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# How Actualities Affect the Credibility and Audience Evaluation of Radio Newscasts

Michael G. Bradd

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How Actualities Affect the Credibility  
and Audience Evaluation of Radio Newscasts  
(TITLE)

BY

Michael G. Bradd

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How Actualities Affect the Credibility  
and Audience Evaluation of Radio Newscasts

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Running head: RADIO NEWS ACTUALITIES

Abstract

This study tests the hypotheses that actualities increase the audience appeal and credibility of a radio newscast. Two treatment newscasts of identical content were produced using the same announcer. One of the treatments used actualities in four of the seven stories while the other treatment had no actualities. Analysis of variance was used to compare subjects' evaluations of the two treatments. The study found that contrary to common wisdom in the radio industry, actualities have no statistically significant impact on the audience appeal of a newscast. The data did not confirm the credibility hypothesis; it strongly suggested that actualities do improve the credibility ratings of a newscast. Factor analysis showed that credibility is an important element in subjects' evaluation of a radio newscast, ranking second to audience appeal. More research is needed to examine the actuality-credibility link. If it exists, it gives radio news departments empirical evidence to support the on-going practice of spending a great deal of time, effort, and money producing actualities.

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How Actualities Affect the Credibility  
and Audience Evaluation of Radio Newscasts

For many years, radio news professionals have been striving to use taped actualities, or sound, in their newscasts (Bittner & Bittner, 1977, chap. 1). Many stations spend a great deal of time, effort, and resources gathering, producing, and airing actualities. Broadcasters firmly believe that listeners enjoy actualities and sound adds to the quality of a newscast (Adkins, 1966, p. 15; Cain, 1984, p. 14; Boyd, 1988, p. 118).

There is little empirical evidence to support this belief. Very few researchers have investigated the impact of sound in radio news. Two published studies (Wulfemeyer & McFadden, 1985; Grady, 1987) indicate that listeners rate newscasts with actualities no higher than newscasts without sound. This finding contradicts common wisdom in the radio industry (Gibson, 1991, chap. 9). It should cause broadcasters to question whether actualities are worth the effort that newscasters put into gathering and producing them.

This study was designed to further measure the effect of actualities on the audience appeal of radio newscasts. It also investigates another possible benefit of actualities that previous studies have not addressed: do actualities increase the credibility ratings of newscasts?



The Industry's View of Actualities

In its infancy, radio relied largely on newspapers as a source for news. This resulted in radio newscasts that consisted entirely of readers; the announcer reading stories from the studio with no background sounds or interview clips inserted. Radio reporters later began to realize the potential of their medium by moving outside the studio to bring listeners the sound of the news (Gibson, 1991, pp. 178-179).

Originally, radio's use of sound consisted exclusively of live reports. Early examples include WGN's live coverage of the Scopes trial in 1925, NBC's description of New York's ticker-tape parade for Charles Lindbergh in 1927 (Bittner & Bittner, 1977, pp. 2-3), and the BBC's coverage of the Crystal Palace Fire in London in the early 1930s (Herbert, 1976, p. 14). Radio's ability to communicate the excitement and emotion of a news event was immortalized in Herb Morrison's famous account of the explosion of the Hindenburg in 1937 (Bittner & Bittner, 1977, pp. 5-6). The art of bringing the sounds of a news event to the homes of radio listeners was elevated to new heights by Edward R. Murrow and CBS Radio during World War II (Halberstam, 1976). Improved recording technology later led to today's practice of using taped actualities in newscasts (Gifford, 1977, pp. 14-18). During the past twenty-five years, "radio news

has gone from a medium consisting mostly of announcers' voices to one of increasingly heavy eyewitness news material" (E. Stone, 1988, p. 44).

There are four ways that taped segments may be packaged for a radio newscast: (a) actualities, (b) voicers, (c) wrap-arounds, and (d) natural sound. Actualities are taped inserts featuring the voice of a newsmaker and are introduced by a studio anchor. Voicers are live or taped segments voiced by a reporter. They are introduced by a studio anchor but do not contain tape of a newsmaker. Wrap-arounds are a combination of actuality and voicer. Wraps are introduced by a studio anchor, voiced by a field reporter, and include tape of at least one newsmaker. Natural sound is background sound or noise that is added to a radio news story to make listeners feel like they are at the scene of the event (Gibson, 1991, pp. 178-207).

Sound is now a regular staple of radio news. The best evidence of its pervasiveness is found in the national radio networks; they generally employ the most experienced and skilled reporters. A 1986 study found that 47 percent of the stories on six national radio network newscasts used some type of sound. Actualities were used most commonly, accounting for 61% of the stories with tape. Voicers represented 28% of the stories with tape, while wrap-arounds totalled 11%. (Burriss, 1988). It is logical to assume that

the emphasis on sound at the top levels of radio news filters down to newscasters in medium and small market stations, where it has also become standard practice.

It is almost impossible to overstate the breadth of belief in actualities within the radio news industry. Virtually everyone in the business shares the conviction that sound makes a positive contribution to newscasts. Good newscasts have actualities and bad ones don't. It is a dogma that has gone unchallenged for many years in radio news.

Most beginning electronic news reporters are strongly encouraged to use sound in their newscasts. Cohler (1990, p. 150) claims the ability to write to tape is a skill "demanded" of today's broadcast journalists. Textbooks routinely claim actualities help make radio news more interesting. Herbert (1976, p. 16) writes that one thing radio does extremely well is to bring listeners the sound of the news as it is happening. Miles (1975) calls on radio journalists to use actualities to create a "picture with sound that is worth one thousand words" (p. 314). Others credit actualities with adding drama (Keirstead, 1976, p. 177), impact (Gifford, 1977, p. 17), emotion (Hewitt, 1988, p. 100), color, and feeling (Cohler, 1990, pp. 150-151).

Textbook authors also recommend actualities as a way to increase the credibility of a radio newscast. According to Boyd (1988, p. 118), broadcasting's greatest appeal is that the audience can hear the facts straight from the source, lending greater authority to a report than any number of quotes in the next day's newspaper. Hewitt (1988, p. 3) lists field recordings as a strength of broadcast news because they give the audience a chance to hear how something happened.

Trade publications consistently promote the use of sound in radio news. The actuality gets the listener involved in the story and means a lot more to the listener than hearing a newscaster read about it (Adkins, 1966, p. 15). The use of actualities provides listeners with a "being there" flavor (Crouse, 1988, p. 46). Radio newscasters now seem to strive for immediacy and to air as much tape as possible (Cain, 1984, p. 14). Even public relations professionals recognize the importance of sound to radio newscasters and encourage their colleagues to make actualities available to radio news departments whenever possible for optimum exposure of events (Moorman, 1984).

#### Previous Studies on Actualities

Despite the heavy industry emphasis on the use of sound, there is little empirical evidence suggesting actualities have a positive effect. Few scientific studies

on the effectiveness of actualities have been published. Results from two studies focusing exclusively on actualities contradict the common wisdom within the industry. They indicate actualities do not make a newscast more appealing to the audience.

Wulfemeyer and McFadden (1985) explored the effect of actualities on the recall of information and the degree of listener interest in a radio newscast. They produced two three-and-one-half minute radio newscasts. In the control treatment all five stories were read by a newscaster with no actualities. In the experimental treatment, the same five stories were used but actualities were added to three of the stories.

They concluded actualities have a negative effect on both listener interest in the newscast and the ability to recall information from the broadcast. On a multiple choice exam testing recall, subjects who heard the control treatment significantly outscored subjects who heard the actualities. Subjects who heard the control treatment also rated it significantly more interesting than subjects who heard the treatment with actualities (Wulfemeyer & McFadden, 1985).

Grady (1987) conducted a similar study, focusing on recall and audience evaluation. Four treatment newscasts were produced with each consisting of five stories. Stories

1, 2, 4, and 5 were identical in each treatment and were read by the newscaster. Story 3 was produced four different ways: (a) a voicer done by a reporter with no natural sound, (b) a voicer done by a reporter with natural sound in the background, (c) an actuality featuring tape of a newsmaker, and (d) a reader delivered by the newscaster in the studio with no actuality or voicer.

Grady found no significant differences in audience recall or audience evaluation between the four treatments. Differences in scores on a nine question recall exam were not statistically significant between treatment groups. A semantic differential to test audience evaluation also failed to produce statistically significant differences between the treatments (Grady, 1987).

A thesis pilot study (Bradd, 1991) conducted prior to this experiment contradicted the two published studies. Subjects listened to two versions of the same newscast: one treatment with actualities and the other treatment without actualities. The newscast with actualities produced significantly higher audience appeal ratings than the treatment with no actualities. An attempt to test whether actualities improved newscast credibility turned up no significant results.

Additional studies have investigated the use of sound bites and videotape in television newscasts. These studies

may have direct implications for radio news since a TV sound bite requires the viewer to mentally shift gears between the anchor and the newsmaker. Theoretically, it is similar to the process radio listeners go through when an actuality is aired during a newscast.

Burriss (1987) found that increases in TV story complexity, like packages and sound bites, caused lower audience recall rates and lower audience evaluations of the newscast. This finding supports the results of actuality studies in radio news (Wulfemeyer & McFadden, 1985; Grady, 1987). Grimes (1991) determined that a television program can overload the viewer's capacity to pay attention if the video and audio segments do not match. Brosius (1991) reported that strong visuals enhanced audience retention of material presented in television news stories. However, the study did not examine the use of TV sound bites, which seems to be more directly related to the practice of using radio actualities.

#### Studies of Retention by Radio News Listeners

When studying the usefulness of actualities, it is important to identify the desirable qualities they should add to a radio newscast. Previous studies have often investigated audience recall or retention as a dependent variable.

Radio has not proven to be as effective as other media in audience recall. Recall levels for television and print news have been shown to be significantly higher than radio (Wilson, 1974; Stauffer, Frost, & Rybolt, 1980; Stauffer, Frost, & Rybolt, 1981). Subjects who watch a program on television demonstrate higher retention levels than people who listen to the same program on radio (Goldberg, 1950; Barrow & Westley, 1959). Viewers of television news bulletins retain more information than do listeners of radio news bulletins (Katz, Adoni, & Parness, 1977).

Several scholars have investigated the characteristics that increase listener retention of the information in a radio newscast. Findahl and Hoijer (1975) confirmed retention rates increase when elements of information are repeated in a news story. Lang (1989) determined listeners retain more information if stories are written in a chronological style, rather than traditional broadcast style. Smith and McEwen (1974) showed listener retention drops when the newscaster speaks at more than 190 words per minute. Hadwiger (1970) discovered listeners retained more if the newscaster had good voice quality as opposed to nasal, breathy, or tense voice quality. Tannenbaum (1954) and Gunter (1987, pp. 200-201) found the order of stories affected retention. The highest recall rates came on



stories at the end of a newscast and the lowest rates were for stories in the middle of the program.

Others have identified characteristics that do not have a significant impact on listener retention rates. Meyer and Miller (1970) found that whether the newscaster had an emphasis or non-emphasis delivery style had no effect on listener recall. Tiedge and Ksobiech (1982) determined that adding timeliness cue words like "now in progress" or "this just in" to suggest a newscast is up-to-date does not improve audience recall. Klein (1978) showed retention did not increase when the newscaster lumped similar stories together according to topic.

While retention is an interesting variable to study, I contend it is not an important quality in the eyes of radio news professionals. Radio newscasters are not using the techniques that have been demonstrated to have a positive effect on listener retention. Information is not being repeated in radio news stories to increase recall. Stories are not being written in a chronological style. The most important stories are placed at the beginning of a newscast, not the end. By ignoring these techniques, broadcasters demonstrate they do not place a high priority on listener recall of newscast information.

Most newscasters do not see themselves as teachers trying to communicate information in a way that the audience

will learn it. Radio listeners are not given multiple choice exams after newscasts to determine what they remember. High listener recall rates do not automatically result in larger newscast audiences or increased income for radio stations. Because it is not a high priority in the radio news industry, retention and recall are not a part of this study.

#### Audience Appeal

Radio newscasters and particularly news directors are more interested in how their newscast appeals to the audience. Audience appeal means listeners find the newscast pleasing to hear. An aesthetically pleasing broadcast should result in a high number of repeat listeners, which can be converted into increased income for the station.

Previous research has attempted to identify characteristics linked to audience appeal of radio newscasts. Using cue words suggesting a newscast is up-to-date increases evaluation levels (Tiedge & Ksobiech, 1982). Not surprisingly, increasing the number of commercials in a newscast from one to two causes audience evaluation levels to go down (Dominick, 1976).

The thesis pilot study (Bradd, 1991) found actualities have a positive effect on the audience appeal of a radio newscast. Analysis of variance showed statistically significant differences ( $p < .05$ ) on several bi-polar pairs

of adjectives related to audience appeal: strong/weak, interesting/boring, lively/dull, good/bad, and easy/difficult to listen to. The study uncovered a strong order effect. Subjects rated the treatment with actualities particularly high if they heard the newscast without actualities first.

### Credibility

Credibility means the audience believes the stories are accurate and has faith in the newscast. It is an important construct to both electronic and print journalists, who go to great lengths to establish and protect their credibility. Many of the ethical guidelines that radio journalists subscribe to (avoiding conflicts of interest, etc.) are designed to maintain the credibility of their news.

Several years ago the Federal Communications Commission abolished its requirement that radio stations must carry news. Despite deregulation, most stations continue to carry news programming. The decision to keep news is supported by science. Research shows most radio listeners want to hear news on the radio. This holds true even for listeners to music-intensive formats (Wright & Hosman, 1987).

While listeners say they want news, radio news suffers from a general lack of credibility. Westley and Severin (1964) discovered the percentage of subjects who say radio is the most credible medium (21%) ranked well below the

percentages for television (42%) and newspapers (37%). Mulder (1980) determined radio trailed far behind television and newspapers when subjects were asked what medium was most credible. Gaziano and McGrath (1986) found radio news ranked third, far behind newspapers and television, in reliability of local news coverage and the ability to explain local news stories. For national stories, radio ranked fourth, behind TV, newspapers, and magazines, in reliability of coverage, ability to explain stories, and overall believability.

Credibility is a complex construct to investigate. It is comprised of multiple factors, many of which are difficult to measure. Factor analysis has been used to identify "knowledgeability" of the news person as the number one element in determining their credibility (Singletary, 1976). The same study indicated factors that appear to be part of audience appeal ("attraction" and "articulation") are actually important elements in judging the credibility of the newscaster. This suggests that in some respects credibility and audience appeal are closely linked.

Another study (Markham, 1968) found that elements of the message are an important factor in newscast credibility. Subjects indicated the logic of the content of a television news story was closely related to its credibility. For radio news, this suggests that whether the content is

packaged into an actuality or reader might influence its credibility.

Several scholars have investigated other factors related to the credibility of radio news. Burgoon (1978) showed various attributes of the newscaster's voice can affect credibility. Several researchers (V. A. Stone, 1974; Whittaker and Whittaker, 1976; Hutchinson, 1982) found gender of the newscaster played no statistically significant difference in the credibility level of the newscast. Dominick (1976) demonstrated that increasing the number of commercials from one to two lowered the credibility rating of a newscast.

Credibility has been shown to be related to use of a medium. Westley and Severin (1964) found that subjects who rated radio as the most credible medium spent the most time listening to the radio. This suggests that perceived credibility can increase the size of a listening audience. That means credibility should be important in radio news, where a bigger listening audience means additional revenue.

#### Research Hypotheses

Previous research has not focused on the relationship between actualities and newscast credibility. Actualities are purported to make listeners feel like they're at the scene and hearing directly from the source. Common wisdom in the radio industry suggests actualities should increase

newscast credibility. Based on these universal beliefs among radio professionals, the following hypothesis was investigated:

H 1: The presence of actualities will have a positive effect on listener credibility ratings of a radio newscast.

Despite two studies to the contrary, most of the literature in the radio industry suggests that actualities should increase the audience appeal of a newscast. Based on this widely-held belief, plus the results of the thesis pilot study, a second hypothesis was tested:

H 2: The presence of actualities will have a positive effect on audience appeal ratings of a radio newscast.

#### Method

##### Materials

Two treatment newscasts were produced. Each treatment consisted of seven fictional local news stories in a mythical community named Redmon. Each newscast was approximately five minutes long. Both treatments started with a standard radio news introduction and ended with a local weather forecast to make them sound as realistic as possible.

The same announcer was used in both treatments to eliminate newscaster effects. A former radio news director

recorded the stories to achieve professional sounding newscasts. The announcer's voice was not familiar to the subjects and a fictitious name was used. This was done to eliminate the possibility of tainted data from subjects who recognized the announcer's name.

In the control treatment, the seven stories were read by the newscaster with no actualities. In the experimental treatment, actualities were used in four of the seven stories. The other three stories in the experimental treatment were read by the newscaster with no actualities. The wording of those three stories was identical to the control treatment.

The wording of the four stories with actualities differed slightly between the two treatments. This was necessary to make the actualities sound more natural and conversational. Newsmakers who are interviewed for actualities usually do not phrase their answers in broadcast news style. Therefore, the wording of the actualities in the experimental treatment differed slightly from the control treatment, where the same content was delivered by the newscaster.

The content of the stories in the two treatments was identical. Information expressed in the actualities was paraphrased and delivered by the newscaster in the control

treatment. Copies of the scripts from both treatments can be found in Appendices A and B.

The four stories in the experimental treatment that used tape presented it in the form of actualities. The tape consisted of a newsmaker talking and was introduced by the studio anchor. Voicers and wrap-arounds were not used because they would introduce additional news reporters in the experimental treatment. Additional reporters would add another variable to the experiment and make the results more difficult to analyze. No natural sound was used in the experimental treatment because of the difficulty of inserting it in a realistic manner.

The actualities were recorded by three college broadcasting students and an older adult with substantial theater experience. In each case, the scenario of the news story was explained in advance to the participant, who was then interviewed on tape. This method allowed participants to phrase their answers in their own words, making the actualities sound more natural. Voice quality varied between the four participants. This should not effect the results of the study, because all subjects who heard the experimental treatment heard the same four participants. Voice quality of the newsmaker is also a factor that cannot be controlled by the reporter, so it was not controlled in this study.



A panel of three former professional broadcasters and broadcast educators listened to the treatments prior to the study. The panel consisted of Dr. Frank Parcells, former radio personality and current professor of Speech Communication at Eastern Illinois University; Bill Lower, former radio news director and current director of the radio-television program at Lake Land College in Mattoon, Illinois; and Ken Wooddell, veteran radio personality and current instructor in Speech Communication at Eastern Illinois University. The treatments were judged to be realistic sounding and identical in content. The same two treatments were also used in the pilot study, where their validity was demonstrated.

#### Instrument

The dependent variables of credibility and audience evaluation were measured with a two-part questionnaire. The first section of the instrument was a semantic differential that contained ten pairs of bi-polar adjectives on a seven-point scale. Two pairs (believable/unbelievable, unbiased/biased) were designed to test newscast credibility. The other eight pairs (strong/weak, interesting/boring, thorough/superficial, lively/dull, good/bad, clear/hazy, professional/amateurish, easy to listen to/difficult to listen to) were designed to establish audience appeal ratings of the newscasts. The same semantic differential

was used in the pilot study, where its validity and reliability were demonstrated.

The second section of the instrument was a Likert scale featuring seven statements. Five of the items measured newscast credibility while the other two related to audience appeal. This section was developed specifically for this experiment after the pilot study failed to produce adequate credibility ratings using only the semantic differential. See Appendix C for a copy of the instrument.

### Subjects

The study was administered to 244 college students enrolled in an introductory speech communication course. The course was a university requirement for graduation, meaning all majors could be represented. Using an introductory course helped decrease the likelihood that subjects had previously taken broadcast news courses which might make them sensitive to the variables being tested.

### Procedure

At the beginning of the day's class, the subjects were told they were participating in a study of radio news production techniques. The subjects heard a tape of one of the treatment newscasts and were asked to evaluate it by filling out the instrument. Everyone in the class heard the same treatment. Treatments were alternated between classes. Just over half of the sample heard the experimental

treatment (n = 126) while the rest of the subjects listened to the control treatment (n = 118). Subjects were asked to be as honest as possible in filling out their evaluations and were directed to put down their first impression for each item. At the conclusion of the experiment, the subjects were told the study was testing the effectiveness of radio actualities and a brief description of actualities was given.

Results were calculated using the Number Cruncher Statistic System computer program. A one-way analysis of variance was used to test differences in the audience ratings of the two treatments. Factor analysis was used to determine the importance of the constructs being tested and to confirm the validity and reliability of the instrument.

### Results

Seven items from the instrument were designed to test the credibility of the newscasts (see Table 1). Analysis of variance found only one item that produced means significantly different between the two treatments. The Likert scale statement "I would rate this station as a reliable source for news" had a significantly better mean for the treatment with actualities than for the newscast without tape. Positive responses to this statement should indicate the newscast has a high degree of credibility with the audience.

The newscast with actualities also produced higher means for the other six credibility items on the instrument. However, none of the differences was statistically significant when tested at the  $p < .05$  level. Three of the items produced differences that were significant at the  $p < .10$  level.

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Insert Table 1 about here

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The low number of statistically significant differences means hypothesis one cannot be confirmed by the data. However, there is evidence to strongly suggest the hypothesis may be correct.

Ten items from the instrument were designed to test audience appeal of the newscasts. Analysis of variance revealed there were no statistically significant differences between the means of the two treatments on any of the ten items.

The treatment with actualities produced higher means on only three pairs of bi-polar adjectives from the semantic differential (strong/weak, interesting/boring, good/bad). None of the differences were statistically significant to the  $p < .05$  level.

The treatment without actualities produced higher means on five pairs of adjectives (thorough/superficial,

lively/dull, clear/hazy, professional/amateurish, easy/difficult to listen to). The control treatment also produced higher means on two items from the Likert scale ("The newscast held my attention well" and "The newscast was very interesting"). Again, none of the differences was statistically significant.

Of ten items designed to test audience appeal, the newscast without actualities produced higher means seven times. None of the ten items produced statistically significant differences between the two treatments; therefore, hypothesis two is not confirmed.

Factor analysis identified four elements with Eigenvalues over 1.0 (see Table 2). These factors accounted for over 65% of the variance in the experiment.

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Insert Table 2 about here

---

Factor 1 was labeled audience appeal because it consisted of the bi-polar pairs strong/weak, interesting/boring, and lively/dull along with the Likert scale statements "The newscast held my attention well" and "The newscast was very interesting". This construct was far and away the major factor in the study, accounting for almost 38% of the variance.

Factor 2 accounted for nearly 15% of the variance and was labeled credibility. It was loaded by the Likert scale statements "I believe the news I heard during this newscast", "I found the newscast to be highly credible", "I believe this station's news can be trusted", and "I would rate this station as a reliable source for news". Interestingly, the statement "The newscaster's voice made me believe the stories" did not load this factor, meaning the performance of the announcer did not contribute to newscast credibility.

Factor 3 was labeled balance. It accounted for over 7% of the variance and was loaded solely by the bi-polar pair unbiased/biased.

Factor 4 was labeled precision. It accounted for about 6% of the variance and was loaded by two bi-polar pairs: thorough/superficial and clear/hazy.

#### Discussion

The main point to emerge from this study is that actualities may help increase the credibility of a radio newscast. Even though hypothesis one was not confirmed by this experiment, the data strongly suggests actualities increase credibility. The treatment with actualities produced higher means than the control treatment on all seven items designed to test credibility. One of the items

supported the hypothesis at  $p < .05$ . Three of the other credibility items came close to  $p < .05$ .

There have apparently been no previous studies of actualities and credibility. No articles were discovered during a search of college libraries in Illinois through the Illinet On-Line computer database, an investigation of communication journals listed in Matlon's Index, and an extensive review of reference lists from related articles. With no previous findings to either support or contradict this study, the evidence suggests there is a connection between actualities and credibility.

It is logical to assume that actualities and newscast credibility are directly related. A large number of actualities should give the audience the impression that the station has an active news department. Each story that utilizes an actuality carries the unspoken message that the station covered the event in person or by telephone, or expended the resources necessary to obtain tape from another outlet that did. This should create a positive impression with the audience and add to the credibility of the station's news.

More research is needed to better understand the connection between actualities and newscast credibility. Conclusive proof that actualities increase credibility would give radio stations a reason to continue their current

practice of using actualities whenever possible. Newscasts with a large number of actualities would result in greater credibility for the station's news department. That should result in more listeners to that station's news, since a link between perceived credibility and time spent listening has been established (Westley and Severin, 1964). A larger audience would give the station an opportunity to increase advertising revenues from the news which would help offset the cost of gathering and producing the actualities.

It seems clear from this study and others that actualities do not increase the audience appeal of a newscast. The treatment with actualities produced lower means than the control treatment on seven of the ten items designed to test audience appeal. None of the ten items resulted in statistically significant differences between the means of the two treatments.

It is logical that the treatment with no actualities would produce higher means on the adjective pair "thorough/superficial". With no actualities to rely on, the newscaster must dominate the air waves and be more thorough in telling the story. This may create the impression that the entire newscast is more thorough, even though the content is identical.

It is also not surprising that the adjective pair "clear/hazy" resulted in higher means for the treatment with



no actualities. The process of switching back and forth between newscaster and newsmaker could easily result in less clarity than a simple newscast where the anchor gives all of the information.

It is also logical that listeners would find it easier to listen to the newscast without actualities. More effort is required for the listener to switch their attention back and forth between newscaster and newsmaker in the experimental treatment.

Common wisdom in the radio industry suggests the newscast with actualities should produce higher means for the other adjective pairs (strong/weak, interesting/boring, lively/dull, good/bad, professional/amateurish). Yet none of the differences came close to being statistically significant. We are left with the conclusion that actualities do not increase the audience appeal of the newscast.

The results of this study contradict the findings of the pilot study (Bradd, 1991), which found support for the hypothesis that actualities increase audience appeal. The contradiction is apparently a result of methodology. In the pilot study, each subject heard and evaluated both treatment newscasts. The highest ratings for the treatment with actualities came from subjects who heard it after the newscast with no actualities. The actualities apparently

sounded especially good after subjects heard a newscast without tape. Some subjects may have become sensitive to the independent variable being tested during the course of the two treatments and their discovery may have influenced their ratings.

This study allowed each subject to hear only one newscast. No one knew what variable was being tested until after the newscast evaluations were complete. With a cleaner methodology and no opportunity for order effects, the higher ratings for the treatment with actualities disappeared. The data clearly suggests actualities make no difference in audience appeal.

This finding supports the research of Grady (1987) who also found actualities have no significant effect on audience appeal of a radio newscast. The evidence stops short of supporting Wulfemeyer and McFadden's (1985) conclusion that actualities reduce audience appeal. The inconsistencies in the findings of the three studies may again be attributed to methodology. Wulfemeyer and McFadden measured audience appeal with a single item asking subjects to rate the newscast from 1 to 10 with 10 being "very interesting". This experiment and Grady's study used bipolar adjective pairs to determine appeal, providing a broader measure of the construct. I believe the studies

with the best measure of audience appeal show actualities have no significant impact.

If this were the only finding of this study, I would suggest that radio news departments take a strong look at their news gathering operations and consider cutting back on the production of actualities. If the actualities don't give a newscast more audience appeal, why should news departments spend so much time, effort and money gathering them? Over half of the radio stations in the United States reported losing money in 1991. In a period of economic hardship in the radio industry, stations do not need to spend money on work that has no benefit. However, the possible credibility benefits of actualities could offset the fact that they do not increase newscast appeal.

This study demonstrates that credibility is an important element used by listeners to evaluate a newscast. Factor analysis determined audience appeal was the number one evaluation factor, followed by credibility. Even though actualities do not increase audience appeal, they could still make a positive contribution to a newscast by strengthening its credibility.

The potential link between actualities and newscast credibility could be an important finding for the radio news industry. Increased credibility may prove to be the only contribution actualities make to a radio newscast. A

connection has been established between an individual's perceptions of the credibility of a medium and the person's media consumption patterns (Westley & Severin, 1964). The low credibility of radio news means it needs to take any possible steps to increase its credibility ratings. Better credibility may result in higher ratings and more revenue.

Broadcast journalism educators should consider changing their approach to radio news actualities. It is becoming clear that the belief that actualities make a newscast more appealing is a myth held by the radio industry. Educators should begin to send this message to their students. However, it seems unlikely that radio news departments will stop using actualities any time soon. Educators should stress the importance of actualities because of their widespread use in the industry and the possibility that they increase newscast credibility.

This study has limitations. One is the make-up of the sample in this experiment. The subjects were college students, who typically do not make up a large percentage of the radio news listening audience. Future research should attempt to measure an older population to see if the findings hold true with a demographic group that is more likely to listen to radio news.

Another limitation is the credibility of the treatment newscasts used in the study. It is very difficult to

produce fictional actualities that sound real. Those used in this study sounded credible to many subjects. However, judging from the evaluation sheets, a few subjects apparently found the entire newscast lacking credibility. Perhaps a future study could tape actualities off the air and use them in news stories that are recorded by a different anchor.

Another limitation is the measurement of the construct credibility. Factor analysis showed several of the items used in this project loaded together to measure an element that could be labeled credibility. However, in real life it is difficult for any station to establish real credibility with a single newscast. I suspect credibility is earned by a news department over an extended period of time. This factor is not measured by asking a group of subjects to rate one newscast for credibility.

Another potential limitation is the type of actualities used in the experimental treatment. They were all what might be called standard cuts: a newsmaker's voice with no natural sound. The audience might find this type of actuality boring. However, carefully crafted reports that skillfully blend natural sound with actualities might produce an entirely different audience reaction. It may be that actualities do not have a positive effect unless they are very well done.

The results of this study spawn the question, "Are radio news departments doing the right thing for the wrong reason?" For years, newscasts have included actualities because they supposedly make the news more interesting and appealing to the audience. This is obviously not true. However, actualities may be making a far more important contribution to radio news by increasing the credibility of the newscasts. More research is needed in this area. Radio journalists need more information so they can frame their use of actualities in the proper perspective. This knowledge will give news professionals a better understanding of how their audience responds to their product.

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Appendix A

Scripts for Experimental Treatment

Introduction

IT'S TIME NOW FOR WXLY NEWS. I'M TERRY JAMES  
REPORTING.

Story # 1 - Water

SEVERAL HUNDRED REDMON RESIDENTS ARE STILL WITHOUT  
WATER FOLLOWING A MAJOR WATER MAIN BREAK LAST NIGHT. WATER  
DEPARTMENT OFFICIALS SAY A 12-INCH MAIN BROKE AROUND 8:00  
LAST NIGHT AT THE INTERSECTION OF CEDAR AND 16TH STREETS IN  
REDMON. THE OUTAGE IS AFFECTING A 16-BLOCK AREA ON THE  
NORTH SIDE OF THE CITY. WATER DEPARTMENT MANAGER BILL  
BREWER...

"We had to interrupt service in the area to allow our  
workers to repair the main. Our progress was slowed  
down because we had to wait for a replacement part  
from out of town so we apologize to all of our  
unhappy customers. We do however expect to be finished  
by 5:00 this evening."

A TEMPORARY WATER STORAGE TANK HAS BEEN SET-UP AT REDMON  
FIRE STATION NUMBER TWO AT 21ST AND HAYES TO PROVIDE WATER  
FOR RESIDENTS WHOSE SERVICE HAS BEEN INTERRUPTED. RESIDENTS  
WHO USE THE TEMPORARY TANK ARE ASKED TO BRING THEIR OWN  
CONTAINERS TO TRANSPORT THE WATER TO THEIR HOMES.

Story # 2 - Fire

A LOCAL SERVICE STATION AND TWO PARKED CARS WERE DAMAGED BY FIRE IN AN UNUSUAL INCIDENT LAST NIGHT. THE ACCIDENT OCCURRED AT THE VALLEY VIEW MOBIL STATION AT 1726 EAST ROSEBERRY IN REDMON SHORTLY AFTER 9:00. FIRE OFFICIALS SAY A CAR DRIVEN BY 33-YEAR OLD TERRY McCLENDON OF 4050 KINGSVILLE AVENUE WAS PULLING AWAY FROM THE GAS PUMPS WHEN THE PROBLEM BEGAN. REDMON POLICE OFFICER RICH STEVENS EXPLAINS WHAT HAPPENED...

"Oh the fire was started today as a car was pulling away from the gas station, and its rear bumper caught the loop of the gas hose, and it caught the station on fire when it pulled the electrical wires loose from everything and it ruptured the lines. And whenever the fire broke loose it damaged the whole station and then a parking lot next to us also had a couple cars damaged."

THE DAMAGED CARS WERE OWNED BY SERVICE STATION MANAGER DALE PHILLPOT AND EMPLOYEE RAY JOHNSON. THERE WERE NO INJURIES IN THE INCIDENT AND NO TICKETS WERE ISSUED BY POLICE. TOTAL DAMAGE TO THE SERVICE STATION AND THE CARS IS ESTIMATED AT MORE THAN 20-THOUSAND DOLLARS.

Story # 3 - Accident

A REDMON WOMAN HAS BEEN CHARGED WITH RECKLESS HOMICIDE FOR HER ROLE IN LAST MONTH'S ACCIDENT THAT CLAIMED THE LIFE OF A LOCAL TEACHER. 47-YEAR OLD TINA LAMBERT OF 501 MAPLE STREET HAS BEEN CHARGED WITH RECKLESS HOMICIDE. LAMBERT WAS THE DRIVER OF A CAR THAT STRUCK AND KILLED REDMON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHER MELODY MELANSON LAST MONTH ON NORTH MAIN STREET. LAMBERT HAS ALREADY BEEN CHARGED WITH DRIVING UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF ALCOHOL. HER FIRST COURT APPEARANCE ON THE RECKLESS HOMICIDE CHARGE IS SCHEDULED FOR TUESDAY IN THOMAS COUNTY CIRCUIT COURT.

Story # 4 - Derailment

ONLY MINOR DAMAGE WAS REPORTED IN THE DERAILEMENT OF A FREIGHT CAR OVER NIGHT ON THE SOUTH SIDE OF REDMON. ONE CAR OF A UNION PACIFIC FREIGHT TRAIN LEFT THE TRACKS AT THE SOUTH END OF REDMON'S RAIL YARD AROUND 3:45 THIS MORNING. THERE WERE NO INJURIES AND ONLY MINOR DAMAGE TO THE CAR, WHICH WAS CARRYING A LOAD OF COAL. THE CAR WAS RIGHTED AND RETURNED TO THE TRACKS SHORTLY AFTER DAYBREAK. A BROKEN DRAWBAR IS BELIEVED TO HAVE BEEN THE CAUSE OF THE DERAILEMENT.

Story # 5 - Obituary

A LONG TIME CIVIC LEADER IN REDMON PASSED AWAY LATE LAST NIGHT. UNION NATIONAL BANK PRESIDENT ROBERT RANKIN DIED AT CENTRAL VALLEY MEMORIAL HOSPITAL, FOLLOWING A LENGTHY ILLNESS. HE WAS 63. RANKIN HAD SERVED AS PRESIDENT OF UNION NATIONAL BANK FOR THE PAST 16 YEARS. HE WAS ACTIVE IN A NUMBER OF COMMUNITY GROUPS AND WAS A FORMER CHAIRMAN OF THE LOCAL UNITED WAY AND FORMER PRESIDENT OF THE REDMON CHAMBER OF COMMERCE.

Story # 6 - Leash Law

A LOCAL PET OWNER WILL ASK THE REDMON CITY COUNCIL TO AMEND THE CITY'S LEASH LAW TONIGHT. MARIE GABLER OF 407 WEST BROOK HAS BEEN CIRCULATING A PETITION SEEKING A CHANGE IN THE LEASH LAW. GABLER SAYS SHE WILL PRESENT MORE THAN 300 SIGNATURES TO COUNCIL MEMBERS AT TONIGHT'S MEETING...

"Well right now the law is that you do have to walk your dog on a leash and I feel that the people that have enough control over their animal should be able to use verbal or hand control."

TONIGHT'S CITY COUNCIL MEETING BEGINS AT 7:30 AT REDMON CITY HALL.



Story # 7 - Walker

A MAN WHO IS TRYING TO WALK ACROSS AMERICA STROLLED THROUGH REDMON THIS MORNING. ROB SWEETGALL BEGAN HIS WALK LAST SEPTEMBER IN SAN FRANCISCO. HE PLANS TO WALK THROUGH ALL 50 STATES ON HIS WAY TO NEW YORK CITY, WHERE HE INTENDS TO FINISH HIS JOURNEY IN NOVEMBER. SWEETGALL SAYS HE IS MAKING THE WALK TO PROMOTE CARDIOVASCULAR HEALTH AND FITNESS THROUGH WALKING...

"Oh my two main reasons are to walk across the United States and to talk to large groups of people and tell them to stress the benefits of walking. And also on the way I am having tests done on myself to show or to prove the importance of the walking."

IF SWEETGALL COMPLETES HIS PLANNED ROUTE, HE WILL HAVE COVERED MORE THAN 11-THOUSAND-200 MILES... BREAKING THE EXISTING WORLD RECORD OF 10-THOUSAND-600 MILES WHICH SWEETGALL ESTABLISHED DURING A CROSS-COUNTRY WALK IN 1985 AND 86.

Weather and Close

OUR LOCAL WEATHER FORECAST... PARTLY SUNNY TODAY WITH A HIGH OF 63 DEGREES. FAIR AND COLDER TONIGHT WITH A LOW OF 35. SUNNY AND COOLER TOMORROW WITH A HIGH OF 56. CURRENTLY IT'S 59 DEGREES. FOR WXLY NEWS, I'M TERRY JAMES REPORTING.

Appendix B

Scripts for Control Treatment

Introduction

IT'S TIME NOW FOR WXLY NEWS. I'M TERRY JAMES  
REPORTING.

Story # 1 - Water

SEVERAL HUNDRED REDMON RESIDENTS ARE STILL WITHOUT  
WATER FOLLOWING A MAJOR WATER MAIN BREAK LAST NIGHT. WATER  
DEPARTMENT OFFICIALS SAY A 12-INCH MAIN BROKE AROUND 8:00  
LAST NIGHT AT THE INTERSECTION OF CEDAR AND 16TH STREETS IN  
REDMON. THE OUTAGE IS AFFECTING A 16-BLOCK AREA ON THE  
NORTH SIDE OF THE CITY. WATER DEPARTMENT MANAGER BILL  
BREWER SAYS WATER SERVICE HAD TO BE INTERRUPTED IN THE AREA  
TO ALLOW WORKERS TO REPAIR THE MAIN. REPAIR EFFORTS WERE  
SLOWED WHEN CREWS HAD TO WAIT FOR A REPLACEMENT PART TO  
ARRIVE, BUT BREWER EXPECTS THE WORK TO BE COMPLETED BY 5:00  
THIS EVENING. A TEMPORARY WATER STORAGE TANK HAS BEEN SET-  
UP AT REDMON FIRE STATION NUMBER TWO AT 21ST AND HAYES TO  
PROVIDE WATER FOR RESIDENTS WHOSE SERVICE HAS BEEN  
INTERRUPTED. RESIDENTS WHO USE THE TEMPORARY TANK ARE ASKED  
TO BRING THEIR OWN CONTAINERS TO TRANSPORT THE WATER TO  
THEIR HOMES.

Story # 2 - Fire

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Story # 7 - Walker

A MAN WHO IS TRYING TO WALK ACROSS AMERICA STROLLED THROUGH REDMON THIS MORNING. ROB SWEETGALL BEGAN HIS WALK LAST SEPTEMBER IN SAN FRANCISCO. HE PLANS TO WALK THROUGH ALL 50 STATES ON HIS WAY TO NEW YORK CITY, WHERE HE INTENDS TO FINISH HIS JOURNEY IN NOVEMBER. SWEETGALL SAYS HE IS MAKING THE WALK TO PROMOTE CARDIOVASCULAR HEALTH AND FITNESS THROUGH WALKING. HE HAS BEEN SPEAKING TO NUMEROUS GROUPS TO STRESS THE BENEFITS OF WALKING IN MAINTAINING GOOD HEALTH. SWEETGALL IS ALSO THE SUBJECT OF A SERIES OF MEDICAL TESTS DURING THE JOURNEY TO DETERMINE THE IMPACT OF WALKING ON HIS FITNESS LEVEL. IF SWEETGALL COMPLETES HIS PLANNED ROUTE, HE WILL HAVE COVERED MORE THAN 11-THOUSAND-200 MILES... BREAKING THE EXISTING WORLD RECORD OF 10-THOUSAND-600 MILES WHICH SWEETGALL ESTABLISHED DURING A CROSS-COUNTRY WALK IN 1985 AND 86.

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## Appendix C

Instrument Used in this StudySECTION 1

Please evaluate the newscast you have just heard by placing an "X" at the appropriate position on each of the scales shown below. Please give your first impressions or immediate reactions.

|                           | Very  | Moderately | Mildly | Neutral | Mildly | Moderately | Very  |                      |
|---------------------------|-------|------------|--------|---------|--------|------------|-------|----------------------|
| Strong                    | _____ | _____      | _____  | _____   | _____  | _____      | _____ | Weak                 |
| Biased                    | _____ | _____      | _____  | _____   | _____  | _____      | _____ | Unbiased             |
| Boring                    | _____ | _____      | _____  | _____   | _____  | _____      | _____ | Interesting          |
| Thorough                  | _____ | _____      | _____  | _____   | _____  | _____      | _____ | Superficial          |
| Unbelievable              | _____ | _____      | _____  | _____   | _____  | _____      | _____ | Believable           |
| Lively                    | _____ | _____      | _____  | _____   | _____  | _____      | _____ | Dull                 |
| Bad                       | _____ | _____      | _____  | _____   | _____  | _____      | _____ | Good                 |
| Clear                     | _____ | _____      | _____  | _____   | _____  | _____      | _____ | Hazy                 |
| Professional              | _____ | _____      | _____  | _____   | _____  | _____      | _____ | Amateurish           |
| Difficult to<br>Listen to | _____ | _____      | _____  | _____   | _____  | _____      | _____ | Easy to<br>Listen to |

SECTION 2

Please choose the best response for each item to indicate your degree of agreement with the statement. Again, please give your first impressions.

1. I believe the news I heard during this newscast.  

|                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Strongly<br>Agree        | Agree                    | Neutral                  | Disagree                 | Strongly<br>Disagree     |
2. The newscast held my attention well.  

|                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Strongly<br>Agree        | Agree                    | Neutral                  | Disagree                 | Strongly<br>Disagree     |
3. I found the newscast to be highly credible.  

|                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Strongly<br>Agree        | Agree                    | Neutral                  | Disagree                 | Strongly<br>Disagree     |
4. The newscaster's voice made me believe the stories.  

|                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Strongly<br>Agree        | Agree                    | Neutral                  | Disagree                 | Strongly<br>Disagree     |
5. I believe this station's news can be trusted.  

|                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Strongly<br>Agree        | Agree                    | Neutral                  | Disagree                 | Strongly<br>Disagree     |
6. The newscast was very interesting.  

|                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Strongly<br>Agree        | Agree                    | Neutral                  | Disagree                 | Strongly<br>Disagree     |
7. I would rate this station as a reliable source for news.  

|                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Strongly<br>Agree        | Agree                    | Neutral                  | Disagree                 | Strongly<br>Disagree     |



Table 1

Adjusted Means for Items Testing Credibility

|                         | Experimental | Control | p<  |
|-------------------------|--------------|---------|-----|
| Reliable Source         | 3.83         | 3.63    | .04 |
| Newscaster's Voice      | 3.90         | 3.68    | .06 |
| Believable/Unbelievable | 5.92         | 5.60    | .07 |
| Highly Credible         | 3.82         | 3.64    | .07 |
| I Believe the News      | 4.13         | 4.01    | .21 |
| Can Be Trusted          | 3.91         | 3.80    | .22 |
| Unbiased/Biased         | 5.11         | 4.97    | .50 |

Note. The adjective pairs are based on a 7-point scale.  
The Likert scale statements are based on a 5-point scale.

Table 2

Factor Analysis of All 17 Items

|               | Variable             | 1    | 2    | 3     | 4    |
|---------------|----------------------|------|------|-------|------|
| Factor # 1    | Strong/Weak          | .67  | .25  | -.13  | .34  |
| (Appeal)      | Interesting/Boring   | .84  | .03  | -.12  | -.01 |
|               | Lively/Dull          | .80  | .06  | .03   | .14  |
|               | Held My Attention    | .80  | .19  | .04   | .13  |
|               | Very Interesting     | .82  | .19  | .04   | .04  |
| Factor # 2    | Believe the News     | -.17 | .81  | -.28  | .14  |
| (Credibility) | Highly Credible      | .22  | .75  | .03   | .15  |
|               | Can Be Trusted       | .12  | .86  | -.001 | .19  |
|               | Reliable Source      | .20  | .81  | -.07  | .10  |
| Factor # 3    | Biased/Unbiased      | .09  | .05  | -.88  | .04  |
| (Balance)     |                      |      |      |       |      |
| Factor # 4    | Thorough/Superficial | .04  | .34  | .04   | .62  |
| (Precision)   | Clear/Hazy           | .14  | .13  | -.07  | .82  |
| Total         | Per Factor (%)       | 37.9 | 14.3 | 7.1   | 6.1  |
| Variance      | Cumulative (%)       | 37.9 | 52.2 | 59.3  | 65.5 |
| Eigenvalues   |                      | 6.44 | 2.44 | 1.21  | 1.03 |