Target Marketing to Newscast Audiences: An Exploratory Segmentation Analysis

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Abstract

To evaluate the efficacy of any television show as an advertising vehicle or the effectiveness of sponsors' promotional messages, managerially useful ways of depicting audience segments must be found. Results from this exploratory investigation into characterizations of audiences of locally-produced news programs suggest sponsors should consider measures of viewers' interests, opinions, and behaviors, as well as receptivity to various program attributes. Viewing behavior patterns also may be informative. But demographics, despite their popularity, seem of little value.

Introduction

Locally-produced television newscasts provide sponsors with a popular advertising vehicle. However, audience characteristics must be understood to evaluate the efficacy of such programs in reaching targeted customer segments and to develop and place advertisements so as to access targeted segments effectively (Aaker and Myers 1988; Engel, Warshaw and Kinnear 1983; Lumpkin and Darden 1982; McGann and Russell 1981; Soldow and Principe 1981). Accordingly, two salient questions emerge for research into the efficacy of locally-produced television news programs as vehicles for marketing communications: (1) which variables can be used to provide an efficient characterization of the market served by news broadcasts; and (2) how can the resulting characterizations be used to reach targeted customer segments? The purpose of this exploratory study is to answer these questions.

Specifically, this empirical inquiry is focused on two related sets of variables: (1) viewer preferences for program format attributes serves as the criterion; and (2) four constructs representing viewer characteristics serve as predictors. Variables representing program format attributes and viewer characteristics were taken from previous studies of factors thought to influence attention to media. Interpretations of statistical

results include suggestions on how to reach identified segments and evidence concerning the usefulness of prospective segmentation variables.

The Preferred Program Format for Television News

In market segmentation studies, the criterion construct typically represents the product/service selected by the market. Hence, preferences for program attributes serve as criterion measures in this study (Domzal and Kernan 1983; Lumpkin and Darden 1982; Swartz and Meyer 1986). Such preferences can be envisioned as having three facets. First, the human facet includes the attributes of the newscasters themselves (Cathcart 1969-70; Houlberg 1984; Prisuta 1979; Sanders and Pritchett 1971; Shostek 1974). Individually, newscasters may be viewed as persons having certain characteristics of speech, appearance, and knowledge; collectively, they may be seen as a group of persons who interact with one another. In fact, many stations have implemented "happy talk" formats because they believe such interaction attracts certain viewer segments (Demby 1986; Prisuta 1979).

Second, the topic facet pertains to the focus of news featured (e.g., local or international) and

the time allocated to various types of events (Chang, Shoemaker and Brendlinger 1987; Demby 1986; Lehmann 1973; Litman 1980; Stone, Hartung and Jensen 1987). The manner in which stories are presented, regardless of the featured subjects, is the third facet of the newscast (Jackson-Beeck and Sobal 1980; Prisuta 1979). Thus, stories can be created to vary in their emphasis on humor and human interest and can be produced to vary in length.

Identifying Characteristics of Viewing Segments

Marketing researchers have employed a wide variety of variables to describe audience segments (Aaker and Myers 1988), as have researchers in the fields of broadcasting, journalism, and communications. The conceptualization underlying this empirical study drew from findings of previous research in all of these fields.

The audience of a television station is typically described in terms of its demographics by station management and by its sales force. Similarly, marketing researchers have long recognized demographics as useful for the purpose of segmentation involving promotion in a wide variety of markets (Engel, Warshaw and Kinnear 1987; Gensch and Ranganathan 1974; McGann and Russell 1981).

As the first subset of predictor variables, demographics therefore furnish a benchmark for the success of this research in linking the criterion construct to the other three subsets of predictor variables. To the extent the other three subsets perform at least as well as demographics, they can be considered relatively efficient variables in the present context. Therefore, several demographic characteristics of viewers comprise the first subset of predictor variables (Stevenson and Lang 1976). Previous research has linked both viewer preferences and choice measures to such variables as sex (Eastman, Head and Klein 1981; Shosteck 1974), age (Levy 1978; Shosteck 1974), education (Houlberg 1984; Kline 1971), income (Eastman, Head and Klein 1981), occupation (Kline 1971), and socioeconomic status (Shosteck 1974).

The second predictor subset contains variables reflecting viewer interests, opinions, and behaviors in relation to news sources in general. It

includes measures of the extent to which individuals are influenced by significant others. For example, some viewers seemingly want to feel close to members of the news team; that is, to be involved in what has been called "para-social interaction" (Horton and Wohl 1956; Houlberg 1984; Levy 1979; Rubin and McHugh 1987). Also, some persons may not personally select the channel for news because another member of the household usually makes this choice (Bower 1973; Lull 1978; Wand 1968; Webster and Wakshlag 1982). Moreover, some viewers may (or may not) feel the range of newscasts offered in the local market provides a satisfactory level of quality or that stations fail to differentiate their offerings sufficiently from one another (Mausser 1976). Additionally, format preferences may relate to whether viewers travel frequently, whether they are sports fans (Michaels 1973), or whether their daily schedules allow watching television at a particular time (Ehrenberg 1968; Bower 1973).

The third predictor subset depicts viewer receptivity to various elements of the newscast (Lehman 1973; Domzal and Kernan 1983). Some viewers may be receptive to weather information; others may favor sports. Some may have strong opinions about the proper order of presentation of news items; still others may be characterized in terms of their degree of receptivity to local, national, and international news items.

The fourth subset contains variables that pertain specifically to viewing behavior patterns (Tan 1977). Viewing behavior is particularly important to marketers because it subsumes such measures as viewers' attention to newscasts, the amount of time spent watching news, and the time of day and the days of the week when viewers watch news (Faber, Reese and Steeves 1985; Hornik and Schlinger 1981; Houlberg 1984). Viewing behavior includes the extent to which a viewer is loyal to a particular channel and the viewer's loyalty to local sources of news programming, as opposed to network sources (Bruno 1973; Goddhardt, Ehrenberg and Collins 1975; Levy 1978). Additionally, this set includes the viewer's propensity to habitually watch programs that immediately precede or succeed the newscast (Comstock 1978; Litman 1980).

The four noted subsets of hypothesized pre-

dictors were examined empirically to determine their usefulness in characterizing audiences. Identified viewer segments will be described jointly in terms of programming preferences and viewer characteristics.

Method

Data Collection

Data were collected via a quota sample of 180 adult residents of a large western metropolitan area. The sample design matched the age and sex of respondents to the proportions listed in twelve age-and-sex categories reported for the media market in the most recent census. To obtain proper socio-economic representation of the population, interviewers were assigned to all sections of the metropolitan area. Respondents filled out self-completion questionnaires in the presence of the interviewers, who motivated cooperation and monitored compliance with instructions.

Six-point rating scales were used to measure most variables. The remainder were operationalized using forced choice or free response techniques. Categorical measures were converted to dichotomous dummy variables to facilitate statistical analysis.

Data Analysis

Canonical correlation analysis was used to investigate relationships between the multivariate criterion and predictor sets (Hair et al., 1987). Specifically, linear combinations of the variables comprising the criterion and the predictor sets, called canonical variates, were derived. They describe two patterns of variables that are maximally related--one pattern for the criterion set and one for the predictor set. Loadings--i.e., correlations between the derived canonical variates and the original variables--were used to interpret results. The higher the loading, the greater the emphasis given a variable when interpreting results. Patterns discovered via this technique indicate which variables are determinant of segment membership (Alpert 1972).

Segments of the Local Television News Market

To serve the first purpose of this study, re-

sults of the canonical analysis are presented in Table 1. They indicate which variables can be used to provide an efficient characterization of the market served by news broadcasts. The first eleven variables shown in the table are measures of preferred program format and constitute the criterion set. The remaining variables constitute the predictor set, which comprises the four subsets of variables introduced above. The predictors were analyzed as one group of variables, and are interpreted as such. However, to reflect the conceptualization developed earlier, loadings for the predictor variables are reported under four subheadings.

Three roots were found significant at the .05 level. The statistical structure of the three viewer segments they represent is explicated in this section. In the next section, their marketing implications are examined. Root A represents a viewer segment whose criterion measures indicate it wants a news team that has been together a long time and whose members interact well with one another. This segment focuses on human aspects of the news presentation; specifically, on the appearance of the newscasters and their having a pleasing voice and way of speaking. It also likes a format that emphasizes humor and the presentation of items high in human interest content. Finally, this segment prefers local news to national and international news.

The corresponding canonical variate for the predictor variables shows a high need for parasocial interaction; this segment wants to feel close to the news team on a personal basis. Also, the segment delineated by Root A can be characterized as wanting an entertaining newscast, one that presents the human side of the news. This segment finds satisfaction with the selection of news programs available on local stations, and does not like disturbing news items. Furthermore, it is satisfied with the coverage of national news, even though it is not very interested in it.

At a lesser level of importance, the predictor variables describe these viewers as satisfied with the coverage of international news by their favorite newscast, with its sports and weather, and with its format and order of presentation. Their general acceptance of the channel's newscast extends to other programming; that is, Segment A is more loyal to its news channel and tends to

watch the program that follows the news on that station.

Root B reflects the desire that newscasters be knowledgeable about the news they report and that newscasts devote a relatively large amount of time to national and international news subjects. The segment delineated by Root B finds it important to learn something from watching a newscast. Although it is interested mainly in non-local news, it rates the local news content of its favorite newscast quite highly.

At a lesser level, these viewers are interested in the appearance of the newscasters and in their voice and speech characteristics. They are receptive to the format of their favorite local news program and the order in which it presents news items, as well as to its coverage of national news stories. These viewers also spend more time watching news programs, are more likely to be female, and travel more frequently for reasons other than business.

Segment C has virtually no interest in the news team itself and prefers items rich in national, local, and human interest content. Also, it has little interest in sports and feels there is little differentiation among newscasts provided by competing television channels. The pattern of smaller loadings suggests this segment wants longer news stories, and watches a newscast for the purpose of education rather than entertainment.

Implications for Marketers

To serve the second purpose of this study, this section is focused on how the given audience characterizations can be used as the basis for effective marketing communications. First, the characteri-

TABLE 1
Characteristics of Three Segments of Television News Viewers

Variables	Root A	Root B	Root C
<u>Criterion Variables: Program Format</u>			
(Six-point rating scales for importance of item)			
Newscasters' Characteristics - consistent news team	.68	-.14	-.18
Newscasters' Characteristics - appearance	.55	.36	-.37
Newscasters' Characteristics - knowledge	.04	.55	.03
Newscasters' Characteristics - voice and speech	.70	.33	.03
Allocation of time - percent international news	-.08	.36	.11
Allocation of time - percent national news	-.11	.45	.54
Allocation of time - percent local news	.47	.11	.35
News format - length of stories	.06	.03	.28
News format - humor	.57	-.14	-.11
News format - human interest	.55	-.32	.48
News format - newscaster interaction	.90	.04	.08
<u>Predictor Variables: Identifying Characteristics of Viewers</u>			
<u>Demographics</u>			
(Measures as indicated)			
Sex (0=female;1=male)	-.10	-.28	-.04
Marital status (0=single;1=married)	.00	.00	-.17
Age (years)	.07	-.11	.04
Socioeconomic status (NORC scale)	-.15	.02	-.16
Education (years of schooling)	-.23	.19	-.15
Household income (7-point scale)	-.22	.11	-.02
<u>Interests, Opinions, and Behaviors</u>			
(Six-point rating scales except as noted)			
Reasons for viewing -- education	.26	.49	.20
Reasons for viewing -- entertainment	.61	.01	-.27
Emotional requirements -- not bothered by the news	.54	-.19	.19
Emotional requirements -- para-social interaction	.70	-.06	.09
Viewer availability	.05	-.24	.12
Social aspect of viewing	-.07	.14	-.17
Person who selects the program, whether viewer or someone else	-.08	-.13	-.02
Satisfaction with news alternatives	.46	.24	.10
Perception that news alternatives are similar	-.23	-.16	.33
Attention to media--newspaper (minutes per weekday)	.01	-.01	-.02
Attention to media--radio (hours per weekday)	-.07	.28	.18
Attention to media--television (hours per weekday)	.26	-.09	.16
Interest in sports (3-point scale)	.01	.05	-.42
Interest in travel (3-point scale)	.01	.28	.05
<u>Viewer Receptivity to Newscast Features</u>			
(Six-point rating scales)			
Coverage of local news	.29	.44	.03
Coverage of national news	.42	.30	.33
Coverage of international news	.37	.21	.22
Coverage of sports	.31	.10	-.06
Presentation of weather information	.37	.18	.06
Presentation of human interest features	.47	.27	.12
General format, order of presentation	.30	.30	.07
<u>Viewing Behavior Patterns</u>			
(Measures as indicated)			
Loyalty to news on channel of preferred newscast (days in five)	.28	.21	-.16
Attention to newscast (6-point scale)	.12	.17	.24
Volume of news viewing (hours per week)	.04	.30	.22
Volume of local news (days per week)	.08	.22	-.11
Watches news on weekend (0=no;1,2=number of days)	.08	.04	.03
Prefers daytime news (0=no;1=yes)	.16	.11	.19
Prefers six o'clock news (0=no;1=yes)	-.27	.10	.17
Prefers ten o'clock news (0=no;1=yes)	.19	.04	-.26
Watches program on same channel before news (weekdays in five)	.18	-.19	-.07
Watches program same channel after news (weekdays in five)	.32	.07	-.07
Channel loyalty (6-point scale)	.38	-.02	-.22

zations of the three identified audience segments are interpreted to suggest means for reaching these segments. Next, the five sets of variables are examined to determine their usefulness in understanding audience segments.

Characteristics of Three News Segments

The three viewer segments identified here reflect particular degrees of (1) local vs. national/international focus; (2) requirements for personnel on the news team; (3) interest in information vs. entertainment; and (4) preference for the human element in news stories. Implications of these characterizations will be treated here by considering simultaneously the two related (criterion and predictor) patterns for each root.

Segment A. Segment A views locally-produced news offerings in large measure as entertainment and "show biz." The human aspects of the presentation dominate its requirements; moreover, it seeks a "family" of familiar and attractive newscasters when watching local newscasts. Having a strong interest in para-social interaction, its favorite news show may take on the semblance of a daily reunion with old friends.

This segment's loyalty and receptivity to virtually all aspects of its favorite newscast may be indicative of more general loyalty and receptivity traits that encompass brand loyalty and receptivity to advertisements and purchase suggestions. Accordingly, it would seem to present an attractive segment for marketers whose success is dependent on building loyal clienteles. Those who aim for this audience might use entertaining themes that involve the audience in the presented situation. These themes might feature humor (Murphy, Cunningham and Wilcox 1979) and identifiable characters (Petty, Cacioppo and Schumann 1983), such as local news personalities.

Segment B. Segment B comprises information-oriented viewers. These viewers have interests more cosmopolitan in nature than Segment A insofar as they seek news from the world beyond their own locality. These relatively heavy viewers of newscasts concentrate on fewer attributes of the news team. In contrast with Segment A, they seek knowledge about world events, not entertainment. Their search for information brings them to watch more newscasts than are viewed by those with different orienta-

tions.

Given this greater need for information, marketers can consider reaching Segment B by using themes featuring a higher concentration of information, as opposed to imagery. These viewers would seem more likely to respond to commercials featuring characters from the world beyond their immediate geographical locale and should be more receptive to situations consistent with their cosmopolitan orientation. In addition, advertisements, products, and services with feminine appeal seem highly suited for this audience.

Segment C. Segment C is less clearly portrayed. The findings show a segment having an interest in the human side of news of America, particularly stories from outside the viewers' geographical locale. These viewers are not concerned with the attractiveness of the news team and definitely do not have an interest in sports news.

Because they perceive offerings of local news channels as very similar, they may not remain loyal to a single news program. Certainly, the program format they prefer will not devote much time to sports news. The finding that these viewers prefer education over entertainment may partially explain their desire for longer news stories. The overall pattern of low interest in certain aspects of television news suggests this segment is composed of uninvolved viewers who are the television counterpart of the uninvolved shoppers who do not devote much effort to finding the best buys (Williams, Painter and Nicholas 1978).

This segment appears to offer the greatest challenge for marketers who seek to communicate with them. Marketers might feature identifiable persons in their ads, preferably persons who are visible because of activities recognized at the national level, but who participate in fields other than sports. Themes could provide more information than is found in the usual commercial message.

Usefulness of the Specified Measures

Below, the usefulness of the criterion and the predictor sets used in this study are examined. Regarding their part in defining viewer segments, 10 of the 11 program format variables,

which comprise the criterion, exhibited loadings of at least .30 on one or more of the canonical variates, which indicates they contributed substantially to characterizing the market (audience) segments. The remaining criterion variable, preferred length of news stories, made a marginal contribution in defining one segment.

Of the four subsets of variables in the predictor set, the viewer receptivity subset demonstrated the greatest relative efficiency for describing viewer segments. All seven of these variables contributed importantly to the description of at least one segment. For the interests, opinions, and behaviors subset, six of 14 variables reached the .30 level. Three of 11 variables in the viewing behavior pattern subset reached this level, but none of the six demographics loaded as highly as .30.

Findings based on the receptivity variables indicate marketers should recognize that viewers differ with respect to their acceptance of television news programming in several respects. For instance, they differ not only in terms of their acceptance of the news program as a whole, but perhaps more importantly, with respect to certain benefits provided by the program. In particular, marketers should consider their acceptance of either information- or entertainment-oriented programming (Swartz and Meyer 1986).

The specified interest, opinion, and behavior variables also suggested effective ways of reaching the market. Specifically, sponsors can find implications in the social aspects of viewing, whether viewers have educational or entertainment reasons for viewing, and viewers' perceptions of how news producers differentiate their products (Litman 1980). As suggested above, viewers with an educational interest would likely require more information-oriented messages than those who seek entertainment from their newscast. Of course, in this study it was possible to include only a small subset of all such variables. Further research into the usefulness of variables of this type in characterizing news audience segments seems promising.

Viewing behavior patterns made a marginal contribution to the understanding of this market. Findings with respect to these variables largely confirm what is already known or might be suspected. For example, the "flow concept"

suggests that some viewers watch the news as a prelude to the following show; or alternatively, perhaps out of inertia, they stay with the same channel after the news to watch what follows (Litman 1980). For one reason or another, some viewers become loyal to a particular channel.

The set of demographics, as noted above, was virtually useless in characterizing the viewer segments identified in this study. This finding supports the results of Swartz and Meyer (1986). Earlier it was suggested that demographics could be used as a benchmark for evaluating the contribution of the other three subsets of predictors. Using this basis for comparison, the other variables performed relatively well.

The non-significance of the statistical findings for individual demographics, too, holds implications for marketers. They should note that none of the three segments could be characterized by income or education, two variables often used for marketing decisions. The negative finding with respect to income suggests local newscasts are not particularly efficient in reaching high or low income customer segments. The same applies to customer segments defined in terms of education. In general, the weak loadings on demographics should remind marketers that, in their search for the best fit between their message and television programming, personal characteristics other than demographics (e.g., psychographics) may have to be employed (Hornik and Schlinger 1981).

One other non-significant statistical finding holds meaningful implications for marketers. The results disclose no monolithic segment of general media attenders. The loadings for attention to print and electronic media showed one segment somewhat interested in television and a different segment somewhat interested in radio (Faber, Reese and Steeves 1985). None of the segments emerged as differentially interested in newspapers, and there was no segment particularly attentive to more than one such medium.

Concluding Comments

In summary, the results from this exploratory investigation indicate newscast segments can be identified in ways that provide marketers with useful information. Moreover, it appears, marketers will be well-advised to consider a variety

of measures beyond (or in lieu of) demographics when deciding on themes and placement of their television commercials. Such measures include viewer receptivity, viewers' interests, opinions, and behaviors, and, to a lesser extent, viewing behavior patterns.

Directions for future research include refining the predictor or the criterion sets by adding or modifying measures of constructs investigated in this study. Also, insofar as this study was of an exploratory nature, no attempt was made to assess whether the reported audience profiles hold across localities. Such a study, which should be of substantial academic and managerial interest, affords another opportunity to extend the research reported in this article.

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