Fox News: Fair and Balanced? We Report. You Decide.

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Abstract
The Fox News Channel has been claiming for more than a decade that their news channel is fair and balanced. To test this claim a statistical analysis was done on 32 partial transcripts of the Hannity and Colmes Shows posted on the internet with dates from February 16, 2003 to January 7, 2009. Results indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between the average number of words Sean Hannity spoke (397) and the average number of words Alan Colmes spoke (284) on the 32 partial transcripts. Hannity spoke more words than Colmes on 21 of the 32 partial transcripts and this observed frequency approached statistical significance. Based on the data collected from February 16, 2003 to January 7, 2009 the findings suggest that the Hannity and Colmes Show is not fair and balanced and that, by inference, perhaps neither may the Fox News Channel be fair and balanced. The methodology used in this study can be used to analyze a different set of data.
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1. Introduction

Accusations of media bias in political news reporting have been around for decades (Morris 2007). Most Americans believe that bias exists in the news (Eveland & Shah 2003). Those who perceive bias in political news reporting are more likely to become aware of it and identify it when it is counter to their own political beliefs (Perloff 1989; Vallone, Ross & Lepper 1985).

Of the major networks, the Fox News channel is the only news outlet that claims to be fair and balanced and has even taken legal action to "protect" its slogan. Fox News sued Al Franken, the current U.S. senator and former comedian and political satirist in August 2003 over his book *Lies, And the Lying Liars Who Tell Them: A Fair and Balanced Look at the Right*. Fox lost the court battle and withdrew its law suit.

"In recent years media scholars have noted the blurring of the line between information programming, or 'hard news' and entertainment content" (Moy, Xenos, & Hess 2005, p. 113). This admixture has been dubbed "infotainment" (Delli Carpini, & Williams 2001). Anderson (2004) asserts that the infusion of bias and entertainment into news is a result of a business strategy to make more money by corporations that took over the major news organizations. This was made possible primarily by the suspension of the Fairness Doctrine.

According to Anderson and Thierer (2008) "the Federal Communications Doctrine (the "Fairness Doctrine") which became a formal agency regulation in the late 1940s but had been in effect since the late 1920s, required broadcast stations – radio first, and then television – to provide 'opportunity' for the presentation of contrasting viewpoints on controversial issues" so that the public could make informed decisions on issues of public importance. Consequences for broadcasters who did not follow the rules regarding this Fairness Doctrine included Federal Communications Commission (FCC) fines and forced free time to present both sides; in egregious cases it could mean the loss of broadcasting licenses (Anderson & Thierer 2008). In August of 1987 the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) announced that it would no longer enforce the Fairness Doctrine after the courts declared that the doctrine was not mandated by Congress and the FCC did not have to continue enforcing it (Limburg 2011). The U.S. Congress had tried to put the Fairness Doctrine into law but President Reagan vetoed the legislation and there were insufficient votes to override the veto (Limburg 2011).

2. Evolution of the Media

The current infusion of bias and entertainment into news is also a result of the evolution of the media and its power in the United States since the country's inception. In his book, *The Rise and Fall of the Media Establishment*, West (2001) examines the rise and fall of the news media establishment as a major political power in the United States from 1789 to 2000. He breaks this time period into five general stages or eras: The Partisan Media (1790s to 1840s), characterized by political parties with partisan objectives; The Commercial Media (1840s to 1920s), characterized by news and stories with mass appeal; The Objective Media (1920s to the 1970s), characterized by professional standards such as fairness and objectivity; The Interpretive Media (1970s to 1980s), characterized by pundit analysis and personal interpretation of the news; and The Fragmented Media

(arose in the 1990s), characterized by a fragmenting of the mass media environment. West also devotes a chapter to The Future of Media. These partitions by era are important because they provide the historical evolution of the media in the United States and shed light on the last three decades of media power and influence in the United States.

West (2001) believes that the fragmentation of the media and concomitant decline in public respect for the media will considerably reduce the influence of journalists over the political process. He believes that in the next several years the media will experience a backlash from dissatisfied viewers and political officials. He predicts cutthroat competition, industry re-concentration and European-Style partisan press in the future of mass media.

The media today seems similar to West's (2001) partisan media stage with different media groups, news and radio stations pursuing partisan objectives that cater to and seek to mobilize party supporters. Survey research has demonstrated that viewers perceive ideological bias in television news with CNN representing the liberal viewpoint and Fox News Channel (FNC) representing the conservative viewpoint (Turner 2007).

3. Fox News Channel

The Fox News Channel (FNC), commonly referred to as Fox News or Fox, was launched on October 6, 1996 by Rupert Murdoch, an Australian-born media mogul, and Roger Ailes, a former political consultant and TV producer, to address the need for a news organization that provided balanced reporting where the facts from all sides would be presented (Fox News Channel 2011). As of April 2009 it was available to 102 million households in the United States and to viewers internationally (Fox News Channel 2011).

The Hannity and Colmes show on Fox News Channel ran from October 6, 1996 to January 9, 2009. It was a live one-hour debate driven talk television show in the United States hosted by Sean Hannity, who presented the conservative perspective, and Alan Colmes, who presented the liberal perspective. Its genre was a political program but the show also featured debate about soft news stories like the 2006 Duke University lacrosse team scandal (Fox News Channel 2011). The Hannity and Colmes show format resembled the previous CNN show Crossfire with co-hosts on the left and the right who debated mostly political issues (Fox News Channel 2011). Occasionally if Hannity or Colmes was not available there would be a guest host with the same political ideology as the missing host (Fox News Channel 2011).

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine if the Fox News Channel was indeed fair and balanced on this show as claimed by the Fox News Channel by looking at the average number of words spoken by Sean Hannity and Alan Colmes on the partial transcripts of shows posted on the internet and the number of partial transcripts either individual had the highest word count on. The following hypotheses guide these analyses:

H1: Hannity and Colmes will significantly differ on the average number of words spoken on the partial transcripts.

H2: Hannity and Colmes will significantly differ on the number of times each has the highest word count on the partial transcripts.

5. Research Sample and Methodology

5.1 Sample

The sample consisted of 32 partial transcripts from the Hannity and Colmes cable show from February 16, 2003 to January 7, 2009 that were posted on the internet during the data collection period of February 10, 2009 to July14, 2009 and contained comments from both Sean Hannity and Alan Colmes. Fox news was contacted in February 2009 but refused to provide any transcripts of any entire show for this study and stated it was policy not to release complete transcripts of that show. The last Hannity and Colmes show was on January 9, 2009 after Alan Colmes decided to leave the show.

5.2 Procedure

Thirty-two partial transcripts from the Hannity and Colmes Show with dates between February 16, 2003 and January 7, 2009 were downloaded from the internet. The number of words spoken by Hannity and Colmes were tallied for each partial transcript. The number of times each host spoke most frequently on each transcript was also tallied.

5.3 Statistical Analysis

A one-way independent-measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to determine if there was a statistically significant difference in the average number of words spoken by Hannity and Colmes on the 32 partial transcripts. The quasi-independent variable was speaker (Hannity vs. Colmes). The dependent variable

was the average number of words spoken on each transcript by each speaker. A chi-square test for goodness of fit was used to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between the number of transcripts Hannity or Colmes was the predominant speaker (i.e. spoke the most words) on each of the 32 partial transcripts.

6. Results

There was a statistically significant difference between the average number of words spoken by Hannity and Colmes on the 32 partial transcripts, $F(1,62) = 4.9$, $p =.03$. The effect size was large (partial eta squared = .073). The average number of words spoken by Hannity on the 32 partial transcripts was 396.69 (SD=225.55) and the average number of words spoken by Colmes was 284 (SD=178). On 21 of the partial transcripts Hannity spoke more words than Colmes (see Table 1). A chi-square test of goodness of fit approached a statistically significant difference between the number of transcripts Hannity (21 transcripts) and Colmes (11 transcripts) was the predominant speaker on the 32 partial transcripts, chi-square $(1, 32) = 3.12$, $p =.077$.

7. Discussion

The purpose of the study was to determine if the Fox News Channel was indeed fair and balanced as claimed by the Fox News Channel. Partial transcripts available on the internet of the Hannity and Colmes show were examined to test this hypothesis since the Fox News Channel refused to provide complete transcripts of any Hannity and Colmes shows for this study. As hypothesized, there was a statistically significant difference between the average number of words spoken by Hannity and Colmes on the 32 partial transcripts. Hannity had a significantly higher average of words spoken on the 32 partial transcripts than Colmes.

Although Hannity and Colmes did not significantly differ on the number of times each had the highest word count on the 32 partial transcripts the results did approach statistical significance. Had Hannity had a higher word count on 22 partial transcripts instead of 21 the results would have been statistically significant.

8. Conclusion

The results clearly indicate that the Hannity and Colmes show wasn't fair and balanced on these 32 partial transcripts. Had it been fair and balanced Hannity and Colmes should have had approximately equal time speaking (number of words) on each partial transcript and an approximately equal number of times each person was the predominant speaker on the 32 partial transcripts.

The present study was limited to the 32 partial transcripts of the Hannity and Colmes Show with dates between February 16, 2003 and January 7, 2009 which were downloaded from the internet. Since the Fox News Channel declined to provide complete transcripts of any Hannity and Colmes Show when contacted by phone the only alternative was to use partial transcripts of the show posted on the internet. The methodology used in this study can be used to analyze a different set of data.

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Table 1.Number of words spoken in each partial transcript

Partial Transcript	Hannity	Colmes
1	266	85
2	315	151
3	360	76
4	271	149
5	807	226
6	222	246
7	257	142
8	951	6
9	293	277
10	755	429
11	161	163
12	102	142
13	530	564
14	184	151
15	507	793
16	270	526
17	630	552
18	243	279
19	480	537
20	152	198
21	232	431
22	669	400
23	304	225
24	358	224
25	435	129
26	564	488
27	221	175
28	197	119
29	513	268
30	860	331
31	166	235
32	417	371