

THE IMAGE OF BUSINESS ON CANADIAN-PRODUCED TELEVISION

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This study employed content analysis to examine the quantity and quality of images of business on Canadian-produced television. The study was stimulated by the business communities perceptions of distortion. Findings reveal that business appeared almost only in news and public affairs programs, and the coverage was found to be more negative in tone than positive or neutral.

L'étude a utilisé le système d'analyse du contenu pour examiner la quantité et la qualité des projections visuelles traitant de affaires aux programmes de la télévision canadienne. L'étude a été motivée par la distortion perçue par les gens d'affaires. Les conclusions révèlent que le affaires ne font surface que dans les nouvelles et dans les programmes d'intérêt public et sont jugés plus négatifs que positifs ou neutres.

Among the mass media, television provides the single most persuasive image bank. Ninety-nine percent of Canadians access this bank (CRTC, 1980, 9). The frequency and duration of viewers' exposure to television images is such that the average Canadian viewer spends more time watching televi-

sion than doing anything other than sleeping or working (T V Bureau, 1982, 6). Most viewers seek diversion, some factual knowledge, while still others search the screen to make sense of what occupies the "public at large" or, less flatteringly, the "mass". The last of these accesses the image bank atypically: he or she is a student of the medium.

Students of television suggest that all we see and hear upon television is no simple and direct reflection of what is experienced. Rather, the message on television is symbolic. The symbols, unlike signs, must be interpreted not merely read and in this context the student of the medium faces a task quite different from the viewer who perceives the news as factual and situation comedies as entertaining.

In this task, students of television as a communicative form have moved to an increasingly interpretive view. The depiction of television as an information flow process (Bower, 1973; Steiner, 1973; White, 1950) wherein professionally-trained media personnel meet the social needs of viewers as "gate-keepers" has come under close scrutiny. The professional communicators are now seen by most as not merely reflecting the needs of the audience but, in fact, contributing greatly or even creating the image of the world upon which the audience depends (Altheide, 1976; Elliott, 1973; Knight, 1982). In this interpretive view, society itself is both source and audience of the message. The medium serves as interpreter or reality mediator. This is a powerful position, as social reality interpreted by media professionals, is often accepted as the social reality by television viewers (Gerbner and Gross, 1976).

This study seeks to view this interaction effect by focusing upon how the Canadian television medium, be it in entertainment, documentary,

news or children's shows, depicts the idea of business--defined here as private enterprise. This topic is becoming controversial, as many Canadian business persons, who despite pleadings of innocence by television representatives, insist that they are being maligned. The controversy has been and still is fueled by business' insistence that this negative image depicted on television is serving to undermine Canadians' confidence in business at precisely the time when it is least affordable.

The Problem

Controversy to be useful, that is to shed more light than heat, must be supported by information. To date, this has been absent in Canada. The nature of television's interpretation of the business community has gone unexplored. The purpose of this study is to describe this interpretation by determining the frequency, pattern, and image of the message being projected of business on Canadian television.

The Americans are in the process of rectifying this image. United States business persons who are angered by what they see as television producers' negative depiction of the business community may have a point. Critic Ben Stein had this anti-business image confirmed in his discussions with Hollywood producers and writers. One very powerful television producer manifested this in his view that:

Businessmen are all sons of bitches. They're all cannibals. I think of them as eating their own....They commit fraud when they say they are interested in anything but profits (Stein, 1979, 76).

In line with these views, Stein suggests that

television producers derive a great deal of satisfaction in depicting business in less than the most favorable light. It is easy to account for how the self-perceived artist may find the commercial or business aspects of his or her art form highly constraining and so create a scapegoat of those viewed as representative of this constraint. While this psychological rendering of an explanation is useful, it does little to amend businesses' concerns regarding what they view as flagrant misrepresentations.

While Stein conjectures that the attitude of American television producers and writers is reflected in their craft, Theberge (1981) establishes the anti-business image more strongly. His study, as its title--*Crooks, Conmen and Clowns*--suggests, provides an analysis of the prime time entertainment segment of United States television, in which business characters are generally depicted as comical when small business is the focus and unethical when in big business. Further, this negative depiction of business holds not only for light entertainment programs, but also for popular information programs. A study of business coverage on United States network newscasts (Dominick, 1981) found that negative items about business outweighed positive or neutral business news by a 54% to 46% margin. An earlier report (Lowry, 1971) had concluded that considering all types of network news items, the ratio of bad news to other news was one-third to two-thirds.

Controversies south of Canada's border more often than not drift northward. The business community in Canada has articulated its belief that, like its United States counterpart, it is being less than fairly represented on television. In 1978 a Committee for Improved Business Reporting arose out of complaints against the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. In 1980-81, Canadian business decided to take the matter of creating a

television image of private enterprise into its own hands. Some thirty prominent Canadian firms jointly backed a weekly half-hour magazine program on national television, **Everybody's Business**. Its objective was "to create some understanding of the capitalistic system" by offering executive and company profiles, and investment news and advice "to the 80% of Canada that doesn't read the financial papers."

This study examines the actual portrayal of private enterprise on Canadian-produced television programs. Such data is necessary before any setting right can be undertaken. This will allow a further assessment of the contention by the business community that it is being negatively portrayed.

METHOD

A two-phase study employing content analysis was devised to discern the nature of the portrait of business presented on Canadian-produced television programs. Each phase consisted of one week's monitoring of Canadian programs broadcast on English-language stations in Vancouver. The three stations represented the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), CTV network, and an independent channel associated with the Global TV network.

The aim in phase one was to establish whether or not business is in fact represented on Canadian-produced television and, if so, how much and where. To gain this over-view, all types of Canadian-produced programming were monitored: national and local news, public and community affairs, light entertainment (variety, game/quiz shows, comedy, drama/adventure and music), children's shows, sports, adult education/advice, religion, documentaries, and advertising within

these programs.

Every Canadian-produced program broadcast during this week was viewed at least once, and at least three editions of all daily programs were monitored. In total, nearly half the week's Canadian programming, 220 hours 15 minutes, was analyzed for any verbal or visual appearance of private enterprise--as business-in-general, or as specific firms, industries or people. These business items and mentions were categorized by time (exposure) and quantity (frequency). Other data were gathered for subsequent use as the basis for establishing phase two coding procedures.

In phase two, carried out four months later, the study focused upon that part of Canadian-produced television accounting for 90% of business time and appearances observed in phase one: news and public affairs programs. During this second week, 85 hours, 20 minutes, or 96.4% of all non-advertising time on such programs was monitored. Business appearances were videotaped, counted, analyzed, and categorized as business-positive, business-neutral, or business-negative.

This categorization of business images was made according to the predominance of "positive", "neutral", or "negative" elements in each, based on the most common characteristics observed in phase one. "Positive" images were those where business or business people were predominantly seen to be efficient, socially productive, or acting in concert with public opinion; where the business viewpoint was presented alone or in the great majority; where business representatives created positive personal impressions; where broadcaster/production approach was uncriticizing; and where business was connected with "good news" (product or other), and where business-positive visuals were shown. Images were labelled "negative" where business was seen to be inefficient;

unethical; "big and mean"; profit focused; acting against public opinion; acting illegally; where business critics were presented alone or in the great majority; where business representatives were ineffectual or negative; where broadcaster/production approach was negative; where business was connected with "bad news" (product or other), and where business-negative visuals were shown. "Neutral" images of business occurred during simple announcements without analysis or comment (as in most stock market highlights) and in items where a balance of viewpoints or neutral analysis was offered, or where something other than business was the focus of the item.

RESULTS

Phase One Results

In phase one, 168 business-related items and mentions were found, accounting for 7 hours, 57 minutes and 10 seconds, or 7.44% of the nearly 107 hours of monitored programming. Although current events programs constituted just 47.42% of monitored time, almost 90% of all time devoted to business occurred during them: 23.02% of business time occurred in news programs, 57.05% in public affairs, and 9.55% in community affairs programs. Canadian-produced light entertainment, children's programs, sports, education, religion, advice, and documentaries together provided less than 10% of all business item time. Business appeared most frequently (61.2%) in items of less than one minute.

By topic, business appeared most often in conjunction with politics, and secondly as "pure business"--that is, items based solely on specific industry or company events, issues, or personali-

ties. Business in combination with social issues ran a distant third.

Examining exposure by type of business, it was observed that big business (defined as companies with more than 500 employees; in fact, they were usually much larger companies operating on a national level) appeared in more items (74.09%) than smaller business (11.44% of items, 21% of time) and business-in-general (14.45% of items, 5% of time). In phase one, the Canadian petroleum industry received most attention as the subject of 26 items and mentions (15.47%)--over 23.89% of all business time. Retail enterprise was next with 16 items (9.52%). Agriculture was third with eight items (4.76%).

An analysis of the prominence of all private enterprise items indicated that business rarely starred. Business appeared in lead stories or as the subject of a single-topic program just ten times (5.99%), and was simply mentioned or referred-to-in-passing (10 seconds or shorter) in 20.74% of its appearances.

An analysis of the advertisements found 498 product messages and fifteen (15) corporate or industry messages throughout the monitored schedule. Among the commercials selling a product or service, 96 (19.23%) included identifiable business characters -- that is, people recognizable by setting or script as working in private enterprise. Business characters were separated into those appearing in consumer or producer/producer-spokesperson roles in the commercials. Business-people-as-consumers appeared in six percent (6%) of the product messages and, being identified with the sponsor's products, were almost always portrayed positively. One third of these characters were business owners or managers, one quarter were blue collar workers, and another quarter were sales or service people. Business-people-as-

producer characters appeared in 12.63% of the product messages analyzed. Four types of business people served as producer role models. They were, in order of decreasing frequency: "star" or famous name pitchpersons, middlepersons involved in the sale of the product, chief executive officers, and members of the firm in sales or service. Interestingly, "stars" were used as the focus in far more producer than consumer depictions of business.

Fifteen different corporate advertisements were observed. Sponsors here were large national-level firms and industry associations. In eleven (73.33%) of these spots, sponsors self-consciously declared themselves Canadian ("proud to be Canadian", "all Canadian") or at least Canadian oriented. Advertisers commonly portrayed themselves as socially responsible and underscored the benefit of their activities to Canadians: using the country's natural resources efficiently, meeting the country's needs, protecting the environment, raising the level of technology and service through research and innovation.

Phase Two Results

In summarizing phase one's initial examination of the frequency and exposure of business appearances in all types of Canadian programming, it is important to realize that business generally does not have a very visible entertainment or "play" presence on television, but rather is firmly connected to information and serious television. Nearly 84% of all business items and 90% of all business time occurred on current events programming, mostly news and public affairs. All but 2.98% of the items concerned actual, specific industries or firms, and almost all businesses which received repeated exposure were connected

with news stories. News and public affairs programs therefore became the focus for an evaluation of the types of business images being projected.

Phase two of the study examined frequency and exposure patterns of business images within the editorial or non-advertising segments of these programs and, unlike phase one, the quality of observed images, including the degree to which the depiction of business was positive, neutral, or negative.

In phase two, 279 business or business-in-combination items and 78 mentions were logged, accounting for 20.01% of all editorial time monitored, or 16.3% of all time including advertising. These percentages are virtually identical to those found in phase one. The percentage of editorial time devoted to business-related items was higher in public affairs programs (23.52%) than in newscasts (18.43%). The last two figures were each within two percentage points of those found in phase one. These proportions were consistent among all types of public affairs programs in both phases, but varied between national and local news programs in the two phases, according to the geographical origin of each week's big news stories.

In news and public affairs combined, business was the second most frequently mentioned topic (see Table One). Items including some reference to business accounted for 20.01% of all monitored editorial time, with 6.43% of editorial time devoted to "pure business" issues. Politics was the most common topic: politics-oriented items accounted for 36.67% of all editorial time. Labor was third, appearing in items that accounted for 11.22% of all editorial time. Sports were fourth, accounting for 7.66%, then social issues at 6.60%.

Table One

Exposure of Most Frequent Topics in Canadian News and Public Affairs Programs, Phase Two

Topic or Co-topic*	National and Local news-casts	National and Local Public Affairs Prog	Totals and % of all Editorial Time
Politics			
-Items	287	75	362
-Time	12:16:30	13:19:10	25:35:40
-%	36.54%	38.93%	36.67%
Business, excluding mentions**	216	63	279
	5:21:55	8:23:25	13:45:20
	15.98%	24.52%	19.71%
Pure Business	78	17	95
	1:46:55	2:41:05	4:28:15
	5.31%	7.84%	6.43%
Labor	179	28	207
	3:13:50	4:21:15	7:50:05
	9.62%	12.73%	11.22%
Sports	50 + 9	3	50+121
	5:01:40	0:19:20	5:21:00
	14.98%	0.94%	7.66%
Social Issues	63	23	86
	1:36:05	3:52:10	4:28:15
	4.77%	11.31%	6.60%
Entertainment & ent. disc.	8	26	34
	0:14:55	2:26:40	2:41:35
	0.74%	7.14%	3.85%

Table One continued

Crime	113 1:57:05 5.81%	2 0:32:30 1.58%	115 2:28:35 3.54%
Personality	46 1:03:40 3.16%	13 1:08:45 3.35%	59 2:12:25 3.16%
Health/ Medical Science	21 0:57:55 2.87%	6 0:41:10 2.00%	27 1:39:05 2.35%
Weather	60 1:25:15 4.23%	4 0:01:40 0.08%	64 1:26:55 2.07%

*Combination items (e.g. business/politics, labor /crime) are included in both categories.

**"Mentions" were not calculated for other topics, so they are omitted from business figures here.

! includes segments and items

"Pure" or business-only items accounted for 34.05% of all business items and 31.99% of all business time. Table Two shows where business appeared in conjunction with other subjects.

As in phase one, where all types of programming were monitored, big business appeared most often in news and public affairs programming, accounting for 78.02% of all business time. Small business was seen in 16.59% and business-in-

Table 2

Business as Part of Items on Other Topics.
 News and Public Affairs Programs,
 Phase Two

Topic	Business as co-topic in combined items		"Mentions of business in non-combination items		Total business time, this topic	% of all business time
	Items	Time	Mentions	Time		
"Pure-business"	95	04:28:15	-	-	04:28:15	31.99%
Labour	85	04:06:15	8	00:01:20	04:07:35	29.53%
Politics	57	03:22:10	55	00:08:10	03:30:10	25.06%
Personality/"soft"	13	00:45:20	-	-	00:45:20	5.41%
Social issues	22	00:29:30	2	00:00:20	00:29:50	3.55%
Gen. economic dev't.	3	00:18:10	3	00:00:30	00:18:40	2.22%
Environment	4	00:07:15	5	00:00:50	00:08:05	0.96%
Science/technology	1	00:06:30	2	00:00:20	00:06:50	0.82%
Misc. (sports, crime, history, weather)	1	00:00:15	6	00:01:20	00:01:35	0.19%

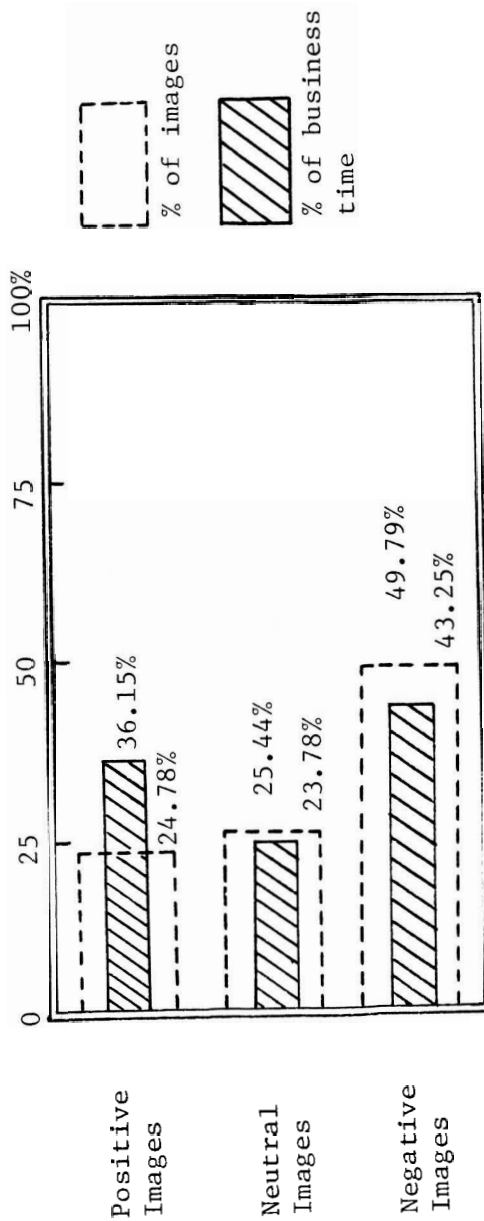
general in 5.39%.

In moving from the frequency to the quality of images of business on Canadian current events programming, the 357 items and mentions discussed were broken down in 452 separate images of business. Of these, 225 or 49.79% were categorized as negative images, 25.44% (115) neutral, and 20.35% (112) positive (see Figure One). In terms of time, negative images accounted for 43.25% of the time devoted to business, compared to 36.15% positive, and 23.78% neutral time. Shorter items were observed to be more likely business-negative, so it was not surprising to find higher proportions of negative image time in the national newscasts (56%, comparable to the 54% found in the United States by Dominick), local newscasts (49%) and local public affairs programs. Only in national public affairs, featuring in-depth interviews, was there a high proportion of positive images (54%).

The most common factors contributing to the images of business on Canadian news and public affairs television are revealed in Figure Two. As might be expected, positive images occurred most often when the business point of view monopolized the image or item. These instances of a lack of dissenting or alternate voice to that of business occurred in 84.06% of positive image time and 30.36% of total business time, most frequently on public affairs programs where a single business representative appeared in a one-to-one interview with a host/reporter. When news programs alone are considered, business appeared in this situation only 11.32% of the time.

Almost all company or industry spokespersons who appeared on television contributed to positive business images. Indeed, this was the second strongest factor influencing positive images (see Figure Two). These spokespersons accomplished

Figure 1
 Positive, Neutral and Negative Images of
 Business in News and Public Affairs Programs,
 Phase Two



this in a variety of ways: by generally giving a **competent**, confident and erudite presentation; by demonstrating a particularly engaging personality, or by being presented as an expert on some subject (such as the head of a personnel agency who commented on the effects of the housing crisis on the job market). Effectively positive business representatives appeared in 58.11% of positive business image time and 20.99% of total business time, most often on public affairs programs.

The third strongest factor contributing to positive images of business on news and public affairs programming appeared to be when business was portrayed as efficient, economically productive or prosperous. This occurred in 53.16% of positive image time and 19.20% of business time. It occurred more in public affairs programming than on the news.

In 13.43% of total business time and 37.18% of positive business time, the host or reporter was uncritical in his or her approach to a business issue or personality, which proved to be the fourth strongest factor contributing to positive images of business. Examples of this occurred when a business representative was welcomed to a public affairs show and presented his or her view, product, or service in an uncritical milieu or when a mini-documentary described a new or novel business or product in a favorable manner.

Announcements of new products, price breaks, formal recognition or the granting of an honor to a business product occurred in 32.56% of positive business image time and 11.78% of all business time. Other factors contributing to the positive image in business but occurring in less than 10% of all business time were those where business was seen as socially productive, associated with good news, accompanied by positive visuals, or portrayed as being in concert with public opinion.

Figure 2

Factors Contributing to Images of Business
 More Than 10% of Business Time in News
 And Public Affairs Programs, Phase Two

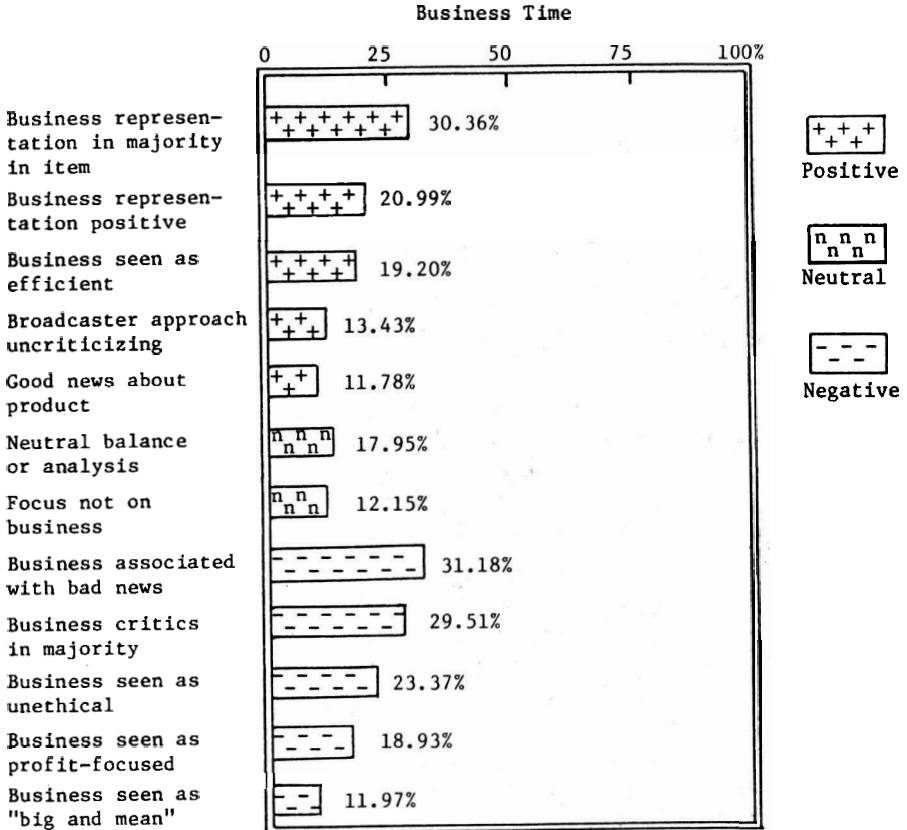


Figure Two also illustrates those factors accounting for more than 10% of total business time which contributed to the negative image of business. It is not surprising, given the mass media's propensity to report more bad than good news, that association with bad news should be the single greatest factor contributing to negative business images in news and public affairs programs. Business was the subject of, or associated with, bad news -- labor strife, rising prices, accusations of wrongdoing -- in 71.96% of all negative image time and 31.18% of total business time.

Business critics appeared unopposed, establishing a clear anti-business position, in 68.12% of the negative image time and 29.51% of business time. Such instances included politicians expressing outrage about "rip-offs" by the oil industry and a person-on-the-street poll in which all but one person was angry at Canadian banks.

In 101 instances, comprising 23.37% of total business time and 53.95% of business' negative image time, business was seen to be unethical or acting against the public interest. Examples include items about developers of luxury high rises and owners of private hospitals about to evict elderly occupants, of manufacturers knowingly polluting above and beyond explicitly designated limits, and of a company accused by labor of "trying to strip workers of their dignity".

In 18.93% of business time (43.67% of business-negative time) on Canadian news and public affairs television business was represented as greedy or strongly profit-focused. Among 87 observed instances of this were several news reports which dwelt on the unseemly profits a corporation executive might personally make, if he or she exercised his or her share option, if his or her company was taken over by another; a number of

interview series also showed the person-on-the-street as feeling that firms in one industry were profiteering at the expense of the public.

Business was seen as obtrusive or insensitive in forty different episodes. They comprised 11.97% of all business time and 27.63% of business-negative time. Here business was portrayed as insensitive to the plight of the common person, as evidenced on newscasts where businesses were depicted as bully landlords or "not caring about the little person".

Factors contributing less than 10% of business time to negative images were instances where business was seen as acting illegally, providing poor or defective products, being economically inefficient, and being represented by an ineffectual spokesperson.

Most neutral images of business (see Figure Two) fell into one of three categories: the balanced analysis, business as a side issue rather than the focus of attention, and simple announcements. Those items in which presentation of two or more perspectives resulted in neither positive nor negative images accounted for 17.95% of total business time and 28.5% of neutral image time. The largest number of neutral business images (56), accounting for 12.15% of total business time and 59.19% of neutral image time, occurred in items in which business was included but was not the focus. Announcer statements made without comment or elaboration (such as news of a firm's change of ownership) and simple lists (such as stock market reports) comprised 4.4% of all business time and 12.44% of neutral image time.

SUMMARY

The image of business on Canadian television is one permeated with Canadians' ambivalence toward the business community. Business images are projected almost solely in the non-entertainment context of news and public affairs. These images are predominantly neutral or negative. Business is frequently associated with bad news, and business people, especially those working in big businesses, are often depicted as greedy and not overly bound by high moral and ethical principles.

As an adjunct to this image it is vital to realize that business and television share a joint distrust. Television journalists demand short, crisp, highly personalized, visual and dramatic episodes to meet the demands of their medium's audience. The business community, long accustomed to relations with print media, demand longer, less personalized and non-dramatic coverage. The two impact messily.

Business and the print media, however, have developed a more symbiotic relationship. Here business gets specialized coverage by knowledgeable journalists, many of them having solid contacts with business. Business news is given a special section in the newspapers, and there are many business magazines. Television coverage of business news is willy-nilly. On Canadian produced television there are few economic or business journalists, and the story of a plant going bankrupt may be sandwiched between news of a fire and the latest figures on casualties in the Middle East.

The variety of factors observed in this study which influence the general image of business on television are themselves influencable, and could be examined by both television and business to

develop a symbiotic relationship. The present depiction of business as revealed in this study unfortunately indicates that, as Canadians reach out more and more for accurate business news and images, they receive a very mixed and, at times, confused message.

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