The 'Truthiness' of the 'Daily Show Effect': A Presidency Study

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The "Truthiness" of the Daily Show Effect
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I began researching journalism, politics, and pop culture at Booth Library in the fall of 2010. Journal articles found on data sources on the second floor helped me bind together a study on the effects of satire television, in which I titled, *The ‘Truthiness’ of the ‘Daily Show Effect’: A Presidency Study*. Eastern students, such as me, are very lucky that we can print research articles for free at the library – for this reason I was able to get as much research as I could find (not limiting myself because of cost). I was amazed at all of the prior research and study statistics on the subject. It prompted me to complete my own study to analyze possible effects of watching political satire especially in reference to the President of the United States.

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The ‘Truthiness’ of the ‘Daily Show Effect’: A Presidency Study

Introduction: A New Wave of News Gathering

Newsgathering for the American public changed in the past decade with a decline in trust for journalists and news media (Jones 2009), technology advancement (Haynes and Pitts 2009), and entertainment becoming a priority (Jones 2009; Haynes and Pitts 2009; Baumgartner and Morris 2006; Colletta 2009). Television, radio, and newspapers (the traditional media) are still used today with broadcast and cable television being the dominate news source (Colletta 2009; Haynes and Pitts 2009), however, an increased amount of Americans utilize the internet for their news information through what is known as new media, referring to Web blogs and social networks. Haynes and Pitts (2009) found that 55% of the public went online during the 2008 Presidential Elections to get their political news and information on candidates. “Those who like political information will have greater ease in finding it [online], while those who prefer entertainment and the like will as well” (Haynes and Pitts 2009, 53). People, however, are finding that entertainment aspect in newsgathering within traditional media. Soft news, in particularly political satire television, is becoming increasingly popular as newsgathering sources. Colletta defined satire “as a form that holds up human vices and follies to ridicule,” a “criticism of any stupidity or vice in the form of scathing humor,”
and a “critique of what an author sees as dangerous religious, political, moral, or social standards.” Comedy and satire differ in that “comedy evokes laughter,” while satire “uses laughter as a weapon” (859). Parody, seen in sketch comedy in *Saturday Night Live*, is therefore satiric.

Satire became popular during the Enlightenment, that Age of Reason in which it was believed that “folly could be corrected by using art as a mirror to reflect society” (Colletta 2009, 860). Artists believed “that when people saw their faults magnified in a distorted reflection, they could see the ridiculousness of their own behavior and then correct that tendency in themselves.” In other words, satire aims to shock viewers by aggressive rhetoric towards structure and the status quo in hopes of progress and for a better society by delivering a deeper meaning beyond the humor. “If the irony is missed, or the better moral standard is also ironically presented as just another construction, then satire is no longer an effective social critique and may even be misunderstood as an example of the very thing it sets out to critique” (P. 860).

*The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, “a fake news show that parodies a legitimate television news broadcast” (Jones 2009, 202), and *The Colbert Report*, “a symphony of absurdity as he parodies Bill O’Reilly’s anti-intellectual rant on Fox News” (Colletta 2009, 861), are two programs aired on Comedy Central that are under constant scrutiny for provoking cynical views of political affairs, politicians, and news media. Scholars claim satire television impacts viewers’ political beliefs and voting behavior. (Baumgartner and Morris 2006; Holbert, Lambe, Dudo, and Carlton 2007). Survey statistics finding that young Americans got their news primarily from satire television have been repeated in many studies’ discussions on newsgathering and political views of
the youth, however, Jones found that none of these studies measured or assessed the actual content in these shows. Scholars and journalists have noted their concern and discontent for the public’s satire news sources. “Journalists and other critics of entertainment television have propagated a myth based on dubious evidence that late-night comedy television programming is a central location for the delivery of news for young people. A myth that competing quantitative evidence suggests is incorrect” (Jones 2009, 205), however, “hasn’t prevented journalists from using the statistic to develop a full-blown myth about young people and their news consumption habits” (P. 205).

Jones argued that even though The Daily Show is a “fake” news show, “its faux journalistic style allows the show’s writers and host to question, dispel, and critique the manipulative language and symbolizations coming from the presidential campaign while simultaneously opening up deeper truths about politics than those offered by the ‘objective’ reporting of mainstream journalism” (P. 203). The Daily Show offered its viewers “more useful information” than “real” journalist reports on news networks, and “informs its viewers in ways that mainstream journalism rarely does” (P. 203). Jon Stewart is “a popular culture icon, and a significant portion of the American electorate take Jon Stewart’s satirical political commentary very seriously” (Morris 2009, 99), whether he wanted that power or not. With the public taking satire television as a serious means of gathering their news information and scholars’ polarizing opinions on the effects and legitimacy of these shows, political satire is a phenomenon that deserves further research. As Jones pointed out, past studies and surveys “do not assess the content of these shows – whether they offer viewers anything of value or are relatively meaningless, whether the information provided is accurate and truthful or biased and
incorrect, or even how this material compares with other sources of information on public affairs” (P. 206). This study’s intent is to analyze political satire in regards to the presidency asking the question, does satire television (soft news) portray the presidency more negatively than hard news? Baum (2005) suggested that future presidential candidates appear on “E-talk” shows, such as The Daily Show and The Colbert Report. “For better or worse, millions of voters make their decisions about candidates based on personal characteristics – the predominant emphasis of E-talk shows – rather than public policy issues” (P. 231).

**Literature Review**

Scholarship on political satire television follows three main themes: fake news versus real news, satire effects on voting behavior and government perceptions, and the irony in parody today in journalism.

**‘Fake’ Versus ‘Real’ News**

Scholars categorize news source programs as hard or soft news depending on certain characteristics they share. Soft news is characteristically different from hard news because the programs “feature lower levels of public affairs information and focus more on drama, sensationalism, human interest themes, and personalities” (Baumgartner and Morris 2006, 341), whereas hard news takes the more traditional investigative approach and is viewed as “more culturally acceptable and respected news source” (Jones 2009, 206) with a traditional monologue format. Television programs such as Dr. Phil, The
*Opera Winfrey Show*, and *Late Night with David Letterman* are examples of soft news. Daily talk shows tend to take the “human interest approach to entertainment,” while late-night talk shows are more “humor oriented” (Baumgartner and Morris 2006, 342). Scholars classify political satire television, for example, *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, *The Colbert Report* on Comedy Central, and the sketch-comedy show *Saturday Night Live* on NBC, as soft news and traditional satire that requires audience participation in determining the truth meaning of the humor (Holbert 2005; Baumgartner and Morris 2006; Jones 2009; Holbert et al, 2007; Jones and Baym 2010).

Recent scholarship has questioned the legitimacy of ‘real’ news (traditional hard news) on television in the 21st century. Ethical scandals, poor fact checking, and political spectacles have decreased the public’s trust in broadcast journalists (Love 2007; Baym 2005; Colletta 2009; Jones 2009). “From the invasion of Iraq in 2003 to the economic crisis of 2008, to the health care debate of 2009 – when we have deeply needed critical information and reasoned debate, the most influential sources of television news instead provided a steady and often debilitating diet of distraction, distortion, spectacle, and spin” (Jones and Baym 2010, 281). Fox News is at the center of the ‘fake’ versus ‘real’ news scholarship. Recent studies have found viewers of *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* “to be better informed” than the average Fox News viewer and viewers become more misinformed on world affairs the more they watch the Fox Network (Alterman 2007, 11). “Fox has assumed an unprecedented role for a single ‘news’ organization as the center of gravity for an ideological movement” (Jones and Baym 2010, 285).

Jon Stewart regularly highlights the errors and ideological ‘truth’ Fox broadcasts, though he refuses to take the label of *journalist*, preferring *comic*. Stewart and Stephen
Colbert both perform on a fake news platform to draw attention to the absence of ethics and integrity in the ‘real’ media arena (Borden and Tew 2007; Jones 2009) uncovering the ‘real’ behind the fakery found in news organizations today (Jones and Baym 2010; Love 2007). Though Comedy Central airs news after the ‘news’, scholars have found *TDS* and *TCR* to be informative and factual (Jones 2009; Borden and Tew 2007). “Their deconstruction of public fakery or bullshit thus offers us some access to the real, even if the real is no more than this unmasking” (Jones and Baym 2010, 288). Fox regularly mocks the Comedy Central news hosts, but scholars find the ‘hard news’ network has its own lineup of “bizarre” right-wing characters that parade around like journalists; for example, Mike Huckabee blends in his musical performances on the network and Glenn Beck’s emotional dramatics (Jones and Baym 2010). “Outliers have always played a pivotal role in shaping the boundaries and identity of journalism” (Tenenboim-Weinblatt 2009, 433). With the boundaries blurred between journalists and comedians (Alterman 2007; Jones and Baym 2010; Colletta 2009; Morris 2009, 99), what is ‘real’ news and what is ‘fake’? Mainstream news media claim to be legitimate because of their “authority” to do so. Could satire be reinventing journalism? *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* do not claim to be legitimate news sources, but they are defining the role of journalist and news people can learn from their criticism of the media and “align their performances with the moral commitments that define them and thus inhabit their role with integrity” (Borden and Tew 2007, 313). Satire, then, may not be reinventing journalism, but the public may be reinventing how they gather their news, “outside the norm of partisan and spectacle-centered talk that has dominated television for so long” (Jones and Baym 2010, 283). Because the audience must figure out the meaning of the
satire, *TDS* and *TCR* “demand a far more active process of engagement on the part of the audience than does the monological and literal modality of news” (Jones and Baym 2010, 290). Their humor is “a means of reestablishing common-sense truths” to “counter the spectacle” and “restore equilibrium to politics” (Jones 2009, 218). Other scholars have found the same significance in other programs such as *Real Time with Bill Maher* and *The Simpson’s* (Colletta 2009; Jones and Baym 2010). Humor makes satire popular, and laughter can be an “antidote” to the “hyper partisan” moments (Jones and Baym 2010, 283), making the news in this format engaging (Colletta 2009, 872). They speak to their viewers as “competent” participants (Borden and Tew 2007, 312) whereas traditional news outlets are “a unidirectional presentation of information, from us in the studio to you, the faceless, voiceless masses watching at home” (Jones and Baym 2010, 289).

Comedy Central and Fox news programs are all political spectacles the only difference is *TDS* and *TCR* characters do not claim authenticity. However, Jon Stewart was named by an online poll by *Time* as the most trusted newswoman in the post-Cronkite era. With 21% of Americans getting their only source of news information from political satire television (Baumgartner and Morris 2006; Holbert, Lambe, Dudo, and Carlton 2007), and though some scholars dispute that statistic because of questions raised on methodology, maybe this myth (or truth) should not be a cause of concern. “If the myth of young citizens turning to comedians for news and information about politics ends up proving true, then as this analysis suggests, the fate of the republic doesn’t seem in jeopardy if a comedy program like *The Daily Show* is a source for their knowledge of public affairs.” (Jones 2009, 219)
The Daily Show Effect

Jon Stewart hosts *The Daily Show* that airs Monday through Thursday night on Comedy Central. The audience of the show is mainly young, well educated, with higher levels of political knowledge than non-viewers (Baumgartner and Morris 2006; Jones and Baym 2010). Stewart has been accused of provoking cynicism (Baumgartner and Morris 2006), stereotyping anything non-American (Ross and York 2007), and effecting individuals’ perception of government (Holbert et al 2007 and Morris 2009).

Baumgartner and Morris (2006) found that viewers of *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* were more cynical towards politicians and the electoral process, a phenomenon known as “The Daily Show Effect.” Their findings suggest Stewart’s satire “influenced young Americans by lowering support for both presidential candidates and increasing cynicism” (P. 361) in the 2004 election. “If young Americans learn about these candidates via Jon Stewart, it is possible that unfavorable perceptions of both parties’ nominees could form. Ultimately, negative perceptions of candidates could have participation implications by keeping more youth from the polls” (P. 362). They also found that exposure to the show-lowered viewers’ trust in the news media. Scholarship, however, does not conclude that *The Daily Show* coverage is biased on the domestic front (Warner 2007; Baumgartner and Morris 2006; Colletta 2009; Morris 2009; Jones and Baym 2010). Ross and York (2007) found the show to symbolize “American power and prestige” and a “hybrid of self-criticism and self-reassurance” (P. 368) arguing foreign subjects are often targeted. Though other scholars admit Stewart’s effectiveness, they argue the show’s host and writers do not purposefully try to influence their viewers, but give an outlet for
questioning and critiquing the government and news media (Warner 2007; Morris 2009; Jones and Baym 2010).

Instead of using fear tactics and emotional appeals to the public as politicians and news organizations have used since 9/11, *The Daily Show* creates an “alternative voice” that uses satire and laughter. “If we can laugh at it, we can examine it, evaluate it, and even critique it. Laughter has the power to disrupt any analytical paralysis engendered by fear” (Warner 2007, 33). In other words, *The Daily Show* actually increases participation. Stewart and Colbert will “tend to cast stones rather than to build bridges” (Borden and Tew 2007, 312) in order to start the discussion on politics. “Critics confuse form with effect... It is in the machinations of politicians and media populists and their spectacle-centered displays of power and pageantry that cynicism lies and is produced as broader effect” (Jones and Baym 2010, 287). Colletta (2009) found that because of the extreme blurring between real and fake news “it is impossible for a viewer to have any reaction except cynical laughter at the fakeness of all information” (P. 869-870). Since Jon Stewart took over the show in 1999, he has come along way from “jester to being a political, media, and cultural critic; and from being an outsider to the journalistic community to having partial membership, or, in some cases, even forced membership” (Tenenboim-Weinblatt 2009, 433).

Truthiness

Stephen Colbert hosts *The Colbert Report* that airs on Comedy Central following *The Daily Show*. Whereas Jon Stewart mocks the media, Colbert performs as a conservative extremist, a parody of Bill O’Reilly’s *No Spin Zone*, making fun of “self-
promoters” in the news media (Fowler 2008, 533). He performs a “poker face delivery” known as deadpan satire (LaMarre, Landrville and Beam 2009, 217), rarely breaking character and forcing viewers to “not only judge the intended meaning of the message, but also evaluate the sincerity of the source” (LaMarre, Landrville and Beam 2009, 217). “If you’re going to get him, or get the joke, you have to read between the lines” (Jones and Baym 2010). *Time* magazine listed Colbert as one of the 100 most influential people in the world (Fowler 2008, 534). His rhetorical strategy intends to show the audience how an opponent’s argument can lead to absurd conclusions, submitting “both liberal and conservative guest to the same ironic treatment” (Colletta 2009, 863). His deadpan, however, caters to liberals with Fox News and Republican politicians’ as constant targets for their spectacle performances of “truthiness.”

Colbert coined the term “truthiness,” mocking newscasters for their “substitution of emotion for rational thinking” (Jones and Baym 2010, 286). He makes fun of the reality of these spectacles that viewers take as truth, opinions as facts (Jones and Baym 2010; Colletta 2009). According to Colbert, “truthiness is what you want the facts to be, as opposed to what the facts are,” (Fowler 2008, 533). Studies have found Colbert’s message to be significantly persuasive, though not in the entire sense the writers intended. “The unsettling problem is that O’Reilly himself uses this kind of rhetorical strategy in his non-comedic ‘news’ show, blurring the distinction between absurdity and politics as usual” (Colletta 2009, 861). Baumgartner and Morris (2008) conducted an experiment that found “exposure to Colbert increases support for President Bush, Republicans in Congress, and Republican policies on the economy and the War on Terror” (634). Whereas *The Daily Show* tends to “clarify the political world for young
adults (Baumgartner & Morris 2006), *The Colbert Report* confuses young viewers (Baumgartner & Morris 2008). With identical rhetoric strategies of spinning emotions rather than rationality, studies have found some viewers cannot see any difference between Colbert’s satire and O’Reilly’s news show. Results from multiple studies found conservatives who watched Colbert thought he genuinely meant what he said about liberals and that liberals understood the satire (LaMarre, Landrville and Beam 2009; Colletta 2009). Colbert is “interpreted by audiences in a manner that best fits with their individual political beliefs” (LaMarre, Landrville and Beam 2009, 226). “The distinction between parody and politics is so erased that even the guest on Colbert’s show often does not get it, and the interview segments on The Colbert Report make for some of the most cringe-making television around” (Colletta 2009, 863).

**Methodology**

I monitored media coverage of President Obama and his administration for six weeks, Oct. 3-Nov. 6 (2010), to ascertain if satire television portrays the presidency more negatively as “The Daily Show Effect” would predict.

(RQ1): Does satire television (soft news) portray the presidency more negatively than hard news?

I watched the following television shows with political satire: *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, *The Colbert Report*, and *Saturday Night Live*. I choose these three shows because of their popularity in ratings and in previous scholarship on political satire and their effects on viewers. During this time, I also watched the “hard news” program *ABC World News with Diane Sawyer* on the same days TDS and TCR aired. I wanted to
see if I could get the same issue reported on in all three programs and find out which program portrayed the presidency more negatively. I choose to watch ABC’s nightly news show because of my unfamiliarity with the station’s political bias. I am well aware of the way other network television broadcast’s lean (right or left). I wanted to go into this study with an objective view to see if I could notice a conservative or liberal trend rather than already knowing the network bias.

I tallied the number of negative, objective, and positive remarks in regards to the President’s policy, political affiliation, character, and physical attributes. Measurement of negativity in this study is calculated by jokes made at the President’s expense and scolding of behavior from the host. Commentary in favor of the President and jokes made to ridicule those opposing the President were tallied as positive remarks. Commentary on the presidency that I cannot categorize as negative or positive will be classified as objective. Upon unexpected results from the initial research design, I form a new hypothesis in response to the Baumgartner and Morris ‘Daily Show Effect’ theory. This study is limited because data collection began a month prior to the 2010 congressional elections. Congress was the main focus in the news while the presidency took a break from the spotlight. Journalists and comedians gave more attention to congress members and candidates. The butt of most jokes being Christine O’Donnell’s political ad stating she is not a witch and the Democrats losing badly in the midterm elections.
Discussion of Major Findings

After the six-week period of analysis, I found that my initial research design was not effective in answering my research question. The methodology was suitable for analyzing hard news only. I watched the ABC World News with Diane Sawyer and found the program to be objective towards the presidency, no positive or negative tallies. This surprised me considering the network bias found in watching CBS, NBC, Fox News, MSNBC, and CNN. On Oct. 11, Diane Sawyer reported that “President Obama questioned the Chamber of Commerce’s campaign financing” in regards to the Chamber taking money from foreign countries and possibly spending the money on campaign donations. On Oct. 27, Sawyer discussed how President Obama stated in a phone interview that “he is not optimistic about how the midterm elections will go.” On Nov. 10, Sawyer discussed the growing deficit and showed news clips of analysts and politicians asking the question, “Will the new Republican congress seriously do something about it?” Sawyer’s guest named President Obama as the target of the new Republican congress. Diane Sawyer did not praise the Obama’s successes, policies, or character. Neither did she defend, blame, doubt, or give her own opinion on the presidency. The anchor let liberals, conservatives, and the Administration discuss presidency issues without making a spectacle out of the program. I was thoroughly impressed with the objectivity. Future studies should compare other network news programs along with Sawyer’s. The framework could work if the variables were exclusively hard news programs as I explain below, satire is difficult to categorize as negative and positive.
Saturday Night Live is notorious for their political opening skit. I watched seven episodes of SNL; three were re-runs. Out of the four new episodes from Season 36, President Obama was parodied twice (Oct. 23 and Nov. 13), one episode featured a parody of Vice President, Joe Biden (Oct. 30), and another parody of Tea Party member, Christina O’Donnell (Oct. 9). While looking for negativity towards the presidency, I found little evidence. A parody of President Obama addressing Nevada at a Harry Reid rally for the 2010 congressional elections was the opening skit on Oct. 23, 2010. The skit emphasized how President Obama wanted to be “cool” and told Harry Reid, “I got your back,” when Reid was justifying his need to be re-elected. The opening sketch on Nov. 13, parodied President Obama at a joint press conference with Chinese President Hu Jintao. President Hu joked about how the two politicians had a nice discussion except Obama did not mention anything about the $800 billion the United States owes China. The comedian who played President Obama promised President Hu the U.S. would pay them back. The sketch brought awareness to the fact that the U.S. is in debt to China, but the President wasn’t singled out or made to look like the problem. He was portrayed as being laid back in both skits. On Oct. 30, the comedian who played Joe Biden asked America, “Is it really that bad?” in the opening skit. He compares the Chilean minors’ national pride after living underground for months to U.S. citizens complaining about the economy. He announces he has come up with the Biden checklist to find out if people should be satisfied with life in the U.S. “Number One... are you above ground? That’s it.” He then asks, “Why are they [minors] happier than us? We are above ground.” Biden goes on to discusses how President Obama isn’t getting mad about the complaining because “he is a robot.” Biden tells the audience, “Don’t be whiners, think
about the miners.” The sketch points out that even though the recession is (so called) over, people are still hurting financially and the top (the presidency) needs to know that. Slight negativity towards the presidency could be attributed to this skit in regards to joking about Joe Biden’s distance to the middle-class and President Obama being a robot. I found little evidence that the skits portrayed the presidency negativity. Further studies on SNL could include presidential skits from past episodes. Researchers could compare Republican presidential parodies to Democrat presidential parodies to see if there is a significant difference.

The content in *The Colbert Report* was not negative towards the presidency because I understood the deadpan satire of Stephen Colbert. This is an important example of a case my methodology is ineffective for because a viewer, who did not understand his satire as scholars have found in past studies, would consider Colbert’s commentary negative towards the presidency (whereas the writers meant for it to be a positive or supportive remark towards the presidency). Colbert called President Obama “Complainer and Chief,” referring to news clips of Obama talking about corporate campaign financing and the Chamber of Commerce, in the episode that aired on Oct. 26, but that was the extent of direct Obama bashing (though meant to be as silly). The guests on *The Colbert Report* were more ‘visibly’ positive when discussing the presidency. For example, Doris Goodwin, a presidential historian, appeared on the Nov. 3 episode. He discussed how Harry Truman faced the same thing Obama is about to (Republicans taking over congress). The guest was hopeful towards the future and President Obama’s policies. He concluded with a story on how Roosevelt turned the economy around. Colbert did joke about President Nixon to guest, Gary Wills, a historian. Wills wrote
“Outside Looking In,” a book President Lincoln. This was the only interview I saw
during the six-week period that had blatant negativity towards past presidencies. Colbert
and Wills commented that Nixon was “nutty.”

My research took a different turn after watching The Colbert Report on Nov. 10,
when I found a disturbing (but not surprising) trend. I realized that the majority of
negativity towards the presidency was in the Fox News clips Colbert and Stewart
showed. On this particular episode, Colbert stated that “the Obama’s have embarrassed
the country again” when a conservative Muslim man shook hands with Mrs. Obama
during the family’s trip to Indonesia. Fox News reported on this incident calling it a
“controversy” event. Colbert termed this incident “Hander-gate” making fun of the
absurdity of the handshake being controversial. Upon hearing about Fox News’ report,
the Muslim man tweeted it was an accident. Colbert made sure his audience was aware
of this fact and then continued to show Fox News clips the network broadcasted as
“suspicious” Obama greetings; bowing to a State Head and the infamous terrorist pump.
In the same episode, Colbert showed news clips of Republican congress members
announcing their plans to “push for Obama being a one-term president.” Colbert
responded, “So they are going to focus on Obama being unemployed and then will worry
about getting you employed.” On Oct. 18, The Daily Show played a series of Fox clips
questioning President Obama about how the mosque being built near Ground Zero was
being funded. Fox personalities, such as Carl Rove, accused the Democrats and Muslim
terrorists for funding the mosque. Stewart, however, did not leave the issue at that, he
called out the Democrat Party for using the same fear tactics by asking where Chamber of
Commerce campaign donations were coming from ("secret foreign money," Stewart joked).

The guests on *The Daily Show* were respectful when discussing the presidency. Condoleezza Rice was a guest on Oct. 13. Stewart asked for her assessment of President Obama and she answered, "I’m not going to chirp at the current administration because I know how hard it is. I think people are doing their best.” Negativity towards the presidency could be seen on *TDS* on Oct. 7, Stewart made a smartass remark towards the President when discussing the continuation of housing foreclosures. Stewart said in frustration, "Thank you Mr. President, for getting us back to square one.” Stewart made negative remarks towards former President George W. Bush. I found the only time Stewart was negative towards the presidency was when he was addressing his frustration with the economy on the episode mentioned above, and when in reference to President Bush on Nov. 11 about his published memoir. He did make fun of President Obama after the midterm elections on the episode that aired on Nov. 3, pointing out many politicians that were endorsed by Obama lost. But at the same time that he pokes fun at the President, which could come off as negative feelings, Stewart also reminds his audience of being respectful to all politicians on both sides. I did not find enough negative remarks made by Stewart or his guests to support a ‘Daily Show Effect’ theory because the overwhelming majority of presidential negative remarks on the show came from Fox News clips played on the program with the exception of President Bush being a target of negativity during one episode. The only way a ‘Daily Show Effect’ exists, in regards to the presidency, would be from Fox clips shown during the program; however, Stewart explains and breaks down the absurdity for the audience to understand. This study
contributes to deferring the concept of a ‘Daily Show Effect’ because it isn’t Stewart who is belittling the President in persuasive spectacle performance. ‘Real’ journalists, primarily on Fox News, are taking on that role. Stewart does question, doubt, and joke about the presidency, but gives his thorough reasons, backed with facts, as to why he disagrees or disapproves of the current administration (and his opinions are sometimes negative).

Though my initial research question, “Does satire television (soft news) portray the presidency more negatively than hard news?” could not be accurately answered, the results of the study indicate my belief in the following hypotheses:

(H1): The ‘Daily Show Effect’ is a myth.

(H2): Fox News journalists portray the presidency more negatively on The Daily Show and The Colbert Report than the hosts of the comic programs portray the presidency.

Further study should focus on how Fox News portrayed the Bush Administration comparing it to their portrayal of the Obama Administration. It is common knowledge that Fox is a conservative network with a strong right bias, but evidence of a scholarly study stands more credibility with the public (or at least should).

References


