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ARTICLES

Selling News: Behind the Content of Cable and Broadcast Morning Shows

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Through content analysis of the three broadcast networks and two leading cable news channels, this study's authors (1) examine how promotional content fits into the overall lineup of the morning news shows, (2) evaluate ownership patterns as they relate to this content, and (3) examine the policy implications of news decisions related to promotional content. The study identifies clear differences in the practices of the broadcast versus cable morning news programs.

On a typical weekday, American television viewers tune in to morning news shows, perhaps expecting to see the information they say they want (Putnam, 2000, citing a DDB Worldwide Survey), mixed with some lighter fare. But although the first 30 minutes of the programs contain almost exclusively hard news, after that much of the rest is peppered with extensive attention given to the latest movie, CD, or book, often produced by that network's parent company. Viewers watching one of the two leading cable networks are somewhat less likely to be on the receiving end of a product pitch, but this study shows that promotional content is still prominent within the coverage.

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American television's morning news shows have held important positions for their affiliated news divisions since the debut of the format in 1952. Among other contributions, the programs have frequently served as a training ground for their network's evening news anchors. Although the shows have taken occasional baffling detours, including the role of J. Fred Muggs, the *Today Show* chimpanzee who co-hosted with Dave Garroway, and Willard Scott's drag appearance as Carmen Miranda, the programs have played a prominent role in their respective news divisions, especially in times of major breaking events such as the tragedy of September 11, 2001. However, on a typical day, promotion of entertainment-related products also makes up a substantial part of the morning news programs. It's important to consider the content of those shows and what that might say about the news values they demonstrate. As the leading network and cable morning news programs and their combined 15 million viewers become a more important part of the economic picture for their parent companies (Johnson, 2007), the role of corporate owners in determining content is an increasingly significant question. Moreover, the way the cable outlets are presenting their morning news shows deviates from that of the broadcasters, highlighting the different business models and audience relationships under which they operate (Johnson, 2007). What this might imply about the role of corporate economic pressures on the media and how those pressures apply to the new world of 24-hour news cycles, is another important question.

Through content analysis of the three broadcast networks and two leading cable news networks, this study's authors (1) examine promotional content, (2) evaluate ownership patterns as they relate to this content, and (3) examine the policy implications of these news decisions. Among other findings, the study identifies clear differences in the practices of the major broadcast networks versus those of the cable networks.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

An author speculating about the audience's reaction to the move of former NBC *Today Show* anchor Katie Couric to CBS' *Evening News* noted: "It may be a considerable adjustment to accept Couric as chief anchor for every future crisis after nearly 15 years as morning cheerleader, fluff flinger, and eager promoter of every movie, book, or TV show the stars come by to plug" (*Hartford Courant*, 2005). Clearly, while there's respect for the journalistic skills of the people who front the shows, the morning programs aren't widely considered to be examples of the most serious or hard hitting of broadcast news content.

That might be an outgrowth of the corporate pressures brought to bear on these high-visibility programs. Morning news show producers are making decisions in an atmosphere of competing tensions, including a drop in the loyalty of viewers, especially young ones (Mindich, 2005; Pew Center for People and the Press, 2000), and pressure from mega-corporations to consolidate opportunities for corporate synergy. In general, daily mainstream media usage is steadily declining for newspapers and television news programs (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2005). In this atmosphere, national television news outlets have stepped up their efforts to hang onto those viewers who are still there and the morning news shows provide a rare opportunity because they're bucking the trend and actually growing (Johnson, 2006). That struggle is evident in the news organizations' attempts to balance informational versus promotional content in their morning programs.

In both the popular press and the academic literature, there's concern about the potential impact of vertical integration – the idea that the most efficient model for large-scale media operations is to own as many elements of the production process as possible (Picard, 2004) – and its impact on news coverage. Media reporter Gloria Goodale (2004) noted:

> As the tentacles of media conglomerates reach further into many of the programs Americans watch, concern is rising that the content of shows, particularly news programming, is putting the business interests of parent companies before the public interest in getting unbiased information. (p. 12)

In the wake of the Telecommunication Act of 1996, which deregulated much of the media industry, other critics expressed concern about how media consolidation could affect news quantity and quality (Baker, 2002; Kaplan, 2003; Puzzanghera, 2006), how it might affect national stories including the 2004 Presidential election (Kurtz & Ahrens, 2004) and effects on routine stories in which the parent company might have a stake (Rivers, 2003). As former University of Maryland College of Journalism Dean Thomas Kunkel (2003) noted, there was a significant public pushback regarding the Federal Communications Commission's 2003 attempt to significantly loosen existing media ownership rules:

> Maybe in this post-Enron world the people just don't like corporate bigness anymore. Or maybe they're sophisticated enough to see that when *Good Morning America* does a week from Disney World, it's not just a coincidence. Perhaps they're getting a tad suspicious. (p. 4)

Veterans of the morning show host chair have raised concerns about the increasing trend toward promotion-heavy content as well. Speaking about the decreasing amount of morning show air time dedicated to more serious news content, former

Today host Jane Pauley recently commented, "We're driving people away from the news. I think we're eating our young" (Pauley, 2005). Meanwhile, researchers have focused on differences between the audiences for cable and broadcast news (Bae, 2000; Baldwin, Barrett, & Bates, 1992), story selection on network newscasts (Stempel, 1985, 1988; Grosheck, 2008), influences affecting news story selection (Shoemaker & Reese, 1995), commercialism in new media (McAllister & Turow, 2002), and the effect of corporate synergy on news content (McAllister, 2002; Williams, 2002). There are no empirical studies that look exclusively at the morning shows and their treatment of promotional content across both broadcast and cable networks, as this study does.

Effects of Vertical Integration on Media Content

The concept of "vertical integration" includes the assumption that media outlets can be most cost effective if one company controls the production and distribution stream up and down the line (Alexander, Owens, & Carveth, 1993; Picard, 2004). For example, the theorists believe that corporations owning movie studios, distribution companies, and theatre chains are most able to capitalize on opportunities in the marketplace.

Whether this admittedly efficient business model has ramifications for news editorial content selection is a matter of much speculation but relatively little hard data. Only a few scholars have looked at aspects of this question. A study by the Project for Excellence in Journalism (2001) found that network morning news programs devoted an average of 34% of their time to "selling viewers something – a book, a movie, a kitchen or garden gadget, a Web site, other network programs, or a segment later in the show." That study noted that each of the morning programs exhibited examples of "corporate synergy" in which products owned by the parent company were touted by the related media outlet but during which the relationship was infrequently disclosed. Another study (Cleary & Adams-Bloom, 2009) found that the broadcast network morning programs, on average, filled at least 20% of their daily news holes with promotional topics, that the entertainment products covered were more likely to have been produced by the networks' parent companies or a corporate sibling, and that the coverage of entertainment topics was almost certain to be favorable. Those studies, however, addressed only the big three broadcast networks and didn't include cable outlets. Although cable audiences are considerably smaller, they do represent an important piece of the morning show audience (Johnson, 2007). Perhaps even more noteworthy is that they represent a very specific, very targeted and very news-centric type of television viewer (Lichter & Noyes, 1995; Whittemore, 1990).

Starting with *The Media Monopoly* (1983), media scholar Ben Bagdikian began to follow the progression of American media conglomeration. In *The New Media Monopoly* (2004), the latest edition of his work, Bagdikian argued that

concentrated ownership of media outlets overwhelmingly restricts information distribution. Bagdikian believes that this strangle hold on information, and the corporate quest for ever-increasing profit margins, has blurred the traditional checks and balances that protected news content from subtle and overt ownership influence. Lichter and Noyes (1995) argued that journalism's influence, once distributed among dozens of newspapers, now demonstrates "a centralization of news media power" (p. 4). Herman and Chomsky (1998) also articulated an argument that news media outlets run by large corporations find themselves subject to the same competitive structures as other corporations and more are likely to "pull their punches" when reporting about entities including the government that hold some control over them.

Other researchers have posed similar questions about the potential influence of corporate relationships on editorial content. McAllister (2002) noted the "plugola" effect in play with NBC News' intense coverage – during the course of several months – of the parent network's decision to end the hit comedy series *Seinfeld.* Wood et al. (2005) found local network affiliate news programs were susceptible to corporate and commercial influence in topic selection. Williams (2002) examined how four network and cable nightly news shows covered the industries and specific products of companies within their corporate family. Results showed that vertically integrated media companies were likely to cover the various products of their related companies more frequently and more favorably than those with no financial stake in the content. Jung (2001) found that CNN, a subsidiary of Time Warner, showed a favorable bias toward covering that company's movie products after the companies merged. In addition, the results showed that in the wake of the merger, stories about Time Warner movies increased while coverage of other movie-producing companies decreased. Also studying the impact of "corporate synergy," although in a nonbroadcast media format, Lee and Hwang (2004) found that *Time* magazine was more likely to provide favorable coverage of its new owner's entertainment products after the Time-Warner merger in 1989.

As Hamilton (2004) noted, ownership of news organizations by companies with interests in related businesses might influence editorial content. Indeed, news workers might fall into "boosting" the parent company's other ventures:

> Companies that provide entertainment programming as well as news may be tempted toward self-promotion. As soft news becomes prevalent in many news venues, companies may prefer to promote their own entertainment products during news program coverage of television, music and movies. Self-dealing may also arise from the increasing trend toward vertical integration in information industries. (p. 26)

This isn't to say that the authors assume this trend is good or bad, but rather that it's an evolution in the packaging of content in the new media world that's worthy of examination.

Traditional Approaches to Journalistic Decision Making

For a half century, Siebert, Peterson and Schramm's (1956) social responsibility of the press theory has shaped discussions of how the American media are supposed to operate (Altschull, 1995; Christians & Nordenstreng, 2004: Gunaratne, 1998; Lloyd, 1991; Merrill, 1974; Singer, 2006). Academics, critics and regulators claim this is how it should be, but operators, practitioners, and corporate owners are likely not looking at this lofty approach and are more focused on the daily ratings and bottom line. Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm (1956) argued that because the press (in all its forms) is the only industry singled out for protection in the Bill of Rights, it must meet a higher level of obligation to the American public. They maintained that within American society, everyone who has something significant to say should have the opportunity to express it in the media. Further, they said, there's a responsibility on the part of corporations, the community, consumers, practitioners, and professional organizations to ensure that access remains open to a diverse group of people and views. In his essay about social responsibility theory, Peterson wrote: "It accepts the role of the press in servicing the economic system, but it would not have this task take precedence over such other functions as promoting the democratic processes or enlightening the public" (p. 74). Despite criticism that the theory is outdated (Nerone et. al., 1995), it has dramatically influenced thinking about the proper role of the American press.

Nerone et al. (1995) argued, however, that ". . . [T]he press driven by capital cannot be expected to provide a thorough critique of the economic system or to offer alternatives because it is not 'free from control or domination' by capital . . . Watchdogs do not bite their owners" (p. 26). They also make the point that the original social responsibility theory downplayed the significance of conglomerate media ownership on influencing the gatekeeping function and, ultimately, content in the media. Those criticisms, it would seem, illustrate the potential for abuse of the social responsibility function in the name of "corporate synergy." McQuail (2005) offered a similar critique, noting that social responsibility theory doesn't adequately address the role of entertainment in media content.

Broadcast Versus Cable News Business Model

There are some fundamental differences in the business approaches to broadcast versus cable news that make cable entities unique. Cable, for example, tends to have a much more specific and focused audience. Lichter and Noyes (1995) wrote: "Cable networks supply news to national "niche" markets (relatively small numbers of people who share common interests or perspectives) that would not have been profitable a decade ago" (p. 4). As CNN founder Ted Turner realized, a small but targeted audience can ultimately be more valuable than a mass audience. In the early days of approaching potential advertisers for his upstart

news network, Turner would argue that his audience, while fewer in number, was superior in intelligence (Whittemore, 1990). In effect, Turner believed that a dedicated news audience was more "upscale" and therefore a better cost per thousand value to advertisers. Further, cable networks rely on a base income of subscriber fees, unlike their network counterparts. As a result, cable news departments are offered a certain freedom from the strict ratings pressure felt by the networks. As Turner noted:

> It's not right when all of television's money comes from advertising. It puts too much pressure on the ratings. Then when you get to the news part of the programming, you could be asked or told to do things that don't really make good journalistic sense. You get out of the news business and into the ratings business. (p. 304)

This study includes the three broadcast morning news programs, and the two leading cable news morning programs, CNN's *American Morning* and *FOX and Friends*.[1] By adding in the cable programs, the authors show that the decisions made when producing these morning news shows – especially those related to promotional content – can differ considerably between the broadcast networks and their cable counterparts.

METHOD

A total of 96[2] morning news programs from ABC (*Good Morning America*), CBS (*The Early Show*), NBC (*Today*), CNN (*American Morning*), and FOX (*FOX and Friends*) were coded for this project during a one-month period which coincided with the Fall 2004 sweeps as defined by Nielsen Media Research. That time frame, November 4-December 1, 2004, was selected because it traditionally represents a major thrust for holiday entertainment product promotion, and it's a time when the networks might be especially conscious of promoting their own programs in order to influence audience viewing habits.

The unit of analysis was individual stories (n = 5,538) within each program. Each story was coded for whether it presented information or promoted a product. Those that were determined to be promotional in nature were coded for

[1]A third cable network, MSNBC, was excluded from the study because it carried a 3.5-hour simulcast of *Imus in the Morning*, a radio show, and therefore departed significantly from the format of the other programs in the study.

[2]The coded programs included 17 episodes of NBC's *Today Show*, 19 episodes of ABC's *Good Morning America*, 20 episodes of *The Early Show*, 20 episodes of CNN's *American Morning*, and 20 episodes of *FOX and Friends*. The numbers of shows vary slightly between the five networks because of the Thanksgiving Day Parade coverage on NBC and technical difficulties in recording the full programs on selected other days.

additional details, including the format of the piece, whether it contained content related to the network's parent company, and if the treatment of the subject was primarily favorable, neutral/balanced or unfavorable.[3] The ownership of the originating company – whether a book publisher, record company or movie studio – was also traced by the coders for each entertainment story. Ownership information was compiled from the *Columbia Journalism Review's* "Who Owns What" database (www.CJR.org/tools/owners/), supplemented by Hoovers' (www.Hoovers.com), to establish corporate ownership patterns. Six communication graduate students from a major U.S. university performed the coding. The students were trained with the coding instrument and their work was checked by the authors for intercoder reliability. Their results were cross-tabulated for analysis.

"Promotional" stories were defined as those in which a specific product or event was featured, regardless of ownership of the product. Examples included cooking segments based on new cookbooks, concert series based on new CD releases, and interviews with stars of upcoming movies. "Informational" stories were broadly defined as those stories that didn't specifically address or promote an entertainment product such as a book, movie, or CD. In several instances, there was some overlap between categories. For example, the Michael Jackson trial involved a celebrity and might initially be considered entertainment related because of Jackson's prominent music career. However, because the story was about his legal troubles, and not a new CD, music video, or other entertainment product, it was coded as informational. There was no delineation between "hard" and "soft" news in the informational category. So, for example, Julia Roberts giving birth to her twins, though not hard news, was none-the-less categorized as "informational" because it was merely a report of an event, not a promotion of a specific movie.

Intercoder reliability was assessed using both percent agreement and Cohen's kappa. The values are outlined in Table 1.

Riffe, Lacy, and Fico (2005) and others (Neuendorf, 2002; Landis & Koch, 1977) suggest that Cohen's kappa values greater than .80 are considered very good agreement and values between .60 and .80 are good agreement.

This study examined four research questions:

R1: How do cable network morning shows compare to broadcast network morning shows in terms of informational content versus promotional content?

R2: Do the five networks provide more prominent coverage of stories promoting "in house" entertainment products compared to those of competitors?

[3]"Favorable" was explained as "Does the reporter/anchor deliver an opinion in the segment that is largely supportive of the content? "Balanced/neutral" was explained as "Is the report without any value statements on the part of the reporter? "Unfavorable" was explained as "Does the reporter/anchor offer a negative impression of the content?

TABLE 1
Percent Agreement and Cohen's Kappa for Variables

Variable	*N*	*Percent agreement*	*Cohen's Kappa*	*p value*
Story type	42	71.5	.67	<.001
Ownership of topic	42	71.5	.62	<.001
Ownership of network	43	100	1.00	<.001
Favorable/unfavorable	42	95.3	.73	<.001
Format of the content	43	86.3	.84	<.001

R3: Which kinds of products are most prominently featured?
R4: Are cable and broadcast networks significantly different in how they cover their in-house promotional content versus that of their competitors?

RESULTS

When it comes to the promotional content offered by the leading American news operations, the cable networks appear to be less overt in their presentation. Generally, the cable programs were more likely to focus on informational content during their morning programs, less likely to feature their parent companies' products, and more likely to offer critical coverage of this content.

R1: How do cable network morning shows compare to broadcast network morning shows in terms of informational content versus promotional content?

The two cable network programs contained more informational news content than their broadcast network counterparts (see Table 2). During the one-month period examined, CNN was the network most likely to focus on informational news content with 91% of its total stories, and only 9% of the total content dedicated to promotional stories. Chi square indicates the results were statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level.

In terms of raw story count, CNN had a significantly higher number of stories during the one-month period studied, with a total of 1,621. However, it's important to remember that CNN's *American Morning* is a three-hour program and, with the exception of NBC's *Today Show*, the others are two-hour shows. Following CNN in terms of story count was the other cable offering, *FOX and Friends*. Although its percentage of informational versus promotional stories was roughly equivalent to that of CBS's *The Early Show*, it's

TABLE 2
Promotional Content Compared to News Content

Program	*Total percentage of promotional stories*	*Total percentage of informational stories*
ABC's *Good Morning America*	31.2% (n = 36)	68.8% (n = 756)
NBC's *Today Show*	20.6% (n = 44)	79.4% (n = 697)
FOX and Friends	14.3% (n = 148)	85.7% (n = 1,028)
CBS's *The Early Show*	14.0% (n = 112)	86% (n = 796)
CNN's *American Morning*	9.0% (n = 134)	91% (n = 1,487)

Note. $X^2 = 240.773$, df = 8, $p < .05$

worth noting that FOX's percentage comes out of a larger whole, meaning both cable networks are presenting more informational stories than their broadcast counterparts.

R2: Do the five networks provide more prominent coverage of stories promoting "in house" entertainment products compared to those of competitors?

Each of the three broadcast network morning programs was significantly more likely to feature promotional content owned by its parent companies than were the two cable news networks (see Table 3). The three broadcast network programs clustered together with roughly a third of their total promotional content devoted to products produced by some subsidiary of their parent companies. At 27.6% of its total promotional content, CNN trailed slightly with its coverage of Time Warner-produced products. FOX was the least likely to feature content owned by its parent company, NewsCorp. Each of the two cable programs was more likely to cover entertainment products produced by an entity other than its parent company. *FOX*

TABLE 3
Ownership of Promotional Content

Morning news program	*Promotional content products owned by parent company*	*Promotional content products owned by others*
CBS's *The Early Show*	36.0%	63.9%
ABC's *Good Morning America*	32.6%	67.3%
NBC's *Today Show*	32.3%	67.6%
CNN's *American Morning*	27.6%	72.3%
FOX and Friends	19.7%	80.2%

and Friends was the least likely to cover entertainment products produced by its parent company with about 20% of its content related to NewsCorp-owned products. The results were statistically significant at the p = .05 level.

R3: Which kinds of products are most prominently featured?

Overall, the five networks were most likely to focus their promotional coverage on television programs (see Figure 1). When the two cable networks were excluded, the results were even more clear: the broadcast networks were highly likely to feature television programs (29.9%) as the center of their promotional coverage. Conversely, when looking only at the cable programs, books were the entertainment product most often featured. Across all five networks, books were the second most likely genre for promotional content coverage with 16.9% of the overall coverage.

R4: Are cable and broadcast networks significantly different in how they cover their in-house promotional content versus that of their competitors?

Each of the five networks was likely to give "favorable" coverage to the entertainment products they featured. All the networks combined had 85.8% of the total coverage coded as "favorable" with 7.6% coded "balanced" and 6.6% coded as "unfavorable." The Disney-owned ABC program *Good Morning America* was the show featuring the largest percentage of promotional content. It was also the program that was the least likely to provide critical coverage of that content (see Table 4).

However, those positions shifted somewhat when the ownership of the topic of the promotional content was cross tabulated against whether the content was coded as "favorable," "balanced," or "unfavorable." (See Table 5.) In that case,

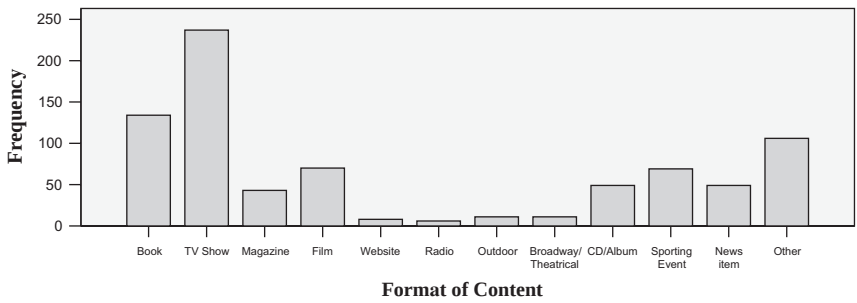

FIGURE 1 Type of promotional content on morning news programs.

TABLE 4
Characterization of Promotional Content by Network

Morning news program	*Favorable*	*Balanced*	*Unfavorable*
ABC's *Good Morning America*	82.6%	1.6%	3.3%
CBS's *The Early Show*	77.6%	6.2%	9.8%
NBC's *Today Show*	74.3%	6.2%	7.6%
FOX and Friends	63.5%	7.4%	5.4%
CNN's *American Morning*	58.9%	14.1%	3.7%

Note. $X^2 = 34.452$, df = 8, $p < .05$

TABLE 5
Ownership of Topic of the Promotional Content by Portrayal of Content

Ownership of the topic	*Favorable*	*Balanced/neutral*	*Unfavorable*
Universal (NBC)	89.5%	4.8%	5.7%
Time Warner (CNN)	88.2%	7.1%	4.7%
Disney (ABC)	83.3%	5.8%	10.8%
NewsCorp (FOX)	76.2%	16.7%	7.1%
Viacom (CBS)	73.2%	14.6%	12.2%

NBC's *Today Show* was the most likely to give favorable coverage to its own products, followed by CNN, ABC, FOX, and CBS. It should be noted that while NBC gave favorable coverage nearly 90% of the time to its parent company-produced entertainment products, CBS, the network least likely to give favorable coverage to Viacom-owned products, still did so 73% of the time. While NBC and Fox led the pack with higher percentages of favorable coverage of entertainment products from parent company-owned sources, ABC was fairly consistent with both in-family and out-of-family products. CBS actually showed a slightly lower percentage of favorable coverage for parent company products than for those outside the company. At first glance, it appears that CNN is the network giving entertainment products the most balanced treatment, with only 58.9% of the coverage coded as favorable, but when that number is broken down by the promotional content specifically featuring in-company products, that network gives favorable coverage a staggering 88.2% of the time.

DISCUSSION

As this study indicates, the morning news programs are not entirely about news, and not incidentally about entertainment. In many cases, they illustrate the concept of corporate synergy in action.

The study found that American cable news networks offer a higher "news count" that's not just attributable to the longer run time for the programs. The presence of more product-related content on the broadcast networks might make it a simple matter of the broadcast networks being in a better position to compel cooperation by their own celebrities. However, the cable programs air on networks that don't have entertainment content as their primary primetime focus and, therefore, the incentive for promoting company-sponsored entertainment might be more subtle. CNN picked up on this distinction and recently aired an ad campaign using the tag line "Where real news makes the difference" to promote *American Morning*. It can make that claim because the CNN audience is highly targeted to be receptive to "all serious news all the time" (Lichter & Noyes, 1995). Meanwhile, media attention has focused on the fact that *Good Morning America* has been steadily gaining on the *Today Show* in the ratings, largely by emulating its relatively high level of promotional and entertainment product-related content (Johnson, 2006).

Because the two cable news networks don't include entertainment offerings in their primetime schedules like the three broadcast networks do, it might not be surprising that the cable news shows tended to feature less promotional coverage of television programs. However, the cable news networks do include a substantial number of regularly scheduled news-related "specials" such as *CNN Presents*, and exclusive interviews through venues like *Larry King Live* and other scheduled in-depth treatments of topics. So, there's opportunity for these kinds of programs to be promoted through segments in the morning news shows in the same way the broadcast networks promote their programs, and that was found to a certain degree. Further, the parent companies of CNN and FOX – Time Warner and NewsCorp – do own movie studios and numerous other entertainment entities, so the difference can't be fully explained by the fact that they don't feature traditional "entertainment" programming on their own air.

There also appears to be some additional level of restraint in covering parent-company affiliated entertainment products on the part of the two cable networks that's not as evident with the three broadcast networks.[4] For example, FOX's parent company, NewsCorp, is a considerable player in the entertainment field. It owns, among other properties, 20th Century Fox, HarperCollins Publishers, and numerous subsidiaries, along with several sports teams. There are ample opportunities for the cable network to feature these entities in its coverage. Likewise, Time Warner, the parent company of CNN, owns major movie studios including Warner Brothers, entertainment cable networks including HBO, and numerous

[4]It should be noted that FOX owns both broadcast and cable networks. However, because its broadcast network programs feature fewer hours of primetime content, it would have fewer entertainment programs and celebrities from which to draw.

entertainment-oriented magazines such as *Sports Illustrated* and *Entertainment Weekly*. Yet, both networks feature less coverage of their own entertainment products than their broadcast counterparts do of theirs. So the question remains: are the cable networks making a deliberate effort to offer more "real news" because of their targeted audience in their morning shows as CNN claims or are they choosing to present their own parent company's products in more subtle ways by highlighting seemingly information-related items including news magazines and nonfiction books?

Each network seemed to have its own preference for the type of promotional content featured on its air. For example, FOX was far and away the most likely to feature writers in its coverage. Its parent company, Rupert Murdoch's News-Corp, began as a newspaper empire and owns substantial properties in the book publishing industry, including HarperCollins Publishers and its approximately 40 related imprints. CNN, owned by Time Warner, a major magazine publisher, was the most likely to feature magazine writers or critics who often worked for magazines, in its promotional coverage, even touting that relationship as part of its coverage. NBC and ABC, owned respectively by GE and Disney, are both substantially vested in television and movie studio production. They were the most likely to feature actors in their entertainment-related content. CBS is owned by Viacom, a widely diversified company including television production outlets, cable networks, movie studios, and publishers. It reflected that diversity in its coverage of entertainment topics. It also wasn't unusual to see one of the five networks feature a company-affiliated expert such as a writer for *Money Magazine* as an interview source. This use of company-affiliated professionals represents perhaps a more covert version of promotional content, "product placement," and corporate synergy (Hanks, 2007).

Further, the promotional content was frequently given a somewhat more prominent level of coverage within the shows, often featuring interviews or demonstrations. Arguably, interviews and demonstrations consume more airtime, indicating that the producer has assigned a higher priority to the story than to one covered as a voiceover or reader. This allocation of resources signals to the viewer something about how the staff assesses the importance of the promotional content.

As the Project for Excellence in Journalism (PEJ) (2001) study noted, not only are the morning news programs covering products produced by their parent companies, they're not always specifically acknowledging it. Although some high profile links were occasionally recognized with language such as "[Name of the artistic work] was produced by [production company], which is owned by [name of parent company], which owns this network," they weren't consistently noted, especially in the less overt case of parent-owned book publishers and record producers. Also of interest is a comparison of the findings in this study to the 2001 PEJ work. Part of that study was conducted in the month immediately following

the September 11 attacks. Presumably, the time after the attacks was a cycle of more serious news coverage, and that might have had an impact on the type of content those researchers found.

This study found an increase in the amount of time dedicated to coverage of promotional content since the 2001 PEJ study. Overall, while it might be a more efficient use of the network's resources to "repurpose" the content it has paid so much for, the question remains whether the audience is aware – or cares – that the journalistic process might be heavily influenced by business considerations. It might be time for an update of the social responsibility model to reflect the current realities of the economic model under which the media operate.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study highlight some differences between cable and broadcast news. While all five morning news programs feature a relatively high percentage of favorable promotional content, the cable programs are more likely to feature nonpromotional news content, less likely to feature the products of their parent companies, and more likely to promote the entertainment products of their competitors. From their inception, the cable news networks have differed from the broadcast networks in that CNN was created as part of an overall marketing strategy that put forth a 24-hour news cycle to attract a very specific demographic/psychographic that would respond to "live and late breaking" news. That isn't to say that either cable or broadcast networks have shunned their obligations to the viewers, but perhaps the cable operations offer a more open acknowledgement that they are serving two masters.

This study offers more evidence that the media are working from a position of dual responsibilities – both to the corporations that own them and the audiences that depend on them for journalistic content. It might in fact be possible to adequately serve both the journalistic and economic masters to the benefit of the viewer and the corporation. However, it's important to have an honest look and honest conversations about this dual obligation.

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

Problematic to this study were the relatively low intercoder reliability numbers for the ownership of topic variable and story type. Given the vast number of subsidiary companies owned by these mega-corporations, it's possible to list multiple owners, depending on how far up the chain ownership is traced. This might have caused confusion with the coders when they were trying to assign ownership, thereby affecting the reliability numbers for the first variable. In the case of the story type variable, we believe the complicated structure of the promotional

content might have caused confusion for the coders. Stories were often structured with multiple story types, possibly causing disagreement among coders.

Further, there are few data from other time periods with which to compare these findings. It would be helpful to know if the current state of promotional versus informational coverage is representative of the long haul or whether it shows a modern shift toward "lighter" fare. Whether audience members see this shift as positive or negative and what expectations they might have of morning news content should be clarified.

Through additional study, it would also be helpful to trace the promotion through the media of in-company owned products over time to help answer the question of whether "corporate synergy" has grown along with media consolidation. An analysis of the content of the adjacent commercial breaks could also yield interesting findings regarding overt sponsorship of news media. Following from this could be a detailed examination of the processes by which these "news judgments" are made. Studies based on participant observation, in-depth interviews and surveys of executive producers and other key gatekeepers would flesh out the "why" as well as the "what is there" questions addressed in this content analysis.

Finally, the results related to how the cable networks are using promotional content raise several additional questions that bear exploration. While the overt promotion of movies and books was less for the cable networks than for their broadcast counterparts, the data from this study suggest that the cable networks might be relying on more subtle strategies for corporate synergy and in-house promotion such as routinely using the writers from their magazine and newspaper divisions as sources and expert commentators. A more careful examination of cable news programming with a coding scheme geared toward examining story sources would likely yield data to further characterize unique cable news network promotional practices.

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APPENDIX

Variables Defined

Following is a list of definitions used in this study for the key variables under examination.

Story Type: Each story was coded according to the manner in which it was presented. Options included:

- VO: voiceover from an announcer over accompanying video tape.
- VO/SOT: voiceover to sound on tape with announcer reading story under related video then switching to a brief comment from an interview source.
- Reader: anchor appears on camera without additional videotape.

- Package: a preproduced piece of video tape that includes the reporter track.
- Satellite interview: live interview with an individual who isn't in the studio but appears via a satellite connection.
- Interview in studio: anchor or reporter appears on camera while interviewing the subject who's with him/her on set but with no additional tape.
- Interview with package: a combination of an on-set interview and a tape package related to the subject.
- Interview w/VO/SOT: a combination of an on-set interview and voice over or related tape excerpts.
- Interview w/VO: a combination of an on-set interview and video that the anchor and/or guest talks over.
- Live performance: on-set performance by the artist.
- Demonstration/presentation: the guest provides a demonstration of a product or activity (not including a performance) during the segment.
- Other: coders were asked to fill in details for any activity that wasn't covered by the previous descriptions.

***Ownership of topic**:* Ownership of topic tracked the originating company for the entertainment product being promoted.

***Ownership of network*:** Ownership of the network the story aired on was a distinct category from Ownership of topic of the entertainment story. Network ownership had three possible categories: Universal (NBC), Disney (ABC), or Viacom (CBS). Cable ownership could be Time Warner (CNN) or NewsCorp (FOX).

Favorable/unfavorable: Whether a story was presented as favorable, unfavorable, or balanced. A segment or story would be ranked as favorable if the reporter or anchor delivered an opinion in the segment that was largely supportive of the content. A balanced or neutral ranking was assigned when the report was offered without any value statements on the part of the reporter. Unfavorable rankings were defined as when the reporter or anchor offered a negative impression of the subject of the content.

***Format of the content**:* Referred to which type of product was being promoted in the story or segment. Options included books, TV shows, CDs, movies, cookbooks, Web sites, and so forth.