

Is 'bad' news a criterion of news selection by the local  
newscasts in Ames/Des Moines, Iowa?

by

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## CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

### Statement of the Problem

Every weekday well over 100 million Americans tune in to a network or local television news broadcast, and millions more obtain news information secondhand from those who view those newscasts. The emergence of television as a prominent provider of information has fundamentally altered the organization and flow of public information in modern society (Robinson and Levy, 1986: 13).

Television is not only the most popular source of information, but also the fifth most powerful institution in the United States, right after the White House, big business, the U.S. Senate and the Supreme Court (Cole, 1981: 121). In Carter and Greenberg's 1965 study, respondents chose television as a more reliable news source than either radio or newspapers. The researchers believed that respondents held the "seeing is believing" attitude. Almost twenty years later, Stone and Grusin's (1984) findings showed that television news was thought to be more believable than news by other media (radio and newspapers). McDonald and Reese (1987) also compared television news with newspaper news. Their results were consistent with the earlier studies that television news was the most reliable medium of current events as compared with newspaper.

Television had also surpassed three other media, i.e., newspapers, magazines, and radio, as the news medium that "gives the most complete news coverage", "the latest news most quickly", and "presenting the fairest, most unbiased news" from the Bower's (1973) study in 1971. For years, television has been the leading source of news. As indicated by

Roper's 1987 report, 66 percent of Americans cited television as their main news source, opposed to 36 percent who cited newspapers, 14 percent who cited radio, and 4 percent who cited magazines in 1986. Respondents could cite more than one medium as their main news sources.

Visualization is the main element that distinguishes between television and the other types of media (Green, 1969). As Blythin and Samovar (1985) mentioned in Communicating Effectively On Television, "a picture is worth a thousand words." Because television news has such an impact on viewers, it is worth studying the types of news television stations tend to carry.

On November 13, 1969, then Vice-President Spiro Agnew gave a speech in Des Moines, Iowa and criticized the network approach to news presentation. Agnew said :

Bad (or negative) news drives out good news. The irrational is more controversial than the rational. Concurrence can no longer compete with dissent .... The labor crisis settled at the negotiating table is nothing compared to the confrontation that results in a strike -- or better yet, violence along the picket line. Normality has become the nemesis of the evening news (Keogh, 1972).

In fact, television news has been criticized for "... placing too much emphasis on show business values, concentrating on recording action rather than probing for its significance, overemphasizing firstness or fastness, preferring conflict or violence..." (Cole, 1981).

If negative news is one criterion of news selection in network news, it is reasonable to assume that the network affiliates (or local television stations) will also emphasize negative news more than other news



such as positive or neutral news (i.e., neither positive nor negative or balanced news). This is reasonable because negative news can attract viewers and boost ratings (Brady, 1973: 85). In fact, local newscasts have more regular viewers than do network newscasts (Cole, 1981 and Stevenson and White, 1980). Therefore, as far as the ratings are concerned, local newscasts, like network newscasts, may tend to broadcast the negative news at the expense of positive or neutral news.

### Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to see whether negative news is a news criterion of local news selection in Ames/Des Moines, Iowa. Stone, Hartung, and Jensen (1987) compared the three local markets of Memphis, Tennessee; San Diego, California; and Syracuse, New York to see whether these local newscasts carried negative news more than other news. The results indicated that all local newscasts in these markets did in fact carry negative news more than other news. Dominick, Wurtzel, and Lometti (1975) compared three local stations in a single market: New York City. They found that these three stations emphasized violent news, i.e., negative news. Both of these studies focused on big cities located in the South and on the East and West coasts. None of these studies focused on the Midwest. Hence, it would be interesting to know whether local television stations in the Midwest such as these in the Ames/Des Moines, Iowa area also emphasize negative news.

## Plan of the Study

This paper consists of five chapters. Chapter I is an introduction to the topic under considerations. Chapter II discusses both the definition of negative news and positive news, and the related studies on negative news. Chapter III describes the research method employed. Chapter IV reports the findings of this study and the statistical methods used. Chapter V concludes the study on negative news.

## CHAPTER II. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

### Gatekeeper

According to Abraham Z. Bass (1969), news selection is characterized by the dual functions of news gathering and news processing. News gathering is the activity of reporters and writers (or news gatherers) headed by an editor or bureau chief, who collect information and prepare news stories. News processing is the handling and adapting of news stories. An editor or a translator is a news processor. Whether a news story is selected by a news gatherer or a news processor, there will always be certain news values underlying their decisions.

Kurt Lewin stated that "the journey of a news item through certain communication channels was dependent upon the fact that certain areas (decision makers) within the channels functioned as 'gates'" (White, 1950). These gates are controlled by decision makers (or gatekeepers), each of whom decides whether the news item continues to the next channel (Peterson, 1979).

In other words, gatekeeper refers to those who control the flow of news (Snider, 1967). Gieber (1964) used gatekeeper to refer to the newsmen who were employed by a news-gathering bureaucracy, to those who were the sources of news outside the news bureaucracies, and to the members of the audience who influenced the reading of other members of the audience.

Dimmick (1974) defined the gatekeeper as those who decided what would ultimately be the news.

Today, the gatekeeper function applies to entire institutions as well as to groups of persons. People and technology within these institutions influence the journey of information between senders and receivers (Bittner, 1980). In fact, a local newscast is produced by numerous people including reporters, camerapersons, editors, news directors, audio and video recording specialists, together with the appropriate technology such as electronic news-gathering (ENG). Each plays a part in the gatekeeping function. ENG refers to a single portable camera which is connected to a portable videocassette recorder. This ENG system can transmit live pictures and sound of an event back to the studio for immediate broadcast (Wurtzel and Acker, 1989).

### Negative News as a News Value

There are a number of traditional news elements that help gatekeepers make selections. These news elements include immediacy, proximity, consequence, prominence, oddity, conflict, sex, emotion, and progress (English and Hach, 1984). Stone, Hartung, and Jensen (1987) considered negative news as a legitimate and necessary news value after examining the previous studies on negative news. News values are working rules in the newsroom. According to Golding and Elliott (1979: 114), the news values could be used in two ways. News values are "criteria of selection from material available to the newsroom of those items worthy of inclusion in the

final product" and "guidelines for the presentation of items, suggesting what to emphasize, what to omit, and where to give priority in the preparation of the items for presentation to the audience."

Golding and Elliott contended that "negative news is good news."

They observed that :

there is little mileage in reporting the safe arrival of aircraft, the continued health of a film star, or the smooth untroubled negotiations of a wage settlement. News is about disruptions in the normal current of events.

Pressman (1974) viewed news as disaster, tragedy, crime, and those sentimental vignettes known as human interest stories.

Reuven Frank, the former president of NBC news, described news as events covering joy, sorrow, shock, and fear (Golding and Elliott, 115). With the exception of the first element (joy) which is clearly positive, the latter three elements all are negative. As can be seen, negativity plays an important role in news selection.

### Definition of Negative News

In a network television study, Stone and Grusin (1984) defined positive news as what a majority of people living in their study area (Memphis, Tennessee) would consider as positive or upbeat. Negative news was defined as the opposite of positive news: negative or downbeat events. The Stone, Hartung, and Jensen (1987) study adopted the same definition of positive and

negative news as did Stone and Grusin. But they added one more category, namely indeterminable news, which was defined as neither positive news nor negative news, or equally balanced.

Galician (1986) conducted a telephone survey of audience members (at least 18 years old) to determine their perceptions of positive news and negative news on television. Negative news was defined almost universally by the respondents as depressing, whereas positive news was defined in various ways, according to the respondents. Young respondents (aged 18 to 34) considered positive news as having a funny or happy ending, middle aged respondents (aged 35 to 54) considered positive news as human interest stories; and older respondents (aged 55 or older) considered positive news as personally informative news.

In Gieber's (1955) study of newspaper content, news was categorized as negative, positive and other. Gieber defined negative news items as those reporting social conflicts and disorganization. Under the negative category, there were four subcategories:

1. International tension. Conflicts between nations -- military, political or economic.
2. Civic disruption. Conflicts between groups -- political, economic or social.
3. Crime and vice.
4. Accidents and disasters.

Gieber defined positive news items as reporting social cohesion and cooperation. There were four subcategories under the positive category:

1. International cooperation. Normal relationships among nations.
2. Government at work. Noncontroversial information on affairs of government.

3. Society at work. Information about groups of persons cooperating in nongovernment affairs.
4. Life goes on. News items about individuals.

There were two subcategories under the "other" category which could not classify those news items as either positive or negative. These two sub-categories were:

1. Oddities of life. The so-called 'brighteners.'
2. Sports and entertainment.

Lowry (1971) compared the network newscasts and basically followed the structure of Gieber's definition of negative news. But Lowry developed his own subcategories of negative news to include six classifications instead of using Gieber's five classifications. Lowry's subcategories of negative news included:

1. Armed conflict/war. All stories concerning armed conflict between social groups, nations, or groups of nations. This armed conflict can be as small as a commando unit of a few men or as large as a full scale war.
2. International tension. All stories of conflict or disagreement between nations (political, diplomatic or economic) where the conflict or disagreement stops short of armed conflict or war.
3. Social conflict/strikes/riots. All stories concerning the failure of individuals or society to function in a cooperative, integrative manner. These events may be intranational in scope rather than international, and may involve conflict between groups rather than between individuals.
4. Crime. All stories concerning extra-legal acts not included in armed conflict/war, and social conflict/strikes/riots.
5. Accidents/disasters. All stories resulting from 'acts of God'

or unforeseen events leading to personal injury or destruction of life or property.

6. Other news. All stories not belonging to one of the above five subcategories or stories that would have been negative news to some people. For instance, air and water pollution stories, which do not fit into the above categories, are classified as 'other' news.

This study will adopt Gieber's definitions of negative and positive news. But for the subcategories of negative news, it will adopt Lowry's six classifications, i.e., armed conflict/war, international tension, social conflict/strikes/riots, crime, accidents/disasters and other news. This is because these subcategories will allow a more precise explanation and more classifications to code than will Gieber's.

The positive subcategories of this study will use the Gieber's classification, i.e., international cooperation, government at work and society at work, with the exception of "life goes on." This term does not identify itself as news items about individuals. Thus, this study will use the term "personalities" to represent news items about individuals.

Some stories are neither positive nor negative or are equally balanced, these type of stories will be classified as neutral.

### Research on Negative News

The findings of Stone and Grusin (1984) in their study of network television news indicated that negative news dominated early evening newscasts on all three networks. They found that there was a greater



percentage of negative news than of positive or neutral news for all three network newscasts. They also found a greater percentage of negative news than of positive news on each individual network's newscasts. Most negative news items (64 percent) were more than thirty seconds (the longest story category coded) compared with either positive (31 percent) or neutral news (6 percent). Negative news (62 percent) was generally accompanied by film clips (moving pictures) compared with positive (32 percent) or neutral (6 percent) news items.

Stone and Grusin's findings were similar to those of Lowry's (1971). Lowry found that all three networks tended to place a significant position and visual emphasis on negative news. Sixty-three percent of all negative news was presented in the first half of the newscasts. Visual aids such as slides and supers (written information on the screen) were used in conjunction with 82 percent of the negative news and with only 60 percent of other news types.

On the business coverage in network newscasts, Dominick (1981) found that the network newscasts carried negative news (54.1 percent) about business, such as stories about strikes, environmental threats, health hazards, product recalls, industrial accidents, and illegal financial dealings, as compared with positive (10 percent) and neutral (35.9 percent) business news. Rank-order correlations in that study indicated that news concerning strikes was the number one business topic among the networks. Kickbacks, illegal payoffs, overcharges, slush funds and illegal contributions were in second place.

It is not only network newscasts that carry negative news more than other types of news, however. Local newscasts do the same. Dominick, Wurtzel, and Lometti (1975) formed two composite weeks (weekdays only) and videotaped thirty evening newscasts of the three network affiliates, i.e., WABC, WNBC and WCBS, in New York City. Their analysis indicated that all local television stations showed a tendency to emphasize stories about violence, which was defined as any force that causing harm to persons or property. The researchers concluded that the emphasis on violence by the local stations could arouse viewer interest. An article in *New York Magazine* (1973: 85) points out that "All the local news shows seem to be into violence, at least in short bursts, because ... well, because it tends to hold viewers and boost ratings."

In their 1987 study, Stone, Hartung, and Jensen used content-analysis, randomly selecting a composite five-day week newscasts for analysis. They found that there was more negative news than positive news broadcast in all three local markets studied (Memphis, San Diego, and Syracuse). Seventy-seven percent of the news stories that were considered negative news were placed in the first third of the local newscasts. However, there was no statistically significant difference in the length of news items between negative and positive, and in stories containing video between negative and positive items. Of the negative and positive news stories containing video, 54 percent were negative and 46 percent positive news.

Hofstetter and Dozier (1986) contended that television journalists produce a video kaleidoscope of disasters, crimes, accidents, and

fires. Roberts and Dickson (1981) found that local stations in Mobile, Alabama and Pensacola, Florida allotted crime news great amounts of time in comparison to that allotted to other categories of news, such as the local economy or education (except weather).

Ryu (1982) analyzed three network affiliates in Cincinnati, Ohio and found that sensationalism and human interest stories could maintain high ratings. He followed Adam's (1978) definition of sensationalism and human interest, which referred to crime, accidents, and natural disasters.

Lynch, Nettleship, and Carlson (1968) considered orderliness as one of the elements of human interest stories. Orderliness was defined as stories with themes of disorder and elements of change in human behavior. Gans (1979a) contended that "the frequent appearance of stories about disorder suggests that order is an important value in the news."

As can be seen, negative news dominates in local newscasts as well as network newscasts. Haskins and Miller (1984) pointed out, "bad (negative) news gets preferred treatment in all news media. It is displayed more prominently than other news, in terms of space, more pictorial and graphic attention -- getting devices, and up-front placement. This is true for both print and broadcast."

### Visualization as a Television Value

Television is a visual medium, and good visuals are important to television values (Glasgow, 1976). MacNeil (1968: 35) stated that "most of the energy and organization of television goes into getting pictures."

This is also true in television newsmaking. Television producers cannot be wordsmiths alone. They need to make use of visual communication and must also try to avoid "talking heads" such as interviews or discussions (Schuneman, 1966). This is because talking heads have been found to arouse the audience interest and attention less (Edwardson, Grooms, and Proudlove, 1981). In general, a talking head is a closeup of a human head talking on television (Benjamin, 1973). Schuneman (1966) conducted a nationwide survey of television news directors. More than three-fourths of the 205 news directors who responded agreed that newscast was the major tool of television news. Buckalew (1969) interviewed 12 news editors and found that they preferred stories with video rather than those without.

Lowry (1971) found that negative news received more visual emphasis than other news in his analysis of network newscasts. This was particularly the case with the use of visual aids such as slides and supers. Lowry divided visual emphasis into four classifications: visual aid, film/tape, correspondent on camera, and all three together. Stone and Grusin (1984) analyzed the network newscasts and found similar to Lowry's that there was a larger proportion of negative news with film clips (moving pictures). As can be seen, television gives more emphasis to visual elements than does any other news medium, and tends to carry news that can be reported with pictures (especially moving pictures) over news without pictures (Green, 1969).

As a matter of fact, only television has news footage as a characteristic. This is the principal difference between television news and

the news of other media. Because of this distinction, television has a distinct capability to evoke an emotional reaction (Green, 1969: 39). As Green writes of the assassination of John F. Kennedy:

Many persons, even those who had no fondness for President Kennedy or his policies, wept in the quiet of their living rooms as they watched their nation mourn, and few failed to be impressed with television's visible witness to the mortality of man and the continuity of his institutions. No other medium could begin to convey the reality of the tragedy as television did.

The primary measure of television news is action (Gans, 1979b).

Gans defines action as something that is happening, an incident, not a situation, such as a battle, an interpersonal conflict, or people struggling against nature. Action is also coupled with emotion, it is either a display of anger or other strong feelings, or an activity that evokes an emotional response such as pity.

Because television news emphasizes visuals, Green (1969: 45) considers news broadcasts a form of show business because television tries to show the news as it happens.

Robinson and Levy (1986: 14) elaborate:

TV news 'gatekeepers' take great pains to provide 'visuals' to add appeal to their stories .... Indeed, television's visual qualities do make the news lively and entertaining. TV simultaneously engages both the eye and the ear, the same sense modalities that most people use to learn naturally from their own environment and experiences.

The use of visuals are thought to create audience interest and to add "color and vitality" to local television newscasts (Powers, 1977).

Comstock (1989) stated that "television news emphasizes the visual because that is thought to be one way of attracting viewers." Indeed, good pictures are essential for holding viewer interest (Epstein, 1973a: 147).

### Hypotheses of the Study

After examining the previous research on negative news, the findings of these studies suggest that negative news plays an important role in television news. Since news tends to report the negative aspects of society such as violence, crime, disasters, or other conflicts, it is reasonable to assume that negative news will tend to be selected by television gatekeepers as news items for local newscasts rather than neutral or positive news. Previous findings (Stone, Hartung and Jensen, 1987; and Dominick, Wurtzel and Lometti, 1975) support the assumption that local newscasts emphasize negative news. Thus, the first hypothesis of this study is as follows:

- H1: The total number of negative news items of network affiliates, i.e., the local newscasts in Ames/Des Moines, Iowa, is greater than that of either neutral or positive items.

The lead, or first story, has a special significance in a television newscast. This is because television newsmakers, unlike newspaper editors who can put several stories on the front page, must decide on one story that surpasses the others in importance (Foote and Steele, 1986). Stone, Hartung, and Jensen (1987) found that local network affiliates tended to carry negative news in the first third of the local newscasts. Lowry (1971) and Stone and

Grusin (1984) found that negative news showed up most often in early segments of network newscasts. As television news emphasizes negative news, it is reasonable to assume that negative news will be placed in a prominent position of the local newscasts. The second hypothesis is that:

H2: Negative news items are placed in the lead position of the local newscasts more often than either neutral or positive items.

In general, the first few stories should be the most significant stories of the day's newscast, these stories are supposed to be covered in more depth and detail. As previous research such as Lowry (1971) and Stone and Grusin (1984) have indicated, television newscasts devoted more time to negative news than to other types of news. The third hypothesis is that:

H3: The length of negative news reports on local newscasts is greater than that of either neutral or positive items.

Visualization is an important element in television news selection; at the same time, television news emphasizes negative news. Lowry (1971) found that negative news received more visual aids such as slides and supers than did other types of news. Stone and Grusin (1984) found that negative news was associated with film clips (moving pictures). The fourth hypothesis is that:

H4: More visual techniques are used for negative news items than for either neutral or positive items.

Television news production employs many visuals. Because television news emphasizes negative news items, each negative item may receive more visual treatment than do either neutral or positive news items. These visual techniques include talking heads, still stories, video reports, and live conversations between the anchorperson in the studio and the reporter on

location. Under Hypothesis Four, there are four sub-hypotheses to measure whether each single negative news item receives more visual techniques than do neutral or positive items.

The simplest visual technique of a news item is to show an anchorperson or anchorpersons alone, without any further visual aid such as a graphic or moving picture. In the television news-production jargon, this technique is called a talking head. The first sub-hypothesis is:

H4(1): Negative news items apply more talking heads than do either neutral or positive items.

When a video-camera photographs any still picture, slide, or any graphics such as maps, charts, diagrams, and other art work to illustrate a story, this technique is called a still story. The second sub-hypothesis is:

H4(2): Negative news items receive more still story techniques than do either neutral or positive items.

The most common visual element of a newscast is the moving picture. Fang (1980) said many news shows are built each day around film and videotape. Film and videotape mean showing action. In fact, news stories are similar to "miniature movies" with a beginning, a middle, and an ending (Shook, 1989). This is called a video report. The third sub-hypothesis is:

H4(3): Negative news items have more video reports than do either neutral or positive items.

With the advancement of broadcast technology, a real time conversation between the anchorperson(s) in studio and reporter(s) on location has become possible with the ENG camera (Carroll, 1988). This type of



conversation always comes with special effects such as a double box shot or chroma key electronic effect. As the name suggests, a double box shot means that there are two boxes on the screen. Both the anchorperson and the reporter or interviewee are seen in different areas of the screen at the same time. Chroma key permits the insertion of any object or subject into a background picture to create a reality that exists only in the videospace (Wurtzel and Acker, 1989). For instance, a meteorologist stands in front of a weather map. Chroma key works by replacing a specific color (usually blue or green) in the primary image with video from another source. The fourth sub-hypothesis is:

H4(4): Negative news items receive more live reports between the anchorperson in the studio and the reporter on location than either neutral or positive items.

Hypothesis four can be supported only if these four sub-hypotheses are supported by the results of this study.

## CHAPTER III. METHODOLOGY

### Use of Content Analysis

This study is a partial operational replication of certain content analyses of television newscasts. Aspects of the categories constructed were developed by the author, who modified the operational definitions of categories used in previous studies.

There are several definitions of content analysis in the mass communication field. Berelson defined content analysis as "a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication (Stempel, 1981). Holsti (1969) described content analysis as "any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages." Krippendorff (1980) defined content analysis as "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context." Kerlinger defined content analysis as a method of studying and analyzing communication in a systematic, objective, and quantitative manner for the purpose of measuring variables (Wimmer and Dominick, 1987).

These definitions, regardless of their variety, agree that it is the application of scientific methods to documentary evidence (Holsti, 1969). Content analysis is a popular research method in mass communications because access to media content is readily at hand. Since the media messages are disseminated widely, researchers can gain access to copies of the print media and to audio- and videotapes of the broadcast media (Singletary and Stone, 1988: 168).

Content analysis, right after survey and laboratory studies, is indeed one of the major research methods used by broadcast researchers (Wimmer and Haynes, 1978). Wimmer and Haynes analyzed 128 statistical articles which were published in the Journal of Broadcasting from Volume 14 (1969-70) to Volume 20 (1975-76). Twenty-seven (21 percent) out of 128 articles applied content analysis approach, 57 (44.5 percent) applied a survey approach, and 33 (25.7 percent) used laboratory methods.

Carney (1972) describes content analysis as "a general-purpose analytical infrastructure, .... It is intended for anyone who wishes to put questions to communications (pictorial and musical, as well as oral and written) to get data that will enable him to reach certain conclusions." As this study will examine the content of local television news messages, content analysis is the choice for this study to analyze the content of local television newscasts.

In content analysis, four methodological problems should be considered: sampling, unit of analysis, category construction, and reliability of coding (Stempel, 1981).

### Sampling

Three network affiliates carry local television newscasts in Ames/Des Moines, Iowa: WOI (channel 5, ABC affiliate), KCCI (channel 8, CBS affiliate), and WHO (channel 13, NBC affiliate). Green states that television stations "give weight and time to news of significance where the public interest is involved.... The audience of the early evening newscasts was the mass audience representative of all the interests of all the people."

Because the evening local newscasts between 6:00 and 7:30 p.m. are the finest programming offered by television stations (Green, 1969), this study considers only the early evening local newscasts of these affiliates. The sampling period began October 8, 1990 and ended on November 9, 1990.

This study chose KCCI's and WHO's local newscasts at 6:00 p.m. as sampling period. WHO indeed has two local evening newscasts: one between 5:00 and 5:30 p.m., and the other between 6:00 and 6:30 p.m. WHO carries the network news (CBS) between 5:30 and 6:00 p.m., and because its 5:00 p.m. newscast is telecast before the network news, it is possible for WHO to use some news items that are generated by the network for its 5:00 p.m. local newscasts. But it may use fewer of these items and use more local news items on its 6:00 p.m. local newscasts to avoid repetition of what network news carries. Inasmuch as this study concerns local news, the 6:00 p.m. local newscast of WHO is an appropriate choice. WOI has its only local newscast between 5:00 to 5:30 p.m. Therefore, the 5:00 p.m. local newscast of WOI was chosen for analysis.

The selection of October 8, 1990 as the starting point of this study is arbitrary. However, samples were randomly selected according to a composite weekday sampling period technique. The rule of sampling procedure was that only one day of each week could be chosen so as to ensure a balanced distribution in the sampling period. Evening newscasts of all these affiliates were videotaped on the following days: Monday of the first week, Tuesday of the second week, Wednesday of the third week,

Thursday of the fourth week, and Friday of the fifth week. Because none of the three affiliates had an early weekend evening newscast at either 5:00 or 6:00 p.m. but only one at 10:00 p.m, weekend newscasts were not sampled.

### Unit of Analysis

Unit of analysis is what is actually counted. It is one of the most important elements of a content analysis despite the fact that it is the smallest element (Wimmer and Dominick, 1987). In this study, unit of analysis is an individual news item. A news item is defined by Fowler and Showalta (1974) as "any topic introduced by the anchorperson coupled with any report or reports by other correspondents on the same topic plus any conclusion remarks by the anchorperson." Because this study focuses on negative news, not considered were items on sports, weather, stock market reports, and news teases. News tease is defined as a sentence or two of copy which reveals just enough about an upcoming story to help keep viewers tuned to the newscast (Shook, 1989). These items were counted as news items only when they were not announced during the regular segment of sports, weather, and stock market reports. In other words, if these items were announced by the anchorperson or news reporter, these items were considered as news items.

### Category Construction

The heart of content analysis is category construction. There are some advantages of using a category system that has been used in other studies. This is because that category system should be workable. When that system is functional, its validity and reliability would be a matter of

lesser concerns (Stempel III, 1981). The category system of this study is adapted from some different studies. For instance, the category of news items, i.e., negative, neutral, and positive, is adapted from Stone, Hartung, and Jensen (1987). The definitions of negative and positive news are borrowed from Gieber (1955). Negative news refers to any news item reporting social conflicts and disorganization. Positive news, on the other hand, refers to any news item reporting social cohesion and cooperation. Neutral news, as defined by Stone and Grusin (1984), refers to any news item that is neither negative nor positive, or equally balanced.

The operational definition of negative news is adapted from Lowry (1971), and the operational definition of positive news from Gieber (1955). The subcategories of negative news are as follows:

1. Armed conflicts/war. All stories concerning armed conflicts between social groups, nations, or groups of nations. This armed conflict can be as small as a commando unit of a few soldiers or as large as a full scale war.
2. International tensions. All stories concerning conflicts or disagreements between nations (political, diplomatic, economic) where the conflicts or disagreements stop short of armed conflicts or wars.
3. Social conflict/ strikes/riots. All stories concerning the failure of individuals or society to function in a cooperative and integrative manner. These events may be national rather than international, and may conflict between individuals or groups.

4. Crime. All stories concerning extra-legal acts not included in armed conflicts and social conflicts/strikes/riots.
5. Accidents/disasters. All stories resulting from "acts of God" or unforeseen events that lead to personal injury or destruction of life or property.
6. Other news. All stories that would have been negative news to some people. For instance, air and water pollution stories do not fit into the above categories, and are classified as other news.

The categories of positive news are as follows :

1. International cooperation: normal relations among nations.
2. Government at work: information on the affairs of the government.
3. Society at work: information about groups of persons cooperating in non-governmental affairs.
4. Personalities: news items about individuals.

All the local evening newscasts of WOI, KCCI, and WHO are divided into five sections. Section here refers to the content of a newscast between commercials. Usually, all these stations carry the news items in the first two sections, the weather forecast in the third, the sports news in the fourth, and soft news items in the fifth. On a news broadcast, the audience, of course, has no choice to view what news item it would like to see first. It is the decision of news producers as to the order of the news items (Fang, 1980). In this study, it was deemed convenient to break a newscast into five sections for the purpose of analysis. The classifications

of the position category where the news item is placed in a newscast are as follows:

1. The first section: from the beginning of a newscast - before the first commercial break.
2. The second section: after the first commercial break and before the second commercial break.
3. The third section: after the second commercial break and before the third commercial break.
4. The fourth section: after the third commercial break and before the fourth commercial break.
5. The fifth section: after the fourth commercial break and the end of a newscast.

The length of each television news item is timed in seconds.

Because the duration of a newscast is about 20 minutes after deducting commercials, introduction, news tease, and closing, it is possible to report a news item in 15 seconds so that the local newscast can take advantage of the limited news time to carry more news items. Length of news items is classified into seven 15 seconds increments as follows :

1. 1-15 (in seconds)
2. 16-30
3. 31-45
4. 46-60
5. 61-75
6. 76-90
7. 91 or longer



Each single news item is coded for whether it has each of the following visual techniques: talking head, still story, video report, and live conversation between anchorperson in studio and reporter on location. Zero stands for "no" and one for "yes" for each classification.

### Reliability

In order to satisfy the requirement of objectivity, a reliability test was run before the actual coding began. Reliability means consistency of category classification, i.e., repeated measures with the same instrument on a given data should yield similar results (Holsti, 1969). Two journalism major graduate students were invited to code two newscasts separately which accounted for 21.8 percent of the total 136 news items. They were given a coding book (Appendix) and told to follow the category classification for the coding. Before the work started, they were given some examples of how to decide whether a news item should be considered negative, neutral, or positive. The author was the third coder.

In the calculation of reliability, Scott's (1955) formula was applied:

$$pi = \frac{\% \text{ observed agreement} - \% \text{ expected agreement}}{1 - \% \text{ expected agreement}}$$

According to Scott, the observed percentage of agreement refers to the percentage of judgments on which the two coders agree when coding the same data independently. The expected percentage of agreement is the percentage of agreement to be expected by chance. Pi is the ratio of the actual difference between the obtained and the chance agreement to the

maximum difference between the obtained and the chance agreement. Pi can be interpreted as the extent to which the coding reliability exceeds chance. Scott's formula was used in this study because it produces a conservative estimate of reliability by taking the chance into account (Holsti, 1969; Stempel, 1981).

Observed agreement for the three pairs of coders was :

A and B = .89;

A and C = .93; and

B and C = .89.

The expected agreement is determined by finding the proportion of items falling into each category of a category set, and then summing the square of those proportions. The expected agreement for the three pairs of coders was .09. Scott's pi for each pair of coders was as follows:

A and B = .87;

A and C = .92; and

B and C = .88.

A composite reliability coefficient is computed according to the following formula:

$$\text{Composite Reliability} = \frac{N(\text{average inter-judge agreement})}{1 + [(N-1)(\text{average inter-judge agreement})]}$$

where N is the number of judges (Holsti, 1969). The average inter-judge agreement equals to  $(.87 + .92 + .88)/3 = .89$ . So,

$$\text{Composite Reliability} = \frac{3(.89)}{1 + [(3-1)(.89)]} = .96$$

There has been little agreement about what the minimum acceptable level of reliability is. In general, content analysts would like to see this minimum level above 90 percent (Stempel, 1981). Practically, it is hard for all coders to agree on all the category classifications completely.

According to Stempel, disagreement among coders is attributed to: (1) inadequate definition of category, (2) failure of coders to achieve a common frame of reference, and (3) oversights. Because the composite reliability of this study is 96 percent, it should be acceptable. It can certainly be said that the category system of this study was adequate and the coders were able to achieve a common understanding of the category system.

## CHAPTER IV. FINDINGS

### News Profile

A total of 15 evening newscasts with 136 news items from the three network affiliates were videotaped in a composite five weekdays between October 8, 1990, and November 13, 1990. The second week (October 16, 1990, Tuesday) of KCCI's evening newscast could not be videotaped because of technical problems in the recording. The Tuesday evening newscasts of the three local newscasts were videotaped in the sixth week on November 13, 1990.

The principal news issues during the period of this study were the gubernatorial campaigns between Governor Terry Branstad and challenger Don Avenson and the U.S. senatorial campaign between incumbent Tom Harkin and Representative Tom Tauke. Federal budget talks, the occupation of Kuwait by Iraqi troops and the deployment of American troops in Saudi Arabia also received news media attention.

### Results

There are four hypotheses in this study. Two of them are supported and two of them are not supported by the results of this study. The frequency distribution of each variable will be presented before referring to any statistically significant relationships between variables.

Hypothesis 1: The total number of negative news items of the local evening newscasts in Ames/Des Moines is greater than that of either the neutral or positive items. This hypothesis is supported by the results of this study.

✓ The three local television stations carried a total of 136 news items in a composite week. All three local stations emphasized negative news in terms of numbers as can be seen in Table 1. Out of 136 news items, 82 items (60.3 percent) were negative, 34 items (25 percent) were neutral, and 20 items (14.7 percent) were positive news items. Even the sum total of all neutral and positive, 54 news items (39.7 percent), is 28 news items (20.6 percent) fewer than the number of negative items. As can be seen, the majority of the news items was negative in all the evening local newscasts during the sampling period.

TABLE 1: Frequency distribution of the type of news item

The type of news item	Frequency	Percent
Negative news	82	60.3
Neutral news	34	25
Positive news	20	14.7

As shown in Table 2, more than half of the news items fell into the accidents/disasters and the crime classifications. Of the 82 negative news items, slightly more than one-third (34.1 percent) were accidents/disasters, and 25 (30.5 percent) were crime, 11 (13.4 percent) social conflicts, 5 (6.1 percent) international tension, and 13 (5.9 percent) fell into the other classifications.

A total of 20 positive news items was broadcast by the local

television stations in the sampling period. Slightly more than half of these news items (55 percent) fell into the society at work classification, a quarter (25 percent) into the government at work, and one-fifth (20 percent) into the personalities classification. Thirty-four news items were considered neutral.

TABLE 2: Frequency distribution of negative news classification

Negative News Classification	Frequency	Percent
Armed Conflict/War	0	0
International Tension	5	6.1
Social Conflicts/Strikes/Riots	11	13.4
Crime	25	30.5
Accidents/Disasters	28	34.1
Other News	13	15.9

As indicated in Table 3, the results of a Chi-square test show that there is a statistically significant relationship between the types and numbers of news items at the 0.001 level.

News stations were examined individually to see whether any station overemphasized negative news as compared with neutral or positive news. The results indicated that there is no statistically significant difference at the 0.05 level among stations regarding different types of news items. Table 4 shows that Channel 5 had 32 negative items (59.3 percent of its total items); Channel 8 carried 22 negative items (68.8 percent of its total items); and Channel 13 carried 28 negative items (56

TABLE 3: Relationship between the types and numbers of news items

	Negative items	Neutral items	Positive items	Row total
Observed frequency	82	34	20	136
Expected frequency	46	45	45	136
Column total	128	79	65	272
Chi-square = 21.24 D.F. = 2				
p < 0.001 (two-tailed), p < 0.0005 (one-tailed)				

TABLE 4: Relationship between the type of news items on three local stations

Count Row % Column %	Negative news	Neutral news	Positive news	Row Total
Channel 5	32 59.3 39.0	15 27.8 44.1	7 13.0 35.0	54 39.7
Channel 8	22 68.8 26.8	7 21.9 20.6	3 9.4 15	32 23.5
Channel 13	28 56.0 34.1	12 24 35.3	10 20.0 50.0	50 36.8
Column Total	82 60.3	34 25.0	20 14.7	136 100.0
Chi-square	D.F.	Significance	Min. E.F.	Cells with E.F. < 5
2.53652	4	0.6381	4.706	1 of 9 (11.1%)
Lambda	<u>With Type Dependent</u>			
	0.00000			

percent of its total). These differences, however, are not statistically significant enough to make a difference among stations and, therefore, hypothesis one, which states that the total number of negative news item is greater than that of either the neutral or the positive news items, can be supported further.

Hypothesis 2, stating that negative news items are placed in the lead position of the local newscasts more often than either the neutral or the positive news items, is also supported.

As shown in Table 5, the distribution of news items indicates that in general the number of news items in news sections diminishes as the newscast progresses. The first two sections carried the majority of news items. Eighty-nine (65.4 percent) of the news items out of 136 were found in the first section of the local television newscasts. The second section carried 33 news items (24.3 percent). The third and the fourth sections were always

TABLE 5: Number of news items and their frequency distribution of the news sections

	Frequency	Percent
First section	89	65.4
Second section	33	24.3
Third section	4	2.9
Fourth section	1	.7
Fifth section	9	6.6
	136	100



allocated to weather forecasts and sports reports, respectively. The fifth or the last section, carried only 9 news items (6.6 percent).

A Chi-square test was run to see whether there is a statistically significant relationship between the types of news items and their positions in a newscast. As shown in Table 6, there is a significant relationship at the 0.005 level. Chi-square, however, cannot be applied at

TABLE 6: Relationship between the types and positions of news items in newscasts

Count						
Row %	First	Second	Third	Fourth	Fifth	Row
Column %	section	section	section	section	section	Total
Negative	68 82.9 76.4	11 13.4 33.3	2 2.4 50.0	1 1.2 100.0		82 60.3
Neutral	13 38.2 14.6	14 41.2 42.4	1 2.9 25.0		6 17.6 66.7	34 25.0
Positive	8 40.0 9.0	8 40.0 24.2	1 5.0 25.0		3 15.0 33.3	20 14.7
Column Total	89 65.4	33 24.3	4 2.9	1 0.7	9 6.6	136 100.0
Chi-square	D.F.	Significance	Min. E.F.	Cells with E.F. < 5		
34.49857	8	0.0000	0.147	9 of 15 (60%)		
Lambda	<u>With Position Dependent</u> 0.02128					

this point, because cells with E.F. (expected frequency)  $< 5$  are 9 of 15 (60 percent) cells. This means that more than 20 percent of the cells have an expected frequency of fewer than 5 cases in an individual cell. The case number in each cell is so small that it is hard to test statistically. Hence, it is necessary to collapse the cells together. Because the first section obviously carried more items than other sections did, it would be reasonable to compare the first section with the other four sections. This combination makes the negative items to be placed in the lead position more difficult.

TABLE 7: Relationship between the types and positions of news items

Count Row % Column %	First section	Other section	Row Total	
Negative	68 82.9 76.4	14 17.1 29.8	82 60.3	
Neutral	13 38.2 14.6	21 61.8 44.7	34 25.0	
Positive	8 40.0 9.0	12 60.0 25.5	20 14.7	
Column Total	89 65.4	47 34.6	136 100.0	
Chi-square	D.F.	Significance	Min E.F.	Cells with E.F. $< 5$
27.93715	2	0.0000	6.912	None
Lambda	<u>With Position Dependent</u>			
	0.25532			

As can be seen from Table 7, Chi-square can be applied after the cells have been collapsed, since no cells have an E.F.  $< 5$ . There is a statistically significant relationship between the type of news item and the position of a news item in a newscast at the 0.05 level. These results indicate that negative news items were more often placed in the first section. In fact, 76.4 percent of the news items in the first section were negative news, whereas only 14.6 percent are neutral and 9 percent are positive. A greater portion of either neutral or positive items was found toward the end of the newscast.

TABLE 8: Frequency distribution of the length of news items

Length in seconds	Frequency	Percent
1-15	8	5.9
16-30	51	37.5
31-45	20	14.7
46-60	5	3.7
61-75	4	2.9
76-90	5	3.7
91 or longer	43	31.6

Hypothesis 3, stating that the length of the negative news reports on local newscasts is longer than either the neutral or the positive news items, is not supported by this study.

As seen in Table 8, more than half of the news items did not run longer than 45 seconds. Fifty-one news items (37.5 percent) fell into the "16 to 30 seconds" classification, and 20 news items (14.7 percent) fell into the "31 to 45 seconds" classification.

Initially, a Chi-square test was run but Chi-square could not be applied because cells with E.F. < 5 were 13 of 21 (61.9 percent) cells. This means that more than 20 percent of cells have fewer than 5 cases in an individual cell. It is necessary to collapse some cells. With the exception of the last classification, i.e., 91 seconds or longer, each classification is equally balanced. In fact, there were some news items that lasted for four to five minutes. So, it would be reasonable to put the first four classifications into one group, and the last three classifications into another group.

As shown in Table 9, there is no statistically significant difference between the type and the length of news items at the 0.05 level. The length of negative news items (37.8 percent) is longer than positive items (25 percent), but not longer than neutral items (47.1 percent). Therefore, the results do not support the hypothesis that the length of negative news reports is greater than that of either neutral or positive items.

TABLE 9: Relationship between the types and lengths of news items

Count Row % Column %	Shorter	Longer	Row Total	
Negative	51 62.2 60.7	31 37.8 59.6	82 60.3	
Neutral	18 52.9 21.4	16 47.1 30.8	34 25.0	
Positive	15 75.0 17.9	5 25.0 9.6	20 14.7	
Column Total	84 61.8	52 38.2	136 100.0	
Chi-square	D. F.	Significance	Min. E. F.	Cells with E.F. < 5
2.61083	2	0.2711	7.647	None
Lambda	<u>With Length Dependent</u>			
	0.00000			

All stations were examined to see whether any of them tended to overemphasize lengthy news items. A Chi-square test was run between the type of the news item and the length of a news item. But there were 13 out of 21 cells (61.9 percent) with less than 5 cases in each cell. Therefore, some cells needed to be collapsed. These collapsed cells were put into two groups (short and long) according to the procedure explained earlier.

TABLE 10: Relationship between newscasts and length of news items

Count Row % Column %	Short	Long	Row total	
Channel 5	30 55.6 35.7	24 44.4 46.2	54 39.7	
Channel 8	17 53.1 20.2	15 46.9 28.8	32 23.5	
Channel 13	37 74.0 44.0	13 26.0 25.0	50 36.8	
Column Total	84 61.8	52 38.2	136 100.0	
Chi-square	D. F.	Significance	Min. E. F.	Cells with E.F. < 5
5.06254	2	0.0796	12.235	None
Lambda	<u>With Length Dependent</u> 0.00000			

After collapsing the cells, there is still no statistically significant relationship between the individual local station and the length of news item at the 0.05 level as shown in Table 10. Channel 8 (KCCI, CBS affiliate) carried more lengthy news items (46.9 percent) than did either Channel 5 (44.4 percent long items) or Channel 13 (26 percent long items). But Channel 8 did not carry more lengthy items than short items. Indeed,

Channel 8 carried a greater number of short items (53.1 percent) than long items (46.9 percent). The same pattern can be observed both in Channel 5 and Channel 13. Hence, there is no significant difference among stations with regard to treating the length of news items.

Hypothesis 4 states that more visual techniques are used for negative news items than for neutral or positive items. With regard to this hypothesis, four different variables such as talking head, still story, video report, and live conversation report were used to see whether negative news received more visual techniques. The results showed that there was no statistically significant relationship between the types of the news item and the visual techniques employed.

As can be seen in Table 11, most news items (80.9 percent) contained video reports. Almost three-fourth of them (74.3 percent) used talking head shots. Slightly more than half (55.1 percent) of these contained still graphics. Slightly more than one-tenth (11.8 percent) of the news items contained live conversation reports.

Each visual technique was examined to see whether negative news items received more use of that technique than did either neutral or positive items. There was no statistically significant relationship between the type of news item and the use of talking heads at the 0.05 level. As Table 12 indicates, negative news items (70.7 percent) using talking heads are more than positive items (65 percent), but fewer than neutral items (88.2 percent) using talking heads. Regardless of their types, news items using talking heads are more numerous than those not using talking head shots.

Table 11: Frequency distribution of visual techniques

	Received visual technique	Did not receive visual technique	Percent
Head	101 items	35 items	74.3
Still	75	61	55.1
Video	110	26	80.9
Live	16	120	11.8

Table 12: Relationship between types of news items and application of talking head shots

Count				
Row %		No	Yes	Row Total
Column %				
Negative		24 29.3 68.6	58 70.7 57.4	82 60.3
Neutral		4 11.8 11.4	30 88.2 29.7	34 25.0
Positive		7 35.0 20.0	13 65.0 12.9	20 14.7
Column Total		35 25.7	101 74.3	136 100.0
Chi-square	D. F.	Significance	Min. E. F.	Cells with E. F. < 5
4.90589	2	0.0860	5.147	None
Lambda		<u>With Head Dependent</u> 0.00000		



The results do not support the sub-hypothesis that negative news items apply more talking heads than do either neutral or positive items.

As for the still visual technique, there was no difference between the types of the news items and the still visual technique, with the exception of negative news. As can be seen in Table 13, the total number of both neutral and positive news items using still visuals is the same as those items not using the technique. Although negative news items

TABLE 13: Relationship between types of news items and application of still stories

Count Row % Column %	No	Yes	Row Total	
Negative	34 41.5 55.7	48 58.5 64.0	82 60.3	
Neutral	17 50 27.9	17 50 22.7	34 25.0	
Positive	10 50.0 16.4	10 50.0 13.3	20 14.7	
Column Total	61 44.9	75 55.1	136 100.0	
Chi-square	D. F.	Significance	Min. E. F.	Cells with E. F. < 5
0.95923	2	0.6190	8.971	None
Lambda	<u>With Still Dependent</u>			
	0.00000			

tended to use more still visuals than did either neutral or positive news items, the result was not significant enough to show a statistically significant difference for neutral and positive items using fewer still visuals. Therefore, the sub-hypothesis, stating that negative news items receive more still visual technique treatment than do either neutral or positive items, is not supported.

TABLE 14: Relationship between types of news items and application of video reports

Count Row % Column %	No	Yes	Row Total	
Negative	14 17.1 53.8	68 82.9 61.8	82 60.3	
Neutral	9 26.5 34.6	25 73.5 22.7	34 25.0	
Positive	3 15.0 11.5	17 85.0 15.5	20 14.7	
Column Total	26 19.1	110 80.9	136 100.0	
Chi-square	D. F.	Significance	Min. E. F.	Cells with E. F. < 5
1.62977	2	0.4427	3.824	1 of 6 (16.7%)
Lambda	<u>With Video Dependent</u> 0.00000			

With regard to video reports, there was no statistically significant relationship between the type of news item and its video treatment at the 0.05 level as shown in Table 14. Regardless of their types, news items containing video reports are more than those not containing video reports. Although negative items (82.9 percent) have more video reports than do neutral items (73.5 percent), but not more than positive items (85 percent). So, the hypothesis that negative news items have more video reports than do neutral or positive items is not supported.

Concerning the visual technique of live conversations, no statistically significant relationship was found between the type of news item and whether they used live conversations. A Chi-square test was run initially, but 2 out of 6 (33.3 percent) had cells with  $E. F. < 5$ . Because no live conversation was recorded for positive news items in this study, the type of news items could then be combined into two groups: negative news and neutral news, as shown in Table 15.

Negative news items with live conversations (8.5 percent of the total) were fewer than neutral items (16.7 percent). These differences however, did not indicate a statistically significant relationship between the type of news item and those items that received the live conversation visual technique. Hence, the sub-hypothesis, stating that negative news items have more live reports between the anchorperson in the studio and the reporter on location than do either neutral or positive items, is not supported.

TABLE 15: Relationship between types of news items and application of live conversation reports

Count Row % Column %	No	Yes	Row Total	
Negative	75 91.5 62.5	7 8.5 43.8	82 60.3	
Neutral	45 83.3 37.5	9 16.7 56.3	54 39.7	
Column Total	120 88.2	16 11.8	136 100.0	
Chi-square	D. F.	Significance	Min. E. F.	Cells with E. F. < 5
1.36394	1	0.2429	6.353	None
Lambda	<u>With Live Dependent</u> 0.00000			

All four visual techniques support an idea that regardless of news type, there is no relationship on the way it receives any kind of visual technique. The hypothesis, stating that more visual techniques are used for negative news items than for either neutral or positive items, cannot be supported.

## CHAPTER V. IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

### Implications

The results of this study indicate that local evening newscasts did in fact emphasize negative news from the perspectives of the ratio of negative news items to the total news items and of the lead position of negative news items in newscasts. The findings of this study, therefore, partly support the previous studies which, as mentioned in the literature review, indicate that negative news dominates newscasts. These results may be explained from economic and production points of view.

From the economic aspect, all local stations analyzed in this study are commercial operations and therefore subject to income fluctuations determined by program ratings. In other words, the higher the rating of a station program, the more income a station makes from selling commercial time during that program. Advertising agencies buy air time based on cost per point (Eastman, Head, and Klein, 1989), which is related to the number of dollars advertising agencies are willing to pay for each rating point delivered by the station. This means that if a station has a higher rating point for its programs than competing stations, the station may probably get more advertisers' support. Hence, as far as the ratings are concerned, local stations may be more likely to use more negative than neutral or positive items in their newscasts. This is because negative news may attract viewers and boost ratings as mentioned earlier.

From the news production point of view, producers may need to arrange news items in a certain order. As mentioned by Green (1969), the

items that are put at the top of the newscast list should be the most significant news stories of the day. The data acquired through this study show that negative news was placed in the lead position more often than neutral or positive items. None of the negative items went into the fifth section of a newscast. As shown in Table 6, either neutral or positive news items occupied the last section of the newscasts.

These results agree with those of Green in indicating that the hard news element decreases as the newscast approaches the end. A brief, upbeat feature story is, according to Green, a good closing. Green also said he believed that if the producers end the newscast with negative news, the audience will not feel comfortable and that, in general, the audience feels confused if the newscast carries negative, positive, and neutral news back and forth without any logical order. The confusion will make it difficult for the audience to adjust between the moods of tragedy and comedy. Therefore, when producing a newscast, newsmakers should take audience psychology into account. For the sake of audience psychology, a newscast that ends with an upbeat item is preferable to one that does not. Television producers then need to look at news events from the viewpoint of the newscast needs (Epstein, 1973b).

Two hypotheses are not supported by the results of this study. The results show that the length of a negative news item is not any longer than that of a neutral or a positive item. Moreover, negative news items do not use more visual techniques, i.e., talking head, still, video, and live conversation, than do neutral or positive items. However, there is a

relationship between the length of news items and application of visual techniques. This study found that more long news items are accompanied by still stories, video reports and live conversations, than are short news items.

A Chi-square test was run to see whether there is a statistically significant relationship between the length of news items and application of talking head shots. But there were 7 of 14 (50 percent) with fewer than 5 cases in each cell. After collapsing the cells as shown in Table 16, there was still no statistically significant relationship between the length of news items and use of talking head shots at the 0.05 level.

TABLE 16: Relationship between the length of news items and application of talking head shots

Count		No	Yes	Row Total
Row %				
Column %				
Short		23 27.4 65.7	61 72.6 60.4	84 61.8
Long		12 23.1 34.3	40 76.9 39.6	52 38.2
Column Total		35 25.7	101 74.3	136 100.0
Chi-square	D.F.	Significance	Min. E.F.	Cells with E.F. < 5
0.12683	1	0.7217	13.382	None
Lambda	<u>With Head Dependent</u>			
	0.00000			

Table 17: Relationship between the length of news items and application of still stories

Count Row % Column &	No	Yes	Row Total	
Short	46 54.8 75.4	38 45.2 50.7	84 61.8	
Long	15 28.8 24.6	37 71.2 49.3	52 38.2	
Column Total	61 44.9	75 55.1	136 100.0	
Chi-square	D.F.	Significance	Min. E.F.	Cells with E.F. < 5
7.70457	1	0.0055	23.324	None
Lambda	<u>With Still Dependent</u> 0.13115			

There is a statistically significant relationship between the length of news items and use of still visuals at the 0.05 level as shown in Table 17. Long news items (71.2 percent) employ more still visuals than do short news items (45.2 percent). On the other hand, short items (54.8 percent) employ fewer still visuals compared with long items (28.8 percent).



TABLE 18: Relationship between the length of news items and application of video reports

Count Row % Column %	No	Yes	Row Total	
Short	25 29.8 96.2	59 70.2 53.6	84 61.8	
Long	1 1.9 3.8	51 98.1 46.4	52 38.2	
Column Total	26 19.1	110 80.9	136 100.0	
Chi-square	D.F.	Significance	Min. E.F.	Cells with E.F. < 5
14.34743	1	0.0002	9.941	None
Lambda	<u>With Video Dependent</u>			
	0.00000			

As shown in Table 18, most long news items (98.1 percent) employed video reports compared with those long items (1.9 percent) without video reports. Moreover, long news items (98.1 percent) employed video reports almost 30 percent more than did short news items (70.2 percent). There is a statistically significant difference between the length of news items and application of video reports at the 0.05 level.

TABLE 19: Relationship between the length of news items and application of live conversation reports

Count				
Row %	No	Yes	Row	
Column %			Total	
Short	83 98.8 69.2	1 1.2 6.3	84 61.8	
Long	37 71.2 30.8	15 28.8 93.8	52 38.2	
Column Total	120 88.2	16 11.8	136 100.0	
Chi-square	D.F.	Significance	Min. E.F.	Cells with E.F. < 5
21.07486	1	0.00000	6.118	None
Lambda	<u>With Live Dependent</u> 0.00000			

There is a statistically significant difference between the length of news items and use of live conversation reports at the 0.05 level as shown in Table 19. The majority of short news items (98.8 percent) did not use live conversation reports. Long news items (28.8 percent) tended to use live conversations more than did short news items (1.2 percent).

These results can be explained because the longer the news the less likelihood that to have only anchorperson reading the news. Long items are more likely to use still stories, video reports and live conversations. In

other words, regardless of the type of news item, the longer the story, the more likely it is to use a still story, video report or live conversation.

The findings of this study match Stone, Hartung, and Jensen's (1987) study in which the number and the position of negative news items show a statistically significant difference from positive news; while there is no statistically significant difference in the length of news items and the type of news item containing video. But there are also some differences between the findings of this study and their study.

This study focuses on a single market, i.e., Ames/Des Moines. Stone, Hartung, and Jensen's study compared three different markets together. The duration of the newscast of this study was thirty minutes. The duration of newscasts in their study, however, was from half an hour to one and-a-half hours long. They chose the first thirty minutes for the purpose of analysis. This may affect the outcome of their results because it cannot be determined whether the remainder of the program carried long, negative news and used visual techniques. Therefore, the possibility that these two studies have come up with similar results by sheer chance cannot be ruled out.

Negative news items were not longer than either the neutral or positive news items in this study. As noted earlier in the news profile, the major issues over the period of this study involved Iowa's gubernatorial and senatorial campaigns. In general, this type of news item was categorized as neutral because it did not report either social conflicts or disorganization, or any social cohesion or cooperation. Seven (20.6 percent) out of thirty-four neutral items were about election campaigns and covered the debates

of different candidates. Five (71.4 percent) of these seven items fell into the highest classification rank of the length of the news item, i.e., 91 seconds or longer. In fact, two of these five items lasted 4 minutes and 30 seconds.

Besides, feature stories are also a contributor to the longest news items because a feature story relies more heavily on visual rather than verbal information compared with other reports (Lemert, 1974). During the time of this study, feature stories included medical reports, gas price information, new product introductions, and child education. These feature stories were considered either neutral or positive, depending on the way producers treated the story.

For future studies, it may be better to distinguish the category of news items into more details such as hard news, soft news, and feature stories. These additional classifications may facilitate determining more specifically the types of news items and their relationships according to length and visual treatment.

Moreover, it is possible for future studies to measure the total news time allocated to the negative, neutral or positive items in addition to measuring the length of a news item alone. Consequently, it may be possible to determine the amount of time stations spend on reporting different types of news items.

As noted earlier, television is a visual medium. No matter what type of news item is broadcast, stations still emphasize visualization. In other words, they are willing to invest more personnel time to package a news item regardless of the nature of the items. This study found that the length

of a news item is associated with the still story, video report and live conversation rather than with the type of news item. In fact, news items involving election campaigns always came with still story, video reports or live conversations. Hence, there are no particular differences between negative and neutral or positive items in what type of visual technique the items receive.

Because the time span of this study was between October and November- of which November is considered a sweeps month (television stations conduct audience surveys to obtain ratings; Eastman, Head, and Klein, 1989), there is a possibility the local stations carried a greater variety of stories with more depth and greater detail than they would during non-sweeps months. Moreover, these stories may have taken more time and received more visual treatment, that is, talking heads, still story, video reports or live conversations to clarify their points as well as to aid audience understanding.

There is, however, no statistically significant relationship between the sweeps month and length of news item at the 0.05 level as shown in Table 20. Short news items (63.4 percent) tended to appear more in sweeps month compared with those short items (59.3 percent) reported in the non-sweeps month. On the other hand, long news items (40.7 percent) tended to appear more in the non-sweeps month compared with those long items (36.6 percent) reported in the sweeps month. Therefore, the sweeps month was not a factor that affected the results of this study.

TABLE 20: Relationship between the sweeps month and length of news items

Count Row % Column %	No	Yes	Row Total	
Non-sweeps	32 59.3 38.1	22 40.7 42.3	54 39.7	
Sweeps month	52 63.4 61.9	30 36.6 57.7	82 60.3	
Column Total	84 61.8	52 38.2	136 100.0	
Chi-square	D.F.	Significance	Min. E.F.	Cells with E.F. < 5
0.09462	1	0.7584	20.647	None
Lambda	<u>With Length Dependent</u>			
	0.00000			

With regard to the use of visual techniques, there was no statistically significant relationship between the sweeps period and application of visual techniques at the 0.05 level.

TABLE 21: Relationship between the sweeps month and application of talking head shots

Count Row % Column %	No	Yes	Row Total	
Non-sweeps	11 20.4 31.4	43 79.6 42.6	54 39.7	
Sweeps month	24 29.3 68.6	58 70.7 57.4	82 60.3	
Column Total	35 25.7	101 74.3	136 100.0	
Chi-square	D.F.	Significance	Min. E.F.	Cells with E.F. < 5
0.92337	1	0.3366	13.897	None
Lambda	<u>With Head Dependent</u>			
	0.00000			

As shown in Table 21, there was statistically significant relationship between the sweeps period and application of talking head shots at the 0.05 level. Therefore, the sweeps month did not affect the results of this study.

TABLE 22: Relationship between the sweeps month and application of still stories

Count Row % Column %	No	Yes	Row Total	
Non-sweeps	23 42.6 37.7	31 57.4 41.3	54 39.7	
Sweeps month	38 46.3 62.3	44 53.7 58.7	82 60.3	
Column Total	61 44.9	75 55.1	136 100.0	
Chi-square	D.F.	Significance	Min. E.F.	Cells with E.F. < 5
0.06448	1	0.7996	24.221	None
Lambda	<u>With Still Dependent</u> 0.00000			

With regard to the use of still stories, there was no statistically significant relationship between the sweeps period and application of still stories at the 0.05 level as shown in Table 22. Therefore, the sweeps month did not affect the results of this study.



TABLE 23: Relationship between the sweeps month and application of video reports

Count Row % Column %	No	Yes	Row Total	
Non-sweeps	11 20.4 42.3	43 79.6 39.1	54 39.7	
Sweeps month	15 18.3 57.7	67 81.7 60.9	82 60.3	
Column Total	26 19.1	110 80.9	136 100.0	
Chi-square	D.F.	Significance	Min. E.F.	Cells with E.F. < 5
0.00619	1	0.9373	10.324	None
Lambda	<u>With Video Dependent</u>			
	0.00000			

With regard to the use of video reports, there was no statistically significant relationship between the sweeps period and application of video reports at the 0.05 level as shown in Table 23. Therefore, the sweep months did not affect the results of this study.

TABLE 24: Relationship between the sweeps month and application of live conversation reports

Count Row % Column %	No	Yes	Row Total	
Non-sweeps	46 85.2 38.3	8 14.8 50.0	54 39.7	
Sweeps month	74 90.2 61.7	8 9.8 50.0	82 60.3	
Column Total	120 88.2	16 11.8	136 100.0	
Chi-square	D.F.	Significance	Min. E.F.	Cells with E.F. < 5
0.38930	1	0.5327	6.353	None
Lambda	<u>With Live Dependent</u> 0.00000			

With regard to the use of conversation reports, there was no statistically significant relationship between the sweeps period and application of conversation reports at the 0.05 level as shown in Table 24. Therefore, the sweeps month did not affect the results of this study.

As long as newscasts continue to emphasize the unusual and the bizarre, local stations are likely to continue carrying more negative news items. Golding and Elliott (1979), in Making the News, quoted what Bucker had said:

It is, of course, a basic principle of journalism that the bigger, the more off-beat, or the more bloody the spectacle, the greater the news value .... It merely reflects the ineluctable fact that readers will flock to a story that has shock value but ignore one that is routine.

Hence, producers will continue to select those items, especially negative news, they think will be interesting to their audience, and they will probably put these negative items at or near the top of a newscast. Therefore, negative news, rather than neutral or positive items seem to be selected by producers in the process of news selection.

#### Summary

The intent of this study was to see whether negative news is a criterion of local television newscasts. The acquired data showed that there is a statistically significant relationship between the types of news items and number of news items. All local stations carried more negative news items than neutral or positive items.

Negative news items have gained priority in a newscast because these items tend to be presented at the opening. The data indicate that there is a statistically significant relationship between the type of news item and the position of the news item in a newscast.

Negative news items did not use more reporting time than did neutral or positive items. The findings suggest that there is no relationship between the type and the length of news items.

As shown by the results of this study, negative news items do not employ more visual techniques than do neutral or positive items. There is no statistically significant relationship between the types of news items and the use of visual techniques.

Although the results cannot totally support the claim that local stations emphasize negative news at the expense of neutral or positive news in terms of the length and the application of visual treatment, it may be said producers do seem to emphasize the selection of negative news items due to stronger audience reactions, which affect station ratings. Negative news items can be considered to a certain extent to be a news criterion of local television newscast. The results clearly demonstrate that the total number of negative news items is more than that of other types of news, and that negative news items occupy the opening position of newscasts.

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**APPENDIX: CODING SHEET OF LOCAL TELEVISION NEWSCASTS**

Unit of analysis: An individual news items will be used as the unit of analysis. For the purpose of this study, a news item is defined as any topic introduced by the anchorperson coupled with any report or reports by other correspondents on the same topic and any concluding remarks by the anchorperson (Fowler and Showalta, 1974).

Column	Variable labels	Description
1-3	ID	-- identification number of news item
5-10	DATE	-- the date of newscast recording (month/date/year)
12	DAY	-- the day of newscast recording 1: Monday 2 Tuesday 3: Wednesday 4: Thursday 5: Friday
13	WEEK	-- the week of newscast recording 1: the first week 2: the second week 3: the third week 4: the fourth week 5: the fifth week 6: the sixth week

- 14-15      CHANNEL    -- newscast on which channel  
                            1: Channel 5 (WOI)  
                            2: Channel 8 (KCCI)  
                            3: Channel 13 (WHO)
- 17            TYPE            -- the type of news items  
                            1: negative news  
                            (any news item reporting social  
                            conflicts and disorganization)  
                            2: neutral news  
                            (any news item that is neither negative  
                            nor positive, or equally balanced)  
                            3: positive news  
                            (any news item reporting social  
                            cohesion and cooperation)
- 18            NEGATIVE  
                            1: 'armed conflict/war' All stories concerns armed  
                            conflict between social groups, nations, or  
                            groups of nations. This armed conflict can be  
                            as small as a commando unit of a few men or as  
                            large as a full scale war.  
                            2: 'international tension' All stories of conflict or  
                            disagreement between nations (political, diplomatic or  
                            economic) where the conflict of disagreement stops short  
                            of armed conflict or war.

3: 'social conflict/strikes/riots' All stories concerns the failure of individuals or society to function in a cooperative, integrative manner. These events may be intranational in scope rather than international, and may involve conflict between groups rather than between individuals.

4: 'crime' All stories concerns extra-legal acts not included in armed conflict/war, and social conflict/strikes/riots.

5: 'accidents/disasters' All stories results from 'acts of God' or unforeseen events lead to personal injury or destruction of life or property.

6: 'other news' All stories not belonging to one of the above five subcategories or stories that would have been negative news to some people. For instance, air and water pollution stories which do not fit into the above categories, are classified as 'other' news.

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#### POSITIVE

1: "international cooperation"

Normal relationship among nations.

2: "government at work" Noncontroversial information affairs of government.

3: "society at work" Information about groups of persons cooperating in nongovernment affairs.

4: "personalities" News items about individuals.

- 21            POSITION: the position of news item in a newscast
- 1: "first segment" (from the beginning of the newscast -- before the first commercial pod)
  - 2: "second segment" (after the first commercial pod -- before the second commercial pod)
  - 3: "third segment" (after the second commercial pod -- before the third commercial pod)
  - 4: "fourth segment" (after the third commercial pod -- before the fourth commercial pod)
  - 5: "fifth segment" (after the fourth commercial pod-- to the end of a newscast)
- 22            LENGTH: the length of news item in seconds
- 1: 1 - 15
  - 2: 16 - 30
  - 3: 31 - 45
  - 4: 46 - 60
  - 5: 61 - 75
  - 6: 76 - 90
  - 7: 91 or longer
- 23-26        HEAD: anchorperson alone without any graphic or video (23)
- 0: "NO"
  - 1: "YES"
- STILL: anchorperson with visual aids such as (24) still picture, drawing or topic box next

to anchorperson's shoulder; or story with  
full screen font, picture or graphic alone

0: "NO"

1: "YES"

VIDEO: any news item with moving pictures  
(25)

0: "NO"

1: "YES"

LIVE: conversation between anchorperson and  
(26) reporter(s) on location, or other place  
outside studio

0: "NO"

1: "YES"