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LOCAL TV NEWS IGNORES LOCAL AND STATE CAMPAIGNS

Presidential Race Sucks Up Most of the Media Oxygen; Coverage Is Mainly Strategy and Horserace

Twice as Much Campaign Advertising as Campaign Journalism in Battleground States

More Sports and Weather, and More Crime, Than Election News

LOS ANGELES, October 21, 2004 -- As the campaign season entered its most intense period, nearly eight out of ten election stories on local television news were about the presidential race, rather than about campaigns for Congress or local offices, a new study has found. In markets with U.S. Senate races, little more than four percent of campaign stories on local news covered them.

In presidential battleground states, a half-hour of local news averaged almost six minutes of campaign advertising, but only three minutes of campaign news. Ad watch stories, which truth-check the political commercials, made up less than one percent of campaign stories in the study's sample.

These are among the findings reported by the **Lear Center Local News Archive**. This ongoing study is monitoring all evening news coverage from 5:00 pm to 11:30 pm aired on local ABC, CBS, NBC and Fox stations in 11 media markets; results released today cover the period from October 4 through October 10, 2004.

"Local television stations promise to cover local issues when they get their licenses," said **Martin Kaplan**, associate dean of the USC Annenberg School for Communication and director of its Norman Lear Center, "but you wouldn't know that from watching their campaign coverage."

The project, funded by the Joyce Foundation [joycefdn.org], is a collaboration between the Lear Center and the NewsLab at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, directed by Professor **Ken Goldstein**. Matthew Hale, assistant professor in the Center for Public Service at Seton Hall University, is the third principal investigator.

These interim findings, plus a searchable video database of stories, can be found at localnewsarchive.org. A full report on the 2004 campaign season will be released after the election.

Researchers analyzed 435 hours of regularly scheduled local news. Based on analysis of the total time devoted to various news elements, a composite half-hour looks like this:

- advertising: 8 minutes
- sports and weather: 6.4 minutes
- crime: 2.5 minutes
- other (celebrity, science, education, arts, etc.): 2.5 minutes
- election coverage: 2.4 minutes
- local interest: 2.1 minutes
- teasers, bumpers, intros: 1.6 minutes
- health: 1.5 minutes
- business, economy: 1.3 minutes
- unintentional injury: 0.9 minutes
- Iraq, foreign policy: 0.5 minutes
- non-campaign government news: 0.4 minutes

Here are additional highlights of what researchers found:

- The average length of a campaign news story was 81 seconds.
- Nearly two-thirds of all campaign stories contained no candidate soundbites. When candidates did speak, their soundbites averaged just under 12 seconds.
- Only five percent of all campaign stories were about local elections.
- Forty-five percent of all campaign stories were about strategy or horserace, while only 29 percent focused on campaign issues.
- Nearly half of all campaign stories mentioned a national or other debate.

Data for this study come from these 11 markets: New York, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Dallas, Seattle, Miami, Denver, Orlando, Tampa, Dayton and Des Moines. Methodology of capture and analysis can be found at localnewsarchive.org.

The Norman Lear Center is a multidisciplinary research and public policy center studying the impact of entertainment on society. Based at the USC Annenberg School for Communication, the Lear Center bridges the gap between the entertainment industry and academia, and between them and the public. For more information, visit learcenter.org.

The Department of Political Science at the University of Wisconsin has consistently been ranked in the top ten political science departments in the country. It is currently home to another major project on political communication in America, the Wisconsin Advertising Project [polisci.wisc.edu/tvadvertising]. This project gathers and analyzes political advertising from the country's top 100 markets and has become the major source of information for journalists, policy makers, and scholars on the volume and tone of political advertising.

Located in Los Angeles at the University of Southern California, the USC Annenberg School for Communication [annenberg.usc.edu] is among the nation's leading institutions devoted to the study of journalism and communication, and their impact on politics, culture and society. With an enrollment of more than 1,700 graduate and undergraduate students, USC Annenberg offers B.A., M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in journalism, communication, and public relations.

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