

Survey finds press is best on politics

Newspapers' superiority over television in informing the public about political candidates has been confirmed, according to researchers at The University of Michigan.

Results of the study, titled "News, Television and Political Reasoning," are based on a nationwide, random sample of more than 1,800 adults interviewed following the 1974 election.

People were questioned in detail about their reasons for favoring or opposing candidates in races for the United States Senate. Both voters and non-voters described contenders' prior records in public office, issue stands, reputation as a good representative of party interests, image of honesty, and other personal characteristics.

In the 67 different news markets surveyed in 25 states, the number of reasons people gave correlated highly with use of newspapers, but correlated negatively with use of television.

The study's conclusions disagree with opinion poll results in which people claim to use television more than newspapers for news. The Michigan survey differs from earlier studies in that it distinguishes informed citizens from those without any knowledge of political affairs, and compares their use of media. Under this more stringent test, the importance of newspapers for disseminating information becomes apparent.

Authors of the research are Peter

Clarke and Eric Fredin. Clarke is professor and chairman of the U-M department of journalism, where Fredin is completing his doctoral work in mass communication research.

The 67 news markets in the survey included large cities, suburbs, towns, and rural areas. Clarke and Fredin calculated average levels of candidate information people held in each market. They correlated this against indexes describing gross exposure to newspapers and television and additional measures reflecting use of these media for political content.

Areas in which people used newspapers heavily emerged as well informed, compared to markets with low newspaper use. Heavy television areas were less informed than markets with light use, though the negative association fell just short of statistical significance.

Greater effectiveness of newspapers remained when the analysis controlled for such other important influences, as years of education and general interest in politics.

Results cannot be explained by claims that people simply do not notice political messages on television, according to the authors. Data show that people see political and governmental news on television. But this exposure does not translate into retained information, Clarke and Fredin say.

The researchers suggest that news-

papers' greater effectiveness results from inherent qualities of print use. These include the audience's control over pace of exposure, greater detail in political reports, repetition of messages, and the like.

Clarke and Fredin's study defines the informed citizen as one who can express reasons for making political choices. But the authors emphasize that their measure succeeds only in tracing the "minimum conditions" of an informed electorate. Almost half the people interviewed could not express a single reason for preferring one candidate over another.

The study's measure of information fails to identify people who make sophisticated judgments about the political scene. Effects of journalistic coverage on their understandings lie outside the scope of this survey.

Whatever political effects television news may achieve, study results call into question its power to convey candidates' policy positions or personality

in such a way that heavy viewers will retain more of this information than light viewers.

Clarke and Fredin went one step further to identify the kinds of newspaper markets where citizen information is especially high. They found areas with competing newspapers have better informed people than monopoly markets. More than half the areas with greatest newspaper competition showed unusually high levels of information. Seven out of 10 areas that are newspaper monopolies, or near-monopolies, contain people who are badly informed about Senatorial candidates, on average.

The authors conclude: "We can legitimately feel uneasy about declining newspaper circulation (per capita) and about any industry developments that limit the amount of newspaper competition within markets. These trends weaken important social resources for public education."

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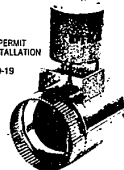
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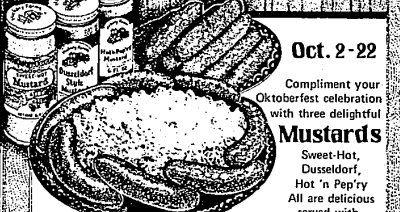
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Jury award near record

An Oakland County Circuit Court jury Monday awarded Frank Roboticnikowski of Warren \$800,000.

It was one of the largest awards ever handed out by an Oakland jury. Roboticnikowski was injured while working on the construction of the Wolverine Towers Office Complex in Ann Arbor in May 1973.

The jury found that the general con-

tractor, the R.E. Dailey Co. of Southfield, had not adequately guaranteed the safety of the construction workers.

Roboticnikowski was hit by a four-inch-by-four-inch piece of wood that fell from the 11th floor of the office complex. The piece of wood was a supporting pipeline carrying concrete to the 11th floor.

Roboticnikowski suffered brain damage and is partially paralyzed.

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