

The Measurement of Local Television News and Public Affairs Programs

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Our analysis suggests that the performance of network owned-and-operated (O&O) stations and affiliates is virtually identical with respect to ratings of early evening newscasts. With respect to the receipt of awards for local news operations, network O&Os outperform affiliates. In addition, network O&Os appear to produce, on average, a greater quantity of local news and public affairs programming than affiliates in markets where the two station types compete directly. Within the class of affiliates, there is clear variation in performance between affiliates that are owned in common with a newspaper publisher and all other network affiliates. Affiliates co-owned with newspapers experience noticeably greater success under our measures of quality and quantity of local news programming than other network affiliates.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Federal Communications Commission has traditionally considered the provision of local news and public affairs programming to be an important function of television and radio broadcasters. This report seeks to measure the output of television stations in the area of news and public affairs and to assess the performance of television stations owned by one of the four largest broadcast networks (NBC, Fox, CBS, and ABC) relative to their affiliates. All available measures are at best imperfect proxies for what we seek to measure. Therefore, we present data on four different measures of output. We measure output by looking at viewer choice. We look at measures of the quantity supplied by broadcasters. We follow standard practice for the hard sciences by using peer review information to measure relative output. Finally, we look at excellence as measured by an expert set of awards. We note that this paper is limited to the identification of observable differences within these categories and does not attempt to explain the basis for any differences or their implications for FCC media policy.

Our analysis suggests that the performance of network owned-and-operated (O&O) stations and affiliates is virtually identical with respect to ratings of early evening newscasts. With respect to the receipt of awards for local news operations, network O&Os outperform affiliates on a nationwide basis. In addition, network O&Os appear to produce, on average, a greater quantity of local news and public affairs programming than affiliates in markets where the two station types compete directly.

Within the class of affiliates, there is clear variation in performance between affiliates that are owned in common with a newspaper publisher¹ and all other network affiliates. Affiliates co-owned with newspapers experience noticeably greater success under our measures of quality and quantity of local news programming than other network affiliates.

II. METHODS OF MEASUREMENT

In evaluating the quality of local news programming, we did not attempt to assess that programming ourselves. Rather, we compiled measures of others' implicit or explicit assessments of programming quality. We use three measures: (1) The ratings received for local evening news; (2) The success at earning awards from the Radio and Television News Directors Association (RTNDA); and (3) The local television recipients of the Silver Baton of the A.I. DuPont Awards. For measuring the quantity of programming, we tallied the hours of such programming aired during the November 2000 sweeps period.

In performing these measurements, we use three overlapping sets of stations. For the ratings and hours measures, we restrict our study to those markets where there was at

¹ Co-ownership refers to a company that owns at least one television station and one daily newspaper irrespective of whether any two of the commonly-owned outlets serve the same local market.

least one station owned-and-operated by a broadcast network and at least one affiliate of a television network.² This was done to facilitate direct comparisons between O&Os and affiliates. The universe of stations considered for the RTNDA awards is the 50 largest markets in the United States, which corresponds to RTNDA's "large market" category for station awards. The DuPont awards include all commercial television stations in the United States.

A. Local News Ratings

Viewer choice is one way to measure the quality of local news programming. It measures quality to the extent that viewers find the quality of the program worth watching relative to other programs and other uses of their time. We relied on the reported ratings for the 5:30 pm and 6:00 pm local news programs for the November 2000 sweeps period. We report the simple unweighed average rating. When no news was reported for a time period we excluded that station from the average.

B. Station Output

The next way to measure the performance of stations in the area of local news and public affairs programming is to ascertain the total quantity of such programming. We measured quantity based on the total number of hours devoted weekly to such programming during the November 2000 sweeps period. We tallied the hours per week of local news programming and included both weekday and weekend local news for all dayparts. For local public affairs programming, we identified and totaled all programs that were locally produced and could be categorized objectively as public affairs programming. In a minority of cases, certain judgments regarding proper categorization were made based on the program information available to us. This categorization process invites the possibility of error. For that reason we break out local news programming and local public affairs programming separately in the appendix. As indicated in the appendix, local public affairs programming is a relatively small percentage of the total for each station measured. As such we anticipate that the totals were not meaningfully affected by certain judgments involved in the categorization process. The table which follows presents the results of the two measures of station output.

² We excluded from consideration all markets with four owned-and-operated stations. In most of those markets, there was no affiliate against which the O&O stations would compete. It is possible, however, that some of those markets may be sufficiently large that a network had both an O&O and an affiliate in operation.

Measures of Local News and Public Affairs Output

<u>Type of Station</u>	<u>Rating 5:30</u>	<u>Rating 6:00</u>	<u>Total hours</u>
Network O&O	6.9 [Avg. 7.2]	7.4	22.8
Affiliates	6.9 [Avg. 7.2]	7.6	18.5
 <i><u>Sub-Groups of Affiliates</u></i>			
<i>Newspaper- Aff'd</i>	7.8	8.2	21.9
<i>All Others</i>	5.7	6.7	14.9

C. RTNDA Awards

Review by industry peers is another way of assessing relative performance among industry participants. Industry peers have a detailed knowledge of the craft and often are in the best position to identify the most effective firms in their industry. RTNDA provides a nationally recognized forum to encourage excellence in radio and television news production. Moreover, as there are local, regional and national awards, many stations can be recognized in any one year. RTNDA issues these awards annually in national and regional competitions. Our sample includes the awards given in 2000 and 2001 in the top 50 markets, which corresponds to RTNDA's "large market" category of awards.

D. A. I. DuPont Awards

The A.I. DuPont Awards are given by the School of Journalism of Columbia University in the City of New York. DuPont Awards are given to a variety of news organizations based on overall excellence in programming. We consider only awards that were given to local commercial television stations. The awards are not given out in fixed numbers but instead vary annually. DuPont awards its Gold Baton and Silver Baton depending on its view of the recipient's performance. Since no local television station received a Gold Baton during the 1991-2002 time period, our survey is limited to the 40 Silver Baton awards given to commercial television stations throughout the United States during that time period.

News and Public Affairs Award Winners³

<u>Type of Station</u>	<u>RTDNA Winners</u>	<u>DuPont Winners</u>
Network O&O	126	337
Affiliates	96	77
<i>Sub-Groups of Affiliates</i>		
<i>Newspaper-Aff'd</i>	319	200
<i>Other Affiliates</i>	22	39

Note: A baseline score of 100 is the national average for each type of award.

III. REVIEW OF RESULTS

The data reviewed in this report suggest several things. First, with respect to our quality measurements, there is no meaningful difference between the performance of network O&Os and affiliates in the ratings of local evening newscasts. With respect to the receipt of local news excellence awards, however, our data indicate that O&Os experience greater success than do affiliates. Second, with regard to the total production of local news and public affairs programming, O&Os produce, on average, a greater quantity of such programming than do affiliates in markets where those two station types compete directly.

Second, within the overall category of network affiliates, there appears to be a systematic divergence between stations that are co-owned with a newspaper publisher relative to all other affiliates. For each quality and quantity measure in our analysis, the newspaper affiliates exceed the performance of other, non-newspaper network affiliates..

IV. LIMITATIONS OF THIS REPORT AND TOPICS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

³ The numbers reported are an index of the success of the stations in each category relative to the per-station average of awards for each award's sample base. The index is equal to 100 if the stations in the classification won an average proportion of the awards. If the stations won twice as many the index is 200. If the one one-half as many as an average station the index is 50.

While we have a high degree of confidence about the material contained within the four corners of this brief report, we wish to note some limitations and topics for further work. This study of necessity relies upon the data upon which it is based. Errors of computation and classification can be made despite our best efforts. To enhance the ease of testing our calculations, we have attached the data we used as four appendices to this study. We have used in this paper relatively simple quantitative methods of examining the data contained in the attached appendices. As such, extensions or modifications to the methodologies employed in this paper may permit additional or contrary findings to those discussed herein. As other papers prepared for this group demonstrate with respect to other questions, it is hoped that these techniques might contribute to the study of this topic.

V. APPENDICES

In order to enhance the readers' ability to review our results, we have attached the following data series.

A. The Network Served Markets Study

This set of data appears as Appendix A. We examined all markets that had at least one station owned by a major television network. We selected these markets because the effect, if any, of network ownership on local news and public affairs performance was a particular question to be addressed. For each station within a market we determined its owner, and assigned the owner to a category. We then generate for each station certain essential data. We reported the rating and share for both the 5:30 and 6:00 p.m. local news programs and the quantity of the local news and public affairs programming. We also estimated the quantity of locally produced public affairs programming. The table also provides a marker for market size.

B. The Radio and Television News Directors Awards

Peer review can be a valuable tool for assessing the quality of intellectual property. The television news and public affairs community has a number of awards for quality programming. The Radio and Television News Directors Association sponsors a set of national and regional awards for many aspects of news and local public affairs. The Edward R. Morrow awards are given annually at both the national and regional levels. The study looks at stations who received this award in 2000 and 2001. The list is reproduced as appendix B.

C. A.I. DuPont Awards

The DuPont Awards are administered by the graduate school of Journalism at Columbia University. The internet page of the awards, which is reproduced in the notes to appendix C, provides extensive detail on the program. We include this as another measure of the quality of local output. It is important to note that this study is not a study of all contributions to news and public affairs. Only programming produced by owned-and-operated local stations, and not by their network owners, was considered in this analysis. We also do not consider in this study the contributions of the Public Broadcast System and its member stations.

D. Station Classification

This study classifies television stations by various categories. Stations can be listed as network owned-and-operated stations or as affiliates. In addition, we subdivide affiliates into those stations held in common ownership with the publisher or one or more daily newspapers. We defined non-group owned as stations under common ownership with at most one other station. Appendix D lists all station groups sharing common ownership with a newspaper.