, while only about 25% of respondents said the same for MSNBC. Not only that, but of those 63%, a little over half said that they would be “very likely” to watch more segments, while only 4% of those who watched MSNBC reported being “very likely” to watch more segments. The data clearly support the conclusion that *The Colbert Report* was more engaging and enjoyable to the high school students than its counterpart.

Conclusions

Interpretations

This goal of this study was to determine whether a comedy news editorial, like *The Colbert Report*, would be more persuasive to high school students than a conventional news editorial, like *All In with Chris Hayes*. Groups of students from the same high school were organized into two sample groups, with one group watching a *Colbert Report* video advocating for net neutrality, and the other watching an *All In with Chris Hayes* video advocating for the same thing. An online survey was administered before and after each video to collect the results.

To measure the relative persuasive power of each type of video, this study distinguished four different elements of persuasion that were tested and compared: Agreement, Consistency and Confusion, Increase in Confidence, and Host/Guest Ethos.

The first hypothesis, that students who watched a comedy news editorial would change their positions to agree with its rhetorical stance at higher rates than those who watched a conventional news editorial, was not confirmed. However, the data suggest that the comedy news editorial caused a more noticeable decrease in “unsure” responses among its teenage audience. This could indicate that the comedic framing of the editorial made its content more accessible to a younger audience, reducing intimidation, and allowing students to feel more confident in expressing a position.

The second hypothesis, that more students will have a more consistent understanding of their own position on the issue of net neutrality after watching the comedy news editorial than the conventional news editorial, was not entirely supported. While the data

suggest that watching any type of video on a policy or topic will make students more consistent in their responses to statements on that topic, they do not in fact demonstrate that a comedy news video possesses a clear advantage in this regard.

Analyzing the data on confusion, however, may have produced a more important result. While the percentage of students who changed their answers from “neutral” to something else was relatively consistent between videos, a noticeably larger percentage of students remained confused after watching MSNBC than Colbert. Not only that, but a larger percentage of students changed their positions from “agree” or “disagree” to “neutral” after watching MSNBC, suggesting that more students were confused by watching this video than the alternative.

The third hypothesis, that more students would feel an increase in confidence in their knowledge about net neutrality after having watched comedy news editorial than the conventional news editorial, was not supported. There was no substantive difference in the degree to which students reported an increase in confidence after watching each video. What can be supported is the argument that watching a video on a topic can increase a student’s confidence in his or her understanding and articulation of an issue. However, this conclusion is not surprising, as it merely confirms something that is akin to common sense.

However, there was a small difference in the way that confidence was expressed between each video. Those who watched Colbert reported a slightly higher level of confidence in being able to explain the issue, while those who watched MSNBC reported a slightly higher level feeling of being well informed. The cause of these differences is

not known, but it is possible that the casual and humorous nature of *The Colbert Report* mitigated some of the feelings of social anxiety these students might have felt when contemplating explaining a complicated concept to a peer. Conversely, while the sophisticated nature of the MSNBC video might have given students a false sense of comprehension if they understood any part of it, when asked to prove their competence and comprehension in a peer interaction, the stakes may have seemed too high and some students chose a safer, less confident answer.

The hypothesis that more students will evaluate the host and guest of the comedy news editorial as being personally persuasive than the host and guest of the conventional news editorial was found to be only partially supported. While Steven Colbert was rated as being significantly more likeable than his conventional news counterpart, he was also rated as being significantly less knowledgeable and trustworthy. Tim Wu was rated as being equally as knowledgeable and trustworthy as Susan Crawford, but was rated significantly less likeable. In fact, both hosts were rated as being more likeable than their guests, but either equally or less knowledgeable and trustworthy. The guest and host of the comedy news editorial tended to be rated independently, while the guest and host of the conventional news program tended to be rated in concert with each other. Yet despite this result, students reported being significantly more likely to watch segments from the comedy news show. All of these results suggest that the comedy news frame does have a significant effect on its audience, but not the simplistic one hypothesized at the start of this study.

These results suggest that more high school students are likely to interpret conventional news as being more intelligent and dependable, but less interesting and engaging. It also suggests that these students enjoy the humor of satire, but do not interpret satire as being an intelligent or trustworthy mode of receiving information. They may instead see it as mere slapstick: a meaningless descent into foolishness that can be enjoyed, but not taken seriously. Thus, two of the major pillars of this hypothesis are contradicted. Students found comedy news to be more enjoyable, but were not more persuaded by it in any conventional sense.

An interesting observation was made in regard to the different ways that students responded to the three questions. In all four comparisons, the individual who was rated the most knowledgeable and trustworthy was also rated the least likeable. This was an unexpected result, as the one of the assumptions underlying this study was that these three qualities of ethos would be correlated with each other. However, when considering the demographics of the sample group and the context of this study, this result shouldn't have been that unexpected. The respondents, being high school students, are in constant contact with authority figures whom they believe to be knowledgeable and trustworthy but may not like: namely teachers and parents. By the same token, their peers may be very likeable, but being fellow students, may not be considered knowledgeable or trustworthy. As these students grow into adulthood, their peer groups and authority figures will begin to merge until they commonly have contact with individuals who embody all three qualities, such as peer that they respect, or a boss that they are friendly with. Until then, the results suggest that students are perfectly capable of viewing an

authority figure on a video and report that they respect and trust that figure, but that they do not at all like him or her.

Limitations

There are notable limitations to the application of this study, including sample size, demographics, and choice of videos.

The first limiting factor is the size of the sample group. While a sample group of 271 students was deemed sufficient to meet the 95% confidence level threshold, a larger sample group would likely produce more reliable data. This would be particularly useful to resolve some of the anomalies that were witnessed in the MSBC pre-video responses.

The second limiting factor was the demographics of the sample. While these students were a fairly accurate representation of this school's population, they were not necessarily representative of all high school students. Some factors that may make them less representative may include the school's location, its high performance culture, and its religious affiliation.

The third limiting factor was the choice of videos. While the videos were chosen because of their very similar subject matter, structure, and rhetorical position, they were not identical. For example, the *All In with Chris Hayes* video was slightly longer, and his guest was a woman while Colbert's was a man. Also, high school students are more likely to be previously aware of *The Colbert Report* than *All In with Chris Hayes*.

Importance and Implications

This study helps to support McLuhan's maxim about the power of the medium in combination with McCombs' agenda-setting theories. First, in this study, the satirical

news editorial did cause the students to become more sure of their own position, but did not actually increase their agreement with its rhetorical stance. Secondly, satirical news caused students to be less confused about the issue, but also less consistent in their viewpoints. Thirdly, satirical news caused students to be more confident in their ability to explain a complex issue, but less confident in their understanding of that issue. Finally, satirical news caused students to rate the host as being more likeable, but to rate him as being less knowledgeable and trustworthy. In all of these examples, the framing of the news had an effect on the audience, but that effect was complex and unpredictable. The comedic frame did not make *The Colbert Report* more effective at convincing students to agree with its position on net neutrality, but the frame did cause students to think about confusion, confidence, knowledge, trust, and likeability in a different way. It set the agenda for the way the students viewed the persuasion of the video.

This study will contribute to the body of work surrounding media frames, and specifically, the effect of comedy news. It can also contribute to the field of modern pedagogy. As technology changes the way that teachers teach and students learn, further research is needed to examine the new ways that media affects students, both inside and outside the classroom. Teachers may wonder if the use of comedic videos as an educational tool would be appealing and effective. This study suggests that while such videos are engaging to students, they may not be perceived as being as legitimate as videos the students perceive as being “serious.”

More research is needed to augment and clarify the results of this study. This type of study should be conducted on adults, and the results compared to see whether the

contradictory nature of the results derives from the study itself, or the often contradictory nature of youthful and half-formed political opinions. In addition, to pursue the pedagogical implications of the study, a similar study could be run on educational videos that have a comedic quality, and use test scores to compare the levels of comprehension between students who watched the comedic video versus the non-comedic video.

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Appendix: Survey Questions

Media Study - Survey Form

* Required

Demographics -1

1. What type of English class are you taking this year? * Mark only one oval.

College Preparatory

Honors/AP

2. What is your current grade in school? * Mark only one oval.

Freshman

Sophomore

Junior

Senior

3. What is your Gender? * Mark only one oval.

Female

Male

Decline to state

4 Approximately how many hours of television do you consume each week? * "Television" includes conventional television and online sources, such as youtube, hulu, etc. Mark only one oval.

- 0-2 hours/ week
- 3-5 hours/week
- 6-10 hours/week
- 11-20 hours/week
- More than 20 hours/week

5. How much attention do you pay to issues in the news? *
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
I don't pay much attention to the news	<input type="radio"/>	I pay a great deal of attention				

6. How well-informed do you feel about current events? *
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
I don't feel well-informed	<input type="radio"/>	I feel extremely well-informed				

Net Neutrality -1

7. How well informed do you feel about the issue of "net neutrality" *
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
I don't know what that is	<input type="radio"/>	I know a great deal about this issue				

8 How confident are you that you could explain the concept of Net Neutrality to a friend or family member? *
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all confident	<input type="radio"/>	Very confident				

9. Respond to this statement: "Net Neutrality is good for America." *

Read the statement carefully. Then, choose the answer that most closely conforms to your own position. Mark only one oval.

- I strongly agree
- I partially agree
- I don't know enough to have a position/ Unsure
- I partially disagree
- I strongly disagree

Respond to this statement: "Internet providers should have the right to set the prices for their own products" *

Read the statement carefully. Then, choose the answer that most closely conforms to your own position. Mark only one oval.

- I strongly agree
- I partially agree
- I don't know enough to have a position/Unsure
- I partially disagree
- I strongly disagree

- 11 Respond to this statement: "The internet should be regulated as a utility." *

Read the statement carefully. Then, choose the answer that most closely conforms to your own position. Mark only one oval.

- I strongly agree
- I partially agree
- I don't know enough to have a position/Unsure
- I partially disagree
- I strongly disagree

12. Respond to this statement: "Net Neutrality is a threat to free speech." *

Read the statement carefully. Then, choose the answer that most closely conforms to your own position. Mark only one oval.

- I strongly agree
- I partially agree
- I don't know enough to have a position/Unsure
- I partially disagree
- I strongly disagree

Stop Here! Watch the video.

13. Which video did you just watch? * Mark only one oval.

- "FCC Makes The Internet A Utility" All in with Chris Hayes, MSNBC Skip to question 14.
- "End of Net Neutrality" The Colbert Report, Comedy Central Skip to question 27.

Media Study - Survey Form HS- Pt. 2A - MSNBC

Host and Guest -2A

14 In your opinion: How knowledgeable was Chris Hayes, the host? *
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not knowledgeable	<input type="radio"/>	Very knowledgeable				

15. In your opinion: How trustworthy was Chris Hayes, the host? * Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Not trustworthy Very trustworthy

16. In your opinion: How likeable was Chris Hayes, the host? *

(Did you enjoy his personality, delivery, or tone?) Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Very unlikable Very likeable

17. In your opinion: How knowledgeable was Susan Crawford, the guest? *

Susan Crawford: Former special assistant to President Obama Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Not knowledgeable Very knowledgeable

18. In your opinion: How trustworthy was Susan Crawford, the guest? *

Susan Crawford: Former special assistant to President Obama Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Not trustworthy Very trustworthy

19. In your opinion: How likable was Susan Crawford, the guest? *

Susan Crawford: Former special assistant to President Obama Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Very unlikable Very likeable

20. How likely is it that you would spend time watching other segments of his show? *

(All In with Chris Hayes) Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very unlikely	<input type="radio"/>	Very likely				

Net Neutrality -2A

21. After watching the video: How well informed do you feel about the issue of "net neutrality?" *
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
I don't know what that is	<input type="radio"/>	I know a great deal about this issue				

22. After watching the video: How confident are you that you could explain the concept of Net Neutrality to a friend or family member? * Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all confident	<input type="radio"/>	Very confident				

23. Respond to this statement: "Net Neutrality is good for America." *

Read the statement carefully. Then, choose the answer that most closely conforms to your own position. Mark only one oval.

- I strongly agree
- I partially agree
- I don't know enough to have a position/ Unsure
- I partially disagree
- I strongly disagree

24. Respond to this statement: "Internet providers should have the right to set the prices for their own products"

*

Read the statement carefully. Then, choose the answer that most closely conforms to your own position. Mark only one oval.

- I strongly agree
- I partially agree
- I don't know enough to have a position/Unsure
- I partially disagree
- I strongly disagree

25 Respond to this statement: "The internet should be regulated as a utility." *

Read the statement carefully. Then, choose the answer that most closely conforms to your own position. Mark only one oval.

- I strongly agree
- I partially agree
- I don't know enough to have a position/Unsure
- I partially disagree
- I strongly disagree

26. Respond to this statement: "Net Neutrality is a threat to free speech." *

Read the statement carefully. Then, choose the answer that most closely conforms to your own position. Mark only one oval.

- I strongly agree
- I partially agree
- I don't know enough to have a position/Unsure
- I partially disagree
- I strongly disagree

Thank you for your participation

Media Study - Survey Form HS- Pt. 2B - Comedy Central

Host and Guest - 2B

27 In your opinion: How knowledgeable was Stephen Colbert, the host? *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Not knowledgeable Very knowledgeable

28. In your opinion: How trustworthy was Stephen Colbert, the host? *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Not trustworthy Very trustworthy

29. In your opinion: How likeable was Stephen Colbert, the host? *

(Did you enjoy his personality, delivery, or tone?) Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Very unlikable Very likeable

30. In your opinion: How knowledgeable was Tim Wu, the guest? * Tim

Wu: Author of "The Master Switch" - Coined the term "Net Neutrality"

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Not knowledgeable Very knowledgeable

31 In your opinion: How trustworthy was Tim Wu, the guest? * Tim Wu:

Author of "The Master Switch" - Coined the term "Net Neutrality"

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Not trustworthy Very trustworthy

32. In your opinion: How likable was Tim Wu, the guest?

*

Tim Wu: Author of "The Master Switch" - Coined the term "Net Neutrality" Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very unlikable	<input type="radio"/>	Very likeable				

33. How likely is it that you would spend time watching other segments of his show? *

(The Colbert Report) Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very unlikely	<input type="radio"/>	Very likely				

Net Neutrality -2B

34. After watching the video: How well informed do you feel about the issue of "net neutrality?" *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
I don't know what that is	<input type="radio"/>	I know a great deal about this issue				

35. After watching the video: How confident are you that you could explain the concept of Net Neutrality to a friend or family member? * Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all confident	<input type="radio"/>	Very confident				

36. Respond to this statement: "Net Neutrality is good for America." *

Read the statement carefully. Then, choose the answer that most closely conforms to your own position. Mark only one oval.

- I strongly agree
- I partially agree
- I don't know enough to have a position/ Unsure
- I partially disagree
- I strongly disagree

37. Respond to this statement: "Internet providers should have the right to set the prices for their own products"

*

Read the statement carefully. Then, choose the answer that most closely conforms to your own position. Mark only one oval.

- I strongly agree
- I partially agree
- I don't know enough to have a position/Unsure
- I partially disagree
- I strongly disagree

38 Respond to this statement: "The internet should be regulated as a utility." *

Read the statement carefully. Then, choose the answer that most closely conforms to your own position. Mark only one oval.

- I strongly agree
- I partially agree
- I don't know enough to have a position/Unsure
- I partially disagree
- I strongly disagree

39. Respond to this statement: "Net Neutrality is a threat to free speech." *

Read the statement carefully. Then, choose the answer that most closely conforms to your own position. Mark only one oval.

- I strongly agree
- I partially agree
- I don't know enough to have a position/Unsure
- I partially disagree
- I strongly disagree

Thank you for your participation