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Getting the Joke: Humor Effects on Information Sharing of Political News

by

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A Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

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Abstract

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This paper examines the role of humor in information sharing of political issues using social media. In an experiment with 164 participants from the University of Memphis, the effects of sharing and information seeking were tested using Stephan Colbert's comedy, and the same story told as straight news. This research found people are more likely to pass along information using social media if the issue is told in a humorous way. Conversely, Colbert's persona seems to effect information seeking rather than primarily interest.

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Introduction

Comedy and tragedy have undergirded human communication since Euripides penned the *Oresteia* and Aristophanes, *The Clouds*. These two themes often frame political discussion and contribute to information dissemination among the electorate. Perhaps not surprising, tragedy appears to garner greater legitimacy. Just as the Oscars routinely award dramas and overlook comedies, many studies of political communication have focused on dramatization and tragedy (Bennett, 2008; Holbert, 2005). Political humorists themselves often emphasize the illegitimacy of their craft as can be seen by Jon Stewart's recent upbraid of the media in his "Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear," and his insistence on a demarcation between himself and political journalists. Yet, many people, especially those under 35, report getting their news from professed "fake-news" sources such as *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*, and Jon Stewart routinely gets higher rankings than his hard news counter-parts (Pew, 2010). Why then is comedic framing of political events deemed less legitimate and therefore exempt from scrutiny? This paper argues comedic framing of politics deserves attention specifically for its contribution to information sharing using social media Web sites.

As consumption of traditional news sources wanes, i.e. print journalism, more people are turning to Internet sources as a means of staying informed (Nie, Miler, Golde, Butler, & Winneg, 2010). Similarly with the upswing in social media, the radius of the water-cooler effect expands. Information has the potential to be passed along beyond one's immediate vicinity. This paper argues humor is particularly well suited for information sharing. No one likes to be the bearer of bad news. Humor softens the blow, making it more likely when someone is given the option between two stories on the same topic, one humorous, one serious, he or she will share the humorous story. To test this theory, university students were assigned to one of three conditions.

Each condition presented the same story, with the exact same information, framed either with humor or gravity. The results showed a significant relationship between sharing and humor. Furthermore the Colbert personality rather than mere interest acts as a catalyst for influencing a desire to seek more information. Therefore, while sharing is driven by humor, information seeking is driven by Colbert.

Chapter I: Literature

Social Media

The tools and strategies for communicating have changed notably with the emergence of social media. This type of media “describes a variety of new sources of online information that are created, initiated, circulated, and used by consumers intent on educating each other about products, brands, services, personalities, and issues” (Blackshaw, & Nazzaro, 2004, p.2). Forums for social media are multifarious including blogs, rating Web sites, sponsored discussion boards and chat rooms, e-mail, moblogs (sites containing digital audio, video, images, photographs, and other multimedia applications), social networking sites, etc. (Mangold, & Faulds, 2008). Social network sites, which are a subset of social media, have been defined as "web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system" (Boyd , & Ellison, 2007). The trend in social media is not restricted to business or personal communication activities. In fact, politicians were among the first to embrace this new form of communication.

The proportion of voters using new media to gather information has grown from 1988 to present. Research indicates that as of 2008, 55% of the electorate had used the Internet to learn about the campaign (Smith, 2009). In his book *New Media Campaigns and the Managed Citizen*, Philip Howard calls the online interaction between presidential candidates, their respective camps, and the constituents, *hypermedia*, and says that the feedback loops for these interactive information technologies are different enough to warrant “specific and critical” treatment. Specifically, he tackles whether, new media campaigns mirror e-commerce tactics of “direct-marketing,” “mass customization,” and “broadcast individualism,” asking what if any

implications this has on the functioning of democracy (Howard, 2005, p. 32). He limits his inquiry to campaigns, focusing on the relationship between the politician and the public. However, outside the campaign, politics and political issues continue. Journalists, intent on informing the public broadcast these issues. Sometimes the public, using social media, re-circulates them. For the issue to be passed along, it must resonate somehow with the receiver.

Humor is particularly well suited for being passed along, as people want to share jokes and enliven members of their social circle. When political information is couched in humor, the likelihood people will share it increases. For this reason, political humorists such as Stephen Colbert and Jon Stewart have leverage in influencing the lifespan of a news story. Nevertheless, humor remains an under-studied frame. Furthermore few researchers have empirically tested what people actually choose to post on social media Web sites. The increased role of the Internet among consumers of political comedy has not received adequate attention (Nie et al., 2010; Xenos, & Becker, 2009). Nor has this relationship been explored for its potential to foster political knowledge and its contribution to the processes of political news sharing (Xenos, & Becker, 2009). This is a major area for new research.

Not only does the Internet constitute a new source of information, it also changes the communicative model (Nie et al., 2010). The model is no longer a simple feedback loop where a source transmits information through channels to publics and then the publics respond back through channels to the source. Social media acts as an additional filtering mechanism in an oversaturated media market. By allowing the public to share information of interest with others in their networks, messages that receive the most attention are those the public finds most interesting. Interest itself is not random. Comedy and tragedy are the two most pervasive themes in human communication, and humor has a greater participatory quality than tragedy (Delli

Carpini, & Williams, 1996). Thus, humor has a greater potential to be passed along, or shared among members of the public.

Rhetoric and Humor

Many researchers of democracy have focused on the role of deliberation (Habermas, 1984; Rawls, 1971; Young, 2000). Inevitably, questions arise about how the deliberation process should function. This includes not only the style of rhetoric, but also the transmission of information through media. For example, do certain styles privilege certain groups? Is one style more suited to producing an informed, participatory public? These questions are important because they can affect what enters the public sphere, and therefore who has a stake in the decision-making process.

For example, Iris Young (2000) challenges Jurgen Habermas' assertion that in a deliberative space speech acts should parse out the perlocative effects on the listener. In other words, the speech ideally suited for the public sphere should exclude elements aimed at forcing a particular outcome. Young argued this is impossible. Furthermore, she argued rhetoric more than relays information. It also embodies elements aimed at increasing the likelihood publics will absorb information. For example, Young identifies at least four overlapping elements of rhetoric: (1) emotional tone, which contains elements of fear, joy, and anger; (2) figures of speech such as puns, metaphors, humor, etc.; (3) signs, symbols, and other visual media, and (4) attention to an audience's personal history and background. It has been suggested political humor works to facilitate understanding by those outside the public sphere, thereby creating an avenue by which they can insert themselves into political discussions (Smith , & Voth, 2002). This paper examines what, if any, effect Young's rhetorical elements have on political deliberation with special attention to the role of humor.

Frames are constructs individuals use to organize and interpret their world, and facilitate learning (Carlson, 1986). Of all the major poetic frames including epic, tragedy, comedy, elegy, satire, burlesque, and grotesque, only comedy and tragedy have existed throughout history (Burke, 1959; Kerr, 1967). Plato, for example, attributed the conviction of Socrates in part to the comedy of Aristophanes. This suggests comedy is not only extant in politics, but also comedy can influence politics. In the United States, humor is as American as apple pie. From Benjamin Franklin's quip that the signers of the *Declaration of Independence* shall "hang to together or else hang apart" to Jon Stewart's characterization of US military action in the Middle East as Mess O' Potamia "the United States political arena has served as an important target and scapegoat for comedians, editorialists and naysayers" (Smith , & Voth, 2002, p. 110). Why then have scholars only recently begun to examine the role of humor in politics?

Smith and Voth (2002) claim that humor in democracy has matured to a level of significance equal to politics itself. While they may exaggerate, they highlight humor's relevance in politics, suggesting humor is an important topic of study. Nevertheless, political scientists only of late have begun studying humor effects, and results have varied and focused primarily on learning rather than teasing out participation effects or linking it to the growing trend in online news consumption. One possible reason humor only recently has become a subject of study lies in its makeup. What does it mean to take a serious look at humor? How does one approach with gravity to a topic that thrives on levity? Another possible explanation for humor's exclusion is its association with an audience "outside the public sphere" (Smith, & Voth, 2002). The Greeks viewed comedy as entertainment for the masses, primarily the lower-echelons of society. A similar reputation permeates today. However, some research on humor has shown it is the incongruence of gravitas and levity, which creates humor and etches it in memory. Furthermore,

the fact United States citizens possess low levels of political knowledge, despite the increase in available information, implies for information to be obtained it has to both differentiate and resonate with the learner. In other words, the information has to stick out to the receiver, or otherwise run the risk of being passed over. Chong and Druckman's (2010) recent research suggests timing plays a big role in shaping peoples perception of issues. People weight higher the more recent story. They contribute a great deal of understanding to how people weigh differing views. However, they do not look at differences in how the issue is packaged. This paper hopes to expand on their research by looking at the framing effects of political communication, specifically humor. Stewart and Colbert's rising popularity over the past decade suggests humor's relevance in politics is on the rise if not at its apex. Humor is not an innocuous rhetorical device.

The Humor Frame

While humor and tragedy are the mainstays of rhetorical framing, it has been suggested that tragedy is Western society's default frame (Christenson , & Hansen, 1996). Smith and Voth (2002) contend that tragic action allows authority to single out those in error, acting as a force of condemnation rather than as a force of correction. Those at the top of the social hierarchy prefer the tragic frame because it maintains the status quo and legitimates authoritative power. Using the tragic frame, authority can maintain the victim status and articulate the need to right societal wrongs and preserve order (Smith, & Voth, 2002). Conversely, comic framing, they argue, is a frame of acceptance, where relationships are amicable, and actors are able to engage in a mutual dialogue (Burke, 1959; Duncan, 1968; Smith , & Voth, 2002). Burke (1959) claims humor allows actors to recognize their shortcomings as well as offers a tool for discerning the irrational from the rational. Duncan (1968) went so far as to say "Comedy teaches us that only so long as

reason can function openly in society can men confront and correct their evil as men, not cowering slaves” (p. 60). According to Moore (1992) humorists infer society is flawed and open to criticism.

Comedic topics are not necessarily ones that lack seriousness. Like tragedy comedy handles grave issues, but comedy interprets the content differently. While the goal of many politicians’ speech acts are to advance their policy objectives (Edwards, 2000; Neustadt, 1990) and reinforce the legitimacy of their leadership (Smith, & Voth, 2002), comic frames act as a check on authority to confront inconsistencies and make corrections to social inequalities. Nevertheless, this idealized view of comedy is tempered with the reality that sometimes it is easier to laugh at a leader than to rationalize his or her decisions (Paletz, 1990). President George W. Bush, for example, was fodder for many comedic sketches, especially among those unhappy with his policies. Some might suggest the humor directed at Bush increased cynicism. However, it seems equally possible humor provided an outlet for cynicism among those who felt unable to participate in the political debate. Instead of trying to rationalize policies, they chose to laugh at his inconsistencies and fumbles. Regardless of whether humor has a positive or negative effect, humor’s strong presence in political communication supports its efficacy as a topic of scholarly inquiry (Alisky, 1990; Bostdorff, 1991; Pfu, Cho, & Chong, 2001).

Some scholars of humor contend comedy acts as a facilitator for the electorate’s learning about the democratic process (Burke, 1959; Smith & Voth, 2000; Zillmann, et al.; 1980). Not only can comedy tackle serious issues, but it also makes able the confrontation of problems not suited for tragic framing, permitting a new form of understanding (Smith, & Voth, 2000). Additionally, they argue humor creates a type of transcendence that allows subjects to become “observers of themselves” (Burke, 1959, p.171). Smith and Voth (2000) contend that the purpose

of political humor is not to replace the existing social structure, but rather to reveal its imperfections and attempt to make small corrections. They also point out comedy is not always accepting. Using the example of Dan Quayle in the 1992 election, Smith and Voth (2000) demonstrate that comedy can take down a politician by discrediting him as a viable leader. Similar studies of presidential elections, Supreme Court nomination processes, etc. support the power of humor to influence individuals' perceptions of leaders (Baumgartner & Mirris, 2006; Brewer & Cao, 2006; Hollander, 2005; Xenos, & Becker, 2009). This suggests the comedic frame can act as a means of disseminating information, and the images humor inspires about political actors can influence the perceptions of voters.

These processes have aroused scholarly interest in studying the mechanisms through which emotion influences memory (Christianson, 1992; Kaplan & Pascoe, 1977; Kintsch & Bate, 1977; Schmidt, 1994; Zillmann et al.; 1990). Schmidt (1994) examined the effects of humor on sentence memory; Kaplan and Pascoe compared learning effects between lectures with either serious or humorous delivery, and Kintsch and Bate (1977) compared memory during lectures for recollection of statements, details, and extraneous remarks and jokes (Schmidt, 1994). Results have been mixed. Kaplan and Pascoe (1977) reported negative effects, while Zillmann (1980) found positive results. One possibility for the differences in findings is the difficulty in creating a controlled experiment. Since humorous material is often packaged with topics of interest to the subject, matching content and isolating humor compounds attempts to gauge the strength of its effects (Schmidt, 1994). This paper attempts to improve on past studies by matching content as closely as possible between conditions.

In an effort to better examine humor effects, some studies have tried to link biological and psychological responses to humorous stimuli. While a majority of studies noted a greater

arousal response associated with negative frames, McGee (1983) reported participants' respiration and heart rate increased in reaction to a humorous event, and these reactions indicated the sympathetic nervous system was activated in response to humor stimuli. Nevertheless, some have argued arousal of the sympathetic nervous system is asymmetrical, and tipped in favor of negative evoking frames (Isen, 1985). This experiment found no significant difference between the mean learning score in the humor (59%) or the serious (58%) condition. However, it did find a significant relationship in the Colbert condition when the respondent was asked if he or she would seek more information on the topic.

People learn from humor because it produces an orienting response (Deckers, & Hricik, 1984). An orienting response is used as a mark of increased attention (Isen, 1985). In other words, humor increases attention by arising out incongruence, which needs to be reoriented (Deckers, & Devine, 1981; Suls, 1992). Something is funny because it is unexpected or does not seem to belong. The partaker then problem solves to make it fit with what he or she expected. For example, President Ford slipping and falling as he descends the stairs from Air Force One became the topic of many jokes, because a clumsy president does not comport with the imagery of the presidency. Even when humor is expected, such as during comedy sketch shows like *Saturday Night Live*, *The Daily Show*, or *The Colbert Report*, or during adult cartoons such as *Futurama*, *Family Guy*, or *South Park*, much of their humor is created out of serious topics like politics and religion. This mismatch should result in a boost in interest in the event. Indeed, at the time of President Ford's misstep, the replaying of this image on both news outlets and comedic shows like *Saturday Night Live* created the 1970s equivalent of a viral video. It is this type of process this paper explores. Will a political story when presented humorously cause viewers to share it? Given the notoriously low-levels of political information possessed by the American

public, such questions are important because knowing what people share can influence how many people will be exposed to information. Furthermore, something spikes interest, will that activate information seeking behavior, shaping learning?

An Inattentive Public

Attentive publics, or those who pay attention to public policy, have a greater potential to wield meaningful influence over policymakers and policy outcomes (Baum, 2003; Cohen, 1973; Greabner, 1983). The American public knows and cares little about politics, both domestic and abroad (Baum, 2003; Converse, 1990; Delli Carpini, & Ketter, 1996) As their engagement with politics decreases, their cynicism increases (Niemi et. al.; 1989). At the same time, concern for foreign affairs diminishes (Baum, 2000, 2003). The result is the preponderance of inattentive publics. The American people are less likely to pay attention to political information unless the time and effort required is low or the topic is packaged in an interesting way.

Some might argue, that instead of subsisting for news, political comedy enhances news, by which viewers then will seek additional information from other sources (Xenos, & Becker, 2009). Viewers of *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* receive political information unique from typical news (Holbert, 2005). Baum (2003) tests the incidental by-product theory using foreign crises as reported on soft-news programming. He assumes the audience will not otherwise seek out the information, and offers soft news as a solution to the inattentive public problem. However, he does not address whether the viewer is seeking political humor, nor does he test whether viewers will supplement the information from soft news by seeking out other sources. Furthermore, no one has yet to test whether humor influences the likelihood viewers will share this information with others.

Effects of Soft News

Much research has indicated that public scrutiny can influence the actions of Congress and the president (Baum, 2000). However, the public is by and large uninformed about politics and uninterested in learning. Those who are interested in politics consume news from different sources than those who are not engaged (Baum, 2003). The less engaged public turns to soft news such as talk shows, morning shows, and other infotainment type programs. Soft news presents issues in easily accessible terms or “cheap frames,” often emphasizing the dramatic and the sensational (Baum, 2003). Many of soft news’ prevalent themes include “us vs. them”, “powerlessness”, “injustice”, “human impact” and “morality” (Nueman, Just, & Crigler, 1992; Powlick, & Katz, 1998).

The rise of soft news stems from the highly competitive environment in the media, particularly in television (Baum, & Kernell, 1999; Patterson, 2000). To raise profit margins for news programming requires an increase in the audience. Soft news, or entertainment-oriented programming, offers such an avenue for raising profits and viewership by capitalizing on both the inexpensive production costs and the ability to frame issues according to viewer interest. Production companies have found this format successful as large numbers of Americans consume soft news (Baum, 2003). However, the past trend in political communication scholarship has been to treat entertainment and public affairs as immiscible (Bennett, 1998).

Recently scholars have begun to abandon the strict divide between traditional and entertainment-based political communication (Holbert, 2005; Young, 2004). Mutz (2001) contends that such distinctions are no longer useful for studying political outcomes. Baum (2003) found soft news could increase the attention levels of inattentive publics when the program airs the type of “high-profile political issues” such as “those involving scandal, violence, heroism, or

other forms of human drama” (p.91). Nevertheless, Baum (2003) points out public opinion scholars have failed to study how soft news, or entertainment-oriented media influence viewers’ attitudes of politics, nor what they do with the information once they have obtained it.

In keeping with the research on emotion, Gamson (1999) suggests audiences connect with humor on an emotional level. Entertainers engage the audience by basing their content on observations and make generalizations about society. Furthermore they speak to the audience, treating them as present in the program (Gamson, 1999; Holbert, 2005). Delli Carpini and Williams (1996) offer further support emphasizing that “viewers interact with television in ways that are more similar to conversing than to other commonly used metaphors” (pp. 150-151). *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* structure their programs as to present themselves as one of the public, taking a bottom up approach to message delivery, rather than the top-down approach common in traditional reporting. Those interested in studying political communications have begun to recognize the qualitative differences in formatting warrant examination of knowledge and attitudinal-based outcomes from soft-news viewership (Holbert, 2005).

When entertainment-based programming selects to cover political issues, they are often high profile issues (Baum, 2003). Foreign crises for example are suited to crossover from hard-news to soft-news, but other highly salient topics are equally suited when they possess characteristics well-matched for entertainment framing. These select issues have the potential to reduce the disparity in attentiveness among segments of the public (Baum, 2003). Thus entertainment-based including humorous-oriented media disseminate information about serious politics. Consumers of soft news are often college students, young adults, and those with lower education. In other words, those groups least likely to follow political issues.

Foreign issues are particularly apt for studying the information-sharing effects of humor in soft news programming. Not only, is the American public especially detached from international issues, but also foreign events are more likely to transcend party lines (Baum, 2003). Therefore, the cynicism associated with partisan politics is less likely to affect the viewer. However, the relevance of soft news depends on its willingness to cover political topics, including international stories. While some programs may insert politics sporadically, others make politics the focal point of their programming agenda.

Daytime shows like *Oprah* and *The View* have a wider range of topics. While some episodes may cover political issues and feature political actors, others may focus human-interest topics such as teen pregnancy, single parenting, and domestic abuse. Late-night television, *David Letterman*, *Late Late Show with Craig Ferguson*, *Jay Leno*, etc., also covers politics as a sidebar, with celebrity guests and entertainment current events as the primary segment. Entertainment news shows — *E-News Daily*, *Hollywood Tonight* — are least likely to cover politics unless featuring the political activism of celebrities. In contrast, *The Daily Show*, *The Colbert Report*, and *Real Time with Bill Maher*, use political issues as the catalyst for their programming. Therefore, coverage of international news is regular though multifarious (Baum, 2003).

While Baum (2003) connects learning to soft news, he supposes under most conditions the uninterested public will not seek out political information. Rather, he supposes information is obtained as free-bonus, resulting political information being packaged with entertainment-oriented media. He neglects, however, to examine how programs such as *Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*, which are political, capture interest and influence information sharing. Do viewers of such programs also receive information as an incidental by-product, or are they actively seeking out political information and choosing such programs because they are

entertaining? Furthermore, are they more likely to share such information with people in their networks?

One undeveloped area of analysis is the affects of political satire (Holbert, 2005; Young, 2003, 2004). Baum (2005) argues the use of satire in coverage of political issues is a significant evolutionary development in political journalism. Contrary to traditional news formats political satire does not strive to provide statements of fact. Rather, it requires active participation from the audience. The host offers the audience political information framed humorously. They leave the audience in charge of interpreting the meaning of humor and therefore the political issue (Young, 2003, 2004). “Thus political messages provided through these outlets are predominately implied by the very nature of their being grounded in humor” (Holbert, 2005, p.444). The process of getting the joke requires action and participation from the receiver.

Humor Effects

One such study looked at whether watching *The Daily Show*, influenced viewers’ perceptions of George W. Bush and John Kerry during the 2004 presidential election. Although viewers reported an increased understanding of politics after watching *The Daily Show*, Baumgartner and Mirris (2006) reported viewers were more likely to rate the candidates negatively even when controlling for partisanship and other demographic variables. They concluded that while entertainment-based programming can contribute to political learning, it also reinforces cynicism among an already disengaged demographic. This is sad news considering the Pew Internet and American Life Project 2005 reported 48% of adults used entertainment media such as *The Daily Show* as a source of campaign news (Kim, & Vishak 2008).

In a more recent study, Cao (2010) got similar results when examining the impact *The Daily Show* has on public attentiveness. While she found positive increases in viewers' awareness and knowledge of presidential campaigns and political issues such as the War in Afghanistan. By the same token, as politically inattentive viewers increased their attentiveness through watching *The Daily Show*, their attitudes towards politics became more negative (Cao, 2010). This evidence suggests *The Daily Show* diminishes viewers' support for leaders and political institutions (Baumgartner, & Mirris, 2006). It seems those scholars, who have criticized political comedy for belittling important political topics and presenting only a superficial level of information are supported at least in part by these studies (Niven, Lichter, & Amundson, 2003).

Conversely, when candidates appeared on entertainment-oriented programs, Baum (2005) found viewers warmed to the candidate. For example Bill Clinton's appearance on *Saturday Night Live* during the 1992 election, bumped his favorability ratings. Additionally, George W. Bush may have benefited from political humor during his 2000 presidential race, because unlike Al Gore, Bush was perceived to have better embraced humorists' impersonations (Pfau et al.; 2001). Furthermore, Brewer and Cao (2006) found significant results from audience exposure to the 2004 presidential candidates on late-night comedy shows. Viewers of these programs showed increases in knowledge of both facts about the candidates and information on the race.

Humor as a Gateway

Does political humor inspire interest in politics? Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert downplay their popular programs as "fake news," but in reality many people report soft-news programs, specifically *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*, as a source for political information. For some, soft-news is the only source of information, but for others it sparks an interest in politics and leads to an increase in news consumptions. While investigating the

learning effects of comedy programs like *The Daily Show*, Xenos and Becker (2009) suggested that humor facilitates learning by acting as a gateway. The comedy of Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert requires some prior acquaintance with their topics. Otherwise their impact on viewers would be minimal (Xenos, & Becker, 2009). In addition, humor is a social emotion. People like to laugh together. Comedy thus produces a water-cooler effect. In an effort to participate, viewers seek out other sources so they might get the joke.

Using an experimental design, Xenos and Becker (2009) tested whether *The Daily Show* would cause viewers to supplement their political knowledge from the show. By giving participants the opportunity to surf the Web after viewing the clips, they were able to track the browsing history of the participants. They found those who watched the Stewart clip were more likely to search for articles relating to the topic. They concluded shows like *The Daily Show* act as supplements rather than replacements for traditional media. In another study, Young and Tisinger (2006) find *The Daily Show* and other humorous news-type programs have become direct replacements for traditional news. These results suggest political comedy is part of a more complex learning process, “despite self-reports of learning from such programs among young viewers” (Xenos, & Becker, p. 319).

Social Networks

Understanding social networks is another important piece to the puzzle. Social networks influence the flow of political information (Huckfeldt, & Sprague, 1987). Saying “politics is a social activity imbedded within structured patterns of social interaction,” Huckfeldt and Sprague (1987) were among the first to tap into the effects of information sharing about politics among members of social networks (p. 1197). Their study looked at the effects of dissonant information among supporters of the minority party in a given social network, in this case South Bend,

Indiana. They found supporters of the minority party were affected by dissent messages whereas supporters of the majority party were not.

An important piece to their research was the notion that although one can choose their friends, this is bounded by his or her location. Furthermore, Downs (1957) argues it is rational for individuals to reduce the cost of obtaining political information by seeking information from personal contacts. Therefore, individuals seek out those, who align with their preferences. When there is an asymmetrical distribution of partisanship, individuals supporting the minority party have fewer options when it comes to using others as a shortcut for political information.

Although this makes intuitive sense, the advancement of online communication technologies, and the high frequency of online behavior using social networking sites, loosens the bounds of location. In other words, one's social network is no longer bound by a physical location. Indeed, Nie et al., found the Internet saturates political taste by offering news coverage across the political spectrum. Therefore, the reach of political information flows likewise increases, and people potentially have more options when it comes to picking their social network. This creates a capacity for the reach of political information to increase when it is shared online. Knowledge of what people chose to share is more and more important.

Chapter II: Research Design

Each morning people wake up check their e-mail, maybe their facebook, grab a cup of coffee and head out the door, smart phone in hand. With the Internet at their fingertips the age of print journalism is all but extinct. As the graphs in figure one indicate, the way people today consume information differs greatly from how subsequent generations got their news. News consumption is primarily digital. Furthermore, the lifespan of any given story is largely determined not only by how many media outlets broadcast it, but also how many consumers pass it along via e-mail, facebook, YouTube, or even twitter. Empirical tests of what people share are scant at best. Fowler, et al. (2009) recognizes the potential for new areas of social science research, but claims current studies of this kind are run in private industries like Google, Yahoo, and the National Security Agency rather than by researchers in higher institutions. One of the hurdles to such research is privacy laws. Current laws protect much of the digital imprints consumers leave behind when they surf the Web, access their social media pages, or check their e-mail. An experiment gets around this hurdle. A researcher does not need to sift through pages of private information when participants volunteer to watch a short clip relaying political information and are given the option of sharing the clip via social media, i.e. facebook, twitter, YouTube, Digg, or e-mail. Their behavior can be recorded and analyzed to answer the same question, of what causes someone to share a political issue. This paper suggests humor plays a significant role in determining the sharing potential of political information.

A major drawback of current research of humor effects has been the lack of rigorous control. With so many moving parts, isolating what contributes and what detracts from learning and humor are difficult to isolate. Therefore it is not surprising results have been mixed. What can be agreed upon is the public lacks interest in politics (Baum, 2002; Converse, 1990; Delli

Caprini, 2000). Scholars are split on the level of contribution humor brings to political information dissemination. Yet they agree political humor appears to help individuals learn about and become interested in politics at some level. Refinement of research hopefully will add to a better understanding of humor in politics.

Despite those who claim humor adds to cynicism, I hypothesize people are actually good at identifying slant, and humor plays an important role in increasing levels of participation. Whether it is through the retelling of a joke, or a desire to “get the joke”, people are probably more likely to share information, “tune-in” and therefore participate in the democratic process when messages are received in a humorous or entertaining way. In the era of mass information and multi-tasking, people tend to filter information. Therefore capturing the attention of the public requires more than simply putting information out there; it also requires that the information capture a public's interest. Could shows like *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* be viewed as news consumption and positively affect political interest and information sharing? If so, how will this change how we view political humorists?

In an effort to hone in on these relationships, I designed an experiment. In this study, participants were assigned to one of three conditions. The experiment included a survey to gauge participants' media habits, level of political involvement, degree of cynicism regarding the government and media, level of political knowledge, and basic demographic information. This experimental design improves on past research by attempting to gain greater control. One condition featured a 2-minute 45-second segment on the Greek financial crisis, delivered by Stephen Colbert in his usual humorous and satirical manner. The second condition keeps Colbert's script, but is read by a local broadcaster. The visuals from the original skit were maintained. These clips, which features excerpts from MSNBC, CNN, ABC and Fox News, was

maintained minus Colbert's humor in the third condition. A news broadcaster from a local radio program provided the transitions between these excerpts. His script was designed in keeping with Colbert's verbiage, minus the jokes. Careful attention was taken to not add extraneous information or remove any pertinent information. Images for the second condition included as many of the same elements as the Colbert clip. Therefore instead of trying to find a news clip, which contained the same information and visuals as the Colbert video, one was created. This improves on past projects because variations between clips could be minimized, allowing the relationship between humor and sharing to be better observed.

In each condition, after viewing the video, participants were given the option to share it. Although, no information was actually shared, participants were led to believe they were sharing the video online. For conditions two and three, approximately 36% shared their videos. In the Colbert condition closer to 48% shared the video. In addition to the stimulus, participants answered post questions regarding how laughable, humorous, amusing, entertaining, informative and interesting they found the video. Furthermore, a short quiz was given on the content of the videos to ascertain the amount of information participants absorbed from watching the video. Finally, they were asked if they would seek additional information on the topic, and where they would seek it.

The Greek financial crisis was chosen in an attempt to minimize partisanship. As can be seen by the graph in figure 2, partisanship does not seem to correlate with the mean thermometer reading of Colbert or Stewart nor the mean thermometer reading of journalists Diane Sawyer or Wolf Blitzer, both of whom appear in all three videos. This suggests a universal and unpartisan quality to the findings of this experiment. The clip shown was limited to 2-minutes and 45-seconds in keeping with the average length of a news segment. Furthermore, in keeping with

research about the exceptionally low interest in international events among the American public, an international issue seemed particularly well suited for observing movement in interest. Domestic issues might already rank high in interest among some respondents, as might their level of knowledge pertaining to the issue. This is less likely to occur when the issue is the Greek financial crisis.

This design combines both experimental and survey methods. Survey data alone presents problems because of difficulties in isolating causation. The experimental method tries to tease out causation (Campbell, & Stanley, 1963). Participants in the study were a convenient sample of 164 university students in primarily general education classes. A small amount of extra credit was offered for their participation. Although Sears (1986) argued college students are not representative of the population at large, the National Annenberg Election Survey (2004) found *The Colbert Report* and *The Daily Show's* key demographics are college-aged individuals. Entertainment media in general have a growing audience among the youth (Hollander, 2005; Young, 2004). Furthermore, the differences between college students and the general population have been well documented. Therefore, using college students as subjects for this type of study will not detract from the results. One possible exception is subjects will likely to watch political humor in a very different way than a laboratory setting. However, with media universally available replications of like conditions are impossible.

Findings

As expected social media are the most used medium. Participants in this experiment reported using social media nearly five days per week. Furthermore around 50% said they accessed social media everyday. In contrast, the mean reported time spent reading a newspaper was only one day per week, with nearly 60% saying they never read print news. Online news

received the highest mean (3.3 days) for news readership with 20% saying they access news online everyday. Even still 20% reported never reading news online. More people reported watching local news, between 2-3 days per week, than national news, slightly less than 2 days per week. In this experiment 100% of respondents reported having a personal e-mail account; 92.68% said they had a facebook profile; 70.73% said they had a YouTube account; 40.85% said they had a twitter account; 23.17% said they had a personal blog or Live Journal, and 4.27% said they had a Digg account. Such high numbers indicate people are traversing, sharing, and communicating online, nearly everyday.

When it comes to news personalities, including “fake” ones, Stephen Colbert was the most liked among both Democrats and Republicans, Jon Stewart was liked second best, with the exception of Independents where the relationship was flipped. Wolf Blitzer garnered the lowest favorability rating, followed by Diane Sawyer. Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert were the most known with only 40 and 41 respondents answering “Don’t Know.” On the other hand, 96 of the 164 people said they did not know Wolf Blitzer, and 53 said they did not know Diane Sawyer. While this study may not be the Nielsen ratings, these findings suggest researchers should take a serious look at the funny people delivering fake news. Stephen Colbert and Jon Stewart are the most recognizable and favorable personalities.

Humor, Sharing, and Information Sharing

The analysis that follows considers the pattern of information flows when humor is involved, specifically in regards to new media and information sharing. I am specifically testing the following questions: (1) are people likely to share political information using social media; (2) if yes, under what conditions is sharing most likely to occur? Using a logit model, the relationship between sharing and the three conditions was tested. Running logistic regressions

are appropriate for this type of analysis because the dependent variable is binary. Either the person shared, or they did not. Also, the independent variables are either categorical, in the case of the humor measure, or else also binary as is the case with the conditions. Of the three conditions, the Colbert condition had the only significant relationship with sharing. For those in the Colbert condition, the coefficient for sharing was .664. Neither the second Colbert imitated condition nor the news condition had a significant relationship with sharing. Nevertheless, the nearly 40% of all respondents chose to share their video. The second Colbert imitation condition did not register as significant. A test revealed respondents did not rank it as being very humorous. One thought is that humor is something not easily replicable. Therefore it is erroneous to assume humor is careless. Rather care and thought go into crafting and executing humorous material despite its seemly slapdash nature. The results of the second condition were then lumped in with the news condition to be as conservative as possible in the testing of the Colbert conditions effect on sharing.

The Colbert imitation condition was created out of concern that instead of measuring humor, a Colbert specific effect would be measured. Anticipating humor would be difficult to recreate, post measures were created to tease out a humor measure. The humor variable was created after correlating answers to questions of how humorous, amusing, laughable, and entertaining respondents found the video. All variables were correlated at the minimum .80. They were added and divided by four after the variables were rescaled from 1-7 to 0-6 and divided by 6 to create a 0-1 scale. This new variable was put in the logistic regression to get the mediating effects of humor on the Colbert Condition. What was found as indicated by table 1, is humor drives sharing. When mediated for humor, the Colbert condition's significance disappeared and its coefficient sign flipped. On the other hand, the humor variable produced a

coefficient score of 2.51 and a P value of .000. Therefore, we can be fairly certain humor influences how shareable people find a video notwithstanding concerns regarding Colbert's celebrity and its effect on sharing. Essentially, despite Colbert's likeability, if he fails to deliver humor, people will not share his video. The predicted probability of humor, as can be seen in table 2, is 68.98% when humor is ranked at its highest versus 15.31% when humor is ranked at zero. The Colbert condition was held at one.

These findings fit with Zillmann (1980, 1983), who argued the degree audience members engage and react to humor depends on whether their expectations have been met. Zillmann's theory as applied to comedy is that maximum enjoyment of political comedy will be achieved when audience members' expectations interact with the material being presented. In other words, if they are tuning in to watch *The Daily Show* or the *Colbert Report*, expecting political satire, they will be satisfied fully only to the extent Jon Stewart and Stephan Colbert deliver on this expectation. Keeping with Zillmann, Holbert (2005) advocates that scholars of political communication need to "recognize whether audience members are expecting and, as a result, actively seeking out entertainment television content that is inherently political or is grounded in the presentation of political processes" (p.443). His research indicates one should expect differences when viewers seek out political humor from when politics is couched with otherwise apolitical entertainment programming. Therefore, people are satisfied when Colbert and Stewart are funny. How funny viewers find them determines whether viewers will want to share the information with others.

A desire to seek more information also appears to mediate sharing in the Colbert condition. If one wants to share the information, chances are that person will also want to seek more information on the topic. The Colbert condition again falls from significances, but the

coefficient does not flip. Given the information in table 1, a person is more likely to seek more information if they have shared the video. However, when desire to seek more information is the dependent variable, the story changes. Instead of emotion driving information seeking, Colbert seems to affect the probability of seeking more information. In the second part of the study the analysis that follows seeks to understand the pattern of information seeking, specifically in regards to interest and the Colbert personality. I am testing the following questions: (1) How much does interest influence the likelihood people will report a desire to seek more information; (2) what if any effect does Colbert appear to have over this reported desire to learn more?

Xenos and Becker (2009) found a significant relationship between viewers of a Jon Stewart clip and information seeking behavior. However, it does not appear that humor drives this behavior. Mediation effects with humor were insignificant. As table 3 indicates interest influences desire to seek information, but interest did not mediate Colbert. These findings suggest Downs' (1957) argument that individuals filter information by seeking sources with high credibility. Colbert appears to be functioning as a heuristic for what information deserves attention.

One of the problems is the more information variable. One might expect people answered yes because it was a survey, without tracking the behavior, one cannot be certain they actually did seek more information. Nevertheless the pattern fits with previous findings. Furthermore to be conservative in the measure, those who answered unsure were coded to fit in the middle of a three-point scale ranging from 0-1, with .5 as the middle value. Again a logit model was used. What was found is a pattern where, only 23% of those in the Colbert condition indicated they would not seek more information. Furthermore, when running a simple regression with interest as the dependent variable and Colbert as the independent variable, no significant relationship was

found. Thus, Colbert does not seem to be the determinate of interest. However, the combination of high interest in the video and Colbert resulted in an 87% predicted probability of seeking more information.

Conclusion

Only of late, researchers have attempted to analyze and interpret the ramifications of humor in media. Those in the political humor industry, continue to stress they are not in the news business. However, large numbers of viewers actively tune in to political comedy programming. This, compounded with the unique effects of humor on sharing, warrants further scholarly inquiry to both gauge the impact of humor on political interest and better define the political humorists role in the news industry. Recent projects in this area have so far found mixed results in regards to learning, but no one has yet to test its effects on information sharing (Baumgartner & Mirris, 2006; Brewer and Cao, 2006; Hollander, 2005; Kim & Vishak, 2008; Xenos, & Becker, 2009; Young, & Tisinger, 2006).

People today learn about their world in different ways from subsequent generations (Nie et al.; 2010). Social media have become a part of many people's daily lives. They check facebook, read blogs, tweet their comings and goings, essentially broadcasting their preferences, activities, and lives to their family, friends, colleagues, acquaintances, and even strangers. A social network is no longer confined by geography. Furthermore, the value of privacy seems to be waning. One can only speculate as to the reasons, but the implications for political science research are boundless. Finding new ways to measure these digital imprints will advance the study of political opinion and behavior. As far as this study is concerned, humor seems to differentiate from serious material. It contains a quality, which causes people to want to pass it along. Furthermore, humor appears to transcend partisanship.

Nevertheless, when it comes to indicating a desire to seek more information, the picture is less clear. Although, this experiment's findings support Xenos and Becker (2009), it is unclear whether interest is truly the mediating variable. To some extent it appears as though Colbert, himself, accounts for some of the desire to seek more information. This supports Downs (1957) claim that people seek information from people they view as credible. Thus, the good news of humor driving sharing is tempered in light of the fact Colbert rather than humor or interest influences whether people will expend the energy to seek supplemental information. While it is the job of journalists to act as gatekeepers of information, Colbert and Stewart have explicitly stated they are not journalists, politicians, or otherwise political elites. Yet as more research centers on their effect on political behavior, this claim holds less weight. It is important to note that political humorists are not held to journalistic standards while at the same time they fill a journalists role of cueing people as to what political issues are important and warrant further investigation. Should those rules apply to political humorists, or are they filling a role not suited to the traditional structure?

Despite arguments over the quality and quantity to which political entertainment mitigates the political engagement deficit among the American electorate, political humor seems to peak interest and influence sharing. Although, comedy has influenced politics since at least the time of Ancient Greece, scholars are treating political humor as a newly emerged phenomenon in the learning process of politics. This explains why little empirical research has been done on humor in politics. The study of humor in politics requires refinement. This experiment attempted to address some common problems when trying to study the information sharing and interest effects of humor. What it found is if politics is a bad tasting medicine, humor might be the sugar, which helps it go down

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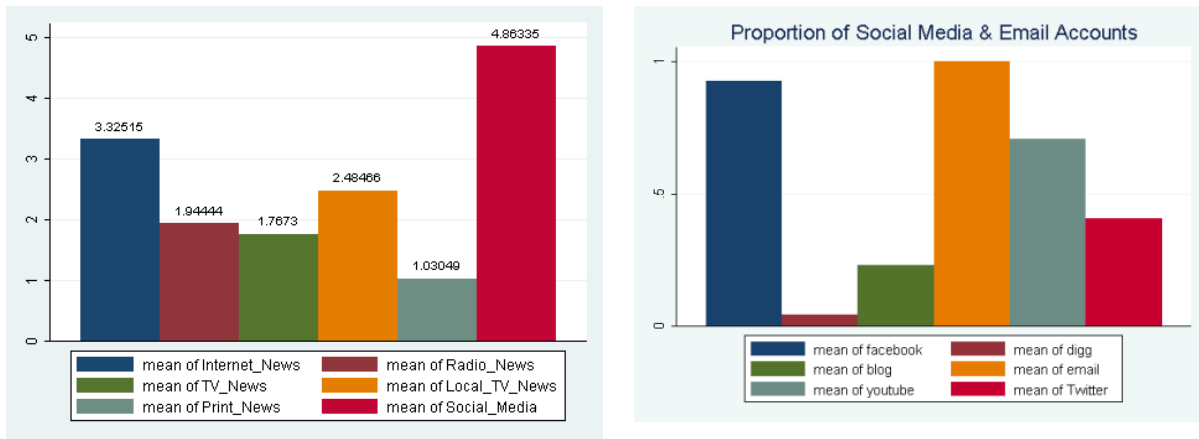
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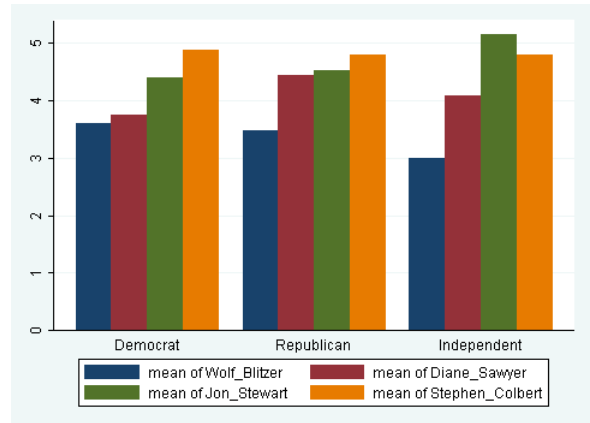
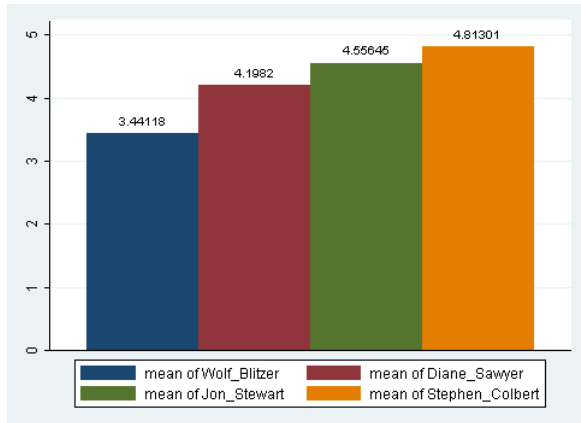
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Appendix I



N= 164

Figure 1. Graphs of Reported Per-Weekly News Consumption by Medium



* Number of Respondents Wolf Biltzer = 68 * Number of Respondents Diane Sawyer = 111 * Number of Respondents Jon Stewart = 124 * Number of Respondents Stephen Colbert = 123* Missing Respondents Answered Don't Know

Figure 2. Mean Thermometer Rating of Wolf Blitzer, Diane Sawyer, Jon Stewart, and Stephan Colbert

Table 1

Logistic Regression: Effect of Colbert Condition on Sharing via Social Media

Independent Variables	Coef.	Coef. w/mediation	Coef. w/mediation
Constant	-0.735 (-3.58)	-1.54 (-5.06)	-1.32 (-4.46)
Colbert	0.664* (1.97)	-.0168 (-.40)	0.474 (1.35)
Humor	—	2.51** (3.94)	—
Seek More Information	—	—	1.19** (3.07)

**P < .01 * P < .05 Note: Logistic regression z scores in (parenthesis) Colbert condition P values dropped from significance in mediated iterations Sobel test for mediation effects on humor mediation: t= 3.46; Std. error = .248 P value = 0.001 Sobel test for mediation effects on seek more information mediation: t= 2.12; Std. error = .609 P value = 0.034 N= 164

Table 2
Predicted Probabilities of Sharing

Independent Variables	Prvalue Sharing = 1 (Shared)	95% Confidence Interval	Prvalue Sharing = 0 (Did Not Share)	95% Confidence Interval
Colbert = 0	.3241	(.2358, .4123)	.6759	(.5877, .7642)
Colbert = 1	.4821	(.3513, .6130)	.5179	(.3870, 0.6487)
Humor = 0 (Colbert=1)	.1531	(.0223, .2838)	.8469	(.7162, .9777)
Humor = 1 (Colbert=1)	.6898	(.5420, .8375)	.3102	(.1625, .4580)
Seek More Information = 0 (Colbert=1)	.3023	(.1455, .4554)	.6977	(.5446, .8545)
Seek More Information = 1 (Colbert=1)	.5851	(.4402, .7299)	.4149	(.2701, .5598)

Table 3

Logistic Regression: Effect of Colbert Condition on Information Seeking

Independent Variables	Coef.	Coef. w/mediation
Constant	.111 (.58)	-.836** (-2.39)
Colbert	1.09** (2.93)	1.04** (2.72)
Interest	—	1.71** (3.28)

** P < .01 Logistic regression z scores in (parenthesis) Sobel test for mediation effects on interest mediation: t= 1.137; Std. error = .0997 P value = 0.2557 N= 164

Table 4
Predicted Probabilities of Information Seeking

Independent Variables	Pvalue More Info = 1 (Seek More Information)	95% Confidence Interval	Pvalue More Info = 0 (Does Not Seek More Information)	95% Confidence Interval
Colbert = 0	.5278	(.4336, .6219)	.4722	(.3781, .5664)
Colbert = 1	.7679	(.6573, .8784)	.2321	(.1216, .3427)
Interest = 0 (Colbert=1)	.5511	(.3424, .7598)	.4489	(.2402, .6576)
Interest = 1 (Colbert=1)	.8713	(.7824, .9603)	.1287	(.0397, .2176)

Appendix II

Condition 1 Script

THE EUROPIAN UNION OR E-U HAS BEEN LOARDING THEIR PRECIOUS EURO OVER OUR DOLLAR JUST BECAUSE IT STILL HAS VALUE.

WELL IM HAPPY TO SAY EUROPE'S PRECIOUS ECONOMY IS NOW SHRINKING SO FAST THAT IT WILL SOON FIT IN TO THEIR TINY MEN'S PANTS.

...LOOKS LIKE THOSE ARE ALREADY WELL STUFFED.

THE EUROPEANS BROUGHT THIS ON THEMSELVES BY ASSOCIATING WITH PIGS...AND BY PIGS I DON'T MEAN THE ANIMALS WHO'S INTESTANS THEY NORMALLY PACK WITH CHEESE.

JIM...

YES PIGS IS AN ACRONYM.

AND A PERFECT ACRONYM FOR EUROPE.

BECAUSE IT MAKES BOTH JEWS AND MUSLIMS FEEL UNWELCOME.

BUT ONE LITTLE PIGGY IS WALLOWING DEEPER THAN THE REST.

A MODERN GREEK DRAMA.

WHICH MEANS NOT ONLY THAT THE COUNTRY'S ECONOMY IS FAILING.

IT MEANS THE COUNTRY IS PROBABLY BANGING IT'S MOTHER.

NOW FOLKS THIS IS NO SURPRISE.

GREECE IS A MESS.

EVEN THEIR MOST VALUABLE REAL ESTATE LOOKS WORSE THAN DETROIT.

AND NOW GREECE HAS GONE CRAWLING TO IT'S WEALTHIEST EURO ZONE
PARTNER GERMANY FOR A BAILOUT.

BUT GERMANY HAS REFUSED.

IM SORRY GREECE BUT GERMANY IS FEELING JUST A LITTLE BIT BURNED AFTER
YOU DIDN'T APPRECIATE THEIR LAST GIFT, FREE NAZI TROOPS.

SO THE GREEKS HAS BEEN FORCED TO MAKE BUDGET CUTBACKS, OR IN GREEK
BUTTCRACKS.

BUT THESE AUSTERITY MEASURES HAVE LED TO VIOLENCE IN THE STREETS
AND IN THEIR RESAURANTS.

BUT IS THE MEDIA BLAMING THE COUNTRY THAT BLOWS HALF ITS GDP ON
REPLACEMENT CROCKERY?

NO, THEY'RE POINTED THEIR FINGERS AT BENEVOLENT KELPTOGARKY
GOLDMAN SACHS.

JUST BECAUSE IN 2001 GOLDMAN HELPED HIDE BILLIONS IN GREEK DEBT WHICH
WAS KEY IN QUOTE "GREECE JOINING THE EURO."

WHICH REPLACED THEIR OLD CURRENCY THE GYRO.

Condition 2 Script

FOR MANY YEARS PAST THE EUROPEAN UNION... OR E-U... HAS HAD A CURRENCY VALUE OF SOMETIMES DOUBLE THAT AGAINST THE AMERICAN DOLLAR.

THE E.U. USED TO PRIZE THEIR CURRENCY OVER THE DOLLAR BECAUSE IT “HAS VALUE“...BUT NOW, THE CONTINENT’S CURRENCY... THE EURO... HAS FALLEN TO JUST OVER EQUAL VALUE TO THAT OF THE U.S. DOLLAR.

(00:20)

JUST AS RECENTLY AS 2009... THE EURO WAS FIFTY PERCENT ABOVE THE AMERICAN DOLLAR.

AS OF THE MIDDLE OF 2010... THE EURO’S VALUE AGAINST THE AMERICAN DOLLAR EQUALS \$1.35.

ONE BIG FACTOR TO THE EXTREME COLLASPE OF THE CURRENCY IS THE EUROPEAN UNION’S INCLUSION OF FOUR ADDITIONAL EUROPEAN COUNTRIES THAT HAVE STRUGGLING ECONOMIES THAT DO NOT COMPARE WELL TO THE TRADITIONAL ECONOMIC POWERS IN EUROPE.

(00:44)

THE COUNTRIES OF PORTUGAL, IRELAND, GREECE, AND SPAIN CULMITATE TO THE POPULAR ACRONYM “P.IG.S.”

THE FOUR COUNTRIES THAT ARE OFTEN POPULAR TOURIST DESTINATIONS HAVE STRUGGLED DOMESTICALLY IN PROVIDING ECONOMIC GROWTH.

(00:54)

THE NATION OF GREECE IN PARTICULAR HAS FALLEN MORE THAN \$400 BILLION IN DEBT.

THE COUNTRY HAS SEEN MULTIPLE PUBLIC PROTESTS INCLUDING RIOTS IN EXTREME CASES OF PUBLIC OUTRAGE THAT Poured OUT INTO THE STREETS LEADING TO FOUR CIVILIAN DEATHS.

THE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC UNREST IS LEADING TO A MODERN DAY GREEK DRAMA.

THE COLLAPSE OF THE GREEK ECONOMY BEGAN WHEN THE COUNTRY CONVERTED ITS MONETARY SYSTEM TO THE EURO.

THE EURO WAS INTENDED TO BLANKET THE EUROPEAN COUNTRIES WHO COULD FINANCIALLY SUBSTAIN THEMSELVES.

BUT THE THEN STRUGGLING GREEK ECONOMY HAS BEEN UNABLE TO BOUNCE BACK.

THE NATION OF GREECE IS KNOWN FOR SOME OF THE EARLIEST TRACES OF MODERN DAY CIVILIZATION AND NOW IT IS CRUMBLING DOWN LIKE THE COUNTRIES HISTORIC ARCHITECTURE.

(01:47)

GREECE HAS ASKED THE EUROPEAN UNION FOR A BAILOUT BUT THE ECONOMIC STRONG COUNTRY OF GERMANY HAS REMAINED CAUTIOUS TO THE SIGNING OF A \$110 BILLION BAILOUT PACKAGE.

GERMANY HAS REMAINED SKEPTICAL ABOUT THE PACKAGE AS GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS IN THE COUNTRY BELIEVE THE SIGNING OF THE PACKAGE MIGHT

NOT BE SUCCESSFUL IN SAVING THE DEBT CONSUMING GREECE.

(02:06)

FOR THE TIME BEING... THE GREECE GOVERNMENT HAS MADE CUTBACKS IN MULTIPLE SECTORS OF THE COUNTRY'S ECONOMY.

THE CITIZENS HAVE CONTINUED TO VOICE THEIR FRUSTRATIONS WITH PROTESTS AND ACTION IN THE STREETS.

THIS TAKING PLACE IN A COUNTRY THAT HAS BEEN KNOWN AS A LIGHTHEARTED DESTINATION FOR TOURISTS.

(02:26)

ALTHOUGH MANY OUTSIDE MEDIA SOURCES BLAME THE COUNTRY'S DOWNFALL TO DOMESTIC FAILURES IN GREECE ITSELF...

OTHER MEDIA HAVE POINTED THE BLAME TO KEY RESEARCH AND PROPOSALS PLACED BY THE U.S. BASED CORPORATION "GOLDMAN SACHS."

THEY CLAIM THE GLOBAL INVESTMENT AND BANKING FIRM LIED ON KEY FINANCIAL RECORDS THAT ENABLED GREECE TO PASS INSPECTION TO CONVERT TO THE EURO.

(02:45)

THE UNIVERSITY OF MEMPHIS

Institutional Review Board

To: Courtney Meyers
Political Science

From: Chair, Institutional Review Board
For the Protection of Human Subjects
irb@memphis.edu

Subject: Getting the Joke: Humor Effects on Information Sharing of Political News (011911-115)

Approval Date: February 9, 2011

This is to notify you that the Institutional Review Board has designated the above referenced protocol as exempt from the full federal regulations. This project was reviewed in accordance with all applicable statuses and regulations as well as ethical principles.

When the project is finished or terminated, please complete the attached Notice of Completion form and send it to the Board via e-mail at irb@memphis.edu.

Approval for this protocol does not expire. However, any change to the protocol must be reviewed and approved by the board prior to implementing the change.

Chair, Institutional Review Board
The University of Memphis

Cc: Dr. Eric Groenendyk