

Television Newscast Promotion, Marketing and Strategy

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Introduction

Perhaps no area of mass media marketing has generated more unresolved controversy than that of the strategic issues involved in the promotion and marketing of broadcast news (Barnow, 1966; Spragens, 1995). Issues of conflict between objective journalism or the role of the media as a “fourth estate” of government, and the marketing strategies required for audience acquisition, audience retention and revenue maximization during news programming appear in the very earliest literature of broadcasting and journalism (Lippmann, 1922). This conflict has spanned the spectrum of broadcast literature having been addressed in areas as diverse as foundational scholarly research (cf. Bogart, 1980) and serving as the fictional plot bases for such contemporary mainstream popular entertainment as the motion pictures “Network” and “Broadcast News” as well as episodes of television programs such as “The Mary Tyler Moore Show,” “WKRP,” “Murphy Brown” and “NewsRadio.”

Similarly the line between news and marketing within newscasts has been an issue of controversy since the very inception of broadcasting (Small, 1970). The separation between news content and marketing material in the form of both promotion and advertising has become even less distinct over time (Boorstin, 1961; Geller, 1996). Today news promotion is commonly presented as if it were news itself, especially when promoting subsequent news related programming. Is it news or a promotion, for example, when Peter Jennings tells his audience what is coming up on Nightline, Tom Brokaw spends a minute describing a new week-long investigative series, or the local 6pm anchor teases a new story for the 11pm newscast?

One potent sign of this blurred relationship between promotion and news can be found in the trainings offered during professional meetings (Richter, 1997). For example, recent Radio-Television News Directors Association (RTNDA) and Promax/BDA conventions have offered such news promotion-oriented topics as, “News & Promotion: Creating a Winning Team,” “News Promos That Make Your Audience Laugh . . . And Your Competitor’s Weep” and “Three Steps to Winning the Late Night News War: From Positioning Your Late News Attributes To Maintaining All-Out Episodic/Topical Blitzes” (RTNDA, 1997, 1999, Promax, 1999). Such conference topics illustrate the industry’s recognition of the importance of positioning and promoting.

After a brief review of current U. S. industry practices related to news promotion, this chapter examines some of the most relevant research about television newscasting and applies its results to station and network news promotion. This section is followed by a detailed review of those studies that deal directly with television newscast promotion. Next the chapter presents a recent content analysis of local television news promotion and closes with an extended discussion of the questions future news promotion research might address and the significance of these questions to both industry and scholarly perspectives.

Newscast promotion practices

For the vast majority of television stations offering local news, the newscast itself has become the primary tool for creating the station's overall brand image (Minnucci, 1991). This newscast-created brand serves as the benchmark for the station's overall marketing strategy. Often station newscasters are used in promotions as human manifestations of the desired brand image of the station itself. Likewise, promotion within a newscast is likely to be perceived as more credible than promotion offered within entertainment programming. Some advertising professionals actually prefer a news environment for their commercials (Buzzard, 1990). The same effect holds true for promos, which are basically commercials for the station itself. Synergistic effects have been demonstrated between the commercial announcement and newscast program material. This effect is typically found in heightened audience attentiveness during news-related programming, and increased subsequent recall (Buchman, 1999; Warner & Buchman, 1993). Making use of a newscast environment for promotional purposes is not limited to broadcasters within the United States. A five year study of the CNN World Report found international broadcasters tend to choose stories that, in effect, market their nations to potential tourists and investors by presenting their nations in a more favorable light (Lee, Akgan & Flournoy, 1997).

The extraordinarily low production cost of news programming, on average one-tenth the cost of a network dramatic or sit-com series, provides a powerful monetary incentive to broadcasters to tailor some news programming, or programming positioned-as-news, to advertiser and audience desires (Kneale, 1989). Active promotion becomes the means for gathering the audiences for those advertisers. In recent years, stations and networks have adopted audience-flow strategies that encourage a seamless transition from daypart to daypart, from program type to program type and thus from entertainment to news, and news back to entertainment (Eastman & Ferguson, 1996). One method to encourage audience flow employed by the television networks has been to minimize the abruptness of program transitions (Eastman, Newton, Riggs, and Neal-Lunsford, 1997). As adapted by local stations, this strategy can be seen in the transformation news teasers, and to some degree the newscast itself, into a kind of program-transition friendly infotainment (Sherman, 1995). Some stations appear to have intentionally blurred the lines of distinction between program content and promotion (McDaniel, 1997). Some marketers have sought to take advantage of the desire for more entertaining information in newscasts by offering VNRs (Video News Releases) to local stations. In practice, the VNR has become a method for, in effect, planting PR material within television newscasts (Vine, 1983). The vast majority of news consumers are caught unaware of the original source of the VNR. Some of which, while presented as unbiased information, is likely to have been supplied by a marketing professional and designed to achieve specific advertising and promotional goals.

Another method for inserting marketing communications within newscast presented information has been through the creation of what have been termed "pseudo-events." A pseudo-event is one created with explicit promotional or advertising goals and designed to bias the news judgment of station gatekeepers at times convenient for live-broadcast or videotaping by local television news crews (Boorstin, 1961; Peale & Harmon, 1991). On-air promotion of news also typically takes advantage of the audience's preference for visuals, and in a promo there is little time to separate hard news from pseudo-events. The best visuals often dominate the spot.

Newscast Audience Research

Many factors are known to influence viewer choice of a newscast. In addition to the appeal (or lack thereof) of a particular night's stories, other non-topical news-related factors include the nature of the station-created images of the personalities of the newscasters and reporters; the tenure of the newscasters, reporters, and station in the market; past professional recognition and awards earned or won by the station; issues related to state-of-the-art technology; and the station's record of timeliness of delivery of past breaking news

events. The specification of such identifiable benefits of newscast consumption as those detailed above has been identified as one of the primary keys to effective promotion (Crippens, Sutton & Eastman, 1991; Weisberg, 1991). However, little scholarly attention has been paid to factors external to the newscast itself (Bryant & Zillmann, 1986).

The vast majority of promotion-related mass media newscast research, both within industry and scholarly venues, has focused primarily on factors-within-the-newscast that indirectly or directly lead to audience involvement, audience size maximization, and revenue maximization. The internal factors examined include, story placement, audio/video redundancy, story format, presentation style, use of graphics, story length, and issues related to perceptions of the personalities of the newscasters. External-to-the-newscast variables, such as station on-air promotion activity both within and external to the newscast itself, and off-air marketing strategies including the effects of external media campaign strategies, have to date been virtually ignored in peer-reviewed scholarly literature.

The Focus on Audience Size

Nearly two decades ago, (Poltrack, 1983) identified the temptation to focus on audience size and revenue maximization over objective reportage as being driven in part by high station monetary demands and personal managerial career stakes, two pressures that have intensified in the past two decades. News professionals and station management must achieve ever more demanding ratings and revenue success to be assured of their own job security. Minnucci (1991) reported that the promotion of local newscasts has a higher priority than the promotion of any other form of programming on local television stations.

Unlike academic researchers, television news consultants and other television industry researchers have focused primarily on the relationship between newscast elements and demographic target audience size maximization. Industry research has tended to examine the effects of such characteristics as, audience perceptions of newscaster and reporter personality type (or Q-ratings), station newsgathering credibility, station branding or image creation, and multidimensional perceptual mapping of station newscast position relative to other stations in the market.

Just as the economics of program production drove local stations to affiliate with networks in the 1920s, the research demands for effective local news production and delivery have driven local stations to affiliate with news consultants. The news consultantancy market in the United States is dominated by four firms, Frank Magid & Associates, Audience Research & Development, McHugh-Hoffman, and Broadcast Image Group (Jacobs, 1999). Most television stations offering locally produced newscasts enter into an exclusive long-term contract with one of these news research and consulting firms (Ferguson & Moses, 1999). News consultants tend to emphasize “presentation over news content” and a commonality in station positioning strategies across local markets (Blumenthal & Goodenough, 1991; Harmon, 1989). Over time the impact of news consultants has been to create a striking cross-market similarity in the presentation and promotion of local news.

Effects and Motivational Research

While industry researchers have tended to be driven by an examination of variables directly affecting target audience size maximization, scholarly studies have tended to focus on the more traditional human subjects dependent measures first developed by psychologists. The preponderance of academic studies examine audience effects of, and self-reported perceived motivations for, self-selected or experimenter-manipulated mass media news exposure. Specific variables examined have included, viewer uses and gratifications-sought, audience activity and involvement, effects of congruent and non-congruent audio and video information, viewer affective response and recall of information as a result of the experimental manipulation of various experimenter-created fictitious newscast elements, audience

motivations, issue-conflict, agenda building and agenda setting functions. This section briefly reviews those foundational studies that have specific implications for research into news promotion. A summary of the most relevant of the following studies is offered in Table 9.1.

Order Effects Research

An experimental study by Lang (1987) examined the relationship between the order of the presentation of information within broadcast news stories and news consumer recall of salient information. Two news reports within an experimenter-produced newscast were manipulated into either a chronological presentation or a typical “broadcast style” (non-chronological) presentation. Dependent measures included unaided and two forms of aided recall of newscast story report topics and within-story-report facts. Results of this study indicate that a chronological news story presentation dramatically increases the news-consumer’s short-term ability to recall information from the newscast. Traditional broadcast-style newscast story presentation (non-chronological) was shown to be less efficient at fostering short-term recall. Likewise, Gunter (1985a) identified narrative structure as an important variable in news consumer recall. Narrative versions of stories are remembered better than standard broadcast style presentations.

Gunter (1985b) examined the serial position effect in relation to newscast structure and packaging. Results indicated that news consumers tended to remember the last stories in the newscast best, the first stories intermediately and the middle-of-newscast stories worst. However, consistent with Brosius (1991), emotional stories and stories with compelling video were shown to overcome the serial position effect. Clustering similar stories was shown to enhance confusion, likewise supporting a mixed-format presentation style.

These findings demonstrate the effectiveness of chronological or narrative presentation in subsequent aided and unaided viewer recall. While the experimenter-manipulated newscast stories were significantly longer than a typical station promo (150 seconds v. 30 seconds), the study suggests that a chronological presentation of on-air promotion elements will aid potential newscast consumer recall of gratifications-promised within the promotion campaign for the subsequent newscast itself. In other words, promotion copy appeals should remain chronological (“Tonight Channel-4 brings you ‘A,’ then ‘B,’ then ‘C.’) rather than typical broadcast style (“A big story tonight in sports, but first we’ll give you news from Washington and the local weather forecast.”).

An experimental study by Brosius (1991) examined newscast presentation style on the comprehension of television news. The two variables manipulated were talking head v. video-clip formatted presentations, and mixed (some talking head and some video) v. same-format (either all talking head or all video). Results indicated that recall was best for mixed format newscast presentations. In the same format condition, video presentation recall scores were higher than for the talking heads condition. The implications for station promotion campaign design are somewhat less clear due to the significant difference in duration between newscasts and on-air promos. It is doubtful if the presentation of both video clips and talking heads within a single promo can similarly enhance recall or overall promotion effectiveness, especially in promos with durations of 30 seconds or less. However, the results of this study, especially in relation to other concordant research, suggest a variety of promotional appeals and styles, within a coordinated overall campaign strategy, is likely to prove more effective than a single style- or single appeal-based campaign.

Human Exemplars Research

Many studies have shown the apparent impact of marketing-related goals on television news content, where emphasis is given to those newscast stories which lend themselves to visual depictions over those which do not (Brosius, 1991; Cross, 1983; Findahl, 1981; Gunter, 1979, 1980). One common form of visual imagery is found in the use of “exemplars,” or

human examples, over baseline statistics and other non-visual content (Aust & Zillmann, 1996; Zillmann, Gibson, Ordman & Aust, 1994). These studies showed a heightened awareness of information related by or about the human exemplar over all other sources of information within television news broadcasts. A typical study might experimentally manipulate a story within a newscast related to recent damage from an earthquake. In one condition statistics relating the number of people killed, the magnitude of the quake, the dollar amount of damage, the size of the area affected and the like would be presented. In a second condition, the story would focus on a brief interview with a victim (human exemplar) of the earthquake. Subsequent recall measures would typically show greater information retention from the story which focused on the human exemplar.

From a news promotion perspective, these studies suggest the importance of the using of actual viewers as human exemplars in station promotions. Rather than show the journalistic awards won by the station or statistics regarding the accuracy of station weather forecasts, promos which focus on viewers who benefit in some direct way from the station's newscast would most likely prove more effective. Specific examples include promos which depict viewers who avoided a flood due to a newscast warning, finding a way to address a governmental concern due to an investigative report or having a special vacation thanks to the station's week long travel feature.

Viewer Activity Level Research

In a study by Rubin and Perse (1987, see also Perse's Chapter 2 in this book) the nature of television newscast consumer activity levels was explored in detail. Two non-discrete news-consumption orientations emerged in the forms of instrumental and ritualized news consumption. The instrumental orientation was characterized by more active television news viewing behavior. They also related positively to perceived news realism, affinity, intentionality and involvement. On the other hand, those television news consumers with a ritualized orientation tended to be motivated by habitual behavior and time-consuming or time-passing viewing patterns. Ritualized-consumption was negatively related to news affinity, selectivity, and intentionality, and positively related to co-viewing distractions. Ritualized-oriented news consumers tended to focus on filling time regardless of newscast content. The results of the Rubin and Perse (1987) study are consistent with the theory that media uses and effects are at least in part a function of audience activity level. This study also indicates that the activity of news consumption relates in largely predictable ways to media use motives and attitudes. The instrumental news consumption orientation was shown to be consistent with prior expectancy-value uses and gratifications research, such as those by Palmgreen (1984) and Palmgreen & Rayburn (1979).

In their 1987 study, Rubin and Perse point out that the ritualized and instrumental orientations are not discrete classifications. Their results suggest that promotional campaigns will likely prove most effective when targeted to the fulfillment of the gratifications-sought by prospective news consumers along the full range of target-audience activity level, from fully ritualized (inactive) to fully instrumental (active).

Affecting the behavior of low-involvement or low activity consumers is a difficult goal to achieve in all forms of product and service marketing, and especially so for intangible services such as broadcasting (Hawkins, Best & Coney, 1997). However, the extant behavior of those potential viewers who tend toward low-activity, ritualized orientations is likely to be reinforced by marketing strategies equivalent to those used to increase product brand loyalty among low-involvement consumers. On-air promotional campaign reinforcement of well established behavioral patterns may well appeal to news consumers with a ritualized orientation. Station newscast loyalty among ritualized news consumers can become to some degree a function of marketing-reinforced behavior over time. Copy appeals such as, "Stay with Channel 11, we'll continue to give you everything you've come to expect." are likely to appeal to viewers in a passive news-consumption orientation.

Those potential newscast consumers who tend toward a more active instrumental orientation tend to be motivated primarily by the “perceived realism” of the newscast. These news viewers appear similar to high-involvement, low brand loyalty product consumers. To attract news consumers with this orientation, promotional elements with documentary or pseudo-documentary visual depictions would likely prove most effective. Perceptions of news realism will likely be enhanced by promotional campaign elements including live remotes, interviews with victim-exemplars, and opinions offered by as wide a variety as possible of political, scientific, religious and educational authority figures or opinion leaders. Stations desiring to build brand loyalty among potential newscast consumers with an instrumental orientation will likely be best served not only by positioning their newscast as the “most real” but also by repositioning their competitors as out of touch, behind the times, superficial, etc. Promotional themes appealing to these viewers are likely to include phrases such as, “Channel 4 gives it to you as it is, real, live, raw, unedited coverage of Anytown,” or “While the others are still playing with their editing decks, we’re on the air, live and unrehearsed. Get real, and get real news with Channel 4.”

In a series of subsequent studies, Perse (1990a, 1990b, & 1990c) examined audience involvement as a function of both cognitive and affective dimensions. Again, two non-discrete orientations to television news consumption were determined and evaluated. These emerged as utilitarian and diversionary news consumption orientations. Utilitarian news television consumption was associated with “higher cognitive involvement and feelings of anger” during newscast exposure. Diversionary television news consumption was associated with “feeling happy” during newscast exposure. Just as with other well-established psychographic measures such as SRI’s VALS II (Stanford Research Institute Values and Lifestyles), promotion campaign strategies can be developed to appeal to identifiable news-consumer targets along the full range of the diversionary to utilitarian news-gratifications-sought orientations. Promised gratification within promotional campaign elements may include appeals to concurrent and post-exposure positive affective diversionary states (e.g. “Watch Channel 4 and we’ll bring you a touching story of love you’ll never forget.”), as well as appeals to cognitive gratifications (e.g. “Watch Channel 4 and impress your boss (spouse, kids, etc) with all you’ve learned.”). Utilitarian affective states associated with anger, such as, “We’ll show you something on tonight’s Newscast-4 that’ll really leave you steamed,” can likewise be developed as part of the overall mix of a strategic station marketing plan targeted to each identified news-consumer orientation.

In a subsequent extension of this research, Perse (1990c) found the utilitarian instrumental orientated viewers reported feelings of parasocial interaction (pseudo-friendship) between viewers and their marketing-enhanced, self-created perceptions of the station newscasters. News consumer affective responses of pseudo-friendship with station personalities were first thought to be a function of social isolation (Horton & Wohl, 1956; Rubin, Perse & Powell, 1985). However, later studies have indicated that parasocial interaction as expressed in a form of pseudo-friendship toward television personalities is a common form of viewer affective response to prolonged television exposure (Perse & Rubin, 1989). Unlike diversionary viewers, those news consumers seeking useful information (utilitarian viewers) were linked more strongly to affective responses typified by feelings of anger. These differences in viewer affective states support the theory that pre-exposure viewing-gratifications-sought strongly influence television news consumers’ post-exposure affective states.

Promotional strategies directed at potential news consumers seeking gratification in the form of parasocial interaction could heighten the sense of pseudo-friendship with copy explicating the nature of a variety of idealized parasocial relationships (e.g. “With Kelsey Newscaster, you’ve got a true friend on Channel 4,” “Isn’t it good to know that you are a special part of our Newscast 4 family,” or, “Together with the Newscast 4 family, we make a terrific team.”).

On-air promotion campaigns can be designed to reach each involvement orientation by using targeted program placement strategies. Utilitarian-oriented news consumers are likely to self-select exposure to other news and information-oriented programming where “learning-gratifications-promised” news promotion campaigns can be placed for maximum effectiveness. Likewise diversionary-oriented news consumers are likely to self-select other types of entertainment programs. Newscast promos with a “feel-good gratifications-promised” appeal are likely to prove most effective in reaching diversionary-oriented news consumers when placed within these types of programs.

Image Research

An experimental study by Leshner, Reeves and Nass (1998) investigated audience perceptions of newscasts as a function of two differentiated channel images presented to subjects prior to exposure. Subjects were informed of each channels’ brand. The two channels were branded as being exemplary in either “specialist” or “generalist” approaches to their news coverage. While program presentation across channels was identical, as predicted, those channels presented prior to exposure as “specialist” scored higher on perceptions of “news attributes” than channels branded prior to exposure as generalist. The authors conclude, “This pattern of results is consistent with the notion of channel as a place where television programs — and the people and action in them — exist (p. 28).

This research illustrates a fundamental axiom of marketing, that perception creates the consumer’s experience of reality (cf. Kotler, 1996). Potential news consumers who, prior to exposure, were led to perceive a given channel as “specialized” in certain news attributes, following exposure, rated the news elements of the specialized channel higher on a variety of measures than they rated the “generalist” channels. The implications for promotional strategy are apparent. Potential newscast consumers who are led prior to consumption to perceive a station’s newscast as excelling in some comparative dimension, largely without regard to the actual newscast content, will act to avoid cognitive dissonance by seeking consistency between their a-priori perception and post-exposure evaluation of the experience. Promotional appeals can be designed to reduce the potential for cognitive dissonance by reinforcing desired news consumer pre- and post-exposure perceptual consistency. Copy appeals can be designed to accentuate the gratifications-promised from the desired comparative through the use of superlative expressions such as, “When you make the choice to watch Newscast-8, you know you’ll experience the very best local news coverage.”

In a pioneering study by Newhagen & Reeves (1992), newscast consumers were exposed to a variety of compelling negative news images within newscast stories. Dependent measures included recall for both visually and aurally presented material. Recall for visually presented information in newscasts was shown to be improved during and following compelling negative images in news stories. Recall for visual information presented before compelling negative images and memory for audio information before and during the compelling negative images was shown to be worse. Each of a series of studies by Newhagen & Reeves (1992); Lang, Newhagen & Reeves (1996) and Newhagen (1998) that examined news consumer recall for stories that induce negative affective states found the recall highest for stories that induce a variety of negative emotional states.

In Newhagen (1998), recall following the induction of the specific affective states of anger, fear and disgust were analyzed. Recall was found to be highest for information associated with the induction of anger, intermediate for fear and lowest for newscast presentations inducing disgust. Remarkably, in this study the author explicitly states one implication for station marketing campaign strategies involving the placement of promotional and commercial material. The author concludes, “The implications of the study also have bearing on news story production strategies. . . . producers can use . . . (images that elicit fear and anger) to first draw attention to a story, and then insert information they think viewers will want to remember right after them (p. 274).” This study suggests that news consumer recall will be highest for promotional material placed immediately after program material which elicits a news viewer affective state of anger. Recall should also be somewhat

enhanced for promotional material placed immediately after program material that elicits an affective state of fear. Program material that elicits an affective response of disgust may tend to cause the news consumer to “simply turn away from news, political spots or public service announcements (p. 274).” This “turning away” may come in the form of a cognitive or emotional disconnect from the program presentation, or manifest itself in the behavior of changing channels. Newhagen concludes, “Thus a producer’s intuition that information worth remembering should go after images evoking disgust may be exactly the wrong strategy (p. 275).”

Audio/Visual Congruency Research

In a series of studies by Brosius (1989), Drew & Grimes (1989), Graber (1990), Brosius (1993) and Crigler, Just & Neuman (1994), stories with visual depictions were found to cause increased recall and comprehension of newscast story information. Brosius, Donsbach & Birk (1996) compared stories where the video illustrated the audio, was mildly related to the audio, was not related to the audio, or was absent (audio only). As predicted, results demonstrated the highest recall level for the exposure condition where the audio and video were redundant. These studies suggest that station marketing and promotion campaigns should make use of graphic visual depictions with redundant audio. In essence, simplistic production values are likely to prove most effective. More discordant or complex promotion campaign approaches, with discrete audio and video presentation, are less likely to generate sufficient recall to motivate program sampling.

A study by Edwardson, Kent, Engstrom, & Hofmann (1992) examined the relationship between recall of audio-presented information and video changes in television news. Their results indicated that introducing graphics into news stories decreased memory for the simultaneous audio information. However, graphics-enhanced newscast stories resulted in increased overall recall for the story, and news consumers’ self-reported enjoyment and overall comprehension of the stories. Thorson & Lang (1992) examined the effects of television graphics and lecture familiarity on adult orienting responses and memory. This study looked at memory for both the verbal and visual content of messages before, during, and after the appearance of a redundant videographic. Results indicated that when the topic of the story was unfamiliar or complex, the videographic reduced recall for information presented while the graphic was on screen. When the content was familiar or simplistic, recall ability was increased for information presented during the videographic. The results of these two independent studies suggest the use of videographics within news promotion campaigns should be limited to those portions of the on-air promo that present the most familiar or simplistic information. The portion of the promotion campaign that requires the presentation of unfamiliar or more complex material is likely to be served without the use of any simultaneous presentations of videographic information.

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News Humor Research

Zillmann, Gibson, Ordman & Aust, (1994) examined the effects on news consumer perceptions of the entire newscast of ending a newscast with either an upbeat or humorous story. In an experimental study newscast consumers were exposed to newscasts which concluded with one of three variables, a humorous story, a human-interest story, or no additional story. Results indicated that news consumers’ perceptions of the entire newscast were affected by the affective state induced by the last story. In the humorous-newscast-ending story condition, earlier newscast stories were perceived as less important or less severe than in the other two exposure conditions. Results of this study indicate that news consumers’ perceptions of the entire newscast can be affected by the emotional state induced by the last story in the newscast. Use of a humorous story in the humorous-newscast-ending story condition, caused earlier stories, and thus the newscast itself, to be perceived as less important. Portions of the overall promotion campaign designed to appeal to diversionary

oriented prospective news consumers may benefit from the use of humor within on-air station promotion. That portion of the promotion campaign designed to target prospective newscast viewers with instrumental or utilitarian orientations is not likely to be served by a humorous approach.

Use of Victim Exemplars in Newscasts

Aust and Zillmann (1996) examined the effects of the use of victim exemplification in television news on newscast consumer perceptions of problem severity, likelihood of local involvement and probability of personal risk. The three exposure conditions manipulated were, newscast presentations without victim exemplification, newscast-presentations-with-unemotional-victim-exemplification, and newscast-presentations-with-emotional-victim-exemplification. Results indicated that the use of emotional victims increased news consumer's assessment of problem severity, perceived probability of risk-to-self and sense-of-distress. In another experimental study by Aust & Zillmann (1996), the use in television news stories of victim-exemplars was demonstrated to have a significant effect on news consumer perceptions of the degree of importance of the issues examined in the report. Consistent with advertising research that indicates the effectiveness of the use of human spokespersons over impersonal, factual presentations (cf. Wells, Burnett & Moriarty, 1998), this study suggests the potential effectiveness of the use of human exemplars in station promotional campaigns. The recruitment of station newscast consumer exemplars who can deliver credible copy such as, "I watched Newscast-4's feature on car safety and it saved my life," or "If I hadn't been watching Newscast-8 when they flashed that tornado warning, I'd have been blown away with my house," is suggested by the results of this study.

Research on Newscast Promotion

In a pioneering study by Schleuder & White (1989), the effects of newscast teasers used within the network newscasts of ABC, CBS and NBC were examined. Results of this study indicated that news consumers paid more attention to and had heightened recall for the verbal information presented in those newscast stories that had been promoted in teasers prior to the story presentation. Cameron, Schleuder & Thornton (1991) significantly extended the prior study by examining the impact of news teaser placement prior to a commercial break, or pod, on viewer processing of the commercials. News teasers immediately prior to a pod acted in part to separate the commercial pod and the newscast into two discrete units. This strategy for news teaser placement appears to enhance primacy and recency effects on news viewer recall. In this study, verbal recognition of the first commercial in the pod and visual recognition of the last commercial in the pod were enhanced in the split-pod condition.

In an extension to the Schleuder & White (1989) study, Schleuder, White & Cameron (1993) examined the priming effects of within-newscast television news promotion on newscast consumer attention and memory. Using the spreading activation model of information processing (Berkowitz & Rogers, 1986), the study examined the effects of bumpers (typically a verbal "table of contents" presented at the beginning of a newscast, sometimes with an accompanying videographic) and teasers (pre-commercial highlights of coming attractions).

The results of this study indicated that news stories that included teasers, or bumpers and teasers, were attended to more than news stories that had neither bumpers nor teasers. However, those stories that had been promoted by bumpers alone, did not receive more attention. Memory of information that had been presented verbally in the story was better for news reports that had been promoted by bumpers, teasers, or both.

Chang (1998) examined the effects of news teasers on news consumer processing of television news. Experimental manipulation created four discrete types of news teasers along the two dimensions of program reference (presence v. absence) and style (talking head v.

visual). Four experimental hypotheses were tested. (H1) the presence of a news teaser in the commercial break of the program preceding the newscast will increase viewer recall and (H2) comprehension of the news story teased. (H3) the order of effectiveness of the different types of news teasers on viewer recall and (H4) viewer comprehension will be: program-referred with visual, program referred with talking-head, non-program referred with visual, non-program referred with talking head. Recall was measured with a factual, three question, multiple-choice questionnaire. Comprehension was measured with an inferential, three question, multiple-choice questionnaire.

Consistent with expectations, the presence of a news teaser prior to the newscast enhanced news consumer recall and comprehension as measured by the questionnaires. However, no effects were demonstrated for the interaction of program reference and style. Overall, this study serves to reinforce prior research on the causal relationship between newscast promotion exposure and news consumer recall, attentiveness and comprehension.

A content analysis of television newscasts by Peale and Harmon (1991), primarily designed to explicate non-promotional newscast characteristics such as story length, geographic orientation, story voice and story initiative, also controlled for "other production elements" that encroached on the actual newshole of a newscast. These other production elements included "transitions," "teasers" and "promotions." Each of these elements were coded identically as "bumpers." The authors found that, while not statistically significant, "The use of bumpers proved to be a fairly clear consultant marker (p. 7)." The reliability of the marker was heightened for those stations consulted by Audience Research & Development and Frank N. Magid Associates which used bumpers extensively. Stations consulted by Primo Newservice used bumpers much less frequently, while non-consulted stations did not use a single bumper. Interestingly, the authors found few other differences among consulted and non-consulted newscasts concluding, "This tendency . . . may be a result of what Harmon (1989) described as the 'cross-pollination effect' [that] leads to local TV newscasts of very predictable style and content (p. 7)."

A Content Analysis of Local News Promotion

The above literature identifies some of the more salient of a plethora of research studies that have served to explore a variety of effects of television news consumption. Studies typically have examined either producer-controlled news variables on news consumers within experimental environments, or survey-based self-reports of the motivational and personality influences on news consumption patterns. No prior research has specifically explicated the quantity, style or content of television industry news promotion.

The study reported here examined the nature and content of local television news promotion within news lead-in programming for two hours prior to and then within, the local early evening news broadcasts of 36 network-affiliated commercial television stations in nine US television markets. Specific variables measured included: the total commercial minutes available for newscast promotion in the two hours prior to the newscast, the scheduling patterns of newscast promos prior to the newscast, the total duration of pre-newscast promotion, the scheduling patterns and duration of within-newscast promotion both within the newscast presentation itself and within commercial breaks within the newshole, and the copy and viewer-appeal persuasion strategies used.

Method

A convenience sample of ten markets was chosen based on the ease of access to volunteers for simultaneous videotaping of all network-affiliated stations offering local newscasts in the market. Each station in each of the ten markets was videotaped at approximately the same time, on the same mid-week weekday afternoon in early March 1999. Taping occurred for at least two hours prior to and then during the early evening local

newscast. One market was eliminated from the study due to the apparent loss of the tapes in transit¹. Another station market was re-recorded on the next day (also a mid-week, weekday) due to technical difficulties with the original recording. In all 38 tapes were returned, with approximately 10,925 minutes of total video, of which approximately 6480 minutes were subjected to content analysis. In each case, tapes were cued to the beginning of the early evening local news, and then rewound 120 minutes. For those tapes with program content at that point, the content analysis began. Those tapes with non-program (commercial or promotional content) at the minus 120 minute mark were rewound to the beginning of the commercial pod and the content analysis began from there.

Three types of coders were recruited and trained. The first set of coders were trained in the process for screening the tapes, in the simple recognition of newscast and other station promotional material, in the logging of the time of broadcast of all commercial pods (in minutes prior to the newscast) and promotional content within the pods, and in the dubbing of all potential promotional material to a set of promotion-only master tapes. The second set of coders was trained in the analysis of promotional material by persuasive appeal and presentation format. The third set of coders was trained in the analysis of promotional material within the newscast itself (teasers, bumpers, comments by anchors and reporters), exclusive of pre-produced promos presented within the commercial pods, the latter having been analyzed by the second set of coders.

Each screening coder was equipped with both a VHS playback and a VHS record deck. To maintain distinctions among stations and markets, prior to dubbing station materials, screening coders dubbed a short slate with the station's call letters and market, from a pre-recorded VHS set of videotaped slates. As each commercial pod was encountered, the screening coders made note of the time of the beginning and ending of the pod and then rewound the tape to dub all station promos (newscast, program and station image) to the promotion master tape in the record deck for later evaluation. Due to time and budget constraints, all program material was scanned by the screeners in fast-forward with the exception of program end-credits, which were viewed in normal speed and occasionally contained audio-only, voice-over promos. All commercial pods were evaluated by the screening coders at standard speed, sometimes more than once. Over 280 minutes of commercial pod and end credits video and audio were dubbed by the screening coders for subsequent evaluation by the content coders. Of this 280 minutes material recorded to the promotion master tape, approximately 262 minutes depicted actual station promotions, the remaining 18 minutes consisting of station program material immediately adjacent to the commercial pods.

Using the duration information collected by the screening coders, pre-newscast news promotion durations were calculated by station, network affiliation, and market; and for each 15-minute time block prior to the newscast and subjected to a chi square analysis. Durations of newscast promotion were calculated as both a percentage of total station promotion duration (news, program and image promotion) and as a percentage of total commercial availability (total pod duration).

An initial content coding scheme based on newscast motivations noted in prior research and established promotion appeals identified in advertising literature was developed. Following content coder training, a trial phase content analysis was conducted. Content coders evaluated 45 randomly selected station promos by type of appeal and presentation format into 20 categories. Intercoder reliability during the trial phase reached 96.4 percent.

Following minor modifications to the content coding schema, content coders evaluated the master promotion tapes and coded both the persuasive appeal (topical, pseudo-friendship, ritualized-pass-time, diversionary-"feel happy," utilitarian-cognitive appeals, utilitarian-anger appeals, instrumental-nontopical "news-realism," humor, call-to-action, newscaster biography, and gratitude) and presentation format (full-screen audio and video, audio-only, video-only and split-screen).

Finally, the third group of coders examined the station newscasts and coded promotional presentations within the newscast, exclusive of those within commercial pods. These promotional announcements included bumpers and teasers, promotion-oriented videographics, audio-only voice overs, and “pseudo-news” promotions typically delivered by anchors in curt phrases such as, “We’ll check back with (reporter’s name) on that story at the end of this newscast,” “All this week we’re covering (name of issue),” and “We’ll have more tonight on (name of station’s late local newscast).”

Results

Results of the pre-newscast screening indicate approximately half of all promos aired in the two hours prior to local evening news broadcasts are news promos, representing about ten percent of total station commercial availabilities. Stations in the sample, without regard to network affiliation or market size, devoted a remarkably consistent 20 percent of total on-air avails to promos.

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INSERT TABLE 9.3 ABOUT HERE
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Average station durations of within-newscast promotions are reported in Table 9.4. Consistent with the pre-newscast content analysis, results of the within-newscast analysis indicate over nine percent of commercial avails are devoted to newscast promotion (see Table 9.5). Similarly, approximately nine percent of the newscast, exclusive of commercial pods, is devoted to the presentation of identifiable promotional material. Some newscast presentations were not easily classified into discrete news or promotional presentation categories. One station offered a news story of its own success in a local community charity drive. Another covered one of its reporters accepting a community-service award on behalf of the station. For purposes of this analysis these stories and other similar content was coded as news. While not directly a part of this study, results indicate less than sixty percent of the early-evening newshole offered by local stations contains actual news. Over forty percent of the station newsholes examined in this study was devoted to commercial and promotional material.

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INSERT TABLE 9.4 ABOUT HERE
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INSERT TABLE 9.5 ABOUT HERE
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Results of the persuasive-appeal content coding are reported in Table 9.6. By far the vast majority of station news promotion, approaching seventy percent, contains topical information about imminent newscasts. However, not all topical promos target the next-to-be-broadcast newscast. A significant quantity (over 14 percent) contain vertical promotions for the late local news, early morning news and, in a handful of cases, the noon newscast. A relative minority (less than 6 percent) offer horizontal promotion for feature stories to be offered during the early-evening newscast later in the week.

Among non-topical news promos, the largest percentage highlight an appeal consonant with a topical-appeal strategy in the form of generic news-realism-based appeals. An appeal to news-realism was identified by Rubin & Perse (1987) as a function of an instrumental (high activity) orientation to news consumption. Brief biographies of station newscasters (including sportscasters, weathercasters and reporters) were evidenced in approximately six percent of station promos. Utilitarian appeals combined for approximately ten percent of total promos, with slightly more than half enticing potential newscast consumers to experience some form of anger over a soon to be broadcast story of injustice. Slightly half of utilitarian appeals offered a cognitive-based appeal in the form of a promise to learn something of value from a given story in the newscast or from the viewing of the overall newscast itself. Other identified persuasive appeals included humor (4 percent), appeal to pseudo-friendship with one or more station newscasters (3 percent), and a promise of “happy feelings” (3 percent). Approximately three percent of station promos invited some form of call to action on the part of potential news consumers. Typical appeals included, “You’ll want to call your Representative in Congress after you hear tonight’s report on (subject matter),” and “A recall on a popular toy. You’ll want to take yours back first thing tomorrow morning after you see our report tonight on (name of local newscast).” Other less common persuasive appeals included promos extolling the station’s technical superiority (1 percent), and awards (1 percent). Nearly all newscasts ended with a brief expression of appreciation such as, “Thank-you for watching (name of newscast).” These appeals were coded as “gratitude” and comprised approximately one percent of total station news promotion. As might be expected, no appeals to “pass time” or diversionary viewing motives were noted in any station promos.

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 INSERT TABLE 9.6 ABOUT HERE
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Table 9.7 identifies the characteristics of identifiable news promotion presentation strategies. Consistent with studies noting the importance of congruent audio and video presentation on news-viewer recall (cf. Brosius, Donsbach & Birk, 1996), the vast majority of station news promotions (89 percent) were full-screen audio and video presentations. Approximately eight percent of news promotion depictions offered split-screens, typically with program-end-credits scrunched into a nearly unreadable glob to one side of the screen. While the split-screen presentation format risks viewer distraction due to the negative effects of non-congruent presentation on recall as identified in prior research, the likely intent of such split-screen formatting is to minimize the distraction and focus the viewer’s attention on the promotional presentation, while minimally meeting station commitments to program providers. While somewhat more common in frequency of use, audio-only promotions over end credits were typically very short in length and thus comprised only about two percent of total news promotion as a percentage of total promotion duration. Video-only news promotion presentations were rarely used (1 percent), and coders noted in comments that at least some of the video-only presentations appeared to be due to station technical difficulties with the audio.

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 INSERT TABLE 9.7 ABOUT HERE
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Discussion

As expected, the results of this study are an indication of the priority that commercial television stations place on news promotion as the primary vehicle for the creation of the core branding strategy of the station. As demonstrated by the current data, news promotion is a substantial portion not only of overall station promotion activity, but also of the content of the broadcast of the newscast itself. Consistent with theories of the efficiency of a free marketplace, newscast on-air marketing strategies appear to reflect, at least in part, academic

research on potential news consumer motivations and viewing orientations (Shimp, 1997). The instrumental, utilitarian and pseudo-friendship appeals identified in prior research are clearly reflected in the content analysis of news promotion offered in this study.

However several significant limitations should be considered in any attempt to generalize or apply the results of this study. Most importantly, it should be noted that data collection occurred late in the first quarter of the broadcast fiscal year, a time when commercial inventory pressures are likely to be at or near their lowest levels (Warner & Buchman, 1993). Stations typically respond to increases in demand not only by raising rate levels, but also by a reduction in promotion-scheduling commitments. Thus, the annual average commitment to promos as a percentage of total station commercial availability is likely to be somewhat less than the approximately twenty-percent identified in this study, and annual news promotion commitments less than the identified ten-percent of total avails.

Time-of-day inventory pressures may likewise affect the ability to generalize from this study. Station inventory pressures are not only seasonal, but also vary significantly with daypart, with highest pressure on inventory occurring during prime-time (Warner & Buchman, 1993). This sample examined the daypart consisting of those programs that provide in essence the local, early-evening newscast lead-in as well as the newscast itself. This time period should be fairly representative of the typical station's average day-long commitment to promotion scheduling and the author anticipates future research will demonstrate the promotion scheduling averages indicated in this study are robust.

Generalizations based on the persuasion-appeals analysis should likewise consider the limitations offered by the sample selection. While the sample of markets used in this study is anticipated to prove robust in any future research (due to the previously identified effects of news consultants and cross-pollination), and promotion scheduling commitments are likely to be robust as identified above, very careful consideration should be given to the effects of the samples' time-of-day on persuasive-appeal strategies. As identified earlier, local news lead-in-programming choices are strongly influenced by audience flow considerations (Eastman, Newton, Riggs, and Neal-Lunsford, 1997). Persuasive strategies used within news-compatible programming would therefore be expected to emphasize appeals to potential news consumers with information-seeking, or news-based-entertainment desires and orientations. News promotional appeals in daytime or primetime dayparts may emphasize entertainment-based persuasive appeal strategies that are typically not scheduled in the early-evening-news-lead-in-daypart.

Some suggestions for future news promotion research

The opportunities for scholarly research into the specific effects of local television news promotion are virtually unexplored and undeveloped in the literature. Subsequent studies could expand greatly on the promotion duration content analysis offered above by controlling for issues of daypart, seasonality, and station relationships with news consulting firms. Among stations with more developed marketing strategies, promotion persuasive-appeal strategies are likely to be tailored to a variety of viewer-orientations and motivations related to program content, an issue not explored in this study. Research questions to consider include, Are fewer topical news promotion appeals used during entertainment programming than in information-oriented programming? Is there evidence of news-promotion, persuasion-appeal strategies having been developed for placement in station schedules based on program type? What interactions occur between program environment and promotion-persuasive-appeal strategies?

Academic research could serve to identify specific potential newscast consumer subgroup orientations characterized by a variety of desired parasocial interaction gratifications-sought. If so indicated, subsequent studies could be developed to explore the effectiveness of a variety of highly targeted pseudo-friendship promotional appeals. Research questions to be examined include, What specific forms of pseudo-friendship are sought by potential news

consumers? For example, do potential news consumer sub groups seek parent-child, child-parent, child-child, or parent-parent para-social interaction? Or is the nature of desired para-social interaction essentially uniform?

While humor in television advertising has been the subject of substantial research (cf. Sutherland & Sethu (1987) and Belch & Belch (1983), no apparent research has examined the interaction of humorous approaches to the marketing of television news. Research questions include, Can humor-appeals effectively serve to market television news? If so, are there some program environments where a humorous persuasive appeal to news promotion works best? Can humorous appeals be used to effectively reposition television news competitors?

The schema of potential news consumers offered by the field of news consumer audience activity level research suggests many opportunities for news promotion explorations. Studies could be designed to examine the relationship between activity level and persuasive-strategy. Is it possible, for example, to attract pass-time or diversionary oriented potential news viewers through on-air promotion campaigns without offending other viewer targets? Do stations appear to utilize on-air promotional appeals targeted to the full range of potential news consumer activity levels? If so, is there an interaction between such activity-level based promotion and program formats or dayparts?

Leshner, Reeves and Nash demonstrated the effect of two forms of channel image (generalist and specialist) on newscast viewer perceptions in a laboratory setting. Several opportunities for replication and extension of this research are evident. In the natural setting offered by a local television station's change in brand image, are the prior channel image perceptions identified in the laboratory sufficiently robust to be replicated? Can other brand image effects for example, "unedited-realism" v. "subjective-but-valuable-contextual-analysis-and-editorial" brands be duplicated?

Newhagen (1998) demonstrated the impact of television newscast depictions of stories eliciting an affective response of anger, fear and disgust; with anger showing a positive impact on both recall and approach behavior. The results of this research at least imply the potential for ratings success in newscasts offering stories that elicit an angry response from the audience. While reminiscent of the motion picture Network ("I'm mad as hell and not going to take it anymore"), and possibly a portent of things to come, several avenues of research are suggested. Research questions to be examined include, Is there a saturation point for anger based stories in newscasts? What level of "angry stories" maximizes viewer interest? What kinds of anger-based-appeals work best in on-air news promotion?

One unobtrusive experimental method for the exploration of these effects would be to expose subjects to a variety of news promotions for identified channel brand images, and then allow subjects to self-select newscast exposure in an experimenter created and controlled cable television system, in an apparently unobserved environment having been told they are to pass time while waiting for the actual research study to begin. A similar experimental method is more fully explicated in Medowcroft & Zillmann (1987).

Research in the use of victim-exemplars by Aust and Zillmann (1996) suggests several avenues for research into television news promotion. Research questions include, To what degree does use of a victim-exemplar in television news promotion heighten potential news consumer conation to view the newscast? What interactions in victim-exemplar depictions maximize the effect (for example interactions between co-depicted "mastering" or "sympathetic" news reporter; or between "mastering" or "co-suffering" cohort victims in multiple victim-exemplar depictions)?

Finally, no scholarly research has yet touched upon the effects of off-air, external-to-the-station mediated news promotion. Examinations of print, radio, outdoor, telemarketing, web-site interactions, direct mail, and telemarketing will surely find their way into the future scholarly literature of broadcast promotion. It's a field deserving substantial attention and development by the academic community.

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Table 9.2
Duration of pre-News-cast Promotion per-Station in Seconds
(for the two hours prior to the newscast)

| | ABC | CBS | FOX | NBC | Average |
|-------------------------|------|------|------|------|---------|
| News promotion | 210 | 220 | 195 | 200 | 206 |
| Other program promotion | 240 | 230 | 215 | 210 | 224 |
| Total availability | 2155 | 2295 | 2050 | 2125 | 2156 |

Table 9.3
pre-News-cast Promotion as a Percentage of Availability
(for the two hours prior to the newscast)

| | ABC | CBS | FOX | NBC | Average |
|---|-----|-----|-----|-----|---------|
| News promotion percentage of total promotion | 47 | 49 | 48 | 49 | 48 |
| Program promotion percentage of total promotion | 53 | 51 | 52 | 51 | 52 |
| ----- | | | | | |
| News promotion percentage of total avails | 10 | 10 | 10 | 9 | 10 |
| Program promotion percentage of total avails | 11 | 10 | 10 | 9 | 10 |
| Commercials as percentage of total avails | 79 | 80 | 80 | 81 | 80 |

Table 9.4
Average Station Duration of Within-Newscast News Promotion in Seconds

| | ABC | CBS | FOX | NBC | Average |
|--------------------------------|------|------|------|------|---------|
| News Promotion within pods | 120 | 119 | 125 | 115 | 120 |
| News Promotion within newscast | 198 | 188 | 185 | 200 | 193 |
| Commercials | 1295 | 1215 | 1130 | 1170 | 1202 |
| News | 2030 | 2068 | 2130 | 2125 | 2085 |

Table 9.5
Within-Newscast Promotion as a Percentage of Total Duration

| | ABC | CBS | FOX | NBC | Average |
|---|-----|-----|-----|-----|---------|
| News Promotion within pods | 8 | 9 | 11 | 8 | 9 |
| News Promotion within newscast | 10 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 |
| News Promotion in newshole | 9 | 9 | 10 | 9 | 9 |
| Commercials, program promotion and image promotion in newshole | 35 | 34 | 30 | 34 | 33 |
| News in newshole | 56 | 57 | 59 | 57 | 58 |

Table 9.6
News Promotion Appeals as a Percentages of Total Promotion Duration

| Appeal Type | Percentage of All Promos |
|--|--------------------------|
| Topical content, Early evening news | 49 |
| Late evening news | 10 |
| Morning news | 4 |
| -----Other----- | 6 |
| Total Topical | 69 |
| Instrumental – nontopical “news realism” | 15 |
| Newscaster biography | 6 |
| Utilitarian – anger appeals | 5 |
| Utilitarian – cognitive appeals | 4 |
| Humor | 4 |
| Pseudo friendship | 3 |
| Diversionary - “feel happy” | 3 |
| Call to action | 3 |
| Superior technology | 1 |
| Station awards or recognition | 1 |
| Gratitude | 1 |
| Ritualized, pass time | 0 |

(Note: Persuasion-appeal categories are non-exclusive. Percentages total more than 100 percent due to multiple appeal strategies within single promos.)

Table 9.7
News Promotion Format as a Percentage of Total Promotion Duration

| <u>Appeal Type</u> | <u>Percentage of All Promos</u> |
|--|---------------------------------|
| Full screen video and audio | 89 |
| Split screen video, promo audio or mix | 8 |
| Audio-only over end credits or other video | 2 |
| Video only, program audio or none | 1 |

ENDNOTES

¹ Markets in the database, Denver, Houston, Indianapolis, Kalamazoo, Knoxville, Louisville, Phoenix, Salt Lake City, and Seattle. Eliminated due to no data, Augusta. Stations in the database, KCNC - CBS, KCPQ - FOX, KDVR - FOX, KHOU - CBS, KING - NBC, KIRO - CBS, KMGH - ABC, KNXV - ABC, KOMO - ABC, KPHO - CBS, KPNX - NBC, KPRC - NBC, KRIV - FOX, KSAZ - FOX, KSL - NBC, KSTU - FOX, KTRK - ABC, KTVX - ABC, KUSA - NBC, KUTV - CBS, WATE - ABC, WAVE - NBC, WBIR - NBC, WDRB - FOX, WHAS - ABC, WISH - CBS, WLKY - CBS, WOOD - NBC, WRTV - ABC, WTHR - NBC, WTNZ - FOX, WVLT - CBS, WWMT - CBS, WXIN - FOX, WXMI - FOX, and WZZM - ABC.