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The production and mediatisation of political talk television in the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom

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The Production and Mediatisation of Political Talk Television in The United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom

Neil James Stevenson

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requirements of the University of Westminster
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Abstract

This thesis is a cross-national study that investigates political talk television. The first and main part looks at political talk show production. By talking to senior political talk producers working in different countries, newsrooms and political talk shows, this study constructs a general framework – involving structural, agency, and ideational factors – which explains how political talk shows are produced, and more importantly, why they appear the way they do. The thesis argues that the traditional divide between structures and agency needs to be abolished to truly understand news production. A typology of talk is constructed – parliamentary talk, participatory talk and advocacy talk – which demonstrates that although the general production framework applies to all shows, different forms of talk are more or less responsive to different production elements.

The second part interrogates the content of political talk shows by looking at marketisation and mediatisation. To what extent can marketisation and mediatisation explain political talk content? A cross-national methodology is employed that categorises the three countries according to their marketisation levels. The relationship between marketisation and mediatisation is then examined in a qualitative content analysis of political talk shows. Evidence suggests that American talk is more mediatised than British or Australian talk – it is more interpretive, more likely to view politics as a game, more likely to personalise politics, and more likely to rely on aesthetic aspects – and some weaker evidence shows British talk as slightly less mediatised than Australian talk, in-line with marketisation expectations. However, no relationship has been identified between more or less commercial news institutions and mediatisation of political talk content other than to conclude that advocacy talk is the most mediatised style of talk overall.

These results highlight that the antecedent of mediatisation is most evident at the macro level of analysis. However, they also point to a problem with the mediatisation theory at lower levels of analysis: political talk is at least partly a mediatised format, but the drivers of this mediatisation do not relate simplistically to more or less marketisation because institutional marketisation does not relate to mediatisation of content, and therefore, the mediatisation of political talk shows might very well relate to wider cultural and political factors.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Political communication in post-broadcast democracy

Mediated political communication is fundamentally tied to wider social, cultural and economic factors.¹ One of the main structuring forces of the past 30 years has been marketisation: the idea that advanced societies have become increasingly commercial – open to market values – and therefore increasingly responsive to individual rather than civic interests. Political communication has been affected by such changes. The relationship between citizens and their elected representatives, as well as between citizens and important information about their society, is filtered through *mediated* political communication that is open to this market-based re-structuring because of the large institutional apparatus required for news broadcasting.

Analysis of political communication is inherently normative because of the importance of a well-functioning public sphere (Blumler and Cushion, 2014). Therefore, the extent to which political communication is transformed by marketisation is a concern for scholars. Mediatisation embodies this concern in relation to mediated political content. Scholars have found that more commercial societies foster a more mediatised form of journalism, that is, a journalism that is self-referential and aggrandising, hyper-distrusting of politicians, and likely to view politics in personalised terms, as well as through a game and contest prism. The extreme mediatisation of political communication poses a threat to important and reliable political information needed to make decisions about society because mediatised journalism serves journalistic celebrificaiton purposes and not necessarily democratically normative civic ends.

A more market-oriented society increases competition via deregulation and the promotion of competition friendly policies. This results in two forms of fragmentation. The first is external fragmentation. Enabled by deregulation and technological convergence, news media compete, channels increase, and this puts pressure on public service broadcasting; in response, the people, formerly known as “the audience”, have begun to form clusters based on politics, lifestyles, and values (Hamilton, 2004: 71-120;

¹ When I use the term “political communication”, I mean mediated political communication.

Bennett and Iyengar, 2008; Stroud, 2011), which are served by niche programming. It is now easier for people to avoid news altogether (Prior, 2007). The very notion of a unified and mass society is experiencing tension: 'Television's role as a public sphere is diminished by these easy opt-outs, and democracy suffers from the absence of socially cross-cutting exchanges of experience, knowledge, and comment' (Gurevitch et al., 2009: 170).

As the news landscape externally fragments, alternatives to the news bulletin appear. This happens in conjunction with post-modern themes like the individualisation of society and the decline of authority. For example, Silverman (1993) identified what he termed the interview society, which recognises that interaction and interviews are an important way to understand and produce cultural knowledge. Taking on this ethos, formats based on question asking and chat rather than fact telling and monologue proliferate in parallel to external news fragmentation. This is termed internal news fragmentation (Ben-Porath, 2007). News formats based on a dialogical ethos as opposed to a monological – lecturing – ethos like the news bulletin are well suited to a fragmented "post-broadcast" landscape because they are cheap to produce, easy to control and sustain, and grounded in lively forms of human interaction. Peters (2006) perceptively outlines three types of mediated talk: conversation (informal, personalised talk), dialogue (problem solving talk), and dissemination (one to many talk); all three forms of talk are found in mediated forms of political communication, but dialogical news formats like political talk shows emphasise the first two styles of talk.

The political television interview format has a long history. Political talk television is both modern, embracing dialogical modes of address and an informal ethos, and historically institutional, being tied to political communication by way of political discussion and interview. Political talk is also a quirky political format. It does not have the authoritative appeal of current affairs, the news bulletin, or documentary, yet it remains, at least nominally, an approximate public sphere: a place where political argument – or public rationality (Habermas, 1962 [1989]; Habermas, 1984) – is brought into being. Public political conversation is not a panacea for democracy, to be sure. Still, Schudson (1997: 307) misses the point when he says that 'conversation is not the soul of democracy' because 'democracy has little to do with intimacy and little to do with community' (1997:

307). What makes political talk shows interesting is that they (generally) combine the rule bound, problem-solving type of talking that Schudson rightly argues is the marker of valuable democratic speech, with – and this is what Schudson ignores – aspects of intimacy, interaction, authenticity and sociability, and the liveliness of everyday conversation.

Scholars have devoted a lot of attention to discourse within political talk shows (Scannell, 1991; Hutchby, 2006; Patrona, 2012), but almost no attention has been given to how they are produced. Similarly, analysis of the mediatisation of journalism is rarely applied to political talk television.

Political talk television and research focus

Related to these big crosscurrents – marketisation, mediatisation, and news fragmentation – I investigate the production of political talk television as well as the marketisation of countries and the mediatisation of political talk show content. Taking the former concern first, I focus on the production priorities of political talk producers and the processes of production. I analyse political talk production in a comparative perspective (America, Britain, and Australia), which enables me to sketch a framework for understanding political talk production. The democratic implications of the findings are also explored.

Research questions: At its heart, this investigation is concerned with two simple questions. What are the production priorities – norms, routines, values, and goals – of political talk producers? How and why is political talk television produced the way it is? At first, the answer to these questions seems commonsensical: political talk production is influenced by news organisations. Yet, upon reflection, there is a whole set of interacting factors: political economy, political factors, and aspects like professional norms and cultural history, as well as the agency of the people involved. It is not actually immediately clear how all this works. The initial – simplistic – questions are devilishly difficult to answer and this is perhaps why, to my knowledge, no serious and comparative investigation into political talk production has been carried out.

New approach: Political talk television has been studied by analysing the on-screen dynamics via methods like conversation analysis and linguistic pragmatics. In simple terms, scholars have focussed on the text. Two aspects are understudied. First, cross-national research on political talk is scant. Second, research on the production of political talk television is very limited, usually reduced to a single programme in a single country. Combining these two aspects, I aim to: 1) study the production of political talk television but include multiple programmes; and 2) research political talk television in different countries for comparative purposes. Finally, there has been an over-emphasis on organisational routines and structures in news production research. I approach political talk production from a pragmatic and unified position that combines both structural and organisational factors, and factors like the values, goals and agency of producers. In this way, the study starts from a holistic picture of production.

Method: To uncover how senior producers perceive their roles, as well as to infer aspects about the production processes and values that underpin political talk shows, semi-structured interviews with producers of different talk shows across three countries were carried out. Qualitative analysis of the shows themselves was also conducted. However, while this data is used here to gain cross-national understanding of the nature of political talk shows, the textual analysis data is mainly used in answering the second set of questions that follow.

Arguments: An underlying production framework is evident across all of the political talk shows investigated in the three countries. Political talk shows are a result of structural factors, ideational factors and producer agency. The structural factors include institutions both public and private, media ecology, impartiality and defamation laws, the news agenda and 24-hour news, and the twin industrial needs to cut costs and increase control, and attract audiences and maintain political prestige. The ideational and agency factors relate to the how producers conceive of politics, their political talk shows and their roles, as well as their normative conceptions of journalism. Production priorities fall into a tripartite schema: serving democracy, pragmatic ideas around the realities of the job, and audience entertainment and attraction desires. These ideas coalesce into a programme identity that provides a common-sense framework from which producers operate. This is solidified early on in a programme's life by a process I term producer path dependency.

Finally, although this political talk production framework applies to all shows, it is not monolithic. Different styles of political talk (parliamentary talk, advocacy talk and participatory talk) relate slightly differently to the framework, meaning that the framework is a guide to understanding the main political talk production influences, and not a functionalist model.

Contributions to knowledge: Comparatively investigating the production of political talk television is a first step towards unpacking the under-studied terrain of political talk production; I pinpoint the main production influences. In addition, I show the role that ideas and values play in the news production process. This pragmatic and unified approach to news production has not been emphasised in the production literature. Furthermore, the democratic implications of political talk are investigated which adds to the production framework outlined in that all forms of talk do not function in exactly the same way, or with the same democratic implications. This approach offers a fresh look at political talk television and provides a basis for other scholars to study political talk television. Finally, this study gives a comparative insight into the nature of political talk shows in modern democracy.

A subsidiary aim of this thesis is to empirically test the theses of marketisation and mediatisation by looking at political talk cross-nationally; mediatisation can be evaluated by comparing political talk shows from more or less marketised contexts.

Research question: To what extent can marketisation and mediatisation explain political talk content? The comparative design gives a decent opportunity to test the macro theories of marketisation and mediatisation. This is especially important because most studies test these theories by looking at the press or the television news bulletin. Political talk, a different genre of news, might have a different relationship to these theories.

New approach: I have surveyed the burgeoning and popular literature on marketisation and mediatisation and I have noticed the following problems with both theses: 1) there appears to be a disjuncture between the marketisation and mediatisation rhetoric, and the empirical data, because the rhetoric is more inflated than the empirical support brought to bear on the claims; 2) there is a lack of clarity about the genres and types of news studied, with the implication that not all news forms should be assumed to be the

same and therefore equally mediatised within a country; 3) the claim that a more marketised environment relates to more mediatised political talk content does not *seem* to play out, but this needs closer investigation; and 4) Hallin and Mancini's (2004) political and media systems typology, which sees America and the UK as similar, is beginning to be challenged with more attention being given to empirical detail, and this is something that this part of the thesis investigates.

Method: I adopt a comparative method that is different from the simplistic typology laid out by Hallin and Mancini. Spurred on by Humphreys' (2012) approach, I order the countries in terms of their marketisation indicators across a range of marketisation measures. America is the most marketised, Britain is the least, while Australia is in the middle. This enables the relationship between marketisation and mediatisation to be tested. A qualitative analysis of political talk shows testing mediatisation indicators across countries then follows. Three different institutional types are also tested (public service, commercial free to air, and 24-hour news) in their treatment of political talk because the mediatisation of political talk at the institutional level should follow that of the country level with regard to the relationship between commercialism and mediatisation; the political talk genre is also taken into account when explaining mediatisation outcomes.

Arguments: American talk is more mediatised than British or Australian talk. This goes against Hallin and Mancini's typology, which lumps the UK and the US together. However, finer grained differences in political talk between Australia and Britain were harder judge except for the following: Australia has an advocacy talk show despite having news impartiality regulation, which suggests weak enforcement and a slightly different political and journalism culture; Britain does not have any advocacy talk but its political talk is centrist and similar overall. Mediatisation differences could not be attributed to institutions, which problematises the link between marketisation and mediatisation and therefore causal explanations about the drivers of mediatisation. The only genre related claim to stand up to scrutiny was that advocacy talk is likely to be heavily mediatised; otherwise, political talk generally tends to show a mixture of mediatised and normative indicators. Political talk is at least partly a mediatised format, but the drivers of this mediatisation do not seem to relate simplistically to more or less marketisation overall,

and might very well relate to factors embedded in the production process and wider cultural aspects.

Contributions to knowledge: By looking at political talk, a news format that spans three countries (The United States, Australia and the United Kingdom), and placing the three countries on a spectrum from the most marketised, America, to the least, the United Kingdom, with Australia in the middle, this thesis contributes to knowledge in a number of ways. First, it implements a grounded and empirical comparative approach that is more nuanced than Hallin and Mancini's. Second, it applies the mediatisation and marketisation theses cross-nationally while looking at political talk, which problematises simplistic conclusions that relate marketisation to mediatisation, and acknowledges the importance of attention to news genres outside of the news bulletin and the press. Third, this study contextualises Hallin and Mancini's simplistic "Liberal Model" typology by giving evidence that Britain and America have different kinds of political talk when judged by mediatisation indicators, with the implication that these two countries have more differences than similarities. Finally, on a more micro level, this study provides insights into the political and journalistic content and style of political talk shows in three advanced democracies, as well as highlights some of the democratic implications.

Structure

Chapters **two** and **three** survey the main theoretical pillars of this investigation: marketisation and mediatisation, and the production of political talk television. Chapter **two** defines marketisation – when commercial aims and values extend into wider society and become the means by which all cultural activity is judged – and makes the case that marketisation is not monolithic across all countries. The chapter then evaluates existing symptoms of marketisation in news content: tabloidisation and mediatisation. There is long term cross-national evidence that news has become softer and incorporates more entertaining aspects, but short-term trends show a mixture of hard and soft news, and serious vs. entertaining presentation. Ultimately, the tabloidisation thesis is crude and conceptually ill defined. I argue that a more recent iteration, mediatisation, has more analytical bite. Mediatisation is defined as a prioritisation of market over normative political and media values (Landerer, 2013). I operationalise mediatisation as follows: the

prioritisation of journalists over other actors and a self-referential impetus; a reliance on game and strategy frames over policy and issue frames; the personalisation of politics; and greater use of visual or performative (aesthetic) techniques. There is some evidence linking marketisation at the national level with mediatisation at the content level, although the evidence is not clear-cut.

Chapter **three** studies political talk television, a form of news ubiquitous in a fragmenting political communication landscape. This chapter defines political talk television and then argues that the production of political talk has not received adequate scholarly attention. This chapter makes logical links with news production scholarship and tours the main findings of broadcast and radio talk scholarship. The chapter pulls out four main claims that are likely to apply to political talk television: the main production perspectives; institutions; the incorporation of audience needs; and the role of production identity. The analysis of political talk production is likened to Scannell's concept of a communicative ethos, which recognises that cultural production bears the marks of its producers and its institutions, as well as its unseen but intended audiences (1996: 21). The chapter concludes by noting that despite Scannell's insight being almost 20 years old, and applying explicitly to production processes, a robust investigation into the production of political talk has not been forthcoming. It is here that this study is situated.

Chapter **four** outlines the cross-national research design. The intention is to get away from the parochial tendencies that are prevalent in news production research, as well as to understand more thoroughly how political talk is produced by including a wide variety of shows. The research design allows a gradient of marketisation to be investigated with hypothesised implications for mediatisation in political talk shows. Finally, it offers a grounded historical-empirical-comparative study of the three countries.

Chapter **five** details the research method. Production was studied by way of interviews with senior producers to cover the ground required to look at multiple shows in multiple countries. Qualitative content analysis was employed to look at the mediatisation tendencies, which enabled a focused analysis of the main mediatisation indicators. This mixed method approach provides a well-rounded look at the backstage and frontstage (content) elements of political talk shows.

Chapters **six** and **seven** examine the production of political talk shows. However, chapter **six** looks at the main structural factors while chapter **seven** is concerned with the ideational and agency factors (called production priorities). These factors are observable across all producers and political talk shows. The structural factors work in a kaleidoscopic way to influence and mould the playing field on which producers work. On the other hand, the production priorities coalesce and eventually harden into an identity, which is an approximate scaffolding that producers carry with them that allows them to consistently “know” how to produce their *specific* show. With producer path dependency, a set of aims and values becomes “locked-in” very early on; change is indeed possible, but continuity over time is more likely. Together, both chapters present a framework for thinking about the main elements that account for political talk production.

It is important that these chapters are read together as a framework to avoid reductionist arguments around structures vs. agency. To explore how this framework operates, chapter **eight** creates a typology of the three main types of political talk (advocacy, parliamentary and participatory). Using a case study approach it explores the different ways in which the framework operates and the democratic implications for different kinds of talk; this chapter provides evidence that the highlighted production factors in chapters **six** and **seven** do not operate in a monolithic manner but remain important to understanding political talk production.

Chapter **nine** analyses the content of political talk shows cross-nationally to investigate marketisation, mediatisation and media systems. There is some evidence that points to the more marketised US being more mediatised in its political talk than Australia and the least marketised UK, but little robust evidence to substantiate differences between the latter two countries. In sum, firm conclusions backed by sustained evidence about the causes of mediatisation remain elusive. Possible explanations relate to the idiosyncratic characteristics of the news organisations and political and journalism cultures.

Chapter 2: Marketisation

Introduction

Marketisation, the deep-seated process by which commercial values are imbued within and across society, is the concern of this chapter. The global marketisation of televised broadcasting structures has challenged public service broadcasting models, and has in part, led to intensified competition for public attention and the drift towards the entertainment characteristic of post-broadcast environments (Prior, 2007). These processes are not uniform, and not altogether negative, but the commercial impulses promulgated by marketisation pose a challenge for political news content traditionally construed as public service. After defining and exploring the underpinnings of marketisation, this chapter looks at its symptoms in political broadcast journalism: tabloidisation and mediatisation. Marketisation is then linked to political talk television in three respects: first, news fragmentation and the democratic implications for different types of political talk. Second, mediatisation is a logical reflection of marketisation and this can be applied at the country level to look at the extent to which more or less marketised countries differ in their mediatisation indicators in political talk shows. Third, a similar logic also allows the link between more or less commercial institutional types to be compared with more or less mediatisation within talk shows.

Marketisation theory and broadcasting

One of the main global *processes* that influences cultural, economic, political and social aspects of society is marketisation. *Market(isation)* is the extending of a *market* (its logics, relationships and priorities) outside of purely economic (commodity related) realms.

Meehan and Paul (2011: 65) define a market as:

[A]n economic construct that emerges from a combination of legal strictures, economic relationships between entities capable of engaging in transactions, and the structures resulting from those elements that may become institutionalized within an economy over time.

This definition is particularly apt for viewing marketisation as a process because it emphasises the role of relationships and human actions in markets; in other words, “a market” is created, fostered, and then embedded and institutionalised in the social and

political fabric of society. Marketisation should be further understood as the “deep effects” (Leys, 2003: 2) of neo-liberalism, (the justification) and deregulation, (the practice) on various dimensions of society including media policy (Murdock and Wasko, 2007).² Neoliberalism is defined here as a political philosophy founded on a belief in the following: individual rights, choices and personal freedoms; the efficiency of free markets and trade; the desirability of extending market transactions to all areas of society; small government, light regulation and private enterprise (Friedman, 1962; Nozick, 1974; Hayek, 1978). Neoliberalism, according to Freedman, aims to ‘transform the balance of forces inside different economies and states in order to facilitate capital accumulation’ (2008: 42). The aim and arguably the result, has been marketisation: aligning the fundamental structures of society – cultural, social, economic and political – with neoliberal philosophy; that is, prioritising a market based organisation of society.

The ascendance of marketisation can be pinpointed to the late 1970s, with the breakdown of the Keynesian post-war, welfare-based, and liberal-corporatist social democratic consensus (Hardy, 2008: 62-63). Murdock and Golding (1999: 118) define marketisation as ‘policy interventions designed to increase the freedom of action of private corporations and to institute corporate goals and organisation procedures as the yardsticks against which the performance of all forms of cultural [and social] enterprise are judged’. The most relevant dimensions are: deregulation (aligning regulation to favour commercial aims and practices, for instance, the relaxation of public service requirements); privatisation (the sale of state assets and the outsourcing of government activity); liberalisation (commercial competition); and corporatisation (a prioritisation of market logic) (see also: Freedman, 2008: 50; Hardy, 2010: 199-203).

The democratic concern over marketisation is the tension between citizenship and consumerism: that citizenship is displaced for consumerism, the public good for individual preferences, and the moderate pursuit of profit for hyper-capitalism (Leys, 2003: 211-224). The Weberian distress over the Capitalist Spirit is also evident (1992: 17; original emphasis): ‘[C]apitalism is identical with the pursuit of profit, and forever *renewed* profit’.

² Marketisation tendencies have been identified in a number of areas in advanced western capitalist societies (Leys, 2003): finance (Krippner, 2005), higher education (Lynch, 2006), government and the political process (Lees-Marshment, 2001a; Lees-Marshment, 2001b; Franklin, 2004), and the culture industries (Kelsey, 2007).

In sum, the marketisation critique holds that market based ways of thinking and acting – consuming and making a profit as an end in itself – might come at the expense of societal inclusion and non-economic ways of being, communicating and thinking.

Aspects of marketisation have long been studied in the mass media. One of the earliest studies comes from The Frankfurt School. Adorno and Horkheimer pessimistically argue that “The Culture Industry” – mass media – hides and even makes pleasurable, citizens’ subordination to elite, corporate and authoritarian control by offering mass produced and thus conformist diversions from their exploited reality (1972: 120-167). In this way, the Hegelian slaves (most of the population) love their masters (elites) and by extension, their subordinate position: ‘Immovably, they insist on the very ideology which enslaves them’ (1972: 134). In other words, aligning mass media solely along market lines prioritises market based goals and output – profit and consumer satisfaction via media products treated as commodities – which is not the same as, for instance, aligning political media with public interest goals and favouring critical confrontation with socio-political reality.

Habermas (1962 [1989]) outlines his well-worn thesis about the development and colonisation of the 18th century British and French public spheres (autonomous and critical spaces of rationality) by the commercial, administrative and technical imperatives of a growing modern society. He asserts that life-world communication and rationality – communicative and social competencies possessed by people in order to function and relate *socially* to others – were displaced by a systems-world rationality – an instrumental rationality privileging “economic” ways of thinking and relating to others – which led to the closing down of the public sphere. This relates especially to the mass media, a key facilitator of mass society, which come to operate along economic lines, and not to serve the aims of the public good such as facilitating intersubjective communication and common knowledge in a fragmented society.

More recently, scholars have pinpointed media marketisation tendencies across Europe (Michalis, 2007; Hardy, 2008: 65-70 & 155-156), the UK (Leys, 2003; Barnett, 2011) and America (McChesney, 2000; Meehan, 2007; Freedman, 2008), with similarities in Australia (Jones, 2003; Phillips and Tapsall, 2007) and New Zealand (Cocker, 1996; Comrie, 1996). The specific media policy thrust (which has different emphases in different countries) is:

the acceptance of market orthodoxy prioritising commercialised competition; the loosening of ownership restrictions enabling multinational conglomeration followed by horizontal and vertical media integration; technological convergence and digitisation, followed by increased channel numbers and the penetration of pay television, and thus increased competition for viewers; the relaxation of public service commitments and statutory requirements, like news quotas and scheduling provisions; and finally, a sustained challenge to the place and logic of public service broadcasting itself. To take one example, Curran et al. (2009: 6) note that:

In most parts of the world, the news media are becoming more market orientated and entertainment centred. This is the consequence of three trends that have gathered pace since the 1980s: the multiplication of privately owned television channels, the weakening of programme requirements on commercial broadcasters ('deregulation') and a contraction in the audience size and influence of public broadcasters.

This strand of research, which is deeply concerned with marketisation in broadcast policy, has successfully pinpointed the pervasive deregulatory drive of many advanced democracies. What is often less appreciated, crucially, is that the marketisation of broadcasting structures has been contested; it is not monolithic. This becomes apparent when we view marketisation in a cross-national comparison. For instance, Gibbons and Humphreys argue that: 'while we accept that deregulatory competition may have a degree of explanatory purchase, our overall conclusion [with regard to the biggest economies in the EU] is that an uncritical acceptance of the rhetoric is not illuminating' (2012: 196). In what follows, I survey the evidence for marketisation.

Marketisation in cross-national perspective

Marketisation and regulation

While the old public service television monopolies have been broken (Bardoel and d'Haenens, 2008), and although de-regulation is a common tag attached to surveys of media landscapes, it is not entirely accurate. Humphreys (1996) notes that the trend in post-broadcast democracies, or the third age of communications policy, at least as far as much of Europe is concerned, is actually *re-regulation*. Garnham (2011: 54) argues that the simple binary between market and public interest policy is misleading because 'there

may at any one time be a range of possible cost-benefit trade-offs and politically defensible regulatory compromises'. Gibbons and Humphreys (2012), in a comparative analysis of media policy in North America and selected EU countries, conclude that states, especially those with either protectionist outlooks (Canada and France) or strong PSB traditions (Germany and the UK), have actually sought to temper market forces by turning to public interest legislation and regulation. They also pinpoint the EU as a mediating site, which is struggling with deregulatory pressures, but often acting to protect public service and public good values.

Following the logic of marketisation, outside of strong statist contexts and bracketing of cultural and social intermediary variables, a less marketised context would be, by definition, more regulated and more oriented towards public service broadcasting than more marketised contexts. Accordingly, less marketised contexts should show a more "serious" treatment of news and politics than more marketised contexts. At the organisational level, commercial outlets should show a less "serious" prioritisation of political affairs than public service outlets.

Tabloidisation

In discussing the symptoms of marketisation at the level of news output, and mainly focussing on broadcast television news, a number of crosscurrents are in operation, which makes the field conceptually and thus empirically murky. The two major operationalisations of marketisation have been tabloidisation and mediatisation; both share similarities with each other. I concentrate predominantly on mediatisation, the most sophisticated and recent iteration, but I deal briefly with tabloidisation first.³

There are two dimensions to the tabloidisation thesis: the displacement of hard news by soft news, and the prioritisation of audience attraction, entertainment values and presentation. According to Barnett, (2011: 169, original emphasis) tabloidisation of television news is:⁴

³ There is some overlap between the tabloidisation and mediatisation evidence. I only make minimal reference to the tabloidisation discussion to avoid dwelling on very similar evidence twice.

⁴ Although I find the phrase "for no other purpose" in this definition problematic because the *aims* of stories or items would need to be distilled by talking to journalists in an almost psychoanalytical manner

the progressive displacement of citizen-enhancing material with material which has *no other purpose* than to shock, provoke, entertain, or retain viewers; and the progressive erosion of professional journalistic values in favour of televisual techniques involving sensationalism, distortion, misrepresentation and dramatization of the trivial.

Looking at the first dimension, there are two ranges to consider: long-term and short-term. A long-term (comparing the 1970s to the late 1990s and 2000s) analysis generally shows news becoming softer (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 1998; Patterson, 2000; Winston, 2002; Barnett, 2011:146-157). Long-term shifts don't seem to be as severe in Europe (Pfetsch, 1996; Waldahl et al., 2009 and Maier et al., 2009 cited in: Reinemann et al., 2012: 8-9) as elsewhere.⁵

Short-term shows a stable balance between hard and soft news (McLachlan and Golding, 2000; Barnett, 2011: 141-159). Countries like the UK, Denmark and Finland show a different mix of news, but a serious prioritisation of hard news in both commercial and public channels in news broadcasts (Iyengar et al., 2010: 298). For instance, Barnett finds that the 'evidence suggests that the United Kingdom has maintained a consistent and broadly serious approach to the issues covered by television journalism' and that the UK has 'not yet suffered the shift in style or content to what is generally defined as "tabloid"' (2011: 155 and 168).

Furthermore, even the most commercial market shows similar stabilisation trends. Brekken et al. (2011) find similar amounts of hard vs. soft news in the UK and US cases. Across all US media for 2010, in the PEJ State of the News Media 2011 (see table 1), the evidence shows a serious prioritisation of hard news topics, even taking into consideration that the PEJ does not have a category for human interest news (many potential human interest items fell into the social category). In sum, long-term news trends do indeed display evidence of a "tabloidisation effect" in that softer items have

(i.e. they cannot be judged by merely viewing the end news product), it differentiates nicely between story type and presentation.

⁵ A note of caution: the rise in soft news and changes in presentational features have partly been a response to audience demand, and are not just a result of the desire to make money (Bird, 2000; Hamilton, 2004). Furthermore, there is more news to choose from now than ever before, possibly making the alarm of long term trends moot. Citizens now have a more even mix of soft and hard news, and more news overall to engage with. For instance, Bromley cites evidence that Europeans now have access to over 160 national and international news channels; India has around 70 news channels; and UK television news hours rose from 30 (1986) to 243 (2002) per week (Bromley, 2010: 35).

become more salient. Short-term trends show stabilisation, which should temper the tendency to view marketisation as systemic and unrestrained.

Table 1: Percentage of topics

	Hard	Soft	Social	Accident/disaster	Other
Online	61	13	15	8	4
Cable TV	60	9	17	9	5
Radio	59	12	16	8	5
Newspaper	59	9	21	6	5
Network TV	49	15	14	12	11
Mean total	61	12	16	9	6

Source: PEJ

Notes: N= 52,614. Hard news: government, campaign/elections, defence/military, legal issues, terrorism, business, economics, and foreign affairs. Soft news: crime, entertainment, lifestyle, and sports. Social: environment, development, transport, education, religion, health, science/technology, race/gender/gay issues/ immigration, and media. Other: domestic affairs and US miscellaneous.

Entertainment values and presentation, the second dimension, is harder to corroborate, partly because of the range of concepts involved and partly due to the “qualitative nature” of the object of study in that values and presentation are harder to quantitatively operationalise than news topics. The values aspect is usually operationalised as personalisation or game/strategy/episodic vs. issue/policy/thematic frames. The style aspect is often looked at via a sensationalism, dramatisation or entertainment orientation. With regard to both elements scholars point to increases in tabloid features, but certainly not to a complete displacement of serious priorities (Esser, 1999; Aalberg et al., 2012: 170-171). TV current affairs, as opposed to the TV news bulletin or press, seem to show signs of tabloidisation in content and style (Barnett and Seymour, 1999; Seymour and Barnett, 2005). This evidence holds true in Europe (Örnebring, 2003; Vettehen et al., 2006) as well as the Antipodes (Comrie and Fountaine, 2004; Debrett, 2004; Turner, 2005).

It is clear that journalistic style has changed but it is unfair to attribute this exclusively to marketisation and see it solely as negative (Corner and Pels, 2003). For instance, Schudson gives a sympathetic analysis of increased journalistic aggression, the tabloid-like focus on the private lives of politicians, and the hunger for political scandal, and argues that these are signs of a robust journalistic culture with a healthy scepticism towards power (2011: 83-106). It is also likely to be attributable to sociological factors such as a

less deferent and less formal political and social culture steeped in progressive change (feminism, civil rights and environmentalism); a weakening of ideology and political and social consensus; the rise of identity politics; a fragmentation of broadcast audiences and tastes (with increasing numbers of digital channels and the internet); the commonplace and seemingly natural human attraction to narrative, drama, human interest and personal aspects of news; and increasing government reliance on public relations tactics and “spin”, which have all contributed to bringing about (and responding to) changes in political communications (Blumler and Kavanagh, 1999; Hardy, 2008: 116-117).

Overall, news priorities have shifted compared to the 1970s, but looking at both dimensions (content and form) of tabloidisation contemporarily, one has to conclude that mixed evidence is apparent. Yet one of the problems of the tabloidisation critique is its crudeness. A more refined critique that covers similar ground is the mediatisation thesis. This thesis is more theoretically robust and links to the previous marketisation discussion.

Mediatisation

The original mediatisation thesis refers to an independent media field or logic subsuming non-media fields or logics, namely, political logic (Altheide and Snow, 1979). At its most basic, mediatisation refers to the imposition of a media logic onto politics (and political logic) in that political behaviour and communication adopt the priorities, aims and evaluative criteria of media logic (Mazzoleni and Schulz, 1999). Strömbäck (2008a) notes four phases: 1) media become the main source of political information and communication (mediation); 2) media become independent of the political machinery and develop their own media logic; 3) other actors adapt to media logic; and 4) this media logic colonises the policy making and governance process as it is internalised.

A more refined understanding is that both media and political actors can have market (demand-driven) or normative (supply-driven) aims. The Weberian and Habermasian concern for different modes of rationality is evident. Media logic is synonymous with market logic insofar as its main aim is audience (or electoral) maximisation and entertainment. Political logic is a normative logic that priorities political decision-making, problem solving and policy solutions. Both normative and market logics have media and political actor dimensions. Landerer (2013: 12) states that:

[In normative logic] media actors are engaged in explaining substantial problems and different perspectives to the citizens, and political actors are interested in finding viable solutions to these problems ... [in market logic] both media and political actors are more interested in the pursuit of their self-interested goals, at the cost of sacrificing their normative ideals. For media actors, this means to increase their circulation in order to generate profit. For political actors this means to increase their electoral strength by subordinating substantial political problems to symbolic issues that are more likely to result in increased public attention and hence electoral gains.

Although research on operationalising and empirically testing mediatisation is only just taking off, mediatisation has been operationalised in a couple of recent attempts (Strömbäck and Dimitrova, 2011; Zeh and Hopmann, 2013).⁶ The following elements reflect a market (media) vs. normative (political) logic: 1) journalistic intervention, visibility and aggressiveness makes journalists more central to the news as opposed to political issues and actors; 2) game/strategy frames highlight a commercial conception of politics in contrast to issue/policy frames that are policy and problem-solving centric; 3) personalisation of politics adopts a celebrity or entertainment model of politics and favours personalities or characters over issues or policy; and 4) a greater emphasis on visual or performative techniques (dramatisation, celebrification, and sensationalisation) is more akin to entertainment and audience maximisation than normative-political concerns.

Journalistic intervention: Schudson contends that '[r]eporting styles around the world have grown more informal, more critical, and more cynically detached or distanced over the past two generations' (2011: 91-92). On this first measure journalistic intervention and aggressiveness seems to have increased over time. Recent evidence suggests that more market oriented countries like the US exhibit more interventionist journalism than corporatist and less market oriented countries like Sweden (Strömbäck and Dimitrova, 2011). Some have charted a rise in aggressive interviewing techniques in the UK and US (Blumler and Kavanagh, 1999: 218; McNair, 2000: 84-104; Clayman et al., 2006; Heritage and Clayman, 2013). A comparative UK-Netherlands study found journalists behaving aggressively and asserting control via questioning (Voltmer and Brants, 2011). This also seems to hold for Sweden, but elsewhere tentatively but plausibly because Sweden is a

⁶ See appendix.

“corporatist” country (characterised by high degrees of organisation and consensus), meaning that adversarial trends evident in this context would likely apply in more polarised countries too (Örnebring, 2003; Clayman, 2004b; Atkinson, 2005; Eriksson, 2011). Finally, others have noted a rise in journalistic interpretation or editorialising (Salgado and Strömbäck, 2012: 152-153; Fink and Schudson, 2014).⁷

Framing: Scholars have noted increases in one-sided framing of news (image, horse-race and strategy coverage over substance or policy) and complained of an untrammelled cynicism in the reporting of politics (Entman, 1989; Patterson, 1994; Cappella and Jamieson, 1997). Lengauer et al., in a review of negativity in political coverage, conclude that: ‘with very few exceptions ... the existing body of evidence hints to predominant, increasing, and overarching negativity towards individual political protagonists and parties’ (2012: 189). Others cite mixed evidence for the British case, but note that America is extreme (Blumler and Gurevitch, 2001; Blumler and Coleman, 2010). Divergent trends have been identified elsewhere; for example, in Sweden, Strömbäck (2008b) demonstrates that from 1998-2006 there was a consistent tendency for politics to be framed as a game and scandal, but that issue frames remained dominant, especially in the quality press and on public service television. Also, the more commercial US frames politics as a strategic game more often than Sweden (Strömbäck and Dimitrova, 2011). There is evidence from Belgium and Sweden suggesting that commercial media (commercial TV and the tabloid press) is more likely to mediatise politics in framing than public service television or the quality press (Strömbäck and van Aelst, 2010). In a comparative study of Germany and Denmark (1990-2009), only Germany’s horse-race framing increased during the 1990s, but it soon decreased and stabilised thereafter, and both countries showed moderate levels (60%) of horse-race framing (Zeh and Hopmann, 2013). Finally, Aalberg et al., in a review of strategy and game framing, conclude that

⁷ Increased interpretation can be more critical, explanatory or open-ended, or more self-promotional, self-aggrandising or driven towards a conclusion. The authors define interpretive journalism as follows: ‘Interpretive journalism is opposed to or going beyond descriptive, fact-focused and source-driven journalism. On the story-level of analysis, interpretive journalism is characterized by a prominent journalistic voice; and by journalistic explanations, evaluations, contextualizations, or speculations going beyond verifiable facts or statements by sources. It may, but does not have to, also be characterized by a theme chosen by the journalist, use of value-laden terms, or overt commentary’ (Salgado and Strömbäck, 2012: 154).

these frames have been found to be commonplace in news coverage, but increases in time have not been noted apart from in a small number of studies (2012: 170-171).

In sum, commercialised contexts like America are more likely to mediatise the framing of politics than less commercialised European cases. Broadsheet quality press and public service TV tend to frame politics more seriously than tabloid press or commercial media. However, the evidence is by no means either/or: normative framing is still apparent and to speak of a complete displacement of market over normative framing is untrue.

Personalisation: There are two aspects of personalisation: the visibility of leaders over parties, and the personal evaluative criteria used towards politicians. There is a visible, but not overwhelming amount of personalisation in news in both respects, which holds cross-nationally. Some cross-national longitudinal studies have found that politics and the media have become more presidential, or more focused on the leaders instead of the party, but current levels of personalisation are not overwhelming (Dalton et al., 2000; McAllister, 2007; Rahat and Sheafer, 2007; Wayne and Murray, 2009; Adam and Maier, 2010; Van Aelst et al., 2012: 208-210; Balmas and Sheafer, 2013; Boumans et al., 2013). Kriesi, in a thirty-year cross-national election campaign study of Austria, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and the UK, finds that 'there is no general trend to increasing personalisation or increasing concentration of the media coverage on a limited set of particularly visible personalities' (2012: 1).

Some studies have investigated how media coverage focuses on the private lives and personal character of politicians (Seaton, 2003), and concluded this trend has increased over time (Langer, 2007; Van Aelst et al., 2012: 210-211). However, few systematic long-term studies exist. Reinemann and Wilke (2007) for the most part do not find any increasing trend over time (1948-1998), but note a recent rise (2002 and 2005) in the German press. Others argue that some politicians are more successful than others in keeping their private lives out of politics (Langer, 2010); this suggests a more subdued media role.

A firm consensus around personalisation has eluded scholars. In a recent review of cross-national personalisation findings, Van Aelst et al. conclude that: '[I]t is the lack of conceptual clarity and the absence of a common operationalization that are major causes

of the unclear or conflicting conclusions about the personalisation of political news' (2012: 214). In sum, the overall evidence is mixed (Karvonen, 2010).

Visualisation and performance: Theoretical engagements with this aspect of mediatisation are more common than empirical studies. Atkinson (2011: 108) finds evidence of a reliance on aesthetic modes of news presentation, defined as:

the more or less persuasive theatrical display of journalistic roles and related aspects of public address and accessibility: costuming, script delivery, pictorial versus textual emphasis, bulletin format and packaging, and the development of skill sets for celebrification, personalisation, entertainment, and parasocial ingratiation. Increasingly it includes melodramatic roleplaying (tough, demotic, cool, etc.) "to initiate controversy, to generate publicity, and to be seen as glamorous" as a way of building audiences (Bromley 2005: 314).

Ekström (2000) argues that a journalism of information and storytelling has been overtaken by a journalism of attractions. Franklin (1997) asserts that news has become consumerised, and he uses the term "newzak" to describe similar aesthetic trends. Longitudinal findings from Germany show changes in style and form (Donsbach and Büttner, 2005). Other evidence suggests a rise in sensationalism and related presentational features (more arousing music, pictures and sounds, and close-up and more frequent camera shots, for example), yet there certainly has not been extreme displacement of non-sensationalised content (Slattery and Hakanen, 1994; Brants, 1998; Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000; Grabe et al., 2001; Vettehen et al., 2005; Vettehen et al., 2006; Vettehen et al., 2010), which mirrors the hard vs. soft news findings previously outlined. In addition, robust longitudinal and cross-national data are hard to come across, which should temper extreme claims. The next table summarises the evidence for mediatisation.

Table 2: Evidence for mediatisation

	Contemporary status (2000s-current)	Source	Commercial countries compared to less commercial countries	Source	Commercial institutions compared to public service institutions	Source
Hard vs. soft news	A mix of hard and soft news	(Scott and Gobetz, 1992; Barnett et al., 2012; Reinemann et al., 2012)	Softer, but some debate; ⁸ corporatist countries harder than non-corporatist (Curran et al., 2009; Brekken et al., 2011)	(Iyengar et al., 2010; Aalberg et al., 2013)	Softer, generally	(Iyengar et al., 2010; Barnett et al., 2012; Aalberg et al., 2013)
Journalistic intervention	Prevalent but not overwhelming	(Eriksson, 2011; Strömbäck and Dimitrova, 2011; Salgado and Strömbäck, 2012)	More intervention	(Strömbäck and Dimitrova, 2011; Voltmer and Brants, 2011)	More intervention, but not a big difference	(Strömbäck and Dimitrova, 2011)
Framing	Mediatised frames common, but so are issue and policy frames	(Strömbäck and van Aelst, 2010; Coleman et al., 2011; Aalberg et al., 2012; Lengauer et al., 2012)	More mediatised framing	(Esser and D'Angelo, 2006; Strömbäck and Dimitrova, 2011; Dimitrova and Strömbäck, 2012)	More mediatised framing	(Strömbäck and van Aelst, 2010; Dimitrova and Strömbäck, 2012)
Personalisation	Prevalent, but not overwhelming ⁹	(McAllister, 2007; Karvonen, 2010; Kriesi, 2012; Van Aelst et al., 2012)	More personalisation, but evidence not overwhelming ¹⁰	(Vliegenthart et al., 2011; Jebri et al., 2013)	More personalised, but some evidence showing no difference (Jebri et al., 2013)	(Karvonen, 2010; Strömbäck and van Aelst, 2010: 54-55; Vliegenthart et al., 2011; Kriesi, 2012)

⁸ There is some conjecture because in some studies the US and UK cases show similar levels of hard vs. soft news. Although Hallin and Mancini put both countries in the Liberal group, the UK's PSB structures remain a point of difference. Furthermore, Reinemann et al. (2012: 10) note that: 'According to this research, US and UK television are similar in their affinity to hard news, even though the UK has a strong PSB and the USA do not. Therefore, the question arises whether this is the result of coding ambiguities'. Aalberg et al. (2010) report that the US provides the least political information on television compared to other European countries (including the UK), and it has actually provided less political information despite increased channels over time.

⁹ Van Aelst et al. (2012) review the findings and show the contrasting conclusions that are prevalent.

¹⁰ More personalisation is also most likely related to presidential or majoritarian vs. coalition or multiparty democracies (Downey and Stanyer, 2010; Kriesi, 2012).

	Contemporary status (2000s-current)	Source	Commercial countries compared to less commercial countries	Source	Commercial institutions compared to public service institutions	Source
Visualisation and performance	Prevalent but not overwhelming	(Brants, 1998; Grabe et al., 2001; Lozano, 2004; Vettehen et al., 2010)	Unclear; lack of comparative research. One study shows public systems the most sensationalised in terms of form (but overall limited), and that more competition leads to greater sensationalism in TV news topics.	(Wang, 2012)	More mediatised	(Vettehen et al., 2005; Vettehen et al., 2010)

Discussion: marketisation and mediatisation

Marketisation is not a neutral process. It aims to extend market-based logics and priorities to all areas of society. This may be fine for some things like consumer goods; in contrast, political news and journalism are public goods and the effects of marketisation are potentially deleterious. Media regulatory rhetoric has adopted a de-regulatory tone, but many established democracies outside of the US case maintain a visible commitment to public interest legislation, which suggests that much of the empirical reality of marketisation lags behind the policy and scholarly rhetoric.

Can any definitive statements be made about mediatisation? Communication and media scholarship is dominated by the American and British perspectives (Park and Curran, 2000; Thussu, 2009), with increasing European involvement (Downing, 1996), particularly in cross-national research (Humphreys, 1996; Hallin and Mancini, 2004; Curran et al., 2009). Evidence is hence drawn from a small pool of countries. This brief tour through one of the key media critiques, mediatisation, has shown that the evidence for it remains mixed; even the most market friendly country shows a mix of normative-market priorities. The reality is certainly more complex, but overall and on balance contexts that are more commercial show more susceptibility to mediatisation tendencies than less commercial contexts, and commercial outlets are more likely to show more mediatised priorities than public service outlets.

Marketisation, mediatisation, and political talk

The corollary of marketisation is mediatisation (Strömbäck and Dimitrova, 2011; Cushion and Thomas, 2013): the prioritisation of market over normative aims in both media and political actors (Landerer, 2013). Political talk television – the focus of this thesis – is a place, at least in its most traditional formulation, where three actors are present: journalists, pundits, and politicians. The format is based on spoken interaction, which means it cannot automatically be treated as equivalent to the news bulletin or newspapers. For example, with the news bulletin being highly edited, and authors arguing that the news is now more mediatised, with shorter sound bites and more editorialising than in the past, the political talk space seems to let politicians talk more – and thus is perhaps a less mediatised space than the news bulletin – but it also seems to be highly concentrated around issues related to political process; that is, the game and strategy as opposed to policy. In sum, there are contradictory forces that are worth exploring.

There are three main aspects that this thesis looks at in relation to marketisation and mediatisation: news fragmentation and the democratic implications of political talk, the role of institutions, and the influence of national contexts. Correspondingly, there are three main questions:

1. How do more or less marketised national contexts compare with regard to mediatisation in political talk television content?
2. What role do different or similar media institutions play in mediatising political talk television? How does this compare cross-nationally?
3. What democratic implications can we infer about news fragmentation from political talk?

News fragmentation and the democratic implications of political talk

The external fragmentation of news audiences across channels, shows and markets increases the supply of (and arguably demand for) alternative news forms. The internal fragmentation of the news into dialogical news formats raises questions as to the democratic priorities of these news forms. Political talk holds the promise of being democratic by being open and interactive, drawing on hybrid modes of talk, and

representing negotiated public spaces (Livingstone and Lunt, 1994), which are often agonistic (Mouffe, 2000). But at the same time, the dialogical news format is easily given to vacuous punditry, argumentation as performance, and partisanship (Jamieson and Cappella, 2008).

In the crowded news schedule, the formats of political talk are eroded forms of interaction – staged, rushed, unruly, unequal, and complicit – especially when viewed through the lens of public sphere discourse ethics. Carpignano et al. (1990) comment that the ‘present crisis of the public sphere ... is the result of a crisis of legitimacy of the news as a social institution in its role of dissemination and interpretation of events’. Ben-Porath (2007) agrees and highlights the epistemological and normative implications of political talk: ‘There is an underlying assumption ... that when news is presented differently, journalism functions differently in society’. Finally, Clayman and Heritage (2002: 334) observe that in the panel format ‘the interviewer’s substantive journalistic role is to some extent diminished. As the interactional center [sic] of gravity shifts toward the interplay between interviewees, the interviewer inevitably becomes a less central player in the discussion’. The common thread here is a concern over the value and place of different news formats in democracy. Investigating political talk cross-nationally enables an analysis of the democratic implications of news fragmentation and dialogical news formats.

National contexts and regulation

Public broadcast systems generally consist of an established and well-funded public service broadcaster, for example the BBC, and a concomitant regulator (Ofcom and the BBC Trust for the UK). Statutory regulation exists in these contexts, for instance, to ensure quotas of local content, scheduling times, and the policing of journalistic standards such as impartiality. The Australian case is similar to that of the UK, but with more intense broadcast commercial competition and a slightly weaker regulatory structure. It has a public broadcaster (ABC and SBS), statutory requirements around fairness and balance, and a regulator that oversees news content and journalistic practice (ACMA). On the other hand, the American commitment to public service broadcasting is extremely weak and the regulator’s (FCC) oversight has withered: news standards, scheduling provisions,

some ownership limits, powers to enforce fairness, diversity, and right of reply in political programming (Fairness Doctrine) and other public interest statutes are no longer enforced or rescinded. Furthermore, in relation to pay television, the FCC has extremely limited powers with regard to indecency, commercials during children's programming, and rules around political candidates during elections (Gibbons and Humphreys, 2012: 20-21). Clayman notes, for example, that the lack of regulatory oversight (and technological changes) have 'yielded expanded opportunities for the development of new interaction-based forms of informational programming' (2004a: 30).

Comparing the UK and Australia with the US – a highly commercialised context– enables an analysis of national political and media *contexts*, not just media channels. The analysis of contexts highlights three things: the extent to which public service structures and culture(s) insulate broadcasters from commercial pressures via tradition, public interest values, and statutory and regulatory mechanisms; the extent to which mediatisation can be generalised cross-nationally; and the relationship between national structures and production.

Media institutions

How do commercial channels differ from public service channels in their treatment of political talk? De Smedt and Vandenbrande believe that 'to understand contemporary political talk – and media talk generally – the relation between interaction, institutional roles and media formats needs to be analysed more extensively' (2011: 91). Born argues that organisations depend on values, their culture, and formal structures which converge on cultural production and cultural "output" (2005: 494). Political talk is broadcast across three main television traditions: public service, free-to-air commercial, and 24 hour news channels. This allows reflection on the role that different broadcasting traditions play in structuring political talk television where different economic pressures, market orientations, cultures, values, and practices affect journalistic output (Ekström, 2002; Born, 2010: 190-195).

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to explain one of the major underpinnings and foci of this study. Political talk is a format that fosters discussion and debate about political issues. This format has become increasingly visible with the rise of the loud and lunatic American cable news shows. However, there are many versions of political talk. It is an open question as to how political talk formats are produced or constructed, what their democratic priorities are, and how they compare cross-nationally. It does not make sense to study political talk in isolation. One of the central processes affecting modern society is marketisation. Yet, the evidence for marketisation and mediatisation remains contested. News has changed since the 1970s but Europe, the UK, and Australia show mixed evidence for marketisation in broadcasting policy and news content (mediatisation). The US remains more marketised in both policy and content, but countervailing tendencies are also apparent. Investigating political talk allows us to look at areas related to marketisation in a cross-national perspective: news fragmentation and the democratic implications of political talk, and the extent to which more or less marketised national contexts and broadcasting institutional styles mediatise political talk content.

Chapter 3: News production and political talk television

Introduction

This chapter refines the focus, first to television, then to a specific televisual news format: political talk. Scholars have given extensive attention to the on-screen dynamics of political talk shows; however, consideration of backstage political talk production has not been commensurate. This chapter defines and situates political talk television in the news landscape. It seems logical to ask the following question: How can the literature on news production and broadcast talk inform our understanding of political talk production? This chapter draws out the key insights from the news production literature, mostly completed in the 1970s, as well as scholarship on broadcast talk to situate the production of political talk shows.

Television and political media

The press, television, radio, and the internet are all major political mediums in their own right. Nevertheless, (political) television is the sole focus of this study for several reasons. First, television remains the main source for news about politics in advanced western nations and commands huge numbers in emerging markets (Ofcom, 2013a: 72). Younger news consumers are, nevertheless, more likely to use the internet than older consumers, and internet news usage is increasing overall (Cushion, 2012: 1-7; Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2013: 25-26).

Second, television is also a trusted news source. For instance, straight after the News of the World phone hacking scandal, 64% of UK respondents said that they rated television journalism as trustworthy, with radio garnering 58%, and the press being trusted by 38%. (Robinson, 2011). Ofcom puts the figure at 74% for television, and 4% for 'any newspaper' (Ofcom, 2010b) in the UK. Barnett gives more UK survey evidence, which shows that television journalism is trusted considerably more than mid-market or tabloid press journalism, and slightly more than the up-market press (Barnett, 2008). And perhaps following on from the high trust that television journalism receives, the websites of television journalism are often the main online sources of news for many (Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2011; Ofcom, 2012a: 63-64).

Third, television can influence its viewers. It is also a site for common knowledge and edification, and a cultural resource for identity and citizenship (Gripsrud, 1999). Cushion's (2012: 9) comments are particularly relevant:

[T]elevision news should arguably be the lead protagonist in journalism studies if understanding the primary medium that most advanced democracies rely on to understand the world is what motivates research and scholarship. After all, while television journalism may be 'old' news to many scholars it remains remorselessly up to date for many viewers who still tune in most days of the week in order to find out what is happening in the world.

Fragmentation

Although established terrestrial news channels and news bulletins retain high levels of viewers, the combination of an increase in channels (free-to-air channel competition, cable, and the internet) and more news *and* entertainment output, means that viewers have an abundance of choice. Table 3 shows the (non-causal) link between the high levels of pay-tv take-up and the lower channel share for the largest channel. However, most countries showed stability from 2007 to 2011, suggesting that despite channel fragmentation, loyalty is stable for the main television channels at present.

Table 3: Channel share vs. pay-tv penetration

	Largest channel share %		Pay-tv take-up %
	2007	2011	2011
UK	22	21	55
FRA	27	24	62
GER	13	14	64
ITA	22	19	35
USA	7	7	89
CAN	8	9	93

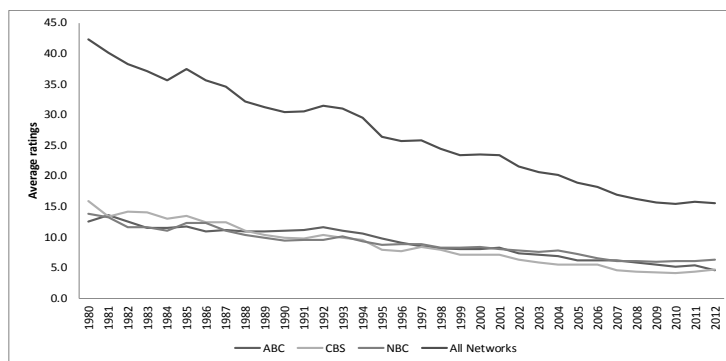
Sources: Ofcom International Communications Market Report 2012 and 2008

Avoiding news is now easily achievable, as is being more informed than ever before (Prior, 2007). The centripetal gaze (Lanham, 2006) is fragmenting as channels proliferate. The European Audiovisual Observatory (Directorate-General Communication, 2010) states that in 2009, 245 channels were launched in Europe and that overall there were 7200 channels: a quantitative increase in channels which are vying for eyeballs. There are

now almost 300 dedicated news channels available in the wider European area (European Audiovisual Observatory / MAVISE, 2013). Blumler and Kavanagh say that: ‘Overall, the political arena has become more turbulent, less predictable, less structured, and more difficult to control’ (1999: 211).

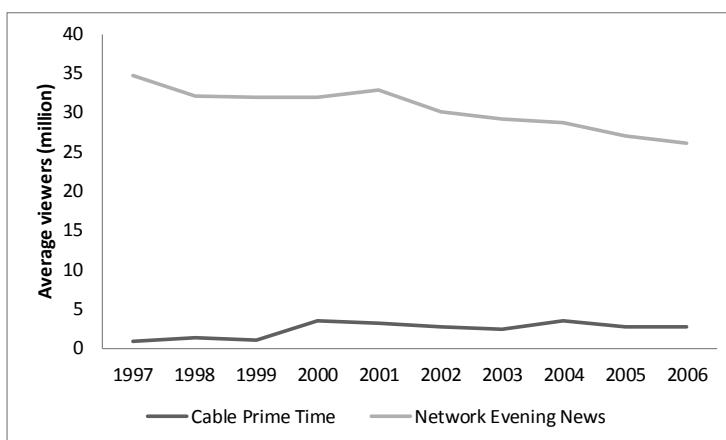
In both America and the UK, although the main television news bulletins have lost viewers over time, millions still tune into the news each night. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate that even given the decline over time in total American news viewership, all three networks combined have around 22 million viewers, down from 50 million in 1980 (Pew Project For Excellence in Journalism, 2013). Mean cable primetime viewing (CNN, Fox, and MSNBC) increased from around 1 million viewers in 1997 to 2.5 million in 2006 (and grew again to 3.5 million in 2012). These numbers suggest that despite fragmentation, television news remains popular.

Figure 1: Declining average ratings per night (America)



Source: Pew Research Center, State of the News Media, 2013.

Figure 2: Rising cable, declining network news (America)

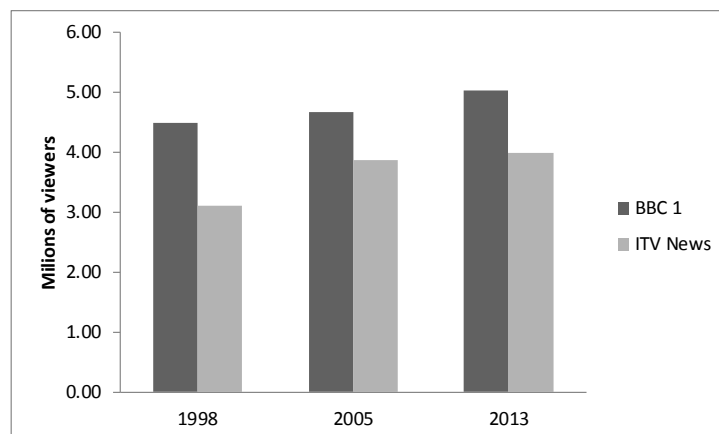


Source: Pew Research Center, State of the News Media 2007.

For the UK, across all terrestrial channels, annual national news viewing hours per individual dropped from about 108 hours to 90 hours comparing 1994 to 2006, and dropped further still to 82 hours in 2012 (Hargreaves and Thomas, 2002: 24; Ofcom, 2007: 19-20). However, national news viewing hours per individual remained consistent for BBC1 compared with ITV in the 2000s. In 2001, the BBC had an average of 54 hours per individual compared with 53 hours in 2006, which rose to 61 hours in 2012. In contrast, ITV had 54 hours compared with 26 hours in 2006, and 13 hours in 2012 (Ofcom, 2013b: 80-81).

Average viewership numbers for the evening news bulletins have halved since the 1980s but have remained consistent since the 2000s (Dean, 2013: 52). Figure 3 is a rough guide to viewership numbers for the two main UK news channels for their early evening bulletins in recent times.¹¹

Figure 3: Stable viewership in early evening news (UK)



Source: BARB

This chart shows news viewers remaining stable in number, which is quite remarkable considering the channel viewing share (4+) for BBC1 and ITV has gone from around 30% and 37% respectively in 1992, to 20% and 13% in 2013; and the share of other viewing (multichannel) increased from 5% to approximately 40% (2009) (BARB, 2013a). Sky News'

¹¹ I consulted BARB data, which I do not have complete access to because it is subscription based. BARB has data from 1998-2013. For each week of a given year, BARB shows data for the 30 most popular programmes. I selected the first week of June for each year – 1998, 2005, 2013 – and I selected the first early evening news bulletin that appeared for each channel. See: <http://www.barb.co.uk/viewing/weekly-top-30?>

average weekly channel share was 0.7% in the first week of June, 2013; its *weekly reach*¹² was 5 million people (BARB, 2013b). Like the US, this suggests that viewers are loyal to established news bulletins in the UK. Indeed, in 2010 Ofcom (2010a) found the impact of 24-hour news channels to be limited:

The data [for the UK] shows that the impact of rolling news channels remains limited despite the significant growth in available audience. Audiences for the BBC and Sky [24-hour] news channels combined have nearly doubled in the last six years in line with digital take-up. But their combined average audience remains little more than 110,000 with a reach of 16.2 per cent across UK individuals (aged 4+) compared to an average 50.8 per cent for the flagship news programmes on the main channels.

Fragmentation and political talk shows

Amid the quantitative increase in news channels and the challenge to the main news bulletins, political communication is fragmenting away from traditional arenas.

Alternatives to the traditional news bulletin are now established (Gamson, 1998; Jones, 2005; Lunt, 2009): satire, comedy and daytime talk shows, as well as discussion, debate and interview shows (Clayman and Heritage, 2002: 340) populate the political communication line-up. Patrona notes that: 'news has given way to a conversational scheme whereby the prestigious anchorperson is currently surrounded by a panel of journalist-commentators' (2012: 148). The focus for this thesis is on political talk formats, which Clayman and Heritage (2002: 2) note: 'are inexpensive to produce, and ... embody qualities of "spontaneity" and "liveliness" that audience members are believed to like'.¹³

Some argue that these political talk formats are evidence of a more conversational and dialogic emphasis (Thompson, 1995: 84-85; Fairclough, 1998; Clayman, 2004b). This is in part because unscripted formats based on spoken interaction are cheap to produce (Tunstall, 1993: 149; Clayman and Heritage, 2002: 2). For example, across the three American cost-sensitive cable news channels, 51% of their primetime news was delivered by way of interviews and 30% by packaged reports in 2012; 70% of programming was opinion or commentary, while 30% was factual. Network news, in contrast, presented news in package format 79% of the time, and in interview format 4% of the time over the

¹² People who tuned in for at least three minutes.

¹³ A full list of political talk shows is presented in the method section.

same period (Jurkowitz et al., 2013). These priorities show a clear difference between the more profit oriented cable news, and the “loss-leading” network news traditions.

Defining political talk television

Political talk is now ubiquitous on television. The overriding goal here is to sketch a definitional boundary between political talk and other traditional and emerging news formats. There is some overlap. Tolson (2006: 3-13) defines what he calls “media talk” as formats with the following elements: they address audiences directly and are thus interactive; they are performative in the sense of talking for an audience; they seem unscripted; and they adopt a measure of “liveliness” (a mix of spontaneity, authenticity and “liveness”). Ben-Porath (2007) defines political talk as a television format that centres on discussion or interviews based on the day’s news events, featuring a changing cast of guests (politicians, experts, pundits and citizens) anchored by a host. McNair highlights this in the UK case. He defines political talk as a format where guests ‘chat in informal, relaxed tones about the events of the week’ (2011: 80).

Two forms of talk are the mainstay of political talk shows: the political interview, and political discussion and debate. Political talk is not new and has a lineage traceable to talk radio in the 1930s (Davis, 1997). The emphasis here is on “live” (participant) political talk (Scannell, 1991) in broadcast settings (Ekström and Patrona, 2011).¹⁴

Political talk is distinct from the news bulletin, documentaries, and current affairs, all of which contain pre-packaged and heavily edited material. Where there is “live talk” in these traditional formats it is largely scripted, for example, a news host “interviewing” a news correspondent. Political talk is distinguished from these modes of news in that it does not involve a news correspondent “reporting”; rather, political talk formats are more focussed on dynamic, situational or spontaneous interactions in interviews, discussions, debates and commentaries, although some shows feature host to camera monologues. Furthermore, political talk does not refer to daytime chat shows, with The Oprah Winfrey

¹⁴ Some political talk shows are either “taped live” or taped and edited before going to air, but the shows are still based around free flowing talk. In addition, some political talk shows do feature some pre-packaged material that is used to contextualise the discussion that follows. Shows that rely heavily on pre-packaged material have been excluded from the analysis to refine the focus to *talk* rather than capturing current affairs generally.

Show being the archetypal model; where Lunt and Livingstone (1994: 1-2) focus on public discussion about 'the issues of the day', daytime chat shows predominantly focus on human interest, lifestyle, relationships, consumer affairs and social issues. While these issues are indeed political (Gamson, 1998; Lunt, 2009), they are outside the scope of this study.

Political talk does not refer to breakfast television shows that feature a range of news delivery modes (that do admittedly feature political talk aspects) (Wieten and Pantti, 2005). Specialist business shows – that cover finance, stock markets and business news – are also excluded from political talk because of the specialist and often utilitarian information in these shows. Finally, political talk also excludes satirical news and other programmes based purely on humour or satire (for example, "political" quiz shows featuring celebrities), although some political talk formats do feature humour, and even celebrities.

The "political" in political talk refers to the articulation of politics in a "live" setting. "Politics" generally refers to topics such as government, campaign/elections, defence/military, legal issues, terrorism, economics and foreign affairs, as well as moral-political issues such as drugs and abortion, and social issues that are construed as public affairs or social policy. No definition of "politics" or "political" is ideal. For example, there is some overlap with daytime chat shows (social issues). It is recognised that a) the personal is political, and b) other shows – like satirical news (The Daily Show for example) – do contain many political aspects and serve a Habermasian function to some degree, but these formats and forms of politics are not "sold" as political to audiences; they are thus outside the scope of this study.

The anatomy of political talk television

The study of political talk television is motivated by its potential to dialogically educate, inform, and engage citizens in public affairs issues. If news, current affairs and documentary are considered factual television, and thus important for citizen information, engagement and political learning, it follows that discussing politics in a serious – mediated – manner is cut from a similar cloth.

Modern political talk has a hybrid lineage. It is grounded firmly in tradition, embodying the high-minded goals of Habermasian discussion, the Grand Inquisitor and Watchdog legacies of Murrow and Day, and the town hall meetings of small communities. At the same time however, modern incarnations have seemingly borrowed from niche American talk radio, featuring hyper-partisan viewpoints and highly emotive modes of address. Often pseudo-debate and aesthetic performativity – the theatrical, spectacular, stylistic, self-presentational and performative elements of on-screen behaviour – are evident (Corner and Pels, 2003: 1-18). There seems to be substantial cross-pollination between these two traditions. Vraga et al. (2012), for instance, outline three modes of host address found in news: the fair minded correspondent, the larrikin comic and the aggressive combatant. Political talk formats mix different modes of discourse: the “to and fro” of the accountability interview; the *agora* of public discussion; the informal open-ended punditry of the panel and debate set-up; and the more extreme partisan incarnations of cable television in America, where there are ‘hosts who appear quite comfortable sauntering between the roles of reporter or source, journalist or pundit, often appearing to wear all these hats at the same time’ (Peters, 2010: 833).

Accordingly, political talk formats consist of different styles of talk (McNair, 2011: 70-82): the anchor addressing the camera, one-on-one interviews, and panel discussions. These styles are more or less formal depending on the particular show. It is common but not necessary for one programme to span the range of styles and produce a variety of commentary, punditry, expert analysis and political exchange. There are three main elements.

Anchor address: A sole, “celebrity” anchor, often referring to information graphics or commenting on media clips, directly addresses the camera for extended periods. The purpose is to offer their “take” or political analysis. These are sometimes organised as segments; for example, Bill O’Reilly’s “No Spin Zone” or the “Pinheads and Patriots” segment. This form of political talk is more common in the cable news political talk formats of America.

The interview: A traditional set-up where a well-known journalist interviews a senior politician, pundit, or newsmaker (Clayman and Heritage, 2002). The aim here is to

interrogate the interviewee to provide citizens with access to political information, analysis and understanding; this set up also performs the traditional accountability role by representing “the public” against the power holders (McNair, 2011: 79).

The panel: A group of guests, for example pundits and journalists, interest group members, legislators, experts, or analysts, guided by a host (or hosts), discuss the issues of the day. The aim is to offer a range of expert perspectives, arguments and future predictions, which amount to commentary and debate; it is common for the guests to debate among themselves with minimal host input (Clayman and Heritage, 2002: 299-300; Patrona, 2012). The panel format also extends to the audience discussion format. Here a panel of guests field questions from a pre-selected audience and a host controls the proceedings (McNair, 2011: 76-77). Other versions of this format centre on a host who calls on a pre-selected mix of citizens and experts to air their views (Clayman, 2004a: 41-45).

Rationale: The production of political talk

Noting the trend towards the popularisation of politics, Blumler and Kavanagh (1999: 221) state:

whether the populist groundswell will mainly be empowering or merely symbolic, mainly redemptive or corrosive for civic communication, could depend in the end on the aims of its producers ... of which we badly need more and better research.

Questions remain as to the production priorities of different modes of political talk. The main investigatory plank of this thesis can be formulated as the following research questions: What are the production priorities – norms, routines, values and goals – of political talk producers? How and why is political talk television produced the way it is? To maximise understanding of political talk production it seems logical to employ a cross-national research design because this will incorporate a large range of political talk shows and provide a rich vein of data through which to better understand cross-national practices and attempt to draw conclusions which work across comparative settings.

Production studies, understood as an analytical inquiry into the production values, norms, and goals of producers, as well as the actual processes of production, are valuable for a

number of reasons.¹⁵ They can highlight the ‘hidden processes’ that shape cultural production, thus revealing the ‘policies and politics’ of broadcasting institutions, as well as assumptions about audiences (Scannell, 1991: 8).¹⁶ Production analysis offers the opportunity to examine the link between cultural production, mediated political communication, and politics itself. More straightforwardly, a production analysis is adopted here to uncover why political talk formats exist as they do. Political talk shows are *produced*, meaning that they are constructed according to certain values, goals, norms and practices. This study hopes to illuminate the backstage and inchoate priorities, processes and patterns.

News production and talk

This section surveys the literature on news production and comes to the following conclusion: it does not make sense to study news production from one perspective; it is better to operate from a holistic framework that integrates organisational and cultural factors with political and economic factors.

Primary insights from broadcast news production

Cottle says that ‘if we want to understand why media representations assume the forms that they do ... we cannot rely upon readings of media texts alone, no matter how analytically refined and methodologically sophisticated these may be’ (2003: 5). This section gives a pithy tour through the news production literature to illuminate important findings.¹⁷ Schudson (2010) identifies four approaches to the sociology of news; Hesmondhalgh (2010), likewise, offers four approaches to media production. Both authors’ typologies share similarities and can be usefully combined to explain the factors which affect news making and production (see also: Cottle, 2003; Cottle, 2007).

First, however, it is important to consider epistemology and news. News is related to objective reality. Scholars such as Fishman (1981), Cohen and Young (1973) and Tuchman (1978) take an extreme social constructivist view and argue that news is “manufactured” or “constructed” as a product of journalists’ routines. The problem with this, however, is

¹⁵ My “production” approach should be understood as different from an ethnographic approach to production adopted by, for example, Born (2005).

¹⁶ Gamson makes the same point looking at daytime television and sexuality: (1998: 20)

¹⁷ Most of this literature is based on the television news bulletin.

that news 'is seen as neither reflecting nor distorting any objective reality, but as a purely constructed discursive reality reflecting only routine practices' (Lau, 2004: 696). This position is anti-realist because it ignores objective reality. While routines and various sociological factors – economics, politics, technology, news values, time pressures, sourcing, socialisation and education – do indeed influence news “constructions”, these are related in different but real ways to an external world. To ignore this is to slip into Derridean discourse theory which would see news as discursive games (Lau, 2004: 701).

Second, a note on Bourdieu (1993). Bourdieu's theories of cultural production are in vogue in the new wave of production literature (for example: Benson, 1999; Couldry, 2005; Hesmondhalgh, 2006; Born, 2010). Field theory gives scholars a decent apparatus to conceptualise cultural production by positing many different cultural fields (economic, political, journalistic, etc.) that operate in relation to each other, as well as between the two main drivers of economic and cultural capital. Within a journalism field, it is the tussle between economic factors like market share, and cultural factors like journalism prestige, that positions a news institution and its journalists within the field vis-à-vis other news institutions. Some good scholarship has been written on the intersection of New Institutionalism and Bourdieu's field theory (Benson, 2006). Bourdieu also elaborates on other interesting concepts like habitus: the notion that future agent activity is influenced by past experience and sociological factors like educational background.

However, the production approach adopted for this thesis downplays these largely theoretical engagements with news production, however useful they are. Indeed, while Bourdieu has a lot to say about production in general, he 'offers no account of how the most widely consumed cultural products – those disseminated by the media – are produced' (Hesmondhalgh, 2006: 218). In an academic division of labour within the scholarly field, I leave the heavily theoretical engagements to others. The task I set for myself is to foreground the empirical evidence in political talk production, even though I occasionally refer to some of Bourdieu's concepts. Furthermore, it seems a worthwhile endeavour, given the prominent place that Bourdieu has in production research, to attempt to engage in understanding production *without* a priori adopting his approach.

Economic: A main economic approach is the Marxist-based (political) economy tradition, which is concerned with power, justice and fairness. It makes the link between concentration of ownership and increasing anti-democratic control over the news (Eldridge, 1995; Bagdikian, 2004; McChesney, 2004). Others maintain that a corporate-government-media nexus stifles the range of views in political media (Herman and Chomsky, 1988). Other approaches, which are not necessarily Marxist-based, look narrowly at economic incentives and commercialisation, and argue that highly commercialised media respond to certain consumer and regulatory incentives, thereby skewing news output (Baker, 2002; Hamilton, 2004). Conversely, the censorship of state-controlled media is often covered (Schudson, 2003: 129-130).

Political: Political research is concerned with the role of the state and political institutions. Issues such as government subsidies and funding, and state regulation are of central concern. The role of PSBs and state regulation, for instance, is argued to offer a public interest as opposed to consumer-based public space. The role of media systems and political institutions, especially in comparative research, is becoming more popular. Hallin and Mancini's typology (2004) is well known and is grounded in historical political factors: the development of the press, journalistic relations to elite political opinion, journalistic professionalism, and the role of the state. More recently, Humphreys (2012) proposed a more workable and measurable political approach that identifies salient political, legal and economic variables that affect news making. In sum, the political context matters for understanding news production.

Organisational: These approaches are concerned with the close analysis of organisations (Hesmondhalgh, 2010). They look at how journalists' roles are constrained or influenced by organisational or work factors. Organisational approaches find that news planning and routine practices heavily influence the final news product, making it more calculable, controllable, and predictable. Organisational studies have been most concerned with news production and this approach is most directly related to the social constructionist accounts alluded to earlier. From this organisational strand of study, Schudson (2010: 172) notes that:

One study after another agrees that the centre of news generation is the link between reporter and official, the interaction of the representatives of news

bureaucracies and government bureaucracies, and that government voices dominate the news.

These relationships are attributed to a reliance on certain (usually official) sources by reporters (Gans, 1980; Schudson, 2003: 134-153); journalists' routines (Tuchman, 1978); an elite orientation (Schlesinger, 1994); socialisation into certain professional values and practices (Epstein, 1974); and time pressures which emphasise immediacy over historical context (Schlesinger, 1992), to name a few.

Cultural: Cultural approaches focus on cultural traditions and symbols that form an overarching system of thought and action. Journalists, for instance, exist within a given culture and are obliged to use certain cultural codes and symbols to relay information in an understandable manner. Thus, generalised images and stereotypes are explainable from this perspective: starving babies in Africa, for example. What becomes news is largely determined by wider culture as well as journalism culture. What makes the raw data of events "news" can be analysed from this cultural approach (Galtung and Ruge, 1965; Harcup and O'Neill, 2001): news values such as amplitude, drama and conflict, meaningfulness and relevance, and rarity and unexpectedness, among others, are deemed culturally important as components of what makes events newsworthy. Cultural approaches also study journalists' beliefs and practices (Hesmondhalgh, 2010: 148). Furthermore, the literary lineage of journalism is also culturally determined: storytelling and news genre, composition and tone, and pictorial emphasis, for example (Schudson, 2003: 177-193).

Taken in isolation, none of these perspectives adequately explains the production of news. The political-economic perspective assumes too much structural control and minimises agency. The narrowly econometric perspective ignores normative aims (or proprietor vanity and ambition); furthermore, it does not account for government regulation and PSBs, and downplays market-driven public interest journalism. The political perspective reifies political structural factors and negates market demand, and in some formulations, has failed to offer accurately measurable variables, instead assuming ideal typologies that have arguable relations to reality. The organisational perspective slips into anti-realist epistemologies and ignores journalistic agency and political-economic (structural) factors. Finally, cultural perspectives do not account for structural

factors and see culture as immutable: a changing (over time) but simultaneously (at any given point) rigid set of cultural symbols on a menu, which accounts for neither extant journalism differentiation nor journalism that serves better or worse public interest ends.

Giddens (1984) offers a more helpful approach. He maintains that social structures are both resources for and products of social interaction. That is, social and cultural structures are instantiated by collective-individual beliefs, norms and practices. Structures are simultaneously open to influence from agents, and influencing agents. There is thus a dynamic structuring-instantiating process at work. It seems logical that macro structures “set the playing field” for agency because by definition they are macro structures, and resistant to change. This is not to say, however, that structures cannot be influenced from the “bottom-up”, but to note that it is harder for this to happen than the other way around (structure influencing agency). New Institutionalism (NI) and Historical Institutionalism (HI) are two related approaches that attempt to theorise structures and agents simultaneously (March and Olsen, 2008; Sanders, 2008).

Echoing this revised approach to structure-agency, McNair (2009: 48-65) identifies a “culturalist” position (distinct from the *cultural* position outlined previously), which seems to be a reasonable starting premise from which to view news production. The culturalist argument seeks to integrate organisational and cultural factors with political and economic factors. That is, it holds onto a materialist analysis but incorporates elements of agency, ideas and culture. Gans (2012), for instance, argues that culture cannot be its own cause: what influences culture? Furthermore, he goes on to charge what he terms “cultural sociology” with ignoring policy research and wider social structures while remaining transfixed with frames, discourse and symbols. Equally though, “structural sociology”, for Gans, is guilty of removing people, relationships and meaning making from its analysis.

While still being grounded in real world events, news is essentially a contested site of struggle that operates within political, economic, organisational and cultural contexts. The interplay between these perspectives (economic, political, cultural and organisational) is what seems to explain the functioning of news. Journalists operate under pressurised conditions and find the most efficient means of meeting deadlines.

Elites, governments, and the powerful generally have better access to the news media, and better powers of definition than others do by virtue of their status or knowledge. Journalists, however, still have to maintain legitimacy in the eyes of the public and their peers; they also operate with at least one eye on normative aims. Governments still have regulatory powers that influence behaviour. Thus, news production is actually influenced by both structural (political and economic) as well as organisational, agency, and cultural aspects. I adopt this more pragmatic perspective for the forthcoming analysis of political talk production. Cottle (2003: 4) pinpoints the political talk production implications:

In between the theoretical foci on marketplace determinations and play of cultural discourses, there still exists a relatively unexplored and under-theorised 'middle-ground' of organisational structures and workplace practices. This comprises different organisational fields and institutional settings, and the dynamic practices and daily grind of media professionals and producers engaged in productive processes.

Broadcast talk

Having surveyed general approaches to news production, this section is concerned with the production of broadcast talk because scholars studied this prior to political talk. Broadcast talk refers to any talk which is produced and aired, usually live, via broadcasting, for example, DJ talk on the radio. Political talk is much narrower, concentrating on talk related to politics and the political (traditionally defined).

Primary insights

A number of fundamental insights have emerged from the study of broadcast talk, which has used ethnomethodology and socio-linguistic methods. I briefly outline these insights and pay particular attention to Scannell's work (see also: Fairclough, 1998; Hutchby, 2006; Tolson, 2006; Ekström and Patrona, 2011).

Institutions and intentionality: Scannell argues that broadcast talk is intentional (see also: Heritage and Greatbatch, 1991; Thompson, 1995: 84-85). It has two characteristics: institutions and the absent audience. Broadcast talk production is organised institutionally, which means that it has its own set of rules, norms and values. An institutional occasion is 'distinguished from other occasions by virtue of the power of the institution to organize and control the nature of the occasion and to impose its definitions

on participants in the occasion' (Scannell, 1996: 18-19). Communicative intent is designed for the absent audience, which means that 'broadcasters have to connect to concerns with what is appropriate in the settings and circumstances in which listening and viewing take place' (1996: 19). Thus, broadcast talk is a constructed political reality that attempts to appear "normal".

Sociability and address: The forms of address and modes of interaction are particular to broadcast talk. For instance, notions of turn taking in an interview and the adoption of everyday modes of speech have been internalised into production processes; that is, ordinariness and sociability have *been created* and are not "natural". Scannell argues that: 'The relationship between broadcasters and audiences is a *purely social* one, that lacks any specific content, aim or purpose' (1996: 23). This is because the relationship between the broadcaster and the audience is unenforced, which means that broadcasters have to socially relate to, appeal to, and address their audiences (1996: 23-24). Two issues that Scannell does not pursue are the ways that *different* broadcasting institutions construe and instantiate sociability, and the ways in which sociability excludes those who do not possess or appreciate the dominant modes of sociability.

Time and liveness: Broadcast talk is first structured by time in that a) the scheduled time it is aired will affect its style, aims and output, for instance, in breakfast television (Wieten and Pantti, 2005); and b) there are limits to the length of the programme and segment, which influences pacing. Second, liveness – authenticity, immediacy, interactivity and naturalness – is a quality that broadcast talk strives to achieve because it conveys facticity and bridges the gap between audiences and performers. Tolson (2006: 11-14) terms this "liveliness", which grasps at the notion of (performative) spontaneity as contrasted with scripted performance, or what Goffman (1981) calls "fresh talk". Scannell says that a programme does not have to be transmitted in the moment of its production (i.e. in real time) to be "live": 'The effect of liveness is preserved in recording in a number of ways ... but most simply, by recording in one continuous unbroken take. Continuity editing ... procures the same effect' (2003: 112). Ultimately, the liveness of a show is for the audience. Audiences must be able to see that the talk is *for* them and is thus produced with the audience in mind (Scannell, 2003: 108).

Identity: Programmes have an identity that is reified in their output over time. Scannell (1996: 10; see also: Hendy, 2000: 94-98) says that:

For output to have the regular, familiar routine character that it has, seriality is crucial throughout the range of output. It creates that difference-in-sameness which is the hallmark of radio, television and newspaper production. The *content* varies from one occasion to the next, the format remains the same.

A programme identity has to remain constant by definition. Production is thus routinised to transform multiple variables (what to focus on, who to speak to, which staff to use etc.) into a reliable and stable output. In a more specific sense, political television programmes have, from the point of view of their producers, a specific identity – a set of production ideas and stylistic preferences – that provides an important scaffold. This identity relates to their conception of audience expectations, as well as to what it is they are trying to achieve. Tracey (1977: 66) elaborates on this: ‘The programme’s identity was an underlying premiss [sic] as to what it would contain’. This is related specifically to guest selection as well as topical choices. For instance: ‘the programme had a declared purpose, which meant that participants were excluded not on the grounds of political unsuitability, but rather on the grounds that they had no relevance to that programme’.

News interviews: A lot of work has been carried out on the news interview and political (election) debates. Major findings to come out of the literature are that: 1) the interview has become a primary means of information about the world; 2) the political news interview is highly institutionally and socially structured, but it is also a fluid and changeable question and answer activity. Interviews have norms (adjacency, turn taking, sequentialism and civility, for instance). They have recognised interviewer (the management of argument and neutralism *via* questioning) and interviewee (expectations around modes of response and conduct) social roles and norms (Heritage and Greatbatch, 1991; Schudson, 1994; Clayman and Heritage, 2002; Clayman, 2004b; Hutchby, 2006; Tolson, 2006; Ekström and Patrona, 2011); 3) interview adversarialism has increased (Clayman et al., 2006; Tolson, 2012); and 4) political talk modes have become hybrid: mixing “neutral”, conversational, comedic and adversarial modes of talk (Jones, 2005; Ekström, 2011).

Discussion and debate: The literature on discussion and debate formats maps onto modernist Habermasian (Habermas, 1984; Goode, 2005) and post-modernist Bakhtinian (Gardiner, 2004; Hirschkop, 2004) arguments. Modernists generally hold that debates have become a spectacle with little real substance or deliberation (Bourdieu, 1998), while those more sympathetic to post-modernist arguments point to affective dimensions of debate, the fluid nature of political representation, and the multiple ways in which audiences engage with texts; they tend to prioritise accessibility and popularisation over rationalist deliberation (Corner and Pels, 2003; Coleman, 2013). Many discussion and debate formats are produced with a view towards airing contrasting viewpoints (Tracey, 1977: 101; Hutchby, 2006: 142). Conversation Analysis scholars also focus on how participants navigate discourse via rhetoric, emotion and embodied display (Craig, 2007; Weizman, 2008).

Political talk radio: Political talk radio is analogous to political talk television in many ways. For instance, Scannell and Cardiff (1991: 153-180) detail how the BBC had to tune into the rhythms of the everyday to appeal to audience members on their own terms, rather than on Reith's. Likewise, political talk television has been charged with becoming more conversationalised (Carpignano et al., 1990; Fairclough, 1994; Clayman, 2004a: 30; Turner, 2006). Others have noted that talkback radio can be extremist and is heavily host-centred. Hendy argues that talk radio can be seen to give voice to communities that often feel marginalised (2000: 207-208). In his analysis of talkback radio in Australia, Turner argues: 'The product is a highly volatile, at times even irresponsible, format which has effectively transformed the genre of current affairs journalism into a format for opinion and entertainment' (2009: 425). This seems analogous to the extreme and partisan forms of televised political talk found on cable news in America. Yet, it cannot be denied that the radio talk back format is a rough and ready *agora* with multifaceted power dynamics between host and caller (Hutchby, 1996; Hutchby, 2006: 81-101), which is never a perfect public sphere, but aspires to participatory and deliberative democratic aims, even if under a populist or demotic form (Hendy, 2000: 209).

Hendy offers an authoritative account of radio production generally. He notes that radio is a producer's medium. To cope with the high degree of output required, programme production is serialised into a production template (2000: 70). Producers work in terms of

ideas for programmes that meet their audiences' latent and manifest needs (2000: 71). In relation to talk radio (but not phone-in talk), producers consider *how* things will be said: 'Much production in factual radio is therefore about finding people who will speak into a microphone on demand. Or as one producer puts it: "ninety-nine per cent of getting radio right is about *casting* a programme properly"' (2000: 76; original emphasis). Presenters or hosts are crucial in the talk format because they give the show an identity and coherence (2000: 81). Many political talk shows are named after their hosts, who exert a large amount of control over the discussion. Hendy also points to the differences in the regulatory structures between the US (deregulated) and the UK (regulated), which enable so-called "shock jocks" in the former and circumscribe the trend in the latter (2000: 211-212).

Political talk television: past research

The study of the production of political talk has been a blind spot for scholars (Murdock, 2000; Clayman, 2004b: 31). Some broad surveys of different types of talk do exist (Livingstone and Lunt, 1994; Timberg, 2002). Research has tended to focus on interview and discussion formats by means of finely grained socio-linguistic conversation analysis (Scannell, 1991; Clayman and Heritage, 2002; Weizman, 2008; Ekström and Patrona, 2011), cable news effects (Feldman, 2011; Stroud, 2011), cable news programmes (Conway et al., 2007), and the content of 24-hour news only channels (Lewis et al., 2005; Cushion and Lewis, 2010). In essence, scholars have focused most of their political talk efforts on the text or on effects.

Notions of political talk as a (broadly conceived) genre of news, like current affairs or documentary, are absent from much of the scholarly literature. Large-scale international comparative studies of political talk shows are lacking, but national quantitative and time series data are widely available for newspaper coverage and televised news broadcasts (Barnett et al., 2000; McLachlan and Golding, 2000; Patterson, 2000; Cook, 2002; Zaller, 2004; Cushion and Lewis, 2009; Pew Project For Excellence in Journalism, 2010), and current affairs (Barnett and Seymour, 1999; Örnebring, 2003; Turner, 2005; Vettehen et al., 2006). There is an emergent comparative field along similar lines (Gunther and

Mughan, 2000; Esser and Pfetsch, 2004a; Norris, 2009; Curran et al., 2010; Kriesi, 2012; Nielsen, 2013).

Two recent (socio-linguistic) investigations (Ekström and Patrona, 2011; Tolson and Ekström, 2013) look at political talk and *aspire* to be comparative by investigating different aspects of political talk across countries; however, they are not *explicitly* comparative because most of the chapters deal with different topics and different countries (on this point, see for example, Norris, 2009: 337). Clayman and Heritage offer a more robust comparative approach and look at the news interview, comparing the US and the UK. They find similarities in the interview practices of the two countries (2002). Voltmer and Brants look at control in the news interview by comparing the UK and the Netherlands; they find less adversarialism and more consensus-based journalism in the Dutch case. They further state: 'In our analysis we only looked at the "front-stage" of political interviews. However, equally important is what happens on the "backstage"' (2011: 143); i.e. the production side of the equation is important to understand political talk television.

The production of political talk television

Political talk production remains an understudied genre of news. To my knowledge, there is no authoritative scholarly treatment of political talk production, which is why much of this chapter has looked at the general news production literature, as well as the broadcast talk literature. This section details a couple of final thoughts on the intersection between news production and how insights might relate to political talk production.

De Smedt and Vandenbrande (2011: 90) note that 'the mediated interactions between journalists and politicians increasingly occur under the premises of new and stringent formats, which influence the structure and organisation of these interactions quite considerably.' In other words, each political talk show has to be produced. Production requires conscious decisions, is embedded in an overarching media organisation, and is plausibly influenced by the related attitudes, production routines, and wider cultural and social context. This includes producers themselves. Hesmondhalgh observes that producers are 'organised into institutions, with established procedures, hierarchies and values, including in most cases the goal of making profit' (2010: 146). These influences –

organisational, values and profit – all shape the supposedly open discourses in dialogical formats. Hesmondhalgh (2010: 146) further notes that ‘analysing media production means thinking about how producers exercise their relative power to create and circulate communicative products.’

As stated previously, Scannell calls broadcast talk (for our purposes, political talk) ‘intentionally communicative’ in that it is ‘doubly articulated’, first, by and for participants interacting with each other, and second, for audiences watching or listening (1991: 1). This means that political talk appeals to audiences by using specific strategies. Audiences, of course, interact with media texts, but crucially, the interaction between production and reception depends heavily ‘upon the ways in which audience interests and understandings are anticipated in the construction of the programmes’ (Livingstone and Lunt, 1994: 6; also see: Born, 2000). In other words, how producers visualise their imagined audience and inscribe this into their production practice characterises political talk (Cottle, 2003). However, the intentionality of broadcasting – the control of political talk – is not monolithic; for instance, Ekström and Patrona (2011: 1-18) note that ‘[i]nstitutional norms, values and principles for legitimacy are realized, but also negotiated, during interaction’, and we might add, during reception. Therefore, we can conclude that political talk programmes are negotiated social spaces (Carpignano et al., 1990: 35; Livingstone and Lunt, 1994: 162) where production processes and sociological contexts vie with live on-screen interactional dynamics and audience reception for control and meaning.

At the level of programmes, as Scannell and Tracey have noted, programme identity heavily influences production decisions. This is often embodied in the presenter of the show (Jones 2012; Vraga et al., 2012). Identity, and more specifically, the programme’s goals and objectives, provide an organising schema from which producers organise their output. Millerson and Owens (2009: 53), in their television production “bible”, make the distinction between production goals and objectives for neophyte producers:

What do you really want your audience to know after they have viewed your production? ... The answer to this question is essential, as it guides the entire production process. The goals and objectives will determine what is used as a measure stick throughout the rest of the production process. *Goals* are broad concepts of what you want to accomplish ... *Objectives* are measurable goals. That

means something that can be tested to see whether the audience reacted the way you wanted them to react to the program.

Taking these points together, political talk television, despite being seemingly spontaneous and lively, is a highly planned activity, yet scholarship has been slow to investigate the underlying production complexity.

Conclusion: communicative ethos and political talk

One of the core foci of political production is analysing what Scannell (1996: 21) calls a communicative ethos. Scannell's communicative ethos crucially analyses political talk as a product of talk that is produced for an absent audience, and thus carries the marks of its producers and broadcasting institution.

To study the production of political talk, this thesis considers 'how the reflexivity, intentionality, and agency' of political talk producers, and the values, norms, and traditions embedded in different broadcasting traditions, affect the construction, creation and production of political talk, and how this holds cross-nationally (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011b: 396). The research design fuses a political economy perspective (looking at the effect of political and broadcasting structures), with a cultural studies approach (investigating the 'practices, beliefs, and discourses of media producers') (Hesmondhalgh, 2010: 146-148), or as Born (2000: 409) puts it: 'recognizing the need to analyze the role of individual and collective agency [and ideas] as well as structural processes in theorizing the dynamics of ... media industries'. Furthermore, Hesmondhalgh points out that while most production studies have generated 'rich and fascinating detail ... it remains to be seen whether such research can be integrated into an explanatory ... framework' (2010: 153). It is precisely in this gap that this study is located.

Focussing on political talk as a construction and wondering about its production leads to the following supplementary questions, which will hopefully give the reader a more detailed road map as to the thrust of this study: How is production organised and managed? What factors account for production decisions? In what ways do producer attitudes, values, and normative positioning influence political talk production? Along which guiding democratic norms and aims are political talk formats produced? In what ways do political talk production staff conceive of political talk? How are notions of what

the audience wants incorporated into production decisions? How do broadcasting structures affect political talk production?

The construction of political talk – how it is shaped – offers a model of political interaction and thus, politics itself, to citizens. Analysing how these live interactions are produced will enable me to outline an explanatory framework for the production of political talk television. In turn, this will allow a more critical assessment of dialogical news forms than is currently available in scholarship, and will help scholars to reflect on political cultures, wider broadcasting structures, commercial processes, as well the mediation of politics generally.

Chapter 4: Comparative methodology

Introduction

Production studies generally analyse newsrooms within a single country because the predominant approach, ethnography, is time consuming. This chapter justifies the comparative approach to studying political talk. Hallin and Mancini's media systems approach is rejected in favour of Historical Institutionalism. Next, the chapter compares socio-economic, political and media factors among the three countries under investigation. Finally, it gives a brief institutional and historical overview of the political talk television landscape in each country. The result of this chapter is an ordering of the three countries on a continuum of marketisation. America is the most marketised, Australia is in the middle, while the UK is the least marketised. However, all three countries are fairly marketised overall.

Why go comparative?

Blumler and Gurevitch (1975) called for more comparative political communications work to deepen our understanding of political communication. Nearly 30 years on, comparative communications research has gained traction, and 'has almost become fashionable' (Gurevitch and Blumler, 2004: 327). Schudson opens the second edition of his seminal book, *The Sociology of News*, by noting that: 'Comparative research on the news media ... may be the most important new domain of academic research on the news' (2011: xix). More does not, however, mean better. Comparative political communications, according to Pippa Norris in a recent overview of the subject, 'has still not yet flowered into mature adulthood' (2009: 322). Comparative scholars argue, for instance, that many samples employ convenience sampling, i.e. doing comparative research with no view as to illuminating *comparative* insights (Gurevitch and Blumler, 2004: 327-328). One feature of mature comparative research, say Gurevitch and Blumler (2004: 333), is that the rationale for a comparative approach is explicitly articulated.

Why do I use a comparative approach? First, comparative research is grounded in attempting to understand how different contexts shape political communications. In this way, similar or different cases can be selected and phenomena investigated with a view

to producing a general theory (Esser and Pfetsch, 2004a: 9). Second, and perhaps most importantly, comparative research seeks to transcend national boundaries, parochialism, and faux generalisability claims by tackling phenomena head-on. That is, it seeks to empirically investigate and differentiate general from context specific causes and effects (Esser and Pfetsch, 2004b: 384-385).

Comparative approaches to the media

The earliest comparative systems approach to media is Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm's *Four Theories of the Press* (1956). Written during the Cold War, the book argues that countries are grounded in liberal democratic, authoritarian, or communist political-economic-social pedigrees. These political, economic and social lineages ultimately determine the form that the press takes. The manifestations are authoritarian, libertarian, social responsibility and communist press systems. Developed democracies such as America and the UK were viewed as mixtures of libertarian and social responsibility. Russia and communist countries were aligned with communist press structures. Most developing countries and parts of Europe could be classified as authoritarian in press structure. These neat constructions, however, have many criticisms, which include: crude Marxist materialism which homogenises societies; the lack of analysis of empirical reality in the nations under study; a narrow conception of the press which ignores a variety of media; and its normative thrust (American liberalism), which uncritically accepts private ownership of the media as desirable (Hardy, 2008: 11-14).

The dominant comparative framework of recent times has been Hallin and Mancini's typology (2004). They outline four independent variables for each media system and a number of political system variables. The argument is that political variables and media variables interact with each other in predictable ways; countries that share political and therefore media similarities can be grouped accordingly, i.e. the development of media systems is tied to political systems. The following table presents the basic conceptualisation.

To describe it briefly, they group 18 North American and European national cases into one of three models. The Liberal (US, UK, Ireland, Canada) model is characterised by early development of the press and the presence of a commercial press, journalistic

professionalism, and a limited role for the state. These countries tend to be majoritarian, market-based and older democracies, with strong legal common law frameworks. Corporatist countries (Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Belgium, Switzerland, Finland, Netherlands and Germany) are characterised by strong forms of social-political pluralism and media ties to these groups, stronger state involvement and regulation of media, and high forms of institutionalised journalistic professionalism.

Table 4: Hallin and Mancini's typology of countries

	Liberal	Corporatist	Mediterranean
Political Variables			
Political history	Early democratisation	Early democratisation	Late democratisation
Type of politics	Moderate pluralism	Moderate pluralism	Polarised pluralism
Consensus vs. majoritarian	Majoritarian	Consensus	Both
Individual vs. organised pluralism	Individualised representation	Organised pluralism: democratic corporatism	Organised pluralism: political party dominance
State involvement	Liberalism	Strong	Dirigisme
Rational-legal authority Strong vs. weak	Strong	Strong	Weaker
Media Variables			
Newspapers	Medium circ; mass press	High circ; mass press	Low circ; elite press
Political parallelism	Neutral; autonomous	Strong party press; shift to neutral	High
Professionalisation	Strong; not institutionalised	Strong; institutionalised	Weak
State and media	Market dominated	Strong	Deregulation; strong state intervention

Source: Hallin and Mancini, 2004: 67-68.

Politically, they are older democracies with highly organised social and political groups; their politics is consensus based, with a strong legal framework. The polarised or Mediterranean model (France, Greece, Spain, Italy and Portugal) is characterised by strong clientelism links between political elites and the press, and subsequently, a non-professionalised journalistic corps. De-regulation and strong state involvement in the media is apparent. Politically, these countries tend to be newer democracies with high ideological factionalisation and weaker legal frameworks. Ultimately, Hallin and Mancini's argument concludes that in 'general, it is reasonable to summarize the changes in European media systems as a shift toward the Liberal Model that prevails in its purest form in North America' (2004: 251-252). This is a very stimulating and valuable contribution to comparative media scholarship, yet it has been challenged on many fronts.

Norris has a number of criticisms of it (2009: 332-335). First, the model ignores the internet and digital technologies, which are global and contribute to politics and media systems. Second, the four dimensions are: 'descriptive, drawing upon their reading of selective historical examples, limiting how far their classification can be replicated by other scholars' (2009: 333). Third, she laments Hallin and Mancini's contentious placing of the UK and the US into the Liberal model. The obvious differences, that Britain has a far larger commitment to public service broadcasting, a different political system, and a different national (partisan as opposed to detached) and tabloid newspaper culture, are identified. Indeed, Hallin and Mancini themselves state that (2004: 11; also, 198, 246):

There is considerable variation among countries that we will be grouping together in our discussion of these models. The British and American media systems (which we will discuss as examples of the Liberal Model) are in fact quite different in many ways, even though it is common to talk about the Anglo-American model of journalism as though it were singular.

They also admit that the case of France is "mixed" (2004: 69). If the countries ultimately differ in so many respects this calls into question the utility of lumping them together in an "ideal" type when the purpose is analysis of extant reality. Norris (2009: 334) further quips that:

if the logic is faulty in these particular cases, then this raises doubts about other classifications, for example whether there are really closer similarities between Germany and Norway, or between Germany and France. Without any rigorous process for testing the classification independently, when by establishing certain standardized indicators or a set of explicit decision rules, the categorization proposed by Hallin and Mancini remains fuzzy, impressionistic and unscientific.

For these reasons, Norris concludes that: 'The search for typological schema and categorical classifications of "media systems" or "political communication" systems should perhaps be abandoned' (2009: 340).

Curran playfully points out that the Liberal model is ultimately 'as much an elegant construct, as much a work of creative intelligence, as the Hogwarts academy for young wizards' (2011: 29). His critique rests on three pillars, which all have the common theme of ignoring differences: the US is an expansionist world super power; the US endorses inequality more readily than other market states; and the US political system is the most money driven. An argument can be made that Western European countries have more in

common with each other than Hallin and Mancini recognise and can be contrasted with the US. This calls into question their contention of the dominance of the Liberal model. For instance, Western European countries generally have strong welfare support, established public service broadcasting systems and funding, public interest legislation and EU governance, and they are not superpowers.

Finally, Humphreys (2012) has developed an extended critique of Hallin and Mancini's model. Their notion that democracies can be lumped together points to a large amount of stereotyping; i.e., not paying close enough attention to empirical reality. Humphreys notes, for instance, that France cannot be clearly classified as a polarised pluralist case, having much in common with protectionist Canada (which in turn is dubiously put into the Liberal camp, despite having a strong "cultural policy toolkit"). Germany, in the democratic corporatist group, shares characteristics with the Liberal model in being averse to press subsidies. Further, Hallin and Mancini ignore large tracts of history, which might have a bearing on the politics-media nexus. Germany, for instance, dominated by recent wars and reconstruction, is surely distinct from corporatist countries like Switzerland, especially considering that historically its media have had close links with political groups. It is unclear why the southern European nations' polarisation remains distinctive, rather than Germany's polarisation history. Moreover, Hallin and Mancini ignore market size, which has a large impact on media policy. Small states with a big next-door neighbour have tended to have less independent media systems than larger states; Ireland and New Zealand are examples. Finally, other important variables that are ignored include: legal traditions, majoritarian vs. federal states, national regulatory "styles", ethno-linguistic diversity, and media concentration and pluralism over all media forms, not just the press.

The preceding section has offered some strong critiques of Hallin and Mancini's comparative approach. However, the groundbreaking nature of their contribution must be recognised; how mass media shape, and are shaped by politics and society and how mass media operate within and across nation states remain important targets of analysis.

A better comparative approach

At the national level, the makeup of a country's media system relates to their policy, and legal and political structures. As Gibbons and Humphreys note, there is a non-deterministic "congruence" between nation-states, but media systems remain too distinct to create typologies (2012: 12-17). Instead, these same authors highlight the role of a comparative methodology to better explain the relationship between political and media systems: Historical Institutionalism (HI). Briefly put, HI holds that (Gibbons and Humphreys, 2012: 16): 'institutions, defined broadly to include norms, informal rules and procedures as well as formal rules and structures, [are] crucially important in explaining political outcomes ... [and that] reforms will follow characteristic national paths.'

Here the authors are echoing March and Olsen (1984), in their seminal article on New Institutionalism (NI), which makes the point that politics cannot be solely reduced to aggregated behaviour and self-interested bargaining, or formal government-legal structures, and that actually, institutions are political, and influence political life in a non-deterministic manner: 'There are structures of resources that create capabilities for acting. Institutions empower and constrain actors differently and make them more or less capable of acting according to prescriptive rules of appropriateness' (March and Olsen, 2008: 3; also see:Lowndes, 2010). Furthermore, Burnham et al. (2004: 20), citing Hall and Taylor (1998), say that HI has four key features: 1) a broad understanding of the relationship between institutions and individual behaviour; 2) an emphasis on asymmetries of power in the way that institutions work; 3) institutional development follows path dependence or divergence; and 4) institutional analysis is often integrated with that of "ideas".

That national contexts remain unique, are influenced by the aforementioned institutional factors, and are not subsumed by global homogeneity, is attributable to path dependency in HI. Path dependency holds that past policy has a strong bearing on future policy. Where change does occur (divergence), usually in critical junctures or crises, that change will take on characteristics of the national context (Humphreys, 2012: 170) and subsequently become entrenched, influencing future decisions.¹⁸ This approach goes

¹⁸ March and Olsen (2008) make the point that evolutionary change is possible.

against the grain of much globalisation theorising around the dissolution of the nation state. In a similar manner, Schudson points to the importance of focussing not just on the media's role in mediating politics, but rather, on wider factors such as 'how political cultures and institutions shape and structure different news cultures and institutions' (2003: 166). With an HI perspective in mind, Gibbons and Humphreys conclude their comparative North American and European media policy study – and it is worth quoting at length – by contending that (2012: 197):

[N]ational systems are sufficiently differentiated to be able to resist pressure to converge towards a lowest common denominator in the kind and standard of service offered. Partly, this is because markets continue to have highly localised characteristics, of language and culture, but it is also because national regulatory policy styles and solutions have strong historical characteristics and institutions which shape change so that it maintains continuity with previous practice. Politics matters in this process.

Taking this HI perspective forward logically, the comparative approach for this project recognises both the similarities and differences in the national cases under selection (i.e., it does not proceed from the homogenising premise of typologies), and emphasises the role of national context and path dependency in affecting political media in a non-deterministic manner.

Comparative methodology and political talk

Analysing political talk cross-nationally gives more explanatory power in terms of valid generalisations, as well as enabling analysis of the relationship between national contexts, political and media cultures, and political media production and content. The following table illustrates this.

Table 5: Research questions and comparative methodology

Research questions	Comparative methodology
1. What are the production priorities – norms, routines, values and goals – of political talk producers? How and why is political talk television produced the way it is?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gives more explanatory power and generalisability than a single country study.
2. How do more or less marketised national contexts compare with regard to mediatisation of political talk television content? 3. What role do different or similar media institutions play in mediatising political talk content?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows the relationship between marketisation at the national level and mediatisation of content to be investigated. • Marketisation at the institutional level can be tested by looking at the mediatisation of political talk content. Broadcast institutions (public service, free to air, 24-hour news) can be cross-nationally compared.
4. What are the democratic implications of news fragmentation?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enables more contextualised inferences to be made about dialogical news formats than a single country study.

Selection of cases

The next logical step is to explain the rationale for the case selection. A first, pragmatic selection criterion for narrowing possible cases, relates to language. Given the complexities of language in terms of analysing the political talk shows, interviewing senior producers, and understanding secondary sources, I was restricted to English-speaking countries when selecting countries to analyse; namely: the UK, Australia, New Zealand, America, and Canada. This is important to note prior to the justifications that follow.

At the most general level of analysis the national context is viewed as an explanatory factor in political talk production and content (Esser and Pfetsch, 2004b; Hardy, 2008: 6). In more formal terms, the national context is a unit of analysis. Esser and Pfetsch (2004b: 396) explain that:

We speak of highly contextualized comparative studies, when the analysis of different systems, cultures, and nations systematically considers contextual factors and builds on an analytical framework divided into microlevel, mesolevel, and macrolevel. A well-founded explanation of the similarities and differences observed can then point to the context variables that have been systematically gathered.

Despite the internationalisation of communication studies and the vogue of globalisation theory, 'communication systems remain, to a significant degree, national in organisation

and orientation' (Hardy, 2008: xvi). The analysis adopted here recognises the push towards a more integrated world and cross-border flows; however, it also recognises that media content and media systems are not platonic because they vary nationally (Murray, 2005). The three cases under consideration are America, the UK, and Australia. They can be broadly classified as "Western" in Hardy's analysis because they have a Judeo-Christian heritage, and they are advanced capitalist economies and representative democracies (2008: 1-3). The UK and America are classified as part of the Liberal camp in Hallin and Mancini's model. Australia shares many similarities with the UK, and even though Hallin and Mancini do not extend their analysis to the antipodes, Australia could logically be put into the Liberal category if extrapolating from the model. However, on closer examination, Jones and Pusey (2010: 456) categorise Australia as somewhere in-between the polarised pluralist model and the Liberal model because of the late professionalisation of journalism, lower levels of education, poor regulation of accuracy and impartiality of commercial broadcast journalism, slow recognition of the freedom of the press, and high degrees of clientelism and parallelism (see also: Rahkonen, 2007).

Similarity and difference

Burnham et al., say that ideally, the cases selected will 'facilitate the isolation of certain factors of interest' which are relevant in the creation of particular political outcomes (2004: 62). Cases need to be justified on a most similar or most different rationale. Most similar designs aim to hold, ideally, all other intervening variables constant, except for the independent variable. In social science, this is usually impossible, but attempts to reach this aim give more analytical clarity. In this way, a clearer picture is gained as to the effect of the independent variables between the cases. Most different designs seek to have similar independent variables and very different intervening variables. This allows the researcher to assess causality across different contexts.

National contexts have been chosen to explain similarity and difference in the production and content of political talk, and to allow reflection on various aspects of marketisation. This project approaches comparative analysis from a holistic perspective. Hopkin (2010) notes, for example, that an advantage of qualitative comparative research is its holism; it can look at contexts as a whole and not eliminate important aspects of a case by defining

factors out of the cause-effect equation. Attention to historical-empirical detail and concern for understanding cases as a whole leads to research that examines its assumptions closely and contains qualifying statements which refine the theoretical framework. The following classification system will be justified at a later stage. It is presented here for clarity. The variables are characterised as follows:

Table 6: Independent and dependent variables

Independent	Dependent
National marketisation: high/low National media regulation: weak/strong	Production priorities of political talk shows Mediatiation of political talk content
Broadcast traditions: PSB, free to air, 24-hour news ¹⁹	

Table 7: Independent variables

	National marketisation	National media regulation
US	High	Weak
Aus	Medium	Medium
UK	Low	Strong

Countries in comparative context

The following section aims to identify and analyse central areas of comparison that relate to marketisation. It answers the main question: What are the similarities and differences at the national level? Four types of factors are outlined: sociological-economic, political, media and perceptions.

Sociological-economic factors

America is by far the biggest country (the third biggest in the world) and Australia and the UK are in the upper-mid range. Ethnically, all of the countries are predominantly white, but they have sizable immigrant or minority populations: South central Asian and European in the UK, East Asian in Australia (as well as indigenous Aboriginals), and Native American Indians, African-American, Hispanic and Asian-Americans in America.²⁰ English speakers dominate in all three countries, and their immigrant populations account for a

¹⁹ Broadcast tradition, an independent variable, defies easy classification yet is related to commercialism.

²⁰ This does not show up in CIA Factbook data, but the ethnic group of Asian Americans is fast growing (Pew Research Centre's Social & Demographic Trends, 2013).

minority of other languages. According to Lijphart's characterisation of pluralism (2012: 53--57), which takes into account the degree of social division (ethnic, religious, and linguistic), America is characterised as semi-plural, while the UK and Australia are deemed non-plural, meaning that America has a slightly more divided population. Australia has the highest concentration (in the OECD) of people in the most populous 10 percent of regions, at 64%. The US has almost 50% compared to an OECD average of almost 40%. The UK has a more geographically diverse population, which is around 30% on the same measure.

Wilkinson and Pickett recently pointed out that the UK and the US in particular are among the countries with the most unequal distribution of wealth, as measured by the Gini Index (2009). Furthermore, there is a significant positive correlation between higher social spending and lower levels of inequality (OECD Social Indicators, 2011). In this regard, all three countries under study can be approximately classed as medium social spending (15-20 percent of GDP; the average OECD spend was 19% in 2007) and unequal in terms of income inequality. For instance, the OECD average for the Gini coefficient in the late 2000s was 0.31. The most equal OECD countries score 0.24 to 0.25, compared to Australia and the UK (with an OECD score of 0.34, and ranked equal 25th out of 34 countries), and the US (with an OECD score of 0.38, and ranked 31st).

In terms of social welfare the UK and Australia are more welfare oriented than the US; social transfers are proportionally larger in these countries compared with America. Just looking at public social spending (which includes health), the UK is the biggest spender, at 20% of GDP, compared with 16% for Australia and the US, and an OECD average of 19%. Further unpacking this figure and looking at support for workers, income tested benefits, and "other social spending", America cumulatively spends 4% percent of GDP, where the UK and Australia spend approximately 13% against an OECD average of 8-9%.

Judging by these blunt measures, all of the countries share similarities in terms of wealth, English language dominance, and levels of inequality. The UK is the most prepared to enact social transfers. Overall, the US is roughly equal in social spending to Australia (16%). It is important to note that social spending is artificially high in the US because of its almost wholly commercial approach to social welfare (which has increased costs as

health insurance providers, for example, seek to make a profit). Thus, although overall transfers in the American case approach Australian levels, it is likely that the commercial set-up over-inflates the magnitude of real terms social spending (Kane, 2012).

Table 8: Socio-economic factors

	UK	AUS	US
Population (million approx.)	63	22	312
Ethnic diversity	White (of which English 83.6%, Scottish 8.6%, Welsh 4.9%, Northern Irish 2.9%) 92.1%; black 2%, Indian 1.8%, Pakistani 1.3%, mixed 1.2%, other 1.6%	White 92%; Asian 7%; aboriginal and other 1%	White 79.96%; black 12.85%; Asian 4.43%; Amerindian and Alaska native 0.97%; native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander 0.18%; two or more races 1.61% (July 2007 estimate) Note: About 16% of the total US population is Hispanic. ²¹
Linguistic	English The following are recognised regional languages: Scots (about 30% of the population of Scotland), Scottish Gaelic (about 60,000 in Scotland), Welsh (about 20% of the population of Wales), Irish (about 10% of the population of Northern Ireland), Cornish (some 2,000 to 3,000 in Cornwall)	English 78.5%, Chinese 2.5%, Italian 1.6%, Greek 1.3%, Arabic 1.2%, Vietnamese 1%, other 8.2%, unspecified 5.7% (2006 Census)	English 82.1%, Spanish 10.7%, other Indo-European 3.8%, Asian and Pacific island 2.7%, other 0.7% (2000 census)
Indigenous population %	NA.	2.5	1.1% (included native American, Alaskan native American, and Hawaiian and other Pacific island native) ²²
Overseas-born population %	11.3	26.5	12.7
Share of national population in the ten per cent of regions with the largest population; OECD Average 39.5 (2010)	28.6	63.8	48.9
Lijphart's pluralistic characterisation ²³	Non-plural	Non-plural	Semi-plural
GDP (2011)	\$2.481 trillion	\$1.507 trillion	\$15.06 trillion
GDP per capita (PPP) (2011)	\$ 35,900	\$ 40,800	\$ 48,100
GNI per capita, PPP (current international \$)	35,840	36,910	47,310
Gini coefficient in late 2000s. OECD average 0.31	0.34	0.34	0.38
Public social spending; % of GDP. (Old age, Survivors, Incapacity-related benefits, Health, Family, Active labour market programmes, Unemployment, Housing, and Other social policy areas.); OECD average 19.3%	20.5	16.0	16.2
Public social spending on income support to the working age population; % GDP. OECD Average 3.9%	4.5	4.0	2.0
Public spending on income tested programmes % of GDP; OECD average 2%	5	5.6	1.2
Public social expenditures on other services as % GDP; OECD average 2.5%	3.8	2.9	1.0
Public social expenditures on pension as % GDP; OECD average 6.97	5.4	3.4	6.0

Sources: Population: ethnic diversity, linguistic diversity, GDP, World CIA World Factbook. Indigenous population: Australia 2011 census and U.S 2010 census. GNI and GDP per capita, 2010, World Bank. Gini, 2011, OECD. Overseas born population, 2009, OECD. Social statistics, 2007, OECD. OECD Factbook 2013.

Last, according to the World Values Survey data, these three wealthy countries are all “postmodern”, in that as Gross National Product rises so does subjective well-being

²¹ (2010 Census Briefs 2011)

²² (2010 Census Briefs 2011)

²³ (Lijphart, 2012: 54-55)

(happiness and life satisfaction), on average, until a country becomes very rich, and then the relationship tapers off. Furthermore, looking at the general shift from survival values to self-expression, and from religious to legal-rational authority, all three countries score high on self-expression, with the UK and Australia being more secular than America, which is more bound to traditional values (Inglehart and Welzel, 2011). This means that the American population are more likely to value tradition, religion, authority, nationalism, obedience and marriage (Norris and Inglehart, 2004: 84). People from Australia and the UK place less emphasis on these values and more emphasis on tolerance and progressive values such as multiculturalism and secularism.

Political factors

This sections aims to compare the political factors of the three countries. Table 9 is based on cross-national data gathered by political scientists (Armingeon et al., 2012). All data is from 2010 unless otherwise stated. Sweden, a Nordic country, is presented as a comparison because its electoral system is proportional representation and thus more consensus based, whereas the compared countries are majoritarian. Sweden also scores well on workers' rights measures. Averages for all OECD countries over a 20-year span are presented, as well as means for 2010.²⁴

All three countries are broadly characterised by democratic continuity, except that the US has a weak state tradition: a characteristic of disjuncture. No country has the post-WWII ruptures of Eastern Europe or Germany. All of the countries have well-established democracies and common law frameworks. The UK has a parliamentary first past-the-post democracy; Australia has a parliamentary democracy, which operates on preferential voting and is federal. Historically, both the UK and Australia have had a two party system, but both countries have different coalition agreements at the time of writing.²⁵ The US has a federal presidential system with a two party majoritarian system. In accordance

²⁴ Not all OECD countries were included in the analysis. Those that were are: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Cyprus (Greek part), Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the USA.

²⁵ The UK is making room for a third party, the Liberal Democrats and perhaps even the United Kingdom Independence Party. Australia has a long-standing centre-right coalition, but it effectively operates as a single party. It also has other minor parties such as The Greens in parliament. Periodically, the US has independent candidates for presidential office, like Ralph Nader.

with Lijphart, all of the countries can be classified as majoritarian and non-consensual, which means they are more likely to marginalise groups than consensus based democracies (2012: 9-20). For instance, corporatist countries have less interest group pluralism than majoritarian countries because diverse group political participation is built into the political framework.

According to specific consensus measures based on Lijphart's formulation (with positive scores indicating a higher consensus system), the UK is the least consensus oriented, with Australia and the US showing more consensus, but majoritarian structures overall. The composition of the government cabinet is judged wholly left in Australia, wholly centrist-right in America, and a balance between left and right in the UK. For electoral and legislative fractionalisation – a measure of the diversity of party votes and parliament party seats – the US is not fractionalised, meaning that most party votes and parliament seats go to one of the two major parties, while Australia and the UK show moderate fractionalisation – allowing more diversity and competition than America. The relationship between the executive and the legislature is parliamentary for the UK and Australia, and presidential for the US. Australia and the US (federal systems) both have strong and equal bicameral houses, while the UK has a stronger lower house and weaker upper house, meaning bicameral asymmetry, and thus a more majoritarian structure. Lastly, in terms of worker organisation, the UK is the most unionised measured by the proportion of unionised workers in the workforce. The UK and Australia give more legal protection to workers than America. Compared to the historical OECD mean, however, none of the three countries are highly unionised; they are guided more by individual bargaining, which seems to fit well with high levels of interest group pluralism.

To sum up, and taking the political similarities first, all three countries are Western Judeo-Christian (predominantly English speaking and ethnically white, as well as sharing

Table 9: Political factors

		AUS	UK	US	Sweden	OECD average 2010	OECD average (1990-2010)
Government	Government type ²⁶	Single party majority	Minimum winning coalition	Single party majority	Minimum winning coalition	.	.
	Electoral system ²⁷	Majority-plurality/alternative vote	Plurality	Plurality	List proportional representation	.	.
	Composition of cabinet ²⁸ (Numbers closer to 3 are more centrist)	5	3	1	1	2.4	2.48
	Index of electoral fractionalisation ²⁹	69.80	73.17	53.51	79.09	75.40	75.69
	Index of legislative fractionalisation ³⁰	59.75	61.28	49.37	77.93	70.09	70.10
	Exec-leg relations ³¹	Parliamentary system	Parliamentary system	Presidential	Parliamentary system	.	.
	Index of bicameralism ³²	Strong bi	Weak bi	Strong bi	Unicam	.	.

²⁶ 1) single party majority government; (2) minimal winning coalition; (3) surplus coalition; (4) single party minority government; (5) multi party minority government; (6) caretaker government or non-party government; (7) other.

²⁷ 0 = simple plurality formula; 1 = majority-plurality/alternative vote; 2 = semiproportional formulas; 3 = list proportional representation; 4 = mixed member proportional formula; 5 = single transferable vote.

²⁸ Based on the Schmidt Index (1992). An indicator of party composition of government that classifies governments as leftist and non-leftist with respect to parties' shares of cabinet seats: (1) hegemony of right-wing (and centre) parties; (2) dominance of right-wing (and centre) parties; (3) balance of power between left and right/centre; (4) dominance of social-democratic and other left parties; (5) hegemony of social-democratic and other left parties.

²⁹ An index of electoral fractionalisation: a measure of political diversity in elections. Numbers closer to 100 show greater diversity of political parties.

³⁰ An index of legislature fractionalisation: numbers closer to 100 represent greater political diversity.

³¹ 0 = parliamentary system; 1 = presidential; 2 = semi-presidential dominated by president; 3 = semi-presidential dominated by parliament; 4 = hybrid system.

³² 1 = unicameralism; 2 = weak bicameralism (asymmetrical and congruent chambers); 3 = medium strength bicameralism (asymmetrical and incongruent or symmetrical and congruent); 4 = strong bicameralism (symmetrical and incongruent).

		AUS	UK	US	Sweden	OECD average 2010	OECD average (1990-2010)
Consensus measures (Higher numbers mean more consensus)	Lijphart first dimension of consensus democracy. ³³	-1.35	-2.28	-1.16	0.37	0.00	0.00
	Lijphart first dimension. Proxy variable institutions.	-1.27	-2.33	-1.16	0.70	0.00	0.00
	Lijphart first dimension. Proxy variable behaviour.	-0.66	-0.93	-1.21	-0.18	0.00	0.00
Interest group pluralism (1945-2010)	Interest group pluralism (0- 4) ³⁴ (Lower scores means less interest group pluralism; higher scores mean more interest group pluralism)	2.12	3.02	3.02	0.35	.	.
Worker organisation	Union density Net union membership as a proportion wage and salary earners in employment (union density)	19.0	27.5 (2009)	11.4	68.9	31.26	36.91
	Employment protection strictness scale of 0-6 (the higher the value the stricter employment protection is)	1.15 (2008)	0.75 (2008)	0.21 (2008)	1.87 (2008)	1.86	1.95
	Bargaining coverage ³⁵ (Higher values mean more coverage)	40.0 (2007)	34.6 (2007)	13.3 (2007)	91.0 (2007)	56.52	56.93

³³ Includes the following: Number of effective parties in parliament; absence of minimal winning and single majority cabinets; proportionality of electoral system; and cabinet dominance.

³⁴ (Lijphart, 2012) The mean (not just OECD countries) was 2.02.

³⁵ '[E]mployees covered by wage bargaining agreements as a proportion of all wage and salary earners in employment with the right to bargaining, expressed as percentage, adjusted for the possibility that some sectors or occupations are excluded from the right to bargain.'

commonalities in historical lineage: Australia is a colony of the UK, and American settler society an offspring from England). They are also wealthy and unequal free-market based democracies. Politically, they share common-law and majoritarian political structures, as well as relatively high levels of interest group pluralism (Lijphart, 2012: 53).

However, where Hallin and Mancini lump the UK and US together, there are important differences to consider between the countries. Looking at the major differences, the UK is the most majoritarian country and the least consensus oriented. This reflects a Westminster model. In terms of electoral and legislative fractionalisation, the UK and Australia are much closer to the OECD historical mean than the US, showing more electoral competition and political diversity. The UK places the most emphasis on social spending out of the three countries. The UK and Australia are more welfare oriented than the US. Compared to the historical OECD mean, none of the three countries are particularly worker friendly, but the UK and Australia are more aligned towards collective worker bargaining than America. Finally, the UK is governed by aspects of EU law, while the US and Australia have federal-state legal dynamics.

Brief comparative histories of television broadcast regulation

This section compares the historical broadcast trajectories of the three countries.

Jonathan Hardy, in his comparative study of “Western media systems” is careful to state that (2008: xvi): ‘[N]ational cultural differences and traditions, differences of language, geography, political systems and power structures, economies, international relationships and histories have shaped and continue to influence media systems.’

It is important to look at broadcast regulation, because as Streeter notes for example, broadcasting licences are a form of soft property that constitutes *political* agreements where the state can determine the institutional arrangements attached to property rights (Streeter, 1995 cited in: Flew, 2006: 285). The rationale for broadcast regulation has traditionally been articulated in relation to spectrum scarcity. Airwave frequencies were scarce and expensive, thus government oversight was required to prevent undue commercial dominance. This took the form of a *quid pro quo*: governments granted licences guaranteeing access to a unique frequency in return for public interest concessions (news provision and rules of conduct, for example) from broadcasters.

However, the UK and the US went about this from different philosophical perspectives. The UK opted for a publically funded monopoly (The BBC) with strong regulatory and statutory oversight. The US, in contrast, was always more market-oriented. It did not support a publically funded “stand alone” broadcaster. However, initially, the regulatory structure overseen by the FCC had many public interest safeguards, which began to wane in the mid 1970s and were ‘essentially abandoned in the anti-regulatory atmosphere of the 1980s’ (Clayman and Heritage, 2002: 33). Nascent Australian television broadcasting adopted many features from the UK, establishing a PSB, but this was more commercially oriented from its inception.

For the US, the FCC, established in 1934, was initially concerned with developing an informed public (Hardy, 2008: 56). The FCC limited cross-ownership and pressured broadcasters to increase their news and current affairs programming in the 1960s (Epstein, 1974). The Fairness Doctrine required broadcasters to strive for balance (of perspectives and opinions) in their factual programming and give due attention to important public affairs issues (Hardy, 2008: 43-45). The “attack rule” required public figures to be notified, and given a chance to respond to critical “attacks”.³⁶ A limited public broadcasting system (PBS and NPR) was funded via the 1967 Public Broadcasting Act, which still applies today. Crucially though, ‘the legislation only facilitates voluntary activity, with some federal funding, and does not mandate concerted state intervention to promote those public interests’ (Gibbons and Humphreys, 2012: 26).

As touched upon in chapter two, the marketisation of broadcasting structures – which started in the 1980s with the abandonment of the Fairness Doctrine in 1987, and was later embodied in the Telecommunications Act of 1996 – led to a dismantling of much public interest regulation, including many ownership restrictions (Hardy, 2008: 148). Gibbons and Humphreys observe that the act ‘relaxed many of the rules which prevented different traditional media sectors ... from providing the same service, and it further relaxed what were already minimal cross-ownership rules’ (2012: 21). And even though the FCC is still required to consider the public interest, television licences are ‘generally automatically given’ (Gibbons and Humphreys, 2012: 20). Allied with this was the digital

³⁶ Critics argue that these rules stymied political debate and encouraged a more cautious political approach by the networks (Clayman and Heritage, 2002: 34)

revolution that undercut the spectrum scarcity argument. With cable and digital channels spawning, broadcasters and the US government no longer saw the rationale for strict policing of licences since access to the airwaves was no longer limited (Hardy, 2008: 63-64). A Reaganite perspective triumphed which favoured non-intervention (Gibbons and Humphreys, 2012: 20-33). Nevertheless, some must carry rules exist to ensure that free-to-air local programming is aired by cable or satellite providers (Gibbons and Humphreys, 2012: 23). With the Fairness Doctrine abandoned, news production was left to the market. The effect on journalism was clear. Traditional journalism culture – on the networks – maintained some commitment to fairness and impartiality, but the cable news channels, which were not hampered by tradition or impartiality mandates, promoted attack journalism, with Fox News supporting the Republicans and MSNBC supporting the Democrats, (Clayman and Heritage, 2002: 32-35; Stroud, 2011).

The BBC was founded in 1922 and operated as a monopoly until 1955. It was initially set up to act in the public interest as a public service. Headed by Director General Lord Reith it took its role as educator and public informer seriously. The 1954 Broadcasting Act saw the introduction of a commercial television service in 1955, the so-called “independent television network” (ITV), and a regulator, the ITA, which was to ensure that the newly established commercial service took its news and civic responsibilities seriously. Later strengthened by the 1963 Television Act, the ITA³⁷ required commercial news services to be fair, balanced and impartial; it stipulated an independent news provider (ITN), mandated news and current affairs quotas, and ensured that news was broadcast in primetime. This introduced competition to the BBC and improved programming output overall; ITV’s advertising monopoly and public interest regulation blunted the deleterious competition effects (Barnett, 2011: 43-61). The introduction of cable, satellite and then digital television enabled transnational corporations into the UK media ecology in the 1980s and 1990s (Hardy, 2008: 69). Later acts (1990 and 1996) ‘advanced the liberalising re-regulation of the media in favour of market forces’ (Hardy, 2008: 70).

Overall though, a regulatory philosophy of managed commercialism applies to this day (Lunt and Livingstone, 2012). Public service obligations currently apply to all the

³⁷ Later the IBA, ITC, and now Ofcom.

commercial public service channels: ITV, Channel 4 and (minimally to) Channel 5; television licences are given through a public interest quid pro quo agreement, with oversight by Ofcom and The BBC Trust (Clayman and Heritage, 2002: 35-37; Leys, 2003: 110-164; Cushion, 2012: 40-57). The UK's regulatory regime, although susceptible to charges of marketisation, especially with the 2003 Communications Act, is backed by statutory legislation which, according to Jones (2003), makes the British regulatory set-up a template that can improve other nations' media policies because it provides strong support for public service broadcasting, while still accepting (regulated) commercial competition.

Problematically, Jacka laments that media scholars in Australia have 'neglected television history in favour of various approaches to contemporary television'; she goes on to say that 'there is no standard history of the whole system of Australian television, especially one that gives appropriate weight to commercial television, and a great deal of that history remains unrecorded' (2004: 36-37). Nevertheless, there is enough scholarship to sketch an overall historical institutional trajectory. Television aired in 1956 with two commercial networks (Nine and Seven) and one public service broadcaster, the ABC, modelled on the BBC. Breen (1996: 123) says that, for instance:

The Broadcasting and Television Act (1956) sought to bring the best elements of the U.S. and British systems to Australians ... However, it was flawed by its emphasis on the recognized strengths of the U.S. approach with a strong advertiser base. Inevitably, television in Australia had a commercial orientation, where public interest was secondary.

The ABC never enjoyed the monopoly status of the BBC and thus never gained the same level of public support; the ABC never had the same levels of regulation as the BBC or the American "Fairness Doctrine" (Jones, 2003). Flew (2006: 290) comments that:

While the subordination of public broadcasting is not as strong as it is with the Public Broadcasting Service in the United States, it has remained the case that the ABC has never been funded to achieve the profile in the national broadcasting system that the BBC has had in Britain.

A fourth channel, The Ten Network, aired in 1964, and a fifth – a second public broadcaster – SBS, aired in 1980. Flew argues that the regulatory agency, the Australian Broadcasting Control Board, was largely captured by commercial interests. It failed to

regulate programme standards and did not facilitate adequate public participation, even with a renewed public interest orientation before, and during the 1970s (Flew, 2006: 291; also see, Flew and Harrington, 2010). The following notwithstanding, some Australian content regulation has, however, remained part of the cultural policy tool kit, with fears of cheaper American imports dominating being a concern (Flew and Harrington, 2010: 265-269). Into the 1990s, Flew (2006: 293) says that:

The net effect of the policy changes associated with the Broadcasting Services Act of 1992 was in fact a consolidation of the social contract, where a minimum level of Australian content and other prosocial content regulations were the quid pro quo for a highly restrictive policy regime that entrenched the privileged position of incumbent commercial free-to-air broadcasters.

The media system remained mostly commercial, whilst giving a nod to moderate public interest regulation. More recently, Dwyer says that 'liberalization of the cross-media rules has allowed consolidation by existing traditional media players, further concentrating media ownership in fewer hands' (2010: 82). For instance, the *Broadcasting Services Amendment (Media Ownership) Act 2006*, removed foreign ownership restrictions and certain cross-ownership limits. This resulted, according to Cunningham, in 'effectively taking much of the [TV] network ownership offshore into private institutional ownership' (2010: 56). Dwyer (2010: 80-81) further argues that the Australian regulatory relaxation:

can be seen as being consistent with an international neoliberal trend to relax ownership rules, and Australia now has gone further than other comparable nations. For example, in the UK, cross-sector limits remain at the local, regional and national levels; while in the USA, new FCC rules ... allow newspaper/broadcast combination in the 20 biggest markets only, subject to certain conditions'.

In sum, Australian broadcasting has neither experienced the deregulatory fever of the US, nor opted for the stricter British model of regulation. Australian regulators have been sympathetic to commercial broadcasters, whilst still extracting some public interest provisions. Australia is thus a hybrid regulatory case.

Current regulatory regimes

This section briefly compares the regulatory contexts of the countries in 2012 (see Table 10). The aim is to pinpoint exact regulatory similarities and differences, as opposed to the previous, more general discussion.

The American regulatory regime, although possessing some public interest safeguards, is market oriented. It operates largely on the basis of self-regulation. Freedman says that America is 'seen as having the prime example of [a] financially led and commercially oriented system' (2008: 19). The US is an active promoter of deregulatory change. Ownership and content regulation is weak, with minimal cross ownership regulations. According to Table 10, public service programming and scheduling requirements are minimal, with only local public interest requirements, as well as Public, Education and Government (PEG) access requirements for pay-tv. The FCC is required to consider the public interest when renewing licences; however, this is ill defined and largely ignored. The Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) is statutorily required to promote programming that strives for objectivity. This is not, however, analogous to the UK's mandated impartiality requirements. The objectivity clause is currently interpreted as a goal that the CPB should promote, rather than a cast-iron requirement.³⁸ The majority of programming on PBS and the commercial networks operates on a self-regulatory basis. PBS is the only US free-to-air television broadcast organisation with an identifiable and publically available code of ethics (which also has impartiality and fairness stipulations, although these are not statutorily required).

The UK has sought to remain competitive in the global media market, grappling with market friendly policies – eschewing strongly protectionist subsidy policies and embracing market perspectives on international competitiveness, ownership restrictions, and

³⁸ In personal correspondence with the Director of Media and Public Relations for the CPB, the following was said: "The CPB is not "required to fund programmes that are objective when dealing with political matters". CPB's statutory responsibility is to facilitate the development of public telecommunications as a confederation of independent organisations, in which strict adherence to objectivity and balance is a goal that CPB is to facilitate or promote among all of the diverse sources from which programmes are obtained by public telecommunications entities. Please note also that the mandate pertains to programmes "of a controversial nature", which is not the same at all as "dealing with political matters". Most – but not all – programmes on political matters are controversial, and some but by no means all controversial programmes are on political matters. One way in which the CPB can facilitate or promote that goal is by awarding programming grants in such a way as to balance points of view that have predominated in other programmes with contrasting views that may be only rarely represented, or in such a way as to focus attention on a topic that has been generally neglected in other programmes. Another way is for the CPB to award grants to programmes or programme-makers that have demonstrated a "track record" of objectivity and balance in their past work, or that have put into effect practices that promise to reinforce objectivity and balance in their future programmes. But in no instance does the CPB have editorial control of any programme produced with the aid of a CPB programming grant. Moreover, the CPB's awarding of programming grants is far from comprehensive in the realm of "national public broadcasting programming." CPB's programming grants aid many – but not even nearly all—of the programmes that diverse sources have "made available to public telecommunications entities."

“value” (for example, public value tests) – while still preserving public service and public interest regulatory protection. Overall, Barnett observes that there is ‘no question’ that the UK parliament and Ofcom have shown ‘a continuing concern for sustaining a healthy culture of television journalism’ (Barnett, 2011: 202).

Ofcom has, however, substantially relaxed ownership regulations, especially with the Communications Act 2003, which abolished foreign ownership rules; it currently maintains weak cross-ownership stipulations: ‘The current rules are therefore relatively minimalist’ (Gibbons and Humphreys, 2012: 105). This was evident when News Corporation’s head, Rupert Murdoch, already owner of over a third of the UK press judged by national circulation, sought to increase News Corp’s 39.1% share of the British satellite provider BSkyB, to take full control. The responsible Minister (Vince Cable and then Jeremy Hunt) initially gave the provisional go-ahead, with agreement from Ofcom, for the takeover to take place on the condition that Sky News become independent from BSkyB (Deans and Sweney, 2011); however, the Milly Dowler phone hacking scandal and subsequent Leveson Inquiry and fall out scuppered the deal.

From one perspective, recent history sees the UK regulatory environment as one of de-regulation and susceptibility to free market competition. There have long been political, partisan and economic scuffles between the BBC, its commercial counterparts and the government; voices have long called for the privatisation of the BBC, and de-regulation of the broadcasting sector in general; scholars have analysed the market based “new management” techniques applied internally within the BBC (Barnett and Curry, 1994; Leys, 2003: 112-164; Born, 2005; Barnett, 2011); and indeed, healthy debate even exists over the definition and remit of public service broadcasting (Debrett, 2010). However, as Table 10 shows, UK broadcasters still have public interest and public service remits and requirements (impartiality stipulations across all programmes and channels produced in the UK, for instance), as well as programming and scheduling requirements (minimum quotas for production of original content and scheduling news in primetime); and, the BBC remains well funded and enjoys strong public support (Ofcom, 2012b). News impartiality requirements even extend to all news channels receivable in the UK including Al Jazeera, France 24, and controversially, RT. Gibbons and Humphreys state that (2012: 90):

UK television policy has exhibited a marked degree of path dependence, in the sense of preserving institutions that are not demonstrably broken and of maintaining continuity in policy development. Policy continue[s] to sustain strong PSB within the new context of marketisation, and multi-channel competition.

Turning to Australia, Flew (2006: 294) asserts that, in the new digital world, current Australian policy has resulted in 'an openly partisan approach to broadcast media policy, favouring the incumbent broadcasters' by preventing multichannel development. Jones and Pusey (2010: 458) argue that: 'There has been no Australian equivalent of the UK content regulation of broadcast commercial journalism to PSB standards or of UK structural regulation to encourage commercial journalism to compete on the basis of quality.'

Looking at Table 10, there is regulatory evidence of concern for media plurality, with moderate – but not strict – cross-ownership rules; for example, there needs to be a minimum of five different voices in a metropolitan area, and a two out of three rule which prohibits more than two of three radio, newspaper or TV licences within an area. Nevertheless, legislation does prevent owning more than one TV licence in an area and more than two radio licences, or reaching more than 75% of the population via the ownership of multiple TV licences across areas. Content requirements are in place for the commercial free to air channels: 55% of all programming between 6am and midnight must be Australian. The ABC does not have specific quotas, but it is required to reflect Australian identity and provide educational and news programmes. Pay television is exempt from any content requirements.

Table 10: Broadcast regulation in 2012

	UK			AUS			US		
	PSB	Comm-PSB	Pay	PSB	Network	Pay	PSB	Network ³⁹	Pay
Ownership and Cross-ownership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “20 percent” market share cap rule (prevents national press cross-ownership with national and regional television for C3) • ITV ownership rules removed (single ownership potentially allowed; see Carlton and Granada merger) • Channel 5 able to attract investment from any company 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximum audience reach is 75% of population for licences • Cannot own more than 1 commercial television broadcasting licence or 2 commercial radio-broadcasting licences in the same licence area. • Directorship limits • 2 out of 3 rule: assigns limits to 2 of 3 radio, television and newspaper combinations within a licence area • Minimum of 5 independent voices needed for metropolitan area 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 39% national TV audience cap (reach) • Only one national TV network per owner • Cross-ownership limits for a given market; a single company cannot own both a TV licence and daily newspaper for example outside of the top 20 television markets; minimal limits for radio-TV combinations within a market (e.g. regardless of number of voices, two TV stations and one radio station allowed, which increases given more independent voices in a market) • Local television station ownership is limited to two in a market, given that the second channel is not among the top four by audience share and there are at least eight independent voices. 		
Foreign-ownership limits	No restrictions on foreign ownership			No restrictions on foreign ownership (but the Treasurer has power to veto)			Yes		
Public interest test (mergers)	Yes			No (but recommended in 2012 Convergence Review)			Yes		
Quotas and scheduling (news and current affairs) (TV)	Yes	Yes	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requirement to provide daily news • SBS “inform, educate, and entertain” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Australian content must be 55% of all programming in a year between 6am and midnight⁴⁰ 	No	No	Local ‘public interest requirements’	PEG access; some must carry requirements for local television ⁴¹

³⁹ The networks are not actually regulated by the FCC because local stations or Network “affiliates” are the ones actually broadcasting the programming; affiliates are thus regulated.

⁴⁰ Also requirements for regions: local content of significance. Operates on a points system which mandates an average of 120 points per week: “Local news accrues 2 points per minute broadcast. Other material which directly relates to the local area accrues 1 point per minute broadcast, and any material which directly relates to the licence area accrues 1 point per minute broadcast.”

⁴¹ Not actually mandated in the law, but the ‘1984 Act specifically allows franchise authorities, if they so choose, to mandate that an operator provide PEG (public, educational, and government access) channels’.

	UK			AUS			US		
	PSB	Comm-PSB	Pay	PSB	Network	Pay	PSB	Network ³⁹	Pay
Impartiality and fairness (TV)	Yes (law)	Yes (law)	Yes (domestic satellite) (law)	Yes (law)	Yes; industry codes, overseen by ACMA	Yes; industry codes for broadcast subscription overseen by ACMA	Yes (fairness, objectivity, accuracy, balance; self-defined code) (CPB – legally required by congress oversight but not linked to PBS or NPR only distributes funding)	Local 'public interest requirements'	No
News notes	News quotas and primetime requirements	<i>Independent C3</i> news provision requirement removed; quality news still mandated Regional requirements for BBC and C3	More leeway for international satellite services on impartiality; e.g., Fox news.	NA	Regional news commitments	NA	NA	NA	NA

Sources: US: FCC <http://www.fcc.gov/encyclopedia/rules-regulations-title-47>; UK: Ofcom <http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/broadcasting/broadcast-codes/> and Communications Act 2003 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2003/21/contents>; AUS: ACMA <http://www.acma.gov.au/>, Parliamentary e-brief http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/Publications_Archive/archive/mediaregulation, (Finkelstein, 2012), ABC <http://about.abc.net.au/how-the-abc-is-run/what-guides-us/our-editorial-policies/> and SBS: <http://www.sbs.com.au/aboutus/corporate/index/id/25/h/SBS-Charter>

It is required by law that the public broadcaster, the ABC, is impartial and accurate with regard to news and politics; SBS is required to be 'accurate and balanced'.⁴² Impartiality and accuracy requirements are not statutorily mandated for the commercial networks; however, the regulator, the ACMA, requires commercial networks to submit their own codes of ethics. Their codes stipulate impartiality requirements; performance is then monitored by ACMA. This regulatory model is co-regulation. Similar codes – including a commitment to impartiality – are required of “subscription broadcast television” (pay TV).

If the degree of public interest of media regulation is taken as a barometer of marketisation, America is the most marketised, with the least public interest regulation. The American regulatory model is largely self-regulation, with minimal public interest requirements. Australia has a hybrid of the UK and US models. It operates mostly on a co-regulation model, with some statutes regarding, for example, Australian content and the operation of the public broadcasters. The UK is the least marketised along these lines. It is heavily reliant on statutes for quotas and impartiality requirements. The BBC is highly regulated and overseen by the BBC Trust. Impartiality requirements apply to PSBs, commercial-free to air, and 24-hour news channels.

Media factors

This section moves deeper into a comparative analysis and looks at the media factors in each country. It covers the press, free to air television, the internet, public service broadcasting, and pay television and 24-hour news.

Press: Newspaper readership is much higher in the UK than in the other two countries. According to UNESCO figures, the UK is a mid-range country for circulation per 1000 people; America and Australia are in the bottom range for readership. The UK has, uniquely, a fiercely competitive and partisan national press market, which has a mixture of broadsheet, mid-range, and tabloid papers. Most of the national papers are conservative. According to the table, there is a moderate to high amount of concentration in the press market; the top four companies (News International, Daily Mail and General Trust, Trinity Mirror, and Northern and Shell) account for 74% of the total daily newspaper circulation share (Curran and Seaton, 2003: pp.67-105; European Initiative for

⁴² SBS Act sec 10c

Media Pluralism, 2013: 134). The top five national companies control 90% of sales (Ofcom, 2007: 32). Murdoch dominates; his company had a 34% market share of the daily national press in the UK in 2009. The UK is also fairly highly concentrated in its local and regional press. According to Humphreys (2009: 202) the top four local and regional groups (Trinity Mirror, Newsquest Media Group, Johnston Press, and the Northcliffe Newspapers Group) have a combined market share of 62.7% of weekly total circulation (2006 figures). Ofcom puts this figure at 69% (Ofcom, 2007: 32). Furthermore, most regional and local areas are under monopoly conditions (Humphreys, 2009: 203).

Table 11: Media factors

	UK	AUS	US
Govt. PSB spend (TV) 2011	High (3.7 billion US)	Middle (900 million US)	Low (350 million US 2010)
PSB funding 2010 per cap £	44	31	1
TV revenue per cap £	181	218	304
TV advertising revenue per cap £	59	109	116
Top five TV channel share %	55	73	28
National circulation share of top four newspaper companies	74%	99%	22%
Public service type	Hybrid	Hybrid	Private
Public broadcasting audience share %	48	17	1
Partisan press (national)	Yes	Yes	No
Regulation and public interest legislation (TV)	Present	Present	Weak
Press freedom rank (Reporters Without Borders)	19	18	20
Newspaper circ per 1000 (UNESCO) 2004 <200 low ≥201 mid ≥400 high)	289.75 (mid)	155.07 (low)	193.19 (low)
Cable TV sub. per 1000 (2005 UNESCO)	57 (15th)	68 (14th)	252(6th)
Television viewing (minutes per person per day 2009-2010)	242	188	283
Percentage of households with internet access	82.7 (2011)	78.9 (2010)	71.1 (2010)

Sources: Ofcom Market Report 2011; Finkelstein Inquiry 2012; UNESCO Communication and Information Statistics 2004; OECD Factbook 2013; Reporters Without Borders.

Australia has one of the most concentrated media ownership structures in the world (Jones and Pusey, 2010: 453). Rupert Murdoch owns eight of 12 capital city titles.

Australia has two (right-wing) national daily papers, *The Australian* and *The Australian*

Financial Review. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, based in Sydney, is widely read in the main centres. There are regional tabloid papers, but the market is not comparable to the UK national tabloid market (Tiffen, 2010: 134-135). The total daily newspaper circulation share (Table 11) of the top four companies is 99%. Tiffen says that the '[t]wo proprietors [News Limited and Fairfax] account for more than 90 per cent of daily metropolitan circulation' (2010: 130). News Limited has 68% (in 2006) of the Mon-Fri capital city market, and similarly high percentages for weekends; it has 18% of regional markets (Gardiner-Garden and Chowns, 2006). This is mostly due to the cluster of capitals where most people live, making each capital city small by global standards and thus amenable to oligopoly (Rahkonen, 2007: 19). In a government report into media regulation, QC, Ray Finkelstein (2012: 57) says that 'Today, Sydney and Melbourne are the only cities with competing locally-produced daily newspapers. The other state capitals and major urban and regional centres have only a single daily newspaper.' Australia's press structure is thus mostly regional, with severe monopolistic tendencies.

Aside from *The Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, and a handful of supermarket tabloids, the US does not have a genuine national press, but *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and the *LA Times* serve as the nation's elite press. The top four companies have a national share of circulation of 22%, making the US the least concentrated on this measure. Yet the press is somewhat concentrated at the state and city level, with state and local oligopolies being common. For instance, the 21 biggest newspaper companies (by revenue) owned around 40% of daily newspapers but controlled around 70% of national daily circulation in 2005 (Pew Research Journalism Project, 2007). The US does not have the same tabloid presence as the UK or Australia. The press is less partisan than the UK press overall (Hardy, 2008: 33-36).

Free to air television: The UK is moderately concentrated with regard to channel share. This is a reflection of the dominant place of the BBC and ITV in the media ecology, and the medium maturation of pay television. The UK's television sector is the most highly regulated of the countries. The BBC and the licence fee enjoy high public support (Ofcom, 2012b). Channels 3, 4 and 5 are commercial and survive through advertising revenue, but they are considered PSBs because they are licensed by Ofcom and have guaranteed access to frequencies and electronic programming guide slots. There is competition –

mostly for the primetime audience – between the commercial channels, as well as between the BBC and the commercial channels; however, this is ameliorated by a) licence fee funding for the BBC, and b) different statutory requirements for the commercial PSB channels.

Table 12 presents viewing shares. The data for each country comes from separate sources and should only be read as a rough guide. On this measure, both the UK and Australia have dispersed viewing shares across PSB, commercial free to air channels (which are actually commercial PSBs in the case of the UK), and pay TV. America appears to be the outlier with only a 1% percent viewing share for its PSB; most of the viewing share goes to pay television. Across all of the countries, total viewing share is minor with regard to pay-tv news channels. Furthermore, the top five channel viewing share (see Table 13) is lower for America compared to the other two countries; this reflects eclectic viewing patterns and deeper pay-tv penetration rates.

The ownership of television in Australia is not as concentrated as newspaper ownership, because Australian law does not allow newspaper owners to own television channels in the same city. Yet judging by viewer share of the top five channels, Australia is more concentrated than the UK. In Australia, the ABC is directly funded via taxes, as is the SBS. The SBS is allowed to air five minutes of advertising per hour. The other metropolitan (but usually syndicated) commercial networks, Seven, Nine and Ten, are not bound by as many public interest requirements as the UK case, and are more commercial, emphasising lifestyle and reality television programming, and targeting the 18-39 year old market (Flew and Harrington, 2010: 270-274; Jones and Pusey, 2010).

The US has the most commercial television system with regard to legislation and funding out of the three countries. For instance, in 2010, Ofcom put TV revenue per capita (the sum of subscription, public funding and advertising revenue) at £304 for the US, £218 for Australia, and £181 for the UK (Ofcom, 2011: 128). Advertising revenue per capita in the same year was highest for the US at £116, then Australia at £109, and finally the UK at £59 (Ofcom, 2011: 128). PBS is largely marginalised to the four titans of commercial network television (ABC, CBS, Fox, and NBC); according to Table 12, it garners only 1% of channel share. Television works via local “affiliates” or carriers. Affiliates sign up to carry

commercial network programming and add their local content (usually a mixture of local news and drama). The free to air commercial channels are not bound by statutory public interest requirements (prime time news and current affairs provision, for instance) outside of minor provisions for decency. Judging by channel share, the US is the least concentrated out of the three countries. This is most likely due to its enthusiastic embracement of commercial competition and pay television penetration, and its marginalised PSB system. America’s large overall size and decentralised populous most likely encourages niche markets, thus dissuading viewer concentration around a few channels.

Table 12: Viewing share (%)

	UK (2011) ⁴³	AUS (2012) ⁴⁴	America ⁴⁵ (2010)
PSB	32.7	19.6	1
Commercial networks	40.8	56.1	(Including PBS) 25
Pay TV	24	22.3	(“Multichannel”) 75
Pay TV News	0.8 (Sky News)	0.4 (Sky News)	2.9 ⁴⁶ (2011) (Fox, MSNBC, CNN)

Sources: Ofcom International Communications Market Report 2011; Ofcom Communications Market Report 2012; OZtam Week 35 2012; PEW State of the News Media 2012.

Table 13: Top five channel viewing share 2010 (%)

	First	Second and third	Fourth and fifth	Top five share
AUS	18	31	24	73
UK	21	24	11	55
USA	7	13	9	28

Sources: Ofcom International Communications Market Report 2011.

PSB: Hardy makes the point that when attention shifts to broadcasting as opposed to the press, the US cannot be lumped into the same (Liberal) category as the UK, Ireland and Canada because the PSB differences are too great. Hallin and Mancini overestimate ‘the weakening of PSB institutions and institutional support for public media’ in many places (2008: 232-233). Gibbons and Humphreys reason that: ‘Generally, the degree of political

⁴³ Commercial networks refers to the commercial PSBs; pay television also includes some free to air digital television channels.

⁴⁴ 5 city share, 06:00 - 23:59 for week; total share added up to 98% on OZtam’s data.

⁴⁵ Comparable statistics for the UK are 55 for terrestrial and 45 for multichannel.

⁴⁶ Refers to the sum of primetime cable news audiences of MSNBC, FOX, CNN (mean). Viewing share calculated using the following assumptions: The sum of primetime cable audiences (mean) was 3.336 million. Neilsen put the total US viewing audience (2010-2011) at 115.9 million. Thus, $3.336/115.9*100=2.878$.

commitment can be simply measured in terms of the public resources put at the disposal of the PSB' (2012: 91). In US dollars, the UK is by far the biggest spender on PSB, at 3.7 billion dollars; Australia shows less commitment to PSB, spending 900 million dollars; and the US shows the least commitment, at 350 million dollars. Per capita funding comes out at £44 for the UK, £31 for Australia and £1 for the US (Ofcom, 2011: 111). This positions the UK – in line with the analysis of socio-economic priorities – as more inclined to spend public money for social democratic ends, and drastically so with PSB, reflecting what Seaton argues was the BBC's historical role in solidifying national identity and a social-democratic consensus (2003: 127-148), which is in-line with other European countries such as Germany.

On the demand side, PSB enjoys support across all three countries. In response to a question about quality of programming in 2012, 78% of Australians judged ABC's television service to be 'good'; commercial television garnered 49% on the same measure (ABC Annual Report, 2012). Similar results hold for the UK; however, it is important to note that ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5 are included as PSBs (Ofcom, 2012b). In PBS commissioned research, 46% of people said that they trust the organisation 'a great deal' compared with 17% for commercial broadcast television (PBS Report, 2013).

Australia and the UK both have hybrid public service systems, mixing market and PSB. Both PSBs have a greater "full service" mandate compared to America's niche PSB. Yet the UK's public service system is much more developed and stringent than Australia's system. The US is the most marketised case in terms of PSB and television generally. US public broadcasting is certainly 'underfunded' (Gibbons and Humphreys, 2012: 25) and highly decentralised with various local affiliates. Public broadcasting is mostly funded through public donations.⁴⁷ Government funding is the lowest in the developed world in per capita terms. Television markets are dominated by an unmistakable commercial presence. Looking at Australia, Rahkonen notes that '[t]he concept of the Australian model originated in Britain in the 1920s and is based on the same values and principles as the BBC, namely to democratise and educate society and to act as a cultural and moral force' (2007: 22). Flew and Harrington (2010: 276-284) point out that the ABC has sought

⁴⁷ In 2010, Federal money accounted for around 17% of total revenue (Chozick, 2012).

to offer a mixed programming line-up in recent years so as not to be marginalised in the market failure model of PSB. Only the ABC and SBS have analogous statutory impartiality requirements to the UK in news and current affairs coverage. Funding comes from the government rather than a licence fee, and is much higher than the US, and slightly lower than the UK. The ABC is based around fostering and reflecting a singular national Australian identity, while SBS concentrates on diversity and multiculturalism.

Pay television: According to Ofcom data, per capita revenue for pay-tv (cable, digital, satellite and IPTV) in 2010, was £78 for the UK and Australia, and £187 for the US (Ofcom, 2011). Pay television is dominated in the UK by BSkyB, which has over 10 million subscribers. Virgin Media has around 4 million subscribers (Informitv, 2013). In Australia, Foxtel (25% owned by Rupert Murdoch with 1.66 million subscribers), Austar (755,000 subscribers), and Optus (subscriber numbers are not published) are the main subscription TV providers (Canning, 2012; Jackson, 2012). The dominant cable providers in America are Comcast (23 million subscribers) and Direct TV (20 million subscribers). The top cable networks include TBS (103 million subscribers), Discovery (102 million subscribers) and USA Network (102 million subscribers) (NCTA, 2014).

Table 14: Take-up of pay and free-to-air television: end of 2010 (% of television homes)

	US	UK	AUS
Pay	88	52	31
Free	12	48	69

Source: Ofcom International Communications Market Report 2011

24-Hour news channels are highly competitive in America with FOX, CNN and MSNBC aggressively competing for the niche news market. All three remain highly profitable because of a large consumer base and high penetration rates; their 2012 profits were \$985, \$412, and \$202 million dollars respectively. They cumulatively invested close to \$1.7 billion in news (Pew Project For Excellence in Journalism, 2013). In contrast, Sky News in Australia and the UK is thought to have never been profitable; Barnett cites evidence that the UK division's budget was £35 million in 2006 (2011: 212-214). However, BSkyB posted profits of 900 million pounds in 2012, a 9% increase on the previous year.

Internet: All three countries have high internet penetration rates. Approximately 80% of people have access to the internet in Australia and the UK compared to 70% in the US. Despite high penetration rates, in most high-income countries, people with internet access are more likely to use TV as their main source of national and international news than the internet. Furthermore, in the UK, France, Germany and the US, people are more likely to state a preference for using traditional news brands than news aggregators or social media (Ofcom, 2012a).

Perceptions

Cross-national perceptions of both journalists and citizens are one guide as to the degree of shared or dissimilar national cultures. I am wary of the term “culture” because it is used in a multiplicity of ways and to mean multiple things, which decreases its analytical utility. I proceed by thinking of journalistic or political culture in terms of beliefs or practices. This keeps the focus more specific.

Journalists: Table 15 is based on Deuze’s work (2002: 141-143) and shows the perceptions of journalists in three countries studied here.

Table 15: Journalists' perceptions of roles and ethics

Journalists' Role Perceptions			
% Saying “Very or Extremely Important”	UK	AUS	US
Provide analysis and interpretation	83	71	48
Get news to the public quickly	88	74	69
Be an adversary of public/business officials*	51	30	21
Reach widest possible audience	45	38	20
Investigate claims of government	88	81	67
Develop intellectual/cultural interests of public	30	37	18
Provide entertainment	47	28	14
Acceptance of Various Reporting Practices in Selected Countries			
% Saying “Might Be Justified”			
Go undercover to gain inside information	80	46	63
Use business/govt documents without permission	86	79	82
Badger or harass news sources	59	55	49
Use hidden camera/microphone	73	*	60
Use private documents without permission	49	39	48
Paying for information	65	13	20
Claim to be someone other than a journalist	47	13	22
Reveal a confidential source	9	4	5

The first grouping shows perceptions of the role of journalism; the second taps into perceptions around ethics. Two points stand out. Great Britain shows a mix of priorities in that journalists are more likely to conceive of their role as explanatory and analytic, as well as adversarial, commercial (mass dissemination), and in entertainment terms. American journalists evidently see themselves as more neutral and detached. Australian journalists are in the middle. American journalists are the least likely to view their profession's mission as developing the intellectual or cultural interests of citizens, which reflects America's suspicion of paternalism. The second aspect, ethics, illustrates that the UK is more comfortable in investigatory journalism, as well as tabloid practices such as undercover journalism and paying for information. Its American and Australian counterparts show a reduced propensity in these measures.

The UK is not included in the 'Worlds of Journalism' study – an 18-country study about the perceptions of journalists – but it is worth briefly outlining the results because Australia and the US are covered. Australia and the US show similarities in their perceptions of the institutional roles of journalism: 'non-involvement, detachment, monitoring the government, as well as providing political and interesting information to motivate the people to participate in civic activity'; the US shows slightly more commitment to these ideals than Australia. Interestingly, the US comes out as non-market oriented according to the study (providing journalism as entertainment). With regard to epistemological assumptions, the authors note that these data are the weakest because they rely on individual predispositions rather than country differences; nevertheless, the US and Australia are somewhat objectivist and empiricist, but they make room for factually based analysis and interpretation; and, Australia is slightly more analysis led than the US (Hanitzsch et al., 2011: 281-282). This finding challenges the common perception of the US as the home to objective and independent journalism (see for example: Curran, 2011: 9-46). It also contradicts Deuze's previous data, which places the US as the least interpretivist; or perhaps Deuze's data underreports America's penchant for analysis and interpretation. With regard to the last measure, ethics, the US has a very strong absolutist commitment to ethics that entails always following ethical principles and avoiding dubious journalistic practice. Australia has a moderate

commitment overall; its journalists are more likely to cite exceptions to general ethical rules (Hanitzsch et al., 2011: 284-286).

In sum, it seems that all three countries' journalists operate along the basic tenets of journalism: being suspicious of government, aspiring to inform citizens, and remaining largely detached. Further conclusions remain sketchy – highlighting the problem with analysing “culture”. For example, the authors of the second study note that: ‘The patterns of similarities and differences are not neatly classifiable along common political or cultural dimensions’ (Hanitzsch et al., 2011: 287). Britain seems to have the most diverse and mixed journalist perceptions (both serious and market oriented), which is due to its tabloid lineage. The US shows a strong commitment to ideals overall, as does Australia. The perceptions that show the US as non-market oriented seem to contradict the previous analysis of political, sociological and economic factors, which are based on more reliable empirical data. These survey data will become more robust when future waves are carried out and analysed over time, but currently they do not offer a reliable guide to the political, cultural, sociological and journalistic characteristics of each country beyond the very general conclusions outlined here.

Citizens: The following table shows data from the World Values Survey 2005-2007 wave. The responses presented here tap into perceptions of more or less marketisation. All of the responses were given on a 10-point Likert scale. For the first group of responses, lower scores indicate more marketisation and higher scores indicate a more social-democratic orientation. Across these measures the countries are all fairly marketised, showing affinities towards market competition, faith in hard work, and a preference for private over state ownership. Nevertheless, the US shows consistently more marketised measures than Australia and Great Britain, which fits with most of the analysis in this chapter. American citizens are also the least trusting of each other, and are more likely to view others as functioning instrumentally. These conclusions are partly backed up by a 2012 global Pew survey (which did not cover Australia); 77% of Americans agreed that hard work is the key to success. This compares to 57% in Britain's case (Pew Research Global Attitudes Project, 2012). The last measure, income inequality, works in the opposite direction. Higher scores reflect opinions that accept inequality, while lower scores reflect a preference for an egalitarian society. US citizens are more inclined to

think that inequality incentivises the pursuit of wealth while Australian and British citizens are likely to agree overall, but are slightly more egalitarian.

Table 16: Mean responses for 10-point Lickert scales

	Great Britain	Australia	USA
Competition good or harmful	4.18	3.77	3.43
Hard work brings success	4.55	4.31	3.87
Private vs. state ownership of business	4.93 ⁴⁸	4.88	3.61
Most people take advantage of you	6.01	6.39	5.78
Income inequality	5.41	5.67	6.18

Source: World Values Survey 2005-2007 Wave.

Talking politics on television

This final section gives a brief overview of political talk shows. Political talk formats emerged in America in the mid 1900s with Meet the Press (1947, NBC) and Face the Nation (1954, CBS) pioneering the Sunday morning timeslot; This Week (1981, ABC) joined them later, taking over from Issues and Answers (1960-1981). This arrangement continues currently. According to Clayman and Heritage (2002: 42-46), these shows were modelled on the presidential press conference and thus had an adversarial questioning underpinning. They can be contrasted with the more sober McNeil-Lehrer Newshour and perhaps latterly, with shows like Richard Heffner's Open Mind, as well as the more visible and populist Nightline and 60 Minutes. The competitive and regulatory context in which these formats were born was starkly different from the PSB monopoly and the then managed PSB competition in Britain, which had more regulatory oversight and less unrestrained competition; these two factors initially rendered a more lively and adversarial approach in the US.

These Sunday morning (network) shows – aired outside of primetime – have always struggled to gain a mass audience and have always been a niche. They appear on Australian, American and British television stations. An Australian commentator (Keane, 2009) lamenting the decline of prime time current affairs comments that:

Political broadcast journalism is not in a particularly healthy state in Australia. The commercial television networks have retreated from serious current affairs, partly

⁴⁸ Data comes from the 1994-1999 wave.

under pressure from the new media-induced fragmentation of audiences. Political interviews don't rate well and are consigned to dead shifts like Sunday mornings, which has become the last redoubt of political interviewing.

Sunday morning talk show audiences generally consist of political insiders, journalists and other news people, or highly politically interested citizens (Clayman and Heritage, 2002: 42 and 342). During the 2012 presidential campaign, US viewers claimed to have regularly learned something from a wide range of sources, including political talk shows on both cable and network television.

Table 17: Learning about the presidential campaign from a variety of sources by age

Regularly learn something about the presidential campaign on	Overall	18-29	30-49	50-64	65+
	%	%	%	%	%
Cable news networks	36	28	32	39	47
Local TV news	32	15	33	37	45
National nightly news	26	12	21	37	36
The internet	25	29	33	21	11
Other sources					
Morning TV news talk shows	16	9	12	21	23
Talk radio shows	16	12	19	15	16
Cable news TV talk shows	15	11	7	19	28
Sunday morning TV talk shows	12	4	10	19	15
Late night comedy TV shows	9	15	7	9	6

Source: Pew Centre for the People and Press, 2012

The main talk shows of relevance, Sunday morning talk and cable talk, are watched by older viewers, but by no means exclusively. Their influence is wider than their small audience suggests; they often contribute to the next week's news agenda or make the Monday news cycle. The seemingly obscure placing of these formats suggests that news networks view the genre as commercially unviable. Clayman and Heritage (2002: 46) note that: 'The longest running American Sunday interview shows owe their existence in part to the networks' desire to address FCC policy preferences', which suggests an identifiable relationship between political talk production, regulatory oversight and public interest concerns.

However, this landscape – of public interest network political talk shows – is belied by the fare offered on cable channels. The more opinionated and at times outrageous cable news shows are clearly partisan and hyper-adversarial. It seems that, in contrast to the

more moderate formats of political talk on the networks, cable political talk is required to be outrageous to gain a niche audience. Indeed, why would audiences pay for versions of political talk that exist on free to air television? The mean number of viewers across the three major cable channels was 3.6 million in 2012, up from 3.2 million in 2003 (Pew Project For Excellence in Journalism, 2013). Table 19 demonstrates that political talk on cable is a niche pursuit.

Table 18: Small audiences for US network television Sunday morning political talk, 2012

	Average Share (%)	Average Viewership (m)	Average Ratings
Meet the Press	6.2	2.94	2.2
Face the Nation	5.7	2.97	2.2
This Week	5.0	2.57	1.9
Fox News Sunday	2.3	1.24	0.9

Source: Project for Excellence in Journalism, State of the News Media 2013

Table 19: Evening cable political talk viewership

	All viewers 2+ (000s)
The O'Reilly Factor	2,842
Hannity	1,620
Rachel Maddow Show	874
Piers Morgan Live	715
Anderson Cooper 360	713
All in with Chris Hayes	668

Source: TV by the numbers, Cable News Ratings July 22, 2013.

The BBC, because of its monopoly status and at times testy relationship with the government, initially had a more conservative approach to producing television political talk than the US; the BBC was wary of controversy, and had to abide by arcane legislation such as the Fourteen Day Rule.⁴⁹ Clayman and Heritage note a far more deferent political talk style compared with the US case. However, with the introduction of competition in the mid 1950s, and pioneered by Robin Day, a critical and more self-assured interview style flourished both on the BBC and commercial television (2002: 51-52). In sum, the

⁴⁹ The rule prevented news from covering any item which was to be debated in parliament within the next 14 days, or any Bill under consideration in either House.

UK’s political talk style, latterly embodied by a ferocious Jeremy Paxman and forensic Andrew Marr, shed its earlier conservatism and shifted – in line with the American case – to a more combative and adversarial style in the late 20th century.

The following table shows the viewing figures for selected political talk shows in the UK. Like the US, the audience figures are small overall but not trivial. Interestingly, it seems that the BBC has assumed responsibility for providing most political talk television in the UK; however, only one programme (Question Time) is shown in primetime (6pm to 10:30pm) across all channels.

Table 20: UK political talk is also a niche (viewership per episode)

	Viewers (000s)
Question Time	2,600
The Andrew Marr Show	1,500
Sunday Politics	500
Daily Politics	415
The Wright Stuff	330
Murnaghan	*

Source: Mediatel based on BARB figures.

This is probably because of the perceived “unpopularity” of such formats. Furthermore, the part Murdoch owned, subscription based Sky News political talk programming appears neither as opinionated or outlandish as its US cable counterparts, nor as opinionated as Australian Sky News talk shows. This seems to point to the role of impartiality requirements, as well as the cultural and social traditions, journalistic norms, and audience expectations.

The table below shows approximate viewing numbers for Australian political talk shows. The viewership appears small because of Australia’s small (22 million) population.

Table 21: Australian political talk

	Viewers (000s) ⁵⁰
Q&A	900
The Bolt Report	272
Insiders	261
Insight	200-230
Meet the Press	85-95
Paul Murray Live	50

Sources: See footnote.

⁵⁰ (Author Unknown, 2011a; Dyer, 2012b; Dyer, 2012a; Dyer, 2013; Knott, 2013)

With regard to political talk, Australia has a mix of both UK and US features. Australia shows the most commitment to airing political talk in primetime. Network Ten is the only commercial network channel to air political talk. There is one openly partisan show: The Bolt Report. One overview (Keane, 2009) of prominent political talk shows (Insiders, Q&A, and Meet the Press) says that Insiders is relaxed but serious, 'of interest to politicians, journalists and political junkies'. Q & A – modelled on the UK's Question Time – with a panel and live audience interaction, removes 'the crutch of sticking to a script' and forces 'politicians to demonstrate at least a little of whatever native wit and wisdom they may possess.' Lastly, Meet the Press is viewed as a traditional stalwart. It has a panel set-up and 'tackles policy issues and guests more usually found in newspapers.' Sky News features many political talk shows (for example, Paul Murray Live, Showdown and Australia Agenda), mostly during primetime. Neither of the (Murdoch controlled) Sky News channels in the UK and Australia is anywhere near as outlandish as the American cable versions of political talk, yet as stated previously, Australian political talk seems more opinionated than the UK's talk. Impartiality requirements are statutorily enforced in the UK case; they are adopted via co-regulation in the Australian case, and are non-existent for America.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued against adopting a "media system" perspective because this ignores too much difference between cases judged "most similar". Historical institutionalism is a more fruitful approach to analyse countries and their media because this takes into account historical path dependencies and national particularity. That is, the analysis is more "finely grained" and grounded in empirical reality than a systems approach. In this light, the comparative analysis has revealed distinct similarities and differences between the countries. New institutionalism, more generally, places the sociological role of (media and political) institutions more centrally in the analysis, outside of crude economic explanations. This gives a valuable starting premise: individuals are not simply value maximisers (rational choice theory) or unconscious dupes (crude structuralism); instead, the reality is more dynamic and individuals are governed by norms and law, economic incentives, normative, political, organisational and cultural values, conscious and unconscious routines, and a tendency not to conceive of alternative

ways of acting and being. Structures influence individuals. Individuals also influence structures.

All three countries are long established democracies. They operate by majoritarian electoral systems and common law frameworks. They have high interest group pluralism, and are wealthy, unequal and well developed. They are predominantly English speaking (with the US being the most pluralist in this regard) and politically narrow.

There are also quite significant differences; there is a continuum of marketisation – defined as a friendly orientation to free markets, a lack of state support for pro-social ends, corporatisation, and deregulation benefitting business – which can be used to situate the countries. For instance, the UK is the least marketised and has a social democratic orientation, measured in social welfare spending, PSB spending, and the proportion of unionised workforce. The UK is the most majoritarian country. Australia and the UK are more electorally and politically diverse than the US. Australia fits in-between the US and the UK. First, Australia’s government system is a hybrid of the Westminster majoritarian model, but with an American federalism adjunct. It is equal in overall social spending to the US (including health and pensions) per capita, but is more willing to fund working age people, and income-tested benefits. Australia is also willing to fund its PSBs to a much higher degree than America, but less than the UK. It has comparable unionisation to the UK, which is higher than the US. The US is the most marketised country overall, with lower social spending, the least unionised workforce, and the least per capita funding of PSBs. The following table crudely maps out the countries. It only refers to the countries as they compare each other.

Table 22: Comparative priorities

	Marketisation	Social Democratic orientation	Regulation model	PSB in media ecology	Impartiality
UK	Low	High	Governance	Central	Law
AUS	Medium	Medium	Co-regulation	Central	Industry led
US	High	Low	Self-regulation	Marginal	No

Just looking at broadcasting, the UK has the firmest public interest legislation governing its broadcasting sector, as well as the most well established PSB system. Its regulatory

model is largely governance based, with statutes being common. However, it should be noted that press ownership concentration is fairly high, as is television ownership concentration. Accordingly, the UK is by no means a socialist utopia; marketisation is apparent and the PSB system as a whole is a hybrid characterised by managed commercialism. However, looking at the comparative priorities as laid out here, the UK is the least marketised overall. A regulatory model of co-regulation governs Australian media, which is not as public interest oriented as the UK case, but strives to achieve some measure of public interest provision. Its PSB system is relatively well funded and popular. Australia does show intense press ownership concentration and moderate television ownership concentration levels. Politically, the Australian environment is not as benign as the UK case. There is occasional political intervention as the PSBs are funded directly via the tax take, which politicises funding rounds. The US, reflecting its marketised structure, is the least regulated and governs the media largely through self-regulation, with minimal oversight by the FCC; the US is the least likely to mandate public interest legislation and therefore PSB is marginalised into a niche. The next chapter looks at the justifications for the methods employed and also provides details of the actual research procedure.

Chapter 5: Methodology and method

Introduction

This chapter explains the research procedure. I make the case for the methods chosen and explain why other approaches were not employed. I apply three standard criteria for the methodological evaluation (King et al., 1994: 23-27): reliability, validity and generalisability to both of the main research methods. However, because these concepts stem from quantitative science, I adopt a reinterpretation of them for qualitative research (Marshall and Rossman, 2011: 39-51). Validity is better thought about in terms of credibility; generalisability is better conceived as reasonable applicability or transferability; and reliability is more appropriately reconfigured as consistency (for an overview of this issue, see: Patton, 2002: 541-588; Bryman, 2012: 389-394). The aim is for the results to be *trustworthy*. Finally, I attempt to take stock of the limitations of my approaches. Semi-structured elite interviews were used to investigate political talk production, and qualitative content analysis was used to analyse mediatisation.

First, it is necessary to briefly consider ontology and epistemology. An empiricist but pragmatic ethos underpins this study, which is neither wholly positivist nor wholly interpretivist/social constructionist. Technically, it falls very loosely under the label of post-positivism. The purpose of science in this approach is to 'investigate and identify relationships and non-relationships, respectively, between what we experience, what actually happens, and the underlying mechanisms that produce the events in the world' (Danermark et al., 2002: 21). Post-positivism 'seeks to identify those deeper lying mechanisms which are taken to generate empirical phenomena' (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009: 40). Post-positivism has the following assumptions: there is an external reality to our minds; external reality is knowable yet ultimate truth remains mediated by our social world and subjective experience; knowledge is therefore partial, iterative, and probabilistic, but there remain meaningful differences between fact and fiction and it is the attempt to be objective that matters, even if the reality falls short of the ideal (Patton, 2002: 92-93; Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009: 39-49; Bryman, 2012: 29). In simple terms, I take structural conditions to be important while also considering the socially

constructed and interpretivist nature of individual experience essential for understanding how the world works.

Aims and research questions re-cap

Methodology is the means to answering research questions, which relates to research aims. What follows is a brief rehearsal of the aims and research questions of this project. Although not included below, this thesis also considers some of the democratic implications of political talk using a combination of the two research methods.

Table 23: Aims and research questions

Aim	Research question	Analysis
Investigate the production of political talk television	What are the production priorities – norms, routines, values, and goals – of political talk producers? How and why is political talk television produced the way it is?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider structural factors • Consider the role of agency and ideas
Study marketisation and mediatisation cross-nationally by looking at political talk shows	To what extent can marketisation and mediatisation explain political talk content?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The link between marketisation at the country level and mediatisation in political talk content • The role of more or less marketised institutions in mediatising political talk content

Elite interviews

A useful strategy when deciding whether interviews are the most appropriate methodology is to compare the information you need with the information you have already. The main aims of this project are to look at how and why political talk is produced the way it is. There is not much data on political talk production yet we know a fair amount about television news production, and looking at political talk production involves exploration for understanding rather than verification of an existing theory, which points to interviews being more appropriate than surveys (Arksey and Knight, 1999: 33-35). It is therefore justifiable to interview those involved in making political talk television if we want explanatory insights into political talk production.

Although the gold-standard methodology for this would be ethnography combined with interviews, unfortunately, ethnographies were practically impossible based on cost, time and access issues (Bryman, 2012: 494-497). Taking into account the cross-national component, I would have had to spend considerable time abroad, which would have been too expensive. In-depth ethnographies take a great deal of time and it is not conceivable that the project would have been completed in the required three years. Perhaps the most compelling reason why ethnography was not feasible is access. It is unlikely that I would have gained access to a minimum of nine newsrooms across three countries for observational studies. Finally, many observational studies come away with the now predictable conclusion that “the news” is a product of journalists’ routines (Cottle, 2007: 2-4). The choice of interviews as a method assumes that political talk production is at least partly a function of journalistic routines.⁵¹

Elite semi-structured interviews are a compromise between breadth and depth. While the interviews did not provide the thick observational description data that ethnography would have, they still allowed me to sketch a picture of professional practices, and more importantly, producers’ perceptions, beliefs and values. Interviews were also more manageable around the three roadblocks of time, access, and money, and thus made it feasible to investigate different political talk shows in different countries. Moreover, Burnham et al. (2004: 219) say that ‘if one is interested in actors’ perceptions of the world in which they live, the way in which they construct their world and the shared assumptions which shape it, there is much to be said for the model of the elite interview as an extended conversation’. Yet interviews also allow the researcher to “push back” in an active (or interactive) dialogue (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995). I used interviews to tap into producers’ understandings of their jobs, as well as to make inferences about their practice.

A number of limitations bedevil interviews. The main criticism is validity: the researcher cannot tell if the respondent is telling “the truth”, which has implications because we need to know that we are measuring what we intend to measure (Silverman, 2005: 210-220). While this methodological noise is partly true it then also logically applies to other

⁵¹ It does not seem a good use of time to conclude that routines play a large part in political talk production; this is already well established in the news literature generally.

methods. For example, quantitative surveys ask respondents for their opinions and judgements, which means this method is open to the same criticism.

Although more sophisticated apparatuses of statistical tests and random sampling are available to the quantitative researcher to act as a counter-balance to validity problems, the fundamental point remains the same: there is an element of uncertainty and fuzziness when studying human behaviour, and even more so when studying human perceptions, beliefs and values. The inherent fuzziness is not, however, a stand-alone reason to shy away from studying the phenomena. It is also not a proven assertion that a) interviewees consciously lie, or b) they unconsciously tell the interviewer what he wants to hear. It is reasonably conceivable that respondents roughly explicate their behaviour, perceptions and values, if not exactly.

A better test of validity is the extent to which respondents' opinions are accurately reflected in the interview data (Arksey and Knight, 1999: 52). To let the respondents construct their own opinions and narrative – to speak on their own terms – leading questions were minimised in the interview schedule (see appendix). The interview questions were sent to the interviewees ahead of time to enable a degree of reflection. After the interview, a transcript was sent to the interviewee as a double check on the meaning and context. Finally, the draft chapters were sent to the respondents and feedback was solicited. These strategies attempted to involve the respondents in the research to minimise ambiguities and give them a chance to reflect on what they had said initially. However, respondents did not have any editorial control over the findings after the interviews were completed.

One aspect that could not be entirely overcome was the problem of professional communication. Most producers were working in the industry when they were interviewed. They were not offered anonymity.⁵² The resulting data should be viewed as a hybrid of professional communication and personal producer perspectives. Put simply, it is naïve to think that producers would be completely transparent under these conditions. However, most of the respondents seemed forthcoming and candid. Three strategies

⁵² I reasoned that I would need to refer to the individual shows themselves in the research, and because I interviewed senior producers on each of the shows, they are easily identifiable and thus anonymity serves little purpose.

triangulate what the respondents said. First, the interviewees were challenged in the interview on contradictions or ambiguities that arose. Second, the shows themselves were analysed as a reference point. Third, care was taken to find interviewees from the three different countries, working on different political talk shows, in order to provide different reference points.

Another problem with interviews is reliability or consistency (Arksey and Knight, 1999: 52-53; Bryman, 2012: 390). It is difficult and arguably impossible to “do” the same interview twice. Yet an important research consideration is consistency of approach and openness. This was addressed by having a semi-structured interview format where the participants were asked roughly similar questions. This enabled a reasonable degree of comparability across the interviews. Moreover, the interviews reached a saturation point, suggesting triangulation across the interviewees.

Finally, there is the issue of generalisability. Generalisability is defined as the extent to which the theoretical and empirical insights derived from the data might explain or apply to similar social practices in comparable situations; furthermore, generalisation should be thought of as a working hypothesis, not a cast iron conclusion (Patton, 2002: 581-584). The interviews covered three countries, ten newsrooms and 16 producers, which gave a fair spread of political talk shows, political and journalist cultures, and producers. The conclusions drawn from this data are not unduly subject to extreme outliers (partly because of the qualitative approach). This gives a reasonable degree of generalisability in the sense of the interviews being representative of comparable talk shows within the three countries. In turn, insights can be usefully applied to other similar political talk shows and countries to understand news production processes, and political talk television itself. However, the insights should not be uncritically imported to wildly different contexts or political talk shows.

Qualitative content analysis

Although I am primarily interested in the backstage production of political talk television, it seems logical to enquire about the “text” or front stage. Thomas (1994) argues that the study of the cultural artefact has a legitimate function as an investigation into existing knowledge structures. Mediated political talk instantiates structures of politics,

journalism and citizenship. More specifically, my interest is in the cross-national structuring of political talk via marketisation and mediatisation.

Why opt for a thematic qualitative content analysis as opposed to a quantitative, semiotic, or critical discourse analysis? First, I will consider the case for qualitative content analysis. Altheide (1996: 42) says that qualitative research should 'understand the processes and character of social life ... [and] seek to understand types, characteristics, and organization aspects of the documents as social products in their own right, as well as what they claim to represent'. He also makes the point that qualitative content analysis can be used to understand communicative meaning as well as to verify theoretical relationships (1996: 16). Qualitative content analysis, at its core, is about recognising patterns in information. The larger strategy here is to test political talk content for mediatisation indicators, which is theoretically a reflection of marketisation. This strategy is termed analytic induction by Patton (2002: 454 and 493-494). In other words, the study of the text via qualitative analysis would allow me to infer answers to macro-processes.

Quantitative content analysis was considered but rejected. The small sample (n=65 episodes) means that a quantitative approach would have had a tendency to over claim the data, or at least, 'not use the technique's full potential' (Krippendorff, 2004: 42). Second, a quantitative approach would have been more time consuming, and considering that mediatisation analysis is a secondary research aim, it was decided against laboriously quantifying political talk content. Third, one of the common arguments in favour of quantitative analysis is that it is objective, yet Krippendorff notes that 'all reading of a text is qualitative, even when the certain characteristics of a text are later converted into numbers' (2004: 16). Qualitative content analysis was chosen with a self-conscious trade-off in mind: it would be more efficient than the quantitative approach and could pick up the rough tendencies of mediatisation (low, medium and high) in each category, yet it lacks further precision (which would have required a more time-consuming quantification procedure). Simply put, the qualitative approach served the research question and aim and works within real-world constraints, yet conclusions stemming from this methodology remain indicative.

Semiotic approaches generally look closely at a very small number of texts to identify how the world is represented through codes and signs, which ultimately relate to underlying values and ideologies (Bertrand and Hughes, 2005: 185-187). The research object in this study is not ideology and the number of talk shows is too large for an in-depth semiotic approach. Critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1998) was initially an attractive methodology in that it conceives of the social as linguistic and discursive, draws attention to implied meanings and absences, and maintains that language should be analysed within a social context. While these aspects might be relevant for this study, critical discourse analysis is also occupied with issues of elite domination, power and ideology. These elements no doubt play a role in political talk shows and an interesting study could be done that interrogates these aspects fully. Meta-issues of ideology and power will not be interrogated head-on because this would change the direction of the whole project, which is geared towards addressing marketisation and mediatisation.

Does the qualitative approach accurately capture what it intends to investigate? Is it consistent? Can we generalise? I operationalised mediatisation according to the literature; I also constructed a mediatisation coding protocol, which aided analytic consistency. Mediatisation was broken down into a subset of clearly defined categories to increase the probability that the analysis would capture what it intended to capture. In this regard, the analysis is transparent, and thus open to replication. The broad insights might reasonably apply to similar countries and talk shows; however, they will most likely not apply to extremely different talk shows or very different countries. The following section describes the research procedure.

Method

Definition: “Political talk television” was defined as television formats primarily based on talking about politics via discussion, interview and debate. Programmes mainly featuring either humour or “daytime chat” were excluded. Only programmes that aired on the main channels in each country were considered. For example, BBC1 and BBC2 were included in the UK, but not BBC3. Most, but not all programmes followed a broadsheet news agenda, which tended to revolve around parliamentary politics. Programmes that were mostly based on pre-recorded packages were excluded (this being more akin to a

current affairs programme), as were programmes that readily switched between pre-packaged pieces and in-studio discussion (Newsnight in the UK is an example of this).

Time: Political talk shows were selected at the end of 2011. The sampling year was 2012. Due to sampling difficulties and recording errors, some episodes were recorded in 2013 and 2014. But these substitutions were few and far between and there was no reason to think they distorted the data.

Programme Selection: For each country I looked at the television listings online. Programmes that appeared on either public service channels, free to air commercial channels, Sky News (Australia and the UK), or Fox News (US) were chosen.⁵³ Only primetime was chosen (8pm-10pm) for Fox News because its line-up is filled with political talk, making selection unwieldy and arbitrary. I reasoned that primetime is where their flagship (but more extreme) political talk programmes appear, enabling a justifiable selection rationale. Apart from Fox News, I identified all of the relevant political talk shows that matched the definition. This was done by researching the shows or viewing them where possible. Programmes were sorted according to three types of channels: public service, commercial free to air, and 24-hour news channels. Around 40 shows were initially chosen.

Taping: Based on the main list of shows, I organised for shows to be taped in the three countries. I used The University of Westminster's taping facilities for UK political talk. The School of Journalism & Communication at The University of Queensland kindly taped shows for me. Finally, the University of Pennsylvania also kindly collaborated with me. I randomly and prospectively sampled 5 dates from 2012 (Krippendorff, 2004: 122-124). I kept the dates constant with regard to the types of shows (weekly shows airing during the week, Sunday morning shows, and daily shows).⁵⁴ For the initial taping, shows that could not be freely accessed online as well as those which most thoroughly fitted my definition of political talk were selected. The rationale here was to give myself the most options in content at what was then an early stage of the study. Three shows (one for each broadcast tradition) from each country were chosen for taping, which meant that some

⁵³ I included MSNBC as well, but I could not establish contact to interview their producers.

⁵⁴ Further information is available in the appendix.

shows were left out. I tried to get the most reasonable and representative mixture of shows taped. For example, where two shows were judged to be very similar in a country, I removed one. Taping proved somewhat problematic. A minority of the taping was done outside of the 2012 framework because of pragmatic issues (like recorder failure). These errors were idiosyncratic, meaning that it is doubtful that they systematically affected the overall sample. In the end, I was left with online shows and taped shows across the three countries and three institutions within each country. I then had to match the shows where I had access to content to shows where I later had access to interview producers.⁵⁵ This produced the final list of political talk shows (see appendix) that were analysed.

Interviews: I aimed to interview the most senior producer at each political talk show (details in appendix) because they were more likely to have an overview of the process of production and the ideational aspects of the show. Identifying my target population was straightforward. Most of the producers were accessible. After analysing the literature and in conjunction with the research questions for the production of political talk, I came up with a list of relevant themes that warranted exploration. Keeping in mind that political talk production has not been studied in depth to my knowledge, much of my approach was a) constructed with reference to existing news production literature, or b) exploratory, in that I thought about logical avenues to delve into. In consultation with my supervisor, these themes were whittled down to specific questions (Patton, 2002: 343-344; Bryman, 2012: 472-482). Furthermore, I conducted informal pilot conversations with two BBC news producers, a former researcher from Newsnight (BBC), and another producer. This process further refined my questions and approach. My semi-structured interview schedule consisted of a core body of questions that were put to all of the producers (see appendix); a periphery of other questions was added and subtracted at various points. The rest of the questions I asked arose spontaneously within my conversations with the producers.

I systematically tried to contact a number of political talk show producers but I was not always successful. Australia and the UK are oversampled compared to America. This is

⁵⁵ The interviews were arranged after the content was taped.

due to their producers being easier to contact and more willing to be interviewed. All of the interviews except three were conducted face to face.

A basic interview schedule with broad topic areas was sent to each interviewee prior to the interview in conjunction with a brief project description. All of the interviews were taped with the consent of the producers. A digital copy of all of the interviews has been kept on an external hard drive, which is locked away. Full transcripts have been produced. The producers were told that what they said would inform this study, and may be used in published work later. Some of the producers made off the record comments in places, but this was rare. As stated previously, the interviewees have been given a chance to comment on this thesis. Some took up this opportunity. Some of the interviewees' quotes have been modified at their request, although in all cases the quotes reflect their original meaning.

All of the interviews were coded in Nvivo. The coding was done inductively which allowed various themes to emerge, as well as deductively, when themes reflected specific questions. Micro-themes were merged into macro themes as a clearer picture emerged. The result of this process produced an explanatory framework for political talk production.

Qualitative content analysis: The unit of analysis was a segment within an episode of a political talk programme. When I refer to the content of a specific political talk show, I am referring to a judgement about the aggregate of all its analysed segments.

Advertisements were not included. According to the procedure outlined by Altheide (1996: 25-28), a rough protocol with several themes was constructed. All programmes were viewed with the aim of discerning broad tendencies in the following mediatization categories: journalistic intervention, visibility and aggression; game vs. policy frames; personalities compared to policy or issues; and the prevalence of performativity and aesthetic aspects. I used a coding book to aid judgements about the tendencies of each theme. The analysis of each episode of each programme was then collated, giving a summary judgement on all four themes and an overall judgement for each political talk show.

Limitations

A few limitations to the method are apparent. First, I could not reasonably include the total universe of political talk shows in the analysis. I have tried to be as inclusive and representative as practically possible. The implication is that when conclusions are drawn about political talk in general or within a particular country, they cannot be mindlessly exported to very different contexts. In other words, the sample does not claim to statistically represent all political talk within a country. Yet, insights can be reasonably applied to the political talk shows that are in the sample, and political talk shows that were not sampled but that are reasonably similar. Second, as stated previously, political talk shows from Australia and the UK were oversampled. This means that these countries have more reliable coverage. Third, the production insights were gleaned by interviewing political talk producers. There has been no check on actual practice. There is likely to be some disjuncture between perceptions and practice. The interview data did, however, reach saturation point across the political talk shows and countries which gives a degree of confidence because separate perceptions regularly and reliably converged. This heightens the probability that perceptions and practice are aligned at least somewhat. Finally, the qualitative content analysis relied on a small sample and its intent was to look at approximate tendencies of mediatisation. The conclusions drawn are therefore indicative.

Chapter 6: Production structures

Introduction

This chapter taps into the perceptions of political talk show producers. Drawing on interviews with executive producers and editors, it aims to gain an insight into the most important “structural” production mechanisms responsible for shaping political talk shows. This structural distinction refers to overriding incentives, patterns, arrangements, and other influences that act to limit the range of opportunities or perceived freedom of thought and action of producers. First, there are the two industrial structural factors: the need to cut costs and increase control, and the need to attract audiences and maintain political prestige. Other structural factors include: the role of institutions; relationships to and perceptions of the media ecology; impartiality and defamation concerns; and finally, the news agenda and 24-hour news. The next chapter looks at ideational and agency factors. The two chapters should be read as complementary. Together, they answer the following research questions: What are the production priorities – norms, routines, values and goals – of political talk producers? How and why is political talk television produced the way it is?

Institutions

Institutions are a crucial factor in the production of political talk. Producers are of course in control of their political talk shows, but they still operate within a given context that influences their range of options and incentivises certain decisions over others. This takes two forms: overt influence or an inchoate process involving institutional values and ethos.

Recognisable institutional influence

Most of the institutional marks on political talk are subtle taken-for-granted assumptions about production. However, two producers spoke of overt institutional influences. It is interesting to contrast two famous news agencies: the public service stalwart, the BBC, and right-wing ideologue, Fox News, because their producers reported institutional influences in the strongest terms but in different ways.

Robbie Gibb (Daily Politics and Sunday Politics) for instance, mentioned the BBC's politics review in 2000, led by Fran Unsworth, under the Director General (DG) of the BBC Gregg Dyke. Dyke's tenure as DG was characterised by a dualism of freedom and innovation in journalism – in contrast to John Birt's multi-layered bureaucracy – and a penchant for populism and sensitivity to the audience (honed via his time at TV-am), in contrast to Birt's more academic approach to news (Barnett, 2011: 136-139 and 171-174). Gibb stated that there were two main conclusions to come out of the review: political programmes can easily become boring; and more specifically, political programming uses jargon and inaccessible language that viewers do not understand and this makes political programming unappealing. He noted that he did not agree with a completely populist approach that some took from the review: that of increasing the salience of “ordinary people” on screen and ignoring process stories. Instead, Gibb concluded that television has to be enjoyable: ‘The idea that you can offer up cod liver oil television – you know it is good for you but you don't really like it – is away with the birds.’ Gibb emphasised audience enjoyment brought about via the overall tone of Daily Politics and Sunday Politics (politically serious, but conversational and informal, with fun and jovial aspects throughout). He further argued: ‘we have a responsibility to our viewers. They've been good enough to give us 75 minutes of their Sunday, the least we can do is to make the effort to make it enjoyable and interesting.’ Dyke's review of news strategy is a common managerial strategy at the BBC, reflecting its bureaucratic preoccupation with processes, accountability and justifying the licence fee. Gibb at least partly reflected Dyke's influence in an acute sensitivity to the audience and slight populist sheen. More importantly, though, Gibb asserted his own autonomy as a senior producer by arriving at a negotiated conclusion with the politics review.

Another form of recognisable institutional influence was the top-down right-wing management of Fox News, which was unique among all of the news organisations studied. As an adjunct to documentaries like *Outfoxed*, which portrays a unified ideological operation, Muto, a former producer of *The O'Reilly Factor*, describes institutional control as a ‘more decentralized, entrepreneurial approach’ (2013: 236). He says that the senior and middle layers of management, stemming from Ailes at the top, are all strictly conservative or at least profess to be. At the level of producer and associate

producer are people who are generally ‘too busy and harried to be ideological’ (2013: 79-80). He also details what he calls a Kool-Aide test: a meeting between a senior manager and probationary hires in which the probationary hires are questioned about whether they believe Fox is “fair and balanced” (2013: 116-118).⁵⁶ In conversation with me, Muto made a couple of additional points that are worth quoting at length:

Roger Ailes runs the network pretty tightly. He's intimately involved in day-to-day operations to the point where he will call the control room and yell at a producer for something he's seen, something he doesn't like. More than anything, all the shows on the network are a reflection of his sensibility. He handpicks all the hosts and the programming. He takes his executives for weekly meetings with all the top hosts, and just sort of talk things over. “These are the stories we want to cover; this is where we think you can improve”; that kind of thing.

There is a degree of autonomy ... The hosts are allowed to pursue their own flights of fancy to a point. If it gets distracting, like Glenn Beck, there are repercussions. They indulged him for a long time because his ratings were good. But eventually, you know, he started ignoring their suggestions on what stories to cover, and they said “we just can't work with this guy” [and he was fired].

Individual shows generally operate without a sustained top down influence. Hosts and executive producers are given the freedom to construct shows as they see fit. However, the producers and hosts need to be aware of the acceptable limits and boundaries. In the case of repeated transgressions, big names like Beck can potentially be shunned (even for being, ironically, too extreme). President of Fox News Channel, Roger Ailes, keeps close tabs on his senior talent with weekly meetings that Muto claims direct the news agenda and overall strategy.

Relating the discussion back to *The Factor*, the institutional influence runs through *The Factor*'s host and controller, Bill O'Reilly, who in turn is open to influence from Ailes. Muto says that O'Reilly had total control and that: ‘He never once in five years asked me my personal opinion. His staff's political viewpoints were totally irrelevant to him, in fact, because the only viewpoints that ever made it onto the show were his own’ (2013: 78-79). Muto explains how O'Reilly managed his show:

Our job was to bring him stories. Bill personally approved of every story. He was the absolute final word at all times. He dictated every single item. He wrote the

⁵⁶ The correct answer is that the prime time line-up is opinionated, but viewers like and expect this, while the daytime line up is more liberal and thus overall fair and balanced.

scripts for himself. ... Every word on the show was his own. As a producer on the show, my job was to bring him stories that I thought he would want to see. That's how you get prestige; that's how you rise above your fellow producers ... That's how you claw your way to the top. It becomes this weird ... it is probably very Freudian. He's like the father figure and we are all clamouring to impress him.

Producers on *The Factor* internalise what O'Reilly values. However, he is ultimately beholden and responsive to Ailes. Muto says that O'Reilly would often 'throw a tantrum but in the end he always gives in. He knows that ultimately these are the people that are writing his paycheque. He has to please them.'

Institutional ethos

One of the main structural factors influencing political talk is institutional ethos. Actual "hands-on" interference from top-level management is vanishingly rare. Political talk producers find themselves making television within an institutional context. This meso level of influence operates in two main ways: first, formal institutional policy, which demarcates broad aims, as well as the acceptable range of action and thought. Second, a more subtle version of the previous point is value based and much akin to identity: an ingrained and amorphous consideration of institutional values guides thought and action.

Formal policy: Llewellyn specifically cited the SBS Charter and maintained that his show accords with it: 'We're probably right up the top of what the SBS core values and Charter is [sic]' (Insight, SBS, AUS). The SBS is required to 'reflect Australia's multicultural society' and 'promote understanding and acceptance of the cultural, linguistic and ethnic diversity of the Australian people'.⁵⁷ Meggie Palmer (Insight, SBS) stated that: 'We try and give a voice to people who don't often get heard, which is part of SBS's Charter, being the multicultural broadcaster, but it's a big push by Insight'. She went on to explain that the arrangement of translators and "subtitling guests" is not a problem: 'We can arrange all these things because it is part of our Charter'. This could also be read as aligning policy goals and resources. Outside of the wide-ranging coverage of his programme, Llewellyn pointed to his in-studio audience and guests: 'we source far and wide [so] that we have a good balance of ages and mixes of ethnicities and socio-economic status [sic]'.

⁵⁷ (SBS Charter, 2014)

Similarly, Craig Morris (Channel 5, UK) views *The Wright Stuff* as reflecting the channel's ethos: 'It is part of C5s overall appeal: more informal, fresh, and a little bit different from other channels/programmes. [*The Wright Stuff* is] Tabloid chat, but done in an intelligent way'. This relates, at least tangentially to Channel 5's statutory underpinning and conception. Channel 4 is required to be distinctive (from the BBC and ITV), and while Channel 5 does not have this particular dictate, producers still conceive of it as fulfilling "a different" role. With *The Wright Stuff* being independently produced by Princess Productions, Cunningham (*The Wright Stuff*, Channel 5, UK) noted a subtle influence on production decisions: 'Princess is one of those places where we will do something a bit different or cheeky. A bit ... lateral. Looking at things in a slightly different way, or coming from a different direction. That does fit in with that kind of feel'. The producers are cognisant of their own in-house production priorities, as well as the aims and ethos of their commissioner, Channel 5. Producers are largely aware of the macro context in which they work; their political talk programmes are at least, in part, a reflection of the institutional policy and aims in which they operate.

Institutional values: Many of the producers cited institutional values as guiding mechanisms. These were most clearly articulated at public service broadcasters and usually revolved around the established tenets of journalism. For example, Vincent (*Insiders*, ABC, AUS) stated: 'I think the editorial policy runs through the veins of every programme and every platform of the ABC'. She further elaborated about honesty, integrity and accuracy and how these values contribute to professional credibility. Gibb (*Daily Politics* and *Sunday Politics*, BBC, UK) talked about maintaining viewer trust via bureaucratic procedure:

The main thing [that] is important [is] editorial issues at the BBC, which I one-hundred percent subscribe to and I'm fanatical about. It relates to BBC values and they are particular values that have permeated broadcasting ... the values that are in our Charter, that we train our staff, we have lectures about, we bang on about, get cross about, are the values that have permeated commercial broadcasting as well ... We have systems – processes that some people find onerous about compliance, but I don't. They are processes that make sure that we are the trusted broadcaster of choice for viewers.

Similar to Vincent, Gibb talked about accuracy and reliability. He keenly realised the fragile nature of viewer trust ('We lose that at our peril'), and stressed the need to check

and double check information. Relating this to a specific aspect of his show, fairness with guests, he said that the BBC's policy on fair dealing is important when booking guests because 'What you can't do is book them for one thing and then do something totally different'. He explained that guests are told about the broad areas that interviews will cover in an effort to be transparent. Gibb summed up his take on news values at the BBC: 'It's straightforward. As long as you are open and transparent: fair dealing, open and transparent, impartial, check your facts, you can't go wrong'.

Steve Kinder's institution, Sky News (Australia), is an interesting case because it is the most informal of all those studied and it is this very informality that is evident in its political talk shows. As a commercial news provider, Sky News is focused on providing news to a niche 24-hour news audience. Kinder (Showdown and Paul Murray Live, Sky News, AUS) maintained that: '[N]ews and political talk is a form of entertainment as well as information. You have got to keep your audience engaged. You've got to – you don't want to see everyone talking about the same things'. The institutional marks of Sky News are evident: doing political talk in a way that remains relevant and engaging, but is perceived as different from other shows and other institutions. He went on to state two important points related to institutional influence:

I think we do have a more relaxed style. And Sky News in general is a lot more fly by the seat of your pants, and free flowing. One of the big differences between us and the [public service] ABC is that if a big story is happening, we'll just throw out the rundown and do whatever you [sic] need to do.

We are not set to that – and just the physical structure of the shows, that flexibility – if an interview is going pretty well, we can drop an ad break and keep going with it as long as it needs to go. Whereas the ABC and Channel Ten and the commercial networks particularly, they are quite rigid in [a way that] "this interview will be 7 minutes long" and that's it.

Kinder sees Sky News as more informal, flexible, and entertaining than other news networks. Unlike the more bureaucratic ABC, Sky is perceived to be able to act with contingency and dynamism to political developments, as well as having a more lively and informal style of political talk. Producers come to embody their institutions by taking on institutional identities, aims, traditions and standards; this structures their production decisions.

Regulation and impartiality

Only two producers mentioned that their shows were explicit responses to public affairs quotas set by the government. Morris described The Wright Stuff as: ‘A good way to maintain PSB quota levels at a good price. The other option would be to air something in prime time, which would have to have higher production values, like Panorama’.

Founding member of (Australian) Meet the Press, Bongiorno, stated that: ‘in 1991 Network Ten had just come out of receivership. Management decided that they needed to fulfil their licence condition, which requires broadcasters to cover news and current affairs’ (Paul Bongiorno, Meet the Press, AUS). Given the pared down production values of most political talk shows, those in management view the political format – where regulation mandates quotas, as in the UK and AUS – as an attractive way to boost their news and current affairs quota hours at minimal cost.

The most common regulatory matter mentioned was defamation. Political talk, being opinionated in its ethos, is somewhat problematic on these grounds. Producers are aware that they are responsible for what their guests say. Llewellyn (Insight, SBS, AUS) noted that: ‘defamation is very easy to get caught up in. Contempt [of court], that’s your first and foremost one: whether there are any charges or proceedings going on or things like that’. The implications are that professional guests are selected to guard against breaking the law. Kinder (Showdown and Paul Murray Live, Sky News, AUS) stated that:

If I’m producing a show on which something is said that defames someone I still get in trouble for it. That’s part of selecting your guests as well. You need people who can be – who can push the boundaries and be opinionated and unafraid to call things as they see it. But at the same time, knowledgeable enough [not to defame people].

Defamation also brings resources into play. Insight, a very well resourced weekly programme, regularly runs things by its team of lawyers. Llewellyn (Insight, SBS, AUS) observed that:

A lot of the time, when you’ve got daily programmes, the lawyers aren’t thought of that highly because they’ll just say “you won’t find a way to get what you think is going to work, you won’t get your story to air”. Or there will be something that has to be cut out, and as a personal thing, as a news producer, that may give you the shits. But for us, because we bring in the legal team as early as possible, they go: “alright look, here is where you need to start looking, or this is good, the risk is

fine. That is such a minor risk that you are probably okay to start looking in that area”.

Two dimensions become apparent: time and a chilling effect. Weekly, well-staffed and resourced shows have more time to pursue controversial subject matter. Llewellyn gave an example of doing a show debating the legitimacy of removing abused children from their families, which required extended cooperation with the SBS legal team. Under pressure to churn out news, daily shows appear to be more conservative in this regard because they do not have the time and perhaps resources to go through a story in detail with their legal teams. The implication, as Kinder outlined, is the selection of professional spokespeople, namely politicians and pundits, who are aware of the law. This implicitly marginalises less institutional voices like “ordinary” people and activists.

Most producers consciously thought about impartiality. It is a statutory requirement in Australia⁵⁸ and the UK. Impartiality was operationalised in the following ways: 1) diversity of political voices and perspectives; 2) overall fairness in approach; and 3) conforming to audience expectations of the programme. The most common conception was diversity of voices, and nearly all of the producers talked about political balance. However, some producers mentioned attempting to get a more representative balance between men and women. Political balance was generally perceived as left-right balance and proportionality to electoral representation. Vincent (Insiders, ABC, AUS) stated: ‘I think if you’ve got a balanced panel and then that immediately sets up a filtration process’. She perceived her panellists as having particular viewpoints on issues that can be broadly categorised on the left-right spectrum. Robbie Gibb (Daily Politics and Sunday Politics, BBC, UK) gave the most eloquent description about balancing political perspectives, which was widely shared:

There’s no machine that you put all your elements [in] and out comes impartiality. But you have to consider stuff, and I go to great lengths. So, the booking of our guest of the day. All on my board, in my room, as they are booked, I look at them: right wing, left wing, middle etc. So just on that alone, a broad mix. Then we’ve [got] political parties; we want to make sure that we give a reasonable shout to parties sort of based on where they are in the polls, the number of candidates they had in particular elections, how many MPs or MEPs, councillors ... so it’s not an exact science.

⁵⁸ For public service channels only; commercial channels have a self-nominated code.

Impartiality as diversity of voices is envisioned in terms of institutional political representation. This applies most strongly to those shows that regularly feature political guests. The Wright Stuff, in contrast, is more concerned about a diversity of perspectives (as opposed to guests). Cunningham (The Wright Stuff, Channel 5, UK) affirmed that he is aware that the on-screen debate is sometimes more skewed towards one side: 'then you just say "look Matthew we've got to [bring in other perspectives]" ... Then at least that feels like we are addressing a balance'. He also saw a balance of perspectives as more interesting and entertaining for the audience: 'the programme wouldn't be interesting if people are listening to the same debate and saying "This is right wing claptrap", or "this is left wing claptrap"'. Having a broad range of perspectives increases the number of people who can potentially engage with a topic (with obvious implications for ratings); it also conforms to statutory regulation and is a normative tenet of journalism.

Some of the producers mentioned fairness as an ethos. Llewellyn (Insight, SBS, AUS) mentioned that his show's reputation is based on dealing with people and issues fairly: 'the reason people answer your calls is because they know they are going to get a fair hearing. The programme has got a reputation for impartiality'. Kinder (Showdown and Paul Murray Live, Sky News, AUS) argued that even though his programmes are opinion based in that hosts reveal their opinions, he conceives of impartiality more in terms of fairness and openness: 'As long as everyone gets [a fair go]. A big part of it is guests being able to disagree with the host as well ... the show as a whole is designed to air everybody's viewpoint'. Robbie Gibb again gave a full articulation. He explained that impartiality also has fairness dynamics:

It's about the tone of your interviews ... Not revealing any personal biases. Making sure that you are fair. Making sure that you've got the strongest arguments tested on both sides ... All the time, if it's in your DNA, all the time looking for fairness, accuracy, impartiality. We don't always succeed. We make mistakes. But it is not a mistake always one way... it's about fairness.

On shows that had weaker conceptions of statutory impartiality requirements, producers invoked a fit between the perceived lack of strict impartiality on their shows, and audience expectations. Kinder noted that his shows try to get a range of guests to balance political affiliations. However, he also stated that:

They are not sold as news programmes. They are opinion-based programmes. People know who our hosts are, and know their backgrounds and know their opinions ... I don't think there's any secret that the hosts – that's what hosts are there [for]. It's not a straight ... [news show] ... Part of the brief is that they are there because they have opinions and they [express them].

Finally, Muto (The O'Reilly Factor, US) operates in a context that does not have impartiality requirements. He invokes a market place of ideas approach:

I'm pretty into the first amendment. Something like that [impartiality requirements] makes me wary: the government is going to come in and dictate viewpoints. There are always some liberals who are stirring up some Fairness Doctrine things, saying it would counter someone like Rush Limbaugh. I feel – let the marketplace work it out.

Politics on a budget: a response to two pressures

More than just producing cheap television and even on comparatively well resourced programmes, the political talk format is a measured response to the practicalities of television news: to attract audiences, cut production costs, and make a reproducible product. Atkinson (2011: 113) calls these dimensions “news templates” which have ‘overlaps and incongruities evident in both historical and current practice’. The desire to attract audiences places the emphasis on big name personalities or attention grabbing gimmicks: attractive visuals, the politics of outrage and performance, ingratiating presentation, and mood management. The backstage desire for planning and control requires a rational approach to news production: keeping costs down; forward planning which reduces uncertainty; the need to make a reliable and consistent programme that becomes readily identifiable for viewers; and a focus on ratings. The backstage desire for control and calculability attempts to be offset by the frontstage attraction aspects. Although they work slightly differently for each programme, the following is a guide to two major templates in political talk.

Cut cost and increase control and efficiency: Political talk producers operate based on standardised behaviours, called routines, and standardised templates. This increases efficiency, cuts costs, and maintains control over a complex and dynamic political landscape. Political talk is cheap to produce because the talk is live in-studio. The format is controllable, with few “moving parts” outside of guest selection. It can be subject to advanced planning. Guests can be booked ahead of time, or in the case of daily shows,

guests can be selected to fit a topic. Most interviewees appear without being paid. Regular correspondents are reliable and thus manageable.

Audience attraction and political prestige: Audience attraction is usually garnered by having a recognisable and heavily promoted host. Depending on the programme, audience attraction is further maintained by recognisable or important political guests, pundits or celebrities, controversial or topical subject matter, or lively opinion. Political prestige is gained by forging links with the political class and thus promoting the television channel or brand as a serious political player.

Cost

The following fact is the most clearly defined commonality of all political talk shows across the three countries: political talk television is produced cheaply. Most political talk shows have small teams of between two and four people. This often includes the host. Craig Morris stated that *The Wright Stuff* (Channel 5, UK) 'delivers lots of hours of television at a good price'. Muto (*The O'Reilly Factor*, US) stated that Fox News:

always want to create shows on the cheap. The interview format is actually the best way to do that. People do interviews for free ... Our format is very cheap. We do it almost entirely from a little set cluster of desks in the middle of Manhattan. We rarely, rarely, left the office to do anything.

Another producer, Steve Kinder (*Showdown*, Sky News, AUS) pointed to the lack of production effort required:

the format is ... not very labour intensive as long as you have your guests locked-in. Peter [the host of *Showdown*] doesn't use a lot of grabs or a lot of overlay, so production wise it's quite easy to get on air provided you've got your guests ... There's not a lot of pre-stuff that you really need to worry about. Which is why I guess it is such an attractive format.

One of the most candid articulations of cost pressures was given by Geoffrey Davies, the original producer for *Frost on Sunday* on (the now defunct) TV-am.⁵⁹ Davies detailed how the genesis of *Frost on Sunday* was actually a response to revenue problems: 'It was

⁵⁹ Geoffrey Davis is currently the Academic Director of the School of Media, Arts and Design at the University of Westminster. Although his inclusion falls outside of my sampling frame, I interviewed him for two reasons: he was the original producer for *Frost on Sunday* as well as currently being involved in academia, which means he has an insight into the practitioner and academic fields; and he was easy to access.

conditioned by no budget, and you had David Frost. Well, put him in the studio. Easy'. According to Davies, in 1983, TV-am was losing money⁶⁰ and the Programmes Director, Greg Dyke, needed a new show. He decided to do a political talk show featuring Frost for four reasons: 1) Frost was already aligned to TV-am, being a founding member and shareholder; 2) in 1982 there was no other competition for serious political content on Sunday mornings; 3) the resulting show had to be studio based and cheap to produce; and 4) Frost had a decent (but then waning) reputation, but more importantly, he possessed a thick "contacts book" which cut the costs and uncertainty of securing guests. The impetus for Frost on Sunday, then, was about minimising costs and relying on Frost's gravitas. This concern about cost is an overriding factor for the existence of political talk formats. Political talk delivers a decent political bang for a producer's buck.

Control and efficiency

Political talk is an attractive format for producers because it is perceived as less labour intensive than the news bulletin or current affairs, which require more staff and more forward planning. The three moving parts that political talk has to contend with are the news agenda, guest and panel selection, and on-camera discussion. Aspects like the studio, camera crew, host, and production staff, are easily accounted for. Furthermore, guest and panel selection, which will be covered later, is controlled by featuring a rolling cast of regular pundits and political spokespeople. The in-studio dynamic is controlled by briefing the host. Gibb (Daily Politics and Sunday Politics, BBC, UK) alluded to the control, cost, and efficiency aspects of his shows:

[The] format on the Mondays is fairly cheap. Planning can book up Monday members [politicians] for weeks and weeks in advance. It's cheap. You haven't got to just think of this programme because you are on the same phone calls to political correspondents: "Can you do next Monday? No. Can you give me a date?" So one person can book up weeks' worth. So there's mass production elements to it, which makes it cheap.

We have 26 editorial staff across the Daily and Sunday Politics. They produce hours and hours of television ... So, graphics, not everyone's cup of tea, but they -- a lot of money went into make those graphics. They are now made for every eventuality. They are dropped in. It looks produced. There's nothing to it; it's just a sting, and a two and a half minute VT – someone has three days to make it

⁶⁰ Davies stated that the budget was 12 million pounds but the station was losing 18 million.

maximum, for half a day's editing on a Saturday. Very, very cheap. No fuss. The panel is the same panel every week. All booked. No fuss. No effort.

Instead of the analogy of the Fordist production line, a more apt description is the “just in time” production philosophy pioneered by Toyota in Japan. The key axiom is that unused and idle inventory is a waste of resources. Political talk formats rely on their guests and the existing news agenda. The format does not require extensive background planning, investigative resources, or on-location camera crews. With regard to the Sunday paper review segment in her show, Vincent (Insiders, ABC, AUS), stated:

It is a great segment in that it allows you to deal with the breaking [news] quite high up. If you didn't have that segment you would be re-cutting packages and just doing a lot of last minute things on the weekend that you probably don't want to do.

Harding (The Wright Stuff, Channel 5, UK) highlighted similar problems with using pre-packaged material:

The difficulty is that because we are a topical show it's possible that we'll spend weeks, days, months organising shooting, and booking something only to drop the part because something else happens, or because something changes and we can't do it.

The implication here is that resources should not be “wasted”. Political talk ostensibly requires a studio and production crew, subject matter, a capable and well-informed host, and the selection of guests who can make their points clearly. Producers try and control and streamline as much of the production process as possible. They are eager to align the control and efficiency aspects of political talk production.

Routines and standardisation

Closely related to control and efficiency is routine. At first glance, political talk shows appear to be dynamic and dialogical in nature. However, the reality is that most (but not all) political talk producers operate according to standardised routines. A lot is pre-planned. Political talk shows have small teams. The planning happens in meetings that are held to decide three main things: topics and angles of discussion; suitable guests and availability of guests; and appropriate “vision” for the introduction to segments.

Some political talk shows, those that are more centralised, operate by a formal pitching process where the executive producer(s) and the host will act as gatekeepers.⁶¹ This is most acute in *The O'Reilly Factor*. Muto (2013: 10) describes the process whereby O'Reilly 'personally approved of every story', and states that 'Bill shot down 95 percent of ideas' in the twice weekly pitching meetings designed to generate story ideas. Furthermore, Muto says that the show is systematically put together segment by segment. Outside of the twice-weekly pitches, O'Reilly has conference calls each morning with senior producers. Muto estimates that around 50 percent of the show is filled on the day, with the rest being booked days or weeks in advance.

Harding (*The Wright Stuff*, Channel 5, UK) described a more relaxed approach where the next day's producer goes over the plan with her. Being a morning show, Beth and the host read the morning papers at 5am the next day and decide whether the previous day's plan is adequate; she defines "adequate" as topics and debate that will appeal to a weekday morning audience, and generate a phone-in or social media response. The show is likewise thought about in a highly structured manner: 'People know they'll get, at the beginning, Matthew and celeb chat, and then they'll get, for the next hour and three-quarters, four debates on four things from the newspapers plus a newspaper review' (Cunningham, *The Wright Stuff*, Channel 5, UK). The pitching aim is thought about in terms of filling each pithy segment with a different debate that can be articulated clearly, and is framed in binary (either/or) terms.

Insight, a conceptually based weekly discussion show has the longest pitching and production process out of all the political talk shows. The executive producers and host still act as gatekeepers. A team of two producers (six teams altogether) work on story ideas that they pitch in regular pitching meetings. Once commissioned the team has 5-6 weeks to source guests and bring the show to fruition; there are regular meetings throughout the process. Unique in this process, the premise and direction of each planned show is allowed to change in line with the guests: 'Our concept at week 1 to week 6 is often quite different; it morphs' (Meggie Palmer, *Insight*, ABC, AUS). This also

⁶¹ An exception to this is Sky News in Australia. Kinder described the production of political talk shows that he is responsible for as 'fly by the seat of your pants'. He stated that the hosts across the three programmes he produces do not use autocue and none of the shows have scripted elements. The main thing Kinder has to pre-prepare is the guests. These and other differences will be covered in later chapters.

reflects the show's dialogic orientation: it is the most guest-focussed in the sample. The commissioning process is perceived as the hardest part of the whole process, with robust debate at the routine meetings: 'You've got to think, alright, I've got to have a topic that is big enough, that I can find the best, most interesting, compelling versions – and a good strong story to tell over an hour'. After commissioning (weeks 2-6), 'the producers are catching up with me and the two supervising producers who are here as well ... helping steer the producer and the associate producer in the right direction' (Llewellyn, Insight, SBS, AUS). Although this process is iterative and producers are seemingly given leeway, the routinisation of meetings at various points in the process acts as a filtering and checking process designed to assess the suitability and newsworthiness of the ideas and guests.

Finally, with smaller teams, the process is more relaxed but still at least partly routinised. Smithurst (Meet the Press and The Bolt Report, Network Ten, AUS) works on host driven shows. She described her role at Meet the Press as mostly one of support because the hosts know 'exactly what they want to talk about, and how they want to talk about things, what vision they want etc'. Therefore she suggests questions and topics, and approaches it in an informal but routine manner. Vincent (Insiders, ABC, AUS) works closely with her host and two associate producers during the week to track political events; she makes guest bids generally in the middle of the week. She describes the process as follows:

We are earmarking ... and shaping the content of how we want it to come together ... You start out with this much – which is the beauty of a weekly show – and then you really filter out and stick with the best bits. And then ... Friday's the day that we bed everything down for our editing team who come in early on Saturday mornings. From a nuts and bolts perspective, the pre-produced aspects are cut together on a Saturday.

Gentchev identified two core tasks that are essential for his show, Question Time (BBC, UK): guest selection and research briefs for the host, David Dimbleby. This show is unique because the in-studio audience selects the questions to put to the panel, which removes this task from the production team's routine. Although he was reticent about speaking in terms of formulae, he revealed that an emphasis is put on guest selection, which has to be finalised by Tuesday or Wednesday for the show to be filmed and broadcast on

Thursday: 'It probably looks like a very unproductive use of time; if you were doing a time in motion study you'd say surely you can book five people in a day. But actually we spend – me and my producers spend a lot of time talking to potential panellists'.

Audience attraction

There are multiple dimensions of audience attraction aspects. The most obvious is ratings. Most of the political talk show producers kept an eye on the ratings but were not obsessive. It was not possible to make even crude distinctions between public service shows and commercial shows. For instance, Muto (The O'Reilly Factor, Fox News, US) stated that O'Reilly was obsessive about ratings, which befits the commercial cable news context:

[H]is number one priority was to get high ratings ... He's been the number one rated show on cable news for ... almost 14 years. He's very proud of that. He likes to maintain that. That is his main concern. That trumps ideology. That trumps newsworthiness.

Overall, however, the producers reported mixed feelings about ratings. A consensus seemed to be that as long as the ratings were satisfactory to upper management, then the equilibrium and consistency of production was preserved. It is important to note one implication of this conservatism: political talk producers tend not to want to upset established routines and patterns. Once a format is locked-in and ratings are acceptable, producers are intent on operating within a given framework. For instance, outside of The O'Reilly Factor, an extreme version of political talk, no other producers mentioned *increasing* ratings, which speaks to the previous point. This suggests that the political talk format is risk averse.

Political talk producers "attract" audiences through consistency. One may think that uniqueness would be a logical aim, and it is up to a certain point. However, an overriding concern is to keep the format recognisable and consistent for audience members. The political talk format is very conservative in these terms. The most recognisable point of reference for audience members is the host, which is essential to political talk. First, many shows feature their host's name in the title: Paul Murray Live, The Andrew Marr Show, The Wright Stuff, This Week with Gwen Ifill, to name a few examples. This includes but goes beyond a mere branding enterprise. It cuts into a key mechanism of political talk:

the host is central to the show because he or she has the most power, journalistic credibility and gravitas among all of the participants.

There are a number of dimensions. First, the hosts embody news values and journalistic authenticity. Many producers commented on the behind the scenes involvement or journalistic standing of their hosts.

So we've had a consistency with Jenny – been there the whole time. She's very much involved in the programme. She's not someone who just comes up who reads the links or reads the questions. She's involved week to week on all those [production] things (Llewellyn, Insight, SBS, AUS).

[Political talk] shows are host driven. So they – very intelligent hosts who are some of the – Meet the Press, at least, [has] two of the best political journos in the country, ... And therefore [they] know exactly what they want to talk about, and how they want to talk about [it], what vision they want etc. (Smithurst, Meet the Press, Network Ten, AUS).

Second, the producers often think their hosts as branding mechanisms, not just of the talk show, but also of the wider channel. One channel scheduler noted that Matthew Wright, a host, is extremely well liked and that audiences have formed a relationship with him. He conceived of Wright as part of Channel 5's brand. The host-as-brand concept was common throughout:

It's his brand almost. I think people really respect his measured approach to things. In the last few years, he has started writing a column as well. He's really built his brand in the last few years. He's sometimes a guest on The Project. He has a weekly interview spot on John Fein. It started as Insiders but it has really built up. I think he's a huge pull factor for the show (Vincent, Insiders, ABC, AUS).

When people think of the programme – what do you think of Newsnight? They say Jeremy Paxman. What do you think about [The Daily Politics]? Oh, it's Andrew Neil. People relate to human beings. He is a brilliant interviewer ... He's got presence. He's a big figure. He's got credibility (Gibb, Daily Politic, BBC, UK).

Third, the personality and style of the host is linked to the way the whole show is structured, giving the host the power to set the “frames” of interaction for the show. The extreme version of this is The O'Reilly Factor, where O'Reilly is the person on the side of the common people: 'He is the guy that is looking out for you' (Muto). O'Reilly's aggressive persona thus informs the pugilistic nature of the show; this is similarly the case with the right wing, The Bolt Report in Australia.

Aggressive styles were in the minority, however. Many political talk shows were imbued with more benign host priorities. For example, Kinder (Showdown, Sky News, AUS) pointed to informality as a personality trait that bleeds into his shows: 'Most of our shows are host focused. His [Showdown's host, Peter can Onselen] identity reflects on the show as well. His casual style – casual but trying to get more than just the standard [show]'. He went on to emphasise the light-hearted nature of the show: 'It's not like a stiff, serious and angry – which is quite good because it opens people up. He's more relaxed and quite personable, so he can ask tough questions without seeming like he's being an arsehole. But definitely, the personality of the host is [crucial]'.

Robbie Gibb (Daily Politics and Sunday Politics, BBC, UK) acknowledged that 'it helps when you've got a good presenter like Andrew, who is exciting and well respected ... He's cheeky ... He'll come on, amend the script, make [it] better, and he will adlib'. He further added that Neil strikes a good balance between a tough and forensic interviewer, while keeping the show's tone conversational and informal. Another British example is Question Time's David Dimbleby. Interestingly, he is referred to as the Chairman, not the host. Gentchev, the producer, noted that: 'I think people trust him. He's seen as someone who will stick up for the audience. He tries to stop participants going on too much'. And finally, Llewellyn (Insight, SBS, AUS) pointed to host Jennie Brockie's journalistic rigour: '[the audience] know that, with a good moderator, a strong, informed, intelligent, moderator like Jenny is, that people won't get away with bullshitting'. These examples illustrate the bleed-through that a host's personality has into the discourse – or modes of politics – of the political talk show itself. O'Reilly and Bolt, both partisan pugilists, have a cantankerous, full-throated engagement with politics and their shows manifest this. Other political talk hosts more commonly interweave the standard journalistic markers – credibility and gravitas, tough but fair questioning, and fairness – with humour and conversational sociability.

Political prestige

Although not uniform across all political talk shows, political talk producers, especially those from commercial backgrounds, are concerned with political prestige and political-commercial branding. Davies (Frost on Sunday, TV-am, UK) gave an account of how Greg

Dyke, Programme Director for TV-am, conceived of Frost on Sunday. 'TV-am came along ... looking pretty crap', but the aim was to raise the channel's profile. Including Frost in the show 'raised the station's profile and gave it bottom [political weight]'. Paul Bongiorno, the host of Australian political talk show, Meet the Press (1996-2012),⁶² which airs on commercial Network Ten, described the original motivations for setting up the show as pragmatic. He was also part of the initial talks that led to the programme being set up in 1992.⁶³ The original aims 'were to be seen and heard by media and newsmakers, and not for ratings success'. The rationale was to involve senior politicians in an interview format that would be newsworthy and gain "pick-up" by other news agencies. More than that, however, Meet the Press was also conceived as giving the commercial Network Ten political weight. Management attempted to axe the programme in the 1990s. However, according to Smithurst, the former producer:

Bonge [Bongiorno] said to the head of Channel Ten: "My show is the best access you are ever going to get to politicians. I have this excellent network of first name basis, of constant contact with politicians. If you axe this, you will potentially suffer as a result." ... From this argument, they kept it on air.⁶⁴

Important to note here is that normative aims and audiences were not emphasised. The political talk format was born out of pragmatics: fulfil licence conditions, gain political weight, maintain prestige, and increase the channel's visibility in the news landscape.

Political guests

Political prestige is closely related to the guests who appear on the show. This applies most strongly to the Sunday morning political interview shows, which feature a line-up of political decision makers. However, almost all of the producers said that securing political guests was their biggest headache. Producers who have parliamentary-based shows are in a difficult situation: 1) their format is centrally related to political guests; 2) political guests require an incentive to come on their show and political talk shows *generally* do not air in prime time and thus do not command large numbers of viewers; and 3) there are other political talk avenues, including radio, where guests can choose to go.

⁶² Meet the Press was outsourced to Murdoch owned News Ltd in 2013. This resulted in a softening of the show – adding sport and human interest angles – and pushing the show to an hour in length. Bongiorno was no longer the host, but still featured in the political segments of the show.

⁶³ Errol Simper, 'Birthday Boy Bongiorno', *The Australian*, 5th November, 2012.

⁶⁴ See also: Errol Simper, 'Birthday Boy Bongiorno', *The Australian*, 5th November, 2012.

Bongiornio (Meet the Press, Network Ten, AUS) gave the clearest articulation of this balancing of interests, which was also articulated by many of the other producers:

Guests are hard to get. It's complicated. You have to think about the long haul and gain respect for the long-term. You can't be too aggressive because it will scare away guests. There is a quid pro-quo between the press and politicians. You need to give the politicians some reason to come on the show. There is a balancing of interests.⁶⁵

The implications are that if the interview is too tough, politicians – the very people that give the show political prestige – will simply refuse to be interviewed. Gibb (Daily and Sunday Politics, BBC, UK) echoed similar sentiments:

There are many more opportunities for politicians to get their voices out given multiple news channels generally ... There's less of a monopoly and therefore you've got to try and make going on your programme an attractive place to go on. Audiences are lower than they used to be.

Kinder (Showdown, Sky News, AUS) stated that the original idea behind Showdown was head-to-head debates: 'asking the tough questions of political leaders'. However, 'it becomes difficult; not many want to go on a show like that where you know you are going to get grilled'; he explained how the show had to consider a more relaxed approach, which reflects Bongiornio's remarks. Finally, Robbie Gibb (Daily Politics and Sunday Politics, BBC, UK) again alluded to balance:

There is a balance that you have to strike between being tough on politicians and allowing them the freedom to make their points. If you are too tough all the time it becomes harder to get the guests you want.

It seems here that the traditional accountability function of the interview is under strain because of the centrality of political guests. Furthermore, many producers told of the strategic battle waged with aids and press officers: senior politicians refusing to go on a show; some politicians demanding a certain line of questioning; or minor parties being relied on because the major parties refused to put anyone forward. It seems, then, that the political class holds a good deal of sway over political talk producers and editors because producers value political visibility, prestige, and ultimately power, and it is access to these very aspects – embodied in politicians themselves – that are withheld from them if they cross implicit boundaries.

⁶⁵ This passage was reconstructed via notes from a phone conversation I had with Paul Bongiornio.

The BBC's Question Time faces an inverse problem: because of its high ratings, political guests clamour to get on the show and potential guests are screened. Gentchev said: 'We spend a lot of our time, the people you see on screen, there's probably about 10 times the number of people that you haven't seen that we are having conversations with and auditioning essentially'. This attention to guest selection further reinforces the perceived importance of the *type* of guests in a political talk format. The salience and prioritisation of political guests and recognisable industry and media personalities should not be overlooked: this gives a show political weight and relevance.

The panel: journalists, pundits, and celebrities

Some political talk shows do not feature regular political guests, but pundits, journalists or celebrity/personality figures. Featuring experienced and well-known pundits or journalists gives a political talk show a serious and analytical edge: viewers are promised a break-down of what "really" happened and a behind the scenes tour through the complexities of the political day or week. Both *Insiders* and *Washington Week* feature a regular political panel. Chris Guarino (*Washington Week*, PBS, US) stated that his show only features well-regarded Washington based journalists; this is to give the viewer a reasoned analysis of what has been happening over the past week. This model of political talk moves away from the accountability interview and towards analysis of the issues of the week.

Common criteria for panel selection were political credibility and ability to give political analysis. Political talk television requires fast thinkers and fast talkers (Bourdieu, 1998: 29). Columnists and pundits feature heavily because they are practised at authentically giving their views in an artificial scenario. Vincent (*Insiders*, ABC, AUS) stated that she chooses her panel 'for their analysis and credibility as well. If we find ourselves drawn to a particular columnist week in week out, then they start to get your [sic] attention'. This means that the political pundits who are seen as attractive are usually political columnists or working journalists, which gives shows like this an institutional dimension because recognised and authoritative voices are privileged over, say, activists or "common" people. Panels are politically conceived as left-right in spectrum. Vincent explained: 'We have particular panellists who have particular viewpoints, and we welcome differing

viewpoints on our programme but provided they are with the right mix of people, then those viewpoints are going to be challenged and questioned’.

Another way to gain audience attraction is to feature celebrity or personality guests. Two shows do this regularly but in different ways. Cunningham, (Executive Producer, The Wright Stuff, Channel Five) revealed that each day a new celebrity – usually a media personality – is added to The Wright Stuff’s regular panel of two for the week; this celebrity is not paid but is there to promote something. This is a function of show’s small budget. It is also a trade-off: the celebrity gets publicity, while the show gets a recognisable guest. In a different manner, but still serving audience attraction purposes, Question Time regularly features a “personality” alongside its politician guests. This guest usually represents an “anti-politics” perspective, which resonates with the in-studio audience (judged by the applause after speaking turns). Examples include Russell Brand and John Lyons (a former Sex Pistols member). This guest gives the panel a pacier and more raucous dynamic as the politicians invariably look staid and “institutional”. The anti-politics guest is perceived to have more links with “reality” or how “ordinary” people see things.

Producers depend on and value consistency in their guest selection, which is why a panel of regular guests is a favoured strategy. By dealing in known elements, producers can accomplish a dual feat: controlling the production process and fostering familiarity for the audience. For example, Vincent (Insiders, ABC, AUS) stated:

We constantly have our eyes open for new panellists. At the moment we are at our maximum, 15-16, because we like to keep bringing them back and creating some sort of familiarity for the audience. You don’t want to go beyond that number.

A second reason why a regular roster of panellists is valued is because they are a known quantity: ‘With the regulars, we know roughly what we are getting, so you can make that call’ (Cunningham, The Wright Stuff, Channel 5, UK). Muto (The O’Reilly Factor, Fox News, US) claimed that O’Reilly ‘likes to use Fox guests because he likes the predictability of it. He likes the person he knows he can get a good four minute segment out of them with a couple of pithy sound bites and be done with it. He doesn't feel the need to go outside his comfort zone’. Television production is risk averse in these terms: why risk dead air with

an unknown guest? Equally relevant is that political talk producers value those who can speak in the language and temporality of television. Put another way, producers are on the hunt for guests who possess certain kinds of media-performance capital that “plays well” in their political talk format; it is even better if they can consistently sustain this over multiple appearances.

Ecology and competition

Political talk producers are hyper-aware of three things: 1) the type of political shows in the existing landscape, and especially those at a similar time-slot; 2) the general news agenda; and 3) what similar political talk shows have covered, or will be covering that week. To put things in Bourdieu’s terms, the political talk “field” – the interrelational dynamics between political talk shows – is highly sensitive to the movements and strategising of similar actors. The producers explicitly acknowledged this:

There are four political programmes now on a Sunday morning so it’s getting quite competitive ... we don’t want a guest who has just done Sky Agenda and Meet the Press doesn’t want a guest that we’ve just done. Even though we are not going directly head to head, we are for the guests (Vincent, *Insiders*, ABC, AUS).

That same ratings sheet ... that show[s] our ratings, show[s] all the ratings for the competitors too. And then in the morning phone call we tell him what guests the competitors are going to have on that night. Bill always – and Fox News in general, every control room has a set of TVs that are always tuned to the competitors. We are looking at all times at what our competitors are doing to see if they have something more compelling than we do (Muto, *The O’Reilly Factor*, Fox News, US).

Competition and relational dynamics were at the forefront of most of the producers’ minds. Vincent even described how she gets one of her producers to watch *The Bolt Report* on Network Ten, which airs half an hour before her show, *Insiders*: ‘We keep across that content and sometimes turn it around within the hour if there’s a political guest who has said something really interesting or something that we are going to be discussing and we think that will add to the discussion’.

The producers acknowledged the existing landscape of political talk shows and their nearest competitors. They aim to position themselves as *slightly* more distinctive in the political talk “field”, yet not radically so. This competitive impulse reinforces the often-noted “pack journalism” instinct, where a fear of missing a story trumps the desire to be

unique (unless a show has an exclusive). Being “better” than similar shows translates into having more prestigious political guests or more “attractive” topical discussion.

The news agenda

Political talk formats are generally not focussed on *setting* the news agenda. Their purpose is contextualisation, debate and analysis. Many producers perceive the news agenda as pre-defined. They conceive of their tasks as a) covering the big stories of the week, and b) doing so in an interesting and attractive manner for the viewer. Harding stated, for example, that ‘by the time we talk about any given news story, chances are that there are any number of programmes, online forums, or radio shows that will have discussed it one way or another’ (The Wright Stuff, Channel 5, UK). She went on to say that it is her job to frame issues in ways that people might not have thought about before and therefore engage them. Vincent (Insiders, ABC, AUS), working on a weekly show, described two types of political week. In one, there is a major story with many aspects that dominates the agenda: ‘it’s like an octopus topic that has arms hanging off it that you can sink your teeth into and discuss’. Then there are ‘other weeks where there are separate and individual topics’ that are decided ‘by what we consider people will most be interested in’. Even on a more conceptually based political talk programme, like Insight (SBS, AUS), the shows have a news hook: ‘We need to be current and we do need to be covering news issues that are affecting Australians. I don’t think there is a hard and fast rule. I think, generally speaking, 80% of the time, our shows have some form of a news hook’ (Palmer).

There are two exceptions to this trend: the accountability interview set-up, and shows that are heavily host directed. The accountability interview has more news-making potential and those Sunday programmes that feature them regularly appear in the Monday news cycle. The accountability interview solicits the views of public leaders as well as holds them to account. Yet this is very different from breaking news or an investigatory scoop; the news that results is sound bites, some minor policy related remarks, or perhaps a “gaff”. This is actually more akin to a ritualised game with politician and interviewer both playing pre-defined roles. Smithurst (Meet the Press, Network Ten, AUS) pointed to the accountability interview ethos that underpins her

show, and many like it: 'getting somewhere in an interview is quite hard. You do spend the first two or three minutes just cracking the shell of spin ... and then you find the holes in that, then you start punching the arrows through. That takes a while. You've got to warm them up'.

Heavily host-driven news formats are more focussed on their own message and agenda than on other forms of political talk. Kinder reflected on why certain topics and issues are covered in the shows he produces for Sky News in Australia:

A bit of it is the news of the day where you follow ... But then again the hosts, if they have got a – particularly Richo – if he's got a certain topic he wants to pick up on, he'll base his guest on that ... Again, the hosts being political columnists and former politicians, they have a good insight into what needs to be talked about and what should be being talked about.

Kinder recognises the host-driven news style of his programmes. He sees his show as either adding to the existing news agenda by analysis and contextualisation or otherwise introducing new issues that the hosts think merit discussion. The punditry lineage of political talk is further apparent here. The extreme host centred formats, *The Bolt Report* and *The O'Reilly Factor*, consciously appeal to a niche. This means that their news agenda is largely pre-defined to fit with their message. Referring to Bolt, Smithurst (*The Bolt Report*, Network Ten, AUS) reflected that: 'We haven't had a pretty intelligent bloke come out and take such a strong right wing opinion'. Bolt's news agenda is anti-global warming, anti-immigrants, and anti-Labour (party). Muto (*The O'Reilly Factor*, Fox News, US) summed up O'Reilly's overarching schema: 'The coastal media elites are trying to hurt you and your family. You should listen to me because I am looking out for you'. It seems that with power and decision-making being more heavily centred around a host, the news agenda becomes a function of their (purported) views.

24-hour news is often mentioned as a problem because of the perceived continuous flow of news and the faster "news cycle". Many claim that there is a relentless pressure to move a story on, which producers believe is leaving journalists and the public with little time to reflect on issues and policy.

The 24-hour cycle – so immediate and almost hyperactive. When you work on a weekly show, and if you've got a topic that you're focussed on -- I've had weeks where I'm astounded because there are questions in my head and you would

think there is going to be people out there asking these questions but they've moved on to the next topic. A lot of these questions don't get asked because of the frenetic feed the beast 24 hour news (Vincent, Insiders, ABC, AUS).

The need to be first and the perceived increased speed of news delivery is related to the expansion of 24-hour news and increased competition. Others noted a shallower form of journalism, focussed on speculation or trivial issues:

The journalists at the heart of the action – it's the personalities; it's the things that go wrong; it's the "oh my god, let's cut her arms off! ... it's about [Julia Gillard's] massive earlobes ... It's Tony Abbot's ridiculous ears. His budgie smugglers ... They are *cartoonist's* tools, really. In some ways, some journalists have become caricaturists (Smithurst, Meet the Press, The Bolt Report, Channel Ten, AUS)

Political talk shows are caught up in the 24-hour news ecology; producers report feeling influenced by the news agenda and the hyperbolic, operatic relentlessness of the political news cycle. Political talk producers are trapped between the dual desires to 1) keep abreast of the ever-changing developments, and 2) pause, reflect on and analyse political issues (while remaining relevant for viewers).

Conclusion

A multidimensional mix of factors is responsible for how and why political talk is produced in the way it is. This chapter has covered the main structural factors. They structure, affect, arrange, prioritise and reward particular thoughts and actions.

Regulation such as defamation and impartiality makes producers cautious about their guest selection. Producers are likely to ignore those at the margins of the political field, which causes their guest selections to be tied to the established political framework. In countries like the UK, which has the strongest impartiality framework, political talk is not extreme compared with some American political talk shows. Institutions operate in two ways: explicit intervention, and by implicit values and ethos. Political talk producers generally take on the identity and values of their institution, which structures their production decisions.

Political talk is a cost-conscious format. Two main industrial templates are evident: the drive to cut costs while increasing calculability, planning and control over moving parts; and the need to attract audiences. This is not to say that political talk is a defective

political product, but merely to note its industrial underpinning. Political talk is, however, a conservative format. It generally relies on the existing news agenda to reduce costs. It is hamstrung by the need for a steady supply of guests, which means that producers tend to rely on institutional or professional spokespeople (except for participatory talk shows). Routines and standardisation play a big role in cutting costs and controlling the production process. Producers endeavour to pre-book guests as much as possible. A regular roster of political, pundit and celebrity guests is mostly preferred. This cuts down on uncertainty and enables planning. Finally, production meetings are used as a regular opportunity to monitor and influence production decisions.

While cutting costs and increasing control, producers must attempt to attract audiences. The biggest factor in attraction is consistency. Producers keep the format consistent and thus recognisable for their audiences, thereby managing their moods and expectations. This relates to hosts, panel members and guests. Hosts are central to the political talk format; their personalities and styles bleed into the discourses of their shows and they act as institutional brands. Producers are in constant negotiation with members of the political class, and shows that heavily feature politicians have to make themselves attractive places to appear on. This often means an implicit agreement around question topics as well as less aggressive journalistic inquiry.

The function of the production staff is to consider the best approach for their show, which usually starts from the premise of the news agenda as a menu of topics. Once a topic is decided guests can be booked, and the discussion and debate can be planned. Some producers assert the importance of political talk as a forum for reflection, analysis and debate; however, many are caught between the aims of keeping up with developments – which is perceived to have sped up in the 24-hour news environment – and operating in a more analytical, reflective manner. Host driven shows and accountability interview set-ups have slightly more news making potential than general discussion-based shows because they have more autonomy to go against the prevailing news agenda.

Producers construct and produce their shows with their competition in mind. They seek to be slightly different but ultimately similar. The logic is thus: give audiences a reason to

watch *this* as opposed to *that* programme. Give politicians and guests a reason to come on *our* rather than *their* show. In most countries, for example, Sunday Political interview programmes are similar. In the US, the cable prime-time landscape is populated with similar political talk formats across the three cable channels. Points of difference are conceived in terms of the quality or type of discussion, the prestige or attractiveness of the guests, and the selection of topics or approach to the news agenda. There is a fascinating dynamic at play here: political products have to have a different aesthetic appeal, but functionally do very similar things.

In sum, institutional and regulation dynamics, combined with cost, control, routine and attraction impulses dynamically affect and structure production decisions across the countries studied. This, however, is only half of the story. Producers are not mechanical robots functionally representing structural factors. There is a range of ideas, values, aims, and normative aspects that come into play. The next chapter uncovers these ideational and agency production factors.

Chapter 7: Production priorities

Introduction

The last chapter argued that political talk is a pragmatic format that is determined in large part by structural factors. Our attention now shifts to the ideas, values and agencies of political talk producers. This ideas distinction recognises that ideas about politics and production are somewhat idiosyncratic yet remain more under the control of producers than structural factors. If one is seriously interested in understanding production, both sets of factors need to be incorporated into an explanatory framework. This chapter argues that aspects such as producer path dependency, producer aims and fuzzy – but real – values play a big part in how and why political talk shows appear the way they do.

History and path dependency

The concept of “historical path dependency” comes from political science (Pierson, 2000). It refers to the tendency for future government policies to take on their historically prioritised “path” or trajectory unless a serious disjuncture or rupture occurs, which forces radical change. Put simply, because government, politics, and thus policy are unavoidably human, collective values, conceptions, norms, and worldviews become taken for granted ways of acting, especially if particular actions are perceived to result in profitable returns.

A very similar dynamic is at work in political talk. Political talk shows bear the marks of their origins. Formats and ways of “doing” political talk become locked-in. I call this producer path dependency (PPD) whereas Bourdieu uses the concept, habitus, to explain a similar phenomenon. PPD is largely values and aims based, akin to an identity; producers are only vaguely aware of its operation. Each political talk show functions in accordance with its identity. A show’s identity consists of its aims and values, and established ideas about how to make a good programme. These often implicit aspects come together to form an established common-sense framework from which producers operate. Identity becomes a way in which producers justify why they do what they do; a show’s identity is heavily influenced by its initial conception. Values, aims and ideas get locked-in and PPD operates thereafter.

For instance, Question Time (BBC, UK) has been running since 1979 and is a copy of Any Questions, a successful BBC radio show. Gentchev noted: 'I'm conservative in terms of changing. The sense I get is that lots of people like the simplicity ... there is so much rich variety in that'. The long-standing and almost institutional place of Question Time in the British political landscape plays a role here. A high rating primetime show with rich historical background, there is simply no obvious reason (critical disjuncture) to change the Question Time format and approach from a producer's perspective.

The Australian Meet the Press (Network Ten) was created in 1991 in part by long running host, Paul Bongiorno. Referring to the nascent show, he commented: 'The original concept was that the format would be senior political figures being interviewed. What they would say would make the news ... We decided against a panel of journalists wanking on'. This initial idea, of the show revolving around high-level interviews has carried on; one or two journalists and a host simply interview one or two politicians for each 30-minute show.⁶⁶ The Executive Producer echoed this PPD:

Because it is being run by a host that has been involved for so long, the host has been the driving force as to why the show has stayed the same. It's an interview, and Paul says he wants it like it is because it is an interview based show (Smithurst, Meet the Press, Network Ten, AUS).

In other words, Smithurst appeals to the original rationale of the programme to justify its present form. This is similarly the case with Washington Week: 'Because we feel strongly about the reporter/panellist discussion, unless there is something significantly different that we could incorporate into the programme and we just haven't found it yet, our stock and trade is the panel discussion' (Chris Guarino, Washington Week, PBS). Finally, Barney Jones (BBC, UK) said that one of the reasons that his programme, The Andrew Marr Show, contains a quirky blend of culture and politics is because this was the legacy of its predecessor, Frost on Sunday.

⁶⁶ Meet the Press has undergone major changes since 2013. It has outsourced to News Ltd. This stems from the Network Ten directorship and financial difficulties of the company. It is an example of critical disjuncture.

Production priorities: aims and values

Aims are extremely important and relate to the identity of a programme. I define aims as the goals that producers see themselves, or their shows, as trying to achieve. A more interesting way of analysing aims is as deeper reflections of production values. Values are defined here as production ideas, practices and outcomes that are perceived as the most important. I combine the discussion of aims and values under the term “priorities”, the rationale being that aims and values reflect the *prioritisation* of some outcomes, practices, ideas and goals over others. There are three main groups of priorities: normative democratic, pragmatist and aesthetic. Different shows, of course, have different weightings of priorities, but all of the producers discussed these three groups. I present examples of each group with a view to illustrating their working.

Normative democratic priorities

A surprising finding from the interviews was that most of the producers did not consciously reference normative priorities unless directly prompted. It seems that the democratic or public sphere conception of political talk shows is either ignored or taken for granted. The producers across the three countries tended to have a pragmatic conception about what they were trying to achieve, which often related to the day-to-day grind of churning out a show. Nevertheless, some normative democratic priorities were evident.

Debate and the public sphere

The most common normative priority related to informing the public, fostering debate, and giving the public an opportunity to witness and parasocially interact with their elected representatives. Winn stated: ‘we are also trying to educate people ... we don’t take a very high esteemed knowledge of what’s going on. We are not dumbed-down, but we try and explain things well ... I think we try and be a more accessible political show’ (Murnaghan, Sky News, UK). Kinder stated that his aims were ‘encouraging debate and getting things out of the guests that you may not get out of a structured one-on-one, pre-recorded interview ... It’s all about encouraging debate and informing the audience, really’ (Showdown, Sky News, AUS). Llewellyn pointed to giving the audience real insights

into an issue as an overarching aim. He went on to detail a show that Insight did around the recent Syrian conflict. The show was structured around understanding the pro and anti- Assad divisions among the expatriate community in Australia.

As unbelievably compromised and proven as a total dictator as Assad was, you can see why some people, and why some communities would feel assured by him and uneasy about the anti-Assad stuff. You can't find that out in a news story; you just can't. You can get a glimpse into the fact that it is not united, but probably not much more. It was only through those things [that were covered in the show] that it's really revealing what politicians are talking about, what Kofi Anan is facing – all those kinds of things, you really get a good idea about that (SBS, AUS).

Shows that are more audience oriented are more focused on creating a shared experience or giving “ordinary people” a platform to participate in politics. Gentchev commented that Question Time is ‘social TV’ and ‘is about the audience. Some people complain about the audience being too much in the programme. I kind of think that if you don't like the audience you can go and watch Newsnight’ (BBC, UK). With regard to his show, The Wright Stuff, which is part panel debate and part audience phone-in, Cunningham reflected:

The key thing is to find subjects to talk about that people want to talk about ... if you think that actually, they might not think they were interested in, but we can think of a way through to it so the audience that we know are watching will react, and think about how we can phrase it and frame it in such a way that they'll be interested in talking to us, then that's the thing (Channel 5, UK).

Analysis

Another aim is to offer political analysis or get past “the spin” and explicate the “reality”. This is more closely related to the parliamentary political talk shows. These producers see political talk as a format that is useful for understanding, not just *what* (happened), but also *why* (it happened) as well as the potential implications. Guarino (Washington Week, PBS, US) commented that, ‘We are there to provide context and analysis on primarily, the workings of Washington and the news stories that are generated out of Washington on a weekly basis’. Vincent stated of her Sunday morning interview and panel based political talk show:

So rather than just getting a breakdown of what's happened today, it's looking beneath that and asking, you know, the motivations, the strategy. And also looking ahead as well to where, how, this shapes into the national political

landscape and where an issue or strategy might be headed as well ... Our aim is to primarily inform but it's to offer, perhaps, in part, things that you haven't necessarily seen during the week (Insiders, ABC, AUS).

Political public relations (PR) were often highlighted as problematic and something that producers see themselves as battling. A common aim was to get past "the spin". Kinder observed that 'they – parties do have their talking points and the links that they want to push. If you just stick with what they are comfortable talking about, every interview would be essentially the same ... It's definitely an aim to get past that – get a bit more honesty' (Showdown, Sky News, UK). Winn talked about PR in similar terms:

You get people coming on and they are media trained within an inch of their lives. They think in sound bites and talk in sound bites. They are not real. And we'll talk afterwards, and you'll think oh my god, you are a human being. On camera, they are very grim, stone-faced and talking in sound bites. People don't trust something they don't think is real. We'd rather see someone that is human (Munaghan, Sky News, UK).

Both producers echoed a common theme: political guests are too invested in media and information management. People want "real" engagement with politics. Therefore, it is partly the job of political talk producers to balance the PR requirements of political guests with the journalistic ideal of political analysis.

Accountability

A common priority for producers is to hold politicians to account. Smithurst described how Meet the Press had a well-researched brief each week: 'we'd be across the news [agenda]. It was vital because you needed that – things these politicians had said in the past that they were backtracking on. You needed that to catch them out' (Meet the Press, Network Ten, AUS). Other producers also mentioned holding politicians to account in a more traditional sense. Gibb (Daily and Sunday Politics, BBC, UK) stated that one of the main aims is accountability: 'I call it fair and forensic; they are tough interviews and they hold politicians to account. That was how I got it commissioned as a programme – holding politicians to account in the traditional slot'. And finally, Kinder talked about Showdown (Sky News, AUS) in similar terms: 'Showdown is more – in theory – more of a confrontational *showdown*. The theory behind it is Peter Van Onselen asking the tough questions of political leaders'.

In summary, normative democratic priorities were not immediately apparent when talking to the producers. Normative priorities are implicit, taken for granted aspects of producing and “doing” politics. Contributing to the public sphere, informing the audience, providing analysis, and holding politicians to account were common themes that emerged, even if the producers required prompting.

Pragmatist priorities

In contrast to the normative priorities just outlined, the producers found it easier to articulate pragmatist priorities, defined as priorities that relate to the perceived realities of making political talk shows. These include a need to be recognised and to remain relevant, an insular focus, and a fear of failing to produce something at all.

Self-promotion, public relations, and talkaboutability

Many producers are concerned with remaining relevant in what is now a highly competitive news environment. The producers interviewed often spoke about self-promotion of their shows and making it into the papers, which reveals a preoccupation with the critical acclaim of other journalists and the political class. This relates most firmly to parliamentary political shows. Most of the producers mentioned that one of their aims is to get picked-up in the newspapers and perhaps even set the news agenda. For example, Sunday shows aim to get into the Monday papers to set the news agenda. Two comments illustrate this:

Often on Monday [mornings] and Sunday nights our political interview will get used in major bulletins, which is always the best result for us. It’s even better when they are being quoted in the papers the next day. That’s a good result. We measure our impact, I guess, by that – by follow up coverage (Vincent, Insiders, ABC, AUS).

The second aim is to try and get news into the Monday papers. So that’s part of our own PR. So ... to get a paper to actually lead – you know in the past year we’ve probably had six or seven front page leads from the show. And lots from the inside pages. A lead on a story: “Minister calls UKIP clowns” is one we’ve had. “He said on the Murnaghan programme on Sky News” will come in paragraph 10, which is tiny but it gets us mentioned (Winn, Murnaghan, Sky News, UK).

Producers are concerned with gaining pick-up to increase the profile and prestige of their shows, giving them political capital with politicians and other journalists, as well as,

presumably, news bosses. Increased visibility for a show also means increased visibility for the news channel, and this maintains future credibility. Many shows make transcripts of their interviews available to the press in the hope of being picked up. Another producer mentioned trending on Twitter as a marker of impact (Gibb, Daily and Sunday Politics, BBC, UK):

What I really love, weirdly, is trending on Twitter. On the BBC, Sunday Politics trends on Twitter quite often when blogs like Guido Fawkes and Conservative Home, and Labour List, where they take a clip and embed it – the BBC have free embedding – you can embed our clips in your blogs and websites; you want to make waves; you want to make an impact. You don't want to be irrelevant.

Producers have to work hard to entice guests onto their shows, which requires extensive self-promotion and the maintenance of political capital. For parliamentary political shows, this means ingratiating themselves with the political class:

A big part of our job is that we are having to sell ourselves to our potential guests, essentially. You have to give them a good reason to get out of bed on a Sunday morning and come in and do a show. So you are having to do the PR and saying how many viewers we have, this is how strong the show is, Dermot's very interested in this topic. So ... me getting out and about is not necessarily guest getting but it's building relationships. It's key to build relationships with PR people and special advisors, press officers etc. That really is about building relationships – trying to get them to trust you. Trying to get them to know that you are someone who plays by a straight bat, and that if you give someone your word, then they can trust it (Winn, Murnaghan, Sky News, UK).

As alluded to previously, producers try to get some part of their show into the main news agenda. The desire to gain pick-up and “talkaboutability” stems not only from the desire to be a major player in setting the news agenda, but also to simply be talked about in the national news. This provides a feel good factor for producers. Furthermore, political talk shows are not structured around investigative, research-based journalism. Their main journalistic tools are on-screen questions, answers and arguments. Influencing the news agenda requires a pragmatic focus on securing access to and interviewing major or controversial political players. Generally, pundits and journalists pontificating does not make the news agenda. Thus, everything from guest selection to the discussion and tone of a political talk show is done with at least one eye on remaining relevant in the news agenda. For example, most producers value conflictual debate. Such sensitivity to

“setting” the agenda, keeping up with the agenda, or gaining pick-up, means that political talk producers are at least partially wedded to the established news agenda:

I'd say roughly in news, about half of all news is planned: speeches, announcements, reports, elections, rallies etc. So you know a certain amount of what's coming up for the week ahead, and so that's the first thing that I start to do is look at what's coming up that we can peg ourselves to (Winn, Murnaghan, Sky News, UK).

What we do in terms of preparation is one, monitor the news in the early part of the week. Two, monitor our stable of reporters ... monitor what they're covering and how it aligns with what the major news stories of each week are (Guarino, Washington Week. PBS, US).

This is similarly the case for shows that are more removed from a parliamentary conception of politics. Insight, a socially based discussion show is anchored around a single topic. The producers claimed that their aim is to promote discussion on controversial issues; however, even then, the topic is usually at least obliquely related to the news agenda. The Wright Stuff surfs a tabloid news agenda and is built around an audience phone-in:

So what can we do that is different and that will provoke a different kind of answer? ... There are all kinds of things to talk about ... And people will normally call in with very different things, which is great. But as long as we know at the end of it all that there's something that people can call in about and that they can understand (Cunningham, The Wright Stuff, Channel 5, UK).

Ideas about the audience

Most political talk shows are insular in their focus. Producers are largely uninformed and vague about their actual audiences outside of ratings and other audience research metrics. This has implications for aims and values because a producer's conception of his or her audience (what he or she thinks they think and want) is a good guide to production priorities.

Parliamentary political shows are the most removed from their audiences in general. For example, Kinder (Showdown, Sky News, AUS) cited *channel* demographics: 'For the channel we get demographic breakdowns ... Probably older, 50+ I think, or 40+. That's just from the figures'. This reflects the common idea of a statistical audience, which often

includes categories such as male or female, or socio-economic demographic indicators.

Other vague answers were common:

It's a range of people. I think that definitely political insiders keep across our programme. And I don't think you have to be a political fanatic to watch our show. I think political fanatics do watch our show ... Particularly now, being offered across so many platforms. I think we definitely are engaging a younger demographic (Vincent, Insiders, ABC, AUS).

Producers are worried about succumbing to 'the day-to-day [political] ping-pong [which] I find, just frankly, really annoying' (Smithurst, Meet The Press and The Bolt Report, Network Ten, AUS). However, parliamentary political shows are unavoidably linked to the political machinations although they try not to become obsessed by them. Pragmatically then, producers try to combine running on the political treadmill with more removed non-bible belt political perspectives. For example, some producers realise the insular tendency embedded in their roles and rely on friends and family to get outside of their professional ideology:

Sometimes you have to sit back and think "well, I have my head buried in this, do people at home really care about this minute detail?" ... no one in my family works in the media which I think is a blessing because I can say to them and ask them what they think about things. So yeah, it's kind of taking the temperature away from your office I think, in whatever way you can (Vincent, Insiders, ABC, AUS).

I use my mum quite a lot. My mum has watched Question Time since the early 80s ... She's a BBC 1 and ITV and occasionally BBC 2 kind of viewer. So if she's heard of a politician I know that they are really big. She's probably only heard of 10 politicians, and half of those are not in [Westminster]: Gordon Brown, Tony Blair (Gentchev, Question Time, BBC, UK).

Some producers look to social media for clues about their audience and some even relish interacting with them; however, many are aware that the interactivity promoted by Twitter only represents a vocal minority.

I think people enjoy the interactivity of Twitter. It gives me a chance to open up a dialogue with some viewers – I sometimes take their suggestions about a question to put to a guest for example. I think this digital interactivity promotes a kind of loyalty to our programme because we are involving our audience (Gibb, Daily and Sunday Politics, BBC, UK).

You have to filter out the extremes. Peter Van Onsolen and Paul Murray definitely look a lot at Twitter and Paul's got a Facebook page for his show as well. Definitely interact with the audience that way (Kinder, Showdown, Sky News, AUS).

We have a panel of three commentators or journalists, which is balanced. They are paid a set fee, as we would pay someone to appear on the show, to tweet during the show, to comment on tweets, to give analysis and context. That gets the Twitter audience engaged and promotes interactivity (Winn, Murnaghan, Sky News, AUS).

While social media interactivity is seemingly valued, it is not apparent that producers (apart from Gibb) use social media to gain formal audience feedback and then act on that feedback. Interactivity is more of an end in itself. Under the rubric of “engaging the audience”, social media is used as a shortcut for getting in touch with the audience to stimulate them and engage them in debate rather than to gain formal feedback on production decisions.

In contrast to the parliamentary shows, two types of show are close to their audiences: partisan shows and participatory shows. Partisan shows like The O’Reilly Factor and The Bolt Report consciously appeal to a niche. They are more ratings focused than other shows and consciously stay within a set of parameters to foster a branded political approach. Both of these shows appeal to a disaffected right-wing audience. Their aim is to satisfy their core audience. The hosts, the driving forces, are highly aware of the alignment of their aims and values. Smithurst (The Bolt Report, Network Ten, AUS) described a conversation she had had with her host, Andrew Bolt: ‘He said, “I know my market. I know my niche. My market is what it is.” He understands this. I hadn’t heard him speak about it like that before. You have to presume that – it’s his brand. I think that is actually more the word he uses, he says “I know my brand.”’ Muto reported a similar perspective for The O’Reilly Factor, which is worth quoting at length:

The first thing on Bill's mind is the people that watch the show. He does take feedback from the audience. He reads those emails after the show everyday. Those are taken from – they get between two and five thousand emails a day. Two women on the staff have to go through them and cull them down to the most interesting forty or fifty, which they give to Bill. From that pool he will choose five or six to read out on the show. He is very interested in what his audience thinks. If he does a segment and the audience reacts poorly to it, that's always on his mind. He's very cognisant about not wanting to piss off his audience too much ... I would think that people watching our show would like it because it was their opinions parroted back at them.

Participatory shows, by definition, have the most contact and empathy with their audience. Both Insight and Question Time attempt to get representative studio

audiences. Furthermore, their producers rely on their studio audiences as barometers of success:

The litmus test for me, for whether the programme has worked well or not, because often people will turn up to our programme with an opinion about something, or maybe without an opinion about something. They may be nonplussed about the debate that we are talking about that night. And when you get to the end you are actually good at arguing all the opinions, and all the various parts of it even if you don't agree; they've had a fair go and you actually understand – you've got some empathy for the feelings (Llewellyn, Insight, SBS, AUS).

You get to meet quite a few of the audience every week – you get to meet 150 every week. In that sense, I suppose we have a very close relationship with our audience. You use them as a proxy for people at home (Gentchev, Question Time, BBC, UK).

Insight is a discussion-based programme and the executive producer uses deliberative criteria in relation to the in studio audience to judge the effectiveness of a programme. Question Time's producer uses the sizable weekly in studio audience as a sounding board, and because the show is structured around audience questions, what the audience wants is reflected in their questioning.

While taking into account ideas about what the audience wants, the producers did identify a tension between what the audience wants, and professionalism and authorship. Two examples illustrate this:

There's a couple of schools of thought when making a programme. Some people will keep a very close eye on the ratings, on demography, and who's watching, what do they want? And let's try and make a show for them. Then there's another school which says, let's create a – this is the school that I believe in – let's create a product that we believe in. Let's create a show that we think works. If no one watches it, then sooner or later we'll get taken off the air. I'm not going to make a show, or a product, that just tries to please every single one of our viewers. Something strong and that has a bold identity and will hopefully win viewers for that (Winn, Murnaghan, Sky News, UK).

But I think there is a bit of a danger in that if you altered something in your programme for every negative viewer email you received – you have to have the conviction to believe in your product. For a programme that's been going for 12 years that is reasonably easy to do (Vincent, Insiders, ABC, AUS).

Overall, producers' ideas about their audiences are imprecise. Although the shows do not operate identically, producers are broadly trying to reconcile the same contradictory

aims: to make identifiable and consistent programmes according to a programme's identity; to uphold their professional vision while simultaneously producing a programme that people want to watch; to interact and engage with audiences but not become beholden to a vocal minority; and to appeal to key demographics but remain politically relevant and professional. More commercial shows are more sensitive to what their niche audiences want. Participatory shows are more in-tune with their audiences because they directly involve them. Twitter and social media are used as interactive tools, but only a small number of producers engage in dialogue with their audiences. Most producers possess a professional vision of their craft. Although they combine aggregate, anecdotal, and other ways of knowing their audience, they still rely on their own notions of what makes good political talk television. In this regard, much political talk production remains insular.

Human alchemy: something over nothing

Something rather than *nothing* must happen on political talk shows. Two issues are in play: deadlines and liveness. Political talk shows are produced to either a daily or weekly deadline, which means that producers have to assemble something to go to air within a timeframe. However, because political talk shows are centred around live, human interaction, producers are concerned that liveliness, action, and spontaneity are priorities. There is a central conundrum: because most shows are either taped live or aired live, producers do not have much control over in-studio interactions. Further compounding this problem is the fact that producers are not particularly sure of the exact elements that go into a successful programme.

Kinder pointed to the prioritisation of liveliness: 'It's just a stream of consciousness. That all works with the format. You are not sitting there trying to put things into an auto-cue and pre-scripting things' (Showdown, Sky News, UK). Guarino stated that it's: 'A good, engaging conversation, as well as a good presentation' (Washington Week, PBS, US). Palmer referenced human energy as a marker of a good show: 'I think the energy in the room. I know that is a bit of an ethereal concept, but I think that is really important. If people gel and if people are talking' (Insight, SBS, AUS). Both Winn and Cunningham pointed to the ambiguity of knowing how to generate a "good show":

I don't know – there's something about making a show like this, or any show or programme, where you get a sense that you know you've done a good show ... You get a – it just feels good. It feels exciting. It feels watchable. I don't think you can do it by formulae. Because if there was a formulae you would do it every week (Winn, Murnaghan, Sky News, UK).

It's really hard to guess what's going to be a good show or a bad show. We can sit here today and come up with things that we think are fascinating for tomorrow, but somehow it will be like wading through treacle. Whereas we could think, that's a crap idea, but someone will say something that just flies! (Cunningham, The Wright Stuff, Channel 5, UK).

Even The O'Reilly Factor, which is a highly formatted, pacey and segmented show, suffers from a production ambiguity as to what makes a decent show. Muto lamented that his host pays too much attention to the ratings:

I always thought it was sort of nonsense. The ratings are statistical extrapolations of a very limited set of data, and he's making sweeping conclusions from them. For example, we did a Catholic Church scandal and it didn't rate well, so he told us not to do those kinds of stories. He thought that gay rights stories didn't rate well. Those stories were sort of banned for a while. He would often change his mind, too. He would say something was banned from the show at the beginning of the month. Then at the end of the month he would be back on the topic and that we are doing the whole show about this. He was very mercurial (Fox News, US).

Gentchev, editor of Question Time (BBC, UK), is actually resistant to the idea of a formula. He does, however, spend a lot of time organising and planning the guests:

If there was a formula, and the formula produced what I thought would be a dull panel, I'd throw away the formula and I'd start again. I suppose in the same way that news editors are – one of the things that I learned over the years working in news is this thing called news judgement, which is an intangible ... so it's quite a nebulous process I would say ... I spend a lot of time talking to my presenter and to my executive producer, and to my team about who to have, and looking at options, at people who might be able to join us ... sometimes you think someone won't be great and then they are brilliant. That's one of the nice things about the programme. You are constantly surprised. To go back to the poker analogy, if you knew how each hand would go, nobody would bother playing.

The producers readily acknowledged that there are intangibles about their role.

Producing a good show is partly a guess. Producers cannot physically control what their guests and hosts say and do. This live hot potato is both attractive and nightmarish for producers. Pragmatically, producers do their best to organise their guests, pick relevant

topics and engage their audience, to hopefully stumble upon the alchemy of a “buzzy”, “dynamic” and “lively” political talk show.

Entertainment and aesthetics

Political talk producers have a complicated relationship with politics. Politicians rank among the least trusted professions (Ipsos MORI, 2013). Producers are keenly aware that political talk involves “talking heads”, which are often politicians, and that these talking heads can become tedious for viewers. Smithurst stated of Meet the Press (Network Ten, AUS): ‘You have to really love politics to really sit down and sit through MTP because it doesn’t deviate’. It is unusual because it is solely focussed on the interview, with minimal entertaining aspects. Gibb argued that: ‘what you don’t want is the lone BBC presenter standing in the middle of this huge space pontificating like “I’ve got all knowledge.” It’s incredibly off-putting and tedious. And then they have a series of interviews and long films – very old fashioned; not very interesting’ (Daily and Sunday Politics, BBC, UK). Kinder likewise noted: ‘political talk is a form of entertainment as well as information. You have got to keep your audience engaged. You’ve got to – you don’t want to see everyone talking about the same things’ (Showdown, Sky News, AUS).

Therefore, most producers aim to produce political talk with an eye on what is attractive for viewers. Political talk producers commonly want their shows to be both politically relevant for other journalists and political players and *enjoyed* by their audiences. Thus, a common aim is to liven up politics. There are a number of ways in which producers seek to achieve this.

Segments and format: Segments are used to compartmentalise talk and give viewers cues. Different segments often relate to different guests and thus different topics of discussion. This is thought to hold the viewers’ interest, a philosophy that Gibb (Daily and Sunday Politics, BBC, UK) subscribes to:

I have all kinds of theories about other programmes that I think are genius, and it’s all about format. Homes Under the Hammer. You’ve probably never even seen this programme. So Homes Under the Hammer, in my opinion, is a genius programme. It’s heavily formatted. Viewers know what they are going to get.

Homes Under the Hammer is broken into distinct segments, with specific music, camera angles, and interviews for identifiable segments. This logic of keeping things entertaining and familiar by embracing a highly formatted and stylised approach is generally evident in political talk television. Vincent, for example, implicitly referenced her view of politics by saying that her show cannot be all talk:

Other elements are incorporated to keep it moving. It is an hour long programme. It can't be all – as interesting and insightful as they [political talk participants] can be – it can't be all political chat. The other components have been added to keep the show entertaining and light (Insiders, ABC, AUS).

Accordingly, her show features various segments, all politically based, which attempt to make the show enjoyable, for example, reporterless montages, a Sunday newspaper segment, a panel discussion, interviews, and a segment called “talking pictures”, which is a review of the week’s political cartoons. Winn (Murnaghan, Sky News, UK) aims for “biteability” in his two hour show. This is to keep the show “moving” as well as to enable viewers to dip in and out of the show:

That's something I aim for, to try and pack a lot in. Not to have long, flabby interviews. Pack it in quite tightly, so you've got – if you tune in for half an hour (our average viewership time is 35 minutes which is higher than at any other time on the channel), so if you are tuning in for 35 minutes, you will hopefully get an interview, a discussion, and a briefing on what's coming up.

Visuals: To avoid talking heads dominating the shows producers use visuals to add interest. Visuals usually consist of introductory pre-recorded grabs from speeches, parliament or previous interviews; pre-recorded VT pieces featuring people of note or a reporter; graphs, quotes or newspaper articles; or photographs or maps. The O'Reilly Factor, for instance, regularly involves interviews via video link. One way in which the show makes interviews visually appealing is by having three potential speakers on the screen simultaneously: one third of the screen for O'Reilly, and one third for each of the other two guests. This adds, at least minimally, to the feeling of interactivity and dynamism that the producers are eager to create, which is further fostered by the show's penchant for agonistic politics.

A classic problem is how to make a long-form interview “appealing”. Gibb's solution is to use graphics – displayed on a large screen that forms the background to the interview

that is taking place – to add visual interest and create a sense of drama. Politicians are regularly caricatured on the screen with the use of oversized faces on small bodies in VT packages. A usual scenario is that a quote is put on the screen, which relates to the subject under discussion:

We have a long-form interview and then Andrew will then bring up the iPad information that will help illustrate and break it up – it can be quite long – it's all in the directing as well. We will do an over the shoulder quick while he does that. Then we'll go immediately full frame ... then there's a two-shot where you can see the guest reading it and it just creates a bit of drama. So we are thinking the whole time about – we're not just saying: "we've got our interview; we've got our tough questions" – we're thinking the whole time about the theatre of the event. It's very important. Again, we have a responsibility to our viewers. They've been good enough to give us 75 minutes of their Sunday, the least we can do is to make the effort to make it enjoyable and interesting (Gibb, Sunday Politics, BBC, UK).

Other producers follow a similar line of thought: political talk needs breaking up. Smithurst pointed to her show's tabloid underpinning: 'Bolt uses lots of vision to make the show pacey. The Bolt Report ... can be a highly complicated graphics show. It uses the graphics team a lot (The Bolt Report, Network Ten, AUS). And finally, Vincent maintained that graphics aid understanding and promote interest: 'We use grabs throughout the panel discussion to illustrate a point ... you want them to be simple and clean. You don't want people to be trying to read. You have to make the viewer's experience a pleasurable one and an easy one' (Insiders, ABC, AUS).

Not all programmes, however, prioritise visuals. Two programmes, Meet the Press in Australia and Question Time in the UK do not emphasise visuals to any great degree. Meet the Press is only 30 minutes long and features a long form interview. Bongiorno stated that his show targets senior politicians; the implication is that the format is pared down to foreground the interview. Question Time, in which audience members question a panel, is unique because it is not structured around segments (but audience questions), and it does not use visuals. Gentchev talked about Question Time being like poker:

Poker is a very boring game when you look at the order of ranking of hands. You can learn the rules of poker in about half an hour, less. Once you play it with seven other people it becomes endlessly fascinating because you can never predict how people will react. I think my sense of it is that it is the unpredictability of having five people, some from the same terrain of the House of Commons or politics more broadly, and some from outside that, and the combination of that plus 150

people is just sort of a – you know, if people like reality television because it is unscripted, then QT is kind of like reality television ... there is so much rich variety in that, a bit like poker.

If producers are trying to create an interesting, lively and watchable programme by segmenting and formatting the talk, then according to this logic, either they or their audiences do not value the political talk enough for it to stand-alone. In shows such as Question Time and Meet the Press, the producers take a different stand and trust the in-studio political talk to be watchable.

Style and tone: Producers have a choice about the overall style and tone of their show. There is a multiplicity of options: Oxbridge style debate, informal conversation and banter, agonistic shouting matches, self-assured punditry, and other permutations. Producers self-consciously consider how they want their shows to “feel” and adjust their production decisions accordingly. Producers, overall, prioritise a mix of serious-entertaining priorities; that is, covering politics but making it is amusing and injecting some humour and irreverence. Gibb aims to make politics enjoyable:

The idea that you can offer up cod-liver oil television – you know it’s good for you, but you don’t really like it – is away with the birds ... That’s the thing I most measure and take account of, is do people say “ooh good, The Sunday Politics is on.” Rather than “awww, I suppose I should watch it” (Daily Politics and Sunday Politics, BBC, UK).

Gibb aims to create a ‘conversational and slightly amusing tone’, while remaining serious overall. His solution is to introduce a Guest of the Day (GOD), who accompanies the host. Depending on the programme and the day of the week, GODs are either politicians or journalists. Their purpose is ‘primarily tonal ... [which] allows the presenter to have a conversation with somebody, not in an interviewee/guest type way. These are friends of the programme. They are the presenter’s friends’. Gibb is aware that having informal banter and chat with a programme’s formal political guests is inappropriately informal: ‘if you try and have that conversation with a politician it’s the wrong dynamic, because you are supposedly trying to hold the politician to account. We use the GODs, and that allows you to have a wider range of humour and chat’. Gibb consciously attempts to make politics entertaining, but not too entertaining as to become trivial. The show switches tones in accordance with the seriousness of the segment. He summed up his overriding

priority thus: 'I make sure that what we are making is a television programme ... that people want to enjoy – I want them to *enjoy* it. It's not much to ask'.

Many Sunday shows feature a Sunday newspaper section that is an informal discussion about selected news stories across the Sunday papers. Although primarily used as a cheap and quick way to cover ground, it also fits into the casual, discussion-based style and tone of "weekend politics". More agonistic shows like *The O'Reilly Factor* reject this "relaxed" style and opt for a full-throated engagement, featuring interruptions, angry monologues by the host, and emotions like outrage and sarcasm. Similarly, *The Bolt Report* (Network Ten, AUS), according to Smithurst, has a tabloid feel because of its pithy rhetoric and fast-paced speed:

The Project is a fast-paced, high rating, nightly show that involves lots of overlay. Lots of quick – not lingering too long on anything. It's pacey. Bolt's got that. Bolt's got that in spades. He uses the same graphics team that works on *The Project*. It's pace, pace, pace, and I think it makes it quite watchable as a result. It hits the zeitgeist.

In contrast, *Question Time* (BBC, UK) is politically serious overall but its producer is adamant that the audience should be at the core of it, which gives it a direct, anti-authoritarian, and sometimes populist or tabloidesque feel:

If you look at parodies of the programme ... they are quite funny because it shows you how people look at *Question Time*. It's like, from the audience: "the bankers, the bankers blah blah blah" (making incoherent points). That was the joke ... the programme is, a lot of it, is about the audience ... I think it's quite tabloid.

Insight (SBS, AUS), which is also audience based but more focussed on social-political issues, attempts to set the tone of reasonable discussion and empathetic understanding. Palmer made the case that her host sets the tone of the show: 'If you've ever watched an *Insight*, you know there is going to be someone on there who agrees and someone who disagrees. That is partly Jenny's skill in negotiating that in ... a way that doesn't judge and is fairly open'. *Insight's* self-consciously produced tone is adopted by the audience, which means that discussion is free of aggression and interruption.

From segments and formatting, to visuals, style and tone, producers pay a great deal of attention to the aesthetic aspects of their shows. They are not just concerned with

making democratically valuable talk but they aspire to make an attractive and entertaining political product or experience.

Conclusion

Political talk shows are not merely a functionalist result of structural factors. Producers have to continually instantiate their show's identity via their decisions. Two ideational aspects are central: production priorities and producer path dependency solidified around inception. The decision to create and maintain a political talk show is conscious and goal related. There are sets of aims and values, which I have termed production priorities, which serve as a guide to a show's identity. This identity – the different normative, pragmatic and aesthetic priorities that are instantiated and reinforced – serves as both a justification for and a guide to production decisions.

However, a show's identity is heavily influenced from its initial conception because of producer path dependency. Its identity is also temporally structured, drawing on the contemporary cultural, social and political milieu. This does not mean that a show cannot evolve, but it is more common for a show *not* to change radically than vice versa, even if the executive producers change over time. Furthermore, in dealing with these ideas and attempting to produce a consistent show over time, producers still exert a fair degree of autonomy, even if they are operating under the aegis and inertia of PPD.

Chapter 8: Three types of talk: advocacy, parliamentary and participatory

Introduction

The previous chapter outlined a general framework for understanding political talk production based on the aggregation of interview data from three countries, 11 channels, ten newsrooms and 16 producers. The general framework explains a lot about political talk production but it is not formulaically deterministic. With a view to adding nuance to the aforementioned *general* framework, this chapter considers how different types of political talk relate to the general production framework. In order to do this, the chapter first constructs a typology of political talk from the sampled shows.

Types of talk: advocacy, parliamentary, participatory

The political talk shows can be roughly divided into three types of talk: advocacy, parliamentary and participatory (see Table 24). Advocacy talk appeals to a niche audience and views the world in partisan terms. The host is central to the format and is generally a charismatic, authoritative and partisan figure who speaks from a position of outrage, shock and common sense. The host often points out the absurdity of opposing positions. Accordingly, the type of talk that ensues is polarised high-voltage argument that advocates and functions as a mobiliser (“appealing to the base” in political strategy terms). These shows are unlikely to appear on public service channels because they are market-based political incarnations. Nor are they likely to appeal in news environments prioritising impartiality. Examples of this type of show in the sample are *The O’Reilly Factor* (US) and *The Bolt Report* (AUS).

Parliamentary talk is the most common form of political talk in this sample (for example, *Sunday Politics*, *Showdown*, *Meet the Press* and *Washington Week*). It is the most institutional form of politics because it is tied to parliament and politicians. Because of the intimate relationship to parliament, audience requirements take a back seat to parliamentary political requirements. The host has a dual role as a moderator, steering discussion, as well as interviewing guests. Both roles require a more impartial performance than the full-throated advocacy talk performance. The mood, although

sometimes pointed and argumentative, is rationalist and not as extreme as advocacy talk. Democratically, although potentially elitist, it comes closest to a deliberative – public sphere – model of talk.

Participatory talk is the most audience oriented but also the loosest categorisation. Insight, Question Time and The Wright Stuff are shows in the sample that fall under this participatory banner. This style commonly features an in studio audience and some versions feature "ordinary people" as guests. It conceives of politics in a tabloid, but intelligently populist sense. It fosters mainly social discussion that is multi-perspectivist and grounded in lived political experience. Participatory talk is prone to being anti-authoritarian (the people vs. the power bloc) and because of the centrality of the audience and "common people", it features "common-sense" reasoning. The mood is demotic and emotive without being melodramatic. It is the most informal mode of talk and is the most likely to feature humour. The host generally takes a subdued role.

Table 24: Three types of political talk

Type of talk	Audience	Host	Talk	Democratic role	Mood	Historical antecedents
Advocacy	Niche	Central; authoritative	Polarised argument	Advocacy; mobilisation	Outrage	Partisan press; partisan talk radio
Parliamentary	Secondary to parliament	Central; interrogator or facilitator	Impartial argument	Public sphere; argument and debate	Cool rationalist	Broadsheet press
Participatory	Central; "common people"	Neutral moderator	Experiential discussion	Common space; multi-perspectivist	Demotic	Tabloid and broadsheet press hybrid

This typology is constructed to give the subsequent analysis analytical clarity. The following sections sketch out how these three types of talk operate in relation to the political talk production framework outlined previously. For each type of talk, one political talk show is chosen as a mini case study that most closely represents the ideal of the typology.

Advocacy talk

The O'Reilly Factor airs on weekdays in primetime on Fox News, an American cable news channel. It is an extreme version of advocacy talk that has gained notoriety as a vehicle for its mercurial host Bill O'Reilly. For example, a New York Times review of one of his books summarises the main thrust of The Factor (Maslin, 2008):

By his own reckoning, he is a force for good in a world full of miscreants who need correcting. He is also “one of the most controversial human beings in the world,” a self-appointed vigilante who is blessed with the “crusader mentality that often makes my TV program hum.”

Structures

Regulation: The Factor is unencumbered by impartiality requirements compared to the UK and Australia. If impartiality is conceived as balance, fairness, and diversity, then despite Fox News claiming to be ‘fair and balanced’, The Factor is not impartial, fair or balanced in its selection of guests, the stories covered and the news angles taken. Defamation is usually not a problem because most of the guests are political pundits (and thus professionals) who argue about political ideas. This is all enabled by the non-existent impartiality regulations at the national level. In relation to the general framework outlined, The Factor is “affected” by the *absence* of regulations whereas the reverse is true for political talk in Australia and the UK.⁶⁷

Institution: Whereas more straight-laced news institutions and political talk shows profess to have no agenda, advocacy talk is organised around narratives that serve a political niche. This is unavoidably linked to institutional influence and relaxed regulation. The Factor exists within a right-wing institution and is enabled by an absolutist national conception of freedom of speech, weak public interest requirements, and a country that is ideologically accepting of free market values. This right-wing institutional influence works explicitly via top-down management decisions and pressures, and implicitly by taken for granted assumptions and incentives. O'Reilly has the most control over the show and embodies Fox News values. The Factor works on the basis of a narrative that appeals to a niche audience while simultaneously generating large ratings. The narrative runs thus: the west coast political and media elites are out to get you and corrupt American heartland traditions. Bill O'Reilly will look out for your interests. Muto says that O'Reilly's primary purpose is to push this narrative because it is a commercial strategy with a partisan template underneath it. This is no accident given that The Factor is the most successful cable news show in American history. The partisan or advocacy values

⁶⁷ However, The Bolt Report is an outlier in the sense of operating in Australia where impartiality is mostly valued. The regulators seem to make an allowance for this right-wing programme to exist; it also points to the slight weakness of the co-regulatory model that characterise Australian broadcasting.

pushed by The Factor, outside of senior management, are a function of producers working for prestige and promotion or just getting by.

News agenda and 24-hour news: With hours to fill, cable news is reliant on political talk shows, and because there are competing cable news shows using this same political talk-as-filler strategy, the economics of differentiation and lack of traditional public interest legacy⁶⁸ quickly leads producers and schedulers to create hyperbolic, entertainment focussed and manic political talk shows. Therefore, advocacy talk is largely a creature of the 24-hour news ecology and commercial competition. Advocacy talk like The Factor challenges what it sees as the mainstream news agenda. Many of the issues and concerns it covers have to fit with a-priori assumptions. For example, O'Reilly is often concerned with exposing public hypocrisy and goes about finding stories that fit this line. He is uninterested in the extent to which public officials are hypocrites *on average* or *overall*. Aspects like his Talking Points Memo set out his well-argued editorial line that challenge the mainstream news agenda. This outrage-based politics stems from the show's advocacy narrative and meshes well with its overall "man the battle stations" tone. The Factor is also not as reliant on politicians-as-guests as other parliamentary type shows, which gives it further leeway in breaking away from the established news agenda. Considering that The O'Reilly Factor has been running since 1996 and is consistently the number one rated cable show, it has evidently succeeded in mastering its approach.

Media ecology: Although The Factor is concerned with its commercial viability and political narrative, it is not overly attuned to other shows because the American cable news landscape is ideologically differentiated into niches. Muto says that O'Reilly regularly consults influential right-wing blogs like The Drudge Report as a guide to stories of note. In this sense, The Factor is part of the echo-chamber identified by Jamieson and Cappella (2008). O'Reilly also keeps an eye on what he considers left wing media in order to launch self-justifying criticisms of the "liberal media"; in essence, The Factor challenges what it sees as the main stream news agenda with its own news agenda, but the main thrust of the show remains distinctly wrapped in its ideological zone which is very often blind to main stream news concerns.

⁶⁸ Cable news stations date back to the early 1980s in the US.

Cut costs and increase control: Like all political talk shows, The Factor is under tight budgetary constraints even though it is immensely profitable.⁶⁹ Fox News relies on an army of interns who work long hours for little pay in the hope of gaining permanent employment, which further keeps costs down. Staff for The Factor source stories and guests from their desks. Guests are inexpensive. There is not much in-field reporting and it is predominantly shot in-studio. The Factor increases control by having a pyramid organisational structure, with O'Reilly at the top and the junior producers at the bottom. Stories are commissioned by being personally vetoed by O'Reilly and other senior producers. Shows are planned a week in advance and segment by segment. To further increase control, Muto says that all guests are pre-interviewed and their arguments mapped out. Their argument outlines are then given to O'Reilly, which allows him to counter-argue more effectively and maintain a coherent narrative. Muto likens this process to professional wrestling: a staged fight for the cameras that is highly controlled behind the scenes.

Whereas the parliamentary shows rely heavily on the existing news agenda and political players (which subsidises newsgathering and guest costs), The Factor leans less heavily on these pillars. It does not regularly feature politicians (they prefer to go on the shows perceived as more credible like Meet the Press or Face the Nation) and opts to use its own cast, enabling a more politically pointed but also *predictable* analysis. Most guests are "friends of Fox": regular contributors who can be relied on to give pithy remarks. Examples include Karl Rove, Gerlado Riviera and Dennis Miller. This further enhances control because these regulars are known quantities to both audiences and producers, which minimises risk. The Factor, contrary to popular perception, does feature Democrat-aligned guests like Kirsten Powers; however, Muto says that they are chosen because they do not pose a serious challenge to O'Reilly. If they oppose O'Reilly too forcefully they will be removed from the line-up.

Audience attraction and political prestige: The Factor is highly attuned to ratings and thus to attracting and maintaining its audience. In combination with its political narrative, ratings inform much of its content and style, which manifests in its outraged mood,

⁶⁹ Fox News made around \$1 billion in profit in 2012 (State of the News Media 2013, 2013)

unambiguous rhetoric, and slick, punchy and formulaic segments. The Factor's tabloidesque hard news sensibility further aids its attraction by mixing politics, scandal and entertainment; furthermore, it consistently compresses complex political issues into simplistic dichotomies.

Central to its audience attraction – and its style and approach – is its angry but mercurial rogue, Bill O'Reilly. O'Reilly serves two purposes that relate to audience attraction: embodying the Fox and Factor ethos, and acting as a recognisable anchor-point for viewers. As with regular and reliable guests, story types and reoccurring segments, both the ethos and anchor aspects reinforce its attraction through consistency. In contrast to the more moderate parliamentary shows, however, O'Reilly is the lightning rod of manufactured outrage and the central attraction impulse of his show. As noted, The Factor does not maintain prestige by slavishly ingratiating itself with the political class. It does not need to because as a right-wing show it has easy access to right-wing politicians. Yet it mostly relies on pundits for the aforementioned reasons of cost, control and predictability. Moreover, these pundits – often big-name Republican players like Karl Rove and Sarah Palin – are used to giving the show an analytical but politically pointed edge that doubles as a big draw-card for attraction purposes. In a more salacious respect, Muto wryly observes that The Factor prefers female blonde guests to the usual (balding middle-aged male) suspects; he further observes that O'Reilly always prefers less credentialed but more attractive female guests to more qualified men or unattractive women, which serves an obvious attraction purpose and reemphasises the commercial penchant for visually appealing "content".

Ideas

Production priorities and identity: The Factor's advocacy ethos means that its normative democratic role is a mixture of analysis and accountability. Regular segments such as The No Spin Zone or Talking Points Memo are devoted to "cutting through" spin, mounting political arguments, and holding politicians to account within a narrow right-wing framework. This allows the show to be pugilistic and harken back to partisan press and muckraking traditions. Muto says that after ratings success, O'Reilly's favourite type of story is one that "makes a difference"; if his show can outline a public problem and call

attention to it (politicians wasting public money is a favourite) and claim to bring about a result (a resignation or public apology for instance), this brings O'Reilly delight. On a more abstract level, this form of talk is clearly democratically valuable advocacy journalism although there are deleterious effects as well. The highly charged opinionated format also serves political mobilisation purposes because strong partisans are more likely to participate democratically (Mutz, 2006). Therefore, O'Reilly's operatic outrage is not merely a self-serving entertainment device because it serves a number of normative-democratic purposes.

Pragmatically, *The Factor* is simple to produce: push a right-wing narrative and appeal to a niche audience. *The Factor* is not concerned with gaining pick-up by the national news agenda because it serves a niche and its cable competitors serve different niches. Furthermore, the types of stories it chooses to pursue and its analysis-based core mean that it is not usually breaking new stories, but offering opinionated analysis. It does not need to worry about keeping politicians onside because most avoid the show anyway. Muto identifies a Freudian dynamic where producers clamour to please O'Reilly in their story selection. In this sense the production priority is insular and quintessentially pragmatic. Moreover, lower and mid-level producers are not as wedded to the partisan project as might be expected; they are concerned with putting out a show and pleasing O'Reilly. Furthermore, and as previously stated, Muto says that under O'Reilly *The Factor* is concerned with ratings and commercial success first, and partisanship second, which is another pragmatic concern in appealing to its audience.⁷⁰

Aesthetically *The Factor* is a distinctive show. It is highly segmented with slickly branded segments that are signposted for viewers and repeated on a predictable schedule. All of the segments are pithy and fast-paced, which fuels the high-octane nature of the show and emphasises its liveliness and dynamism. O'Reilly's style of political engagement is indicative of that of the show: macho, aggressive and self-righteously outraged. O'Reilly is concerned, according to Muto, to come out "on top" when interviewing someone, which further reinforces its advocacy and combative ethos. *The Factor* is not in search of truth;

⁷⁰ Although the two are arguably flip sides of the same coin.

it is an *aesthetic* as opposed to ethical form of politics, which works to confirm its political narrative.

Origins and producer path dependency: The Factor's origins stem directly from Roger Ailes (personally hired by Rupert Murdoch), the conservative boss of the Fox News Channel and former top-level Republican political consultant. Ailes selected O'Reilly to set-up and head The Factor. This high-level, right-wing old boys club was referenced by Muto. He stated that although O'Reilly is temperamental and often baulks at managerial influence, he is aware of the identity and purpose of his show, which is reiterated at private lunches and dinners with top managers.⁷¹ The only way that The Factor would change would be if O'Reilly leaves it (Muto says that the show would then be cancelled because O'Reilly is so pivotal) or if Ailes demands significant change. With a long running, high-rated show forged in an ideological stew in the mid-1990s, there is no incentive for The Factor to modify its priorities, and by extension, its identity.

Parliamentary talk

The BBC's Sunday Politics and the Daily Politics are examples of parliamentary talk. They are two editions of the same programme. Sunday Politics is a Sunday morning BBC One programme; it is the weekend version of The Daily Politics (which airs daily during the week at 11:30am on BBC Two). The same person edits both shows; they are the most institutionally oriented in the sample.

Structures

Regulation: The UK is governed by impartiality requirements and the BBC takes this seriously. Both politics shows, accordingly, prioritise a balance of professional political voices: journalists and politicians. The interviewing ethos is characterised by Gibb as 'fair and forensic'. He emphasises being transparent with guests about the topics of conversation, which feeds into impartiality as fairness and transparency.

⁷¹ Interestingly, this similar dynamic is at play with right-wing The Bolt Report, hosted by right-wing columnist Andrew Bolt. Network Ten, whose significant shareholders include Lachlan Murdoch and right-wing billionaire Gina Reinhart are reported to back the show and are personal friends with Bolt (McKnight, 2012).

Institution: The Daily and Sunday Politics are affected by the institutional dynamics of the BBC. Counter to John Birt's sometimes-impenetrable analytical approach the shows were given a remit in a 2003 news revamp to make politics more accessible while maintaining a seriousness befitting the BBC. Gibb produces both shows with a view to making them entertaining but not tabloid. This impetus is shared with his main anchor, Andrew Neil, who himself is right-wing in his instincts (as chairperson of the Spectator magazine and former editor of Murdoch's The Sunday Times), but he anchors the show impartially while regularly injecting a cheeky and wry humour which Gibb encourages. The BBC itself occupies a central place in British life as the broadcaster of record – even in a multichannel universe – and Gibb takes this responsibility seriously, with his show reflecting an institutional seriousness and focus on Westminster politics. This further manifests in an emphasis on fact checking and accuracy, fairness with guests, and a neutralising of the host's opinions.

News agenda and 24-hour news: The politics shows are institutionalised versions of politics, being tied to Westminster. This means that they are highly attuned to the established news agenda and its main political players. Gibb is wary of the fast-paced 24-hour news environment. For instance, Gibb specifically contrasted the BBC's focus on accuracy and fact checking with Sky News' focus on breaking news first. The Sunday and Daily Politics are reasonable, sober and reflective spaces compared to the "breaking news" obsessed 24-hour news channels (although the UK 24-hour news landscape is more anchored by regulations compared to cable news in America).

Media ecology: The Daily and Sunday Politics are thought to be quasi-"natural" homes for politicians and political debate because of their institutional linkages and privileged positions on the BBC. Similar shows like The Andrew Marr Show (BBC) and Murnaghan (Sky News) air on Sunday mornings. Gibb stated that he constructed his Sunday show as a point of difference to the Marr Show. For example, The Andrew Marr Show is seen as "lighter" and slightly easier on politicians than the Sunday Politics. An ecological dynamic is further evidenced by the light-hearted Twitter exchange in which the senior producer of Sky News' Murnaghan, Winn, found a Daily Politics coffee mug perched next to a Murnaghan mug on his desk. Robbie Gibb re-tweeted Winn's original tweet, containing a picture of the mugs, with a prefix that obliquely referenced their competition: 'Battle of

the mugs RT@gileswinn: Don't know how this arrived in the Murnaghan office! We're being infiltrated!⁷² This dynamic seems to be most severe in parliamentary shows because producers are dealing with similar news agendas and guests; therefore, they are hyperaware of what other shows are doing as well as the prevailing political winds in the scramble to get the most senior, relevant, or well-known guests.

Cut costs and increase control: Although relatively well-resourced and staffed, The Daily and Sunday Politics are produced according to an industrial template, which brings costs down and allows the senior producers and editors to deal with the high output required. The graphics, theme music and other inserts that make up the different segments are stored in a computerised system ready to be inserted when needed. Guests are booked well in advance and costs are further kept down by relying on politicians – who appear for free – and what Gibb calls Guests of the Day (GODS). These guests (politicians or pundits) are chosen to give the show familiarity and lighten the tone. Regular political performers like Dianne Abbot and Janan Ganesh give the programme familiarity as well as politically and editorially reliable performances.

Audience attraction and political prestige: The Daily and Sunday Politics are not overly concerned with aggregate ratings; however, Gibb values the BBC's Audience Appreciation Index because it measures audience enjoyment, which comes back to his aim of making politics watchable. The host, Neil, is a recognisable and well-regarded journalistic brand; he is tough and serious, but also cheeky and humorous. The segments are formulaic, branded and identifiable, to cue audiences as to the expected content. Because of the intimate relationship with politicians and the unavoidable need for them to consistently appear, there is an acute awareness of the importance of balancing politicians' needs with journalistic integrity. Successfully doing so demonstrates that the show is a fair political space for politicians to enter and a robust journalistic space working on behalf of audiences. The Daily and Sunday Politics regularly feature a mix of front and backbench political talent and most pundits are drawn from the broadsheets, which is a further guide to the intended political approach. Both shows maintain political prestige and use this as a point of audience attraction.

⁷² (Winn, 2013)

Ideas

Production priorities and identity: The Daily and Sunday Politics have a firm normative commitment to debate and accountability. Politicians are given room to explain their positions and are held to account; a mixture of pundits and politicians debate issues. Both the debate and accountability aspects run through Neil who adopts the role of chair or interrogator while injecting his wry humour.

Pragmatically, the show has an insider feel: senior production staff make programmes they think are enjoyable; most of the show involves process type stories that appeal to the political Bible belt; and, much of the humour is self-referential. Twitter is used by the Editor, Gibb to interact with his audience and to solicit feedback; however, this is only used by a minority of very active viewers and his rationale for this interaction is to keep them watching by making them feel included. Furthermore, parliamentary shows are concerned with what other journalists think about their programmes. Gibb mentioned that he likes it when segments of his show are “picked up” by other shows. This gives producers and the show political and journalistic gravitas because their show is seen to be central to the news agenda. As a consequence, parliamentary news can become insular from their audience because of a production focus of appealing to politicians and other journalists. Finally, Gibb stated that he is a great watcher of television formats; this has a bleed through into his production approach, which, is slick, highly planned and segmented, with a slight emphasis on visuals.

The Daily and Sunday Politics aesthetically attempt to make politics accessible by adopting an amusing, wry and conversational tone, which permeates the shows and stems from the host. Yet both shows are careful to ensure that this sociability does not override their normative commitments, which Gibb recognises is an imprecise balancing act. Argument is sometimes heated but mostly rationalist with the appropriate level of civility. The segments are heavily formatted with identifiable graphics, music and flow, but the aesthetics are not sensationalised, reflecting a stronger normative commitment to political issues and dialogue than entertainment values. Finally, there is a good pinch of humour to the shows in their visual depiction of politicians, echoing political caricature.

Origins and producer path dependency: The Daily and Sunday Politics emerged out of a review of political programming at the behest of the then Director General, Greg Dyke. The review concluded that the political output had become inaccessible to many. As Editor of live political programming, Gibb created a more accessible, conversational and amusing form of politics than the previous shows. In balancing those normative and aesthetic aspects he adopted hybridity as an organising concept. A more dialogic and informal approach was preferred to an authoritative, serious and monologic one. The traditional interview format and centripetal form of Westminster politics was kept, which relates to the show's institutional place in the BBC; however, amusing and fun aspects such as a self-mocking weekly quiz and the best parliamentary punch-ups in the world were spliced into the show in addition to the tonal aspects previously mentioned. Because Gibb was the "founding editor" of the programmes, PPD primarily works through him.

Participatory talk

Participatory talk is the most varied form of talk and the hardest to draw conclusions about. This case study will draw on three participatory programmes: first, a weekly Australian programme, *Insight*, which airs on the multicultural public service broadcaster, SBS, in primetime and features an in-studio audience. Second, the UK tabloid style morning weekday show, *The Wright Stuff*, a phone-in show that airs on Channel 5, a commercial broadcaster; and third, *Question Time*, a weekly primetime BBC programme where audience members ask questions of a mixed panel of politicians, personalities and business people.

Structures

Regulation: All three shows are governed by impartiality requirements and fulfil statutory public service news and current affairs quotas. *Insight* and *Question Time* are not broadcast live but taped a few hours before transmission (both in primetime). *The Wright Stuff* airs live, which increases the risk of defamation or causing offence, and thus potential complaints to the regulator. For instance, *The Wright Stuff* received the most complaints to the regulator in 2011 (Author Unknown, 2011b). Producers consciously fret about managing their audiences and all of the shows have an extensive audience

screening protocol to minimise risks. Impartiality is instantiated in the more political Question Time by ensuring a broadly politically representative audience and panel, and a fair-minded moderator controlling the proceedings; it also airs from a different place in the country each week. The Wright Stuff is constructed around debating binary positions and impartiality is taken to mean airing both sides. Insight views impartiality as fairness: disagreeable guests, usually “ordinary people” who relate to the theme of the week, are given opportunities to air their views and experiences.

Institutions: All three institutions affect their talk. Insight airs on SBS, a public service multicultural broadcaster that is grounded in an ethos of “bottom up” multiperspectivism and is comfortable using translators and subtitling guests, for example. The BBC’s Question Time is institutional – it is a marked point of the political week and features recognisable politicians – as well as participatory because it involves a studio audience questioning the main political guests who respond earnestly. The Wright Stuff, which is produced independently and aired on commercial Channel 5, shows a less formal commitment to the overtly political and sides with a tabloid and gossip approach that is consistent with the broadcast institution because it has the weakest public service mandate and commitment. All three shows, however, are committed to involving the audience.

New agenda and 24-hour news: Participatory shows are removed from the 24-hour news cycle because they focus on issues and concerns most relevant to “ordinary” people. In other words, the micro-dissection of politics is not the concern of participatory shows.

Insight is somewhat insular in its approach to the news agenda but it takes care to make tangential links or news hooks; it often pursues “big issues” because it is a conceptually based show. Recent episodes have covered issues including: phobias, drunken fighting, terminal illness, self-harm, an election special, and sex addiction. Insight, thus, at least partly drives its own agenda, which is based on social or political problems that are affecting people (because it is grounded in *their* experiences), and is not overly concerned with keeping up with the metronomic parliamentary agenda.

The Wright Stuff’s agenda is mostly sourced from the tabloid papers but some broadsheet stories also appear; stories are selected for their ability to generate audience and

(celebrity panel) discussion. Some recent stories include: the right to smack, gene tests at birth, MPs' pay, and grammar schools.

The audience and the national news drive Question Time's agenda. The in-studio audience members in the locality for that week are asked to write down two questions each. These questions are then pooled and the producers choose the most popular or "relevant" questions. The show is tied to the news agenda because the audience members are likely to ask questions about issues in the news. The questions tend to have a populist tinge and mix national with local concerns: elites vs. ordinary people; the cost of living; so-called banker bashing; London vs. the rest of England; and, industry and exports. Overall, participatory programmes attempt to foreground their audiences as well as integrate the news agenda into their shows (even if tangentially).

Media ecology: None of the three forms of participatory talk is overly concerned with other shows; this is probably because none of the shows face direct, sustained competition. All three shows, as stated, are aware of the news agenda, especially the press. However, these shows rely on their audiences as a resource because they are interested in engaging them, which makes participatory shows less reliant on their relational positioning to other shows within the media ecology.

Cut costs and increase control: Participatory shows save money because they rely on their audiences as a resource. However, audiences have to be managed because broadcasters and producers are wary of making "bad" television or being sued. To avoid this, audience members go through an extensive vetting process: first, for relevancy (do they meet the topical or political requirements of the show?) and second, for coherency (can they make a lucid point?). These impulses for control – to massage "the ordinary" into a performative and "interesting" version of the ordinary – grate against the increased costs of management. Audience shows feature a mixture of guests, both political and non-political. It takes time, staff numbers and money to source, screen and organise the logistics (for example, travel) for all those taking part. To take an example from each programme: Insight has a team of roughly 12 producers (not including the senior producers) who source and screen potential guests, in addition to a dedicated audience manager who takes care of the logistics and screening other non-contributing audience

members. Question Time has a dedicated audience division that screens audience members while the executive producer has a small team that screens the panel guests. The Wright Stuff relies mostly on phone-in calls, which are all screened by the producers prior to putting them on air, and the in-studio guests are briefly surveyed for their opinions prior to going live.

Audience attraction and political prestige: Audience shows are ratings conscious. Having ballasts grounded in “the people” these shows are concerned not only with “what ordinary people think” and their experiences, but also with how many people are watching, which puts them in between the commercial cable world and the insular parliamentary shows. The hosts vary in style but all are recognisable. They each embody their institution and act as a guide to their show’s political discourse priorities. Matthew Wright, a tabloid journalist and host of commercial Channel 5’s the Wright Stuff, is mischievous, friendly and jokingly argumentative; David Dimbleby is the fair-minded doyenne of Question Time and the BBC; while Jenny Brockie is the empathetic, tolerant, motherly but forensic face of SBS’ Insight.

Insight and Question Time have in-studio audiences that are central to their shows. The in-studio audiences serve as an attraction point for viewers. This audience-as-a-resource is simultaneously dynamic and changeable but also predictable and familiar. Its editor, for example, likens Question Time to a game of poker because it is a known quantity, but it also has many permutations. As stated previously, studio audiences are heavily screened to weed out non-performers, rabble-rousers and the unhinged.

Participatory talk is not as hamstrung by maintaining impressive links to the political class as parliamentary shows. Insight and The Wright Stuff regularly cover political stories but they do not feature political guests because they foreground the experiences and opinions of “ordinary people”. Although Question Time often features front bench political talent, it does not need to ingratiate itself with politicians because of its ratings success. This is because it airs in primetime and the production staff have an important political bargaining chip: access to eyeballs. The Wright Stuff features a mix of media celebrities, authors, personalities and sport stars on its panel who opine on the news of the day. Counter to the idea of seeking political prestige, it works to attract audiences by

mixing the “real” opinions of these celebrities – who otherwise appear in anodyne media managed settings – with the experiences and opinions of “ordinary” callers at home. Insight has a different model again. It mixes an in-studio audience that has experience of the week’s topic, with academic and third sector representatives. Insight thus completely shuns political prestige for a socially grounded model of talk, which is its *raison d’être* and thus its attraction impulse.

Ideas

Production priorities and identities: All three shows have a normative commitment to airing the views and experiences of “ordinary people”. This manifests as a socially grounded conception of politics and the political (which is the strongest in Insight). Participatory talk has less affinity with professional modes of talk and performance, but still has a firm grounding in advancing debate and differing perspectives in a public sphere model. Some shows do this in a more simplistic manner while some embrace complexity.

The Wright Stuff has the closest affinity to tabloid politics; it often debates issues from the front pages of the tabloid press, making its normative democratic commitment anti-authoritarian, populist and prone to the simplification of complex issues. Even though a variety of perspectives are often heard from multiple speakers, the debate tends to fall into binary positions. To a lesser extent this is the case with Question Time, where the audience interrogate politicians, because the questioners tend to ask blunt questions. Furthermore, because Question Time features politicians on its panel, a normative democratic priority includes political accountability. In contrast, Insight foregrounds complexity, debate and the contradiction of human experience; for example, one show profiled Assad supporters in the Syrian civil war, breaking the “bad dictator vs. good rebels” frame, and highlighting the complexity of the situation. In one sense it fosters debate, but unlike the Habermasian public sphere which aims to achieve consensus, Insight aims to explore multiple perspectives; in this way it is *empathetic* as opposed to *argumentative*.

Looking at pragmatic ideas, participatory talk is less concerned with self-promotion, talkaboutability (setting the news agenda) and the esteem of journalists and politicians, and more concerned with generating discussion about topical issues, and connecting and

talking to and with its audience. The overriding concern for participatory shows is remaining relevant to their audiences. This transcends a crude focus on aggregate ratings. In order to engender appropriate mediated responses from audience members, participatory shows need to be intimately aware of their audiences. Thus, producers of participatory talk axiomatically value audience contributions and are more likely to view their audiences in positive terms than others shows. This stems from their audiences being *participants* rather than *recipients*.

For example, Question Time is focussed on presenting an interesting panel of politicians and personalities, and then turning the show over to the in studio audience. The simplicity of the show's format ensures continuity and consistency by being controllable and predictable, giving producers certainty around the moving parts each week. The participants offer questions that are usually related to the national and local news agenda, ensuring topicality and relevance while also maintaining a firm (audience) participatory commitment.

Insight's main aim is to air first person experiences that are organised around a single topic each week. Production staff take care to research, fact check, and then air multiperspectivist discussions. Similar to Question Time, it is closely tied to its audience. Pragmatically, the producers aim to get people talking about their experiences; they relish the thought of providing their viewing audience with unbelievable stories on complicated subjects to provide an *insight* which might puncture pre-conceived notions.

The Wright Stuff is billed as a phone-in show. It is the most aware of its mid-weekday morning broadcast time and the implications for who is watching or participating. Most of its segments are pithy, well branded and fast-paced to ensure that morning audience members (housewives, the elderly and shift workers) can dip in and out of the programme. The Wright Stuff is constructed entirely around the (mostly tabloid) news agenda, which reasonably pushes producers into worrying about which stories will "play" well on air and generate the most useful audience and panel interaction. The producers worry about ratings, and indeed, higher than average ratings are a reason why the show is continually renewed. Perhaps because of the commercial reality of ratings, The Wright Stuff is the least participatory show because its host and three celebrity/personality

panellists dominate the talk. These professional participants have more performative capital than non-professionals. There are only two to four “ordinary” callers in any one segment that are quickly whisked on and off air; if the show lacks callers, a member of the small studio audience offers a brief comment.⁷³ This unease at what people may say on air runs through participatory talk shows and a pragmatic concern is anticipating, and then managing what audience members are most likely to say.

Aesthetically, *Insight* has a subdued tone that emphasises reasonable exchange, empathy and understanding. It highlights human emotion as people often recount disturbing or controversial experiences. Close-ups are used when people emote or recount their experiences to enhance the emotional dimension of the show. It is not rigidly formatted into branded segments because the point of the programme is to foreground experience and opinion, which is often free-flowing and kaleidoscopic. Visuals are minimised but occasional pre-recorded VT items are played as contextualising aids.

Question Time does not rely on visuals and similar to *Insight*, does not feature branded segments. Instead, different questions from the audience signal changes in topics. The primary aesthetic pull of the show consists in how the panellists will handle unseen audience questions (a quintessentially “live” dynamic). The tone is reasonable overall but spliced with humour and populism. The juxtaposition between “ordinary” questioners and professional politicians produces moments of absurdity and humour as well as moments of political accountability and exchange, giving the show a feeling of unpredictability.

The Wright Stuff is heavily segmented and stylised, alluding to its pithy treatment of the political and binary framing of issues. It is a fast-paced show punctuated by advertisements, gimmicky music and branded segments, which feed into its tone: breezy, conversational and argumentative, yet humorous and fun with a serious undertone. Giving the audience a chance to participate alongside celebrities and the well-known host allows a quasi-equality (between professional and ordinary) to emerge which promotes a tonal or stylistic appeal to authenticity because the celebrities break their manufactured

⁷³ I attended one live show.

image by opining on political and social issues (what they “really think”) while “ordinary” citizens get to air their views on the national stage.

Origins and producer path dependency: The three shows are long running and thus have similar producer path dependency mechanics at work. Question Time stems from (radio) BBC4’s Any Questions and the simplicity of the format is itself something that is valued. For instance, there was slight consternation among the viewing public and media when the regular panel was changed from four to five members to make more room for celebrity guests (Judd, 1999). Nevertheless, the iconic nature of the show and long running Chair makes producer path dependency strong. The Wright Stuff’s current approach (borne out of budget cuts) has rated so well that Channel 5 extended the length of the show from one to two hours. This further incentivises producer path dependency, as does its long running history (over a decade) and iconic host. Insight shares similar features in being long running, possessing a strong identity, and having a respected, successful and recognisable host. These factors strongly hedge against radical future change.

Contrasting parliamentary, participatory and advocacy talk

The preceding section has hinted at the contrasts between different types of talk and the relationships to the general framework of political talk production. This section explicitly compares the three styles of talk with a view to further understanding the nuances within the framework. The first set of factors is structural.

Regulation does not influence political talk shows uniformly. Advocacy talk, being the most politically pointed, needs a relaxed regulatory framework to exist. Relaxed regulatory frameworks enable (but do not mandate) activist broadcast institutions to operate. Thus, the relatively ungoverned American cable news landscape, bolstered by a more absolutist first amendment, has many examples of partisan talk and activist broadcast institutions. Whereas in contexts like the UK, which is governed by impartiality requirements and a more caveated freedom of speech conception, parliamentary and participatory talk is likely to flourish as a function of more neutral broadcast institutions, which are themselves at least partly a product of the salience of the traditional tenets of journalism. In other words, connections to impartial journalism, the parliament, or the

people is privileged in the latter, while adherence to activism is more likely to be valued in the former.

Each country has 24-hour news competition, with the UK and Australia sharing Sky News and the US having CNN, Fox News and MSNBC. All forms of political talk face more competition than at any point in history but there is a distinct national ecological affect at play. In countries like the UK and Australia, the 24-hour news agenda is less likely to be strongly partisan;⁷⁴ that is, the news ecology (the different broadcast institutions and news programmes that are produced) is more converged than in the US, where the cable news landscape operates according to its own (niche commercial) logic.

The advocacy model of talk fits into the 24-hour news landscape well. With hours of airtime to fill and “fresh” news being expensive to produce, political talk is the solution but is also likely to be part of an echo chamber. Advocacy talk is more likely to go against the established news agenda because of its activist instincts and niche audience base. Parliamentary talk is less narrow but convergent. The news agenda usually stems from parliament because of its reliance on official spokespeople and sources; most forms of parliamentary talk review the week’s or the day’s news in some way and, therefore, parliamentary talk works closely with the news agenda. It does, however, often feature an accountability interview set-up that has news making potential and some independence from the news agenda. Furthermore, parliamentary talk is most likely to operate in relation to similar shows because of the limited number of guests available to its centrist instincts. Therefore, “the competition” is highly relevant because the audiences for the shows are very similar too. Participatory talk is more variable in its relationship with the news agenda and is insular with regard to ecological competition (because there are few politically based participatory formats). Some participatory shows – those more reliant on experience – have access to their own well of material and do not need the established news agenda as much as others. Shows that mix citizens and politicians/celebrities use the news agenda as a topical bridge between the two groups.

All three types of talk perform in a fragmenting news environment and are under pressure to cut costs, increase control, and increase (or hold on to) eyeballs. All three

⁷⁴ This is because of stronger public interest regulation.

forms of talk are cheap to produce because they rely mainly on unpaid (or cheap) guests and a series of routines that make the production process manageable. Advocacy talk relies on a mix of handpicked pundits and personalities, and relevant subject “experts”. Similarly, parliamentary talk relies on a cast of (inexpensive) regular panellists – more likely to be journalists than the partisan insiders of advocacy talk – and/or leading politicians who don not charge a fee for their appearance. Although research is involved for all forms of talk, it is not extensive and mostly relates to background issues (preparing interviews and issuing briefs for example).⁷⁵ To further cut costs as well as to increase control, political talk shows share an industrial model of production that has a mixture of the following features: forward planning of guests and topics; a tendency to rely on previously shot news footage (as well as stories in most cases); pre-packed theme music and visuals, and familiar segments; a reliance on regular commentators and guests; and extensive planning around the likely arguments of guests and the appropriate questioning for hosts. Participatory talk unavoidably needs to screen its audience, which is resource intensive, but the payoff is increased control and the selection of audience members with performative capital. A small subset of partisan and parliamentary shows have a skeleton staff of no more than 3 people, which further cuts costs and keeps the team efficient.

As well as cutting costs and increasing control, all three forms of talk are concerned with attracting or at least maintaining audiences. All of the shows have an identifiable and renowned host who acts as an anchor point to the show’s style and content; all of the shows seek to be identifiable (i.e. recognisably different from other shows) but consistent in their particular coverage of politics (the types of stories covered, the types of guests that appear, and the types of conversations). Advocacy talk is the most commercial form of news and thus is most concerned with ratings. It also has a niche audience, which gives it little room for manoeuvre because it has to push a consistent and predictable political narrative. It is the most emotional, brash and unequivocal form of talk. Nuance is muted in favour of vociferous and unequivocal argumentation. Parliamentary talk, in most cases, does not rate well. It is generally not scheduled in primetime and thus has a more subdued emphasis on gaining audiences, but is nevertheless concerned with making

⁷⁵ One exception is the participatory show *Insight*; it features extensive background research because the show is based entirely on its audience’s experiences (that need to be sourced and verified prior to shooting).

politics enjoyable and maintaining its existing audience. Accordingly, it has the most subdued aesthetics, more well-rounded and nuanced political discussion, and an emphasis on insider process stories. Participatory talk is concerned with ratings. Its main attraction impulse is allowing the home audience to see their in-studio counterparts discussing political issues. Participatory talk is likely to emphasise experience over expertise and construct politics in a populist mode, which is a form of simplification, but this works as an attraction mechanism because it places the viewers as part of the “us” and the politicians and the establishment as “them”.

Advocacy talk does not need to maintain close links to the political establishment. It garners viewers and guests that fit into its political narrative. It is exclusionary by definition and is able to construct an attractive and engaging political talk format around this exclusivity. Parliamentary talk, in contrast, relies the most on politicians and parliamentary business, and is limited by the need to keep politicians coming back onto the show; politicians are a draw card for viewers and provide political and journalistic gravitas for talk shows. Participatory talk is most closely centred on the experiences of its citizen participants and trades on the notion of authenticity. This rhetorical appeal is another audience attraction impulse. It relies implicitly on the promise of being *less mediated* (i.e. less performative or fake) than other forms of political talk.

The second aspect of the production framework relates to ideas. The mixture of ideas (normative, pragmatic and aesthetic) culminates in a production identity. Although the following section will attempt to generalise with regard to the three types of talk, it must be remembered that an *individual* show’s identity is at least somewhat idiosyncratic because it relies on the senior producer’s vision upon commissioning the show. Therefore generalising across many different programmes is likely to omit some complexity.

The three forms of talk aim for different normative democratic functions. Advocacy talk works in an advocacy mode that aims to stoke outrage, justify its own political narrative, and perhaps even mobilise viewers; its political message is simplistic, emotional and easily dichotomised. Parliamentary talk is the most traditional and stable form of journalism: wedded to impartiality, it seeks to inform citizens, hold politicians accountable, analyse politics and foster debate. Participatory talk is grounded in

understanding the lived experience of “ordinary people” and performs a range of functions depending on the particular programme. However, its most common function is fostering horizontal (citizen to citizen) debate, and in the case of a programme like Question Time, vertical talk between citizens and politicians.

Pragmatically, all three types of shows are concerned with maintaining an audience (but not necessarily increasing it), and seek to appeal to some notion of “the audience”.

Advocacy talk is concerned with its niche audience and its own political narrative; this form of talk views the political world in partisan terms and, from the perception of its producers, operates unproblematically because of its highly defined position which stems from a partisan host, its niche audience, and its reliance on an established roster of guests. Parliamentary talk is a somewhat insular form of talk and prone to self-promotion; pragmatically, this is because it is focused on politicians and parliament and the producers worry about how their show is perceived by the political *and* journalistic class; therefore, they produce a centripetal rather than centrifugal form of politics.

Participatory talk is mostly concerned with the performative capital of ordinary people and seeks to weed out those who do not possess this capital. Furthermore, however, participatory talk is the most audience centred in that the producers are highly attuned to how their in-studio audiences think and feel and by extension, this applies to their viewers. Participatory talk is pragmatically focussed on generating audience discussion and interaction. It is an outward looking and less institutionalised form of talk because it relies on non-professionals.

The three types of shows function according to different aesthetic modes. Advocacy talk’s full-throated political engagement lends itself to a fast-paced politics of pugilistic outrage with a heavy visual emphasis. Parliamentary talk’s aesthetic mode is much more subdued. It generally features a moderate amount of visuals, with dialogical elements of humour and sociability thrown in to add flavour to the perceived dryness of much political conversation. Participatory talk features the rawness of the “ordinary” public and therein the unpredictability inherent in a non-professional audience. Emotion is apparent in participatory talk because producers highlight the lived emotional and visceral relationship to the political. In contrast to the high minded and sometimes abstract aesthetical appeal of parliamentary talk, and the simplistic but combative aesthetic of

advocacy talk, participatory talk's currency is the witnessing of ordinary engagement with the political, which has a human interest dynamic.

Finally, producer path dependency works in very similar ways across all types of talk: the initial ideas (normative, pragmatic, and aesthetic) are locked in from the very early days of a show's life, and are then continually instantiated by the producers.

Conclusion: some democratic implications of different modes of political talk

This section draws out some democratic implications for each of the three types of political talk. Advocacy talk serves a niche audience and is likely to be adversarial in challenging the news agenda and what it sees as status quo politics. This will be most apparent when government does not share its political affinities. Advocacy talk serves to puncture the centrist instincts of much of the news and in this regard it is open to more radical voices (serving its partisan agenda) than other forms of talk. It is likely to simplify political issues into unproblematic "common sense" narratives imbued with emotional appeals and us vs. them dichotomies. Viewers of advocacy talk are axiomatically more partisan than the general population and thus more likely to participate in political life. If one of the centralities of democracy is the mobilisation of people supporting political arguments then it follows that advocacy talk is democratically beneficial in this regard. Moreover, because advocacy talk serves a niche audience it is grounded in its audience's desires, moods and sensibilities, reflecting at least the rhetoric of the market as a democratising force.⁷⁶ However, one competing democratic centrality is a deliberative tradition *aiming* towards consensus. Advocacy talk upholds conclusions searching for evidence and is thus damaging to the prospects of a deliberative citizenry and common discussion. Furthermore, advocacy talk, unlike parliamentary and participatory talk, is more likely to feature a mixture of entertainment and politics. This is a function of its commercial, audience maximising instincts and a subtle indicator of its lack of interest in the political as a means to a better world.

⁷⁶ There are familiar problems with this claim; namely, the market recognises only those *consumers* who (are able and willing to) pay.

Parliamentary talk is most likely to be involved with the established news agenda because of its reliance on political guests, its centripetal focus on the parliamentary machinery, its valuation of the traditional journalistic tenets of impartiality and fairness, and its relentless surveillance of similar shows in the media ecology. This form of talk serves to keep its viewers up to date with developments in parliament. Despite its normative commitment to inform and educate, paradoxically, this form of talk is likely to be insular because of its focus on parliament and politicians. It tends to focus on issues of political process, strategy and forecasting, which fits with its insider philosophy. Some forms of parliamentary talk are mediatised – more likely to assert journalistic autonomy – but still follow the news thrust of the day and prioritise debate and discussion. Politicians are most likely to appear on this form of show; in turn, the accountability interview is most likely to occur here, giving citizens a chance to see politicians and journalists interacting on their behalf. Parliamentary talk is most likely to command smallish audiences. Many parliamentary shows attempt to make politics entertaining by overlaying a conversational style and tone. Being the most traditional form of talk, it is likely to narrowly privilege institutional actors. This relates to two democratic points. First, if a citizenry elects political representatives to represent their interests, it follows that forms of journalism that privilege the voices that represent the main citizen body can be democratically justified on this basis. Second, this logic of majoritarian representation necessarily de-emphasises radical, alternative and minority voices. Therefore, there are gains and losses here and in sum, parliamentary talk is open to the charge of elitism but is the most firmly focussed on the politics and institutions of representative democracy.

Participatory talk is unsurprisingly the most concerned with its participants, who are supposedly representative of “ordinary people”. Participatory talk has links to the news agenda because it relies on people talking about current events. It is also the most varied type of talk because audience participation can be structured differently. The most consistent democratic feature is populism, which is likely to manifest as elites vs. the rest, a prioritisation of “common sense” over complexity, and experience over expertise. With an ethos steeped in the people, the democratic implications are multifarious. Democracy is ostensibly about collective self-government which is messy because a) people often want different political outcomes, b) many people do not know what they want (the

common good needs to be discovered), and c) non-elites articulate themselves in different ways. Grounding political talk in “the people” thus opens up a space where the messy everyday reality of political argument of non-elites – their thoughts, aspirations, contradictions and often brilliance – is given oxygen; however, this often takes a populist form, as mentioned, which ignores the very real problem of the need to balance trustee vs. delegate modes of democratic governance. Furthermore, because of the high-pressure nature of live television, producers cannot broadcast voices that do not possess the performative television capital required and they therefore need to screen these “ordinary people” to weed out undesirable contributions. Another view, a more radical version of democratic populism, is more sympathetic to participatory talk. If democracy is about “the people” then how people speak is of no great concern as long as they get to speak. In this regard, participatory talk is most likely to mix a hard news conception of politics (government, policy and public affairs) with the personal, producing a socially grounded news form that is less abstract and elite oriented than parliamentary talk.

The previous three chapters have looked at how political talk shows are produced, why political talk shows appear the way they do, and some of the democratic implications. This has been a study into the hidden (but emerging) world of political talk production. The main point is that the political talk shows that we see on screen are no accident. There are certain production mechanisms – structures, ideas and agency – that operate dynamically but in identifiable ways. This chapter makes the point that certain forms of talk operate in certain ways, with democratic implications. The next chapter picks up on an earlier theme – marketisation and mediatisation – and moves away from production, although relevant insights will be used where possible to interrogate the text. The emphasis is on testing whether marketisation can explain the mediatisation of political talk show content.

Chapter 9: Mediatisation in political talk shows

Introduction

The last three chapters skirted around causal explanations of marketisation's relationship to political content. This chapter takes this up. How do more or less marketised national contexts compare in their political talk television? As discussed previously, mediatisation is the theoretical corollary of marketisation (Strömbäck and Dimitrova, 2011). The analytical approach will proceed by looking at the content of political talk shows and testing the mediatisation indicators. These indicators should be commensurate with the sliding scale of marketisation of the countries. A second – implicit – question is the role of institutions. What role do media institutions play in structuring political talk and how do these compare cross-nationally? The same marketisation-mediatisation logic applies here: more marketised contexts should theoretically have more marketised institutions, and thus more mediatised political talk content.

This chapter tackles the national and institutional questions in different ways. For the first strategy, each country's political talk is analysed discretely for mediatisation indicators. This procedure is beneficial to comparing all shows within *and* across countries because of the wide variety of talk in each country, which brings comparability issues into play (comparing like with like). To address this comparability problem, a second strategy isolates the most common type of political talk show – parliamentary talk shows, which are found across institutions and countries – and compares them cross-nationally. This method provides a control (of type of political talk and institution) to look at mediatisation.

This chapter answers four research questions. How do political talk shows compare to each other in terms of mediatisation salience within each country? To what extent are political talk shows mediatised overall within each country? What is the relationship between institutions and mediatisation? What is the relationship between political talk genre and mediatisation?

What does mediatised political talk look like?

Before analysing mediatisation in political talk we need to operationalise mediatised talk.

As outlined in chapter two, mediatisation is broken down into the following categories.

Interventionism: Mediatised talk is likely to be excessively interventionist to the point of self-absorption and self-aggrandisement. This is distinct from the traditional public interest role of journalism. Mediatised talk gives more space, authority and attention to journalists or pundits than to politicians. It is arguably a symptom of a bad faith model of politics: politicians cannot be trusted, are more than likely to be “spinning”, and are only interested in political gain (over normative aims) and thus the institution of journalism needs to be given more authority because journalists have citizens’ interests at heart. Furthermore, mediatised talk emphasises interpretation; talk will focus on political process and be interested in why something happened, the possible motivations or strategy of the people involved, and the potential political (as opposed to civic) implications. This mode of journalism provides analysis and seeks to get behind the given (or front stage), and into the implicit (or backstage) mechanics of politics.

Game/strategy vs. issues/policy frames: Mediatised framing is likely to focus on political strategy or tactics, on winning and losing, on the horse race and tussle for voters, and the implications of legislative or political battles for political parties. This is in contrast to the issue/policy frame that deals with policy issues and stances, “real world” problems and solutions, and the relevance of all of this to citizens.

Personalisation: Mediatised talk emphasises three aspects of the personal: 1) private lives (families, love life, hobbies etc.) in that it aims to get behind the public image; 2) character and persona (image, credibility, leadership or performance) in that it hones-in on the personal qualities of leaders; and 3) the leaders become the focus instead of political parties or government.

Aesthetics: Mediatised talk relies on sleek visuals, increased pace, regular graphics and VT, as well as mood music. These features visually and aurally punctuate political talk. Mediatised talk highlights a performative host who slips into a melodramatic role: parasocial ingratiation, outrage, amusement and other heightened and emotional modes

of address. Finally, human-interest aspects – human examples to illustrate subjects; dramatic and emotionally engaging subject matter and style; and humorous appeal – are more likely to be apparent in mediatised talk. Together, these aesthetic aspects “ramp up” political talk dynamics. At best they add another layer to, but at worst they shift political talk away from, its humble core: political argument.

This chapter proceeds by systematically looking at each political talk programme to identify manifestations of these mediatisation indicators (see appendix for the coding schema). It then assesses each country and attempts to reach conclusions about the relationship between marketisation (of countries and institutions) and mediatisation of political talk shows.

The United States

The political background to the US sampling period was the 2012 presidential elections. The Republican Romney-Ryan pairing challenged the incumbent Obama-Biden ticket. The sampling period also caught the tail end of the Republican primaries. This background is important to note because elections usually feature more pointed political coverage – for obvious reasons – yet are susceptible to horse-race, game and personalisation tendencies (Iyengar, 2011).

Washington Week: PBS and public service

Washington Week is hosted by Gwen Ifill, who is also a news anchor for PBS News Hour. She is synonymous with the channel. Washington Week is a simple show; it is based solely on an insider roundtable of Washington correspondents discussing the major issues of the week. The correspondents talk about the stories they covered during the week and give insider information. Unsurprisingly, Washington Week assumes a good deal of knowledge about politics. It regularly looks at political minutiae. The motivations of actors, the genesis of legislation, and backroom power brokering are examples of common topics.

Washington Week is highly interpretive because it features a panel of journalists who discuss why something happened and how this fits into the wider political strategy of the political parties. Politicians only appear in soundbites in VT, which cedes control to the

producers; the journalists do all of the talking in the studio. This points to highly mediated political talk: journalistic analysis and journalists themselves are firmly prioritised. As a result of its journalist focus, the political talk was heavily focused on game, strategy, conflict and battle aspects, yet intersperses these with some issues and policy discussion. The journalists were predominantly concerned about how issues “will play”, how to characterise “the debate” and comparing Obama vs. Romney “reactions” to issues or events. There was heavy discussion on political polling, what voters thought about a given issue or debate, and how they might respond.

Because of the presidential campaign, most of the Washington Week political talk prioritised leaders over political parties. A fair amount of discussion concerned the character of the politicians: leadership ability, credibility with voters, and general competence in campaigning. However, much of this was linked to talk about the election campaign. There were only occasional references to the personal lives of the politicians (Obama’s middle class background and Romney’s large number of children). Overall Washington Week was moderately personalised.

Aesthetically Washington week is a very subdued show. The tone is civil and restrained, but conversational. Performative address is muted and there are only occasional humorous aspects. It remains a pared-down and sober political talk show. These aesthetic indicators are, however, the exception to Washington Week’s mediated rule. Despite being a public service show Washington Week is highly mediated, which stems from its decision to shun politicians and foreground journalists.

Meet the Press: NBC and legacy network television news

The basic formula for Meet the Press features newsmaker interviews followed by a press roundtable discussion. David Gregory anchors the show in a moderator fashion. Out of around 48 minutes of airtime, at least half of this is devoted to newsmaker interviews. In terms of overt commercialism, Meet the Press remains a serious and sober political talk show because it does not contain tabloid excess, outrage, or other attention seeking mechanisms. It is a straightforward show to analyse because of its consistent format and formulae.

Meet the Press is topically bound to Washington centric political concerns; at the time of this study election based issues were common (“the women’s vote”, gay marriage, healthcare, the election race itself, and the economy). Meet the Press has less of an insider feel and approach than Washington Week, which stems from its prioritisation of political guests. It even has a mixture of game/strategy and policy/issues framing, which, again, is traceable to the inclusion of newsmakers themselves in host+1 or host+2 interviews. Newsmakers generally want to talk about issues and policies; they often denounce their rival’s positions with political argument and advocate why or how their own, or their party’s approaches are better. This leads to argument that is framed around policy and issues rather than game and strategy. The opposite is true of the press roundtable segments, which are heavily laden with game/strategy frames resulting from pundits offering meta-analysis.

Looking at interventionism Meet the Press is a tale of two halves. In the straight-ahead news interview segments the ratio of journalist vs. guest talk and visibility is tilted towards political guests. Interruptions and interventions are civil and appropriate. Interpretation is subdued (except for a slight host tendency to make implicit arguments via a line of questioning) because the political guests get a fair amount of time to elucidate their arguments. In the roundtable segments the talk is more likely to shut out politicians’ voices by prioritising journalists’ voices and in doing so, give priority to journalistic interpretation and analysis, which usually looks at insider issues around political impact, strategy and future political moves.

The interview segments are less personalised than the roundtable segments. They generally show slight hints of a private life focus, and an even mix of leaders and party talk, but are quite heavily focused on character (leadership, credibility, appearance and so on). The roundtable segments generally focus more on private lives, have a heavy emphasis on leaders over party, and contain more character focussed talk than interview segments; i.e. this type of segment is personalised the most.

Meet the Press has subdued aesthetic indicators. Performative address is muted outside of standard introductions and goodbyes. One programme was devoted to political scandal (which involved sex and prostitution), which is arguably human interest in its

dramatic, emotional appeal. However, overall, Meet the Press is a serious and sober political talk show and dispenses with overt aesthetic elements (outside of its sleek production elements like big screens in the background and shiny blue surfaces).

In summary, because of its bifurcated structure Meet the Press has mixed mediatisation indicators. When political actors are present a segment becomes less mediatised. In the roundtable press discussion segment Meet the Press is more insider oriented, interpretive and personalised, and focussed on winners and losers, political strategy, and future prognostics than on straight interview segments. That is, the focus tends to be on “political impact”, how issues will “play”, the appearance and rhetoric of candidates, and polling and electioneering generally. Getting a mixture of press members and political insider strategists around a table to offer political analysis pushes political talk into a centripetal (inward looking) rather than centrifugal (outward citizen-oriented) mode.

The O’Reilly Factor: Fox News and prime time 24-hour news

The O’Reilly Factor has a strict format that relies on a highly segmented approach. The crux of the show is O’Reilly lecturing viewers, host+1 interviews, or host+2 interview/debate hybrids. Topically, The Factor is a hybrid political talk programme that ranges from the highly political, occurring usually at the top of the programme, to the almost wholly entertaining topics, which are near the end. The Factor has a real running time of around 45 minutes. Most of the segments do not last for more than 7 minutes, reflecting a bite-sized political approach.

The Factor is the most interventionist programme in the sample. Interviews or debates with actual newsmakers or politicians are rare. When politicians do appear it is usually in a pre-recorded clip from a previous announcement or speech that gives context to the upcoming analysis. The staple of the programme is the host interviewing either “Fox News Contributors” who are conservative pundits, or partisan political insiders (from the Democrats and Republicans) called “strategists”. Although the show is famous for its raucous nature, which stems from O’Reilly, argumentative cross-talk only usually occurs when a Democrat appears (at most, in one segment out of five or six per show). The prioritisation of pundits and strategists marginalises actual newsmakers and pushes the discussion into an interpretivist mode. How could it not? In the absence of actual

politicians, the only thing left to speculate about is *why* something is happening, the possible motivations of the “players” involved, and the likely implications. Added to this, O’Reilly regularly chimes in with his own analysis. The intervention impulse is ultimately about authority, and in *The O’Reilly Factor*, political authority is not granted to politicians, but to pundits, the host, and strategists who interpret the political world for viewers.

The *O’Reilly Factor* does not suffer from a sustained obsession with strategy and process but imbues its often-heated policy and issues discussions with some game and strategy elements. Often O’Reilly lectures the Republicans on their political strategy or argues against the Democrat strategy. Segments that are mostly entertaining do not feature either political frame.

The *Factor* emphasises the private lives of politicians, yet it includes some focus on the private lives of other “actors”. For example, one segment looked at the US Olympian hurdler Lolo Jones, who the *New York Times* claimed was more interested in exploiting her sex appeal than her athletics. The segment defended Jones with a Fox news pundit saying: ‘Maybe she was just too conservative, too Christian and too moral for the mainstream media’.⁷⁷ The *Factor* heavily personalises politics by looking at leaders rather than their party. For example, ‘President Obama’s policy incentivizes bad behavior and punishes good behaviour’.⁷⁸ The *Factor* also has an emphasis on personal-political character – image, leadership, credibility and appearance – that ties into a leader over party emphasis. Discussion often centres on a politician’s appearance or credibility from the perspective of potential voters. For example, O’Reilly notes that ‘People have a lot of questions about Mitt Romney, who is the most undefined challenger I’ve seen in my lifetime, so I think there’s uncertainty about who this guy is and how good a president he might be’.⁷⁹

The *Factor* has a distinctive aesthetic pull. Its visuals, slashes and music are upbeat, fast paced and sleek. The interview segments are broken up by graphics or VT. The defining aesthetic feature is performative address. The host is chameleonic in that he switches from ingratiating friend, to acerbic but witty uncle, to outraged heartland warrior. Most

⁷⁷ August 10, 2012.

⁷⁸ August 14, 2012.

⁷⁹ August 10, 2012.

of the exchange that takes place is doggedly emotional. This mercurial emotive mix adds a palpable texture to the show and is central to its appeal. The Factor brushes with human interest aspects in giving human faces to problems as well as adding regular humorous segments like “Miller Time”, “tip of the day”, and “pinheads and patriots”. These human interest tendencies by no means overwhelm the political content of the show but together give the programme a fun, dramatic, and visual appeal that is commensurate with a show trying hard to appeal to (or entertain) its audience. O’Reilly is, after all, proud of being the number one cable show.

In summary, The Factor is a mostly highly mediatised show. It is politically simplistic because it prioritises only one conservative conclusion for each segment; i.e. it avoids political complexity. Its internal dynamics are slightly more complicated because it is a hybrid show. That is, it mixes entertainment and politics in equal measure. The political segments are meant to be just as entertaining as the entertaining segments. As such, it shows a high level of mediatisation overall, but it still features some normative-political aspects. It is highly interventionist and interpretivist yet the discussion usually has a mix of policy and issues talk, and strategy and game framing. Personalisation is apparent, with a focus on characters and leaders over parties, but the show is not excessively focused on these aspects. Aesthetically, The Factor relies on emotive engagement and a smattering of graphics and VT to spice up the talking heads. Occasional human interest talk is apparent, but again this is not overwhelming.

Mediatisation in American talk

How do political talk shows compare to each other according to their mediatisation indicators? In terms of interventionism Washington Week only includes Washington reporters which completely ignores politicians and is therefore highly interpretivist. The Factor has a similar tendency but involves the occasional politician. However, it is slightly more interpretivist overall than Washington Week because of its piston-like partisan push. Meet the Press is the least interventionist (but it still has interventionist tendencies) of the three because of its underscoring of political guests.

Washington Week shows more game and strategy talk than The Factor, which is a function of guests and its format. The Factor features a mixture of pundits and partisan

strategists (and occasionally politicians), who while being interpretivist and often talking in game and strategy terms, offer policy and issues based argument. Meanwhile Washington Week only features reporters who are concerned with strategy and game issues; most of the talk centres around political process and only obliquely references policy. Meet the Press has a split structure in its political interview and press roundtable, which generates more issues/policy talk in the former and more game/strategy talk in the latter.

Both Washington Week and The Factor demonstrate a preference for leader over party, as well as a focus on character (image and appearance, leadership, and credibility). These two aspects were most likely heightened because of the presidential election race where issues around campaign leadership and strategy are more naturally emphasised. Meet the Press similarly favours leaders over parties and regularly looks at political character, but to much lesser extent than Washington Week or The Factor. All three shows only occasionally discuss the private lives of politicians.

Meet the Press and Washington Week have subdued aesthetic appeal because the talk is civil and restrained, graphics and VT are used sparingly and mostly for context, and performative address is pared down. In contrast, The Factor's performative address is full throttled, its argumentation is often heated, and cross-talk is common; furthermore, while Washington Week and Meet the Press forgo sustained human interest elements, The Factor incorporates human interest aspects like humour, dramatic story material, or a human face to personify issues. The Factor also relies more heavily on visuals like graphics and VT to punctuate its political talk.

So what of mediatisation within American political talk? All of the political talk shows analysed are at least moderately mediatised because of their marginalisation of politicians and foregrounding of journalistic analysis. However, important differences exist with corresponding implications. In sum, commercial Meet the Press has the least mediatisation comparatively, but moderate mediatisation overall, while Washington Week (a PBS show) and The Factor (Fox News) have similar (high) levels of mediatisation, but with slightly different mixtures of indicators. Therefore, the explanatory power of the mediatisation thesis at the institutional level (that more commercial institutions will be

more mediatised than less commercial institutions) does not hold given the similarities between Washington Week and The Factor. Furthermore, looking at the genre of talk, Washington Week and Meet the Press are parliamentary forms of talk and The Factor is an advocacy form of talk. Therefore, genre cannot be an explanatory factor for mediatisation because of the differences in mediatisation between Washington Week and Meet the Press, which are both parliamentary forms of talk, and the similarities between Washington Week and the advocacy-based Factor. Yet it is interesting to note that America does not have participatory versions of political talk on the main channels other than traditionally tabloid extremes like The Jerry Springer Show or relationship and lifestyle based shows like The Oprah Winfrey Show (which ended in 2011).

The main driver of more or less mediatisation is simply the commitment to talk to politicians or political guests rather than pundits, strategists, or journalists. Meet the Press is the least mediatised show in the American sample because of the large amount of space that the producers give for political guests. With political guests prioritised, discussion is more likely to be policy and issues based, less interventionist and interpretist, less personalised, and feature fewer aesthetic markers overall.

Finer-grained differences between the shows also call into question simplistic assertions about the mediatisation of countries. For instance, if we want to call American news media “mediatised” it follows that there must be something about the macro-level that relates to mediatisation. If political talk shows have different levels of mediatisation, then this relationship between a country and its news does not operate in such a direct way (otherwise content outcomes would be convergent within a country). Notwithstanding, however, it does seem that American political talk is at least somewhat mediatised at a minimum level overall, with variations past a minimum baseline, which lends qualified support to a country level explanation.

Australia

Three major political issues in the sample period are important to note. The first is the introduction of a Carbon Tax, which was controversial because the Prime Minister Julia

Gillard had initially promised that her government would not introduce one.⁸⁰ The second issue is the political scandals involving politicians Peter Slipper (parliamentary expenses fraud and sexual harassment) and Craig Thomson (union expenses fraud), both of whom were aligned to the Labor government.⁸¹ Finally, there is the complicated issue of Gillard's leadership. She successfully challenged the sitting Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, for the leadership of the Labor party to become Australia's first female MP, and she subsequently faced a hostile media spurred on by the leader of the Coalition, Tony Abbott (Murphy, 2013).

Insiders: The ABC and public service

Insiders is principally a panel-based show that runs for about 60 minutes. The host, Barrie Cassidy anchors the panel discussion. There is one major (12-minute) interview with a front bench politician each week. Insiders is a traditional parliamentary show and the very name of the show befits its political focus. It relentlessly looks at parliament but does so in a slightly irreverent way while maintaining overall political sobriety.

Insiders is a highly interventionist show because it is dominated by journalists and pundits. This results in interpretive modes of talk as speakers give context and background, and offer political analysis. Furthermore, the producers regularly opt for edited packages and clips that summarise the political developments of the week. While politicians do appear in these packages, they are heavily ventriloquised because their appearances are edited, often to humorous effect.

The political framing of talk is a mixture of game/strategy and issues/policy, with slightly more game and strategy than issues and policy. This stems directly from the fact that most of the show relies on political pundits who naturally seem to talk about the meta-game and strategy of politics. Issues and policy talk are not absent, however, with pundits often giving informative background information and explaining government and opposition policy. Furthermore, the 12-minute political interview accounts for a lot of policy and issues talk.

⁸⁰ There were technical differences between the definition of an emissions trading scheme and a tax. (Author Unknown, 2014)

⁸¹ For the background to Peter Slipper, see (Dubois, 2012); for the background to Craig Thomson, see (McClymont, 2013).

Insiders is personalised, although this is arguably a function of the concurrent Slipper and Thompson political scandals that occurred at the time of the research, which pushed much of the discussion towards the private lives and political character of these two men. Furthermore, the Australian political climate was also characterised by extremely negative politics, mostly aimed at the childless, atheist and unwed Julia Gillard, at the behest of the pugilistic Coalition leader Tony Abbott, aided by major press outlets, which are centre-right and either Murdoch or Fairfax controlled (Howitt, 2013). This resulted in many character-based issues (leadership, credibility and trust) of both leaders being discussed. Moreover, the political cartoon segment involved political character and caricature. Finally, as opposed to just looking at leaders over parties, the discussion blended both.

Aesthetically, Insiders frequently relies on VT to review political developments or provide context for the ensuing panel discussion. This ventriloquises politicians because the power of editorial and political framing is ceded to the producers. The panel discussion also has a casual demeanour that befits a Sunday morning. Finally, Insiders has a segment that looks at the political cartoons of the week and pictures of the cartoons are displayed. This segment is humorous because it deals with caricatures of politicians and is light hearted, which falls into satire and human-interest territory.

To conclude, Insiders is one of The ABC's flagship political programmes and is a main course in the news junkies' Sunday morning diet. However, its mediatisation indicators – interventionism, framing, personalisation and aesthetics – are at least somewhat mediatised, which stems from its reliance on a panel of pundits for most of the programme. If mediatisation is a measure of the centrality and dominance of market-based journalism and by extension, the prioritisation of journalists over politicians, then Insiders throws up some problems because its public service institutional groundings are contradicted by its mediatisation indicators.

Insight: SBS and multicultural public service

Insight is a participatory talk show; it aims to foster a multi-layered debate by mixing "ordinary" first people's voices with expert or official voices. In this way, the discussion problematises a priori assumptions about a given issue. Insight covers political issues from

what might be described as a “bottom up” approach; in other words, from people who have *experience*. Each episode is dedicated to one topic. Topics in the sample included the state of Australian manufacturing, the war in Afghanistan, the withdrawal of Australian troops, polygamy, Aboriginal identity and immigration. The host, Jenny Brockie, runs the discussion as an open forum and calls on the participants (most of whom have been pre-screened as desirable contributors) to contribute.

Insight is non-interventionist. Its host plays a probing and clarifying role and the majority of the speech and screen time is devoted to the participants. There is a notable lack of journalistic interpretation because, again, the participants talk from experience as opposed to commenting *on* politics. Politicians appear rarely, with only one former politician appearing in the sample. The conversation is always civil and respectful even though the participants are often poles apart in their argumentative positioning and lived experience. In sum, either experts or “ordinary” people with experience of an issue make up most of the guests on the show, which results in non-mediatised talk on this intervention measure.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, there was no meta-analysis of politics, or discussion of polling, strategy, or winners and losers. Instead, the discussion was heavily issues based and often combined a consideration of those affected by an issue with more abstract aspects like addressing public policy. For instance, an episode based on asylum seekers and immigration covered the relevant positions of the debate as well as mooted potential reforms.⁸²

Related to the extensive use of first person testimony, the discussion was personal; the participants regularly talked about their own experiences in relation to an issue. In a show about Australian manufacturing and globalisation, for example, recently laid-off workers spoke about the difficulty of finding new work and up-skilling while industrial manufacturers spoke about the realities of business and their decisions to send their manufacturing offshore.⁸³ Political character and political leaders did not register. The

⁸² 28 August 2012.

⁸³ 24 April 2012.

talk was mostly about around what the government was, could, or should be doing; the discussion was very rarely in party political terms.

Aesthetically, Insight has a distinct and sustained human-interest appeal because of its reliance on first person experience, which can be emotional, lively or funny. VT is used for context or as mini-case studies spotlighting a participant's experience. Insight is free from major production interventions and outside of the stated aspects the predominant aesthetic attraction remains the civic and deliberative nucleus and not the bells and whistles of production.

If mediatisation measures journalistic intervention, then Insight firmly prioritises (pre-selected) citizen and expert voices over parliamentary voices, and on balance, scores minimally on most of our mediatisation indicators. Insight is unique in its absence of politician and journalistic interventions, as well as its firm prioritisation of political issues that have social resonance (issues that are not narrowly related to parliamentary ping-pong). Yet Insight's talk is heavy laden with emotional and human-interest aspects like first person testimony, although it manages to avoid tabloid extremes. Despite these aesthetic aspects, Insight's core mission remains problematising issues by fostering dynamic and well-rounded debate.

Meet the Press: Network Ten and commercial free to air television

Meet the Press is one of the most straightforward programmes in the sample. The 30-minute show is split into three segments. In the first segment, the host interviews a senior politician (or newsmaker). Two journalists join the host for the second and third segments in which the three question the political guest. A new guest occasionally appears in the last segment. The format is closely aligned to the interview set-up with almost no cross-panel interaction or superfluous talk at all. Front bench politicians or senior newsmakers are unfalteringly prioritised; the host and journalists are simply interrogators.

The show is about what the political guest has to say about issues. Therefore, journalistic interpretivism is rare, as are ostentatious interruptions. Meet the Press prioritises a hard news conception of politics and in the sample studied in this research, the discussion was

focused on policy and issues; for instance, the carbon tax, the economy, childcare policy, and a discussion of the budget with The Treasurer Wayne Swann. Political discussion is depersonalised in terms of the private lives of politicians or political character. Some of the discussion did feature the Peter Slipper and Craig Thomson scandals, but this emphasised procedural issues such as whether Slipper could remain as Speaker of The House. The talk mostly prioritised the political party or “the government” instead of leaders, although some leader focus – on Tony Abbot and Julia Gillard in particular – was evident. In line with the other measures, *Meet the Press* is aesthetically reserved. There are minimal visuals, packaging, performative address, or human-interest elements.

In sum, despite being titled *Meet the Press*, the press itself is actually not as central as in the other shows; rather, journalists question politicians and newsmakers. As a result, *Meet the Press* has very low mediatisation indicators. Problematically for the mediatisation thesis, the show appears on a commercial free to air network but is less mediatised than *Insiders*, a public service programme.

The Bolt Report: Network Ten and advocacy politics on commercial free to air television

The Bolt Report is a 30 minute, fast-paced and polemical programme that covers a narrow range of advocacy politics: “boat people” asylum seekers, anti-green politics, anti-Gillard’s leadership, problems in the economy, political scandal, and government waste. The Bolt Report has a simple format. Segments come in one of three forms: host to camera monologues, panel debates, or interviews. Participants tend to talk in pithy statements of commonsensical “fact”; the most common scenario is for guests to share Bolt’s position, rendering the political conversation predictable.

The Bolt Report is highly interventionist. It is extremely interpretivist, with the host and guests not being afraid to use pejorative language and state their positions in unequivocal terms. For instance, the following quote is from the host, Bolt, in a monologue to the camera:⁸⁴

You probably think you’ve seen enough government waste to last a lifetime. Enough Pink Batts and overpriced school halls. Well strap yourselves in. Treasurer

⁸⁴ 22 April 2012..

Wayne Swann this week released a report on how the Gillard government will invest ten billion dollars of your money in green power – especially in schemes which banks won't touch because they are too risky.

Alongside this right-wing interpretivism, journalist-guest visibility is variable. Some segments consist of host to camera rants (high visibility), while others consist of the host and two panellists (usually former politicians or political strategists) in a more traditional and even-handed panel format. The discussion is always civil and good-natured, mostly because the panellists tend to agree with each other.

Political discussion is evenly split between game/strategy talk and policy/issues talk. Some segments, usually the panel segment, are highly game and strategy based, while Bolt's polemical rants are usually issue and policy based, even if relentlessly one-sided. Apart from glancing mentions, the private lives of politicians do not feature. However, The Bolt Report is firmly concerned with political character, and in particular, the then Prime Minister Julia Gillard's leadership and credibility. Tony Abbot's character (more authentic than Gillard's) was often discussed, as were the Thomson and Slipper scandals, which both related to character and morality. Talk switched between prioritising leaders and parties because personalities were often linked to parties; for example, Gillard's poor leadership with an out of touch Labor party.

The Bolt Report has a sleek and professional look. Bolt's show makes extensive use of VT throughout, the staple diet of which is clips of politicians speaking. Bolt also has highly produced graphic and textual slashes running across the screen; sound effects and dramatic music are liberally employed. This all adds pace and urgency to its aesthetic; it is firmly a tabloid-style television show, with another example of this being the heavily branded nature of the segments. Bolt is not a natural presenter but he manages to inject melodramatic outrage, absurdity and scepticism into his address. His pieces to camera are relentlessly negative and hyperbolic. Finally, the show is not without humour, with Bolt being at pains to point out the "absurdity" of left-wing government.

The Bolt Report, in summary, is a highly mediatised political talk show: it is heavily interventionist in constantly pushing a political position; the production and talk bear the visible marks of aesthetic consideration; political leaders are regularly prioritised, and political character – leadership, trust, credibility, and morality – is often analysed; and the

discussion regularly slips into game and strategy frames. Interestingly for our mediatisation hypothesis, The Bolt Report comes from the same institution, Network Ten, as Meet the Press, yet shows wildly different mediatisation indicators more akin to the *public service* show *Insiders*.

Showdown: 24-hour Sky News

Showdown is a parliamentary show focussed on hard news policy-based topics. It airs Monday to Thursday in the early evenings on Sky News, a 24-hour news channel. It is based around interviews with current and former politicians or panel discussions; the host, Peter van Onselen, sporadically opines to the camera via monologue. The show remains serious overall but has a casual – distinctly Australian – conversational style.

Showdown is not an overly interventionist show. Most guests are politicians or former politicians, which means that the talk tends to be “political” as opposed to a meta-analysis of politics. However, the host directly states his opinion with regularity, which shows a relaxation of strict impartiality and a tendency towards interpretation. A typical example: ‘I firmly believe that despite the improved primary numbers ... this really is the opportunity for Labour to strike, change leaders, and expose an unpopular opposition leader [Abbot]’.⁸⁵ Aside from a regular but not dominating penchant for opinionated comments by the host, the political talk mostly consists of political actors arguing for or against policies. Speaking and screen time are roughly even among the participants and disruption are minimal.

The political framing of the discussion is serious, showing mostly issues and policy discussion, which again stems from its political guests. For instance, the introduction of the carbon tax, education and defence policy, and the housing market and economy are a selection of the issues that were discussed in detail. Meta-political comment around winning and losing, and political strategy and power, although not absent, were not salient or sustained concerns of the programme.

Apart from an occasional foray into the private lives of politicians – for example, by referencing the birth of politician Ed Husic’s baby – Showdown is de-personalised on this

⁸⁵ 29 May 2012.

measure. Analysis of political character registered somewhat but not overwhelmingly. Julia Gillard's leadership, character, credibility and trustworthiness were a common concern, as were similar issues for the Coalition leader Tony Abbot. Adding to the character focus were the Peter Slipper and Craig Thomson scandals, both of which relate to issues of morality, trust, and leadership. Furthermore, and connected to the non-dominance of character issues overall, most of the talk related either to the government or political parties and was not generally focussed on the leaders of the parties.

Showdown is based around the talk of guests and the host, without much else going on. Visuals, graphics, VT and pictures are used sparingly, if at all. Showdown is tonally distinct. The host mixes a personalised style and occasional emotive display with straight laced and probing journalistic address. He has a tendency to make assertions that are barely disguised as questions (often tagging the question at the end: "don't you agree"? or "surely"?); as a result, the show has an informal, humorous, and pared-down political tone while remaining serious and avoiding tabloid or human interest extremes.

In summary, Showdown shows only mild and intermittent mediatisation indicators. It is fairly low in interventionism apart from a tendency for the host to opine. The political framing is mostly issues and policy based, with occasional game and strategy frames creeping in. The talk is mostly depersonalised, with touches of character, but a firm focus on government and parties. Finally, Showdown is aesthetically subdued but has a distinctly informal and humorous approach to politics.

Mediatisation and Australia

The Bolt Report is the most interventionist, with sustained and argumentative monologues, a relentless right-wing interpretivism, and few politicians appearing. This is followed by Insiders, which consists mainly of a panel of pundits, and foregrounds journalists over politicians. Showdown mixes a prioritisation of politicians with a highly opinionated host and thus falls in the middle on interventionism, while Insight and Meet the Press show low levels of interventionism.

Framing tells a similar story. The Bolt Report and Insiders are more likely to have a higher salience of game/strategy frames but a mixture of game/strategy and policy/issue frames

overall. Meet the Press and Showdown show the firmest policy/issues orientation. Insight is completely focused on issues, but in a socially grounded manner.

Personalisation indicators reveal a less straightforward picture. Insight is the most personalised show because the participants talk about their personal experiences related to the topic of the programme. Yet the show avoids talk around personal character or leaders of political parties and is likely to talk in terms of “the government”. Insiders consistently relies on personal lives and personal character – from the Slipper and Thomson scandals – yet has a mixed focus on leaders and parties. The Bolt Report ignores private lives, is heavily concerned with issues of political character, and has a mixed leaders and party focus. Meet the Press and Showdown are the least personalised overall. They show only a minor private lives focus and some minor character focus, and tend to look at the government as a whole as opposed to party leaders or political parties.

The Bolt Report features the most aesthetics in having sleek production, lots of VT, emotive display and outrage, and partisan sentiment. Insiders has a lot less reliance on aesthetics than The Bolt Report, but still more than the other shows. Insiders uses VT related to the political week as an introduction to segments and throughout as discussion pieces. This practice ventriloquises politicians and is thus interventionist. Insiders also has a slight comedic edge in the panel segment. Insight uses aesthetic appeal by way of the human-interest underpinning of its show (first person testimony, emotion and social-political issues), as well as incorporating VT that is usually a mini-case study of the issue under discussion featuring a participant on the programme. Showdown does not show a sustained use of aesthetics apart from the opinionated and personal style of the host and occasional humorous quip by either the host or guests. Meet the Press is the most aesthetically subdued show because it is completely centred on the political interview and is conducted in a reserved style.

What conclusions can we draw about mediatisation in Australia? First and most obviously, political talk shows are not equally mediatised. The Bolt Report shows the most sustained mediatisation followed by Insiders. In the medium range – yet awkwardly measured by this mediatisation framework – is Insight. Finally, Showdown and Meet the Press register low mediatisation indicators. These divergent mediatisation levels in different political

talk shows call into question the link between marketisation and mediatisation. If different shows demonstrate divergent mediatisation levels overall (and within each measure), then this cannot be clearly attributed to a macro-level cause (because there are different outcomes).

Second, the hypothesised connections between marketisation and mediatisation embodied via public service and commercial institutional factors, do not hold. *Insiders* is a public service programme (ABC) yet shows high levels of mediatisation compared with other non-PSB political talk shows. *Meet the Press*, which airs on commercial Network Ten, has some of the least mediatised talk in the sample, but *The Bolt Report* which is from the same network is the most mediatised overall. This makes simplistic institutional explanations untenable. Furthermore, *Meet the Press* (Network Ten) and *Showdown* (Sky News) show much less mediatisation than *Insiders*, a public service programme, which again gives reason to doubt the link between marketisation, institutions and mediatisation of political talk show content.

Third, what about the role of genre and mediatisation? We would expect different genres to align with different levels of mediatisation, yet this is not the case. For example, while *The Bolt Report* is an advocacy programme and has the most salient mediatisation, *Insiders* is a parliamentary programme and is also highly mediatised. Moreover, *Meet the Press* – another parliamentary show – displays less mediatisation salience than *Insiders*. This does not give credible evidence for a simplistic relationship between genre of talk and mediatisation because *Meet the Press* and *Insiders* are both parliamentary shows but they have different levels of mediatisation.

The United Kingdom

No one issue dominated UK politics in 2012 and the political environment was more benign compared to the other countries. Large issues included the Olympics, Chancellor Osborne's "omnishambles" budget, The Leveson Inquiry, education reforms, economic growth and the recession, and immigration.

The Andrew Marr Show: Heavyweight interviews and the BBC

The Andrew Marr Show is a 60-minute programme that airs on Sunday mornings. Its core is two long-form interviews. Marr (separately) interviews two frontbench politicians: one from government and one from the opposition. The two politicians are usually drawn from different ministerial areas. The rest of the show is an odd mixture, featuring a Sunday morning paper review and discussion, two news bulletins, a weather report, and one or two cultural interviews. The show finishes with a performance from a recognisable band or artist. The Andrew Marr Show is one of the main spaces where top political talent are regularly interviewed in the UK. However, it insists on including cultural interviews with theatre performers or occasionally, sports stars. This creates an odd dynamic because the entertainment segments are very different from the serious political segments. It is also evidence of a kind of highbrow hybridity.

Marr gives reasonable speaking space and visibility to his political guests and journalistic disruption and interpretation is minimal. The Sunday morning paper review, consisting of a journalist, an actor or broadcaster, and an MP, is somewhat interventionist because members attempt to explain the significance of a story, or cover process related detail; however, the segment mostly serves as a review of the news agenda rather than an in-depth analytical space. Regardless of the segment, the conversation is civil. Overall, The Andrew Marr Show is minimally interventionist because it allows a lot of space for politicians to talk.

The show remains policy and issues focused which relates to having high-level politicians as guests. These one-to-one interviews consist mostly of issues and policy based talk, but contain regular glimpses of strategy and game talk. That is, game and strategy talk forms a noticeable part of the talk – around winning and losing elections, the battle for voters, party strategy, and parliamentary procedure –but this form of talk does not overwhelm the political conversation. The newspaper review has the most strategy and game talk, which is a function of guests discussing newspaper stories (and not having much else to say). The cultural interviews do not register on this indicator because political subject matter is not the focus.

The Andrew Marr Show is only lightly personalised, reflecting a collective and abstract conception of political organisation and action. The private lives of political actors are rarely mentioned. There is a slight tendency to delve into issues of character, which tend to be leadership, appearance, image, or credibility related. Party over leader talk is mostly prioritised in the long-form interviews, but the newspaper review is a faintly more leader centric discussion.

Visually, The Andrew Marr Show is a very basic show.⁸⁶ The political interviews do not have graphics or visual aids. The newspaper review flashes shots of the newspaper story being discussed onscreen. VT plays during the cultural interview segments, and is either sporting clips (for sports guests) or theatre/drama/movie clips for actors. Most of the conversation is free from overt performative address. The show does not have overt human-interest elements (dramatic or emotional subject matter) or humorous appeals. Yet the cultural segments skirt close to this in terms of providing “non-political but interesting” subject matter.

To summarise, The Andrew Marr Show is a quirky programme because it awkwardly mixes serious politics with makeshift cultural segments; this stems from the legacy of its forerunner, *Breakfast with Frost*. However, it does not show salient mediatisation indicators overall. It is mostly policy and issues based. It is minimally interventionist and personalised, and contains subdued aesthetics. However, the inclusion of cultural segments that are resolutely non-political, as well as closing the programme with a band, shows a concern with entertainment, culture, and ultimately, hybridity.⁸⁷

Sunday Politics: The BBC and Westminster politics

The Sunday politics is a highly branded and segmented show. Regular segments include: “Top Story”, which consists of one or two interviews on a topic; “The Sunday Interview”, which is a host+1 interview with a senior politician; “Head to Head”, where two people debate binary positions on a topic; and the last segment is always “The Week Ahead”,

⁸⁶ Ignoring the news bulletins and weather reports, which are not political talk.

⁸⁷ There has been some public consternation about the band segment at the end of the programme. The show’s previous political guests sit on a sofa where they can be seen watching the band. One Twitter commenter complains: ‘Is there anything more toe-curlingly embarrassing than watching politicians awkwardly watching the music section on Andrew Marr?’ (Author Unknown, 2013)

which is a pundit discussion about issues raised in the programme as well as a preview of the coming week. Quirky contextualising VT packages are also spliced in-between these segments. Sunday Politics is unique in that around 20 of its 70 minutes are given to regional versions of the programme, which follow an interview format with MPs or MEPs.⁸⁸ Sunday Politics packs many guests – mostly senior or middle ranking MPs – into its one-hour airtime. It is somewhat of an insider show; it tends to look at the internal mechanics of Westminster, but this is tempered by its wry and amusing tone that stems from its host, Andrew Neil, who breathes some fun and mischief into the show.

Sunday Politics is a non-interventionist and non-interpretivist show overall. Most of the programme commits to questioning politicians fairly and facilitating robust debate. Andrew Neil is somewhat disruptive in his questioning style, but he does not overwhelm the political speakers. However, there are a few interventionist and interpretivist aspects of the show like the VTs and the Week Ahead segment. The VTs are generally used as contextualising aids for the forthcoming interview and often feature politicians, yet the packages are still highly edited (and often amusingly funny). The Week Ahead segment consists of a host plus three journalists who offer political comment and analysis (which is highly interpretivist and speculative).

The political framing indicators follow a similar trajectory to the interventionist measures. Overall, issue and policy aspects are the focus, yet the discussion tends to regularly but not outrageously flirt with game and strategy talk. The focus is usually on issues and policy in segments featuring political guests, while pundit-based segments and to a lesser extent, VT packages are more game, strategy and process based. Politicians come on to debate policy related issues and give their take on the latest political developments. To give an example: each week the London programme did a long form interview with a mayoral candidate for the London Mayoral election in 2012; these interviews were mostly policy and issue based and had a local flavour.

Sunday Politics does not show a high degree of personalisation. Apart from the occasionally jokingly sardonic comment about Tories being “posh boys”, Sunday Politics avoids talk about the private lives of political guests. There are hints of a character focus;

⁸⁸ There are eleven regional programmes as well as one each for Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland.

in the sample for this research the discussion sometimes centred on the leadership, credibility, or appearance of the major party leaders. However, this is not overwhelming and more likely to occur in the pundit sections. Finally, the focus on either a political leader or party is mixed. Sunday Politics sometimes stresses more abstract issues related to party politics or government while at other times it combines a leader and party focus.

Sunday Politics has an identifiable aesthetic look and feel. It avoids an overly sleek production style in favour of a more pared-down look. However, segments are branded with their own headline titles and music that is thematically linked to the show's opening sequence; yet while quirky (the music evokes a playful and amusing feeling without being kitsch), the visuals and music are purposefully simple in avoiding crescendos and whizz-bang dynamics. A subtle but important point is the delicate and multi-layered lacquering of tone. The main coat is the sober, traditional, argumentative, and policy-related fare of politics, which is then mixed with a top finish of self-amusing irreverence. This stems from the host, Andrew Neil, who uses a wry turn-of-phrase and a mischievous delivery. Furthermore, the visuals used in contextualising the VTs are regularly caricatures of politicians; the style of the VTs is often ironically literal but informative, for example, talking about economic growth statistics while the presenter is in a garden.

In summary, Sunday Politics shows an occasional reliance on mediatisation indicators, but for the most part only shows a low mediatisation salience. With a guest profile that is firmly (Westminster) political, Sunday Politics commits to talking about public affairs issues and policy and gives a fair amount of space and time to political guests. It also steers clear of excessive personalisation while its aesthetic style adds an amusing tone without overriding the actual political thrust.

Question Time: Participatory public service and the BBC

Question Time is a long-running programme and is appointment viewing for many. It serves as a quasi-public sphere. The crux of the format is that "normal" people (who are in studio participants) put their questions and concerns to a panel of politicians and a mixture of media pundits, celebrities or businesspeople, who argue their positions. The panellists respond to each other's points as well as to the audience's points. Audience questions are used as a starting point and frame the discussion; David Dimbleby, the

chair, polices the discussion. The panel members, being mostly parliamentarians or from the media, generally express well-argued and logical positions. The audience questions usually relate to national headlines: the economy, welfare, housing, confidence in the government, banking, drugs, and the UK Citizenship test were common topics in the sample analysed. There is a mixture of government-elite discussion among the panel members and experiential talk from the audience, which produces an interesting “intelligently-tabloid” or “intelligently-populist” debate.

Question Time is non-interventionist. The panel of five or six members has at least three politicians at any one time. Dimpleby, the host, rigidly polices speaking turns ensuring equal talking time; he also makes a point of drawing on the audience. This ensures that one type of speaker cannot dominate the talk. An implication of this fair allocation of speaking turns is that interpretation does not feature heavily. Most of the participants argue *for* or *against* a policy or idea, which gets away from the meta-analysis of politics favoured by professional journalists. Last, although the talk is occasionally disruptive because the participants interrupt each other, these occasions are exceptions to the rule of emotive but polite discussion and political argument.

Question Time is focussed on issue and policy discussion; there is a distinct lack of process or strategy talk. The questions from the audience relate to policy or political ideas, but often in a funny way. For instance, one audience member asked the panel to recite a poem they had learned in school, which was an oblique reference to the Education Minister Michael Gove’s attempts to reform the National Curriculum with such measures.⁸⁹ The ensuing discussion seriously debated these reforms.

Question Time’s political talk is not personalised because the talk is focused on abstract issues, policies and political arguments. Commensurate with a high number of political guests, Question Time almost wholly ignores the private lives of politicians. An exception to this was when the pro-Scottish independence actor Alan Cumming’s private life was invoked because he was arguing for Scottish independence as a panellist yet was a dual citizen of America and Scotland.⁹⁰ There were, however, hints of a character focus. The

⁸⁹ 14 June 2012.

⁹⁰ 7 June 2012.

following character aspects appeared: the competence and leadership of David Cameron; comments about “Tory posh boys”; the credibility of opposition leader Ed Milliband; the character of Rupert Murdoch as “fit and proper” to operate a broadcast licence; and, the Lib Dem figure Vince Cable being described as ‘bonkers’. Nevertheless, some of these were merely colourful flourishes, and spanning across the five episodes analysed, character was not overwhelmingly apparent. In terms of a focus on either leaders or party politics, the emphasis was, rather, on government.

Aesthetically, Question Time is a straightforward programme. No visuals are used and no outrageous human-interest subject matter is included, although the occasional curve-ball question from the audience might arguably be human-interest. The participants generally speak passionately and emotively and not without humour, which gives the show a British feel of discussing serious issues but not taking *itself* too seriously. None of these aesthetic aspects are overwhelmingly salient, rendering Question Time a pared-down political talk show.

In summary, Question Time demonstrates minimal mediatisation indicators overall. It is resolutely policy and issues based, features a range of political, non-political and citizen participants, and avoids indulgent use of personalisation, intervention and aesthetic aspects. At times, it is a rambunctious and funny form of talk but the commitment to seriously debating political issues is what ultimately underpins the show.

The Wright Stuff: Commercial participatory talk on Channel 5

The Wright Stuff describes itself as a show which ‘gives ordinary people the chance to talk and comment on everything from the invasion of Iraq to social, emotional and even sexual issues back at home’ (Author Unknown, 2005). Matthew Wright, the host, is joined by a panel of two who stay for the duration of the week; they are usually media personalities or celebrities. In addition, there is a new special guest each day, who is most often promoting something (a book, an upcoming show, an event, or themselves). Audience members phone-in from home to have their say, and the show features in-studio audience members. The Wright Stuff is the most tabloid of all of the shows in the sample and it mashes up a mix of headline hard news stories with social and relationship issues; it is unique among political talk shows because its running time is almost two

hours. The nucleus of The Wright Stuff is the airing of “ordinary views” which applies to the “personalities” as well as the citizen speakers. This produces political talk that is humorous, light and breezy, with a somewhat serious underpinning because the participants attempt to air their views and engage with the counter arguments. The overall tone is civil and good-natured.

The Wright Stuff is an interventionist show. It completely ignores politicians, and its guests mostly come from the media. In addition, if citizens are conceived as political actors, most of the airtime goes to the (professional) panellists and the host. From the set of guests that are included space is given to each speaker and interruptions are rare. The Wright Stuff is moderately interpretive as the speakers sometimes allude to the background of an issue and offer their analysis. However, much of the talk also makes arguments about issues as opposed to commenting on the background to or context of, an issue.

Although The Wright Stuff has a breezy political approach its political framing is issues based. It resists the game/strategy tendency because its guests give their take on issues without straying into the meta-discourses of analysis. The issues that are discussed on The Wright Stuff tend to fall on the softer side of the hard-soft news divide: social issues like education, health and relationships feature heavily with a smattering of harder issues like the London riots, Boris Johnson’s prospects for Prime Minister, and class or wealth issues.

In accordance with its participatory and experiential ethos, The Wright Stuff is moderately personalised. Guests speak from personal experience and offer anecdotes. For instance, in a segment related to Sunday trading laws, most of the participants based their arguments (anti-liberalisation) on their personal experiences of spending Sundays with their families.⁹¹ The Wright Stuff does not often analyse political character because political actors are rarely discussed. Political parties or leaders are also rarely referred to because the discussion takes place on the basis of issues; occasionally “the government” is mentioned but it is not a sustained object of discussion. However, one segment that

⁹¹ 7 September 2012.

looked at Boris Johnson, the London Mayor, was heavily related to personal character as the participants discussed his image and character as a “bumbling upper-class twit”.⁹²

The Wright Stuff has a high salience of aesthetics. First, the show makes liberal use of visuals: VT and graphics contextualise and add flavour to the discussion. The show has quirky, up-beat music, a gimmicky multiple-choice question at the end of a segment and answers to it at the beginning of a new one, and a red and white colour theme for all of the on-screen visuals and text. Second, performative address is evident; this stems from the host Matthew Wright, who is a former tabloid celebrity journalist. He has a gregarious personality and comes across as “camp”. He is quick to laugh and garrulous, skilled at creating a para-social relationship with the viewer, and his delivery is lively and personable. Third, The Wright Stuff relies heavily on human-interest aspects. It is full of humour, involves experiential testimony from its guests and citizen participants, and the topics often have emotional appeal.

In many ways, The Wright Stuff is a typical commercial political show and fits the more commercialism equals more mediatisation hypothesis. It is light and breezy, contains large doses of fun and personal testimony, and shuns politicians as guests. Logically, following this, its mediatisation indicators are moderate to high overall: moderate interventionism, high aesthetics, and moderate personalisation. Its political subject matter is skewed towards social or softer issues consistent with a more commercial approach. However, two aspects problematise drawing simplistic conclusions. First, The Wright Stuff gives space to citizens. If democracy is about public conversation, then this form of commercial participatory talk is grounded at least partly in a *demos*; this is somewhat due its commercial and popularising drive, but if mediatisation is concerned with the marginalisation of *politicians* from the mediated public sphere, it ignores the *visibility* here of citizens as *political* actors; i.e. citizens are at least partly prioritised even if politicians are ignored. Second, even though The Wright Stuff is concerned with softer political subjects, its framing of politics is actually issues based. Thus overall TWS can be viewed as at least moderately mediatised but this should be tempered by the two factors,

⁹² 11 September 2012.

citizen visibility and issues framing, which grate against a simplistic mediatisation conclusion.

Murnaghan: 24-hour Sky News

Murnaghan is a 2-hour show on Sky News. It is broadcast on Sundays and anchored by Dermot Murnaghan. Its two staples are panel discussions and interviews. The show is populated by a large number of guests. Interviews are generally with newsmakers or former politicians. Panel discussions are a more eclectic mix, with two newspaper reviews (one business and one general news), and roundtable discussions including current or former politicians, experts, dignitaries or journalists. Murnaghan embodies many of the features of parliamentary talk shows: an insider orientation, a rolling roster of Westminster operatives, and a mostly serious and sober political approach.

Murnaghan is a mildly interventionist show. It gives an equal amount of time to political actors vs. journalists and pundits. For example, its newspaper review includes at least one political actor, while most of the interviews are host+1 political guest, and the panel discussions mix political and non-political voices. The host and guests generally do not interrupt each other and the norms of civility are adhered to. However, the show has a mild penchant to stray into interpretivist modes of journalism. This is a function of the host, Dermot Murnaghan, who interrogates the backstage mechanics of political parties (for example, Labour's links with its unions and the reasons for proposed reforms),⁹³ as well as the show's reliance on panel and newspaper reviews, which sometimes slip into political meta-analysis. Nevertheless, this interventionist tendency is not dominant overall.

Looking at the substance of the discussion, issues and policy themes are emphasised over game and strategy. In the sample analysed for this research, a selection of the topics discussed include: the HS2 railway; NHS funding and performance; foreign policy regarding Syria and Russia-Crimea; green politics; and a whole show was devoted to analysing Scottish independence. In addition, related to this sober issues-based approach, the discussion avoids the private lives of politicians. Hints of a political character focus are apparent, usually in the context of discussing leadership and

⁹³ 2 February 2014.

credibility: Putin's leadership over Crimea; Alex Salmond's credibility and leadership over Scottish independence; and the leadership of Environmental Secretary Owen Patterson over the Somerset floods. Again, however, these are glancing and not reflective of a sustained approach. Finally, the discussion is variable with regard to prioritising leaders or parties. Many of the segments feature a leader and party focus in equal measure; while sometimes a party focus prevails, and sometimes no party or leader approach is apparent and the discussion is centred on government.

Aesthetically, Murnaghan is a subdued show. It occasionally uses infographics to give statistical or geographical context to an issue. Murnaghan does live crosses from the studio to a guest or journalist on location. One innovative feature is that the show features a Twitter panel of three journalists who comment on the show; these tweets appear onscreen throughout (and can be seen by using the "red button" for HD viewers).⁹⁴ Performative address is vanishingly rare; the guests and hosts speak in subdued or normal registers. Finally, in the sample analysed, some human interest elements were detectable, for example, the coverage of Oscar Pistorius' trial.⁹⁵ Another segment was set inside an Accident and Emergency centre to investigate whether or not the NHS was in crisis, which had a tabloidesque feel. Each show contains at least one sport related interview, which is not analysed but is human interest. As with the other mediatisation indicators discussed, these aesthetic aspects were intermittent and not sustained.

With Sky News being a commercial news provider, it might be expected that it would reflect visibly salient and sustained mediatisation indicators; however, this is not the case. Murnaghan is a parliamentary style of talk and commits to discussing politics in a sober and issues-based manner. It does feature occasional splashes of mediatisation – a personal character focus, the inclusion of some human-interest aspects, and the tendency to offer interpretive analysis – but the main thrust of the programme remains non-mediatised.

⁹⁴ The Red Button is a button that prompts interactive services.

⁹⁵ Pistorius is a South African celebrity athlete who shot his celebrity girlfriend.

Mediatisation and the UK

How do the shows compare to each other? With regard to intervention measures, Question Time is the least interventionist show, which is a function of the high salience of political guests. Sunday Politics, the Andrew Marr Show, and Murnaghan are roughly equally interventionist, which is minimal overall because of their consistent commitment to interviewing politicians. However, Sunday Politics has a bigger tendency towards interpretation, which stems from its panel of journalists. The Andrew Marr Show and Murnaghan both feature newspaper reviews, which tend towards interpretivism but this does not play an overwhelming role overall. The Wright Stuff, being a commercial daytime show, is the most interventionist, in that politicians are ignored and interpretivism is evident. However, like Question Time, it is open to citizen voices.

All of the shows demonstrate a prioritisation of issue and policy frames vs. game and strategy frames. Question Time shows the highest commitment to issues and policy. Murnaghan has slightly less game and issue framing than Question Time. The Andrew Marr Show and The Sunday Politics both flirt with game and strategy politics more than the rest but in equal amounts compared to each other, which seems to be a function of their greater reliance on journalists and pundits as voices, as well as their hosts' line of questioning. Interestingly, despite The Wright Stuff being a politically softer commercial show, it remains issues focused in its political framing.

Most of the shows are equally depersonalised. That is, they stay away from the private lives of political actors, occasionally stray into character-based evaluations around leadership, credibility and appearance, and spread their focus across government, parties and leaders. The outlier is The Wright Stuff, which shows a similar level of personalisation overall, but in different measures. It is intensely personalised on the one hand, and focuses resolutely on the personal anecdotes and experiences of its guests – who are not politicians but citizens and media personalities – but on the other hand it also ignores political character and political party or political leader talk in general.

Aesthetically the spread of indicators is more complicated. The Wright Stuff features the most sustained use of aesthetic indicators that relate most genuinely to its softer political treatment: performative address and emotion, large doses of human-interest topics and

humour, and visual aids and other noticeable production markers. Sunday Politics shows a high salience of aesthetics that is at odds with its sustained and serious Westminster-based treatment of politics. It uses infographics and VT the most, which serve informational purposes, yet these often have a humorous bent, which fits into its overall tone of being fun and jokey with occasional splashes of performative address from the host. Most importantly, however, this aesthetic impetus is careful not to override the show's serious underpinning. It also avoids outrageous extremes. Question Time features no aesthetics in terms of VT, infographics, production or performative address (outside of passionate political argument). Murnaghan and The Andrew Marr show fall somewhere in-between. The Andrew Marr show features cultural segments and has a band playing at the end, which is a human-interest impulse, and Murnaghan features sporting segments. However, both shows rely minimally on VT and infographics and their aesthetic segments and tendencies do not bleed into their wholly political segments. Overall, the aesthetic picture is variable in the UK: some shows consistently rely on aesthetics while others do not and furthermore, these differences cannot be mapped simplistically onto commercial vs. public service shows.

What of the overall picture? From a macro perspective the UK is the least marketised case and the talk shows demonstrate subdued indicators overall (with the Wright Stuff being the exception to the rule but also an outlier in its tabloid style). One ecological point to note is that the BBC seems to have taken responsibility for airing political talk: political talk on ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5 is a scheduled rarity. In this regard most of the UK's political talk measures similar (low to moderate) on the mediatisation indicators, which is most likely a function of the strong regulation throughout television news, as well as the strong norms and assumptions around the political and news culture, and most obviously, the dominance of the BBC and its gravitational-normalising role. Another way of putting this is that political talk in the UK is similar as judged by the mediatisation indicators. This is attributable to the fact that most political talk airs on the BBC, as well as the convergent UK news broadcast landscape.

Turning to the institutional question, the mediatisation thesis runs into trouble based on the previous analysis. Whereas public service shows (Question Time, The Andrew Marr Show, and Sunday Politics) demonstrate approximately similar mediatisation indicators to

Murnaghan, which stems from a 24-hour commercial news channel, both forms of talk are less mediatised than commercial The Wright Stuff. One show not included in the sample is ITV's recent invention, The Agenda.⁹⁶ If The Agenda (on TV) had been included it would most likely have been analysed as being more mediatised than public service shows like The Andrew Marr Show or Sunday Politics, but less mediatised than the tabloid extremes of Channel 5's The Wright Stuff. Therefore, the claim that commercial news institutions should axiomatically have greater mediatisation indicators than public service shows only somewhat plays out with this data when comparing The Wright Stuff (and hypothetically, The Agenda) with public service shows, but is weakened because of the similarity between public service and 24-hour news political talk (Murnaghan). Again, this problematises simplistic assertions about mediatisation and media institutions. One explanation might stem from the specific character of 24-hours news channels and institutions in the UK. Being highly regulated and not sharing the political extremes of the US, the news and political culture is more converged towards the centre, where the BBC theoretically lies. In this case, it is perhaps logical that Murnaghan is more akin to the BBC's political talk, which also then provides evidence of a strong PSB culture in insulating news providers from extreme marketisation effects.

Finally, what about genre and mediatisation? It is problematic to draw these conclusions for the UK. Tellingly, the UK does not have any advocacy talk on television because of its strong impartiality regulation. Just looking at the parliamentary shows, The Andrew Marr Show, Murnaghan and the Sunday Politics seem to share similar mediatisation indicators, despite Murnaghan originating from a 24-hour news institution, which lends support to genre as a predictor of mediatisation in the UK case. Clouding the water still is the two participatory shows, Question Time (BBC) and The Wright Stuff (Channel 5). Question Time shows the least mediatisation indicators in the UK while The Wright Stuff shows the most, problematising genre as a reliable predictor of mediatisation, or at the very least pointing to great variance within the participatory talk style.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ The Agenda's format is a "soft" chat version of political talk. Leading frontbench politicians talk about political issues in a relaxed and personable manner in front of a studio audience. It was not included in the sample because 1) it did not exist at the time of sampling, 2) it was aired for the first time towards the end of the sampling period, and 3) I did not interview the producers.

⁹⁷ Participatory talk is the genre type with the most variance.

Mediatisation within countries

The mediatisation theory has intuitive appeal; however, robust conclusions linking mediatisation to the national level, institutional level, or to the genre of political talk have eluded this investigation, which was based on a qualitative analysis of mediatisation in political talk shows in three countries.

Table 25 presents all of the shows analysed by their country, institution, type of talk, and mediatisation indicators, and serves as a summary of the discussion thus far. First, regarding the question of national context, America shows the most mediatisation across its talk at the minimum level (i.e. its lowest level of mediatisation is high compared to other countries). This stems directly from political talk prioritising journalists more than political guests because this most affects the interpretivist and game/strategy indicators. It also shows sustained political character and political leader focus. However, this is arguably attributable to its presidential system and the presidential election of 2012. Australia and the UK are more likely to prioritise politicians over journalists (although there is variation) and therefore show less salience of interpretivist, game/strategy indicators and personalisation. Yet Australia and the UK do not show a great variation in mediatisation overall, which gives only partial credence to the marketisation-mediatisation hypothesis at the national level.

Second, what about the relationship between institutions and political talk? The theoretical rationale holds that public service talk should show fewer mediatisation indicators than commercial forms of talk. Evidence for this proposition is not found consistently across the countries. In brief, America has public service talk and advocacy talk with similar levels of mediatisation; Australia has public service talk with higher levels of mediatisation than commercial-free to air talk and has two talk shows from a single commercial broadcaster with wildly different mediatisation outcomes (high and low); and the UK shows more consistent evidence with public service talk generally showing lower mediatisation indicators than commercial talk, yet most of the UK's talk appears on the BBC, which is a dominant news player, and therefore might distort the picture.

Table 25: Mediatisation analysis

	Type of talk	Interventionism			Frames	Personalities			Aesthetics		
		Journalist vs politician ⁹⁸	Interpretivism	Disruption	Games vs Issues ⁹⁹	Private lives	Political character	Leader vs party or government ¹⁰⁰	Visuals and production	Performative address	Human interest
America											
<i>Public Service</i>											
Washington Week	Parliamentary	✘	↑↑↑	↑	✘	↑	↑↑	✘	↑	↑	↑
<i>Comm-free</i>											
Meet the press	Parliamentary	■	↑↑	↑	■	↑	↑↑	■	↑	↑	↑
<i>24-Hour</i>											
The O'Reilly Factor	Advocacy	✘	↑↑↑	↑↑	■	↑↑	↑↑↑	✘	↑↑↑	↑↑↑	↑↑
Australia											
<i>Public Service</i>											
Insiders	Parliamentary	✘	↑↑↑	↑	■	↑↑	↑↑	■	↑↑	↑	↑↑
Insight	Participatory	●	↑	↑	●	↑↑↑	↑	●	↑	↑	↑↑↑
<i>Comm-free</i>											
Meet the Press	Parliamentary	●	↑	↑	●	↑	↑	●	↑	↑	↑
Bolt Report	Advocacy	■	↑↑↑	↑	■	↑	↑↑↑	■	↑↑↑	↑↑	↑↑
<i>24-Hour</i>											
Showdown	Parliamentary	●	↑↑	↑	●	↑	↑↑	●	↑	↑↑	↑
United Kingdom											
<i>Public Service</i>											
Question Time	Participatory	●	↑	↑↑	●	↑↑	↑	●	↑	↑	↑
Andrew Marr Show	Parliamentary	●	↑	↑	■	↑	↑↑	■	↑	↑	↑↑
Sunday Politics	Parliamentary	●	↑↑	↑	■	↑	↑↑	■	↑↑	↑↑	↑
<i>Comm-free</i>											
The Wright Stuff	Participatory	✘	↑↑	↑	●	↑↑↑	↑↑	■	↑↑	↑↑↑	↑↑↑
<i>24-Hour</i>											
Murnaghan	Parliamentary	■	↑↑	↑	●	↑	↑↑	■	↑	↑	↑

⁹⁸ Mosly journal = ✘; mostly politicians or citizens = ●; mostly mixed = ■

⁹⁹ Mostly game and strategy = ✘; mostly policy and issues = ●; mostly mixed = ■

¹⁰⁰ Mostly leaders = ✘; mostly parties or government = ●; mostly mixed = ■

Third, what of the relationship between the genre of talk and mediatisation outcomes? It seems that advocacy modes of talk are more mediatised because they avoid politicians, have more production aesthetics, and are polemic and highly interpretivist. Participatory talk is variable in its relationship to mediatisation. For example, Question Time is participatory but extremely low in mediatisation salience. Yet shows like The Wright Stuff and Insight are highly personalised and based on human-interest but reveal divergent outcomes, with the Wright Stuff being more mediatised than Insight. Parliamentary shows are similarly problematic to classify because they show different mediatisation outcomes within Australia and America, while in the UK political talk shows are more consistent and analogous with each other in their mediatisation salience.

According to the data, and to conclude this section, mediatisation is a valid phenomenon; there is plenty of evidence for at least some level of mediatisation in each political talk show. However, untangling possible explanations – marketisation of countries or institutions, or the role of genre – has only been partially possible. This suggests that there are more complicated explanations of the causes of mediatisation than have been looked at here.

Mediatisation and parliamentary talk

This section isolates parliamentary political talk and looks at questions that are analogous to the last section, except that the emphasis is on comparing talk *across* countries. This approach provides a control for the type of talk, allowing firmer conclusions to be drawn across the countries. To what extent are there country level differences in parliamentary talk shows? What is the relationship between institutions and mediatisation? This section uses the same data as the last, but supplements the analysis with a look at the types of guests that appear on each show. An important limitation is that the complete universe of political talk shows has not been included in this study and therefore conclusions relating to mediatisation are based on partial information. In other words, the conclusions that follow are tentative.

Parliamentary talk, mediatisation and countries

The first thing to note is that American political talk is different from Australian and British political talk. American talk, on average and overall, is less politician and more journalist centric. For example, shows like Washington Week are constructed entirely around journalist talk. In contrast, shows in Australia and the United Kingdom are more likely to have politicians as guests.¹⁰¹ This is clear when looking at Figure 4. Washington Week and Meet the Press have a strong preference for journalists as guests compared to other shows in other countries. Also important to note is that the American Meet the Press shows the highest salience of political strategists and political operators. Australia has more of a commitment to politicians than America, but less than the UK. In turn, the UK has the most sustained commitment to talking to politicians. Furthermore, the UK and Australia are unique because their parliamentary talk shows are open to guests who are experts, researchers and campaigners, as well as guests related to industry: union officials, business and finance. Political talk in the UK shows both the biggest commitment to politicians as well as the most varied guests. The Andrew Marr show is an outlier due to its odd mixture of politics and “highbrow” popular culture, which is identifiable in Figure 4.

Most political talk shows run for an hour; however, not all of the shows in the sample had an equal running time. Therefore, merely looking at the percentage of guests overall might be misleading. To remedy this, Figure 5 shows the type of guests by minute; this controls for different programme lengths and provides an approximate indicator of guest make up per show, in comparable terms. According to this data, the UK shows the most politicians per minute on average. Australia shows slightly fewer, while the US shows the least. This measure should, however, be treated with caution because it is very blunt. For example, The Andrew Marr Show reveals a moderate preference for politicians, at 0.052 per minute but the show is constructed around the long form interview and therefore fewer politicians are spoken to but they are spoken to for longer than in other programmes. In terms of journalists or strategists as guests, the indicators run approximately in the expected direction, with America showing slightly more of a

¹⁰¹ This is an approximate tendency.

Figure 4: Guest percentages

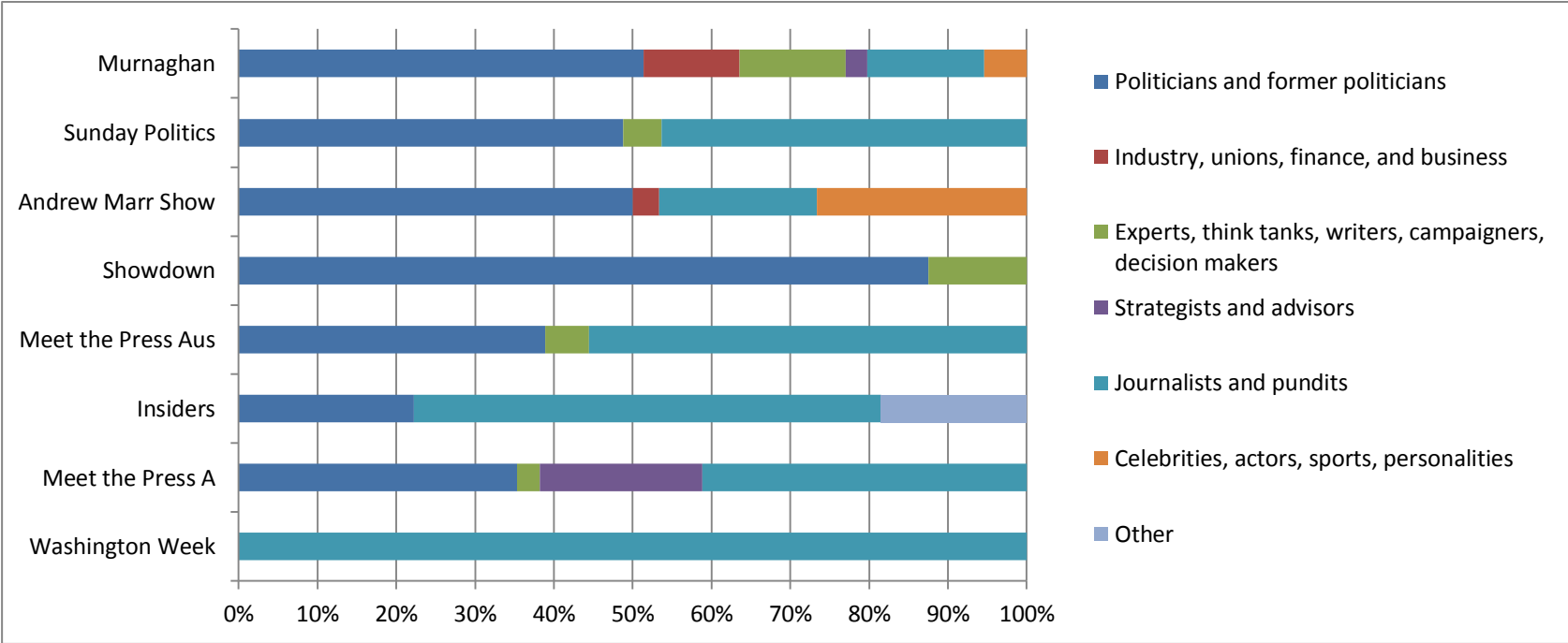


Figure 5: Guest type per minute

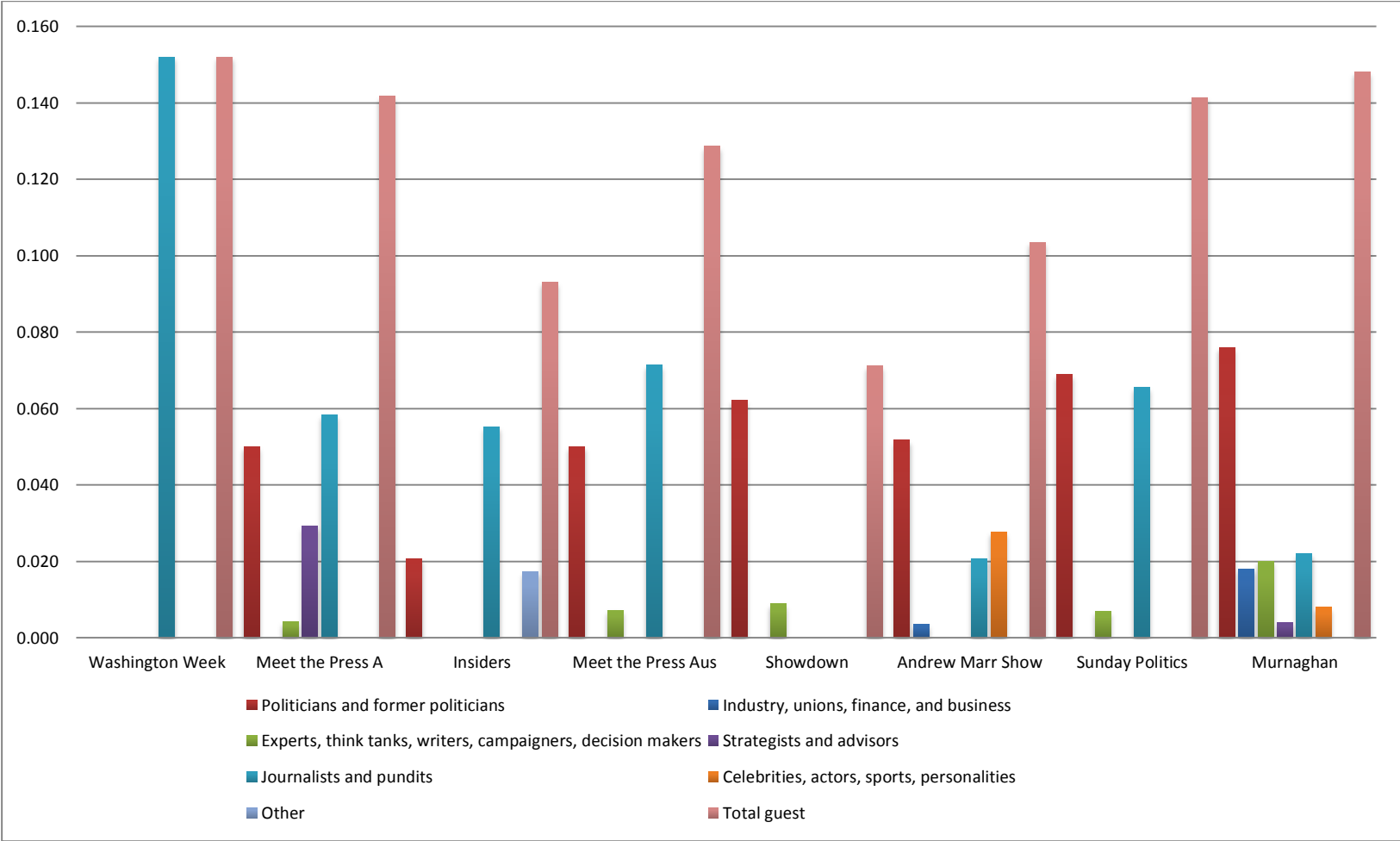


Table 26: Parliamentary talk mediatisation

		Interventionism			Frames	Personalities			Aesthetics		
	Type of talk	Journalist vs pol-cit ¹⁰²	Interpretivism	Disruption	Games vs Issues ¹⁰³	Private lives	Political character	Leader vs party or government ¹⁰⁴	Visuals and production	Performative address	Human interest
America											
<i>Public Service</i>											
Washington Week	Parliamentary	✕	† † †	†	✕	†	† †	✕	†	†	†
<i>Comm-free</i>											
Meet the Press	Parliamentary	■	† †	†	■	†	† †	■	†	†	†
Australia											
<i>Public Service</i>											
Insiders	Parliamentary	✕	† † †	†	■	† †	† †	■	† †	†	† †
<i>Comm-free</i>											
Meet the Press	Parliamentary	●	†	†	●	†	†	●	†	†	†
<i>24-Hour</i>											
Showdown	Parliamentary	●	† †	†	●	†	† †	●	†	† †	†
United Kingdom											
<i>Public Service</i>											
Andrew Marr Show	Parliamentary	●	†	†	■	†	† †	■	†	†	† †
Sunday Politics	Parliamentary	●	† †	†	■	†	† †	■	† †	† †	†
<i>24-Hour</i>											
Murnaghan	Parliamentary	■	† †	†	●	†	† †	■	†	†	†

¹⁰² Mostly journalists = ✕; mostly politicians or citizens = ●; mostly mixed = ■

¹⁰³ Mostly game and strategy = ✕; mostly policy and issues = ●; mostly mixed = ■

¹⁰⁴ Mostly leaders = ✕; mostly parties or government = ●; mostly mixed = ■

prioritisation per minute of these guests than the other two countries, and Australia and the UK showing similar orientations.

Although the guest preferences show that America is slightly more journalist/political strategist centric than the other countries, the mediatisation indicators do not run in such a neat direction (see Table 26). For instance, *Washington Week* shows very high mediatisation indicators: a preference for journalists, high interpretivism, game framing, and a personalised focus. Yet *Meet the Press* shows more subdued indicators. The discrepancy between these two shows should at the very least temper simplistic country level attributions of mediatisation. Moving on to the other two countries, Australia's parliamentary political talk shows have a variable level of mediatisation with *Insiders* demonstrating the highest salience (attributable to its reliance on a panel of pundits) while *Meet the Press* displays the least mediatisation across the whole sample, and *Showdown* sits in the middle. Again, like the American case, the Australian case gives reason to caution against blanket statements around the marketisation of countries given the variance in mediatisation between its three talk shows; yet Australia is less mediatised overall than America. The UK's political talk is the most clustered as judged by mediatisation indicators; the UK's parliamentary talk is less mediatised than the American case; however, the differences in mediatisation between Australia and UK are not very large.

These conclusions give partial evidence for the link between marketisation and mediatisation in the countries (as judged by looking at political talk), in that the US, the most marketised case, is more mediatised than the Australian and UK cases. However, marketisation at the country level is not a singular explanation for political talk outcomes. This is because political talk shows vary a good deal within the countries. In other words, if marketisation at the country level was a single and strong influence for mediatisation, political talk shows should demonstrate similar mediatisation outcomes within a country (and only the UK could reasonably be said to have clustered versions of parliamentary talk). The reality is that while very broad conclusions can be drawn about mediatisation and political talk between the US on the one hand, and Australia and the UK on the other, there seem to be other factors outside of marketisation that influence the mediatisation

of parliamentary political talk shows. For instance, political and news cultures may be playing a large intervening role.

Given that we are looking at a single gene of news and style of talk across different countries, what can we conclude about media systems? Recall the argument from Chapter four, that a Historical Institutional position – which simply holds that countries may have similarities but there are important differences between them that are grounded in local characteristics and histories – is more accurate than a media systems approach that lumps countries together. The analysis from this chapter approximately states that the US is more mediatised than the UK and Australia – although the conclusions remain tentative. In other words, the UK and the US cannot both be reasonably categorised into Hallin and Mancini’s Liberal model because they are *not similar*. A recent study comes to the same conclusion (Aalberg et al., 2010: 267):

Both British and American media are bracketed together by Hallin and Mancini as part of the “liberal” camp and the media of the remaining countries in our sample as belonging to the democratic corporatist bloc. However, our analysis based on the provision, scheduling, and consumption of news places U.S. television out on a limb and British television as having greater affinities with the television systems of other European countries.

Parliamentary talk, mediatisation, and institutions

What can an institutional perspective tell us about the relationship between political talk and mediatisation across countries? Public service institutions give evidence of a cross-national mediatisation effect. For instance, it appears that America’s public service talk, Washington Week, is the most mediatised, followed by Insiders in Australia, and then the UK’s public service talk – The Andrew Marr Show and Sunday Politics – which is the least mediatised. This follows the expected rationale of marketisation-mediatisation.

Commercial free to air talk gives clear-cut evidence but from a small sample. Only two programmes from this institution, one in the US and one in Australia, were analysed. American Meet the Press is more mediatised than its Australian counterpart primarily because of its pundit panel set up. Therefore, the relationship between marketisation and mediatisation seems to hold for commercial free to air forms of talk.

Finally, with regard to 24-hour news channels, two parliamentary talk programmes were included for this institution, both of which are Sky News programmes: Showdown in Australia and Murnaghan in the UK.¹⁰⁵ The mediatisation indicators show the Australian Showdown to be less mediatised than the UK's Murnaghan; again, this is attributable to Murnaghan relying more heavily on pundit panels than Showdown. From this (limited) data then, the mediatisation theory at the institutional level is not confirmed for 24-hour news channels.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to analyse mediatisation by looking at political talk shows in different contexts. The first strategy was to describe each show with regard to its mediatisation indicators. This enabled each country's talk to be analysed separately. The conclusions are as follows:

- **The first conclusion:** political talk shows vary according to the mediatisation indicators within each country. This calls into question the validity of thinking about mediatisation as occurring homogeneously within a country.
- **The second conclusion:** Looking across countries, America has the most mediatised political talk overall because of its prioritisation of journalists and pundits. Australia and the UK have similar levels of mediatisation to each other.
- **The third conclusion:** There is a tentative case for linking marketisation at the national level with content level mediatisation indicators given that the US shows more mediatised political talk than Australia and the UK; however, Australia and the UK are fairly close overall, with the UK perhaps being slightly less mediatised and definitely more clustered in its political talk outcomes. Yet given conclusion 1, it seems that there are likely to be a number of intermediary factors like political and news cultures for example, that explain mediatisation of political talk shows.
- **The fourth conclusion:** Institutional factors do not account for mediatisation levels; there is no consistent pattern between institution and mediatisation in political talk. This deals a blow to the link between marketisation and

¹⁰⁵ America's 24-hour news channels are only available on a subscription basis, and although these channels contain a mix of political talk shows, advocacy talk dominates because of the partisan nature of the cable news landscape. Resource and time constraints limit the choice of talk for these institutions.

mediatisation because, in theory, public service talk should consistently show fewer mediatisation indicators than commercial political talk, yet this is not the case.

- **The fifth conclusion:** There is a weak relationship between the political talk genre and mediatisation. Advocacy talk is consistently the most mediatised. Participatory and parliamentary talk are variable in their mediatisation.

The second part of the investigation isolated parliamentary talk, to control for genre and institutions, and further analyse the link between marketisation and mediatisation.

- **The sixth conclusion:** Isolating parliamentary political talk gives evidence that American talk is more mediatised than the other two countries. British talk and Australian talk remain approximately similar, but British talk is perhaps slightly less mediated overall.
- **The seventh conclusion:** Given the difference between the US, and Australia and the UK in political talk overall and parliamentary talk specifically, there is reason to disagree with a media systems approach, especially the characterisation of the Liberal group of countries by Hallin and Mancini.
- **The eighth conclusion:** Parliamentary talk on public service institutions and commercial free to air institutions is mediatised in line with country level marketisation expectations; however, this does not hold for political talk on 24-hour news institutions. This provides some weak evidence – from a small sample – for the link between the marketisation of countries and the mediatisation of political talk content.

Chapter 10: Conclusion

Introduction

The last four chapters deliberately foregrounded the *empirical* analysis of political talk television to avoid being glued to grand theoretical debates. The primary research object was the production of political talk television; a secondary research focus was mediatisation and cross-national factors. This chapter situates the preceding analysis into the wider scholarly literature to demonstrate how the evidence and arguments put forth challenge or support existing scholarship.

The main threads of this chapter are:

- How does the empirical evidence about political talk television relate to the existing literature?
- What are the unique findings of this investigation?
- What are the limitations to this study?
- What are the areas for further research?

The production of political talk television and new directions

This thesis has focussed predominantly on the production of political talk shows. To my knowledge, there have been no in-depth studies to date that have looked at the production of political talk television but only studies that have focused on a single programme, for example, as in Tracey (1977). Accordingly, this investigation offers a framework for understanding how political talk shows are produced and more importantly, *why* they appear the way they do. How does this square with our understanding of news production?

Two main perspectives predominate in news production research: one takes inspiration from functionalism (Holmwood, 2005) and the other from symbolic interactionism (Charon, 1995). Functionalism is interested in the maintenance of societal stability and continuity. A tenet is that society is an integrated whole and each part serves that whole (for example, the school system serves a particular *function* for society). This is mapped

onto news scholarship by authors who emphasise a macro-approach to the study of news production: political economy, economics, and organisational approaches for example.

The second major position is symbolic interactionism, which holds that individuals understand reality through lenses that are socially constructed: meanings and definitions are brought about through social interaction and interpretation. Production scholars who adopt this social constructionist account of news find that the news is a function of cultural and social “news” values. Tuchman (1978) famously argues that the news is a constructed reality and a process that frames and brings into being definitions of newsworthiness and reality; in other words, news is a product of the social organisation of work.

These predominant news production approaches have a number of deficiencies. First, most news production studies are based on the broadcast news bulletin, or the press. There needs to be an acknowledgement that different genres of news – like political talk television – may have different underlying production mechanisms. Second, production scholars operate in terms of a binary approach to prioritising structures or individual factors, which downplays the existing complexity. Third, there seems to be an infatuation with the scholarship of Bourdieu (for example, Born, 2010), which has pushed the field of news production into an overly theoretical mode that actually moves the spotlight away from primary insights *within* news organisations, and into the realm of grand theorising *about* news organisations. Research should invert this. Theory should supplement and contextualise primary insights; otherwise, logically, there is no real need to set foot inside a news organisation in order to theorise about it. Fourth, mostly because of the labour intensive nature of researching news production, the field has not branched out into a truly comparative approach, which leaves it open to the charge of being parochial.

The production related findings from this study speak to a number of these deficiencies. The cross-national nature of the study moves news production research profitably into a comparative mode, which allows production insights to be triangulated over multiple news sights and political-media systems. Moreover, news production scholarship traditionally relies on ethnography. While this method has its benefits (Cottle, 2007: 4-6), it also has drawbacks (Cottle, 2007: 6-9); namely, looking at a small number of news sites

within a single country, being labour intensive, and ignoring external (structural) factors and overly prioritising organisational functionalism by reifying the effect of journalistic routines and to a lesser extent, professional journalistic ideologies. News production scholarship can move forward by combining elite interviewing of news personnel with ethnography. More importantly, the most valuable news production insights will be gained if researchers organise themselves into collaborative production teams in different countries and “media systems” to look at news production (widely defined); this will leverage local expertise while overcoming parochialism.

The focus on political talk television widens the scope of production research, which has traditionally been based on the news bulletin. With fragmenting news environments and the proliferation of alternative news formats, news production scholars need to take note of this change and respond by investigating the production mechanisms at play in television news formats that are *not* the television news bulletin. This investigation has purposefully avoided adopting a Bourdieuan framework in order to keep the focus firmly on grounded claims about the production of political talk television. This is not an anti-intellectual strategy but a recognition of the fact that production scholarship is uncritically infatuated with Bourdieu and his analysis of the journalistic “field” and “habitus” (see for example: Benson, 1999). As stated in Chapter three, while this analysis is useful (yet ambiguous and poorly written in places) it is not radically different from concepts and analyses that existed prior to Bourdieu. It seems axiomatic that if we only ever rely on this *theoretical* framework then we only succeed in reproducing it.

Political talk television is a result of a confluence of non-deterministic of factors. Where Schudson (2010) usefully outlines four main approaches to thinking about news production, this political talk production framework combines structures, agency, and ideational elements. Only by looking at news production from this multifactorial perspective can the process be understood. Yet by combing structures, agency, and ideas, this production framework sacrifices the parsimonious elegance of isolating a small number of elements. The reality is that trying to accurately explain how any cultural object comes to be – the process and mechanics of its creation – is inherently messy as it reflects the chaotic and opaque reality of production. The following table summarises the

most important factors that explain how political talk shows are produced. The first set of factors is structures.

Table 27: Summary of structural production factors

Structural factors	Explanation
Institution	Sets priorities, resources and guidelines
Media ecology	Awareness of other shows; situate within ecology
Impartiality and defamation	Balance and fairness; priority to professional voices; risk aversion
News agenda and 24-hour news	Keep pace with current and evolving news agenda
Cut costs and increase control	Cautious and conservative; efficiency; routines and standardisation
Audience attraction and political prestige	Consistency; interest; links to political establishment

Political talk shows are strongly affected by structural factors. The first, institutional influence is extremely important but also hard to locate. Institutions structure political talk by allocating more or less resources, setting specific guidelines and mandating certain outcomes through managerial control. Yet there are also qualitative structuring forces: institutional ethos and values. Producers take on their institution’s ethos and make political talk in accordance with its values. Furthermore, producers are also generally hyper aware of the regulatory framework in which they operate. For instance, in countries where impartiality is a stringent news requirement and defamation claims are more common, producers are more likely to cite the potential of conflicting with the law as a production consideration. Other regulatory aspects like public service news and current affairs quotas applied across public service and commercial channels add to a culture of valuing the seriousness of news and political talk.

Where Bourdieu talks about “the field” political talk producers simply cite awareness of similar shows and competition, which is linked to similar dynamics relating to the news agenda. Political talk producers generally want to produce a unique and compelling show. This cannot happen if a show is not differentiated from similar shows. Therefore, producers compete for guests and compete on quality. Shows that are not similar or that are in direct competition generally take little notice of each other. The news agenda is a

major structuring force. Political talk shows, for the most part, rely on the existing news agenda to organise notions of newsworthiness, which in turn relates to the guests who are considered appropriate. Moreover, political talk is a format that seeks to analyse and interpret the news, which strengthens its parasitic relationship to the news agenda.

The two final structural factors are the big industrial templates that underpin the “reality” of television news (Atkinson, 2011): controlling costs and standardising the production process; and, attracting audiences and maintaining political prestige. The former is a more familiar production focus (Franklin, 2003) while the latter is beginning to attract more attention (Bryman, 2004; Lanham, 2006). The format of political talk is an ingenious solution to a number of problems that speak to the cost and attraction impulses: news as seen in the news bulletin or current affairs is expensive to produce; politicians and newsmakers get limited space in broadcast media; news organisations are eager to brand themselves as serious about journalism (even while reducing their investment in news); journalism has become more aggressive, interpretive, dialogic and centrifugal because there has been a shift in political culture; and finally, the notion of liveness or “reality” has become increasingly prized over edited or pre-packed media content. Political talk responds to these interrelated problems. It is cheap to produce because the outlay is minimal (for example, most shows rely on pre-existing news footage), most of the guests who appear do not charge a fee, and indeed, many are very keen to appear to get their views across in person and unfiltered by press editorial priorities, and the editorial team is small. Politicians, newsmakers or celebrity personalities get more space than in edited packages, where they are likely to be granted a sound bite. Political talk formats are usually crafted around a well-known host with an identifiable political approach, style and personality, which serves as an embodiment of the news organisation and channel. Finally, political talk responds to the breakdown of authority roles in post-modernity by offering an interactive and casual, yet dynamic and “live” political format.

Political talk television has to navigate the news agenda and source guests – and accordingly more time is spent on these aspects – but outside of this, the format is easily subject to control through the advanced booking of guests and planning of segments, and tying this process to the big issues and events on the national political news diary. An implication of this control and efficiency mechanism is that political talk formats are

essentially conservative. They are inclined to do what worked before (in terms of guests, topics and approaches). Bourdieu pinpoints the role of habit; historical institutionalism scholars point to historical path dependency; and production scholars talk about the role of routine. The majority of shows cut their costs even more by having a skeleton crew and operating almost on the fly, parachuting topics and guests in when required.

The flipside to this backstage production template is the front stage attraction template. Ratings play a variable role in political talk production. Generally, commercial talk shows are closely attuned to ratings, while parliamentary talk shows are ambivalent. Relating to the backstage desire for control, a central attraction mechanism is consistency of guests (regular pundits for example), an identifiable host and a “political style”, and regular topics that coalesce into an identifiable and reliable overall political approach. This allows audiences to know what they can expect from the show; it is also more comfortable for producers to work with because known aspects are more easily controllable. Finally, the attraction impulse works through gaining political (or celebrity) prestige and political weight. Political talk shows are eager to forge closer links with the “class” or “field” of people that make up the majority of their guests. This, again, serves as a conservative mechanism because friendly relations need to be maintained. For politician centric shows, more high level politicians appearing on a show gives that show more political gravitas; however, it also binds that show into long term relationships with commensurate obligations and expectations. The myth of the default journalism position as challenging the political establishment cannot be completely fulfilled if mutually beneficial links need to be cultivated.

While these structural factors operate at a macro and meso levels, individual and quasi-cultural factors are intermeshed; the *combination* of the two sets of factors is important when explaining political talk production. The individual level factors can be usefully analysed by thinking about the aims and values – the production priorities – that producers carry with them when working on their political talk shows. These might very well be conditioned by the structures under which producers operate; equally though, the producers seemed aware of the conditions in which they worked, and it is logical that there is a dynamic interplay between structural and individual factors. In other words,

individuals are likely to influence structures too. Therefore, worrying about which comes first does not seem a useful avenue of inquiry.

The producers revealed three distinct types of priorities: democratic, pragmatic and entertainment. I have organised this as a tripartite schema, which builds on earlier work (Ekström, 2000; Atkinson, 2011). These priorities are interrelated and dynamic. The schema outlined here makes the production priorities more distinct from each other than they are in reality.

Table 28: Summary of production priorities and path dependency

Aspect	Explanation
Production priorities and programme identity	Normative democratic priorities Pragmatic priorities Entertainment and attraction priorities
Origins and producer path dependency	Solidify priorities Common-sense

Democratic priorities include informing the public by facilitating deliberation in the public sphere, providing analysis and interpretation of political issues and holding politicians to account. This first set of priorities is clearly normative and represents producers' idealisations around their own production aims and values (and includes what they *ought to* prioritise). The producers found these priorities hardest to articulate because they took them for granted. These priorities were almost an afterthought for most of them.

A second layer of priorities is pragmatic and represents the "realities" of production as perceived by producers. This pragmatic set of priorities reflects a realist position while also acknowledging the autonomy of producers as being more or less aligned with pragmatist priorities. Hesmondalgh and Baker similarly pinpoint the role of ambivalence in creative labour (2011a). Something akin to this operates in political talk production because many producers are at least partly inclined to merely get the job done because of their public-facing product. Producers universally value on-screen liveliness which gives political talk, based on spoken interaction, a dynamic and engaging feel. Talk without this element of liveness is viewed as boring. There is also an underlying pragmatic impulse across producers for self-promotion of their shows (that is less pronounced in participatory shows), which makes political talk an insular format because producers are

focused on getting picked up by other news outlets, or impressing other journalists or political figures. While audience considerations feature somewhat in the minds of producers, political talk is commonly – and strangely – produced for other professionals.

There is a complicated set of tendencies here: to make political talk shows people want to watch, yet audiences are hard to know because of their sheer size; to produce a political talk show that accords with professional authorship and democratic ideas, while being attuned to deadlines, the news agenda and other practical restrictions; to incorporate audience feedback on social media, which is not a representative medium; and finally, to make political talk that remains journalistically, politically and demographically relevant, while balancing all of the above. In practice, producers mostly respond to these conundrums by relying on their professional and ambiguous sense of what makes good political talk. Furthermore, what is thought to make good political talk relates strongly to a show's identity and historical legacy, which producers commonly reference.

Where normative aims and values brush up against the perceived realities of production, producers generally feel that their political talk shows need to be at least somewhat entertaining or attractive to audiences. A number of strategies are used to achieve this: the style and tone of a programme is consciously constructed; hosts are painstakingly chosen, groomed and promoted; most political talk shows are segmented and branded which intimates to audiences what to expect; and visuals are spliced in between talking heads to add context and “break up” the perceived monotony of political talk. These aesthetic priorities underline the following point: a producer's worst nightmare is that their political talk show turns into a university seminar with as many viewers as participants.

Combined, these three priorities – democratic, pragmatic and aesthetic – operate at the individual level for producers, yet they do not work in identical ways across all shows. The idiosyncratic mixture of these three priorities solidifies into a programme identity that is heavily influenced by historical precedent and legacy. This swirling range of ideas about how a programme should look, feel, and generally approach politics, gets locked-in early on in the life of a programme, which more often than not, promotes continuity or what I have called producer path dependency. A programme's meta-identity (its interaction

between structural factors and producer priorities) becomes a knowable and commonsensical framework, from which producers work from and implicitly reference. Producer path dependency goes a long way in explaining the stability and sameness of political talk formats over time.

The political talk production framework outlined here is a contribution to the field. It shifts news production scholarship away from the press and news bulletin and towards an awareness of the production of alternative forms of news; it also redirects the study of broadcast talk away from frontstage discourse (which has received an abundance of attention (Heritage and Greatbatch, 1991; Scannell, 1991; Hutchby, 2006; Marchionni, 2013)) to backstage production mechanisms. Furthermore, it synthesises the two predominant production approaches – structural and individual or ideational – into a unified and pragmatic framework. Moreover, this production framework chimes with Tracey's (1977) early work on the production of political television in the UK. He splits the essential production elements into internal and external contexts. He further states that (1977: 12):

there has been little empirical validation of the actual meaning of these [internal and external] contexts – how the various influences of the wider society, the organization, the production setting, professional and personal ideologies actually relate to decision-making and how they interact to structure and direct programme production.

Although Tracey ends up taking a structural position – and the argument in this thesis is that there is actually a dynamic interplay between structures and autonomy in political talk production – his instincts, of looking “within” and “outside” are correct. What McNair (2009: 58-66) identifies as a “culturalist” position has much explanatory purchase. The culturalist argument seeks to integrate organisational and cultural factors with political and economic factors. That is, it holds onto a materialist analysis but incorporate elements of pluralism. The framework of political talk production uncovered in this study does exactly this in attempting to combine structural and individual factors. Furthermore, Giddens highlights this shift with his structuration theory (Giddens, 1984). And Gans, one of the pioneering news production scholars, has recently made an argument that

sociology in general needs to move away from structure vs. culture binaries (2012).¹⁰⁶ The new wave of production studies (Cottle, 2003; Benson, 2006; Cottle and Rai, 2006; Matthews and Cottle, 2012) is beginning to hint at this synthesising drive and this is where my analysis of the production of political talk television is situated.

The political talk production framework is *not* a functionalist model. The framework identifies the key elements that work in the production of political talk television. The elements within the framework do not, however, work in the same way across all political talk shows. For this reason, this study explored how different styles of talk interact with the main elements of the framework, echoing Murdock's (2000) prescient analysis, which points out that there are different ways of talking about politics. This thesis identifies three distinct styles of political talk: advocacy talk, parliamentary talk, and a broadly conceived participatory talk. These three styles of talk interact differently with the framework.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, by comparing different forms of talk this study has begun to explore the notion that different forms of talk have different democratic implications. This is something that has not been recognised outside of the analysis of the advocacy talk of American cable television (Meader, 2013; Smith and Searles, 2013).

Advocacy talk is more likely to arise in low regulation environments and under conditions of competition where differentiation is important. Therefore, it is more likely to be excluded in high regulation environments that take impartiality seriously. Advocacy talk is likely to be an embodiment of its institution and is a creature of the hyper competitive commercial world of cable news. The production of this type of show is likely to be more tightly managed and controlled by the host. It has to be controlled tightly for it to construct and maintain a consistent political narrative over time. This form of talk is more likely to be partisan, hyperbolic, populist, contrarian and politically simplistic. It uncommonly features politicians and relies on pundits and political strategists. It is the liveliest form of talk and possibly the most entertaining because it relies heavily on aesthetic elements. Advocacy talk is likely to be very concerned with its ratings and trades

¹⁰⁶ Although he still maintains that structure determines culture.

¹⁰⁷ However, individual shows have slightly different relationships to the main elements, even within a given style of talk. Indeed, the evidence for this is that different political talk shows operate independently with their own identities, staff and political approaches, but still share enough similarities to be reasonably grouped together.

on its emotional and outrageous ethos to appeal to viewers. It is the most likely to challenge the news agenda and is not concerned with fitting in; rather, it self-consciously targets a political niche. In this sense, it follows the tradition of muckraking tabloid journalism (Ehrlich, 1996) and serves a political mobilisation purpose (Mutz, 2006).

Participatory styles of talk are the most mercurial. Participatory talk is the closest to its audience and is accordingly populist. It is a hybrid political-entertainment style in general. Nevertheless, this style of talk has the most authentic claim to being a democratic agora in letting the public speak as opposed to representing the public via third parties (Livingstone and Lunt, 1994; Lunt, 2009). However, audiences are generally pre-selected according to the desired “media capital”, which is a performative criterion, and one that reflects a conservatism inherent in live television: the possibility of defamation or “dead air” is high when relying on “normal” people and therefore these instances of “ordinariness” are carefully managed. Participatory talk does not face much direct competition (in the sample) and is not overly concerned with the news ecology.

Furthermore, participatory talk is not concerned with maintaining links with the political establishment because it is concerned with the ordinary. Question Time, for instance, represents a tricky forum for politicians who subject themselves to direct citizen questioning, but do so to receive prime time exposure. This affords the producers a degree of independence. Furthermore, participatory talk’s pragmatism de-emphasises self-promotion, links with the political class, and setting the news agenda, and prioritises maintaining a lively, dynamic relationship with its audience-participants. Its aesthetic pull is similarly related to the dynamic potential of live ordinary talk and opinion. Interestingly, participatory political talk is not evident in America, which favours tabloid style daytime chat over participatory political talk as defined in this thesis. This absence might be due to the popularity of talk-back radio in many parts of the State, which has advocacy-based (Jamieson and Cappella, 2008; Sobieraj and Berry, 2011).

Parliamentary talk is the most centripetal in its focus on parliamentary business. It is therefore the most insular form of talk because of this centralising (as opposed to centrifugal) drive. Parliamentary talk is generally straight-laced, and sometimes “seriously casual” if airing on Sunday mornings. It is the most sensitive to the news agenda,

ecological competition, and maintaining links with the political and journalistic establishment. It works to attract audiences through seriousness as opposed to overt entertainment, and operates along similar control and efficiency lines to other forms of talk. Parliamentary talk shows struggle to differentiate themselves from each other because they compete for the same guests, cover similar events, and might even feature similar pundits; all of this results in an impartial, centrist political approach. Normatively, political talk is firmly focused on analysis, the accountability interview, and fostering debate. Pragmatically, it is the most concerned with being picked up by other news channels, outperforming other political talk shows, and being seen as serious. It is thus a form of talk made primarily for the political and journalistic classes. Aesthetically, parliamentary talk shows tend to be pared down and do not rely on visuals; their aesthetic style usually revolves around the tone and personal approach of the host.

In sum, this part of the thesis provides a framework that explains much of how political talk shows are produced, why political talk shows are produced the way they are, and some of the implications that stem from different forms of talk. This represents a substantial engagement with the nature of political talk shows in the three countries. This approach could be used profitably by other scholars. Furthermore, the framework outlined here fits into an emerging strand of pragmatic news production scholarship.

Marketisation, mediatisation, and a cul-de-sac

It is an uncontested claim that advanced western democracies have become more market friendly over the past fifty years. Countries such as America, the UK, and Australia have been identified as enthusiastically market oriented and also willing to tolerate highly unequal wealth and income distributions (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009). The journalism within these countries has been subject to forceful claims around the deleterious effects of this marketisation (Franklin, 2003; Thussu, 2005). Yet it has been hard to establish systemic and widespread evidence of marketised news in recent times. A secondary aspect of this thesis has tested the mediatisation of politics while looking at political talk. There were two main reasons for this: 1) the cross-national picture that emerged showed a gradation of marketisation for the three countries, allowing inferences to be made between more or less marketisation and more or less mediatisation; and, 2) political talk

shows are rarely looked at with respect to mediatisation, which provides an opportunity to break into new territory.

The mediatisation analysis ran into a cul-de-sac. In broad-brush strokes we can identify American talk as being more mediatised than Australian and British talk. At a basic level, American talk is more journalistic and pundit centric than the other countries in the sample; it is more interpretive, more likely to view politics as a game, more likely to personalise politics, and more likely to rely on aesthetic aspects. This is at least partly attributable to its greater marketisation. The differences between Australian and British talk are less pronounced. Finally, advocacy talk seems to be the most mediatised genre of political talk. Finer grained conclusions remain on shaky ground.

However, despite the equivocal nature of the evidence, this is still an important contribution to scholarship. On one level, the finding that the United States has more mediatised talk than Australia and the UK confirms what scholars have found elsewhere (Strömbäck and Dimitrova, 2011) with regard to more vs. less marketised cases in other genres of news (usually television news bulletins and the press). The inference here is that marketisation at the national level relates, on average, to mediatisation of political talk.

However, when we look at the role of more or less commercial institutions the same logic should apply (for example, see: Cushion and Thomas, 2013), yet there was no evidence to support this internally within the countries. This points to a flaw in the mechanics of the relationship between marketisation and mediatisation. The problematising of the link between marketisation and mediatisation is important. If this link is murky at lower levels (for instance, the institutional level), the rationale of the mediatisation theory loses some of its analytical bite. For instance, we might be able to say that political talk is more or less mediatised, as well as considering the potential implications, but in thinking about why this is the case we are unable to fulfil a key analytical task.

Yet mediatisation has an internal coherence as a theory when applied to political talk shows. Political talk shows that favour journalists/pundits and/or devote large amounts of space and time to their hosts have higher levels of mediatisation than shows that favour a wider selection of guests and allow them space to talk. This makes sense. Television

journalists and pundits are more likely to be interpretive than other guests because they see their role as giving context and insider information, which strays from neutral description. They are likely to conceive of politics as a game and strategy; that is, they tend to view politics from a meta-perspective, as a power struggle, rather than with an ideas and policy focus. Political actors are more likely to talk about politics in terms of issues or policy, while ordinary people refer to their own experience. Journalists and pundits are likely to talk about politics and politicians by referencing political character, the private lives of politicians, and focus on leaders rather than their party. The analytical framework of mediatisation picks up these aspects in the content of political talk shows.

Yet as shown in this thesis, political talk shows in general showed mixed mediatisation indicators (but some shows have comparatively higher levels while others have lower levels). There is emerging scholarship that is looking at mediatisation with a critical eye. For example, research is beginning to challenge the notion that politics is *increasingly* mediatised. A study of the mediatisation of election television news coverage in Denmark and Germany over the last 20 years has found mixed results (Zeh and Hopmann, 2013: 237):

In short, at best we find mixed evidence pointing to mediatization in election campaign television coverage. On several accounts no evidence was found and, clearly, the specific context still matters substantially for how political news coverage is constructed.

This reveals an important insight: (televised) political formats are not homogenous and therefore it follows that different forms of television news can mediatise politics in different ways.

Political talk seems to be a somewhat inherently mediatised format, and this form of mediatisation could be quite different from other news formats like the news bulletin. Cushion and Thomas argue that when looking at the evening news bulletin, dialogic and interactive news segments are more mediatised than pre-packaged and edited segments; that is, they are likely to be interpretive, not well-sourced, and journalist centric (2013). An assumption here is that live interactive forms are (generally) mediatised. However, the results of this thesis demonstrate that political talk shows can have *low* or *high* levels of mediatisation, often for idiosyncratic reasons.

Cross-national methodology: a better approach

This thesis rejected the media systems approach popularised by Hallin and Mancini (2004). The main criticism is that their categorisations do not pay attention to high-resolution empirical reality; instead, they use very broad categories to do the analytical work (for example, political parallelism). A better comparative method is outlined by Humphreys (2012); he advocates a multidimensional yet empirical approach to comparative investigation. Similarly, Norris (2009) advocates the use of quantitative data to compare countries. Although hampered by pragmatic linguistic constraints in terms of selecting and analysing countries, I have taken inspiration from both sets of arguments and adopted a methodology that is grounded in empirical description in that it relies on quantitative data sets where possible. The main elements – sociological and economic, political, media, and perceptions – give a well-rounded picture of the three countries. Furthermore, I have combined this descriptive approach with attention to the institutional histories and media regulatory context (in 2012) of each country.

This method offers a grounded, robust and detailed comparative analysis of the three countries. There are two appropriate ways of comparing countries. One is choosing variables that are thought to be important for generally explaining outcomes. This is the approach adopted by Humphreys. Yet merely comparing countries *generally* is not optimal. Outside of basic factors such as government and electoral type, and GDP, there are a myriad of factors that an analyst can reasonable use. One way to overcome this deficiency is to organise the variables using a sensible analytical framework. In this way, the analyst makes clear the assumptions that inform the variables investigated. This is the approach chosen in this study and it represents a contribution to comparative approaches generally.

Marketisation was chosen as an organising rationale because Hallin and Mancini characterise the Liberal countries as being (equally) market oriented despite Canada and the UK having more mature public service broadcasting systems and stronger cultural protection policies than the US. Starting from this rationale (how can we organise countries according to their market-orientation?) corresponding variables were selected, for example, union density, public broadcasting audience share, interest group pluralism,

and World Values data about the acceptance of market values by citizens. It was immediately apparent that the three countries showed consistently different levels of marketisation. It was possible to categorise the US as the most marketised, Australia as in the middle, and the UK as the least marketised (see also: Nielsen, 2013).

Emerging comparative studies still struggle with Hallin and Mancini's model. For instance, a recent comparative content analysis of the press (Esser and Umbricht, 2013: 15-16) concludes that 'we find qualified support for their basic assumptions but also an opportunity for further development'. Yet at the same time they state that their study 'shows that over time British newspapers seem to be aligning more with continental European papers than with US papers'. Moreover, in their first footnote (2013: 16), the authors further hedge their bets, saying that the important similarities between the Liberal countries, should 'not mask important differences concerning the role of public broadcasting, press partisanship, tabloid news culture and competition among many national newspapers'. These inherent contradictions in Hallin and Mancini's model of countries and their political and media arrangements point to a need to rethink their comparative method; the proposed empirical-historical approach is perhaps one fruitful avenue that is worth exploring.

Limitations

It is important to consider the limitations to the evidence, arguments and methodology. The production framework is based on the perceptions of producers and could usefully be triangulated by ethnography. Put simply, the cognitive map from which producers work might not correspond in the same way to their real practices. However, the study has very good internal validity in that the data – the perceptions of the different producers – reached saturation point across talk shows and countries.

This study oversampled Australian and British talk in interviews and content analysis. American political talk producers were much harder to contact. As a result, this study had to rely more on Australian and British political talk shows and producers to draw its conclusions. This means that each political talk show analysed and producer spoken to is weighted proportionally more in the US than Australia and Britain, which brings into play the effect of outliers. However, external verification is required to assess this.

The main part of this thesis focussed on the production of political talk television. A secondary analysis was the mediatisation of political talk, which studied the content of political talk shows in a small scale qualitative content analysis. It should be acknowledged that there was a modest sample of five episodes for each political talk show and the number of American political talk shows was small. This makes the investigation somewhat exploratory and the conclusions tentative. However, to my knowledge, this is the first cross-national analysis of mediatisation in political talk shows.

Further research

This investigation has pointed to a few areas of further research. Whereas the analysis of political talk discourse has branched into comparative research (Ekström and Patrona, 2011; Tolson and Ekström, 2013), the study of news production in general and the production of political talk television in particular could profitably do the same. Scholars could consider how the production framework outlined here works in different countries and its implications. Indeed, the three countries in this study are Anglo-Saxon countries and these need to be compared with countries that have different cultural, economic, media and political factors. This should include both developed countries – the usual suspects of southern, central and northern Europe – as well as less democratic zones like the Middle East that have a vibrant political talk culture, as well as fast-developing economies with a strong history of political engagement through media, such as India.

The production framework was gleaned by talking to senior political talk producers. Therefore, the framework is a reading of their perspectives on producing politics. Further work needs to be done by looking at all of the participants in talk: producers, hosts and guests (journalists, politicians, industry and citizens). This will give a more multidimensional analysis of political talk production mechanics than was allowed for in this investigation. Interesting tangents spring from here. For instance, in the gladiatorial battle between politicians and journalists, what can we learn by attending to the back stage preparations of both actors? Moreover, scholars could also analyse the interplay between backstage and on-screen dynamics: how does the preparation for a political talk show compare with the actual show? This would require mixed methods: interviews, ethnography and content analysis. By more deeply considering the production of politics

and the resulting democratic implications, scholars would more thoroughly understand news fragmentation and the modern television news environment.

Finally, a large-scale quantitative longitudinal analysis of mediatisation within political talk shows could investigate changes in mediatisation over time and map this onto changes in marketisation over time, which would productively add to an avenue that was only partially explored in this investigation.

Appendix 1: Interviewees

Name	Position	Talk show	Country	Type of interview
Chris Guarino	Senior Producer	Washington Week	US	Phone
Joe Muto	Former Associate Producer	The O'Reilly Factor	US	Phone
Margie Smithurst	Supervising Producer Executive Producer	Meet the Press The Bolt Report	AUS	Face-to-face
Paul Bongiorno	Host and Political Editor	Meet the Press	AUS	Phone
Erin Vincent	Executive Producer	Insiders	AUS	Face-to-face
Steve Kinder	Executive Producer	Paul Murray Live Showdown	AUS	Face-to-face
Meggie Palmer	Producer	Insight	AUS	Face-to-face
Angus Llewellyn	Executive Producer	Insight	AUS	Face-to-face
Robbie Gibb	Editor	Daily and Sunday Politics	UK	Face-to-face
Barney Jones	Editor	The Andrew Marr Show	UK	Seminar and face-to-face
Nicolai Gentchev	Editor	Question Time	UK	Face-to-face
Beth Harding	Series Editor		UK	Face-to-face
Tim Cunningham	Executive Producer	The Wright Stuff		Face-to-face
Craig Morris	Channel 5 Scheduler			Phone
Giles Winn	Editor	Murnaghan	UK	Face-to-face
Geoffrey Davies	Producer	Frost on Sunday	UK	Face-to-face

Appendix 2: Sample of shows

Programmes	Talk	Institution	Interview	Episodes	Approx. running time (min) ¹⁰⁸
US					
The O'Reilly Factor	Advocacy	24-hour news	Yes	5	60
Meet the Press	Parliamentary	Comm-free	No	5	60
Washington Week	Parliamentary	PSB	Yes	5	30
AUS					
Showdown	Parliamentary	24-hour	Yes	5	60
Meet the Press	Parliamentary	Comm-free	Yes	5	30
The Bolt Report	Advocacy	Comm-free	Yes	5	30
Insight	Participatory	PSB	Yes	5	60
Insiders	Parliamentary	PSB	Yes	5	60
UK					
Murnaghan	Parliamentary	24-hour	Yes	5	120
The Wright Stuff	Participatory	Comm-free	Yes	5	90
Question Time	Participatory	PSB	Yes	5	60
Daily/Sunday Politics	Parliamentary	PSB	Yes	5	60/70
The Andrew Marr Show	Parliamentary	PSB	Yes	5	60

¹⁰⁸ Including advertisements and promotions.

Appendix 3: Sampling dates

The O'Reilly Factor

- 18 April 2012
- 6 June 2012
- 10 August 2012
- 14 August 2012
- 3 September 2012

Meet the Press (America); Insiders; Meet the Press (Australia); The Bolt Report; Sunday Politics

- 1 April 2012
- 15 April 2012
- 22 April 2012
- 29 April 2012
- 13 May 2012

Washington Week

- 20 April 2012
- 4 May 2012
- 8 June 2012
- 13 July 2012
- 20 July 2012

Insight

- 24 April 2012
- 18 February 2012
- 29 May 2012
- 7 August 2012
- 28 August 2012

Showdown

- 15 May 2012

- 29 May 2012
- 7 August 2012
- 28 August 2012
- 11 September 2012

Murnaghan

- 14 July 2012
- 8 September 2013
- 26 January 2014
- 2 February 2014
- 2 March 2014

Question Time

- 26 April 2012
- 3 May 2012
- 24 May 2012
- 7 June 2012
- 14 June 2012

The Andrew Marr Show

- 1 April 2012
- 29 April 2012
- 1 July 2012
- 8 July 2012
- 13 May 2012

The Wright Stuff

- 6 June 2012
- 10 August 2012
- 14 August 2012
- 7 September 2012
- 11 September 2012

Appendix 4: Main interview questions

1. How would you describe your show to someone who has never seen it?
2. What are your show's aims? How do you know when you achieve them?
3. What role does your show play in the public sphere?
4. What would you say is your show's ethos or guiding philosophy? Why is this?
5. Why is the format, the format? Are there any other ways this show could be formatted?
6. If money were no obstacle, what would your show look like? Would it be any different?
7. How does your show compare to competitors?
8. What makes a good show? What is effective political talk?
9. What is the most important part of the production process in getting a show to air?
10. What would you say are some "golden production rules" for your show?
11. What are some practical constraints you face in producing your ideal show? What is the hardest thing about producing your show?
12. What kinds of research/planning go into a show?
13. How are guests/panellists selected?
14. What makes a good guest/panellist?
15. What is considered newsworthy? What are the main drivers of this "newsworthiness"?
16. Why do viewers turn to your show, and not others?
17. How do you conceive of your audience?
18. What do you think viewers value in your show? How does this translate into how the show is produced?
19. What role does the host's personality and style play in the show?
20. What would you say is the "house style" in covering politics and "doing" political talk? For instance, what is expected, what is the news culture?
21. What does "impartiality" mean to you and your show?

22. What other national regulations do you consistently and consciously take into account when producing a show?

Appendix 5: Mediatisation coding protocol

Interventionism

(Strömbäck and Dimitrova, 2011)

Visibility	The ratio of journalists' screen time to political actors' screen time.
Speaking	The length of speaking time: journalists vs. political actors.
Interpretation	When the journalistic style is mainly interpretive, journalists instead tend to focus on the why and another kind of what: why something happened, what it means, and what something might lead to. It is a kind of journalism that attempts to go beyond the obvious and provide analysis or context.
Disruption	The extent to which the journalist interrupts and dominates the conversation.

Meta-frames

<p>The game metaframe was dominant if the news story focused on the tactics or strategy of political campaigning, on the horse race and battle for voters, on the images of politicians, on political power as a goal in and of itself, or on politicians as persons rather than as spokespersons for certain policies.</p> <p>(Dimitrova and Strömbäck, 2012)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Deals extensively with politicians or parties winning or losing elections, legislative debates, governing negotiations, or winning or losing in politics generally; 2 Deals extensively with politicians' or parties' strategies for winning elections, negotiations or issue debates, i.e. campaign tactics, legislative manoeuvres, the way they campaign; 3 Deals with the implications or consequences of elections, governing negotiations, legislative debates or other news events for politicians or parties, i.e. how politicians or parties might be affected by elections, governing negotiations, legislative debates, or other events; and 4 Deals extensively with polls and politicians' or parties' standing in the polls.
<p>The issue metaframe, on the other hand, was dominant if the news stories focused on issues and issue positions, on real-life conditions with relevance for issue positions, or on what had happened or what someone had said and done with respect to issues and issue positions.</p> <p>(Strömbäck and van Aelst, 2010)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Deals extensively with substantive public policy issues, problems or solutions; 2 Provides descriptions of politicians' stance or statements about substantive policy issues; 3 Deals extensively with general implications or impacts of legislation or proposed legislation for the public; and 4 Deals extensively with real-world problems, situations or processes that explicitly or implicitly have policy implications.

Personalities and character

(Van Aelst et al., 2012)

Personalities	A focus on the personal life of a political actor: families, love life, hobbies.
Character and persona	A focus on the persona or character of a political actor: competence, leadership, credibility, morality, rhetorical skills, and appearance.
Leader over the party	The extent to which a political actor is more salient than his or her political party

Aesthetics

Visuals and packaging	An emphasis on visuals and “sleek” production: pictures, graphics, mood music, and special effects.
Performative address	Melodramatic role playing; para-social ingratiation
Human interest	Giving human example/face to illustrate issues. Covering topics that are dramatic and resonate emotionally. Humorous appeal.

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