Primacy Effects of The Daily Show and National TV News Viewing: Young Viewers, Political Gratifications, and Internal Political Self-Efficacy

R. Lance Holbert, Jennifer L. Lambe, Anthony D. Dudo, and Kristin A. Carlton

This study examines program ordering effects derived from viewing CNN television news relative to The Daily Show on the political gratifications associated with both types of information sources. Internal political self-efficacy is assessed as an individual-difference moderator. Main primacy effects are found on the gratifications associated with both national television news viewing and The Daily Show viewing. However, The Daily Show primacy effect on the political gratifications associated with national television news viewing was isolated among those participants who retain low internal political self-efficacy. Ramifications for these findings are outlined and future lines of research are summarized.

The Daily Show with Jon Stewart has become a fixture on the U.S. political landscape (Mutz, 2004). There is much discussion within the popular press as to the legitimacy of emerging satirical public affairs outlets (Trigoboff, 2001), with public opinion polling pointing toward this program type being particularly influential among younger voters (Rutenberg, 2000). A poll conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press reveals that 21% of 18- to 29-year-olds regularly turn to satirical public affairs television to obtain information about presidential politics (Bauer,
In addition to attracting the youth demographic, the 2004 National Annenberg Election Survey revealed *The Daily Show* audience to be well educated and highly knowledgeable about politics in general (Young, 2004a).

The introduction of *The Daily Show* as a potential source for political information raises questions concerning how this outlet functions alongside more traditional means of public affairs consumption. Of particular interest to this study is whether the use of one type of programming can alter the perceptions of the other within the minds of audience members. More specifically, this experimental study focuses on how varied consumption patterns of national television news and *The Daily Show* alter the political gratifications associated with the viewing of these respective public affairs outlets.

*The Daily Show* offers a satirical critique of various elements of U.S. democracy, capitalism, and, of special importance to this study, journalism as a profession. In short, this outlet presents a competing message type to more traditional forms of television news programming (Baym, 2005). More specifically, the competing messages of various national TV news outlets and *The Daily Show* offer radically different perspectives concerning the ability of news organizations to be valued information sources for political information. Persuasion scholars have long studied the influence of competing claims (Miller & Campbell, 1959), and this area of research remains a permanent fixture in the social psychology literature (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). There is solid empirical evidence supporting the claim that when someone comes into contact with two competing messages in immediate succession, the first message consumed tends to be more persuasive (i.e., “the primacy effect”; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986, p. 78). The primacy effect can serve as a foundation from which to begin an assessment of how the combined consumption of *The Daily Show* and national television news influences the political gratifications associated with the respective political information outlets within a conditional model of media influence.

Young viewers were placed into one of three stimulus conditions for this experiment. Some participants were first shown *The Daily Show*, and this mediated communication experience was immediately followed by viewing a half-hour of national television news (i.e., *CNN Headline News*). A second group came into contact with these same program types, but in the opposite order of consumption. Finally, a third set of individuals served as a control group (i.e., no stimulus). Internal political self-efficacy is hypothesized to serve as a moderator between contact with the public affairs stimuli and the political gratifications associated with the mass communication viewing experiences. Literature summaries concerning the study of entertainment television and politics, *The Daily Show* and political satire, political media gratifications, primacy effects, and internal political self-efficacy are provided. Four hypotheses serve as a foundation for the study. The experimental design and results are summarized, followed by a discussion of *The Daily Show* as political communication.
Political communication scholarship has long treated entertainment and news media content as immiscible (Bennett, 1998), with all major political communication theories focused on a single type of media content, traditional news (Krosnick & Kinder, 1990; McCombs & Reynolds, 2002; Scheufele, 1999). However, recent works are moving beyond the entertainment–news divide by analyzing potential political outcomes relative to soft news (Baum, 2003), situation comedies (Cantor, 1999), crime dramas (Holbrook & Hill, 2005), made-for-television docudramas (Delli Carpini & Williams, 1996), political dramas (Holbert, Pillion, et al., 2003), and late-night talk shows (Young, 2004b). Indeed, Mutz (2001) stated that “the traditional distinctions between news and entertainment content are no longer very helpful” (p. 231), and the discipline appears to be embracing this point of view.

Williams and Delli Carpini (2002) argued that “the political relevance of a cartoon character like Lisa Simpson is as important as the professional norms of Dan Rather, Tom Brokaw, or Peter Jennings” (p. B15). Not only is the study of entertainment television relevant to the basic tenets of mass-communication-related political communication scholarship (see Holbert, 2005b), but many scholars argue there is a need to study more than news content from a political perspective because the messages being offered via entertainment outlets are qualitatively distinct from those provided through traditional journalism programming (e.g., Gamson, 1999; Holbert, Kwak, & Shah, 2003). The satirical political messages offered via entertainment outlets like The Tonight Show, The Simpsons, Saturday Night Live, or The Daily Show are some of the more explicit examples of how audience members come into contact with entertainment-based political messages that are distinct from the storylines derived through traditional news conventions (Niven, Lichter, & Amundson, 2003). Shah (1998) noted that a diverse set of sociopolitical television messages needs to be analyzed to best reflect the inherent complexity of the medium. The empirical study of entertainment television as political communication simply reflects a desire to better understand a set of sociopolitical outcomes relative to the varied ways in which citizens use this influential form of mass communication.

Not only is it important for political communication scholarship to begin to explore the potential political effects of various entertainment television outlets, but also to assess how the use of various forms of entertainment television might affect perceptions of more traditional public affairs programming. It is not just the case that entertainment television shows can have unique effects on citizens relative to news, but that viewing certain entertainment content has the potential to influence how traditional forms of public affairs material are perceived and subsequently consumed by an audience. This point is particularly relevant to The Daily Show, which models itself on the structure and norms of (or some would argue as a functional alternative to) television newscasts (Baym, 2005; Peyser, 2004).
The Daily Show and Satire

The Daily Show offers viewers a satirical perspective of not only the stories dominating a news cycle, but the tasks of information gathering and storytelling performed by journalists. Jon Stewart strikes the pose of an anchorman, while also taking on the traditional satirist’s role of “skeptical and bemused observer” (Knight, 2004, p. 3). Stewart retains a cadre of comedians who gather information on and tell stories about a variety of events, from the substantive to the trivial. In addition, the program offers Stewart, his writing and reporting staffs, and other comedians (e.g., Lewis Black) an opportunity to provide comedic interpretations on a wide range of public affairs topics. As Baym (2005) argued, “The show functions as both entertainment and news, simultaneously pop culture and public affairs” (p. 262). This half-hour program devoted to political and journalistic satire is unique for U.S. television, but the show’s format stems from previous comedic outlets using a similar mode of presentation as a vehicle for social commentary (e.g., Saturday Night Live’s “Weekend Update”).

All forms of satire, whether they are political or take on some other form of broader social commentary, have been defined as “pre-generic” (Knight, 2004, p. 4), in that it is in the nature of satire to exploit preexisting genres. In the case of The Daily Show, the preexisting genre is the national television newscast. The basic aesthetics of the program (e.g., opening music, studio setting) seek to mock TV newscasts. In this sense, The Daily Show is like other forms of satire in that it is “a playfully critical distortion of the familiar” (Feinberg, 1967, p. 86). Audience members, no matter the degree to which they regularly watch national television newscasts, retain at least a limited understanding of the genre’s format. The Daily Show uses the audience’s familiarity with the national nightly newscast as a means by which to satirize the practice of journalism. As a result, the two program types are intricately connected in people’s minds. Therefore, it is important to begin to address how the use of one program type can affect perceptions of the other program type, and how viewing various combinations of both program types affect audience perceptions of each form of public affairs media content.

The Daily Show averages more than 1 million TV viewers each evening (Levin, 2003). The program points its satirical poker not just at those individuals and social institutions making headlines, but the news industry that constructs the headlines. It is important for empirical political communication researchers to better understand how coming into contact with the messages being provided on a program of this type can influence viewers’ perceptions of more traditional forms of television news, and vice versa.

Political Media Gratifications

The rise of The Daily Show has brought a series of empirical questions concerning its influence on basic democratic processes. One type of knowledge can be obtained
from better understanding the unique effects of this program on the U.S. electorate when compared to more traditional political communication outlets (e.g., political advertising, debates). Research of this kind typically introduces a number of political information outlets and assesses the relative predictive value of one outlet versus another for a host of dependent variables (e.g., Brians & Wattenberg, 1996; Holbert, Benoit, Hansen, & Wen, 2002; Weaver & Drew, 2001). This approach to political communication effects provides important empirical insights, but there is little effort made to understand how the information outlets relate to one another in producing a set of outcomes.

Holbert (2005a) argued that political communication scholarship should not simply look past analyses of relations among various political media stimuli. Instead, there is a real need to better understand how the consumption of one type of media stimulus can influence the perceptions or use of another media stimulus. This argument is particularly relevant to the study of emerging forms of entertainment-based political information and more traditional forms of public affairs media consumption. For example, Young and Tisinger (2006) argued for and found empirical evidence to support the claim that late-night comedy viewing for political information purposes is not supplanting the use of more traditional forms of television news viewing. Instead, the two forms of media use complement one another in aiding citizens to better understand the major issues of the day. Of particular interest to this study is whether viewing The Daily Show, which presents a critical view of U.S. journalism, influences people’s perceptions of the political gratifications associated with national television news viewing. Thus, this study seeks to assess stimulus-to-stimulus relations that can shed light on how various types of political information outlets function in coordination with one another as citizens work their way through today’s complex media environment.

The study of political media gratifications has been a part of political communication research for several decades (see Perse, 1994, for a brief summary). Palmgreen, Wenner, and Rayburn (1980) pointed out that the “study of the uses and gratifications of television news programs has its origins in Lasswell’s (1948) conceptualization of the functions of communication” (p. 167). Specific measures of political media gratifications were first used to better understand why people tune in to watch political television broadcasts (e.g., Blumler & McQuail, 1969), and similar measures have also been employed in McLeod and Becker’s (1974) transactional model of media influence in an effort to link motivations for political media consumption to tangible media effects. McLeod and Becker found political media gratifications for TV news to serve as statistically significant and unique predictors (beyond the predictive value of TV news exposure) of vote likelihood, political participation, and exposure to political advertising. McLeod, Becker, and Byrnes (1974) also found that the political media gratifications can serve as a hedge against certain types of media effects (e.g., agenda setting).

Overall, political media gratifications have been linked to the study of (a) why people consume political media, (b) how individual-level media orientations function
alongside actual political media use, and (c) important conditional media effects on a wide range of dependent variables deemed important to basic democratic processes. In short, the study of political media gratifications is central to the core aspects of political communication research. Variations of the original political gratifications measures have been employed to assess why people engage a variety of political information outlets, beyond just TV news (e.g., political rallies [Sanders & Kaid, 1981], newspaper reading [Becker, 1979]). However, political gratifications measures have never been used for entertainment-based political media like The Daily Show.

McLeod and Becker (1981) described three distinct methodological approaches to the study of media uses and gratifications. The first and most commonly used method is the survey-based technique of self-report gratifications-sought measures and associating these items with actual media consumption or the indirect effects of gratifications sought on a given set of post-media-use outcome variables (Rubin, 2002). A second technique is also survey-based and uses more traditional survey items (i.e., demographic, psychographic, and contextual variables) as indirect or surrogate measures of motives for media use and then analyzing the relations between these variables, different types of media use, and the effects associated with mass communication consumption (e.g., Shah, 1998). The final and least used technique involves experimentation. More specifically, researchers can study how the manipulation of media stimuli or the conditions under which media stimuli are consumed alters media gratifications.

This study employs the latter experimental approach. The study seeks to assess whether the consumption of The Daily Show influences the political gratifications associated with national television news viewing, and vice versa. There are a number of ways to create media stimuli manipulations to achieve this goal. However, it was essential to this study to not treat The Daily Show and national television news viewing in relative isolation. As a result, it was necessary for those participants in a stimulus condition to receive both types of political media stimuli. Once multiple stimuli become imperative, there is a natural questioning of whether varied patterns of consumption will make a difference. In short, the study of message order effects can serve as a foundation from which to begin a broader empirical assessment of how the combined consumption of The Daily Show and national television news influences the political gratifications associated with the viewing of the respective stimuli.

The Primacy Effect

The study of message order effects has been a mainstay of persuasion research since the inception of the discipline (e.g., Knower, 1936). A significant amount of time and attention has been spent trying to better understand what Lund (1925) first identified as the dominance of the first persuasive message when two competing messages are provided to an individual one immediately after the other (e.g., Hovland, 1951; Hovland & Mandel, 1957). Much of this research has found the primacy effect to exist...
across a variety of contexts (Lana, 1961; Luchins, 1957), but there were only sporadic theoretical discussions as to why this should be the case (McGuire, 1966). Lund (1925) suggested that audience members view the second of two competing messages in a more critical light. Hovland (1951) argued that the primacy effect may be due in some part to audience members engaging in proactive inhibition. Anderson (1965) noted that participants may simply pay less attention to the latter message, resulting in less potential influence. Finally, Insko (1967) provided a detailed argument that contact with the first message can alter the very nature of the meaning of the second, resulting in the latter message being purely reactionary relative to the first message. In short, there is relatively consistent support that primacy effects do exist under several different conditions, but the theoretical discussions concerning these empirical findings have been scattered.

It is not the underlying motivation of this study to test competing theoretical claims concerning why primacy effects persist. Instead, the primacy effect is used as a starting point by which to explore the more general empirical question of whether viewing The Daily Show can influence viewers’ perceptions of the political gratifications associated with national television news, and vice versa. Given that The Daily Show is a satirical presentation of journalism as a profession, it is argued that those participants who view The Daily Show prior to national television news will retain weaker political gratifications associated with national television news relative to those individuals who view national television news prior to The Daily Show. Similarly, participants who view national television news prior to The Daily Show will retain weaker political gratifications associated with The Daily Show relative to those people who view The Daily Show prior to national television news. Thus, the following two hypotheses are posited:

H1a: Political gratifications associated with national TV news viewing are weakest among those participants who consume The Daily Show just prior to national television news.

H1b: Political gratifications associated with The Daily Show viewing are weakest among those participants who consume national television news just prior to The Daily Show.

Internal Political Self-Efficacy as Moderator

The pair of primacy effects just posited offer a first step for studying how the combined consumption of The Daily Show and national television news affects audience members’ perceptions of the respective outlets. However, recent work on the primacy effect by Haugtvedt and Wegener (1994) has reemphasized the need to explore the conditional nature of this type of persuasive effect relative to individual differences. The individual-difference variable focused on in this study is internal political self-efficacy (Craig, Niemi, & Silver, 1990). Niemi, Craig, and Mattel (1991) defined internal political self-efficacy as “beliefs about one’s own competence to understand,
and to participate effectively in, politics” (p. 1407). Internal political self-efficacy is a latent variable that is comprised of two observable dimensions, perceived competence and perceived effectiveness. The competence dimension concerns whether citizens believe they have the ability to understand the major political issues of the day, and the latter dimension focuses on whether voters feel their actions matter in terms of how political decisions are made. There is the potential for the main primacy effects generated by varied consumption patterns of *The Daily Show* and national television news to differ across those high versus low in internal political self-efficacy.

Satire requires a unique connection to be formed between the satirist and the audience member. As Knight (2004) remarked, “the addressee and the addressee must agree that the author’s imaginative attack and the reader’s actual condemnation are justified by the values articulated or implied by the satire” (p. 41). The satirical message offered by Jon Stewart and *The Daily Show* is that national television news is fraudulent; journalists are acting more like guard dogs than watchdogs of the public and private power elite (see Olien, Donohue, & Tichenor, 1995, for guard dog vs. watchdog argument). National television news in particular has become an outlet where the two major political parties can present their particular framing of issues, whereas these programs used to be places for “journalism-as-public inquiry” (Baym, 2005, p. 259). This message about journalism would be particularly well received by those individuals who already feel somewhat disenfranchised by the political system, those low in internal political self-efficacy. In other words, the implicit agreement concerning the moral justification of Stewart’s satirical commentary is strongest among those low in internal political self-efficacy, and this deeper connection to the satirical elements of the show should lead to a stronger primacy effect for *The Daily Show* among those low in internal political self-efficacy. Thus, the following hypothesis is offered:

**H2a:** Internal political self-efficacy serves as a moderator in the relation between the experimental stimulus condition and the political gratifications associated with national TV news in that the primacy effect for *The Daily Show →*national television news condition is more pronounced among those participants who are low in internal political self-efficacy.

Applying the same basic argument to national television news, a pronounced primacy effect for national television news on the political gratifications associated with *The Daily Show* would be expected among those who are high in internal political self-efficacy. Those individuals who perceive themselves to be more politically competent and to have a meaningful say in how political decisions are made are more likely to cling to the idea that national television journalism can aid them in better understanding the political system and how to be more effective when they engage in political activities. Thus, the following hypothesis is posited:

**H2b:** Internal political self-efficacy serves as a moderator in the relation between the experimental stimulus condition and political gratifications associated with *The*
Daily Show in that the primacy effect for the national television news → The Daily Show condition is more pronounced among those who are high in internal political self-efficacy.

Method

Participants

This study involved undergraduate students enrolled in various introductory courses offered by the Department of Communication at the University of Delaware (N = 201). The mean age for the participant pool was 20.07. All participants were of legal voting age. The mean for a combined two-item (economic and social) 7-point political ideology scale reveals a participant pool balanced around the midpoint (M = 3.5, SD = 1.2; α = .81). Roughly half of the young voters (48%) stated they were members of a political party, and the partisans were nearly evenly split between Democrats and Republicans.

Procedures

The study was conducted over the course of 3 weeks in late March and early April 2004. Participants were informed that they would be taking part in a study dealing with personal perceptions of television public affairs content, with their first task being to complete a pretest questionnaire 1 week prior to coming into contact with experimental media stimuli. The pretest questionnaire asked participants to provide basic demographic information, to provide responses to a battery of internal political self-efficacy items, and to specify their existing public affairs television viewing habits. The participants were placed into one of three experimental conditions: The Daily Show → Traditional TV News, Traditional TV News → The Daily Show, and control (i.e., no stimulus). Participants were then e-mailed with the date, time, and location for where they could complete the second and final phase of the study.

Participants were asked to attend one of eight session times over the course of 2 weeks (March 29, 2004–April 1, 2004, or April 5, 2004–April 8, 2004). The first week’s sessions had participants show up just prior to the live evening viewing (11:00 p.m. EST) of The Daily Show. Participants in these sessions first viewed The Daily Show and then watched a subsequent real-time half-hour of CNN Headline News. CNN Headline News was chosen as an example of national television news relative to the participants for this study for several reasons: (a) A majority of the participants stated in the pretest questionnaire that either CNN Headline News was their primary traditional TV news source or all traditional TV news sources were about the same (50.8%);¹ (b) CNN Headlines News has redesigned its format multiple times in recent years in an attempt to appeal to a younger demographic, achieving some success through these endeavors (Romano, 2002); and (c) CNN Headline News afforded the opportunity to provide a live TV viewing experience in the time surrounding the live
airing of *The Daily Show*. The participants were asked in the second week’s sessions to first watch a real-time half-hour of *CNN Headline News* (10:30–11:00 p.m. EST) and then the live viewing of that night’s episode of *The Daily Show*. On completion of the stimulus phase, each participant filled out a posttest questionnaire. The posttest phase inquired separately as to the political gratifications associated with national television news viewing and *The Daily Show* viewing. The gratifications measures for the respective forms of television viewing were randomly ordered to reduce response biases. Prior to each stimulus session a predetermined number of control participants were escorted to a separate room where they simply completed the posttest questionnaire without coming into contact with any television stimuli.

**Design**

A 3 (*The Daily Show*—National TV news vs. National TV news—*The Daily Show* vs. control) × 2 (low vs. high internal political self-efficacy) between-subject experimental design was used to address this study’s hypotheses. A mean split was used to break the internal political self-efficacy variable into the high and low groups. A relatively equal number of participants in the three stimulus conditions completed all phases of the experiment: *The Daily Show* as first viewing (*n* = 68), CNN as first viewing (*n* = 70), and control (*n* = 63).

**Measures**

**Independent Variable.** Internal political self-efficacy is a three-item additive index consisting of participant responses to the following three statements: (a) Whether I vote or not has no influence on what politicians do; (b) People like me don’t have any say about what the government does; and (c) Sometimes government and politics seem so complicated that a person like me can’t really understand what is going on. The first two items concern the observable dimension of perceived effectiveness, and the third item measures perceived competence. Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement for each statement on 5-point scales ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Responses were recoded to reflect strong internal political self-efficacy being coded high. This three-item index was created in part to deal with criticisms concerning the use of just the last of the three items as a measure of internal political self-efficacy (Neimi et al., 1991; see also Morrell, 2003). The three-item index proved reliable (*M* = 3.66, *SD* = 0.78, *α* = .70).

**Dependent Variables.** Reduced four-item political media gratifications scales were used to create separate dependent variables for national television news viewing and *The Daily Show* viewing (Perse, 1994). Participants were presented with the following directive: “Here is a list of statements that different people have made when asked why they watch national television news shows that feature political candidates. For each statement on the list, please rate on a 7-point scale how pertinent each
statement is to why you turn to television news shows that feature political candidates. A 1 on this scale reflects a response of not at all pertinent and a 7 reflects a response of extremely pertinent.” The same statement was then provided for The Daily Show political gratifications items, but with “national television news shows that feature political candidates” from the first sentence of the directive being replaced with “entertainment television shows that feature political candidates (e.g., The Daily Show),” and “television news shows that feature political candidates” from the second sentence of the directive being replaced with “entertainment television shows that feature political candidates.” The following set of four statements were provided to each participant, one relative to national television news consumption and another relative to The Daily Show: To judge what political leaders are like; To see what a candidate would do if elected; To keep up with the main issues of the day; and To help make up my mind how to vote in an election. The two, four-item dependent variable indexes were found to be reliable: national television news ($M = 5.1, SD = 1.0, \alpha = .73$) and The Daily Show ($M = 3.6, SD = 1.3, \alpha = .85$). A paired-sample $t$ test revealed a strong mean difference for The Daily Show and national TV news scales ($t = -15.13, p < .001$).

Covariates. Existing viewing habits for both national television news and The Daily Show were included as covariates to account for previous use of both outlets. Both TV viewing variables are additive indexes consisting of exposure and attention measures (Chaffee & Schleuder, 1986). National television news use is a three-item index, whereas The Daily Show is a two-item additive index. Participants were provided with the following statement relative to exposure to “national cable television news” and “national broadcast network news”: “On a scale from 1 to 7, where 1 = rarely and 7 = all the time how often do you watch the following types of television news programs? You also have the option of circling 0 = never if you never watch a particular program type.” The following statement was then offered concerning attention to national television news in general: “Regardless of how often you come across stories about national government and politics when watching any form of television news, how much attention do you pay to these types of stories when you do come into contact with them? The scale ranges from 1 = little attention to 7 = very close attention, and you have the option of circling 0 = no attention.” The same respective statements were provided for a single The Daily Show exposure item and a single The Daily Show attention item. Both indexes are reliable: National TV news viewing ($M = 3.5, SD = 1.5, \alpha = .79$); The Daily Show ($M = 3.6, SD = 1.6, r = .50$).³

Analysis

Multivariate analysis of covariance was used to test this study’s hypotheses. The independent variables reflect the study’s design (i.e., experimental condition and internal political self-efficacy). The dependent variables are the two political gratifications
indexes, national television news and *The Daily Show*. The covariates are preexisting national television news viewing and preexisting *The Daily Show* viewing.

## Results

### Omnibus Effects

Wilks’s Λ was used to assess all omnibus results. Both covariates were found to have significant influence at the omnibus level: *The Daily Show* use, $F(2, 188) = 4.62$, $p < .05$, $η^2 = .05$; national TV news use, $F(2, 188) = 10.83$, $p < .001$, $η^2 = .11$. The experimental condition also retains influence at this level, $F(4, 376) = 4.60$, $p < .01$, $η^2 = .05$, but internal political self-efficacy does not have a significant main effect, $F(2, 188) = 1.74$, $p > .15$. However, internal political self-efficacy does form a significant interaction with the experimental condition, $F(4, 376) = 3.06$, $p < .05$, $η^2 = .04$.

### Univariate Effects

**Covariates.** The covariates function as expected. Previous *The Daily Show* use is found to have a significant main effect for only the political gratifications associated with *The Daily Show* viewing, $F(1, 189) = 9.28$, $p < .01$, $η^2 = .05$. Past national TV news viewing has a significant main effect for only the political gratifications associated with national television news viewing, $F(1, 189) = 19.35$, $p < .001$, $η^2 = .08$.

**Independent Variables.** The first two hypotheses concern the main primacy effects of *The Daily Show* viewing versus national television news viewing in varied sequences of public affairs television consumption. The experimental stimulus condition has a main effect on the political gratifications associated with both *The Daily Show* viewing, $F(2, 189) = 3.46$, $p < .05$, $η^2 = .04$, and national television news viewing, $F(2, 189) = 5.26$, $p < .01$, $η^2 = .05$. The lowest national television news political gratifications mean is found with those participants who viewed *The Daily Show* prior to CNN Headline News (adjusted $M = 4.74$), as hypothesized. Thus, there is support for $H_{1a}$. Those participants who viewed CNN prior to *The Daily Show* retained stronger political gratifications associated with national television news than their *The Daily Show* → CNN peers (adjusted $M = 5.18$). Interestingly, the highest political gratifications mean for national television news is with the control group (adjusted $M = 5.26$). It appears that viewing *The Daily Show* alongside CNN Headline News, no matter the ordering, makes viewers think less of national television news. However, the viewing of *The Daily Show* prior to CNN initiated the primacy effect, which leads to a further reduction in national television news political gratifications.

The lowest mean for political gratifications associated with *The Daily Show* viewing is for the participants who viewed CNN prior to *The Daily Show* (adjusted $M =
3.39), whereas the group who viewed The Daily Show prior to CNN retained a higher level of The Daily Show political gratifications (adjusted $M = 3.58$). As with the findings for the national television news gratifications, the highest mean for The Daily Show political gratifications can be found among the control group (adjusted $M = 3.92$). Once again, coming into contact with both CNN and The Daily Show, no matter the order, leads to a reduction in the perceived political gratifications associated with The Daily Show viewing. However, the primacy effect stemming from viewing CNN prior to The Daily Show leads to a further reduction in The Daily Show political gratifications. These findings support $H_{1b}$.

The Experimental Condition $\times$ Internal Political Self-Efficacy interaction is found to influence the political gratifications associated with national television news viewing, $F(2, 189) = 5.84, p < .01, \eta^2 = .06$. A plotting of the interaction reveals that the low internal political self-efficacy group that first came into contact with The Daily Show reported weaker political gratifications associated with national television news viewing relative to the other five experimental condition and self-efficacy group combinations (adjusted $M = 4.23$; see Figure 1). The high internal political self-efficacy participants who viewed The Daily Show prior to CNN retain a similar level of political gratifications associated with national television news (adjusted $M = 5.19$) as the participants in the CNN $\rightarrow$ The Daily Show and control conditions (adjusted $Ms = 5.13$–5.38). These results reveal the primacy effect of The Daily Show relative to national television news political gratifications to be isolated among those participants who do not feel they are personally empowered in the political process. Moderator variables answer the question of when an effect takes place (Baron & Kenny, 1986), and the when of The Daily Show primacy effect is with those viewers who are low in internal political self-efficacy. In short, watching The Daily Show prior to CNN leads those individuals with low internal political self-efficacy to think less of national television news as a source for political information. Thus, there is support for $H_{2a}$. There is no interaction effect between the experimental stimulus condition and internal political self-efficacy for the gratifications associated with The Daily Show viewing, $F(2, 189) = 0.99, p > .35$. Thus, $H_{2b}$ is rejected.

**Discussion**

The satirical eye of The Daily Show is focused squarely on the practice of U.S. journalism. Like other forms of satire, The Daily Show is “unabashedly didactic” (Bloom & Bloom, 1979, p. 16), and this is especially true when it comes to the overriding message the show communicates about the dysfunctional state of national television news. Entertainment-based political outlets like The Daily Show not only have the ability to generate effects on the dependent variables traditionally studied in the field of political communication (e.g., vote likelihood, political knowledge, issue salience), but can also affect individual-level perceptions of traditional political communication information outlets (e.g., national television news). As a result, political
communication scholarship needs to adopt a two-prong strategy for studying emerging entertainment-based political information outlets like *The Daily Show*.

One front consists of introducing *The Daily Show* alongside the traditional political communication information sources most commonly studied in the field (e.g., talk radio, debate viewing, political advertising, newspaper use). This approach will provide knowledge on how *The Daily Show* stacks up relative to those types of media use most commonly associated with the study of political communication. A second front would focus on how the consumption of programming like *The Daily Show* functions in coordination with more traditional forms of public affairs media use. This approach will provide greater understanding on how various types of media use (entertainment and public affairs) relate to one another in producing a broad range of effects. Additional insights would also be offered as to how consumption patterns of various types of political information outlets mutually affect citizens’ perceptions of the outlets’ utility as political information sources. This study focuses on the latter front of the broader strategy.

In particular, this study uses the primacy effect as a basis from which to begin a systematic analysis of how the combined use of *The Daily Show* and national television news shapes or alters individual-level perceptions of each outlet. The primacy effect of *The Daily Show* leads to weaker levels of political gratifications associated with national television news. However, this message order influence is conditional, with the effect being isolated among those participants who are low in internal political

---

**Figure 1**

*Experimental Primacy Condition × Internal Self-Efficacy Interaction for National TV News*

![Graph showing the interaction between Experimental Primacy Condition and Internal Self-Efficacy for National TV News gratifications.](image-url)

- Low Self-Efficacy
- High Self-Efficacy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experimental Condition</th>
<th>Nat. TV News Grats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TDS-CNN</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNN-TDS</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
self-efficacy. It appears those individuals who perceive themselves to be politically incompetent and ineffective become especially attached to the satirical message of *The Daily Show* and what it has to say about national television news. As a result, this study poses an important empirical question for future research: Does viewing *The Daily Show* lead those who already feel detached from the political process to potentially forgo the use of political information outlets that have been shown to aid in knowledge acquisition and political engagement? Several studies have shown television news to provide tangible benefits for citizens (Chaffee, Zhao, & Leshner, 1994; Zhao & Chaffee, 1995). Whether *The Daily Show* should be embraced as a new form of journalism that has the potential to replace or reform more traditional forms of journalism is open to debate (e.g., Baym, 2005). However, it is clear that *The Daily Show* appears to have a unique influence on those viewers who are low in internal political self-efficacy. Indeed, Baumgartner and Morris (2006) pointed to self-efficacy being an important variable in understanding the varied influences of *The Daily Show*, and this individual-difference variable should remain central in analyzing *The Daily Show* within a conditional model of media influence (McLeod & Reeves, 1980). There is a primacy effect for national television news viewing on perceptions of the political gratifications associated with *The Daily Show*. Thus, it is not simply the case that *The Daily Show* as a new political information outlet can affect perceptions of a more traditional political outlet, but that standard forms of news use can influence perceptions of *The Daily Show* as well.

This study also raises the issue of the need to better understand the political gratifications associated with entertainment-based forms of political media use. Just as an argument has been made for the necessity of studying the political uses and gratifications of new forms of mass communication (Kaye & Johnson, 2002), the discipline should also begin a systematic analysis of the political gratifications associated with new types of political content being presented through traditional media forms. Although the combined use of *The Daily Show* and national television news impacts the relative movement of political gratifications associated with each outlet, it is clear that *The Daily Show* does not retain the same overall strength of political gratifications as national television news. The means for the previous media viewing covariates used in this study point to the participant pool consuming *The Daily Show* and national television news in equal amounts, but the national television news political gratifications mean for the participant pool as a whole is much higher than *The Daily Show* political gratifications mean (paired-sample t test, $t = -15.26$, $p < .001$). This study focused only on the political gratifications associated with *The Daily Show* and national television news, but future lines of research should analyze specific measures of political media gratifications sought and obtained from various types of entertainment-based political media consumption.

Future research on the relations between various forms of entertainment- and public-affairs-based political media use should seek to identify effects that are more long term in nature. Short-term effects provide a solid foundation for initiating a research agenda, but the ultimate goal should be the identification of influences that last for
longer periods of time. In addition, this study focused on the perceptual level, but the study of media gratifications is intricately linked to analyses of behaviors (i.e., media use). Future research should advance along the hierarchy of effects to assess the behavioral outcomes associated with the combined use of The Daily Show and more traditional political information outlets. Most important, political communication research should continue to study how the use of emerging entertainment-based forms of political communication work with the consumption of traditional outlets like national television news to produce a variety of effects. This study is an analysis of the primacy effects produced through varied consumptions patterns of The Daily Show and national television news, but the broader message of this work is a call for the discipline to not study entertainment and public affairs content in relative isolation.

Notes

1 All other major TV newscasts were chosen by far fewer participants than CNN Headline News (each less than 10% of total responses). Additional analyses were run to look at those participants who chose CNN as their most frequently used television news source. The dummy-coded variable was not found to have a significant main effect on either dependent variable.

2 Exploratory factor analyses (EFAs; Principle Axis, Direct OBLIMIN) were conducted on the full eight-item political gratifications scale for national television news viewing and The Daily Show viewing, respectively. The separate factor analyses were run to reduce data in an effort to create identical political gratifications indexes for the two types of viewing. The two EFAs revealed divergent loadings across national television viewing and The Daily Show viewing. The four items used to form the respective political gratifications dependent variables in this study were the strongest loading and most consistent items found in both EFAs. The four items utilized in these analyses form a single factor for national television news viewing and The Daily Show viewing, respectively. This was not true of the other four items listed by Perse (1994), either for national television news viewing and/or The Daily Show viewing.

3 The following are the zero-order correlations between the study’s covariates and dependent variables: preexisting television news use–preexisting The Daily Show use, \( r = .20, p < .01 \); preexisting television news use–national television news viewing gratifications, \( r = .35, p < .001 \); preexisting television news use–The Daily Show viewing gratifications, \( r = .03, ns \); preexisting The Daily Show use–national television news viewing gratifications, \( r = .11, ns \); preexisting The Daily Show use–The Daily Show viewing gratifications, \( r = .18, p < .05 \); national television news viewing gratifications–The Daily Show viewing gratifications, \( r = .32, p < .001 \).

References


Copyright of Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media is the property of Broadcast Education Association and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.