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# **To Infotain or Inform?**

**Television News and the Public Sphere in New Zealand in the Twenty-first Century**

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**This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in Political Studies, University of Auckland, 2016.**

## Abstract

This master's thesis looks into whether the content of prime time television news within a commercialized broadcast market could be continuing to undermine the development of the public sphere in New Zealand. The research obtained data from 2015 to help analyse the content that makes up prime time news in terms of what news categories appear, the amount of hard and soft news, how bulletins are divided up, and how New Zealand politics is framed. The research closely studied prime time news coverage over a one-month sample period, with the data obtained in the study helping to enable further discussion to take place on the effects of news on the public sphere. The study focused on news coverage on *One News* and *3 News*, and was carried out using a mixed methods approach in the form of a content analysis and framing analysis. It also looked at data from 2005 to allow for a brief comparison to be made between different periods of news coverage, ten years apart. The findings of the research showed that soft news content featured more than hard news, the amount of news content per-bulletin in the study averaged only 27-28 minutes, of which a majority was soft news, while news bulletins appeared to have more news content at the top of the bulletin, with an average of 45-49% of news content appearing before the first ad break. In addition to these findings, this thesis concludes that political coverage has been affected by the commercial reality of broadcasting in New Zealand, with politics being presented more in entertaining and dramatic ways at the expense of in-depth discussions on policy and political issues. With this, episodic framing was favoured ahead of thematic framing when covering political stories, while there was also a high rate of general reportage. Based on these results, this thesis argues that the content of prime time television news is continuing to undermine the development of the public sphere, but that more research is needed to fully investigate further how this could be impacting on the public sphere. It is hoped this thesis can be a starting point for this to occur and for further discussion to take place on the relationship between television news and the public sphere.

## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to good journalism everywhere.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank my supervisor Dr. Geoff Kemp for guiding and supporting me through what has been a long and, at times, complicated process of researching and writing this thesis. Also Dr. Maria Armoudian for being another person to call on for advice within the politics department and for being a great media and politics teacher. And, of course the politics department itself. I began studying politics in 2007 and have learned so much in what is the best university department anyone could hope for. Finally, I would also like to acknowledge my family, friends and my 95bFM family for taking an interest in this project and always being keen to discuss the state of the news media with me.

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## INTRODUCTION

Broadcasting in New Zealand is in a state of flux and news and current affairs has been at the front line of change. Newsrooms are being cut back, current affairs shows axed, while news itself is not always being prioritized within media organisations. This comes with the substantial changes that have occurred within the broadcasting sector over the last three decades, changes that have included the commercialization of news and the evolution of a fragmented multi-media environment. In light of this questions continue to be asked of the state of the relationship between the news media and democracy, and in particular the role of the news media in the public sphere. Within the broadcasting environment in New Zealand, an environment that has been affected by deregulation and privatization, scholars and commentators alike have questioned whether broadcast news media now simply exists to entertain audiences instead of keeping people informed about politics and current affairs. Recent evidence for this assertion can be seen in how the 2014 general election was covered on television, with a lot of the coverage being dominated by staged events, political drama and personalities.<sup>1</sup> Considering this, the time seems right for a re-assessment and, indeed, a closer look at the current state of television news. What content are audiences receiving? How is politics reported? And what does the nature of news on television say about the state of the relationship between news and the public sphere in New Zealand currently and moving forward?

This master's thesis investigates whether the content of prime time television news could be continuing to undermine the development of the public sphere in New Zealand. The research obtained new data from a sample period during February 2015 to help examine what sort of content makes up prime time news in terms of news categories and the amount of hard and soft

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Boyd and Babak Bahador, "Media Coverage of New Zealand's 2014 Election Campaign," *Political Science* 67, no. 2 (2015): 143-144.

news, how bulletins are divided up, and how New Zealand politics is framed. The research is intended to be a snapshot of prime time news coverage over a one-month period, with the data obtained in the study helping enable further discussion to take place on the effects of news on the public sphere by providing a platform based on hard evidence for debate to be built around. The study focused on news coverage on *One News* and *3 News*, New Zealand's two main news programs, and was carried out using a mixed method triangulated approach in the form of a content analysis and a framing analysis. It also looked at some news coverage from 2005 to allow for a brief comparison to be made between different periods of coverage, ten years apart. The aim of this multidimensional research approach was to ensure that as many aspects of the news could be analysed as possible in order to complete a thorough analysis of news on television. The research process itself and an explanation of the methods used in the study will be discussed further in the methods chapter.

The foundations of this thesis come from within a wider discussion around the declining standards of journalism, especially broadcast journalism in light of the evolving media landscape. The news media are regularly criticised for being more interested in presenting news as infotainment or in 'snackable' and 'shareable' forms, as opposed to investigative and informative forms where the main purpose is to engage people critically on important political and social issues. It is intriguing as to how this could be impacting on deliberation in the public sphere, and whether this type of news is in fact good for democratic engagement or not. As someone who is interested, academically, in the role of the news media, as well as being a politically interested citizen, I do not feel engaged when I tune into the news at 6pm on television, and wonder exactly what the purpose is of a lot of the softer content that appears in the news, especially given that good journalism can be informative, engaging and critical. Being able to explore more closely the content of television news through research, and in the process obtain data on news content would allow for a broader discussion on the current state

of television news to take place, while helping guide further opportunities for debate into whether the news media are indeed helping to serve democracy.

At this point, it is important to outline the definition of the public sphere, a central concept of this thesis. The public sphere is a term used to describe a real and virtual space where people can interact.<sup>2</sup> It is, for the most part, a normative idea that helps open a wider philosophical discussion about the democratic values that underpin contemporary news culture and the structures that shape it.<sup>3</sup> Normatively speaking, the public sphere is seen as comprising the institutional communicative spaces that help facilitate the formation of discussion and public opinion through the flow of information and ideas.<sup>4</sup> With this, scholarly speaking, it is used as a benchmark for assessing whether the conditions for sustaining a healthy democratic culture and vibrant citizenry are being met.<sup>5</sup>

The concept of the public sphere was developed by German sociologist Jürgen Habermas and was first published in German in 1962.<sup>6</sup> His research charted how European citizens in post-feudal times, between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, tried to reach their own understanding of the world that was independent from the state.<sup>7</sup> This was a period in Europe when democracy was taking shape in what was a move away from absolute monarchy.<sup>8</sup> In line with this development, bourgeoisie sectors of society began using new types of media in the form of journals and print media to help further their own interests and mobilize against the state politically.<sup>9</sup> According to Habermas this gave rise to a print-mediated “public sphere” and

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<sup>2</sup> Alan McKee, *The Public Sphere: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 4.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Dahlgren, *Media and Political Engagement: Citizens, Communication and Democracy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 72.

<sup>5</sup> Stephen Cushion, *Television Journalism* (London: SAGE, 2012), 14.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 13. Note: Habermas’s “The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere” was translated into English in 1989.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 13-14.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>9</sup> Eric Louw, *The Media and Cultural Production* (London: SAGE, 2001), 93.

helped produce a network of public communication, with citizens meeting and exchanging ideas by drawing on sources that were free from commercial and state agendas.<sup>10</sup> This was a significant development because, until that point in European society, citizens had no real input into politics nor had a voice that was independent from the state.<sup>11</sup> However, with the emergence of a public sphere, members of the public were able to become more involved in contributing to political decisions through making their opinions known and getting their voices heard.<sup>12</sup>

The public sphere as a concept has gone on to be a permanent feature within the scholarship of contemporary media debate since the 1980s.<sup>13</sup> Nick Garnham was one of the scholars who introduced the concept, arguing that the market allocation of cultural resources and the destruction of public service media had threatened public communication, which he argued lay at the heart of the democratic process.<sup>14</sup> The public sphere idea, or ideal, has in turn become a useful concept for exploring the state of the space or sphere where the public is organised as the bearer of public opinion.<sup>15</sup> It has the potential capacity to be a space where debate and deliberation can occur, as well as being a setting for the circulation of ideas, and the development of political will and collective political identities.<sup>16</sup> This space, however idealized or theorized, is essential for democracy as it is a space where people as citizens can voice their opinion and discuss openly on issues of common concern.<sup>17</sup> Further discussion on the public sphere and its relationship with the news media will follow as part of the literature review.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid. Cushion, *Television Journalism*, 14.

<sup>11</sup> McKee, *The Public Sphere*, 7.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>13</sup> Louw, *The Media and Cultural Production*, 91.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>16</sup> Richard Butsch, "Introduction: How are Media Public Spheres?" in *Media and Public Spheres*, ed. Richard Butsch (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 15. Dahlgren, *Media and Political Engagement*, 73.

<sup>17</sup> Mick Temple, "Dumbing Down is Good for You," *British Politics* 1 (2006): 259.

In terms of the wider scholarly landscape this thesis fits primarily within the areas of media and democracy, and political economy. The research will be guided by literature on media and democracy, the public sphere, television journalism, soft news and the political economy of media. These areas of scholarship will form the basis of a discussion in the literature review around some of the key themes and debates that exist within the literature, including the relationship between media and democracy, the impact of commercialism on the news media, and the effects of soft news on the public sphere. Media and democracy and public sphere literature will help to situate the media's role in relation to democracy and its contribution to the democratic process, while political economy literature will help evaluate the impact of the commercial side of the media on both media content and the media's democratic role, as well as giving some context to the rise of infotainment and soft news.

As for the gaps this research will attempt to fill, in terms of New Zealand scholarship, most of the literature on television news has, by and large, explored three areas. The first two areas are the financialization or neo-liberalization of broadcasting, and election coverage. Scholars such as Wayne Hope, Margie Comrie, Chris Rudd, Peter Thompson and Dan Cook in particular have written extensively in these areas. The third area, and the one that is perhaps the most closely aligned to this thesis is the work that Joe Atkinson has done on what he describes as the "McDonaldization" of news on television.<sup>18</sup> This involves things such as the rise of performance journalism, the popularization of news, and changes in the structure of news bulletins. This thesis will attempt to both contribute to the existing scholarship, but at the same time also help reinforce the existing work. It will allude to some of the work that has already been done, in the literature review, especially in the areas of the commercialization of news on

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<sup>18</sup> Joe Atkinson, "Performance Journalism: A Three-Template Model of Television News," *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 16, no. 102 (2010): 102-129.

television and aspects of the popularization of news, but at the same time it will also endeavour to add to the existing scholarship in the following ways.

Firstly, this thesis contributes new data to the New Zealand politics and media academic field. This will be in the form of quantitative data looking at the makeup of bulletins content-wise and time-wise, as well as qualitative data in the form of a framing analysis of political coverage, something which, to my knowledge, has not been done extensively in research of New Zealand television news. So both methodologically and empirically this research is filling a gap. Secondly, the research will contribute by continuing the discussion of the news media-public sphere relationship within a New Zealand context, a relationship that has been covered before, although not extensively in recent years. As mentioned before, most of the research has looked primarily at coverage during election periods and less so at coverage outside elections. This research hopes to contribute to this space by looking more closely at content and, in the process, explore how content in the news and the coverage of politics could be impacting on the public sphere, especially outside election periods. Finally, it is hoped that this research can help continue the discussion around the importance of having an informed and deliberative public sphere which the media has a role to play in enhancing. It is important to continue to critically analyse the role of the media democratically, considering it is a prime information source, and to also assess its contribution to the political landscape, especially in regard to political reporting and informing the public on matters of significance to society.

The structure of this thesis is as follows. Chapter one will provide some context to the current state of the television broadcasting industry in New Zealand. It will explore the period of deregulation since 1988 and what successive governments have done with policy in this area. Chapter two will look at the literature, exploring the key arguments in the scholarship around the relationship between the news media and the public sphere, the commercialisation of news, and arguments that exist around the erosion of the public sphere. Chapter three will

then look at how soft news is defined in the literature and what scholars say about the effects of soft news on the public sphere. Chapter four will outline the methodology and research methods that were used in carrying out the research, both quantitative and qualitative, while offering justification for the choice of methods. A brief summary of the literature on framing and framing research will also be outlined in this chapter. Chapter five will then discuss the results of the research and, in the process, will be broken down into two parts. Part one will look at the quantitative results from the content analysis and part two the qualitative results from the framing analysis. In order to then enhance the results of the research, chapter six will do a brief comparison to explore change over time by using data obtained from some television coverage from 2005 and comparing it with the results of this study, to see if there are any significant differences. Finally, chapter seven will link the results back to the main question and discuss some of the potential implications of the results for the public sphere and political engagement in New Zealand moving forward.

## **CHAPTER ONE: NEW ZEALAND TELEVISION BROADCASTING: 1988 TO THE PRESENT**

Since the late-1980s, the media industry has witnessed a great number of changes, and has continued to evolve within a rapidly expanding globalized world where a new form of capitalism became established in the form of neoliberalism. This new economic system has helped facilitate the development of free market policies that encourage private enterprise and consumer choice.<sup>19</sup> With these changes the global media industry, including news media, has been integrated into this system, operating within it and very much a part of it.<sup>20</sup> To give some context to the current television broadcasting landscape, this chapter will explore some of the key changes that have taken place in the media under neoliberalism in the form of integration and deregulation. It will also attempt to set the scene of the television broadcasting environment in New Zealand and look at what successive governments have done with policy in this area.

### **MEDIA DEREGULATION**

The first change that has affected television broadcasting and has, by and large, become the norm within the media industry, is deregulation. Deregulation is a policy process where laws that governments use to shape the financing of industries are weakened, opening the door for greater market influence and, in the process, creating the opportunity for industries to become more consumer-oriented.<sup>21</sup> Deregulation is usually implemented by the state to enhance economic growth in a particular industry, whilst also to encourage greater private investment

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<sup>19</sup> Robert McChesney, *Digital Disconnect: How Capitalism is Turning the Internet Against Democracy* (New York: The New Press, 2013), 24. Robert McChesney, *The Political Economy of Media: Enduring Issues, Emerging Dilemmas* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2008), 283.

<sup>20</sup> Mike Wayne, *Television News, Politics and Young People: Generation Disconnected?* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 21.

<sup>21</sup> Peter Dahlgren, *Television and the Public Sphere: Citizenship, Democracy and the Media* (London: SAGE Publications, 1995), 37.

and market competition.<sup>22</sup> This has been quite a substantial and significant change, as broadcasting in most countries was initially developed under regulatory controls which often involved limits on concentrated and foreign media ownership and which also supported public service content on television.<sup>23</sup> However, the process of deregulation has come within a much wider political and economic shift under neoliberalism, where free market principles have come to dominate the economic and political thinking of governments.<sup>24</sup> Within this wider context, a normative shift has occurred when it comes to looking at how broadcasting should operate financially, with a move away from a state-centric view of broadcasting towards a free-market view.<sup>25</sup> With this, the expectation has become that broadcasters should now operate in more of a commercial manner, leading governments to scale back funding of state-owned broadcasters, as well as relax regulatory frameworks which may constrain commercial expansion and opportunity.<sup>26</sup>

## **MEDIA INTEGRATION**

A second trend change which has taken place in broadcasting during this time has been the integration and merging of media companies on an international scale. Before the 1980s, television news had primarily evolved within national settings.<sup>27</sup> However, due to advancements in areas such as satellite technology and cable television, broadcasting has since become an international industry, witnessing the rise of global corporate media oligopolies set up to capitalise on the potential for economic growth within a growing interconnected world.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Stephen Cushion, *The Democratic Value of News: Why Public Service Media Matter* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 3.

<sup>23</sup> Neil Washbourne, *Mediating Politics: Newspapers, Radio, Television and the Internet* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2010), 26.

<sup>24</sup> Cushion, *The Democratic Value of News*, 3.

<sup>25</sup> Daya K. Thussu, *News as Entertainment: The Rise of Global Infotainment* (London: SAGE, 2007), 43.

<sup>26</sup> Steven Barnett, *The Rise and Fall of Television Journalism: Just Wires and Lights in a Box?* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011), 17.

<sup>27</sup> Cushion, *Television Journalism*, 45.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. McChesney, *The Political Economy of Media*, 315.

Media organisations such as News Corporation and Time Warner have bought into and merged with other smaller organisations, many of which operate within national settings like New Zealand, in order to create large global media conglomerates.<sup>29</sup> This has led to the global media system becoming dominated by a small number of transnational media corporations.<sup>30</sup> Media conglomerates have also benefited from the growth and global reach of the media industry through the diversification of its forms and modes of delivery, with the idea being to converge and thus maximise sales, as well as for media organisations to better position themselves in the face of increased competition within an increasingly commercial environment.<sup>31</sup>

## **TELEVISION BROADCASTING ENVIRONMENT**

*1980s-1990s*

Integration and deregulation have been experienced in a substantial way in New Zealand. Between 1988 and 1991, the New Zealand broadcasting sector was transformed from a model of monopoly ownership by a mixed model public network within a regulated environment, into a commercially focused sector with less regulation.<sup>32</sup> The initial changes in this area were driven by the David Lange-led centre-left Labour government elected in 1984 that adopted a neoliberal policy agenda behind which the eradication of monopolies, deregulating formerly controlled markets, and restructuring public organisations as for-profit entities became the norm.<sup>33</sup> As a result, New Zealand became home to one of the most deregulated broadcasting environments in the world, with the system set up to encourage commercial competition, as

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<sup>29</sup> David Croteau and William Hoynes, *The Business of Media: Corporate Media and the Public Interest* (Thousand Oaks, California: Pine Forge Press, 2001), 72.

<sup>30</sup> Robert McChesney, "The Global Media Giants," in *Critical Studies in Media Commercialism*, ed. Robin Anderson, and Lance Strate (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 59.

<sup>31</sup> Croteau, *The Business of Media*, 73. Thussu, *News as Entertainment*, 49.

<sup>32</sup> Trisha Dunleavy and Hester Joyce, *New Zealand Film & Television: Institution, Industry and Cultural Change* (Bristol: Intellect, 2011), 105.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

well as to enable foreign investors to buy into the sector.<sup>34</sup> Just some of the more significant changes that were brought in as a result of the Broadcasting Amendment Act No. 2 in 1988 included the state-run broadcaster TVNZ being re-established as a state-owned-enterprise whose prime responsibility became to operate commercially and return an annual dividend to the government.<sup>35</sup> Public service broadcasting was also affected, with there being no regulatory body or legislation in place to monitor the public service responsibilities of the broadcasting industry.<sup>36</sup> The election of a centre-right National government in 1990 did not reverse the path set out by the previous government and, in fact, commercialization was intensified even further, with National removing restrictions on foreign ownership of media organisations.<sup>37</sup> This allowed for the introduction of Sky Television into the market; providing a range of specialist channels on a subscription platform, while Canadian company CanWest bought into the privately-owned free to air channel TV3.<sup>38</sup>

### 2000s

Things remained much the same in the broadcasting sector throughout the rest of the 1990s. However, the industry was in for another shakeup with the re-election of Labour in 1999. The Helen Clark government attempted to revitalize public service broadcasting under what became known as a third way approach.<sup>39</sup> This approach to broadcasting championed public service ideals, but at the same time acknowledged that market imperatives and making a profit had to

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<sup>34</sup> Margie Comrie and Susan Fountaine, "Retrieving public service broadcasting: treading a fine line at TVNZ," *Media, Culture & Society* 27, no. 1 (2005): 101. Cushion, *The Democratic Value of News*, 70.

<sup>35</sup> Comrie, "Retrieving public service broadcasting," 103.

<sup>36</sup> Alan Cocker, "The Television New Zealand Charter: Rethinking Deregulated Broadcasting" (paper presented at the ANZCA conference, Adelaide, July 2006).

<sup>37</sup> Comrie, "Retrieving public service broadcasting," 104.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* Dunleavy, *New Zealand Film & Television*, 112.

<sup>39</sup> Peter A. Thompson, "Neoliberalism and the Political Economies of Public Television Policy in New Zealand," *Australian Journal of Communication* 38, no. 3 (2011): 4.

be accommodated.<sup>40</sup> TVNZ was again the focus of the government in terms of implementing new broadcasting policy, with the introduction of a public service charter at the state-owned channel in 2003,<sup>41</sup> the first such initiative in New Zealand broadcasting.<sup>42</sup> The charter outlined a series of public service objectives which TVNZ was expected to fulfil in their programming. These objectives included maintaining high standards of editorial integrity, featuring programmes that would inform and educate, providing shared experiences that would contribute to a sense of citizenship and, most importantly perhaps, providing comprehensive and in-depth coverage and analysis of news and current affairs.<sup>43</sup> The government also provided \$12 million annually to TVNZ in order to help them meet the charter's strict objectives.<sup>44</sup> However, to fit within the third way approach, the organisation was given a dual role that obliged it to maintain its commercial performance in the market while, at the same time, ensure that the range of public service objectives outlined in the charter were being implemented.<sup>45</sup>

This led to some conflicting goals for the state-owned broadcaster, and created a problem when it came to getting the balance right between commercial and public service prerogatives. TVNZ was required to ensure that the charter's objectives were being met in order to justify receiving annual funds from the government.<sup>46</sup> However, at the same time, this had to be done in a way that safeguarded the company's overall commercial performance.<sup>47</sup> This was

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<sup>40</sup> Peter A. Thompson, "Last Chance to See? Public Broadcasting Policy and the Public Sphere in New Zealand" (paper presented at the conference on Media, Democracy and the Public Sphere, Auckland, September 17, 2010).

<sup>41</sup> Comrie, "Retrieving public service broadcasting," 110.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>43</sup> Peter A. Thompson, "Calling the Tune Without Paying the Piper? The Political-Economic Contradictions of Funding the TVNZ Charter," in *Proceedings of the ANZCA Conference*, ed. Peter A. Thompson (Christchurch: University of Canterbury, 2005), 4-5.

<sup>44</sup> Comrie, "Retrieving public service broadcasting," 110. Thompson, "Calling the Tune Without," 2.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Dunleavy, *New Zealand Film & Television*, 12.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 175-176.

problematic because, at the time, 90% of TVNZ's income was commercial-based, while they were receiving only a modest subsidy from the government to help implement the charter.<sup>48</sup> The charter and the funding of it was ultimately criticized by both sides of the political spectrum, as well as the private media sector, with MediaWorks in particular saying that the government was using taxpayer funds to subsidise a failing commercial business.<sup>49</sup> In the end, the conundrum that existed around what was the best way to deliver charter goals without compromising TVNZ's commercial performance was not resolved, and the charter was eventually disestablished by the new National government in 2011.<sup>50</sup>

The election of National to government in 2008 saw the reinforcement of a largely commercial approach to broadcasting, with the new government's focus being non-interventionist and commercially oriented.<sup>51</sup> The John Key-led government made it clear to TVNZ that commercial performance should be the top priority for the organisation and that cabinet was not willing to increase the broadcasting budget.<sup>52</sup> This essentially meant that the government was unwilling to fund, in a significant way at least, public service content. In 2011, The TVNZ Amendment Act refocused TVNZ again as a commercial institution, removing any remaining public service obligations.<sup>53</sup> The act itself described TVNZ as being a digital media company, and that its function should be to provide a range of content and services on a choice of delivery platforms, while at the same time maintain its commercial performance.<sup>54</sup> Broadcasting Minister Jonathan Coleman, said the bill would free the company from the constraints of its dual mandate, allowing it to more effectively pursue commercial objectives,

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<sup>48</sup> Thompson, "Calling the Tune Without," 7.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>50</sup> Thompson, "Neoliberalism and the Political Economies," 8.

<sup>51</sup> Dunleavy, *New Zealand Film & Television*, 185.

<sup>52</sup> Thompson, "Neoliberalism and the Political Economies," 6, 8.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-7.

<sup>54</sup> "Television New Zealand Amendment Act 2011," *New Zealand Legislation: Parliamentary Counsel Office*, July 22, 2011, <http://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2011/0052/latest/whole.html>. Accessed, September 20, 2015.

and continue its transition into a multi-platform digital media company.<sup>55</sup> In line with this in 2012 the decision was made by the government to cut future funding of the broadcasters two digital free to air channels TVNZ6 and TVNZ7, a decision which resulted in their eventual disestablishment.<sup>56</sup> The decision for these funding cuts to TVNZ's public service platform was justified by the fact that, although public service television was nice to have, there was no money available to continue subsidizing it.<sup>57</sup> In other words, for the government, public service broadcasting was not a top priority.

### *The current situation in television broadcasting*

So what then is the current situation in the New Zealand broadcasting sector? Firstly, TVNZ remains in public ownership, but with no official public service obligations.<sup>58</sup> The organisation is commercially focused with 95% of its revenue coming from commercial activity, while it remains dedicated to making a profit and returning a dividend to the government.<sup>59</sup> In its statement of intent for the period 2012-2014, the organisation declared that it aims to direct more efforts into securing funding for commercially attractive peak programming, identifying drama, entertainment, comedy and popular factual genres as being priorities for funding.<sup>60</sup> In the same statement the organisation also makes it clear that it aims to prioritize business growth through consumer driven digital platforms and content.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> "TVNZ Charter Passes into History," *TVNZ*, July 13, 2011, <http://tvnz.co.nz/politics-news/tvzn-charter-passes-into-history-4300677>. Accessed, November 16, 2014.

<sup>56</sup> Thompson, "Neoliberalism and the Political Economies," 8.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> John Drinnan, "Public service television all but gone," *New Zealand Herald*, March 4, 2011, [http://www.nzherald.co.nz/business/news/article.cfm?c\\_id=3&objectid=10710000](http://www.nzherald.co.nz/business/news/article.cfm?c_id=3&objectid=10710000). Accessed, November 16, 2015.

<sup>59</sup> Merja Myllylahti, "JMAD New Zealand Media Ownership Report 2013," *AUT Centre for Journalism, Media and Democracy (JMAD)*, Published November 28, 2013. "About TVNZ," *TVNZ*, 2015, <http://tvnz.co.nz/tvzn-corporate-comms/tvzn-4880728>. Accessed, November 16, 2014.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

Likewise, MediaWorks, which owns TV3, has stated that its programme strategy is one that is designed to maximise viewer choice and opportunities for advertising.<sup>62</sup> This comes as no surprise given they are a commercial enterprise. The impact of this strategy on news and current affairs has already been seen with the axing of current affairs programmes such as Campbell Live and 3D. MediaWorks itself has also been taken over by an American management firm Oaktree Capital.<sup>63</sup> In 2015, the financial company bought out the remaining shareholders in MediaWorks and now has 100% ownership of the media group.<sup>64</sup> Finally, overall, the New Zealand news media market continues to remain one of the most concentrated and foreign-owned media markets in the world, with overseas companies such as Fairfax, MediaWorks and APN News controlling a significant share of the market.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> "MediaWorks TV," *MediaWorks*, 2015, <http://www.mediaworks.co.nz/tv.aspx>. Accessed, November 16, 2015.

<sup>63</sup> Paul McBeth, "Oaktree takes full ownership of MediaWorks," *New Zealand Herald*, June 6, 2015, [http://m.nzherald.co.nz/business/news/article.cfm?c\\_id=3&objectid=11460715](http://m.nzherald.co.nz/business/news/article.cfm?c_id=3&objectid=11460715). Accessed, June 6, 2015.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> Joe Atkinson, "Television," in *Political Communications in New Zealand*, ed. Janine Hayward, and Chris Rudd (Auckland: Pearson Education, 2004), 137. Myllylahti, "JMAD Report 2013," 6.

## **CHAPTER TWO: NEWS MEDIA AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE: IDEAS AND INTERPRETATIONS**

I will now begin to outline the scholarly literature most relevant to this research project. This chapter will set out the prominent arguments in the scholarship concerning the relationship between the news media and the public sphere. Firstly, the chapter will look at the connection between the news media and the public sphere, focusing on the significance of democratic deliberation and information. It will then consider the impact of commercialism in the television news media on news content, focussing in particular on budget cuts in the news room, as well as the tension that exists between the idea of news being a commercial product versus news as a public good. And, finally, the chapter will look at the discussion in the literature around the co-called erosion of the public sphere and the arguments put forward that capitalism, as well as the news media itself, have played a part in this process.

### **NEWS MEDIA AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE: THE RELATIONSHIP**

#### *Encouraging democratic deliberation*

The literature discusses the idea that the news media has a role to play in encouraging democratic deliberation or, in the words of Goode, to essentially make the public sphere.<sup>66</sup> Scholars point out the significance of the news media in helping contribute to a healthy public sphere where political debate and having an interest in political affairs are the norm. Fenton cites the news media as being the lifeblood of democracy, contributing an important resource to the process of information gathering and deliberation in the public sphere; while Craig says news media is the site where politics is played out and where the meanings of public life are debated and evaluated.<sup>67</sup> In addition to these ideas, scholars like Wayne and Kemp focus more

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<sup>66</sup> Luke Goode, *Jürgen Habermas: Democracy and the Public Sphere* (London: Pluto Press, 2005), 24.

<sup>67</sup> Natalie Fenton, "Drowning or Waving? New Media, Journalism and Democracy," in *New Media, Old News: Journalism & Democracy in the Digital Age*, ed. Natalie Fenton (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2010), 3. Washbourne, *Mediating Politics*, 5.

on media and political culture. Wayne argues how news media is central to the functioning of a democratic society's polity and the development of its political culture, while Kemp points out that the news media has a role to play in helping constitute the public as a public, as well as shaping its existence as a national political community.<sup>68</sup> Finally, McKee links back to Fenton and Craig's point about democratic deliberation, arguing that it is through the news media that populations of people can come together to exchange ideas and deliberate on issues.<sup>69</sup> So in summary, the line taken in the literature here is that the news media plays a substantial role in the construction of the public sphere, as well as dictating the terms of it within democratic societies such as New Zealand. The ideal state of this relationship is described nicely by Rosen who says that public journalism should be about challenging people to interact with each other as concerned citizens, rather than as consumers or, indeed, bystanders.<sup>70</sup>

*The significance of information: influencing public opinion and discussion*

The second aspect of the relationship between the news media and the public sphere, touched on in the literature, concerns the role of the news media as an information provider, and its ability to influence discussion and the formation of public opinion. Democracy functions best when citizens are informed, so they can then make informed political choices rather than act out of misinformation.<sup>71</sup> And, according to Murdock, for citizens to exercise their political right to vote, or participate in political discussion, requires them to have access to information, analysis and a range of interpretation and debate.<sup>72</sup> This is where the news media comes in.

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<sup>68</sup> Geoff Kemp, "Media, Politics and Democracy," in *Politics and the Media*, ed. Geoff Kemp, Kate McMillan, and Chris Rudd (Auckland: Pearson New Zealand, 2013), 4-5. Wayne, *Television News*, 76.

<sup>69</sup> McKee, *The Public Sphere*, 5.

<sup>70</sup> Karen S. Johnson-Cartee, *News Narratives and News Framing: Constructing Political Reality* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005), 87.

<sup>71</sup> Toril Aalberg and James Curran, "How Media Inform Democracy: Central Debates," in *How Media Inform Democracy: A Comparative Approach*, ed. Toril Aalberg, and James Curran (New York: Routledge, 2012), 3.

<sup>72</sup> Croteau, *The Business of Media*, 21.

Dahlgren argues the news media has a role to play in making politics visible, through providing citizens with the information and ideas about current affairs in order to help facilitate public opinion and participation in democratic politics.<sup>73</sup> Both Thompson and Kemp argue similar points, with Thompson stating that the news media is the place where people acquire their information and encounter viewpoints on matters they can then form judgements on, and Kemp that the news media's contribution to public opinion is the basis for action by people as citizens democratically.<sup>74</sup>

The scholarship also raises a significant point about media being a gatekeeper, and in particular how the type of information distributed by the news media can influence public opinion in certain ways. The health of political discourse in society can depend very much on the quality of information that the news media provides as, for most citizens, the media acts as a window into the political world.<sup>75</sup> The gate-keeping role of the news media refers to the idea of how it has the power to open certain ideas to the public while, at the same time, close off other perspectives.<sup>76</sup> Through this it helps define and direct public discourse about politics and, in the process, provides a strong indicator to people as to what they should be thinking about.<sup>77</sup> Street argues that public opinion is helped into existence through the rhetoric of public communication, and that what is thought in the public sphere can be affected by the pictures of the world conveyed in the media; with the media responsible for the circulation and projection of certain ideas and images.<sup>78</sup> Schudson makes a similar point in that the news can play a role in the formation of public knowledge and therefore contribute to the beliefs that people form

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<sup>73</sup> Dahlgren, *Television and the Public Sphere*, 2-3. Dahlgren, *Media and Political Engagement*, 34.

<sup>74</sup> Kemp, *Media, Politics and Democracy*, 11. Washbourne, *Mediating Politics*, 18.

<sup>75</sup> Croteau, *The Business of Media*, 28. Thomas Patterson and Philip Seib, "Informing the Public," in *The Press*, ed. Geneva Overholser, and Kathleen Hall Jamieson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 192.

<sup>76</sup> William Bennett, *News: The Politics of Illusion*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Longman, 1996), 26.

<sup>77</sup> Martin Hirst, "The Cultural Politics of Journalism: Quotidian Intellectuals and the Power of Media Capital," in *Scooped: The Politics and Power of Journalism in Aotearoa New Zealand*, ed. Martin Hirst, Sean Phelan, and Verica Rupa (Auckland: AUT Media, 2012), 51.

<sup>78</sup> John Street, *Mass Media, Politics, and Democracy* (New York: Palgrave, 2000), 42, 233.

about different political events and actors.<sup>79</sup> The significance therefore of the news media's influence as a gatekeeper for the projection of political information, as well as their overall role as a provider of information within a democratic setting, makes it even more important that news has democratic value first and foremost. With this in mind, Cushion argues that news providers should produce content that, above all else, has an informative quality, can enhance people's understanding of key issues and, finally, is likely to empower them as citizens within a democracy.<sup>80</sup>

### *What public sphere?*

Although many scholars discuss the importance of the relationship between the news media and the public sphere, as well as the role the news media plays in democratic societies, others take a different angle and challenge such assertions. These scholars tend to focus on the concept of the public sphere itself, arguing against the idea that public spheres can be built within a capitalist system, with Louw in particular stating that society has grown too big to entertain the thought that citizens can deliberate.<sup>81</sup> Patterson backs up this assertion arguing that, although the concept of a public sphere is appealing, it does not mesh with reality as most people do not discuss politics.<sup>82</sup> Alternatively, Graber alludes to a class argument, mentioning how the bulk of political action has always been played out by political elites and citizens with an above-average interest in politics, or people she calls 'the attentive public'.<sup>83</sup> She goes on to argue that the ideal informed citizen does not exist, and indeed cannot exist in most advanced societies.<sup>84</sup> Finally, Schumpeter goes as far as saying that public participation is neither

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<sup>79</sup> Johnson-Cartee, *News Narratives and News Framing*, 148.

<sup>80</sup> Cushion, *The Democratic Value of News*, 2.

<sup>81</sup> Louw, *The Media and Cultural Production*, 102.

<sup>82</sup> Patterson, "Informing the Public," 189.

<sup>83</sup> Doris Graber, "Mediated Politics and Citizenship in the Twenty-First Century," *Annual Review of Psychology* 55 (2004): 563.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 561. Patterson, "Informing the Public," 189. Note: Butsch argues that deliberation and debate are bourgeoisie social practices that other classes are less involved in. Butsch, "Introduction," 5.

necessary, nor desirable and that policy elites should be autonomous from the public at large.<sup>85</sup>

He also says that democracy itself is a process for selecting leaders and that citizen involvement in politics should only be confined to election periods.<sup>86</sup>

## **COMMERCIALISM AND THE NEWS MEDIA**

### *Commercial decisions influencing content decisions*

As outlined in chapter one, the news media environment has undergone significant change over the last twenty-five years, thanks to the growing influence of commercialism, and news organisations now operating firmly within a market system. In connection with these changes, Thussu argues that journalism culture has changed, with content being directed more towards serving the interests of advertisers and consumers.<sup>87</sup> The reality now faced by most news organisations, according to Uscinski, is that operating within a free market system means they must provide a product which allows them to incur a profit, or risk going out of business, especially when you consider the competition that exists for audiences across multiple platforms.<sup>88</sup> With this, Rudd points out how news organisations are constantly in a battle to gain competitive advantages over each other and expand their market share, resulting in news content itself becoming more subjected to the ruthlessness of the market which demands nothing other than increased profit margins.<sup>89</sup> What results, as a consequence, is the production of content designed to attract the largest audience-share and not necessarily content which serves a democratic purpose, something McChesney argues has resulted in the rise of soft

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<sup>85</sup> Robert A. Hackett, "Is There a Democratic Deficit in US and UK journalism?" in *Journalism: Critical Issues*, ed. Stuart Allan (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2005), 86.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid. Note: Temple argues the idea of the public sphere itself needs to be re-conceptualised so it can more accurately reflect the twenty-first century's mediated public sphere which, he says, is made up of multiple public spheres. Temple, "Dumbing Down," 266.

<sup>87</sup> Thussu, *News as Entertainment*, 76.

<sup>88</sup> Joseph E. Uscinski, *The People's News: Media, Politics, and the Demands of Capitalism* (New York: New York University Press), 6.

<sup>89</sup> Chris Rudd, "Political Economy of the Media," in *Politics and the Media*, ed. Geoff Kemp, Kate McMillan, and Chris Rudd (New Zealand: Pearson New Zealand, 2013), 39.

news.<sup>90</sup> This means, according to investigative journalist Nick Davies, that the news media now runs stories which are cheaper to cover, quick to produce and safe to report on or, in other words, stories which news organisations hope will help increase audiences and therefore revenue.<sup>91</sup> These arguments are strengthened by the results of a Pew Research Centre and Columbia Journalism Review research project from 2000. The project surveyed three hundred journalists and found that 41% purposely softened the tone of their stories to benefit their organisation's financial interests.<sup>92</sup>

There is also the role of advertisers to consider when it comes to discussing the type of content featured in the news, with the news media industry, in many respects, having always acted as a delivery space for advertising in terms of producing audiences for sale.<sup>93</sup> With this, news media organisations essentially operate within a dual product market, providing two different products to two separate buyers.<sup>94</sup> The content they produce is used to attract people to advertising, with the advertisers themselves paying media organisations to have their advertisements shown.<sup>95</sup> However, attracting advertising depends on news media organisations being able to deliver the audiences that advertisers seek.<sup>96</sup> This makes audience numbers essential, as the more people who tune into a news programme, the higher the price outlets can charge for advertising.<sup>97</sup> For this to occur, Edwin Baker points out that content which caters to advertisers has to suit their commercial needs.<sup>98</sup> The consequences of this, Baker argues, is that such content could at times discourage critiques of the social world in which advertisers depend

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<sup>90</sup> McChesney, *The Political Economy of Media*, 46-47.

<sup>91</sup> Nick Davies, *Flat Earth News* (London: Vintage, 2008), 114, 133.

<sup>92</sup> Jackson, "News as a Contested Commodity," 155.

<sup>93</sup> Sut Jhally, "Advertising at the Edge of the Apocalypse." in *Critical Studies in Media Commercialism Critical Studies in Media Commercialism*, ed. Robin Anderson, and Lance Strate (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 28.

<sup>94</sup> Croteau, *The Business of Media*, 26.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Street, *Mass Media*, 142.

<sup>97</sup> Croteau, *The Business of Media*, 6.

<sup>98</sup> Hackett, "Is There a Democratic Deficit," 93.

on, while at the same time encouraging political blindness on controversial issues, as advertisers for the most part want to avoid offending buyers.<sup>99</sup> With this he says that advertiser-friendly content usually means ensuring that audiences are in a buying mood as they watch, leading to the production of lighter or softer content over content which might involve greater analysis or a critical perspective.<sup>100</sup>

### *The effects of budget cuts on news rooms*

Another issue the literature raises concerns the impact of budget cuts on news rooms and how this can affect the production of journalism. According to Fenton, when you consider the effects commercialism has had on the news media, the material conditions of contemporary journalism do not offer much in the way of resources for news rooms to be able to practice journalism in the public interest, while in the process places limitations on the ability of reporters to do their jobs.<sup>101</sup> McChesney argues that cuts in news resources and editorial budgets affect what sort of journalism can be undertaken, while Fenton argues that the type of news which journalists can produce, depends a lot on their working environment.<sup>102</sup> In a commercial media environment, returns on investment can be increased more easily by cutting costs, especially in areas such as news which are often deemed to be less financially lucrative.<sup>103</sup> This results in there being fewer reporters required to fill more news space and at a faster rate, meaning less time for journalists to talk to sources, research and edit stories.<sup>104</sup> MSNBC associate producer Bryan Weakland alludes to this, saying that when staff are let go, others have to pick up their work, which for him as a producer means having to take on extra

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Natalie Fenton, "Deregulation or Democracy? New Media, News, Neoliberalism and the Public Interest," *Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 25, no. 1 (2011): 67.

<sup>102</sup> Fenton, "Drowning or Waving," 3. McChesney, *The Political Economy of Media*, 40.

<sup>103</sup> Nicky Hager, "Twenty-Five Ways to Have Better Journalism," in *Scooped: The Politics and Power of Journalism in Aotearoa New Zealand*, ed. Martin Hirst, Sean Phelan, and Verica Rupar (Auckland: AUT Media, 2012), 222.

<sup>104</sup> Fenton, "Deregulation or Democracy?" 64.

responsibilities such as editing.<sup>105</sup> Nick Davies also raises this issue, arguing how staff cuts can result in churnalism, where journalists are being reduced to passive processors of information churning out stories at a fast rate.<sup>106</sup> He describes how journalists are placed under greater pressure to produce material, but at the same time are being required to take on more work in the process, something which ultimately helps cut research time as journalists become more involved in the production side of reporting.<sup>107</sup> This means that the time available to journalists to be thorough in their reporting has decreased and that, if a report requires a lot of work, then it is less likely to be embarked upon.<sup>108</sup>

#### *News as a consumer product not a public good*

One of the more significant implications of the rise of commercialism in the news media which the literature explores concerns the idea that news itself is now seen more as a product to be sold to consumers, and not as a public good designed to serve democracy. In the face of market competition, according to McChesney, news organisations have all but abandoned the idea of fulfilling the 4<sup>th</sup> estate role traditionally ascribed to them and are no longer working to foster democratic interest in audiences or, indeed, stimulate citizen engagement in politics.<sup>109</sup> James Hamilton adds to this arguing that economic markets do not create conditions favourable for the open exchange of democratic ideas, and that what media organisations do with people's attention has little to do with informing or, indeed, catering for political involvement.<sup>110</sup> Instead, Hamilton says the driving forces behind the decision-making over news content revolve around the questions of who cares, what are they willing to pay, where can we reach

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<sup>105</sup> Jackson, "News as a Contested Commodity," 160.

<sup>106</sup> Davies, *Flat Earth News*, 59.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>109</sup> Cushion, *The Democratic Value of News*, 2. McChesney, *The Political Economy of Media*, 86.

<sup>110</sup> William Bennett, "Citizens and the News: Public Opinion and Information Processing," in *News: The Politics of Illusion*, ed. W. Lance Bennett (Boston: Longman, 2007), 83.

them, when is it profitable to provide this content and, finally, why is it profitable?<sup>111</sup> In line with this ethos, with the bottom line being to turn over a profit and link audiences with advertisers, scholars like McKee argue that audiences themselves have become even more important in the eyes of media executives, with a greater emphasis being placed on producing content that media organisations know audiences will consume.<sup>112</sup> This, McKee says ultimately leads to harder news being under-produced, as it is not always considered an output of value from a commercial standpoint while, when political stories are shown, they often carry a softer angle with an emphasis on drama, scandal or entertainment.<sup>113</sup> He concludes his argument by saying that news producers are caring less about whether or not what they produce is contributing in a positive way to the public sphere.<sup>114</sup> This then creates a conundrum for news as a whole, and tension has emerged over the need for news organisations to remain commercially viable, while at the same time serve the public within a democratic context.

### *Commercialism vs the public good*

Given the commercial nature of the modern-day news media industry, scholars have raised the point how this has created some tension with the news media's other role which is to serve the public interest democratically. News media organisations are unique in this regard in that they are simultaneously, for the most part, profit-seeking entities while at the same time also being the primary information source for citizens in a democracy.<sup>115</sup> With this, according to Fenton, news is not a normal commodity and has a special status in society because of its relationship to democratic life and the fact it has links to the health and well-being of democracy.<sup>116</sup> This

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<sup>111</sup> James Hamilton, *All the News That's Fit to Sell: How the Market Transforms Information into News* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 7.

<sup>112</sup> McKee, *The Public Sphere*, 66.

<sup>113</sup> Rudd, "Political Economy of the Media," 40.

<sup>114</sup> McKee, *The Public Sphere*, 2.

<sup>115</sup> Croteau, *The Business of Media*, 20.

<sup>116</sup> Fenton, "Deregulation or Democracy?" 63, 66.

then has meant some paradoxes have emerged between the commercial goals of news organisations and their other mission to serve the public, with scholars raising concerns around the effects this paradox has for democracy. Jackson says the integrity of deliberative democracy is compromised when the news media's ability to keep the public informed becomes subordinate to the economic directives of capitalism.<sup>117</sup> Croteau similarly argues how markets do not necessarily always meet the democratic needs of citizens, especially when lighter content is produced as a result of market imperatives.<sup>118</sup> At the same time, other scholars have mentioned how journalistic and economic imperatives contradict each other by virtue of their nature. Fuller says that journalists and news executives operate at cross purposes philosophically, with journalists in the business of changing minds compared with news executives who are more interested in what sells.<sup>119</sup> Jackson also alludes to this conflicting relationship, stating that the economic logic of maximising profits clashes with the journalistic logic of maximising public understanding.<sup>120</sup> She says that when the news media are expected to be purveyors of the public interest while at the same time pursue profits, the result can be a clash between what she calls the amoral values of the market system and the moral agency of a free press.<sup>121</sup>

## **THE EROSION OF THE PUBLIC SPHERE**

According to Habermas, over time the increasing influence on society by markets and consumer culture has helped undermine the vision of a critical and inclusive space characterized by informed and rational discussion.<sup>122</sup> This process, which Habermas labels the erosion of the public sphere, he argues was triggered by the modernization of society and the

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<sup>117</sup> Jackson, "News as a Contested Commodity," 146-147.

<sup>118</sup> Croteau, *The Business of Media*, 24.

<sup>119</sup> Johnson-Cartee, *News Narratives and News Framing*, 97.

<sup>120</sup> Jackson, "News as a Contested Commodity," 155.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

<sup>122</sup> Paul Hodkinson, *Media, Culture and Society: An Introduction* (London: SAGE, 2011), 180.

transformation of capitalism.<sup>123</sup> Habermas identified that, as capitalism grew, societies became more market-driven, leading to the deterioration of democratic conditions and the notion of the active citizen being replaced by the notion of the citizen as a passive consumer of politics.<sup>124</sup> It is this transformation that this section of the chapter will explore, starting with the emergence of a culture of consumerism.

*A culture of consumerism has emerged*

Wayne Hope argues that, over the last thirty years, western states have become reconfigured due to the globalization of neoliberal capitalism.<sup>125</sup> In the process, commercial organisations intent on maximising the consumption of commodities have colonized most cultural and social spaces.<sup>126</sup> Goode calls this a period where societies have moved from being culture debating societies to culture consuming societies, while McChesney states that such a consumer culture places a strong premium on commercial values while downplaying communitarian ideas.<sup>127</sup> Consumerism as a lifestyle has become all pervasive; a lifestyle which, for the most part, promotes individualism at the expense of collectivism, something that Dahlgren labels as uncivic economism.<sup>128</sup> Uncivic economism involves the intensification of a mode of thought where the definitive purpose is to assert the priority of economics over all other values, including both civic and communitarian values.<sup>129</sup> In turn, values such as competition and profitability have supplemented democratic values, with the redefinition of citizens as consumers helping to implicitly indicate that there is no longer much in the way of a civic duty

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<sup>123</sup> Cushion, *Television Journalism*, 14.

<sup>124</sup> Cushion, *The Democratic Value of News*, 24. Wayne, *Television News*, 81.

<sup>125</sup> Wayne Hope, "New Thoughts on the Public Sphere in Aotearoa New Zealand," in *Scooped: The Politics and Power of Journalism in Aotearoa New Zealand* ed. Martin Hirst, Sean Phelan, and Verica Rupar (Auckland: AUT Media, 2012), 40. Wayne, *Television Journalism*, 26.

<sup>126</sup> Jhally, "Advertising at the Edge," 29.

<sup>127</sup> Goode, *Jürgen Habermas*, 30. McChesney, *The Political Economy of Media*, 370, 452.

<sup>128</sup> Dahlgren, *Television and the Public Sphere*, 378.

<sup>129</sup> Dahlgren, *Media and Political Engagement*, 20.

for people to participate in democratic life.<sup>130</sup> The systematic ideological reconfiguration that helps to legitimize the private sphere at the expense of the public sphere means it has also become increasingly difficult to even promote the idea of a common citizenship, especially as, according to Dahlgren, the notion of the citizen as a social role has become marginalized.<sup>131</sup> This positioning of people as consumers has had the effect of creating what Robert Entman describes as an age of democracy without citizens, while McKee argues that public culture has become fragmented, with the emergence of smaller niche audiences resulting in an increase in political apathy and a lack of interest in societal issues among large segments of people.<sup>132</sup>

### *New media environment*

A second factor which scholars argue could be contributing to the erosion of the public sphere, is the new media environment that now exists and, within it, how people's mediated experiences have become more individualised.<sup>133</sup> The onset of digitalization has led to an increase in the array of media platforms available, while the emergence of a multi-platform media environment has resulted in fragmenting audiences, with people now having more control over the types of information they are receiving and how they choose to receive it.<sup>134</sup> This has been most evident in the rise of the internet, with Eli Pariser, among others, concerned over how the online sphere helps produce bubbles that keep people in a world which reinforces their own interests.<sup>135</sup> This situation is not helped by the fact that both politics and news on the internet is overshadowed by consumerism, entertainment and social media.<sup>136</sup> The long tail

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid. Temple, "Dumbing Down is Good For You," 259.

<sup>131</sup> Dahlgren, *Media and Political Engagement*, 21.

<sup>132</sup> McChesney, *The Political Economy of Media*, 426. McKee, *The Public Sphere*, 3. Wayne, *Television Journalism*, 26. Note: Goode also argues that, with fragmentation, public debate has become a marginalised practice and is now confined to in-groups such as political elites, bloggers, or the chattering classes. Goode, *Jürgen Habermas*, 24.

<sup>133</sup> Cushion, *Television Journalism*, 26.

<sup>134</sup> Dahlgren, *Media and Political Engagement*, 39, 44.

<sup>135</sup> McChesney, *Digital Disconnect*, 70.

<sup>136</sup> Dahlgren, *Television and the Public Sphere*, 383. Fenton, "Deregulation or Democracy," 68.

theory of the internet shows how the abundance of information available online often results in it being easier for people to avoid news and politics altogether, a common occurrence that has come with the establishment of the internet as an information and entertainment source for large numbers of people.<sup>137</sup>

Television has also been affected by the multi-platform nature of today's new media environment, with the range of entertainment options on television and, indeed, online meaning it is now easier for people to be exposed to less news.<sup>138</sup> This has led to the rise of what Cushion calls news grazers, or viewers who will watch news but with the remote at the ready.<sup>139</sup> According to Gans, the effect of this on the public sphere is quite significant, with audiences contributing strongly to the disempowerment of mass media thanks to the proliferation of media platforms that allow people who are indifferent to news being able to easily avoid it.<sup>140</sup> This fragmentation, according to Hackett, has helped undermine the cohesion of the public sphere as a result, with people now having the choice of being able to choose from a wide range of media sources which help meet their own interests.<sup>141</sup>

### *Is the news media to blame?*

A final tenet of Habermas's argument is that the media itself has contributed to the erosion of the public sphere.<sup>142</sup> He argues that the enemy of rational-critical debate in the public sphere has been the commodification of news as entertainment, with the profit-orientation of the news media placing an emphasis on stimulating, but superficial forms of culture.<sup>143</sup> Trivia and

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Cushion, *The Democratic Value of News*, 57.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 183.

<sup>140</sup> Dahlgren, *Media and Political Engagement*, 42. Chris Rudd, "Effects of the Media on Citizens and Politicians," in *Politics and the Media*, ed. Geoff Kemp, Kate McMillan, and Chris Rudd (New Zealand: Pearson, 2013), 102.

<sup>141</sup> Hackett, "Is There a Democratic Deficit," 90. Uscinski, *The People's News*, 151.

<sup>142</sup> Street, *Mass Media*, 42.

<sup>143</sup> Henrik Ornebring, "A Necessary Profession for the Modern Age? Nineteenth Century News, Journalism and the Public Sphere." in *Media and Public Spheres*, ed. Richard Butsch (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 71. Hodkinson, *Media, Culture and Society*, 181.

sensationalism in the news can distract the public from having any interest in participating in the public sphere, while also ensuring that any debate which may take place could potentially become centred around emotional responses, rather than critical reasoning.<sup>144</sup> With this, Jackson argues, the role of the citizen is diminished within a commercial broadcasting environment and that, unless there is a strong political culture already in existence, there will be little in the way of demand for more challenging journalism moving forward.<sup>145</sup> This becomes an even greater possibility when you consider the argument put forward by Bennett who says that the media laments an apathetic public and uses it as an excuse for providing more soft news.<sup>146</sup>

A second area where the literature says the media might be contributing to the erosion of the public sphere, is the coverage of politics in the news and, especially, the amount of attention given to the cynical and self-interested aspects of politics.<sup>147</sup> Washbourne argues this can turn people off politics and the political process, while Graber discovered in her research that when reports discussed things such as strategic political manoeuvring, people tended to react with feelings of resignation about politicians, leading them to hide behind shields of political isolation and cynicism.<sup>148</sup> In line with this there is also the idea, which Bennett raises, and that is how people tune out of news because they find it negative and discouraging.<sup>149</sup> He points out that political cynicism can often be an angry reaction towards a political communication process that offers little to the average person aside from targeted messages to shape public opinion while, in the process, helping raise and lower the chorus of public discontent.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Jackson, "Mediated Society," 48. McChesney, *The Political Economy of Media*, 54.

<sup>146</sup> Bennett, *News: The Politics of Illusion*, 194.

<sup>147</sup> Washbourne, *Mediating Politics*, 11.

<sup>148</sup> Bennett, "Citizens and the News," 90. Patterson, "Informing the Public," 195. Washbourne, *Mediating Politics*, 11.

<sup>149</sup> Bennett, "Citizens and the News," 88.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

So, in summary, this chapter has looked into some of the key themes raised in the literature around the relationship between the news media and the public sphere, as well as some of the scholarly arguments concerning the rise of commercialism within the media environment. The chapter began by exploring the nature of the news media-public sphere relationship, with the literature arguing that the news media has a central role to play in encouraging democratic deliberation and public engagement with politics. The chapter then touched on the issue of commercialism in the news media, and especially how commercialism has come to influence content decision-making, affected what resources are available to journalists, and led to a conflict around how media organisations view audiences. Finally, the argument around the erosion of the public sphere was explored, and in particular how capitalism, a new media environment, and the news media itself could be contributing to this. A discussion of the scholarly literature will be continued in the following chapter, looking explicitly at soft news, how it is defined, and what scholars say about the potential effects posed by soft news to deliberation in the public sphere.

## CHAPTER THREE: SOFT NEWS: DEFINITIONS AND EFFECTS

With the news media industry having entered a period of heightened commercialism, resulting in newsrooms being scaled back and the adoption of news values motivated by capturing larger audiences in a proliferated media market, changes have come about in content and coverage.<sup>151</sup> Within this competitive news market, the need to make news more accessible to attract viewers has become a greater priority for broadcasters, as Thussu observes.<sup>152</sup> He says this has led to the rise of news as being a type of spectacle, or what Atkinson describes as a move towards populist modes of news presentation which offer up entertaining stories.<sup>153</sup> John McManus argues soft news, or what he also labels junk journalism, is the perfect fit for today's news media environment and its commercial demands, with the production of soft news helping to lower production costs, as well as reap the commercial rewards of higher ratings.<sup>154</sup> As a result of the shifts in the news media landscape, shifts which have affected broadcasting in particular, according to Cushion hard news is on the decline while soft news has become more favoured; and when politics is covered it often gets presented in a softer way.<sup>155</sup> Just some of the words used in the literature to describe this includes the rise of infotainment, the tabloidisation of news, and the popularisation of news.<sup>156</sup>

### WHAT IS SOFT NEWS?

So what exactly is soft news? The literature is very broad in this regard, with no single definition emerging. Much of the literature looks at the style of content, emphasising how news

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<sup>151</sup> Cushion, *Television Journalism*, 7.

<sup>152</sup> Thussu, *News as Entertainment*, 3, 8.

<sup>153</sup> Atkinson, "Performance Journalism," 103, 114. Thussu, *News as Entertainment*, 8.

<sup>154</sup> Jackson, "News as a Contested Commodity," 153.

<sup>155</sup> Cushion, *Television Journalism*, 8.

<sup>156</sup> Tove Brekken, Kjersti Thorbjørnsrud, and Toril Aalberg, "News Substance: The Relative Importance of Soft News and De-Contextualised News," in *How Media Inform Democracy: A Comparative Approach*, ed. Toril Aalberg, and James Curran (New York: Routledge, 2012), 66.

organisations have shifted towards producing stories that have greater visual, emotional and human interest potential, while also exploiting the personality, sensationalism and drama of stories.<sup>157</sup> Thussu argues soft news is a type of news where style triumphs over substance and where modes of presentation are more important than content.<sup>158</sup> This theme is also emphasised by both Street and Cushion, who point out that broadcasters are now more obsessed with sound bites and out of context information, while there is also pressure to have stories with high production value in terms of narrative and visual drama which makes for good television.<sup>159</sup> Other scholars have focused more on the types of stories that feature in the news, with Steven Barnett arguing that the rise of soft news has seen the displacement of citizen-enhancing material with material which has no purpose other than to shock, provoke and entertain.<sup>160</sup> In line with this, McChesney states that soft news, in general, is made up of stories which cover celebrities, people's personal lives, scandal, crime, human interest and sport.<sup>161</sup> Finally, Graber argues that soft news tends to focus on the human element more and in particular stories which audiences can identify with on a personal level.<sup>162</sup> With news media increasingly reliant on viewership numbers and ratings, Graber says news producers know that stories about emotion-laden issues such as love, hate and greed can be very appealing to audiences and entice them to keep tuning in on a regular basis.<sup>163</sup>

The literature also raises the idea that the softening of news has had an effect on political coverage. In exploring this, the scholarship brings up two significant changes that have occurred in political reporting. These are the dramatisation and personalisation of politics in the news, and portraying politics as being like a game. Firstly, in terms of the dramatisation of

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<sup>157</sup> Karen Callaghan and Frankie Schnell, "Assessing the Democratic Debate: How the News Media Frame Elite Policy Discourse," *Political Communication* 18, no. 2 (2001): 186. Hodkinson, *Media, Culture and Society*, 144.

<sup>158</sup> Thussu, *News as Entertainment*, 8.

<sup>159</sup> Cushion, *Television Journalism*, 69. Street, *Mass Media*, 187.

<sup>160</sup> Barnett, *The Rise and Fall of Television Journalism*, 169.

<sup>161</sup> McChesney, *The Political Economy of Media*, 46.

<sup>162</sup> Graber, "Mediated Politics and Citizenship," 557.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*

politics, Bennett argues that political events which have the potential for drama are more likely to be newsworthy, and for him this usually means stories with narratives that contain sub-plots usually involving political conflict.<sup>164</sup> Patterson also alludes to this, saying that political coverage has become dominated by themes such as the pursuit of ambition, and struggles for partisan advantage, with Atkinson adding that this type of visually appealing story-telling often comes at the expense of focusing on policy in political reporting.<sup>165</sup> In connection with the idea of dramatisation, scholars have also brought up what they describe as personalisation with McKee, in particular, a proponent of this. He alludes to the idea that political reporting tends to look more at personal angles, including an interest in politicians private lives, and gossip within an overly trivialised political environment.<sup>166</sup> This leads to what he describes as coverage which focuses on individual personalities rather than wider societal concerns.<sup>167</sup>

Secondly, the literature also mentions how political reporting is focusing more on politics as being like a game played out in front of the public, and in particular highlighting political strategy and tactics.<sup>168</sup> Wayne points out that when politics is covered it is often framed in terms of competition and performance, while the analogy of being in a horse race is commonly used, especially during elections.<sup>169</sup> Along with this, Uscinski argues that politics is covered as a strategic game where the main goal is to win rather than to make policy.<sup>170</sup> Under these circumstances, politicians are shown as being like scheming manipulators intent on winning at all costs, something which Uscinski says is passed off as news, but contains little in the way of substantive information for audiences.<sup>171</sup> So, in summary, when defining soft news firstly you

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<sup>164</sup> William Lance Bennett, *News: The Politics of Illusion*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed (New York: Longman Publishers, 1996), 52.

<sup>165</sup> Patterson, "Informing the Public," 195. Joe Atkinson, "The Political Role of Television in New Zealand," in *Politics and the Media*, ed. Babak Bahador, Geoff Kemp, Kate McMillan, and Chris Rudd (New Zealand: Pearson, 2013), 218. Uscinski, *The People's News*, 33.

<sup>166</sup> McKee, *The Public Sphere*, 33.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>168</sup> Croteau, *The Business of Media*, 205.

<sup>169</sup> Wayne, *Television News*, 28.

<sup>170</sup> Uscinski, *The People's News*, 156.

<sup>171</sup> Johnson-Cartree, *News Narratives and News Framing*, 257. Uscinski, *The People's News*, 156.

can look explicitly at the content of news in terms of the types of story categories that feature in the news, stories that focus more on softer subject matter such as crime and human interest. And, secondly, the concept of soft news can also include how politics is covered in the news, with a strong focus within political coverage on dramatic and personal angles, as well as the political process being like a game. These conceptions of soft news will be used in the research to help determine news categories, how politics is framed, and overall to guide the analysis of the results in helping further the discussion around the effects of soft news on the public sphere in New Zealand.

## **THE EFFECTS OF SOFT NEWS ON THE PUBLIC SPHERE**

### *Political issues marginalised in news reporting*

Alongside laying out the definitions around soft news, the literature also examines extensively the potential effects soft news can have on the public sphere. And one of the first points raised is how issues are often marginalised in the reporting of politics, with dramatisation and personalisation dominating coverage at the expense of issue-based reporting. A lot of the scholarship is critical of the way politics is presented in the news, and in particular how the pursuit of profit by news organisations can have the effect of constraining the range of ideas, or indeed issues, featured in the news.<sup>172</sup> Atkinson makes this point, stating that politics is only covered in detail when interest is high, otherwise news tends to gravitate to what is seemingly popular such as crime and entertainment, while McChesney argues that issues such as climate change and poverty often fall through the cracks unless there is a significant event which justifies coverage.<sup>173</sup> Further to this, Iyengar points out that political news is more likely to be presented from an episodic perspective and that, instead of providing the background to an issue and the forces at play, reports tend to depict political issues as discrete events without

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<sup>172</sup> Croteau, *The Business of Media*, 170.

<sup>173</sup> Atkinson, "Television," 141. McChesney, *The Political Economy of Media*, 33.

exploring their causes and potential consequences.<sup>174</sup> Graber says the effects of this include how many stories end up lacking contextual information in order to help people assess their wider meaning while, according to Davies, rejecting whole stories because they are not events-based generates patterns of distortion in the news amounting to a bias against truth.<sup>175</sup>

*Does soft news and a softer presentation of politics in the news lead to the discussion of political issues in the public sphere?*

A second point of discussion in the literature around the effects of soft news concerns whether or not soft news, and indeed a softer presentation of politics in the news, helps to cater for the discussion of policy and political issues in the public sphere. Both Patterson and Bennett argue that soft news weakens the foundation of democracy by diminishing the information available about political affairs.<sup>176</sup> They argue that reports are full of melodrama, but short on analysis and therefore provide little basis for critical thought among audiences.<sup>177</sup> Along with this idea, Habermas made the point that news as spectacle encourages passivity in audiences who end up watching instead for easily consumed pleasure, while Atkinson similarly described news as entertainment as being like a form of mood management involving a temporary loss of self-consciousness for people, something he says is not good for critical confrontations with reality.<sup>178</sup>

Alternatively, Neil Postman states when it gets to the point that entertaining news content overtakes hard news, as a result people are more likely to become distracted, resulting in what he describes as the dumbing down of thought in society.<sup>179</sup> With this, questions then arise as to

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<sup>174</sup> Shanto Iyengar, *Is Anyone Responsible? How Television Frames Political Issues* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991), 136. Johnson-Cartee, *News Narratives and News Framing*, 164.

<sup>175</sup> Davies, *Flat Earth News*, 139. Graber, "Mediated Politics," 559.

<sup>176</sup> Aalberg, "How Media Inform Democracy," 9.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>178</sup> Atkinson, "Television," 143. Cushion, *The Democratic Value of News*, 108.

<sup>179</sup> Patterson, "Informing the Public," 193.

whether audiences are going to develop any understanding of the political world as a result of watching such news coverage.<sup>180</sup> With the simplicity of dramatised and personalised news and the fact it is quite easy to grasp, Bennett mentions this type of news can have the effect of giving audiences a misguided sense of the situations in different reports, especially in political stories, leading to distract people from the issues at stake and in turn help create a false sense of understanding of the wider problems in society.<sup>181</sup> This point comes back to Iyengar's analysis around episodic framing, and the effects of episodic reporting in leading people to attribute responsibility for political problems on to individuals and not wider social systems or structures.<sup>182</sup>

#### *Styles of news coverage and the effects of framing*

Scholars also raise the issue of what effect the style of news coverage could be having as a result of news becoming more of a discourse of personalisation and dramatisation.<sup>183</sup> This comes back to how stories are framed and the impact of news values on the news itself. Bennett argues how the news media often fails to explain and contextualise stories, and has instead become more obsessed with the who, what and where of stories, and not the why and how.<sup>184</sup> Cushion and Davies argue similar points, with Cushion mentioning how this can promote a short attention span in news audiences with ideas not being exposed in detail or at any length, and Davies that the draining of detail out of stories reduces them down to mere events devoid of any meaning.<sup>185</sup> In connection with this, scholars have also raised the point around stories becoming isolated from one another and instead being presented as independent capsules of news. Bennett argues that the de-contextualisation of news items leads to them becoming self-

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<sup>180</sup> Hodkinson, *Media, Culture and Society*, 145.

<sup>181</sup> Johnson-Cartee, *News Narratives and News Framing*, 142.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

<sup>183</sup> Fenton, "Drowning or Waving," 9.

<sup>184</sup> Bennett, *News: The Politics of Illusion*, 50.

<sup>185</sup> Cushion, *The Democratic Value of News*, 105. Davies, *Flat Earth News*, 140.

contained events, making it difficult for audiences to see a connection across stories over time.<sup>186</sup> He says the impression this can create is a world of isolated events that appear and disappear because the news offers little in the way of explanation or a wider context, while the fast-paced nature of the news cycle means there is less time for deliberation in the public sphere, with stories coming and going day to day.<sup>187</sup>

From a more theoretical perspective, Iyengar argues this comes as a result of news being presented as episodic rather than thematic in nature, with the effects of this on political coverage being widely felt.<sup>188</sup> He says episodic reporting can lead to the distortion of public affairs through the portrayal of recurring issues over time as being unrelated, and that rather than news being a marketplace for ideas, it instead provides an ongoing parade of specific events, or what he calls a context of no context.<sup>189</sup> In addition to this, Bennett alludes to how news presents audiences with an endless replay of familiar scripts, with the political world in particular becoming a caricature drawn out of unrealistic stereotypes, predictable political posturing, and superficial images.<sup>190</sup> The impact of this on public opinion can be vast, with Price and Tewksbury arguing that journalists selection of certain events to focus on in news stories but at the same time ignoring other information, can result in audiences receiving an uneven presentation of the world based purely on what is shown in the reporting.<sup>191</sup>

### *The impact of soft news long-term*

Finally, the literature also explores the impact that soft news could have on the public sphere long-term. Cushion argues that if news is supposed to help empower democratic conversation in the public sphere, then what is selected as news to be covered and how it is produced is

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<sup>186</sup> Bennett, *News: The Politics of Illusion*, 40.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 41-42.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>189</sup> Iyengar, *Is Anyone Responsible?* 140, 143.

<sup>190</sup> Bennett, *News: The Politics of Illusion*, 72, 109.

<sup>191</sup> Johnson-Cartee, *News Narratives and News Framing*, 125-126.

critical for the state of informed citizenship.<sup>192</sup> With this, he says, adopting popular forms of news might help to engage more people, but whether this helps enhance news' democratic value is still open to debate.<sup>193</sup> Concerns remain that the amount of soft news featured in the news will affect the level of serious discussion around political issues, and scholars such as Washbourne and Hackett argue that journalism is falling short of expectations around how it should function as an agent of democracy, leading to what Hackett describes as the emergence of a democratic deficit.<sup>194</sup> This democratic deficit concerns how audiences are receiving low-quality information through the news media which they are then acting on in terms of their own political decision making.<sup>195</sup> Uscinski has also labelled this as a negative externality resulting from people being left uninformed and starving on a low-information diet, the effects of which can be felt more widely at the ballot box when it comes to voting.<sup>196</sup>

Leading on from this idea, the consequences long-term for the public sphere of a news space dominated by soft news, also means that it could lead to there being a low-quality information environment for democratic deliberation with the problem, according to Uscinski, being that people begin to act politically under the assumption that the news reported in the news is the actual news.<sup>197</sup> In line with this, McManus makes the point that news audiences often cannot determine the accuracy of stories, or more importantly, whether or not they are receiving a full account of the most important stories of the day.<sup>198</sup> He goes on to say that, although viewers might think they are becoming informed citizens by watching the news, the fact is because of the amount of soft news that is appearing in the news, audiences are increasingly being left unaware about many things, including the critical details of important socio-political issues

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<sup>192</sup> Cushion, *The Democratic Value of News*, 59.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>194</sup> Hackett, "Is There a Democratic Deficit," 85. Washbourne, *Mediating Politics*, 10.

<sup>195</sup> Uscinski, *The People's News*, 12.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, 13, 143.

<sup>198</sup> Jackson, "News as a Contested Commodity," 154.

that news organisations fail to report.<sup>199</sup> This comes as a result of there being a heavy focus on the drama and personal aspects of politics in much of the reporting on television, as well as the prominence of soft news categories such as human interest in the news.<sup>200</sup> Finally, McChesney raises the point, that over time, whatever interest the public has for soft news is only encouraged through their constant exposure to it.<sup>201</sup> He hopes that if there was a greater commitment to hard news by news organisations, then the public's taste for it might also increase, leading perhaps to positive externalities being felt more widely in the form of greater democratic deliberation on political issues in the public sphere.<sup>202</sup>

## **SCHOLARLY ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT OF SOFT NEWS**

### *Soft news helps increase news audiences*

Despite a lot of the literature focusing on the negative effects of soft news, not all scholars take a critical view of soft news. In fact, many scholars argue that soft news and a softer presentation of politics can have a positive effect. Firstly, one of the main arguments is that soft news can help attract audiences who would otherwise pay little attention to news, or politics.<sup>203</sup> This line of argument is that soft news has greater potential to reach wider audiences than hard news, with Wayne going as far as saying that soft news has helped increase the appeal of news to those less interested, getting them to consume news more as a result.<sup>204</sup> The reality according to Entman is that most people know or care little about politics, and therefore neither seek out nor understand political reporting.<sup>205</sup> With this in mind Zaller argues that themes such as political conflict and gamesmanship can help to enliven politics, and thus widen its appeal and

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<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 156.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> McChesney, *The Political Economy of Media*, 46.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Patterson, "Informing the Public," 193.

<sup>204</sup> Cushion, *Television Journalism*, 48. Wayne, *Television News*, 78.

<sup>205</sup> Uscinski, *The People's News*, 12.

promote higher levels of interest.<sup>206</sup> Graber also makes a similar point in line with this that media spectacles and dramatisation can help increase people's emotional involvement with politics, getting them to think more about it as a result.<sup>207</sup> With this, Elizabeth Bird states that covering the personal or dramatic sides of politics may be the most effective way to help people understand the impact of political events, as personal narratives and vivid imagery are usually more memorable to people.<sup>208</sup>

Scholars who see the benefits of soft news also bring up the idea of dumbing down, which soft news detractors discuss, and state how this can actually contribute to the process of engaging people in political debate, while also capturing audiences who fail to respond to a more serious presentation of politics in the news.<sup>209</sup> Temple argues concerns around the dumbing down of the news ignores the need for public spheres that will engage the politically illiterate in ways that will encourage their interest.<sup>210</sup> Dahlgren agrees, saying that the popularisation of news can ensure that the public sphere is made available to larger numbers of people through more accessible formats and presentation styles.<sup>211</sup> This ultimately can help to address those segments of the population which may feel more excluded by what Dahlgren calls highbrow formats.<sup>212</sup>

### *Soft news is a reality*

A second issue raised is the idea that soft news is a reality, and that discourses around the dumbing down of news because of it are associated with an idealised view of television news.<sup>213</sup>

Mick Temple argues the dumbing down thesis is caught up in intellectual snobbery informed

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<sup>206</sup> Patterson, "Informing the Public," 194.

<sup>207</sup> Thussu, *News as Entertainment*, 163.

<sup>208</sup> Barnett, *The Rise and Fall of Television Journalism*, 142.

<sup>209</sup> Temple, "Dumbing Down is Good For You," 257.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, 258.

<sup>211</sup> Dahlgren, *Media and Political Engagement*, 46.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>213</sup> Thussu, *News as Entertainment*, 7.

by an elitist and highbrow sense of what news should be, as opposed to having an accessible form of journalism that audiences can understand.<sup>214</sup> He also says that most of the criticism about the dumbing down of news comes from a desire to realise a normative ideal of the citizen as a critical actor in public life, an ideal that fails to reflect the variety of ways people engage with politics.<sup>215</sup> This theme is reiterated by Dautrich and Hartley whose research suggests that most people tune in to news for entertainment rather than to educate themselves. Finally, Patterson makes the point that it is not even entirely certain whether having better quality information in the news will result in there being a more informed public overall.<sup>216</sup>

*Soft news can be good for citizens*

One final argument put forward by scholars, who advocate for soft news, links back to the point about soft news being able to help increase news audiences, and this is that soft news can actually be good for citizens. Schudson argues that citizens can reach political decisions based on limited amounts of knowledge, and can also ration their intake of news based on what they need to know depending on their own personal situations.<sup>217</sup> He calls this type of person the monitorial citizen, with people choosing to watch and engage with news that is most relevant to them.<sup>218</sup> Zeller on the other hand questions the premises of deliberative democracy altogether, pointing out that it places unrealistic and heavy demands on people, while, in turn, entertaining news coverage has the effect of leading citizens to obtain more information because it is low in intensity and less demanding.<sup>219</sup> With this idea, soft news, according to Patterson, can help contribute to public inquiry into issues, with stories on crime, scandal and

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<sup>214</sup> Cushion, *Television Journalism*, 25.

<sup>215</sup> Temple, "Dumbing Down is Good For You," 263.

<sup>216</sup> Patterson, "Informing the Public," 191. Note: In regard to soft news being a reality, Dahlgren makes the point that politics itself is an activity where passion, drama and the visual are prevailing features. Dahlgren, *Television and the Public Sphere*, 145.

<sup>217</sup> Cushion, *The Democratic Value of News*, 53.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

<sup>219</sup> Aalberg, "How Media Inform Democracy," 9.

the personal aspects of politics sometimes touching on topics in ways which can provoke thought about public affairs and societal problems.<sup>220</sup> Finally, Temple makes the case that what is actually needed moving forward, is what he describes as quality dumbed down pieces in the news aimed at talking about politics from an informed and analytical perspective, but in a manner and style that might help draw in the politically uninterested and those who do not watch news.<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> Patterson, "Informing the Public," 193.

<sup>221</sup> Temple, "Dumbing Down is Good For You," 271.

## CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The question this thesis is attempting to answer is whether television news could be continuing to help undermine the development of the public sphere in New Zealand due to how politics is covered on television, as well as through the amount of soft news content that appears in the news. To help answer this question, a methodology is required that can analyse how politics is covered, and help determine proportionately how much soft news there is in the news. Because of this, the methodology chosen for the research was a triangulated approach with a quantitative and qualitative component. The quantitative component involved a content analysis of news coverage, while the qualitative component saw a framing analysis applied to political news. This chapter will henceforth outline the research methodology beginning with an introduction to framing. It will then look explicitly at the research methods that were applied in the study, before exploring the reasons behind the chosen methods and the limitations of the study itself.

### FRAMING THEORY AND RESEARCH

The first question one needs to ask before undertaking a framing analysis is what is framing, and indeed what is a frame? A frame is a central organizing idea or storyline that provides meaning to events.<sup>222</sup> Frames have been described as conceptual tools which both the media and individuals use to convey, interpret and evaluate information.<sup>223</sup> They suggest what a story is about and place an emphasis in salience on different aspects of a story.<sup>224</sup> With this, Entman says that to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communication text in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal

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<sup>222</sup> Claes de Vreese, "News Framing: Theory and Typology," *Information Design Journal + Document Design* 13, no. 1 (2005): 53.

<sup>223</sup> Baldwin Van Gorp, "The Constructionist Approach to Framing: Bringing Culture Back," *Journal of Communication* 57, no. 1 (2007): 62.

<sup>224</sup> de Vreese, "News Framing," 53.

interpretation, moral evaluation and treatment recommendation.<sup>225</sup> Some of the more common journalistic frames seen in the news media include conflict frames, blame frames, horse race frames, game frames, episodic frames and thematic frames. These types of frames are general and can be applied across all reporting, but when looking at identifying frames in media texts, Capella and Jamieson suggest four useful criteria a frame must meet to be classified as a frame. Firstly, frames have to be identifiable and have conceptual and linguistic characteristics; secondly they have to be commonly observed in journalistic practice; thirdly they have to be distinguishable from other frames and, finally, they need to be identifiable.<sup>226</sup>

So why then do journalists frame? Well, firstly, when they select stories to cover in the news, they have to make those stories presentable for audiences so that people will tune in to watch.<sup>227</sup> News media coverage can be very selective, and not all angles, or indeed facts, can be explored during a news item, especially on television.<sup>228</sup> With this the case, journalists rely on frames to help them package information for a more efficient relay to audiences in the story itself, as well as to suggest possible explanations for what is happening in the story.<sup>229</sup> Framing therefore ensures the complexity of events can be reduced to a more graspable whole for audiences to interpret as they watch.<sup>230</sup> Reporters and news producers do this by using framing devices in their reporting which contribute to the narrative and rhetorical structure of the news items, while also pointing to the same core idea which constitutes the manifest part of the

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<sup>225</sup> Thomas Nelson, Zoe Oxley, and Rosalee Clawson. "Toward a Psychology of Framing Effects," *Political Behaviour* 19, no. 3 (1997): 222.

<sup>226</sup> de Vreese, "News Framing," 54.

<sup>227</sup> Street, *Mass Media*, 37.

<sup>228</sup> Nelson, "Toward a Psychology," 237.

<sup>229</sup> Dietram A. Scheufele, "Framing as a Theory of Media Effects," *Journal of Communication* 49, no. 1 (1999): 106. Baldwin Van Gorp, "Strategies to Take Subjectivity out of Framing Analysis," in *Doing News Framing Analysis: Empirical and Theoretical Perspectives*, ed. Paul D'Angelo, and Jim A. Kuypers (London: Routledge, 2010), 84.

<sup>230</sup> Van Gorp, "The Constructionist Approach to Framing," 65.

frame.<sup>231</sup> Examples of framing devices include narrative, theme, visuals, metaphors and catchphrases.

A second way of looking at why frames are applied in news reporting can be done by breaking down framing into a two-stage process involving frame building, where frames emerge, and frame setting which involves the interplay that exists between media frames and the audiences own predispositions.<sup>232</sup> The frame building stage, in particular, is crucial in this regard, with scholars such as de Vreese referring to structural factors that can influence news frames and help determine how journalists frame issues in news stories.<sup>233</sup> In line with this, Scheufele says there are at least five factors that can influence how journalists frame issues in their reporting.<sup>234</sup> These factors are social norms, internal organizational pressure, interest group pressure, journalistic routine and practice, and finally the political orientation of journalists.<sup>235</sup> I would also add economic pressures to that list as well. These types of factors are important when it comes to looking at why reporters frame, and also in terms of helping establish where frames in the news emerge, with Lawrence summarizing this well saying that frames are normally conceived as part of the norms and routines of the news business.<sup>236</sup>

Although not the central focus of this research project, it is important to also acknowledge the role politicians themselves play in the framing process and how they can apply certain types of frames in the news media. Political elites devote large amounts of time trying to influence what gets covered in the news and how it is covered.<sup>237</sup> They often do this by attempting to

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<sup>231</sup> Ibid., 64. Van Gorp, "Strategies to Take Subjectivity," 91.

<sup>232</sup> de Vreese, "News Framing," 51.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>234</sup> Scheufele, "Framing as a Theory," 109.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

<sup>236</sup> Regina G. Lawrence, "Researching Political News Framing: Established Ground and New Horizons," in *Doing News Framing Analysis: Empirical and Theoretical Perspectives*, ed. Paul D'Angelo, and Jim A. Kuypers (London: Routledge, 2010), 265.

<sup>237</sup> Nelson, "Toward a Psychology," 224.

convey a particular construction of an issue, in order to benefit their own personal and policy interests.<sup>238</sup> Therefore, many political issues and events seen in the news, as well as the frames applied, often have political purposes attached to them and are intended to influence public perception, as well as guide public discourse from an elite perspective.<sup>239</sup> It has been argued that in order to gain as much news time as possible, political players must work to media constraints, or in a way that fits with the editorial decision making around news. This has become increasingly the case in a saturated mediated environment where many political actors and organizations are competing for air time and media attention.<sup>240</sup> For politicians, this often means communicating through events and, also given reporters reliance on them to get information, using press conferences and press releases in an attempt to set the news agenda their way.<sup>241</sup> In order for them to maximise the media's responsiveness to the information they want represented in the news, political actors will often attempt to use frames that fit within news conventions and appeal to journalistic norms.<sup>242</sup> Often this means emphasising drama, conflict, novelty and visual appeal, knowing that information which fits within these confines is more likely to get the attention of news producers.<sup>243</sup> However, despite this, it is also important to note that reporters have the power to ignore the preferred frames of political elites, and can reframe the information given to them in a way which fits more with how they want to present the story to audiences.<sup>244</sup>

As a result of journalists framing news stories a particular way and favouring certain frames in news reports, one of the more significant areas of framing research has been the effects of

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<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

<sup>239</sup> Lawrence, "Researching Political News," 265.

<sup>240</sup> Angela Phillips, "Old Sources: New Bottles," in *New Media, Old News: Journalism & Democracy in the Digital Age*, ed. Natalie Fenton (London: SAGE, 2010), 88.

<sup>241</sup> Callaghan, "Assessing the Democratic Debate," 203. McChesney, *The Political Economy*, 31, 33.

<sup>242</sup> Callaghan, "Assessing the Democratic Debate," 189.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid.

<sup>244</sup> Lawrence, "Researching Political News," 265.

framing, both on audiences and also on how framing can result in the privileging of different accounts. News media have a lot of power in actively shaping what appears as public discourse based on the types of frames they use in their reporting.<sup>245</sup> The presence of a particular frame in a news story can either narrow, or widen the range of considerations open to audiences in their interpretation of what they are seeing in the story.<sup>246</sup> By selectively choosing to cover one side of a story, or go with a certain angle, the news media are acting as gatekeepers for the audience tuning into the news.<sup>247</sup> This can ultimately affect the direction of public opinion, as well as influence how audiences view the information they are receiving based on how reporters privilege particular accounts over others in their reporting.<sup>248</sup> The impact of this is given even more credence when you also consider that much of the public's knowledge and information about political affairs is mediated, meaning a lot of popular understanding around political issues is shaped by the selection and presentation of information in the news media.<sup>249</sup>

A second research area into framing effects comes from a social psychology perspective, and relates more to the audience's perception around frames applied in the news media, and how frames can affect people's responses to what they see. By promoting a frame in a news story, reporters can alter how an issue is understood by audiences, while through elevating certain issues over others, the media can serve to influence people's subsequent evaluations or interpretations of political actors and issues as a result.<sup>250</sup> At the same time, people's own information processing and interpretation of the news can also be influenced by what are known as schema; a configuration of already salient attributes that help people process

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<sup>245</sup> Callaghan, "Assessing the Democratic Debate," 203.

<sup>246</sup> Nelson, "Toward a Psychology," 237.

<sup>247</sup> Callaghan, "Assessing the Democratic Debate," 187.

<sup>248</sup> Street, *Mass Media*, 37.

<sup>249</sup> Nelson, "Toward a Psychology," 222.

<sup>250</sup> Callaghan, "Assessing the Democratic Debate," 186, 188.

information.<sup>251</sup> This relates more to the idea that people rely on their own versions of reality built out of personal experience and interaction.<sup>252</sup> The meanings and interpretations people apply to political information in the news can, according to Graber, vary depending on their own existing political knowledge, the social context in which they are situated, and their overall exposure to news as a whole.<sup>253</sup> She also says that people develop interpretive strategies that will help them construct meaning from the information they choose to engage with, with individuals selecting, filtering, and personalizing the meanings that they ultimately draw from the news.<sup>254</sup> Chong also goes along with this idea, but extends it by arguing that a combination of factors ultimately determines the effectiveness of frames.<sup>255</sup> These factors include the strength of a particular frame, its repetition over time, individual motivations, and other competing frames.<sup>256</sup>

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, the overall aim of this thesis is to investigate whether prime time television news could be continuing to help undermine the development of the public sphere due to how politics is covered, and the amount of soft news shown in the news. In order to do this, the research involved a content analysis looking at what is covered in the news in terms of stories, how bulletins are divided up, as well as looking more explicitly at political news in order to see how politics is framed. The study was undertaken over a one-month sample period in February 2015, and looked at news coverage on both *One News* and *3*

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<sup>251</sup> Bertram T. Scheufele and Diatrem A. Scheufele, "Of Spreading Activation, Applicability, and Schemas," in *Doing News Framing Analysis: Empirical and Theoretical Perspectives*, ed. Paul D'Angelo, and Jim A. Kuypers (London: Routledge, 2010), 117.

<sup>252</sup> Scheufele, "Framing as a Theory," 105.

<sup>253</sup> Bennett, "Citizens and the News," 91. Graber, "Mediated Politics and Citizenship," 548.

<sup>254</sup> Bennett, "Citizens and the News," 91.

<sup>255</sup> Dennis Chong and James N. Druckman, "Framing Theory," *Annual Review of Political Science* 10, (2007): 111.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid.

*News*'s prime time six o'clock bulletins. The research used a mixed method approach with a quantitative and qualitative aspect.

The quantitative aspect of the project aimed to observe what was reported in the news, as well as focus on how news bulletins are constructed over a pre-determined period. This was designed with the purpose of recording proportionally what story categories make up the news, how bulletins are divided up both time-wise and content-wise, and proportionately how much news on television could be considered soft news in comparison to hard news. As there is no standardized story category coding system in existence for this type of research, researchers of television coverage have had to be original in coming up with their own news story classification codes.<sup>257</sup> Following in the footsteps of Comrie and Cook's research on New Zealand television news, excluding the sport and weather sections of bulletins which were classified as non-news, all news stories were coded with a single story category label, using an original pre-determined list.

The hard news categories used for this part of the research were New Zealand politics, world news, local issues, business/finance and health/science, while the soft news categories were crime, disaster/weather, entertainment, celebrity, human interest, sport and New Zealand society. Other was the final category used, but fell outside the hard-soft news divide and was used to code for stories which did not fit within one or the other categories. It is important to also note that world news was measured as a single category in the study, but during the analysis stage was broken down into hard and soft news to get a more comprehensive picture of the types of stories that made up world news, of which not all were hard news stories. This list of codes was developed after undertaking an initial pilot study of news coverage on both channels in order to help determine the key aspects of the research method, and in an attempt

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<sup>257</sup> Daniel M. D Cook. "Diet-News: The Impact of Deregulation on the Content of One Network News, 1984-1996" (PhD thesis, University of Auckland, 2002), 92.

to ensure that most news items that appeared in the sample would be able to fit within a single story category. A list of the story categories used in the research and their definitions can be found in the appendices section of this thesis.

The qualitative aspect of the research involved a framing analysis looking at the coverage of New Zealand political news stories. The research was a deductive content analysis, measuring the extent to which inductively reconstructed frame packages were applied in the text.<sup>258</sup> The framing devices used to help identify the frames in the text during the research were discourse, theme, visuals, editing, headlines and sound-bites. Framing research has often been characterised by theoretical and empirical vagueness due to the lack of a commonly shared model that underlines such research.<sup>259</sup> Previous research into framing shares little conceptual ground and tends to draw on tentative working definitions around frames themselves, with there being no real consensus over how to identify frames in news coverage.<sup>260</sup> It has been acknowledged, however, that there are three commonly applied ways of theorising and researching framing. The first approach looks at the political agents which promote frames in the media in what is also known as a public discourse or social movement approach to framing.<sup>261</sup> This approach views the news media as being a carrier of frames, with research looking at how frame sponsors frame their activities to gain a maximum amount of coverage for their own interests.<sup>262</sup> The second approach, which this research project draws inspiration from, is called the journalistic approach to framing and has also been labelled coverage studies.<sup>263</sup> This research approach focuses on the media frames within the news, looking at the frames journalists rely on when producing news content for presentation to

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<sup>258</sup> Van Gorp, "Strategies to Take Subjectivity," 99.

<sup>259</sup> Scheufele, "Framing as a Theory," 103.

<sup>260</sup> de Vreese, "News Framing," 53.

<sup>261</sup> Scheufele, "Framing as a Theory," 112.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.*

audiences.<sup>264</sup> And, finally, the third approach deals with the effects of frames on individuals. This approach, also known as the media effects approach, explores the impact of framing on people's schema, attitudes and emotions.<sup>265</sup>

With this project looking at the frames applied in the media, the research drew on Shanto Iyengar's framing research and coded for three particular frames to be identified in the text. The three frames chosen were episodic frames, thematic frames, and finally what are known as general reportage frames or, in this project, simply general reportage. Episodic frames are classified as having a narrow and de-contextualised focus, placing an emphasis on events, individuals and groups, and not societal structures.<sup>266</sup> They also direct audiences to think short-term, while interpreting issues in a personalised and emotional way, as well as in terms of concrete instances.<sup>267</sup> The effect of this according to scholars such as Patterson, is that this leads viewers to focus more on the individuals in the story, rather than the larger forces in society, or the bigger issues at play.<sup>268</sup> Thematic framing on the other hand places stories in a greater context with more background and a look at conditions, outcomes and implications.<sup>269</sup> Events and stories are framed within a context larger than the event itself, in what is also at times a more abstract presentation.<sup>270</sup> The result of this, according to Bennett, is that it encourages people to think more about the forces at play around the issue being reported on, while Iyengar's own research found that thematic framing can help to stimulate enquiry in audiences, with people being directed to look more at causes and effects, and a long-range view of policy problems and solutions.<sup>271</sup> The final frame applied in the study was the general

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<sup>264</sup> Ibid.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid.

<sup>266</sup> Bennett, *News: The Politics of Illusion*, 171.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid. Iyengar. *Is Anyone Responsible*, 14.

<sup>268</sup> Patterson, "Informing the Public," 194.

<sup>269</sup> Bennett, *News: The Politics of Illusion*, 171.

<sup>270</sup> Patterson, "Informing the Public," 194. Scheufele, "Framing as a Theory," 112.

<sup>271</sup> Bennett, *News: The Politics of Illusion*, 171. Patterson, "Informing the Public," 194.

reportage frame, also known as the classic frame.<sup>272</sup> This frame is often used to refer to frameless stories, or basic informational reporting where the purpose is simply to provide short informative stories, or to give brief up-to-date accounts of events.<sup>273</sup>

The choice of methods for this research project was designed to ensure that the characteristics and trends in the news bulletins under investigation that are relevant to the projects aims could be mapped and analysed. The purpose is to identify and count the occurrence of characteristics, such as frames applied, in order to be able to reach conclusions around the type of political coverage in the news, and how this could affect the public sphere in New Zealand. The decision then to go with a triangulated mixed methods approach involving a quantitative content analysis and a qualitative framing analysis, allows the researcher to obtain different but, at the same time, complementary data to help strengthen the validity of the results, as well as to gain a greater picture of some of the prevailing trends in the coverage being analysed. A key advantage of the quantitative component of the research is that it enables the researcher to quantify and obtain new data on the type of content in the news in terms of story topic and time. This will help the researcher to be able to see more clearly how much news proportionally is hard and soft, how much time is devoted to news and non-news content, while also establishing what sort of news content audiences are being exposed to.

In terms of adopting a framing analysis, this type of research method allows the researcher to determine how political content in the news is presented to audiences through the types of frames, or angles applied in the reporting of it. Examining if political news content is episodic or thematic in nature meant the researcher was able to explore whether the focus of political news is narrow and personalized, as opposed to being more contextualised and in-depth, with

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<sup>272</sup> Simon Cottle and Mugdha Rai, "Between Display and Deliberation: Analysing TV News as Communicative Architecture," *Media, Culture & Society* 28, no. 2 (2006): 171.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*, 172. Van Gorp, "Strategies to Take Subjectivity," 94.

a greater focus on issues. This is significant, as it ties in with the overall aims of the thesis in terms of looking at the softer presentation of politics on television, and the effects of this for the public sphere. The results of this analysis will guide the researcher in a discussion around the quality of political news on television and what this means for the public sphere in New Zealand.

In terms of the reliability and validity of framing research, concerns are often expressed in framing literature around reliability and validity.<sup>274</sup> This can often be put down to the difficulties in demonstrating the relationship between the abstract nature of frames and the elements within news texts that evoke the core idea of the frame.<sup>275</sup> However, it has also been acknowledged by scholars such as Van Gorp that some form of subjectivity is unavoidable when undertaking framing research, as linking between the news text and central framing idea inevitably requires some level of interpretation by the researcher.<sup>276</sup> With this being the case, Van Gorp encourages researchers to make the most of the gift of observation and having a perceptive mind when carrying out framing research, something the researcher in this case attempted to adhere to.<sup>277</sup> Considering this, both research resource constraints, as well as Van Gorp's point on subjectivity led to the researcher's decision not to employ an inter-coder reliability process for this project.

At this point, it is also worth noting that in coming up with a research methodology for this project, the researcher undertook a pilot study to help with the development of the research design and choice of methods. For this pilot study, the researcher did a basic content analysis of the six o'clock news bulletins of *One News* and *3 News* for the night of Monday July 14, 2014. The researcher watched each bulletin twice, firstly to record a bulletin order and to

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<sup>274</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid.

categorize the news items, and secondly to look out for things such as television production features, framing, and types of content. Undertaking this small pilot study was useful in enabling the researcher to figure out what to measure in the communication text that could match the research aims, as well as helping distinguish what codes to use for both story type and frames. This test run would also help make the task of identifying codes in the text easier, as it would enable the researcher to determine early what codes would be viable, while testing the feasibility of codes. Finally, and arguably most importantly, the pilot study gave the researcher valuable practice in watching and analysing news bulletins.

With the media environment the size that it is, decisions around what to focus on within a research project of this nature ultimately involves deciding what to leave out, rather than what to include. The decision therefore to focus on television news for this project can be put down to a number of factors. Firstly, the fact that broadcasting remains at the centre of the news media sphere in New Zealand, and that television news as a medium still continues to play a significant role in setting the agenda for public opinion, despite the rise of new media forms.<sup>278</sup> Television news as a medium has also been affected more by the substantive changes seen in the media environment in New Zealand since the 1980s, changes which in turn have influenced the researcher's decision to focus on the implications of this for news content on television. The choice of programmes to analyse is largely based on a decision to undertake a balanced study and to ensure that a like-for-like comparison between programmes is being carried out. This is the reason for the decision to focus only on the six o'clock news bulletins, news programmes that have been at the centre of television news in New Zealand for over twenty years. The decision to not look at other channels such as Prime, Maori TV, and current affairs shows such as Seven Sharp and Campbell Live can also be put down to the reasons listed above,

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<sup>278</sup> "Where are the Audiences? New Zealand on Air 2014 Audience Survey," *New Zealand On Air*, last modified July 8, 2015, <http://www.nzonair.govt.nz/research/all-research/where-are-the-audiences/>. Accessed, July 8, 2014.

as well as other factors such as language barriers in the case of Maori TV, different formats, different coverage times, and overall project resources and time constraints.

Finally, as with all research projects, there are limitations in the research that can emerge, and this study is no different. The main limitations of this study include that the research will not be looking at the effects of certain types of coverage on audiences, or how audiences respond to what is in the news. The research is also a bit restricted in that it is focusing only on the relationship between television and the public sphere and not other media forms while, in the process, only two news channels and indeed two news bulletins are being included in the project. The time and sample size of the study could also be considered a limitation, with one month you could argue not permitting enough time to obtain significant data on news coverage, and in the process gain a comprehensive insight into what makes up the content of television news. Again, these limitations can be put down to the confines of the study, the researcher's interests and the need to keep the research focused given the size of the project. Time and resources are also factors that need to be considered when looking at the sample size, the decision to carry out only a content analysis, as well as limiting the analysis to two news bulletins. It is important to acknowledge such limitations, but at the same time view them within the overall context of the research project. Recognising such limitations also allows the researcher to see them as opening up possible avenues for future research in the field. With this, in conclusion, it is important to note that due care has been exercised in ensuring that the best methods are being applied in light of the research aims and overall thesis, as well as the time available and resources at hand.

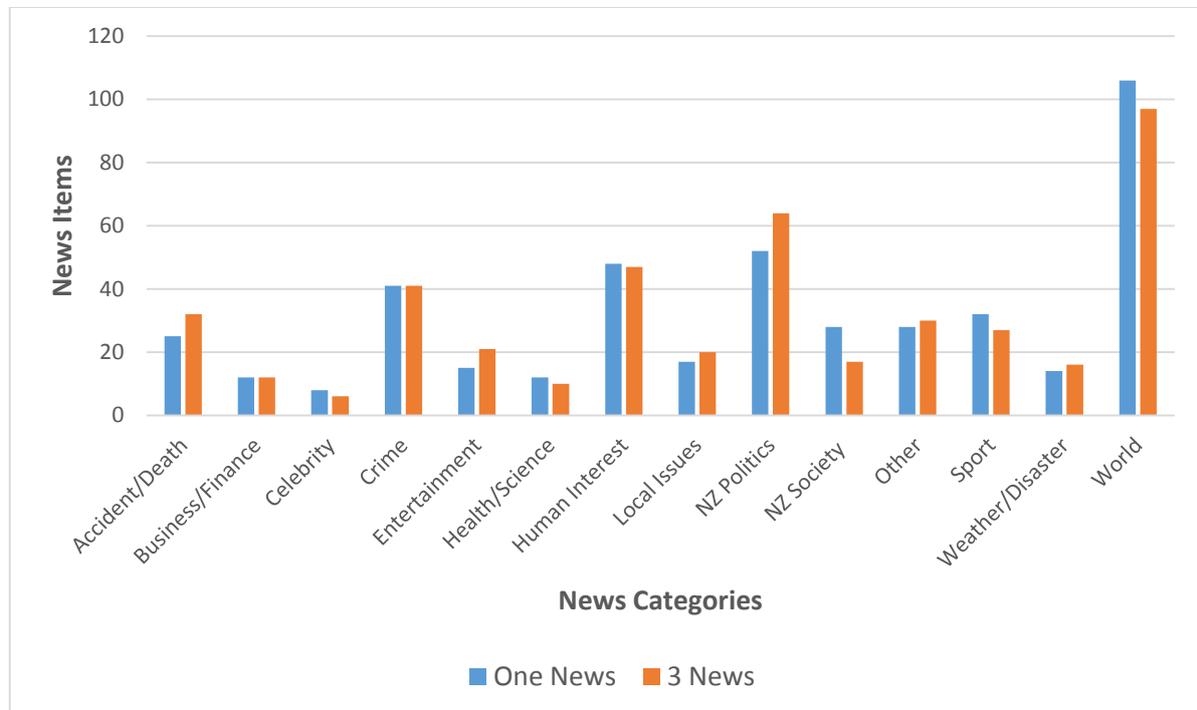
## CHAPTER FIVE: WHAT IS IN THE NEWS?

This research study was designed with the purpose of looking into whether television news and the coverage of politics in the news could be continuing to undermine the development of the public sphere in New Zealand. Focusing on the two prime time six o'clock news bulletins, *One News* and *3 News*, the study took the form of a content analysis looking at the general makeup of television news, and a framing analysis looking specifically at the coverage of New Zealand political news. The study was carried out over a one-month period in February 2015 and sampled the 878 news items that appeared in the news (excluding the sport and weather bulletins) during that month, an average of 15.68 items per bulletin. There were 438 news items on *One News* and 440 on *3 News*. This chapter will outline the key findings of this research and will be separated into two sections. Section one will examine the quantitative results, focusing on the proportion of story categories seen in the news, the proportion of hard and soft news in the news, and also how news bulletins are divided up time-wise and content-wise. Section two of the chapter will then look at the results of the framing analysis that was undertaken on the reporting of New Zealand politics. This section will start by breaking down the proportion of framing that was episodic, thematic and general reportage, before exploring the individual frames in more depth and analysing the key themes that emerged in the reporting.

## NEWS CATEGORIES

**Figure 5.1: News Categories**

Figure showing the number of news items featured under each news category on each channel during the study.



**Table 5.1: News Categories**

Table showing the proportion (%) of news items featured under each news category on each channel and overall during the study.

News Categories	One News	3 News	Overall
Accident/Death	5.71	7.27	6.49
Business/Finance	2.74	2.73	2.73
Celebrity	1.83	1.36	1.59
Crime	9.36	9.32	9.34
Entertainment	3.42	4.77	4.10
Health/Science	2.74	2.74	2.51
Human Interest	10.96	10.68	10.82
Local Issue	3.88	4.55	4.21
New Zealand Politics	11.87	14.55	13.21
New Zealand Society	6.39	3.86	5.13
Other	6.39	6.82	6.61
Sport	7.31	6.14	6.72
Weather/Disaster	3.20	3.64	3.42
World News	24.20	22.04	23.12

Beginning with a look at the quantitative results, firstly, in terms of the types of news stories that featured in the news during the study, as shown above in figure 5.1, world news was the

most-featured category on both channels in terms of number of stories with 160 items appearing on *One News* and ninety-seven items on *3 News*. Proportionately, this meant that world news accounted for 23.12% of all news items in the study, as shown on the previous page in table 5.1. New Zealand politics was the second highest category on both channels, as well as overall with fifty-two items appearing on *One News* and sixty-four on *3 News*, an overall proportion of 13.21% of all news. Although these results show that the categories world news and New Zealand politics represented 36.33% of the total number of news items seen in the study, this only tells half the story. In fact, it is the type of reporting that makes up these categories that is more interesting when it comes to looking at how these results could affect the public sphere. And, despite these two categories prominence, this is not necessarily a good thing, and is something that will be highlighted by looking at the content of world news more closely, as well as analysing the results of the framing analysis of New Zealand political news later in the chapter. In summing up the news categories which featured the most in the study, human interest was the third highest category with forty-eight items appearing on *One News* and forty-seven on *3 News*, making up 10.82% of the news. Crime then completed the top four categories on both channels with exactly forty-one items appearing on each channel, making up 9.34% of all news items. In total, these top four categories made up 56.49% of all news items that appeared during the study.

When it comes to the next tier of story categories that featured, the two channels tended to diverge from each other. There was slightly more sport on *One News* with thirty-two items compared to twenty-seven on *3 News*, while New Zealand society also featured more on *One News* with twenty-eight items compared to seventeen on *3 News*. This could be put down to the fact that TVNZ is a state-owned broadcaster and therefore has a greater responsibility to address the whole nation than *3 News* which is run by the privately-owned MediaWorks. Alternatively, *3 News* featured more entertainment stories with twenty-one items appearing in

comparison to just fifteen on *One News*, something that could be due to *3 News* featuring a weekly film review segment. Accident/death as a category also featured more on *3 News* with thirty-two items appearing in comparison to *One News*'s twenty-five. Other categories that appeared in the second tier of stories proportion-wise were the categories other and local issues, with both coming in within the four to seven percent range. In summary, the categories of sport, New Zealand society, other, local issues, accident/death and entertainment made up roughly one third (33.26%) of all news items that appeared during the study.

As for the story categories that did not feature strongly during the study, the bottom four were the same on both channels. Business/finance featured only twelve times on both channels, while health/science had twelve items appear on *One News* and ten on *3 News*. Weather/disaster stories appeared fourteen times on *One News* and sixteen on *3 News*, while celebrity stories feature only fourteen times in total. Altogether, these four categories made up just 10.25% of the news items that featured in the study, with just ninety stories appearing in total. So in summing up, looking at these results, the conclusion to be made is that New Zealand prime time news on the two major television news channels is dominated largely by four categories, world news, New Zealand politics, human interest and crime. And, although other categories such as sport and New Zealand society also featured strongly in this study, the top four categories made up nearly sixty percent of all the news items that appeared.

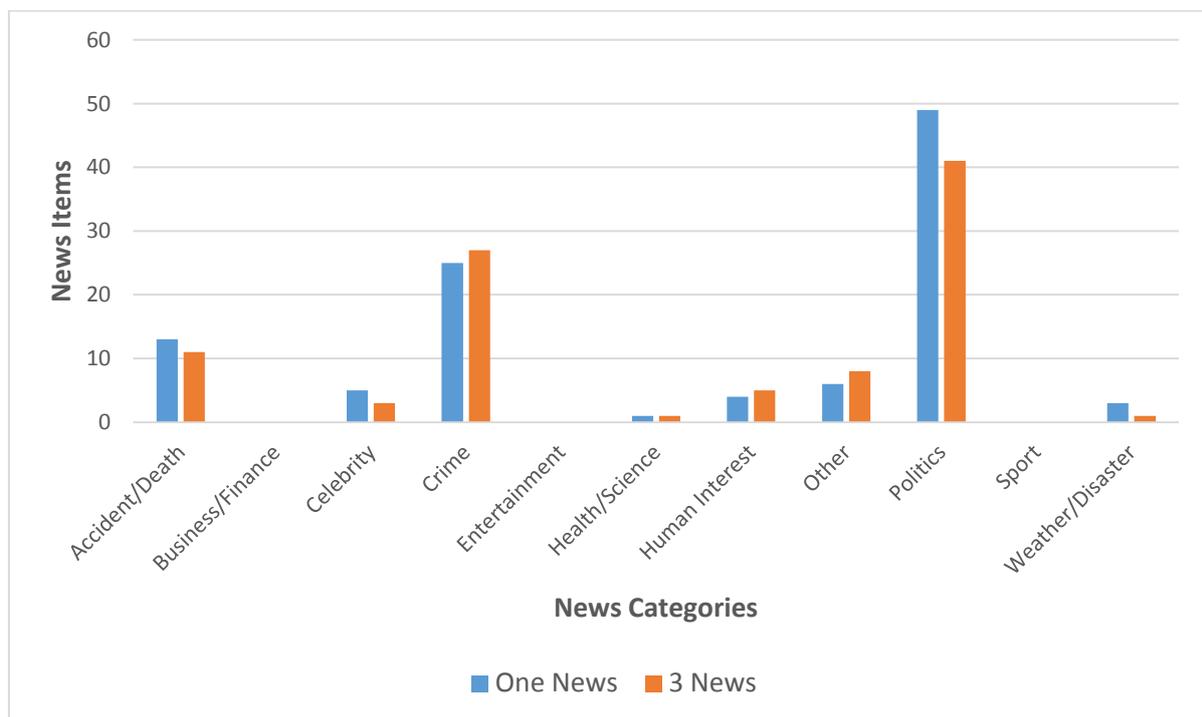
## **WORLD NEWS**

World news is an important category, as the results of this study show that it is the most featured story category on both channels in terms of number of items. But, as mentioned previously, this tells only half the picture, and it is the sort of content that makes up world news as a category and the length of stories that is more significant when it comes to assessing its prominence. Firstly, in terms of the types of stories that featured in world news, two stories

dominated most of the coverage during the study in the form of the ongoing war against ISIS, and the conflict in Ukraine. There were thirty-nine stories on ISIS and twenty-eight on Ukraine, which in total represented a third of all the world news stories that featured. Other stories that featured more than once included Tony Abbott’s leadership struggles, the imprisoned Aljazeera journalists in Egypt, and a Taiwan plane crash. The majority of the remaining world news items were one-off reports that made up a further third of the category. Overall, this suggests that world news coverage tends to fluctuate between a handful of big international stories, stories that are usually ongoing such as the war against ISIS, and smaller one-off reports that are usually event-based.

**Figure 5.2: World News Story Breakdown**

Figure showing the types of news categories that appeared within the category world news on both channels during the study.



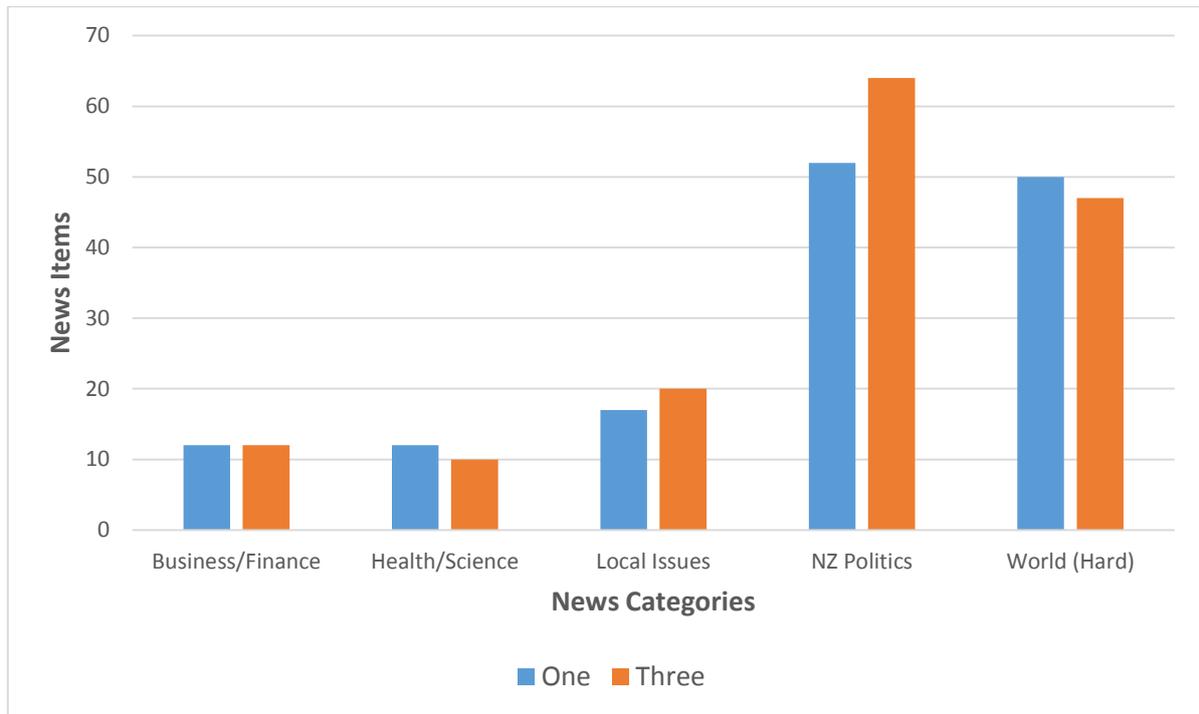
The world news results get even more interesting when you break down the category and look at the types of stories that appeared under world news. And, although in this study 47.78% of world news items were hard news stories covering things such as politics, which incidentally

was the most featured category as figure 5.2 shows, 45.32% of world news stories were in fact soft news items, with categories such as crime and accident/death, in particular, making up a large proportion of world news content. This is quite an interesting result considering the prominent number of world news stories on both channels, as well as how the category itself could traditionally be viewed as being a hard news category. However, what these results show is that, in fact as a category, world news can vary quite a bit between hard and soft news content, depending largely on what is happening globally in terms of the types of events that are taking place, not all of which are political. It was also interesting to see the number of world news items that were short update stories involving the news presenter voicing over wire footage. These sorts of stories were under one minute in duration, but appeared frequently, making up 50% of world news on *One News* and around 45% on *3 News*. So, although world news was the most-featured category in terms of the number of stories, substance-wise nearly half of the items that appeared under this category were only brief updates of world events and not in-depth reports on global affairs.

## HARD AND SOFT NEWS BREAKDOWN

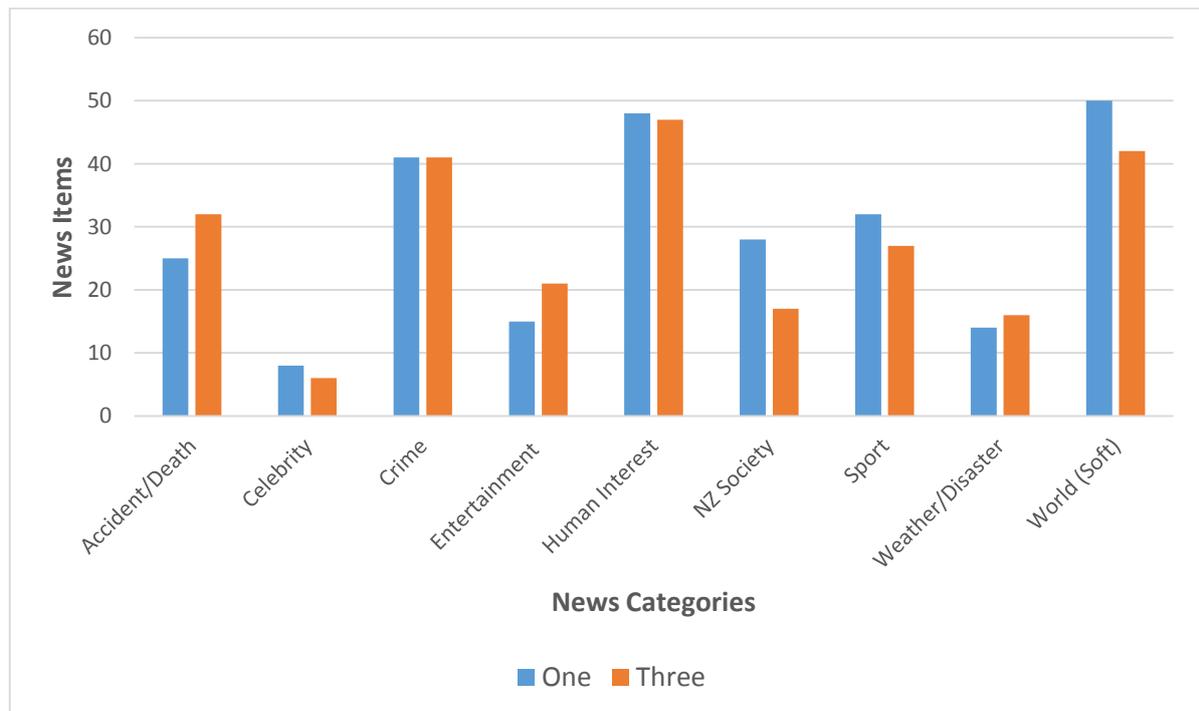
**Figure 5.3: Hard News Story Breakdown**

Figure showing the number of hard news stories that featured on both channels during the study.



**Figure 5.4: Soft News Story Breakdown**

Figure showing the number of soft news stories that featured on both channels during the study.



**Table 5.2: Hard and Soft News**

Table showing the comparative breakdown of hard and soft news in terms of the number of stories featured and the proportion.

	<b>Hard</b>		<b>Soft</b>		<b>Other</b>	
	Items	Percentage	Items	Percentage	Items	Percentage
One News	143	32.65	261	59.59	34	7.76
3 News	153	34.77	249	56.59	38	8.64
<b>Total</b>	<b>296</b>	<b>33.71</b>	<b>510</b>	<b>58.09</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>8.20</b>

In order to get an overall picture of what appeared in the news during the study, it is important to look at the proportion of soft and hard news that featured on each channel. Comparatively speaking, both channels were similar when it came to the proportions of hard and soft news content. Firstly, in terms of hard news and as table 5.2 above shows, 32.65% of the news content on *One News* was classified as such, compared with a similar 34.77% on *3 News*. So, as figure 5.3 highlights on the previous page, these are categories such as hard world news, New Zealand politics, and local issues. In comparison, the amount of soft news on each channel was also split quite evenly, with 59.59% of news content on *One News* soft news, compared with 56.59% on *3 News*. This result shows that soft news items appeared nearly twice as many times as hard news items on both channels during the study. Overall, if you add both channels news content together, proportionally there was substantially more soft news in comparison to hard news, with 58.09% of all news that featured during the study soft news in comparison to just 33.71% hard news content. This suggests not only that the majority of news items that appeared on the two channels were stories that fell under categories such as human interest, crime and soft world news as pointed out in figure 5.4 on the previous page, but also that hard news stories appeared less often, with politics, hard world news and local issues together making up less than a third (28.47%) of all news items that appeared in the study.

## NEWS BULLETIN BREAKDOWN

**Table 5.3: News Bulletin Breakdown**

Table showing how news bulletins were-divided up time-wise on average during the study.

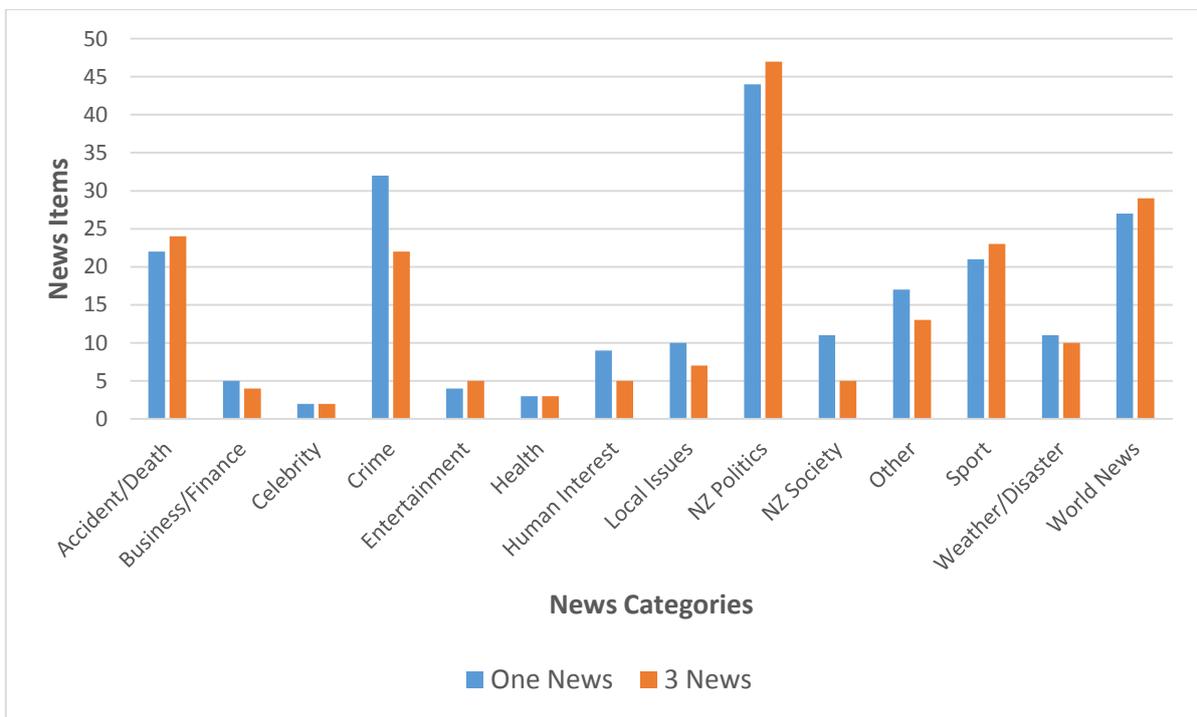
	One News		3 News	
	Time (minutes)	Percentage	Time (minutes)	Percentage
Ad breaks	15.12	25.20	15.73	26.22
Hard News	9.12	15.20	9.48	15.80
Soft News	16.65	27.75	15.43	25.72
Sports Bulletin	9.91	16.52	10.22	17.03
Weather	3.87	6.45	3.46	5.77
News Content	27.94	46.57	27.27	45.45

The previous results looked at what was shown in the news in terms of news categories and content but what about the amount of time given to soft and hard news and, in more general terms, how are news bulletins divided up time-wise? Well, firstly, as shown above in table 5.3, it is worth noting that in terms of content (excluding sport and weather), both channels devoted on average around 45-46% of their bulletins to story content, equating to roughly 27-28 minutes. Of this, the bulletins on each channel contained around fifteen to seventeen minutes of soft news content in comparison to only around nine minutes of hard news over an hour. Advertising, sport and weather together made up on average 48.17% of a bulletin on *One News*, or just under 29 minutes, while in comparison, on *3 News*, the same three made-up 49.02% of the bulletin. What this shows is that together, advertising, sport and weather matched the amount of news content seen on each channel and that, on average, there was a fifty-fifty split when it came to story content versus non-story content. Such results therefore raise the question as to whether news audiences are getting value out of watching television news when you consider the plausibility that around fifty percent of an average news bulletin is devoted to what is essentially non-news content. The fact that, again on average during this study, only nine minutes of an hour-long bulletin featured hard news content is also cause for concern in terms of looking at television news's democratic function, especially when more minutes (15-16) were devoted to advertising than hard news. Finally, the effect these results could have on the

public sphere is enhanced even further if you combine the amount of soft news content with non-news content. Together, these two components of news made up 75.92%, or roughly forty-five minutes of an average bulletin on *One News*, and similarly 74.74% on *3 News*. Overall, this meant that three quarters of the news between 6pm and 7pm was devoted to content that has little to offer in the way of enhancing democratic deliberation in the public sphere.

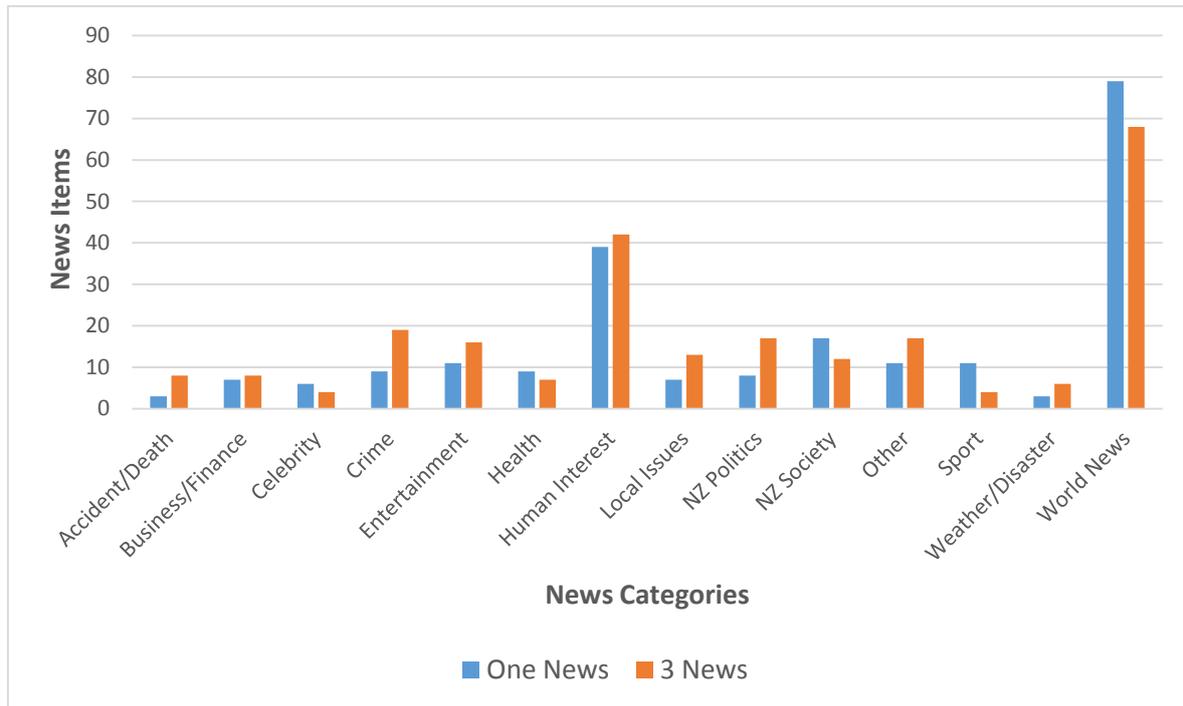
**Figure 5.5: News Categories Before the First Ad Break**

Figure showing the number of stories that featured before the first ad break on both channels during the study.



**Figure 5.6: News Categories During the Rest of the Bulletin**

Figure showing the number of stories that featured in the rest of the bulletin during the study.



**Table 5.4: News Content Before the First Ad Break**

Table showing the amount of hard and soft news that appeared before the first ad break on both channels during the study.

	One News		3 News		Total	
	Items	Percent	Items	Percent	Items	Percent
Soft News	123	56.42	110	55.28	233	55.88
Hard News	74	33.94	75	37.69	149	35.73
Other	21	9.63	14	7.03	35	8.39
<b>Total</b>	<b>218</b>	<b>49.77</b>	<b>199</b>	<b>45.23</b>	<b>417</b>	<b>47.49</b>

**Table 5.5: News Content During the Rest of the Bulletin**

Table showing the amount of hard and soft news that appeared in the rest of the bulletin during the study.

	One News		3 News		Total	
	Items	Percent	Items	Percent	Items	Percent
Soft News	138	62.73%	139	57.68%	277	60.09%
Hard News	69	31.36%	78	32.37%	147	31.89%
Other	13	5.91%	24	9.96%	37	8.03%
<b>Total</b>	<b>220</b>	<b>50.23%</b>	<b>241</b>	<b>54.77%</b>	<b>461</b>	<b>52.51%</b>

When it comes to analysing how news bulletins are broken down, it is also worth looking at where news content features. The research explored this by looking at content that appeared at

the top of the bulletin or before the first ad break, and content that appeared during the rest of the bulletin. Firstly, in terms of content that featured at the top of bulletins, as shown in table 5.4 on the previous page, 49.77% of all the news items that featured on *One News* in the study appeared during this section of the news, meaning that roughly 50% of news content appeared during the rest of the bulletin, as table 5.5 shows. The result was quite similar on *3 News*, with 45.23% of news content featuring before the first ad break, and a further 54.77% during the remainder of the bulletin. Bear in mind the first ad break usually takes place around the fifteen minute mark. These are significant numbers because they show that around 50% of news items that appear in a bulletin, on average appear in the first quarter of the bulletin, leaving the remaining three-quarters of the bulletin to feature around the same proportion of news content. This shows that there is a concentrated amount of news at the top of the bulletin, with less news content appearing as the bulletin progresses.

Following on from this, in terms of the types of stories that feature the most at the start of bulletins, as seen in figure 5.5 on page sixty-five, five story categories dominated at the top of the news during the study. Accident/death, crime, New Zealand politics, sport and world news. Altogether, these categories made up 66.97% of the content that appeared in the first section on *One News*, with New Zealand politics featuring the most. In comparison on *3 News*, during the same section, the same five categories made up 72.86% of the content that appeared, suggesting that the start of bulletins during prime time for the most part tend to be quite specific in terms of the types of news categories that feature. In comparison, as seen in figure 5.6 on the previous page, the type of content that appeared during the remainder of the bulletin on both channels was largely made up of two story categories, human interest and world news. Together, these two categories alone made up nearly half (49.46%) of the stories that featured following the first ad break. Again, these results are suggesting that prime time news in New Zealand is dominated largely by a handful of news categories during different stages of news

bulletins, with politics and crime more so at the start of the news, and human interest and world news throughout the rest of the bulletin.

Finally, looking at the proportion of soft and hard news throughout the bulletin, pre and post the first ad break, the results on average were quite similar between the two sections of news. As table 5.4 shows on page sixty-five there was more soft news that featured at the start of bulletins, with both channels coming in within the 55-56% range, with an overall average of 55.88%. Hard news stories, in comparison made up only 33-37% of the content during this section, with an average of 35.73%. So, as you can see from these results, soft news stories appeared nearly twice as much as hard news stories at the beginning of the news. In terms of the rest of the bulletin, as shown in table 5.5, the gap widens even further between hard and soft news content. During this section soft news items appeared 57-62% of the time, or 60.09% on average across both channels, while hard news stories, in comparison, featured on average only 31-32% of the time.

The latter result, showing that soft news stories appeared more following the first ad break, is perhaps not surprising, especially given the amount of human interest stories that are usually shown during this part of a news bulletin. However, the more noticeable result is how, during the top of an average news bulletin during the study, soft news content featured significantly more than hard news. Although New Zealand politics was the most featured story category on both channels and indeed overall with ninety-one stories appearing during this section, categories such as crime, accident/disaster and sport also featured prominently at the start of bulletins as figure 5.5 demonstrates. This, in many respects, goes a long way to substantiate the increasingly ratings-driven nature of prime time news in New Zealand, and especially in terms of how broadcasters are likely to start bulletins with visually-appealing and eye-catching stories such as those that fall under news categories such as accident/death and crime, as well as entertaining and feel-good content in the form of sports stories.

## FRAMING ANALYSIS OF NEW ZEALAND POLITICAL NEWS

The significance of the quantitative results of the study can be enhanced further when combined with the results of the framing analysis, an analysis that looked at how politics was covered on television news. At this stage it is important to remember the three frames which were the focus of this analysis and to differentiate between them. It is also important to reiterate that the purpose of framing is to place an emphasis in salience on particular aspects of a story, making certain information more prominent, while also offering a casual interpretation and treatment recommendation of that information to the audience.<sup>279</sup> So, once again, the frames being analysed in this study were episodic, thematic, and general reportage. An episodic frame is de-contextualised, and directs audience attention on to individuals, as well as the personal and emotional aspects of stories.<sup>280</sup> A thematic frame offers greater context and background to a story, looks at conditions, outcomes and implications, while also focusing on the forces at play.<sup>281</sup> And, finally, general reportage as a frame category is applied to basic informational reports and shorter stories that are often brief up-to-date accounts of events or issues.<sup>282</sup>

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<sup>279</sup> de Vreese, "News Framing," 53. Nelson, "Toward a Psychology," 222.

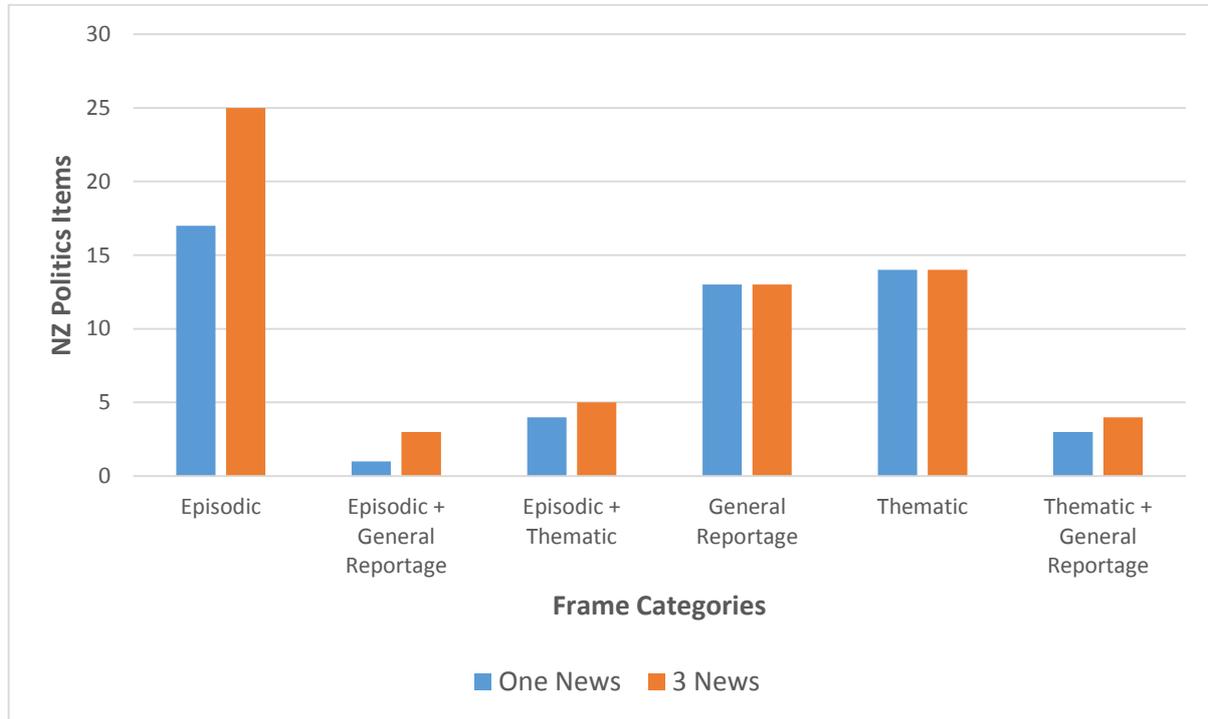
<sup>280</sup> Bennett, *News: The Politics of Illusion*, 171. Iyengar. *Is Anyone Responsible*, 14.

<sup>281</sup> Bennett, *News: The Politics of Illusion*, 171. Patterson, "Informing the Public," 194.

<sup>282</sup> Cottle, "Between Display and Deliberation," 171. Van Gorp, "Strategies to Take Subjectivity," 94.

**Figure 5.7: Framing of New Zealand Politics**

Figure showing the number of New Zealand political stories under each frame category on both channels during the study.



**Table 5.6: Framing of New Zealand Politics**

Table showing the proportion (%) of New Zealand political stories that featured under each frame category on both channels and overall during the study.

Frame	One News	3 News	Total
Episodic	32.69	39.06	36.21
Thematic	26.92	21.87	23.27
General Reportage	25.00	20.31	23.27
Episodic + Thematic	7.69	7.81	7.76
Thematic + General	5.77	6.25	5.17
Episodic + General	1.92	4.69	4.31

Before the themes of each frame are explored in greater detail, as well as the content of the political reporting, it is important to identify how often each frame featured on each channel and overall during the study. Firstly, as shown above in figure 5.7, on *One News*, episodic framing featured the most, with seventeen stories framed in this way. This was followed by thematic framing with fourteen stories, and general reportage with thirteen. As table 5.6 shows, proportionately, this meant that episodic framing appeared slightly more often than thematic framing on *One News*, with 32.69% of political stories episodically framed compared to

26.92% that featured just thematic framing. Meanwhile, general reportage as a category featured in 25% of stories, nearly matching the proportion of thematic framing. These proportions change when you include the stories that contained elements of two frames. With these stories included, the total proportion of episodic framing increases to 42.30%, with thematic framing following closely at 40.38% of stories, and general reportage 32.69%. So, in summary, what these results show is that the political reporting on *One News* was quite evenly balanced during the study in terms of the frames applied between episodic, thematic and general reportage. This suggests that the reporting tended to move between focusing on political stories in a thematic way, from a more personal and dramatic perspective and, finally, in the form of short informational updates.

In comparison, the framing of New Zealand politics on *3 News* appeared in stark contrast to *One News*, with episodic framing featuring significantly more than thematic framing. Twenty-five stories were framed in an episodic manner, eight more than *One News*, while just thirteen were framed thematically, one less than *One News*. The amount of general reportage was similar to *One News*, however, with fourteen stories falling under this category. Proportionately this meant that on *3 News*, as single-story frames, episodic framing appeared 39.06% of the time, thematic framing 21.87% and general reportage 20.31%. Again, when you combine the stories that featured one frame with those that featured two, the results change although, unlike on *One News*, the results on *3 News* are not as evenly balanced between the three framing categories. On *3 News*, episodic framing featured in 51.56% of political items, 9.26% more than *One News*, thematic framing in 35.93% of items, 4.45% less than *One News*, and finally general reportage featured in 31.25% of stories, 1.44% less than *One News*.

So, in summing up, what the results across both channels show is that there was substantially more episodic framing than thematic framing on *3 News*, only slightly more episodic framing than thematic framing on *One News*, while the amount of general reportage was relatively

similar on both channels. These contrasts could be put down to a number of factors, including the fact that twelve more political stories featured on *3 News* in the study, as well as how *3 News*, because it is commercially-owned, tended to feature more personalised and dramatic political stories than *One News*, stories which would fall under the episodic category. The results also highlighted a closeness between thematic framing and general reportage, perhaps signalling that both channels tend to balance their political reporting between having more detail and at other times featuring only basic informational updates on political issues.

**Table 5.7: Total Framing that Occurred in New Zealand Political Items**

Table showing all the times a particular frame appeared in New Zealand politics reports.

Frame Category	Number of News Items	Percentage
Episodic	55	47.41
General Reportage	37	36.21
Thematic	44	37.93

In concluding this section of the framing results, if you combine the results on both channels, what were the total proportions of episodic, thematic and general reportage frames in the study? Well, as shown in table 5.6 on page seventy, in total during the study, 36.21% of New Zealand political stories were episodically framed, 23.27% thematically framed, while 23.27% were general reportage. If you then add the stories which contained elements of two frames, the total number of stories that were episodically framed increases to 47.41%, thematic framing to 37.93% and, finally, general reportage to 36.21%. With this these results show that episodic framing was the most prominently featured frame category across both channels in the reporting of New Zealand politics, during the study, with nearly half of the stories that featured containing some form of episodic framing. Conversely, the percentages of thematic framing and general reportage were quite similar with roughly a third of all political reports containing some element of thematic framing, and a further third general reportage. But what sort of themes made up the stories that featured under each frame category? And what stood out in the

reporting under each frame during the study? This is something I will now turn to beginning with episodic framing.

## **EPISODIC FRAMING**

The episodic framing that featured in the reporting of New Zealand politics was similar on both channels. And, with this, the analysis found that the content of this type of framing was made up of four distinct sub-frames. These are attack politics/game of politics, simplicity of reporting; especially in terms of language, personalisation, and lastly dramatisation.

### *Attack politics/game of politics*

The first themes that featured were the themes of attack politics, and portraying politics and the political process as being like a game; a commonly used frame in the reporting of politics. These themes involved reporters focusing on things such as the main political players, the political implications of events, as well as emphasising moments where politicians faced-off verbally. There were many instances in the reporting that focused on moments of attack between politicians, whether in the house or during interviews, with reporters often attempting to emphasise these exchanges by making them the centre of their reports. One example of this was a story on *3 News* which was about a verbal exchange in parliament between the Prime Minister, John Key, and New Zealand First leader, Winston Peters, an exchange that took place over whether Key dyed his hair or not.<sup>283</sup> Similarly, a report on the standing down of Labour MP, Carmel Sepuloni, by Labour leader, Andrew Little, was presented instead as a report about Andrew Little and National MP Judith Collins trading verbal blows at each other, after Collins, in a tweet, called Little's decision to stand down Sepuloni as being gutless.<sup>284</sup>

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<sup>283</sup> "*3 News*," February 11, 2015, MediaWorks, Auckland, New Zealand.

<sup>284</sup> "*3 News*," February 26, 2015. "*One News*," February 26, 2015, TVNZ, Auckland, New Zealand.

The theme of attack politics was also strongly evident in the reporting of the announcement by the government to deploy New Zealand troops to Iraq as part of the coalition of states fighting ISIS. The reporting on both channels took the angle of John Key versus the opposition, in particular highlighting Key's angry speech directed at opposition parties over their decision to not support the deployment. Key's speech where he calls on the opposition to 'get some guts' was shown on both channels and was also supported by reporter lines such as 'it is not often you see the prime minister this fired up' and 'Key's anger was directed at a leading critic of his deployment decision, Andrew Little'.<sup>285</sup> In response, Little himself was shown 'fighting' back calling Key 'gutless' and an 'armchair warrior' during short clips, in what made up a series of dramatic reports on the deployment decision.<sup>286</sup> At the same time political reporter Patrick Gower on *3 News* was also quick to frame this as a political battle in the form of a 'head-to-head' leadership contest between Little and Key.<sup>287</sup>

In terms of the game of politics theme, the politicians themselves and their popularity drew most of the attention in the reporting, while there was also a strong focus on the politicisation of events and issues. For starters, both channels ran political polls as headline stories, looking at the popularity of the two main party leaders John Key and Andrew Little, as well as who was ahead support-wise in terms of the parties.<sup>288</sup> In this instance, politics is judged on performance and winners and losers, with polling being a simple way of displaying this to audiences. The sorts of angles taken in the reporting of these two polls included 'Andrew Little is gaining traction for Labour, but who is taking the hit' and 'a shock for John Key in our latest poll'.<sup>289</sup> The *3 News* poll also polled audiences directly, asking whether Little was a match for

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<sup>285</sup> "*3 News*," February 24, 2015. "*One News*," February 24, 2015.

<sup>286</sup> "*3 News*," February 25, 2015. "*One News*," February 25, 2015.

<sup>287</sup> "*3 News*," February 24, 2015.

<sup>288</sup> "*3 News*," February 1, 2015. "*One News*," February 22, 2015.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*

Key in terms of leadership.<sup>290</sup> In addition to this, a lot of the time reports were also constructed to examine the political implications of issues or events. For example, *One News* ran an entire story looking at the political fallout of the Sky City taxpayer-funded convention centre issue, a report which included reporter evaluations such as ‘this is turning into a political nightmare for John Key’ and ‘Key is under pressure and down on his luck’.<sup>291</sup> *3 News* ran with a similar angle on this story, with reporter Patrick Gower proclaiming that ‘Andrew Little had hit the political jackpot’, and that ‘this was a great issue for him to attack the government on’.<sup>292</sup> As for Key, well he was in ‘damage control’ and his ‘political pride was on the line’.<sup>293</sup> Other reports which were similarly framed using the game of politics theme included stories on the Big Gay Out, of which both channels framed as being a political event with lines featuring such as ‘the pink vote is a big thing’ and ‘this event is a must attend for politicians’.<sup>294</sup> And, finally, reports on the Northland by-election, reports that focused largely on the potential candidates, including a particular fascination with whether Winston Peters would run or not. During the coverage of the by-election, the political issues facing Northland were ignored in favour of political game headlines and reporter sound bites such as ‘watch out Northland, the politicians are coming’, ‘the big guns are out’, and ‘for National this means a looming Winston-sized headache’.<sup>295</sup>

### *The simplicity of political reporting*

In his research, Shanto Iyengar described episodic framing as being narrow and de-contextualized.<sup>296</sup> And, when it came to analysing the episodic framing in the political reporting during this study, what was noticeable was the simplicity that emerged in a lot of the reports,

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<sup>290</sup> “3 News,” February 1, 2015.

<sup>291</sup> “3 News,” February 24, 2015. “One News,” February 11, 2015.

<sup>292</sup> “3 News,” February 10-11, 2015.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid.

<sup>294</sup> “3 News,” February 8, 2015. “One News,” February 8, 2015.

<sup>295</sup> “3 News,” February 5, 2015.

<sup>296</sup> Bennett, *News: The Politics of Illusion*, 171.

especially in terms of the language used by journalists, and the sound bites. Sound bites were given a lot of prominence in the reporting, especially if a politician came up with a good one-liner or cliché in an interview; while the choice of journalist phrases attempted to make the reports seem more eye-catching and entertaining in order to try and lure in viewers. Some of the examples used by reporters in the study included ‘utu for David Cunliffe’, ‘the taxpayer has hit the jackpot’, ‘the simple fact is all honeymoons must come to an end’, and ‘kiwi John is ready for Jihadi John’.<sup>297</sup> Notice the simplicity of these phrases in terms of the language used and how descriptive reporters get as a way to better connect with viewers, especially those who might be less interested in politics. On the other hand, in terms of the politicians, Labour leader Andrew Little was used extensively on both channels for sound bites, with his no-nonsense approach to issues coming through strongly in his interviews. Just some of the lines that were used by Little and that appeared as sound bites in reports included ‘time to cut the crap’ and ‘this has been a right royal stuff up’.<sup>298</sup>

How sound bites were used and edited into reports was also noticeable from a stylistic standpoint. Words and phrases were often cut together in succession within the final report for dramatic effect, as well as to place more emphasis on particular words. Examples of this included a report showing Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott saying ‘death cult’ multiple times in a speech when describing ISIS, Andrew Little attacking the government in parliament repeating the line ‘the masters of the universe’, and the British foreign secretary describing New Zealand as being “part of the family”.<sup>299</sup> It was also notable in a lot of the reporting that some of the sound bites contained nothing in the way of significant information, leading one to question why they were used in particular reports at all. This occurred especially in the reporting of National MP Mike Sabin’s resignation, as well as the ISIS deployment where lots

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<sup>297</sup> “3 News,” February 1, 10, 24, 27, 2015.

<sup>298</sup> “3 News,” February 4, 15, 2015.

<sup>299</sup> “3 News,” February 3, 10, 28, 2015. “One News,” February 3, 28, 2015.

of ‘no comments’ and ‘wait and sees’ from politicians were shown. At other times, sound bites showed politicians giving quite silly answers to questions or, at times, even avoiding answering questions altogether, such as the time the prime minister responded to a reporter’s question on his relationship with the Whale Oil blogger by saying and repeating “that is a 2014 story to be quite frank”.<sup>300</sup> In summing up, the extensive use of sound bites in political reporting on New Zealand television is seen in that 624 sound bites in total featured in political reports during this study, an average of about five sound bites per story. This highlights just how much credence news producers and reporters place on ensuring entertaining and dramatic quotes get featured in reports. And, when you also consider that more often than not sound bites are edited into reports without the reporter’s question, the point Iyengar makes about episodic reporting being de-contextualised becomes even more relevant, with political reports often appearing as sound bite driven, context-free information capsules.

### *Personalised Reporting*

The third theme which featured in episodically framed stories, was, how many of the stories had a personalised focus, with politicians often being the focal point of a report ahead of the issue or event being reported on. Some of the stories where this was the case included reports on the New Zealand flag debate, Andrew Little not paying an employee, the Big Gay Out, and the Northland by-election. Firstly, coverage of the Big Gay Out was very personalised at the expense of talking about the event itself or gay issues, with one of the main focuses being the simple fact that politicians were in attendance. The reporter on *3 News* described John Key as being a ‘veteran of the event’, while both channels showed footage of Key being booed on stage.<sup>301</sup> Secondly, reports on Andrew Little not paying an election media employee put the focus purely on him, with a report on *One News* declaring Little to be ‘in the firing line on a

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<sup>300</sup> “*3 News*,” February 3, 2015.

<sup>301</sup> “*3 News*,” February 8, 2015. “*One News*,” February 8, 2015.

number of fronts'.<sup>302</sup> Footage was shown of Little getting uptight with journalists in what was quite a dramatic exchange, with Little shown saying 'please listen to the answers I give, don't make stuff up', as well as repeating the line 'it's been paid today' three times in succession.<sup>303</sup> The New Zealand flag debate was also presented in a highly personalised manner on both channels, with John Key the main focus. The decision to change the flag was made out to be John Key's mission, with *3 News* reporter Patrick Gower declaring the flag change as being Key's 'personal crusade, he wants it to be part of his legacy', while a clip on *One News* showed Key saying 'there's a few alternatives I like', in many respects focusing the debate on to him and what he thinks.<sup>304</sup> Finally, as mentioned previously under the game of politics theme, the reporting on the Northland by-election was predominantly framed as being about the potential candidates such as Shane Jones and Winston Peters. Here, reports placed them at the forefront at the expense of policy issues facing Northland in what was a very personalised portrayal of a significant election for the Northland region.<sup>305</sup>

### *Dramatised Reporting*

The final theme that featured in the episodic framing of New Zealand politics, was the emphasis placed on drama in the reporting, and with this, a particular focus on both the emotional and visual aspects of politics. Examples of the stories where this was most prevalent during the study included the Donghua Liu-National donation story, the Carmel Sepuloni story, and New Zealand's ISIS deployment. Firstly, the reporting of the Donghua Liu donation story was highly dramatised in places, especially in terms of its emphasis on the sub-plot of Key vs Cunliffe. In a report on *3 News*, footage was shown of Labour MP David Cunliffe holding up a picture of Key and Liu together while saying 'John Key had dinner with Donghua Liu and forgot to tell

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<sup>302</sup> "*One News*," February 18, 2015.

<sup>303</sup> "*3 News*," February 17-18, 2015. "*One News*," February 18, 2015.

<sup>304</sup> "*3 News*," February 6, 2015. "*One News*," February 6, 2015.

<sup>305</sup> "*3 News*," February 4-5, 2015. "*One News*," February 4-5, 2015.

us, guilty of gross hypocrisy’; while the opening line of the report ‘utu for David Cunliffe’ let the audience know straight away the dramatic angle of revenge the report was attempting to emphasise after Cunliffe was previously accused of supporting Liu’s application for residency when he was immigration minister.<sup>306</sup> There was also plenty of drama shown in the reporting of Andrew Little not paying a media employee, with both channels showing footage of his angry exchange with journalists, footage which would only have been included to inject a sense of drama and entertainment into what was otherwise quite a standard story.<sup>307</sup> The same could also be said of two other stories included for no other reason other than their dramatic and visually appealing nature. Firstly, the short story showing an exchange in parliament between John Key and Winston Peters over whether Key dyed his hair, a story which, aside from having some good one-liners, served no purpose other than to entertain.<sup>308</sup> And secondly the reporting, on both channels, of a protest at a National party lunch.<sup>309</sup> This story contained no discussion of the grievances of the protesters, or indeed the issues they were protesting over, and instead focused entirely on the dramatic nature of the protest. This dramatisation included showing footage of protesters shouting and physically clashing with police, footage used to shock viewers and keep their attention.<sup>310</sup>

There was also a strong tendency to dramatised the reporting on the government’s decision to deploy troops to Iraq to help in the war against ISIS. The emotion and intensity of the situation came through strongly in the reports during the lead-up to the deployment announcement, and also when the decision to deploy was eventually made. In the initial reporting on a possible deployment, the reporting tended to focus on what was at times quite emotive and dramatic language used by people in describing ISIS. This included the British

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<sup>306</sup> “3 News,” February 24, 2015.

<sup>307</sup> “3 News,” February 17-18, 2015. “One News,” February 18, 2015.

<sup>308</sup> “3 News,” February 11, 2015.

<sup>309</sup> “3 News,” February 15, 2015. “One News,” February 15, 2015.

<sup>310</sup> Ibid.

foreign secretary saying ‘we have to take them on, we have to defeat them’ and Tony Abbott calling ISIS the ‘death cult’, both of which were sourced from press conferences.<sup>311</sup> Once the decision to deploy was made, drama was brought out even more in the reporting through the exchanges that took place in parliament between John Key and the opposition. Examples of this included a strong focus on Key’s get some guts speech, a moment which highlighted strongly the tenseness on display over the decision. Footage was shown of Key shouting things such as ‘I will not stand by when people are being beheaded and thrown off buildings’, footage shown to help dramatise the announcement in order to get the audience to take notice, especially given this was a side to the prime minister rarely ever seen.<sup>312</sup>

Finally, although not directly linked to any particular story, the injection of footage of media scrums into reports helped in many respects project a certain type of visual drama into the reporting. This was seen quite a bit in the reporting of Mike Sabin’s resignation, with MPs shown avoiding questions and, likewise, reporters pressing hard for answers. In one particular scene on *3 News*, National MP Anne Tolley was even shown attempting to avoid a large media scrum in the gallery by shouting ‘do you want me to dance through’ as she waded her way through a group of reporters.<sup>313</sup> It is examples like this that, if captured on camera, are more often than not likely to be edited into the final report, particularly if it means bringing a slightly dramatic or entertaining edge to the reporting.

## **THEMATIC FRAMING**

Unlike the reports that were framed in an episodic manner, reports that were thematically framed focused more on the issue being reported on. These reports explored issues in greater detail and avoided focusing on the more trivial aspects of politics that were often seen in the

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<sup>311</sup> “*3 News*,” February 3, 28, 2015. “*One News*,” February 28, 2015.

<sup>312</sup> “*3 News*,” February 24, 2015. “*One News*,” February 24, 2015.

<sup>313</sup> “*3 News*,” February 11, 2015.

reports that were episodically framed. Instead, thematically framed reports gave greater context to what was being reported, exploring more the background and implications of issues or events. In the process, these reports most importantly also attempted to direct the attention of the audiences to these issues and events and, in the process, what was a greater discussion around the issues themselves from a range of different perspectives. Examples of the types of stories that were framed in a thematic manner during the study included some of the reporting on the New Zealand ISIS deployment, the Auckland fruit fly outbreak, as well as one off reports on housing, homelessness, council taxes, and oil legislation.

Firstly, the reporting on the fruit fly outbreak in Auckland was extremely detailed on both channels and full of significant information for the people living in the affected areas, as well as having a strong focus on the potential consequences of the outbreak for New Zealand. These implications, mainly agricultural and economic, were discussed by various experts and government officials, while there was a comprehensive look into what officials were doing to combat the outbreak, both on the ground and at our borders.<sup>314</sup> Interviews with locals and business owners in the affected suburb of Grey Lynn also gave an insight into the problem itself, and the immediate impact the outbreak was having on people in the area.<sup>315</sup> Both channels also presented important information to the public in the form of public advice notices to advise people on what they should and shouldn't be doing if they lived in the affected zones.<sup>316</sup> Altogether, both *One News* and *3 News* made the outbreak itself the sole focus of their reporting, and avoided being caught up in the political fallout and blame game over its occurrence. They also continued to provide up-to-date information as the story progressed in

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<sup>314</sup> "3 News," February 18-24, 2015. "One News," February 18-24, 2015.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid.

<sup>316</sup> Ibid.

the following two weeks after the outbreak, covering all the bases in what was a thorough treatment of an unexpected serious issue.

The second story which featured strongly within the thematic frame category was New Zealand's ISIS deployment. As mentioned previously, this story did have its fair share of episodic framing on both channels but, at other times, the story contained some very detailed reporting which explored the issues around the deployment both in terms of the logistics of the operation, as well as analysing whether or not New Zealand should send troops. The deployment was broken down into key issues under themes such as safety and role, while the detail around what was being planned for the deployment as well as the implications of going were looked at extensively. Both channels relied heavily on defence analysts and academics for this and did not just simply go to politicians for comment offering predictable pro or anti-deployment opinions. *3 News* did some reporting looking into the risks of going to Iraq and the potential safety implications for the troops, including the possibility Iraqi troops might turn on the New Zealand trainers.<sup>317</sup> In addition, *One News* did a story offering an Iraqi perspective of the deployment from the New Zealand Iraqi community, who themselves gave a fresh perspective to the issue and suggested ways New Zealand could help that did not involve deploying troops.<sup>318</sup> Both channels also covered the issue of whether New Zealand troops would be engaging in any fighting while in Iraq and, in turn, pressed the government hard on whether a status of forces agreement would be put in place to allow for this. In summary, an in-depth look at the key elements of the deployment and a wider discussion of the issues around going to Iraq certainly helped balance out what was at times quite drama-fuelled and politically focused reporting; reporting which had a tendency to draw attention away from what was a very significant political issue involving sending New Zealand troops to a conflict-zone.

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<sup>317</sup> "*3 News*," February 16, 23, 2015.

<sup>318</sup> "*One News*," February 25, 2015.

Aside from the reporting on the ISIS deployment and Auckland fruit fly outbreak, most of the other stories that were thematically framed were one off stories unique to each channel. Firstly, *One News* did a story on the issue of bringing in Auckland Council taxes, a story which looked into the potential options being discussed and the implications of such a change for Auckland citizens.<sup>319</sup> The story outlined a proposal to do this from Local Government New Zealand and went to various people for comment, while on the whole directed the audience to think about the issue as something that could affect them and their lives such as how rubbish could be collected if changes came about.<sup>320</sup> *One News* also ran a story looking into proposed changes to environmental law to accommodate Maui Gas Oil, a story which focused on environmental law, the context behind the change, and the implications of changing it; while a story on police vetting looking into the potential privatization of police services, focusing mainly on the implications of doing so and the groups that would be most affected as a result.<sup>321</sup> Like the reporting of the fruit fly outbreak, the reporting of these stories stayed away from the political influences behind such decisions and instead focused explicitly on the issues at hand, the detail behind the proposed changes and the implications of such changes on the affected area.

Likewise, *3 News* also ran some one-off thematically framed stories, including one on homelessness in Auckland and the council's desire to combat it. The story focused discussion around the issue of homelessness itself and looked to give the audience an insight into the lives of homeless people, as well as what the council was trying to do in response to the issue of homelessness.<sup>322</sup> It did this through interviewing an ex-homeless man who was able to let people know through personal experience the problems homeless people face daily, while

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<sup>319</sup> *"One News,"* February 2, 2015.

<sup>320</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>321</sup> *"One News,"* February 17-18, 2015.

<sup>322</sup> *"3 News,"* February 18, 2015.

interviews with people from the council and an agency looking to combat the problem helped give an official view on what is needed to fight the growth of homelessness in what was a very detailed and insightful report.<sup>323</sup> *3 News* also covered the Auckland housing crisis, with their reporting focusing on the crisis as a whole both in terms of what is being done to combat it, as well as the implications of it on people. The housing crisis was framed as a thematic issue that needed serious attention and was presented less as an issue about political point scoring between various parties. Examples of the sorts of reporting *3 News* did on housing included a report looking at what a Wellington company was doing to combat the issue in the form of building movable affordable housing, while they also ran another story on foreign buyers and property speculation, putting the focus squarely on the consequences of this for the housing market, as well as alerting audiences to potential solutions such as the introduction of a registrar of foreign owners.<sup>324</sup>

Finally, both channels did a very detailed story on the release of the Salvation Army's annual state of the union report, bringing to bear the issues the report discussed and what the organisation deemed to be the successes and failures from the year socially.<sup>325</sup> Just some of the issues from the Salvation Army report, which the reporting directed audience attention onto, included the need for more emergency housing, crime rates, and teenage pregnancy, with a discussion of these key issues being the sole focus ahead of things such as political gamesmanship. So, in summary, when featured on both channels, reports that were framed thematically were very informative, detailed and, most importantly, issues-focused. This came at the expense of focusing on personalities, drama, and the game of politics, themes that featured extensively in episodically framed reports. The reporting into the ISIS deployment and the fruit fly outbreak were the two most common thematically framed stories during the

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<sup>323</sup> Ibid.

<sup>324</sup> "*3 News*," February 4, 25, 2015.

<sup>325</sup> "*3 News*," February 11, 2015. "*One News*," February 11, 2015.

study, while a series of very insightful one off reports featured on both channels. The only problem with this, however, was that there was not enough of this type of reporting, as the quantitative results show, while at other times there were stories which could have been explored more thematically, but instead were touched on only briefly, something which I will now turn to.

### **GENERAL REPORTAGE**

General reportage is the third and final category under investigation in the study, and was frequently seen in the political reporting on both channels, featuring almost as much as thematic framing. This suggests a tendency by both channels to just report information rather than to explore issues thematically in greater detail. A lot of the general reportage stories were less than one minute in duration, with these shorter stories usually appearing as updates on events without any featured report. With this, they often only took the form of either the presenter speaking over footage, or a short clip from a press conference or interview. Some of the reporting on MP Mike Sabin's resignation was like this, as was the reporting on the initial stages of the ISIS deployment story, when nothing had yet been officially announced. The type of reporting which featured as general reportage was usually informational in nature, offering a thin account of an event or issue. This was problematic at times as there were a few important issues raised which could have been reported on in greater detail with a more thematic approach taken. The result of this was that reports often contained minimal discussion and seemed light on information, something that could ultimately have an effect on the public sphere in terms of audiences potentially missing out on becoming more informed about certain issues.

There were examples of reports on both channels that could have been covered in a more thematic way, but instead fell under the category of general reportage. Firstly, on *One News*, there was a story shown announcing the submission of a bill to ban testing of cosmetics on

animals.<sup>326</sup> However, the report only served to alert the audience to the announcement and failed to go into any great detail about the issue of animal cosmetic testing itself.<sup>327</sup> *One News* also ran a story on the issue of homelessness in Auckland but, unlike *3 News*, they did not explore the problem in detail and instead simply re-alerted the audience that homelessness exists, in a report that also included interviews with horrified members of the public and shop owners.<sup>328</sup> This particular report was a very thin account of homelessness and offered no real insight into the issue or what is needed to be done to resolve it. On *3 News*, some of the examples of general reportage stories that featured included a report announcing a rise in the minimum wage, a report which appeared as a brief announcement by the presenter and contained no detail into why the rise was happening or, indeed, a wider discussion of the minimum versus living wage debate.<sup>329</sup> Likewise, in covering the Maui Gas Oil legislation proposal, *3 News* simply proceeded to announce the change was happening, unlike *One News* who had a full report on the situation which also included a closer look at environmental law.<sup>330</sup> Finally, *3 News* ran a story on a union protest for fairer wages which, although it showed footage of the protest and a brief interview with a protester, contained little in the way of a discussion on the issue itself or the grievances of the protesters.<sup>331</sup>

So in summing up, reports that appeared as general reportage often involved issues that deserved a closer look at. What featured instead were often shorter stories that contained nothing much in the way of any significant discussion around the issue being reported on or the presentation of substantial information. The result of this is that issues such as the living wage and animal testing, issues which deserve investigation and time to analyse both in the

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<sup>326</sup> *“One News,”* February 16, 2015.

<sup>327</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>328</sup> *“One News,”* February 18, 2015.

<sup>329</sup> *“3 News,”* February 25, 2015.

<sup>330</sup> *“3 News,”* February 17, 2015.

<sup>331</sup> *“3 News,”* February 14, 2015.

media and the public sphere, were reduced to simple short snippets in the news, before they eventually slipped off the news agenda completely. This is a concerning development, especially given how often drama-infused and personality-based political stories gain more coverage in the reporting of politics than other issues that are perhaps of greater importance to society at large.

## **CONCLUSION**

This chapter has outlined the results of a content and framing analysis undertaken on prime time television news in New Zealand over a one-month sample period. The results showed that television news was made up mostly by the news categories New Zealand politics, world news, human interest, and crime, while in total soft news categories featured more predominantly than hard news, with soft news items making up around 58% of the news compared to roughly 33% of hard news. Time devoted to content was also a significant result, with an average per-bulletin of around twenty-eight minutes. Of this, hard news on average made up nine minutes of a bulletin, in comparison to soft news which made up 16-17 minutes. In terms of the framing analysis undertaken on New Zealand political news, in total, episodic framing featured the most with 48% of political stories containing some form of episodic framing. This came in comparison to thematic framing which featured in 36% of stories, and general reportage in 33%. Overall, the common themes which made up the episodic framing of political stories were attack politics, the game of politics, the simplifying of information and finally the dramatisation and personalisation of content. Thematic framing on the other hand focused audience attention more on the issue being reported on and attempted to give greater context and insight into it in order for discussion to be had in the public sphere. Finally, stories that appeared under general reportage tended to be shorter update stories with no analysis, and not much detail given on the issues being reported on.

## CHAPTER SIX: CHANGE OVER TIME: 2005 AND 2015

To help enhance the validity of the research results, as well as to highlight change over time, some complementary data was collected from February 2005 to investigate whether anything has changed in television news coverage from ten years ago. This short study looked at twenty eight hour-long prime time news bulletins on both *One News* and *3 News* between February 6 and February 19, 2005, using the same mixed method approach applied during the 2015 study. Story categories, hard and soft news, and bulletin makeup were looked at quantitatively, and a quantitative analysis into how New Zealand political stories were framed was also undertaken. The results of this comparative study aim to provide more weight to the main research findings, and help establish a wider context to the processes of deregulation and commercialization in television news in New Zealand.

**Table 6.1: News Categories: 2005 and 2015**

Table showing the proportion (%) of news items featured under each news category in the 2005 sample, and the difference percentage-wise compared with the 2015 study.

News Category	One News		3 News	
	2005	Change (2015)	2005	Change (2015)
Accident/Death	5.74	-0.03	6.37	0.90
Business/Finance	3.83	-1.09	2.94	-0.21
Celebrity	5.74	-3.91	5.88	-4.52
Crime	12.44	-3.08	9.80	-0.48
Entertainment	2.39	1.03	2.94	1.83
Health/Science	3.83	-1.14	1.96	0.31
Human Interest	7.66	3.30	10.87	-0.10
Local Issue	8.61	-4.73	4.41	0.14
NZ Politics	11.00	0.87	9.80	4.75
NZ Society	3.83	2.56	3.92	-0.06
Other	7.66	-1.27	9.80	-2.98
Sport	0.48	6.83	0.00	6.14
Weather/Disaster	1.44	1.76	4.90	-1.26
World News	25.36	-1.16	26.47	-4.43

Firstly, in terms of story categories, looking at the comparisons between the 2005 and 2015 studies that are outlined above in table 6.1, proportionately, there are some very interesting trends in terms of which categories have increased and which have declined. Using one percent

as the maximum level required to judge whether a category has changed, in terms of hard news, only one category was shown to have increased from the 2005 study and that category was New Zealand politics on *3 News*, which increased by 4.75%. At the same time, all other hard news categories on both channels were shown to have either not changed, or declined in comparison to the proportions seen in the 2005 study. These categories are business/finance, health/science, local issues, world news and also, in the case of *One News*, New Zealand politics. In comparison, aside from crime and celebrity on *One News*, as well as celebrity and weather/disaster on *3 News*, all soft news categories were shown to have proportionally increased from the 2005 study, or stayed at the same 2005 level across both channels. This trend is also enhanced by the fact that crime on *One News* dropped by only 3.08%, so not a large enough decrease from 2005 to be too consequential. Altogether, if you combine both channels, seven out of sixteen soft news categories witnessed increases from 2005, while a further five had not moved substantially from the proportions seen in the 2005 study. In comparison only one out of ten hard news categories had increased from 2005, while in turn, five had declined, and a further four had not changed. So in summary, this suggests that comparatively, between studies, the proportion of hard news stories seen in the news has either declined or remained at similar levels proportionally as ten years ago while, at the same time, soft news stories for the most part have seen their proportion of news items increase.

**Table 6.2: Hard and Soft News: 2005 and 2015**

Table comparing the proportion (%) of hard and soft news content in the 2005 and 2015 studies.

Year	One News		3 News		Both	
	2005	2015	2005	2015	2005	2015
Hard News	38.28	32.65	29.90	34.77	34.14	33.71
Soft News	51.20	59.59	57.35	56.59	54.24	58.09

This result is amplified further if you look at the comparative proportion of hard and soft news content between studies. As shown in table 6.2, on *One News*, the proportion of hard news content in the 2005 study was 38.28%, but decreased by 5.63% to be 32.65% in 2015. In

comparison, *3 News* has actually seen its proportion of hard news content increase, moving from an extremely low 29.90% in 2005 to 34.77% in 2015, something that could potentially be put down to there being more New Zealand political stories on *3 News* in the 2015 study. Despite this, a slight increase in hard news content on *3 News* has not been matched by a downturn in softer content, with the proportion of soft news content on *3 News* in the 2015 study remaining at a similar level to the 2005 study, which was already at a very high 57.35%. Along with this, with the removal of the charter, *One News* has seen its level of soft news content increase substantially by 8.39%. In the 2005 study, it was at a steady level of 51.20% but, as highlighted in the 2015 study, soft news now makes up nearly 60%, on average, of the total news content on *One News*, a significant increase from 2005. So in summary, these results signify just how much the amount of soft news content during prime time has increased by or, in the case of *3 News*, remained at a similar level to ten years ago. In comparison hard news has either declined or not increased substantially enough to match the increase in soft news content. This ultimately adds up to there being a wide disparity between hard and soft news content, with a 22-27% gap existing between the two.

**Table 6.3: News Bulletin Breakdown: 2005 and 2015.**

Table comparing the average makeup of prime-time news bulletins in minutes in the 2005 and 2015 studies.

Year	One News		3 News	
	2005	2015	2005	2015
Add breaks	15.83	15.12	15.97	15.73
Hard News	10.88	9.12	7.81	9.48
Soft News	14.56	16.65	14.98	15.43
Sports Bulletin	10.38	9.91	12.53	10.22
Weather	4.15	3.87	2.92	3.36
News Content	28.43	27.94	26.12	27.27

In terms of the makeup of bulletins, things have not changed that much from the results seen in the 2005 study, reinforcing the idea that prime-time news bulletins have become quite entrenched in terms of their format. As shown in table 6.3, news content on average in the 2005 study was between 26-28 minutes, in comparison to being 27-28 minutes in 2015. So as you

can see, the results from the two studies are quite similar with no substantial differences. As for the individual components of the news, there have been slight movements, but nothing too substantial. Advertising has remained steady at around fifteen to sixteen minutes on average, weather bulletins have remained similar on both channels, four minutes on *One News* and three minutes on *3 News*, while sport has stayed at around the ten minute mark on *One News* and only slightly declined on *3 News*, possibly due to the removal of their weekend super sport bulletin.

The more sizable differences can be seen in terms of the amount of time spent on hard and soft news content. Since the charter's removal at *TVNZ*, the results suggest the amount of time spent on hard news has declined on *One News*, moving from around eleven minutes in the 2005 study to just above nine; a decrease of around two minutes. Alternatively, the average time spent on soft news on *One News* has increased by two minutes from 2005, moving from around fourteen minutes to over sixteen minutes per-bulletin in 2015. This suggests that on *One News* the amount of time spent on hard news is in decline while conversely the amount of time spent on soft news continues to grow. *3 News* on the other hand, between studies, has seen the amount of time it devotes per-bulletin to hard news increase by around two minutes. Again, this could be put down to there being more New Zealand political stories on *3 News* in 2015 than there were in 2005. However, at the same time, the amount of time spent on soft news per-bulletin on *3 News* has not changed substantially from the proportion seen in the 2005 study, remaining at around the fifteen minute mark, meaning that any increase in time spent on hard news content has not been matched by a downturn in time spent on softer news content.

**Table 6.4: Change over time: News Content vs Non News Content on One News<sup>332</sup>**

Table showing changes over time in news content and non-news content on One News between 1985 and 2015.

	1985		1995		2005		2015	
	Time	Percent	Time	Percent	Time	Percent	Time	Percent
News	22.07	59.04	26.36	47.70	28.43	47.38	27.94	46.57
Other	15.32	39.98	28.50	51.57	31.57	52.62	33.06	53.43
Length	37.38		55.26		60.00		60.00	

Wider changes in bulletin makeup can be seen if you compare the 2005-2015 period with changes seen pre and post-deregulation. Dan Cook's Ph.D. thesis "Diet News" which explored the impact of deregulation on the content of *One News*, obtained data measuring both news content and non-news content on *One News* between 1984 and 1996. As you can see in table 6.4, between 1985 and 2015, a period where the broadcasting sector underwent deregulation, the amount of news content has dropped between studies by 12.47%. In the 1985 study, news content made up 59.04% of an average bulletin, while in 2015 that has reduced to less than 50%.<sup>333</sup> In comparison, non-news content, or what I call in the table other, meaning things such as ads, sport and weather has increased by 10.94% since Cook's 1985 study, moving from less than 40%, to an average of 53.43% on *One News*.<sup>334</sup> Table 6.4 also shows that over a twenty-year period of deregulation between 1995 and 2015, the breakdown of news and non-news has remained steady at almost a fifty-fifty split, with there being no substantial changes in the proportion of news and non-news content since deregulation was enforced on the public broadcaster. In summary, these changes suggest that over time deregulation and commercialisation have had an influence on there being less time devoted to news content during prime time news bulletins and more time devoted to sport, weather, updates and advertising.

<sup>332</sup> Cook, "Diet-News," 108-109.

<sup>333</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>334</sup> *Ibid.*

**Table 6.5: Where News Content Features in the Bulletin**

Table showing the proportion (%) of news content that appeared before the first ad break compared with the rest of the bulletin in the 2005 and 2015 studies.

	One News		3 News	
	2005	2015	2005	2015
Headlines	43.54	49.77	46.08	45.23
Rest of Bulletin	56.46	50.23	53.92	54.77

Looking at the proportion of news content that appears at the top of news bulletins in comparison with the rest of bulletins, some interesting patterns emerged between the 2005 and 2015 studies. Firstly, as shown above in table 6.5, on *One News* during the 2005 study, the results suggest that news bulletins were less heavily concentrated at the start, with 43.54% of content appearing before the first ad break on average in the sample. However, this has since risen to 49.77% in 2015, suggesting that news bulletins are becoming more top heavy, with nearly half of the content appearing before the first ad break. *3 News* in comparison has seen less change in this regard, decreasing slightly from the 2005 result of 46.08% to 45.23% in 2015. This shows that, like *One News*, bulletins on *3 News* are still quite concentrated at the top of the hour.

**Table 6.6: News Categories Appearing Before the First Ad Break: 2005 and 2015**

Table showing the proportion (%) of news categories that appeared before the first ad break in the 2005 and 2015 studies.

Category	One News		3 News	
	2005	2015	2005	2015
Accident/Death	8.79	10.14	10.63	12.06
Business/Finance	0.00	2.30	0.00	2.01
Celebrity	9.89	0.92	8.51	1.06
Crime	12.09	14.75	9.57	11.06
Entertainment	1.10	1.84	0.00	2.51
Health/Science	2.20	1.38	2.13	1.51
Human Interest	4.40	4.15	4.26	2.51
Local Issue	6.59	4.61	1.06	3.52
NZ Politics	19.78	20.28	17.02	23.62
NZ Society	3.30	5.07	3.19	2.51
Other	6.59	7.83	12.77	6.53
Sport	1.10	9.68	0.00	11.56
Weather/Disaster	3.30	5.07	6.38	5.03
World News	20.88	11.98	24.47	14.57

In terms of individual news categories and what makes up headline news, interestingly enough as table 6.6 highlights on the previous page, four of the top five news categories that featured before the first ad break were the same in both the 2005 and 2015 studies. These were world news, New Zealand politics, crime and accident/death. On *One News* these four categories made up 61.54% of stories that appeared before the first ad break in the 2005 study, declining slightly to 57.15% in 2015. In comparison, on *3 News*, the proportions were quite similar with the same four categories making up 61.69% of the headlines in 2005 and 61.31% in 2015, so virtually no change at all between the studies. This suggests that prime-time news in 2015 is still quite similar headline-wise to ten years ago, with a select few news categories appearing more often than other categories at the top of bulletins.

**Table 6.7: Proportion of Hard and Soft News Before the First Ad Break: 2005 and 2015**

Table showing the proportion (%) of hard and soft news that appeared before the first ad break in the 2005 and 2015 studies.

	One News		3 News	
	2005	2015	2005	2015
Hard News	38.46	33.94	28.57	37.69
Soft News	53.85	56.42	61.54	55.28

As for the proportion of hard and soft news that features at the top of bulletins, as seen in table 6.7, on *One News* the amount of hard news that featured at the start of bulletins in the 2015 study has dropped since the 2005 study, decreasing from 38.46% to just above 33% in 2015. In turn the amount of soft news content featuring at the top of bulletins has increased from an already high 53.85% in 2005 to 56.42% in 2015. In terms of *3 News*, the results are quite interesting, with the amount of hard news before the first ad break increasing from a very low 28.37% in the 2005 study to 37.69% in 2015. Again, this change is in line with the fact that more New Zealand political stories featured in the 2015 study on *3 News*. In comparison, soft news during this part of the bulletin on *3 News* has declined since the 2005 study when it was over 61%, to 55.28% in 2015. This is still, however, quite a substantial amount and is nearly

18% more than the level of hard news seen before the first ad break. So in summary, altogether these comparative results suggest that over a ten-year period, soft news content continues to appear more at the start of news bulletins in prime-time than hard news content, despite the differences between the 2005 and 2015 studies being not overly substantial. The results show that over 50% of stories that appear during this section of the news on average across both channels are soft news stories, while in comparison roughly only 30-37% are hard news stories. This again adds to the idea that in recent years news bulletins have become quite formulaic in their appearance and structure, while also suggesting that news producers are favouring more shock-oriented and drama-filled news items as headline stories ahead of harder news stories.

**Table 6.8: Framing Results Comparison: 2005 and 2015**

Table showing the proportion (%) of frames that featured in the reporting of New Zealand politics in the 2005 and 2015 studies.

Frames	One News		3 News		Total	
	2005	2015	2005	2015	2005	2015
Episodic	21.74	32.69	35.00	39.06	27.91	36.21
E + GR	8.70	1.92	0.00	0.00	4.65	4.31
E + T	21.74	7.69	35.00	7.81	27.91	7.76
General	26.09	25.00	10.00	20.31	18.60	23.28
Thematic	21.74	26.92	20.00	21.87	20.93	23.28

The final comparison between the 2005 and 2015 studies looks at how New Zealand political news was framed. Firstly, an interesting point to make about the framing results from the 2005 study is how evenly frames were applied across stories on *One News* compared to in 2015 where, on the same channel, episodic framing featured more prominently. As shown in table 6.8, in 2005 episodic and thematic framing each featured in 21.74% of political reports, while the same proportion featured a combination of episodic and thematic framing. Interestingly enough however, in the same study, general reportage was the most featured frame at 26.09%, although it is important to remember that TVNZ still had a charter in place. In comparison, the 2015 study was conducted in a post-charter environment at TVNZ and, compared to the 2005 study, episodic framing has increased dramatically by over ten percent to the point that in 2015

almost a third of political reports were episodically framed. At the same time, thematic framing has only slightly increased, while the combination of episodic and thematic frames has decreased by around two thirds. On *3 News*, the proportion of episodic framing seen in the two studies remained largely the same, with only a slight increase of 4.06% occurring. In addition to this, the amount of thematic framing in political reports on *3 News* has also not increased substantially from the 2005 study, remaining at around the 20-21% mark.

The significant changes that did take place between studies on *3 News* came within general reportage, as well as the amount of stories that contained a combination of episodic and thematic framing. Compared with the 2005 study, in 2015 general reportage increased by around 50%, while the amount of stories that featured a combination of episodic and thematic framing decreased by over 75%. In line with these changes, episodic framing has been consolidated as the preferred way of reporting politics on *3 News* with nearly 40% of stories in the 2015 study framed episodically. So, in summary, the changes that have taken place between these two studies reinforce a move towards more dramatic and entertaining political reporting on both channels. This follows the removal of the charter on *One News*, and with *3 News* now covering more political news, a higher proportion of episodic framing keeps in line with the fact that they are part of a commercial organisation and are, therefore, required to produce content that will rate. The fact thematic framing levels have not changed very much at all between these two studies, while general reportage continues to match the amount of thematic content seen, also hints at the impact of cost-cutting in news rooms and how budgeting constraints are influencing just how in-depth reporters are able to go with their political stories. In considering these results, the question then turns to what this means for the public sphere in New Zealand? And, in general terms, where does this place the future of television news in terms of its relationship with democracy and playing out its 4<sup>th</sup> estate role? It is these questions which the following chapter will explore in more detail.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN: TELEVISION NEWS AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE IN NEW ZEALAND: CURRENT PREDICAMENTS**

The results of the research confirm what appears to be the dominance of soft news content on New Zealand's two main news channels. In the study, soft news items made up 58% of the news items that appeared, while in comparison, hard news items made up only 34%. Along with this, more time was given to soft news, on average taking up around fifteen to seventeen minutes per-bulletin, compared with just nine minutes of hard news. Soft news also featured more at the start of bulletins, making up 55-56% of all news items shown before the first ad break in the study. In addition, the results also highlighted how little news content there is in the news with, on average, around only twenty-seven to twenty-eight minutes of a bulletin devoted to news content. As for how political news is framed, the tendency on both channels during the study was to cover politics in an episodic manner instead of a thematic manner, focusing on things such as attack politics and the game of politics, while looking for dramatic and personal angles to present political news to audiences. At the same time, the amount of thematic framing that occurred was matched by the amount of general reportage, meaning many political stories were touched on only briefly, and without much detail.

But what do these results mean for the relationship between television news and the public sphere? This chapter will discuss the results of the research more and explore some of the predicaments the relationship between news and the public sphere could face as a result of these findings. With this, it will analyse five effects that a high proportion of soft news and a propensity to frame politics episodically could be having on the public sphere in New Zealand. These include the effect of political news becoming like entertainment; the question around whether in fact audiences are getting value out of watching television news; how a low-quality information environment could emerge in the public sphere because of a softening of news on television; how the results suggest that news organisations are treating audiences more as

consumers; and, finally, how political apathy and de-politicisation could become a negative side-effect of framing political news episodically.

### **POLITICAL NEWS AS INFOTAINMENT**

Episodic framing appeared in 48% of political stories in the news during the study, ahead of both thematic framing and general reportage which appeared only in 36% and 33% of stories respectively. With this tendency to frame political news episodically and emphasise themes such as attack politics and the dramatic and personal aspects of politics, news reporters are being driven by the commercial environment they operate within, and with this the importance of attracting audience numbers to prime time news. This is made clear in both TVNZ and MediaWorks programming strategies, where they outline the need to maximise commercial growth ahead of all else.<sup>335</sup> Along with this, when the TVNZ Charter was removed in 2011, the broadcasting minister Jonathan Coleman said this would ultimately allow the state-owned broadcaster to more effectively pursue its commercial objectives.<sup>336</sup> The influence of commercialism is further seen in that over the last ten years, as suggested by the results in the previous chapter, soft news content has risen at the expense of hard news, the amount of time devoted to news content is in decline, while the proportion of episodic framing and indeed general reportage has grown,. So instead of exploring political news from a thematic or analytic perspective through episodic framing, politics is being presented more as a spectacle, with the visual narrative of the story becoming more important.<sup>337</sup>

Because of this audiences are being positioned more as spectators by news organisations, with reporters inviting people to tune into the news each night to get their daily dose of political drama, or ‘infotainment’. However, one of the potential effects of episodic framing, in

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<sup>335</sup> “About TVNZ.” “MediaWorks TV.”

<sup>336</sup> “TVNZ Charter Passes into History.”

<sup>337</sup> Bennett, *News: The Politics of Illusion*, 169. Thussu, *News as Entertainment*, 8.

particular, is that audiences might begin to perceive politics as being like what is shown in episodically framed stories and that spectacles such as politicians verbally attacking each other are more important, or at least more prevalent than policy debate and discussion. This in itself comes back to the idea of how framing places an emphasis in salience on certain aspects of a story and, in the process as Entman says in the literature, offers up a causal interpretation and treatment recommendation of the information to the audience.<sup>338</sup> Yet, because of this type of framing, the political process, you could argue, is becoming more separated from the average person, who ends up interpreting politics as it is presented to them in the form of an enclosed world of political drama, with politicians playing off against each other for political gain. The problem associated with this is that the public are not personally involved in, nor connected to these aspects of the political world and, in turn, the types of political conflict and drama seen in a lot of episodic reporting has little relevance to most people in terms of how political issues affect their lives directly. With this news channels, instead of contributing to the democratic process and allowing for deliberation to occur on political issues by framing politics this way, you could argue they are in fact hindering democracy and in the process helping to distance the public from their elected representatives.

In connection to this, framing politics episodically ignores the possibilities that can occur politically in terms of focusing on how politicians, as well as the political process itself can engage with the public and work constructively to achieve results on policy issues. If TVNZ and MediaWorks were shown to be committed to democracy, then you would think they would focus more in their political reporting on what is being done in response to certain issues, what policies are being proposed, and how those policies could be implemented. The problem, however, is that episodic framing, as well as having a high proportion of general reportage stories which in turn only provide thin accounts of political issues, do not offer much scope to

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<sup>338</sup> de Vreese, "News Framing," 53. Nelson, "Toward a Psychology," 222.

look closely at issues and the context surrounding them. Instead, the sort of content which features in episodically framed reporting, as the results have highlighted, contain very familiar narratives revolving around the themes of attack politics and the game of politics that are continuously played out in the public arena through the media. As a result, what this means is that, with a stronger focus on the more trivial or lighter matters of politics, real-life issues are pushed to one side in favour of content that concentrates more on the dramatic and personal aspects of politics and the political process.

The literature talks about news media being a gatekeeper, and having a role to play in opening up and closing off ideas to the public sphere through its coverage.<sup>339</sup> However when the attention of the news media is being deflected away from policy discussion on political issues towards more personality-based and dramatic themes, the consequences for the public sphere could be quite significant in the form of a distortion of information, as well as increasing the possibility that people who watch television news will be left unaware of key social and political issues. With this, a question then emerges as to how audiences should define and view television news. Should they simply interpret television news as being another form of entertainment? Or do audiences want more out of television news in terms of in-depth reporting that looks at political and social issues thematically, and that engages them more as citizens in a democracy? The point being, how can you expect people to treat politics seriously within a democratic setting if it is heavily dramatized and personalized on television, and not always presented in a serious manner to audiences? Given how traditional broadcasting platforms, such as television, still deliver the largest audiences in New Zealand media, with more people tuning into broadcasting and for longer periods than alternative media forms, as well as the central role the six o'clock news still plays in terms of setting the agenda for the public sphere,

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<sup>339</sup> Bennett, *News: The Politics of Illusion*, 26.

this is a debate that is certainly worth having moving forward.<sup>340</sup> What relationship do people want news to have with democracy? And, what do audiences want out of the news?

### **DO AUDIENCES GET VALUE OUT OF WATCHING TELEVISION NEWS?**

The results of the research also raise the issue as to whether prime time television news in New Zealand is worth watching for people who want to remain informed and engaged politically. Firstly, as the results showed, a lot of the political stories that were framed episodically tended to lack significant political information and instead focused more on simple sound bites and phrases which dominated a lot of the reporting. Through the coverage, audiences were constantly being presented with clichéd remarks and one-liners from both politicians and reporters that had no basis to them other than their capacity to entertain, amuse or shock audiences. The added appearance of clips showing politicians avoiding answering questions and at times even avoiding being interviewed altogether also brought less value to the coverage in terms of trying to keep audiences informed or at least alert to the subject of the report. Along with this sort of simplicity in episodically framed stories, a lack of analysis was very evident in general reportage stories, stories which, for the most part, did not reveal much information in terms of contextualizing or analysing the featured event or issue in great detail. Instead, these types of reports, which in the study included reports on homelessness and the minimum wage, consisted of small glimpses into the topic, presenting the audience with thin accounts of the overall context of the situation. This then raises the question as to the actual usefulness of television news in terms of whether television itself as a medium remains a viable option for people wanting to become well informed and alert to political and social issues; especially if the coverage is not giving them the information they need to stay on top of issues.

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<sup>340</sup> "Where are the Audiences?"

Given the amount of human interest and world news stories that appeared in the study, as well as the frequency of episodic framing seen in the coverage of politics, one could also query the actual significance, democratically-speaking, of a lot of the stories that are being shown in the news. It is questionable whether television news is becoming made up of mere events and stories devoid of any meaning, with many news items appearing almost as passing parades of information, something Bennett put down to being the failure of news organisations to explain or contextualize the stories they cover.<sup>341</sup> In terms of political reporting, this idea could be applied in particular to the sub-frames that emerged in the episodic framing of politics such as attack politics and the game of politics. These themes pop up time after time in political reports and in the process become very familiar to audiences. But, ultimately, an argument could be made that they do not lend themselves well to the wider discussion of political and social issues in the public sphere, as the scope of these reports is focused on things such as John Key and Winston Peters arguing over whether Key dyes his hair, and Andrew Little getting confrontational with journalists.

The idea of television news showing stories with little meaning can also be seen in the number of one-off stories that feature in the news, especially under categories such as human interest. This category, as seen in the study, contains many trivial and light-hearted stories about things such as animals, or people making fools of themselves, where it can be very easy to question the significance of such stories in relation to New Zealand society and indeed democracy. With this the case, both journalists and audiences should continue to question the content that appears in the news and its purpose in relation to the public sphere. Why is this story news? What is its relevance to audiences? And, why should people care about it? Not asking such questions, as a result, could potentially mean that more soft stories appear in the news ahead of harder news stories, while at the same time increasing the likelihood that people

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<sup>341</sup> Bennett, *News: The Politics of Illusion*, 50. Davis, *Flat Earth News*, 105.

will continue to accept the content that is shown to them without wanting to question further its significance, value and wider meaning to themselves and society.

The results also highlighted substantially just how much of an hour-long news bulletin contains news content. On average, in the study, news content only made up around twenty-eight minutes of an hour bulletin, leaving the rest of the bulletin to be devoted to advertising, sport, weather and updates. Added to this is the fact that of the news content that did feature, on average only nine minutes was devoted to hard news stories. What this means then, is that people tuning in for an hour long bulletin are receiving, on average, around half an hour of news content, of which the majority is soft news. Again this leads to questions around how valuable this is from a democratic perspective and whether television news is doing an adequate enough job in keeping people informed. Especially as the type of content that is more likely to engage people democratically through discussing political and local issues in more-depth made up only a tiny fraction of the overall news content seen each night in the study. With this, there is also the fact that, on average per-bulletin during the study, nearly 50% of the news items seen on each channel appeared before the first ad break. This meant that of the sixteen or so news items that appeared each night, roughly seven to eight of these stories appeared in the first quarter of the bulletin, leaving around 45 minutes where only eight news items were shown. Considering this, it means that by the time of the first ad break, audiences have already seen near on fifty percent of the news for that evening.

Although prime time news in New Zealand might be advertised as being an hour, in reality the results suggest that it is questionable as to whether audiences are really receiving an hour of news each night. With this, it is also important to point out how entrenched this has become over recent years with there having been not much change in terms of the amount of time devoted to news and non-news content. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Cook's study of *One News* showed that in 1985 news content on *One News* made up on average 59% of the

bulletin.<sup>342</sup> That has since decreased by 12% between studies over a thirty-year period, while during the same time the amount of non-news content has increased by 13%. This suggests that during a period of deregulation in broadcasting, audiences are receiving less news content than they did before. And, as a result, one might ask whether the lack of news content featured during prime time news means people are being enticed more easily to switch channels, particularly as the bulletin begins to labour throughout the hour with more ad breaks, shorter stories, and less news. News organisations have operated under the belief that soft news content helps attract and hold the attention of viewers. However, with an average of around fifteen to seventeen minutes of soft news per-bulletin which is dispersed throughout the hour, and twenty-eight minutes of news content in total per-bulletin, the question could be asked as to whether sixty minutes is too long for a news bulletin within the multi-platform media environment that exists today. Considering this, is it then possible that news firms are expecting too much from people to watch news for an hour each night in an environment where competition for people's limited attention spans is already significant enough.

### **A LOW-QUALITY INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT EMERGES IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE**

The previous arguments about the democratic value of television news leads on to this next point which concerns whether, due to the amount of soft news on television as well as the high proportion of episodic framing as a result, are people being left uninformed or at least under-informed politically? In the literature, Habermas argued that the enemy of rational-critical debate in the public sphere is news as entertainment, while Hackett stated that a democratic deficit is emerging in society as a result of people starving on low-quality information diets because of the amount of soft content in the news.<sup>343</sup> And, when you consider the results of the

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<sup>342</sup> Cook, *Diet News*, 108-109.

<sup>343</sup> Hackett, "Is There a Democratic Deficit," 85. Hodkinson, *Media, Culture and Society*, 181. Ornebring, "A Necessary Profession," 71. Uscinski, *The People's News*, 12.

research, a question that emerges is whether television news is helping encourage democratic deliberation in the public sphere, or in fact hindering it. A problem that might emerge because of the amount of soft news content and episodic framing of politics in the news, is that the nature of discussion in the public sphere will become more directed towards this entertaining and lighter content as that is what is predominantly shown. As a consequence people will potentially become less aware of the critical details of socio-political issues or events that are happening in New Zealand, as these are either not reported on, given the nature of the condensed news cycle, or are under-reported due to the propensity to frame politics episodically and rely more on general reportage.<sup>344</sup> What can happen then, as indeed Hodkinson and others mention in the literature, is that with a focus on trivia, sensationalism and drama in the reporting of politics, people become distracted from what is happening politically and socially, while any debate that does take place in the public sphere is more likely to be centred around emotional responses to personalized and dramatized events, and not a critical interpretation of enduring societal problems.<sup>345</sup>

As a result, in the process, this could end up influencing how the public perceive the world of politics, with the constant exposure to the themes seen in the episodic framing of politics leading many people to believe that this is actually what happens and indeed represents the political news of the day. As a result audiences then demand nothing more out of the news they are watching, increasing the likelihood that discussion in the public sphere will become softened. This comes back to the influence framing can have on audiences, especially in terms of how the choice of a particular frame can help to either widen or narrow the range of information available to audiences, and henceforth affect what ultimately appears as public discourse.<sup>346</sup> This idea becomes even more prevalent because of the fact that most people's

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<sup>344</sup> Jackson, "News as a Contested," 156.

<sup>345</sup> Hodkinson, *Media, Culture and Society*, 181.

<sup>346</sup> Callaghan, "Assessing the Democratic Debate," 203. Nelson, "Toward a Psychology," 237.

understanding of politics is mediated rather than direct, meaning their political knowledge and awareness is more likely to be shaped and influenced by the selection and presentation of information in the news.<sup>347</sup> Many significant issues are not regularly discussed in the public sphere because the news media either do not cover them in a thematic way, or on a regular basis. This was seen during the study where many thematically framed political stories on things such as homelessness and introducing council taxes were one off reports, with no follow up stories looking at policy progress, or what was being done to address these issues further. Considering this, it therefore becomes less likely that in-depth discussion can take place in the public sphere on those issues if the only glimpse audiences have of them are one off reports, or short updates.

This also brings up the possibility that public pressure is less likely to be placed on the government to combat societal issues such as poverty, inequality or climate change, with television news organisations not relaying enough information on these issues to the public on a regular basis as a result of framing politics episodically and through general reportage. This is a case of television news organisations in pursuit of commercial gains, not realizing just how much impact they can play in the democratic process when it comes to keeping people aware of societal issues, as well as allowing the public to have the opportunity to hold the government to account. Broadcasters, such as TVNZ, could play more of a hands-on role in helping influence political and social change if it covered politics more in a thematic way instead of relying on episodic framing and general reportage because it is deemed to be more entertaining, or is cheaper to produce. A thorough thematic and analytical presentation of political issues on television could potentially lead to there being more debate and discussion in the public sphere on issues of shared concern, and henceforth also ensure that the government would more likely be held to account on issues, something you could argue is less likely to happen when the media

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<sup>347</sup> Ibid., 222.

reports in an episodic manner. This should especially be the case in between election cycles, a time that is an opportune period to bring important issues to light and, in the process, encourage deliberation to take place in the public sphere in the absence of the distraction and drama of an election campaign. Without this, what other purpose is there for television news democratically speaking in terms of news honouring its relationship with democracy and the public at large. And, if things continue in this way, is it simply a case that the public sphere and the media-political relationship will remain one that is largely focused on political drama, trivia and the entertaining side of politics.

### **NEWS AUDIENCES TREATED AS CONSUMERS NOT CITIZENS**

As mentioned previously, the news media have a highly influential role as being a gatekeeper in society, as for the most part popular understandings of the political world in particular are shaped by the presentation of information in the news.<sup>348</sup> The choice of frames used to convey political information influences how audiences will interpret what they see, and in many ways also alerts them to how they should be thinking about things that appear in the news.<sup>349</sup> However, with television bulletins becoming more dominated by soft news content, as the results suggest, and politics being episodically framed, it is questionable then whether television news organisations in New Zealand are seeing news audiences as citizens in a democracy. In the literature, Rosen argued how public journalism should be about challenging people to interact with each other as concerned citizens, rather than as consumers or bystanders, while Wayne says the news media are central to the development of political culture.<sup>350</sup> However, as the results suggest, when broadcasters are framing politics episodically they are more likely to be contributing to the development of a political culture where politics is seen

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<sup>348</sup> Dahlgren, *Media and Political Engagement*, 81. Nelson, "Toward a Psychology," 222. Patterson, "Informing the Public," 192. Street, *Mass Media*, 233.

<sup>349</sup> Nelson, "Toward a Psychology," 237.

<sup>350</sup> Johnson-Cartree, *News Narratives*, 87. Wayne, *Television News*, 76.

as being a spectator sport, through the simple fact that such coverage is focused predominantly on attack politics and the game of politics. What suffers, as a result, is the opportunity to develop and enhance a critical deliberative culture where political issues are analysed, debated and discussed in the news media and, in turn, through the public sphere. Instead, because of the prominence of a style of reporting that focuses on politics as being a form of entertainment, coverage which contains little basis for critical thought, it becomes less likely that audiences will end up discussing policy or political issues in the public sphere as a result of watching television news. This is because, when they do tune into the news, they are not encouraged to interpret what they see in a critical manner and are instead positioned more as onlookers to the visual infotainment they encounter. This type of viewer-medium relationship where content is infotainment and the viewer is there to be entertained is not one that caters for critical deliberation, nor as Atkinson says is it suitable for critical confrontations with reality.<sup>351</sup>

In line with this idea, Habermas argued that news as spectacle encourages passivity in audiences who end up watching for pleasure.<sup>352</sup> And, when you consider the results, this point gains significantly more credence not only in terms of how audiences are likely to interpret the news they are watching, but also how news organisations themselves view audiences. The entertaining and drama-fuelled nature of political reporting within episodic framing draws people in to watch, but not to watch with an open and critical mind, more so to be entertained and to keep them from switching channels. This point comes back to the commercial reality faced by news broadcasters in New Zealand and the importance of ratings. As the results highlighted, during a period of deregulation and commercialisation over ten years, between the 2005 and 2015 studies, the amount of hard news content had decreased, while alternatively, soft news content had increased. At the same time, episodic framing had increased at the

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<sup>351</sup> Atkinson, "Television," 143.

<sup>352</sup> Cushion, *The Democratic Value of News*, 108.

expense of thematic framing. Again this emphasises that when people tune in to watch prime time news, news organisations are not wanting them to tune in as citizens to gain a critical insight of politics, but instead for them to take in the light-hearted and softer material as media consumers. This also links back to the point Hamilton makes in that what news organisations do with people's attention when they have it has little to do with catering for political involvement or, might I add, serving the public sphere.<sup>353</sup> If the television news media in New Zealand were more dedicated to treating audiences as citizens, it would be evident through framing politics more from a thematic perspective, as well as being committed to giving more time to hard news stories. In doing so, this would show that they acknowledge the important role they play in informing the public of politics issues and, in turn, providing a critical insight into New Zealand's political and social world. However, as the results indicate, it remains questionable whether this is happening through the reporting of politics on television, with the drama and spectacle of politics dominating at the expense of issue-exploration and debate.

### **POLITICAL APATHY AND CYNICISM IN SOCIETY**

One final argument that could be levelled at television news in New Zealand, based on the results of this research, is whether framing politics episodically actually has an impact in leading people to turn off politics because of the narratives which this style of political reporting tends to follow. The abundance of themes played out in episodically framed news such as attack politics or the game of politics, you could argue, helps contribute to the spread of political apathy, political cynicism and feelings of resignation towards politicians and the political process, with people becoming less inclined to engage with politics because of perceptions developed through this type of political coverage.<sup>354</sup> There are, of course, already

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<sup>353</sup> Bennett, *Citizens and the News*, 83.

<sup>354</sup> Bennett, *News: The Politics of Illusion*, 113. Bennett, "Citizens and the News," 88, 90. Patterson, "Informing the Public," 195.

large numbers of people who do not engage with politics in the public sphere in New Zealand, something which episodically framed political coverage could be a contributing factor to in terms of either backing up people's pre-conceived conceptions of politics or, as I have mentioned, actually contributing to people tuning out. This of course could have implications for the development of the public sphere and the future of political engagement in New Zealand if it leads to there being fewer people engaging with, or taking an interest in politics, as well as the development of a climate of discussion based on the public engaging more with human interest stories and the trivial and personalized aspects of politics.

This comes back to the value of television news in terms of keeping people informed and whether or not people are interested in watching the same political plot lines over again while receiving nothing substantive in return for their viewership in the form of analysis, or a greater exploration of issues that they can personally relate to such as poverty or the housing crisis. Considering this, it would be understandable then that people do get turned off politics if the coverage they are watching on television is made up mostly of personalized and dramatised themes. And, therefore, as a result of such coverage prefer to give their time and attention to other platforms or mediums, while in the process discuss things such as entertainment and sport more often in their daily conversations. However, the danger of this predicament, is the damage it could be doing to the relationship between the news media and the public sphere in terms of the news media contributing to the public's engagement with politics, while at the same time helping with the enhancement of a political culture of democratic deliberation.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis has been an examination of the relationship between prime time television news and the public sphere in New Zealand in the twenty-first century. As a news medium, television remains a central pillar in the New Zealand media landscape and continues to play a role in helping set the agenda for news and political debate. Therefore it is important that research continues to be undertaken on news coverage, in order to investigate whether the type of news content on television is contributing positively to or, in fact, undermining the development of the public sphere in New Zealand. With this in mind, based on the results of this study, the question remains open to further debate as to the kind of effects a high proportion of soft news and episodic framing on television could be having on the public sphere.

The broadcasting industry in New Zealand is deregulated to allow for greater market influence, as well as encourage competition between broadcasters commercially. MediaWorks is a for-profit entity, while TVNZ is effectively also for-profit, despite being government-owned, meaning that opportunities for commercial expansion and increased profit margins cannot be constrained. Because of this, there are limitations placed on what can be produced in terms of news content due to the pressure being placed on news resources, as well as the significance commercially of the 6pm slot as a ratings-driver. As a result, it has been argued that infotainment and soft news coverage has continued to be favoured ahead of hard news by news producers, something the results of this study suggest is indeed the case. The results revealed that 58% of the news items sampled in this study were soft news, as opposed to only 34% which were hard news items. So these are news categories such as human interest, crime, sport, entertainment and accident/death. This type of content came at the expense of hard news content, with categories such as politics and local issues only making up 28% of all the news items that appeared during the study. The results also suggested that news producers favour

more entertaining and visually appealing news items at the start of bulletins, with soft news categories featuring 55-56% of the time before the first commercial break as opposed to hard news which appeared only 33-37% of the time.

The research also highlighted that political coverage has been affected by the commercial reality of broadcasting in New Zealand, with politics being presented more in entertaining and dramatic ways at the expense of in-depth discussions on policy and political issues. Of all the stories on New Zealand politics that were shown in the news during the study, episodic framing occurred in some form in 47% of them. This was in comparison to just 38% of stories which featured thematic framing. If you then add the amount of general reportage that was seen, then nearly 60% of New Zealand political stories shown in the study were either entertainment-oriented or brief updates. With this, the types of themes seen in the episodic framing of politics during the study were attack politics, politics being portrayed as like a game, an overly simplistic presentation of politics with a strong focus on sound bites and clichéd phrases, and the dramatisation and personalisation of politics. The presence of these themes and sub-frames meant the coverage of New Zealand politics tended to be overly trivial, with there being less of a focus on political analysis or the thematic exploration of political issues. And, finally, the results of the study also showed just how little news is actually in the news, with the amount of news content per-bulletin in the study averaging only 27-28 minutes. In addition to this, hard news featured on average in around nine minutes per-bulletin, compared with sixteen minutes of soft news while, in total, nearly half of an average bulletin, 48-49%, was spent on advertising, sport, weather and updates. News content also appeared to be heavily concentrated at the top of bulletins with, on average, 45-49% of news content appearing before the first ad break.

But what do these results mean for the public sphere in New Zealand? In the discussion chapter just some of the potential effects of the types of news coverage revealed in the results

were explored. The idea that news is becoming like infotainment was discussed, with news appearing more as spectacle and as passing parades of information, potentially helping to widen the gap between the public and the political process, with audiences becoming more like spectators instead of being treated as citizens. The effects of episodic framing and general reportage were looked at and, in particular, how issues get ignored or not reported on at all while the trivial themes seen in episodic framing are favoured more, resulting in the prospect that a low-quality information environment in the public sphere could emerge. This idea comes back to the power of framing, given the role of the news media as a gatekeeper in helping shape a lot of what appears as public discourse. The question also remains as to whether audiences are getting value out of watching television news, from a democratic perspective, when political coverage is dominated by episodic framing and an overall simplicity, as well as the lack of news content in the news as the results suggest. And, finally, the possibility that episodically framing politics and focusing more on trivial and dramatic themes could be contributing to the erosion of the public sphere by leading to increased political apathy around politics was also considered; the idea being that people could potentially be turned off politics by some of the narratives that feature over and over again in the political reporting on television.

The questions this thesis has attempted to raise and the results of the study itself have opened some potential avenues for future research and further opportunities to discuss the relationship between television news and the public sphere in New Zealand. Just some of the possibilities where this research could be taken further and improved on include, firstly, in terms of looking at media effects, investigating how audiences themselves respond to soft news and the episodic framing of politics while, in line with this, tracking what gets talked about in the public sphere when certain stories appear in the news. Secondly, this study could be run again, but this time with an expanded sample in terms of news programs and months, as well as exploring in greater

detail news coverage from past years. This could help strengthen the evidence by providing more data, as well confirm in more detail change over time. Finally, future research could also look into opportunities for public service broadcasting and new ways of producing news that caters to the public sphere and that works primarily for democracy. This could be done by going inside news organisations and ethnographically studying the norms, processes and culture of modern day news rooms to see how exactly commercialism is affecting news production and what can be done to redress the imbalance that has emerged between serving commerce and serving democracy. This could also involve coming up with new ways to present news on television and, in particular, looking at exploring different types of bulletin formats and experimenting with content. The point of these suggestions, in summary, is that this research project is just a starting point, with opportunities existing to take the research further and in particular focus more on what needs to be done moving forward to ensure our news media is serving democracy and not just commerce.

In summing up this thesis, it is important to remember that the news media plays a significant role in influencing what shape the public sphere takes in democratic society.<sup>355</sup> It is through the news media that public life is debated and evaluated, as well as where people engage and deliberate on information.<sup>356</sup> With this, the debate that is needed moving forward is what role do we want our news media to play? Do we want infotainment from our news media, or do we want information that enables us to deliberate on political and social matters of shared concern. This is a discussion that should be taking place within news rooms, with journalists and producers willing to reflect on and question the content they produce, given that they have a task within democracy which is to serve as the integral 4<sup>th</sup> estate pillar in the public sphere. It should also be up to the public to reflect on their relationship with news media and

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<sup>355</sup> Goode, *Jürgen Habermas*, 24.

<sup>356</sup> McKee, *The Public Sphere*, 5. Wayne, *Television News*, 76.

indeed democracy. What role do people play in relation to the news? Are news audiences consumers of media, or more citizens in a democracy? Because, currently, with the type of news content that is being offered to people in the form of infotainment, people have no real civic duty or responsibility when they tune in to watch the news. This is a crucial point because, for a greater sense of civic urgency to take place in the public sphere, it requires people to view themselves more as citizens in a democratic setting, an identity that has a lot to do with a sense of belonging to a socio-political entity with opportunities to deliberate on issues.<sup>357</sup> This process can be led by the news media providing content which gets people to interpret things as citizens and that also helps to facilitate discussion on political issues. In addition the news media can play a powerful role in enhancing political culture within the public sphere through helping to internalize the idea of the citizen as playing an important role in society. Changes are definitely needed, as the evidence suggests hard news is being covered less at the expense of soft news, episodic framing has become seemingly entrenched as the preferred way of covering political news, while, content-wise, there seems to be less news in the news. And, if things do remain as they are, the question then turns to whether the public can truly rely on prime time television news to ensure that they, as a populous, are fully informed and indeed engaged as citizens in a democracy.

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<sup>357</sup> Dahlgren, *Media and Political Engagement*, 20. Temple, "Dumbing Down," 259.

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX ONE: NEWS CATEGORIES

#### **Accident/Death**

Stories where the central subject of the story involved an accident, either fatal or non-fatal.

#### **Business/Finance**

Stories where the central subject of the story was business, finance or consumer-related.

#### **Celebrity**

Stories where the central subject of the story was celebrity-based.

#### **Crime**

Stories where the central subject of the story was crime-related.

#### **Entertainment**

Stories focusing on entertainment, including film and music.

#### **Health/Science**

Stories where the central subject of the story involved health, or science.

#### **Human Interest**

Stories where the central subject of the story involved quirky and funny things, as well as stories that looked into individual and community achievements or activities.

#### **Local Issues**

Stories where the central subject of the story involved analysing or exploring serious local issues in New Zealand. Usually stories without a political component.

#### **New Zealand Politics**

Stories where the central subject of the story was politics, or a political issue.

#### **New Zealand Society**

Stories where the central subject of the story involved aspects of New Zealand society. These were mainly cultural, historical and environmental.

#### **Other**

Stories which did not fit clearly into a specific category were counted as other.

#### **Sport**

Stories outside the sports bulletin where the central subject was sports-related.

#### **Weather/Disaster**

Stories where the central subject of the story involved weather, or natural and artificial disasters.

#### **World News**

Stories that looked at overseas news and events.

**APPENDIX TWO: 3 NEWS 2015 SAMPLE**

<i>Date</i>	<i>Day</i>	<i>Length (mins)</i>	<i>Stories</i>	<i>Ad Breaks</i>	<i>Sports Bulletin</i>	<i>Weather Bulletin</i>	<i>Market Update</i>
1/2/2015	Sunday	60	11	4	1	1	0
2/2/2015	Monday	60	14	4	1	1	1
3/2/2015	Tuesday	60	20	4	1	1	1
4/2/2015	Wednesday	60	15	4	1	1	1
5/2/2015	Thursday	60	15	4	1	1	1
6/2/2015	Friday	60	17	4	1	1	0
7/2/2015	Saturday	60	16	4	1	1	0
8/2/2015	Sunday	60	21	4	1	1	0
9/2/2015	Monday	60	16	4	1	1	1
10/2/2015	Tuesday	60	13	4	1	1	1
11/2/2015	Wednesday	60	14	4	1	1	1
12/2/2015	Thursday	60	15	4	1	1	1
13/2/2015	Friday	60	16	4	1	1	1
14/2/2015	Saturday	60	14	4	1	1	0
15/2/2015	Sunday	60	14	4	1	1	0
16/2/2015	Monday	60	21	4	1	1	1
17/2/2015	Tuesday	60	17	4	1	1	1
18/2/2015	Wednesday	60	17	4	1	1	1
19/2/2015	Thursday	60	16	4	1	1	1
20/2/2015	Friday	60	17	4	1	1	1
21/2/2015	Saturday	60	17	4	1	1	0
22/2/2015	Sunday	60	14	4	1	1	0
23/2/2015	Monday	60	13	4	1	1	1
24/2/2015	Tuesday	60	15	4	1	1	1
25/2/2015	Wednesday	60	19	4	1	1	1
26/2/2015	Thursday	60	15	4	1	1	1
27/2/2015	Friday	60	12	4	1	1	1
28/2/2015	Saturday	60	16	4	1	1	0

**APPENDIX THREE: ONE NEWS 2015 SAMPLE**

<i>Date</i>	<i>Day</i>	<i>Length (mins)</i>	<i>Stories</i>	<i>Ad Breaks</i>	<i>Sports Bulletin</i>	<i>Weather Bulletin</i>	<i>Weather Update</i>
1/2/2015	Sunday	60	15	4	1	1	1
2/2/2015	Monday	60	20	4	1	1	1
3/2/2015	Tuesday	60	19	4	1	1	1
4/2/2015	Wednesday	60	17	4	1	1	1
5/2/2015	Thursday	60	14	4	1	1	1
6/2/2015	Friday	60	18	4	1	1	1
7/2/2015	Saturday	45	14	3	1	1	0
8/2/2015	Sunday	60	17	4	1	1	1
9/2/2015	Monday	60	15	4	1	1	1
10/2/2015	Tuesday	60	15	4	1	1	1
11/2/2015	Wednesday	60	15	4	1	1	1
12/2/2015	Thursday	60	16	4	1	1	1
13/2/2015	Friday	60	16	4	1	1	1
14/2/2015	Saturday	60	16	4	1	1	1
15/2/2015	Sunday	60	15	4	1	1	1
16/2/2015	Monday	60	17	4	1	1	1
17/2/2015	Tuesday	60	17	4	1	1	1
18/2/2015	Wednesday	60	15	4	1	1	1
19/2/2015	Thursday	60	15	4	1	1	1
20/2/2015	Friday	60	14	4	1	1	1
21/2/2015	Saturday	60	19	4	1	1	1
22/2/2015	Sunday	60	12	4	1	1	1
23/2/2015	Monday	60	14	4	1	1	1
24/2/2015	Tuesday	60	14	4	1	1	1
25/2/2015	Wednesday	60	18	4	1	1	1
26/2/2015	Thursday	60	15	4	1	1	1
27/2/2015	Friday	60	12	4	1	1	1
28/2/2015	Saturday	60	14	4	1	1	1

**APPENDIX FOUR: 3 NEWS 2005 SAMPLE**

<i>Date</i>	<i>Day</i>	<i>Length (mins)</i>	<i>Stories</i>	<i>Ad Breaks</i>	<i>Sports Bulletin</i>	<i>Weather Bulletin</i>	<i>Updates</i>
6/2/2005	Sunday	60	11	4	2	1	1
7/2/2005	Monday	60	17	4	1	1	2
8/2/2005	Tuesday	60	16	4	1	1	2
9/2/2005	Wednesday	60	19	4	1	1	1
10/2/2005	Thursday	60	15	4	1	1	2
11/2/2005	Friday	60	15	4	1	1	2
12/2/2005	Saturday	60	15	4	2	1	1
13/2/2005	Sunday	60	9	4	2	1	0
14/2/2005	Monday	60	15	4	1	1	1
15/2/2005	Tuesday	60	16	4	1	1	2
16/2/2005	Wednesday	60	16	4	1	1	2
17/2/2005	Thursday	60	14	4	1	1	2
18/2/2005	Friday	60	16	4	1	1	2
19/2/2005	Saturday	60	10	4	2	1	2

**APPENDIX FIVE: ONE NEWS 2005 SAMPLE**

<i>Date</i>	<i>Day</i>	<i>Length (mins)</i>	<i>Stories</i>	<i>Ad Breaks</i>	<i>Sports Bulletin</i>	<i>Weather Bulletin</i>	<i>Market Update</i>
6/2/2005	Sunday	60	11	4	1	1	0
7/2/2005	Monday	60	15	4	1	1	1
8/2/2005	Tuesday	60	15	4	1	1	1
9/2/2005	Wednesday	60	14	4	1	1	1
10/2/2005	Thursday	60	16	4	1	1	1
11/2/2005	Friday	60	12	4	1	1	1
12/2/2005	Saturday	60	16	4	1	1	0
13/2/2005	Sunday	60	15	4	1	1	0
14/2/2005	Monday	60	14	4	1	1	1
15/2/2005	Tuesday	60	16	4	1	1	1
16/2/2005	Wednesday	60	16	4	1	1	1
17/2/2005	Thursday	60	16	4	1	1	1
18/2/2005	Friday	60	17	4	1	1	0
19/2/2005	Saturday	60	17	4	1	1	1

## **GLOSSARY**

### **Attack Politics**

Where politicians are shown attacking or criticising each other verbally in the news.

### **Commercialism**

An emphasis is placed on maximising profit above all else.

### **Dramatisation**

Focusing on political drama and dramatic narratives in the reporting of politics.

### **Democracy**

A form of governance in which power is vested in the people and exercised directly by them or by their elected representatives within a free electoral system.

### **Democratic Deliberation**

Democratic deliberation is a form of democracy in which deliberation is central to decision making. Deliberating on issues or policies helps strengthen citizen's voices in being able to directly affect political decision making. Can result in citizens having an influence on policy-making.

### **Deregulation**

The process of removing or at least reducing state regulations of particular industries. Usually done to create more commercial competition within the industry.

### **Episodic Framing**

Episodic frames are classified as having a narrow and de-contextualised focus, placing an emphasis on events, individuals and groups, and not societal structures.

### **Game of Politics**

Reporting politics as being like a game between competing players and/or political sides. Politicians engaged in a constant battle for popularity and political advantage.

### **General Reportage**

Short informational political reports offering up thin accounts of events or issues.

### **Hard News**

News of an important or serious nature, usually concerning politics, foreign affairs and national issues of significance. For the purpose of this research project, the story categories which fall under hard news are New Zealand politics, world news, local issues, business/finance, and health/science.

### **Infotainment**

News content that is designed to simultaneously entertain and inform. Designed to be informative, but at the same time entertaining enough to attract and maintain audience attention.

**Media Integration**

The merging of previously separate media entities and forms

**Personalisation**

Reporting of politics that focuses on the personal aspects of politics and the people involved instead of political issues or policy.

**Public Sphere**

An academic term used to describe a virtual space where people can interact and form opinion on news and the political and social issues of the day.

**Soft News**

News stories that deal more with topics or events that are light-hearted or less serious, entertaining, visually appealing and made more for television. For the purpose of this project the story categories which fall under soft news are accident/death, celebrity, crime, entertainment, human interest, New Zealand society, sport, and weather/disaster.

**Thematic Framing**

Thematic framing tends to place stories or issues within a greater context with more background, while exploring their conditions, outcomes and implications.

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