

Media Prerequisites and Personnel:

Television and Newspaper Differences in Hiring Strategies

C. Ann Hollifield
University of Georgia

Gerald M. Kosicki
The Ohio State University

Lee B. Becker
University of Georgia

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Abstract

This study examines whether, as competition for readers and viewers increases among news producers, media organizations are focusing on hiring individuals whose talents most reflect the specific communication strengths and style of a particular medium, or whether news executives still seek more traditional journalistic skills in applicants. The study also examined differences in the types of application materials news executives require applicants to submit, and compared those responses to what recently hired employees reported being asked to submit by their employers.

The study used data from three national surveys conducted in the Spring of 1996. The first was the Jane Pauley Task Force national survey of television news directors. The second was a national survey of daily newspaper editors, and the third was a national survey of recent graduates of four-year journalism and mass communication programs.

The study found that news executives appear more likely to use traditional journalistic skills when describing an ideal applicant. However, even more important than such skills for both media types were the personality characteristics of new employees. Thus, news executives appear to place more importance on hiring good employees than on hiring good journalists.

The results of the study also have important methodological implications for future research in the area. News directors and news editors were found to describe the language capabilities they seek in applicants very differently, which may be important to question construction for research into television and newspaper news processes. Large and fairly consistent discrepancies also were found between what television news directors reported they use to evaluate applicants and what recently hired employees reported being asked to submit. This finding suggests some caution may be necessary when evaluating the validity of self-report data from the television news industry.

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Introduction

The 1990s have been a decade of seachange in the U.S. media industry. At no other time in history have the conditions under which news and information are gathered, processed and communicated changed as rapidly and profoundly as they have in the last decade of the 20th century. The introduction and expansion of new technologies and the rapid convergence of old ones have transformed both the production processes used by news media companies and the economic conditions in which they operate.

One of the primary effects of the technological changes that have overtaken the media industry in the last 10 years has been to increase the number of news and information sources available to readers and viewers. The start-up of new broadcast television networks with their own local affiliate stations, the rapid increase in the channel capacity of cable systems, and the explosion both of on-line news and information services and the public's access to them have fragmented significantly the market served by news operations. Whereas in the 1960s and '70s there were times of the day when it was impossible to get news from any source other than the radio, and other times when it was impossible to watch television without watching news, today consumers can tap into both television and on-line news and information 24 hours a day, or turn away from it completely to watch any one of dozens of entertainment options that now directly compete for the public's attention against the news.

The effects of this increased competition in the news and information market are clear. The ratings for individual networks and affiliate news operations have steadily declined over recent years (McClellan, 1997), as has newspapers' household penetration. Some readers and viewers -- particularly younger ones (McClellan, 1997; Bogart, 1989) -- appear to have decided that news as it has been traditionally packaged and reported is not sufficiently relevant to warrant the time

and financial investment required to obtain it. Other consumers continue to use traditional news products but now have more choices among news suppliers.

Attracting and retaining an audience for news products has thus become more complex. News executives find themselves needing to position their information products in the marketplace in a way that differentiates their news product from that of their competitors, while still maintaining a product that attracts the size and caliber of audience desired by advertisers.

From a management standpoint, having talented and capable newsroom personnel is a key element in meeting that challenge.

News is, by definition, an information product. It is constructed from information resources (Braman 1989), with the value of the news product being determined by the addition by news personnel of supporting information, corroboration, knowledge, judgment and insight. News creators take an initial bit of information -- say a news tip or press release -- and develop it into a news story. That process entails selecting the initial piece of information out as important from the cacophony of information that is available, corroborating it, developing, expanding and contextualizing it, and communicating it in as clear and efficient manner to the audience as is possible.

In the era of information overload, the value of agents that can filter, sort and contextualize data is steadily increasing. But despite considerable research and development efforts, mechanical agents that can satisfactorily perform these functions remain elusive. For news media businesses, all of the value that is added to their product from the raw material of information that floods the newsroom is added through the skill and creativity of individuals on the payroll.

Given the critical role newsroom personnel play in the overall success of media companies, it seems possible that media corporations would focus a great deal of effort on attracting and hiring the most qualified journalists available. Moreover, in an era of increased competition and diversification among media, it might also be expected that the characteristics executives would seek in applicants in order to deem them "qualified" would reflect the differences that exist between types of media such as newspapers and television. Personnel recruited into and selected for newsroom jobs are the ones who carry out the media policies that produce the differences in products, and so it would appear more likely that, as competition from other media increases, executives would seek employees who would be most able to help capitalize on their medium's strengths in order to make their news product stand out against its competition. Moreover, careful screening of those hired would be more efficient than socialization once on the job.

Possibly counterbalancing such a tendency, however, is the existence of a professional journalistic culture that permeates news media operations regardless of the technology for news distribution that is used. That culture, which is most concretely expressed through the professional standards elaborated by such organizations as the Radio and Television News Directors Association (RTNDA) and the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ), creates shared journalistic values and standards for the selection and production of news. Those commonalities of journalistic standards across media types might be expected to reduce differences both in news

media products and, consequently, in the qualifications that media executives in different types of media might seek in news personnel.

This study examines the qualifications news media executives seek in newsroom applicants to see whether hiring decisions appear more likely to be based upon specific elements of a medium's news format and product, or on more general journalistic skills that would be required across all media types. The study uses a secondary analysis of two national surveys -- one of news directors at commercial television news stations and the other of editors at daily newspapers -- to examine similarities and dissimilarities in hiring standards and practice for newsroom personnel across media types.

Background

Differences in Journalistic Practice Across Media Types

The construction of news takes place in an environment that includes conflicting forces. On the one hand, research has shown that many of the basic processes of gathering and reporting news remain similar across different types of media, although specific elements of the process may differ because of the needs of different media formats for audio, video, both audio and video, still photographs or graphics. However, the fundamental processes of sorting through information to identify possible stories, contacting sources, conducting interviews, gathering information and constructing a news story are fundamentally the same. Also creating similarities in journalistic practice across media are shared understandings of what has come, in the late 20th century, to constitute acceptable standards for news gathering and reporting in the United States. Those standards include such goals as fairness, objectivity, balance and accuracy.

While such factors create commonalities of practice across media, other forces have worked to differentiate the practice and product of journalistic effort in different types of media. In general, greater competition among media of all types is pressuring media organizations to find ways to clearly differentiate their news products from others in the marketplace in order to attract brand-loyal readers and viewers. There also is evidence that differences in the various medium's formats shape the news judgments, values and story constructions within those formats.

Scholars interested in the similarities and differences between journalistic practice in different media have focused most attention on television and newspapers. The similarities found across the two media include research that has shown that gatekeepers in both television and newspapers focused on localness as the most important reason to save or reject a news stories or news releases (Abbott and Brassfield, 1989). Other important shared criteria that determined whether an editor or assignment editor decided to pursue a suggested story included impact, interest and timeliness criteria (Abbott and Brassfield 1989; Berkowitz, 1990; Harmon, 1989). Moreover, despite accusations that television news, as compared to newspapers, has come to focus primarily on mayhem and features, research has shown that -- except perhaps during ratings periods -- television still focuses primarily on hard news and breaking news (Carroll, 1988; Harmon, 1989).

Peer and Chestnut (1995), in a study of how ABC, the Washington Post and the New York Times covered the first weeks of the Persian Gulf crisis that led to the Gulf War, found a high degree of overlap in the angles of the story on which the different mediums focused attention. This led the researchers to conclude that journalists in television and newspapers were "constrained by the same norms and are dependent on the same elite dialogue," (p. 92).

However, other research has found significant differences in journalism values and practice between television and newspapers. Television, not surprisingly, is generally found to place greater emphasis on the visual possibilities of suggested stories, although few scholars have found that to be a primary criteria in story selection (Abbott and Brassfield, 1989; Berkowitz, 1990). Jacobs (1996), for example, found that the development of computer graphics and increasingly mobile video equipment has enabled television reporters to replace video footage of a story with computer-generated images or live shots of the reporter in the newsroom. Such techniques reduced television journalists' emphasis on the visual aspects of potential stories during the gatekeeping process by providing ways to give viewers visual relief during the news cast, if not actual visuals.

If television assignment editors were found to be at least slightly more inclined than newspaper editors to evaluate stories on the basis of visual potential, newspaper editors were found to be more likely to want more in-depth information about a potential story during the evaluation process (Abbott & Brassfield, 1989).

Differences also have been found in the gatekeeping and news gathering processes used by the two media. Generally only one person in a television station evaluated a news release before deciding whether to save it or throw it away, while in newspapers, press releases generally passed through two or more editors before final disposition (Abbott & Brassfield, 1989).

This difference may be, in part, a function of the fact that the number of news personnel employed in television news operations is generally smaller than that for newspapers in the same markets, particularly when technical personnel such as videographers, audio specialists and tape editors are subtracted and only those in gatekeeping and reporting roles are compared. As a result of the relatively smaller size of news staffs in television, there is much less role specialization among television journalists on average than there is among newspaper journalists (Becker, 1982; Becker, Fruit and Caudill, 1987, pp. 110-111). Television reporters, as a rule, are required to work on a wider variety of stories and have the opportunity to develop much less expertise and fewer sources in a specific topical area than is generally true of their newspaper counterparts. Moreover, Becker (1982), in a reanalysis of the Johnstone, Slawski and Bowman national study of journalists from the early 1970s, was able to show clear differences between print and broadcast journalists in terms of amount of autonomy reporters had within the newsroom, with television news reporters being subjected to much less supervisor oversight.

Differences in the format and the nature of the constraints faced by the two media also has been found to shape both news selection and story focus. Television is, of course, constrained primarily by time, while newspapers are constrained by space. Limitations of time in the television format have been shown to encourage television journalists to use information that can be assembled with efficiency of effort (Berkowitz, 1990) and sources that are readily accessible

(Lasorsa and Reese, 1990). Television reporters also have been shown to use fewer sources per story than newspaper reporters covering the same story (Lasorsa & Reese, 1990), less data, and fewer facts and points of view (Peer and Chestnut, 1995). As a result, researchers have tended to conclude that television news, in comparison to the print media, provides viewers with superficial and incomplete information from readily available sources and, in the process, ignores explanations for issues and events that would require detailed or complicated explanations (Lasorsa & Reese p. 70; Peer and Chestnut, p. 91).

Peer and Chestnut (1995) found that the short time allotted to each news story also affected the construction of news stories, leading television reporters to write a cohesive narrative with a beginning, middle and end. They compared the TV approach with newspaper stories and found that once past the inverted pyramid lead, newspaper stories tended to be much less linear than television stories, so that it made little difference where a reader entered the story. Peer and Chestnut suggested that television's narrative structure may encourage the use of a "thematic" approach to stories, creating a more cohesive point-of-view in television news coverage and limiting the amount of information that is provided to viewers that may conflict with the larger theme of the story.

Another constraint imposed on writing and story construction by the television format is the fact that the information is delivered orally to the audience, who must receive it at the pace chosen by the reporter and anchor. Thus, not only must news stories be written concisely, they must be written clearly, simply and succinctly enough so that the listener can comprehend all of the information in the story immediately and completely. There is no opportunity for a viewer to reread or rehear information that is unclear or misunderstood.

It is possible to argue, then, that while television journalists find it less necessary to have mastered the technical elements of writing such as grammar and punctuation, they face a more difficult challenge in the writing process itself.

Other differences also have been found in studies that have examined the news construction processes in television, newspapers or both. Television has been found to place a greater emphasis than newspapers on the reporter as an integral, inseparable part of the story, who, by his or her physical and vocal presence, embodies the story (Peer and Chestnut, 1995). Other studies have shown that television gatekeepers are more likely to focus on the dramatic or sensational aspects of a story (Peer and Chestnut), and even more likely to do so during ratings periods, when a station's success in competing against other news media for viewers' attention is measured (Harmon, 1989).

Differences in Personnel Practices Across Media Types

Given the consistent evidence that the news products delivered by television and newspapers differ substantially, if newsroom personnel are key factors in the news production process that shape those products, it might be expected that there also will be differences between the two media in the characteristics they seek in newsroom employees and the processes they use to screen those applicants.

If, for example, television places greater emphasis than newspapers on the reporter as an integral presence within the story, or on having interesting or pleasing visual elements to accompany the story, it might be expected that television news executives would be more inclined than newspaper editors to evaluate newsroom applicants based on their having a strong personal presence or a pleasing appearance. Similarly, if newspaper reporters are expected to use more sources, deal with more facts and data, and explain more complex issues than are common in television reporting, it would be expected that newspaper editors would focus on hiring reporters with those demonstrated skills. Indeed, Becker, Fruit and Caudill (1987) found this to be the case for both television and newspapers in a series of case studies of media hiring practices (p. 108).

In a two-state survey in 1981 that followed their case studies, Becker, Fruit and Caudill (1987) found other differences between how newspaper editors and news directors viewed applicants. Using an open-ended question that asked news directors and editors to list the characteristics that the ideal candidate would bring to the newsroom, they found that for both television stations and newspapers, writing ability was the single most frequently listed characteristic, and that television stations valued the skill even more than newspapers (p. 120-121). For newspapers, enthusiasm and broad knowledge were second most frequently by newspaper editors, while a college education was listed second most frequently among television news directors. For news directors, enthusiasm was the least most frequently mentioned characteristic for an ideal candidate.

Asked in an open-ended question to describe weaknesses among their applicant pool, television news directors were most likely to cite writing ability, followed by mastery of English grammar, while for newspapers, the focus on these two areas of weakness was reversed (Becker, Fruit and Caudill, 1987).. Both newspaper editors and television news directors also complained about a lack of willingness among applicants to work hard, although television news directors were more likely to list that as a problem than were newspaper editors.

If such variance in hiring priorities exists, it might be expected that the hiring process, as a process, also would differ between television newsrooms and newspapers. News executives in both media would be expected to require applicants to submit materials that would help employers evaluate whether a candidate possessed those characteristics viewed as being of greatest importance to the organization's ability to create a highly successful, competitive news product. Clearly, it is more cost effective to screen candidates for key abilities than it is to try to train or create those capabilities in a person deficient in one or more of the crucial areas.

Thus, if TV news directors believe reporters' personalities or appearance are important to attracting viewers, they would be expected to require applicants to submit materials that would allow them to be evaluated personality and appearance. Conversely, if the ability to locate and use data and multiple sources to explain complex issues to readers is important in newspaper journalism, then newspaper editors would be expected to put a high priority on getting application materials that would help them evaluate those skills in applicants.

Becker, Fruit and Caudill (1987) found evidence of such hiring process differences. Their 1981 survey showed that about half of daily newspapers and slightly less than half of television stations required applicants to take one or more tests during the hiring process. The survey also

found that three-quarters of all television stations asked for experience in applicants, while only one-fifth of daily newspapers responding to the survey had a similar requirement (p. 120).

This study seeks to replicate and extend Becker, Fruit and Caudill's (1987) earlier work and to examine whether, in the past 16 years, as competition between media -- and the focus on news as a competitive media product -- have increased, the differences between media personnel hiring practices and goals also have increased.

Put another way, this study asks whether news organizations are still focused on hiring personnel who bring the skills strongly associated with quality journalism across media types, or whether news executives are changing their hiring practices to focus on obtaining employees who are most able to help the organization differentiate its news product from that of its competitors.

Hypotheses

Previous research has shown that television news stories are written in a more cohesive narrative style than are newspaper stories. Moreover, the limitations that time places on the amount of information that can be communicated to an audience, and the need to be able to communicate that information in a way that is clear, succinct and immediately and completely understandable, should make writing for television more difficult than writing for newspapers. However, newspaper reporting requires greater knowledge of English grammar and punctuation because such errors made in writing news stories are immediately apparent, permanent, and represent a lack of attention to detail in preparing the newspapers' fundamental product. Therefore:

Hypothesis 1: Television news directors are more likely than newspaper editors to focus on writing skills in making hiring decisions.

Hypothesis 2: Newspaper editors are more likely than television news directors to focus on knowledge of English grammar in hiring decisions.

Previous research has shown that newspaper reporters use more sources, facts and data than do television reporters covering the same story. Therefore, the ability to handle in-depth and complex information should be an important criteria for identifying good hires for newspapers. Therefore:

Hypothesis 3: Newspaper editors will be more likely than television news directors to focus on an applicants' basic knowledge and education in hiring decisions.

Television news organizations have been found to place more emphasis on the visual aspects of a story and more emphasis on the personality of the reporter as an integral part of the story than do newspapers. Therefore:

Hypothesis 4: Television news directors will be more likely than newspaper editors to focus on candidates' personal attributes such as appearance and personality in the hiring process.

Previous research has shown that television newsrooms have fewer employees, fewer supervisors and less role specialization among employees than do newspapers. Consequently, news directors are more dependent than newspaper editors on the ability of their staffs to develop and report stories independently. Therefore:

Hypothesis 5: Television news directors will be more likely than newspaper editors to seek applicants with commitment and strong work habits in making hiring decisions.

Previous research has shown that television, in comparison to newspapers, tends to emphasize the spectacle aspect of news stories, focusing on what is simple and interesting as opposed to achieving more traditional journalistic values such as balance, fairness and completeness. Therefore:

Hypothesis 6: Newspaper editors will be more likely than television news directors to consider applicants' commitment to traditional professional journalistic values when making hiring decisions.

Methods

To test these expectations and expand upon the limited research available on the topic, a secondary analysis of three national surveys that were conducted in the spring of 1996 was undertaken. The first consisted of a survey of 308 news directors at commercial television news stations around the country. The initial survey was commissioned by a task force on broadcast journalism education funded by NBC journalist Jane Pauley and undertaken through the auspices of the Society of Professional Journalists.

The second survey, of 735 editors of daily newspapers, was undertaken as part of an ongoing study of labor force issues in mass communication. A report of earlier analyses of data from this project were reported by Becker, Stone and Graf (1996). The third survey was the annual survey of graduates of four-year programs in journalism and mass communication programs in the United States.

In the survey of news directors, a mailing list of 1,131 commercial television stations was developed using combined entries in Bowker's Broadcasting & Cable Yearbook and the Television & Cable Factbook published by Warren Publishing. A three-page questionnaire containing items suggested by the Jane Pauley Task Force and developed from previous research was sent to each of the stations in January, with two follow-up mailings between January and June. In all, 308 news directors completed a questionnaire. Another 86 stations responded indicating that they did not have news operations, while an additional 16 questionnaires were returned with indications that station no longer existed as listed and had no forwarding address. The response rate, which was computed as the number of returned questionnaires, including those indicating no news operation, divided by the total number of usable addresses, was 35.3 percent.

The returns came disproportionately from VHF stations, which are more likely to have news operations, and from smaller ADIs, where entry-level positions are more common. In sum, the sample, despite the low return rate, seems to reflect the sentiments of news directors actually hiring entry-level journalists.

The survey of daily newspaper editors was conducted using a list of 1,539 daily newspapers listed in the 1995 edition of Editor and Publisher International Yearbook. A mail survey was sent to all newspapers on the list in February 1996, using many items identical to those on the Jane Pauley Task Force survey. Two follow-up mailings were sent between the end of February and June. A total of 735 editors returned the questionnaire -- a 47.8 percent response rate.

Finally, data from the annual survey of journalism and mass communication graduates were used to compare the hiring processes experienced by recent graduates who had obtained jobs in television or daily newspaper newsrooms with those reported by television and newspaper executives. The survey of graduates is conducted using a sample of schools drawn from those listed in the Journalism and Mass Communication Directory, published annually by the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, and *The Journalist's Road to Success: A Career and Scholarship Guide*, published each year by the Dow Jones Newspaper Fund Inc.

In 1996, 93 four-year schools were drawn from the 449 total entries listed for the United States and Puerto Rico. Administrators at those schools were asked to provide the names and addresses of their spring bachelor's and master's degree recipients. Surveys were mailed to all students on the list. A total of 2,241 questionnaires were returned from bachelor's degree recipients and 142 were returned from master's degree recipients for a response rate of 52.9 percent.

All three surveys used a similar closed-ended question to ask respondents about the application materials required during the hiring process. In the surveys of news directors and newspaper editors, an open-ended question was used to ask respondents to "indicate the characteristics you are most interested in seeing in an applicant for an entry-level position in your newsroom." The use of an open-ended question for this measure allowed respondents to generate their own list of most important characteristics, so that responses reflected those characteristics that came most readily to the respondent's mind.

Up to seven characteristics were coded for each questionnaire. Different ways of expressing similar characteristics were coded separately. Data analyses are based on analysis of both the initial coding scheme and a reanalysis after similar responses were aggregated into supracategories that eliminated multiple responses in the same general area from individual respondents.

Findings

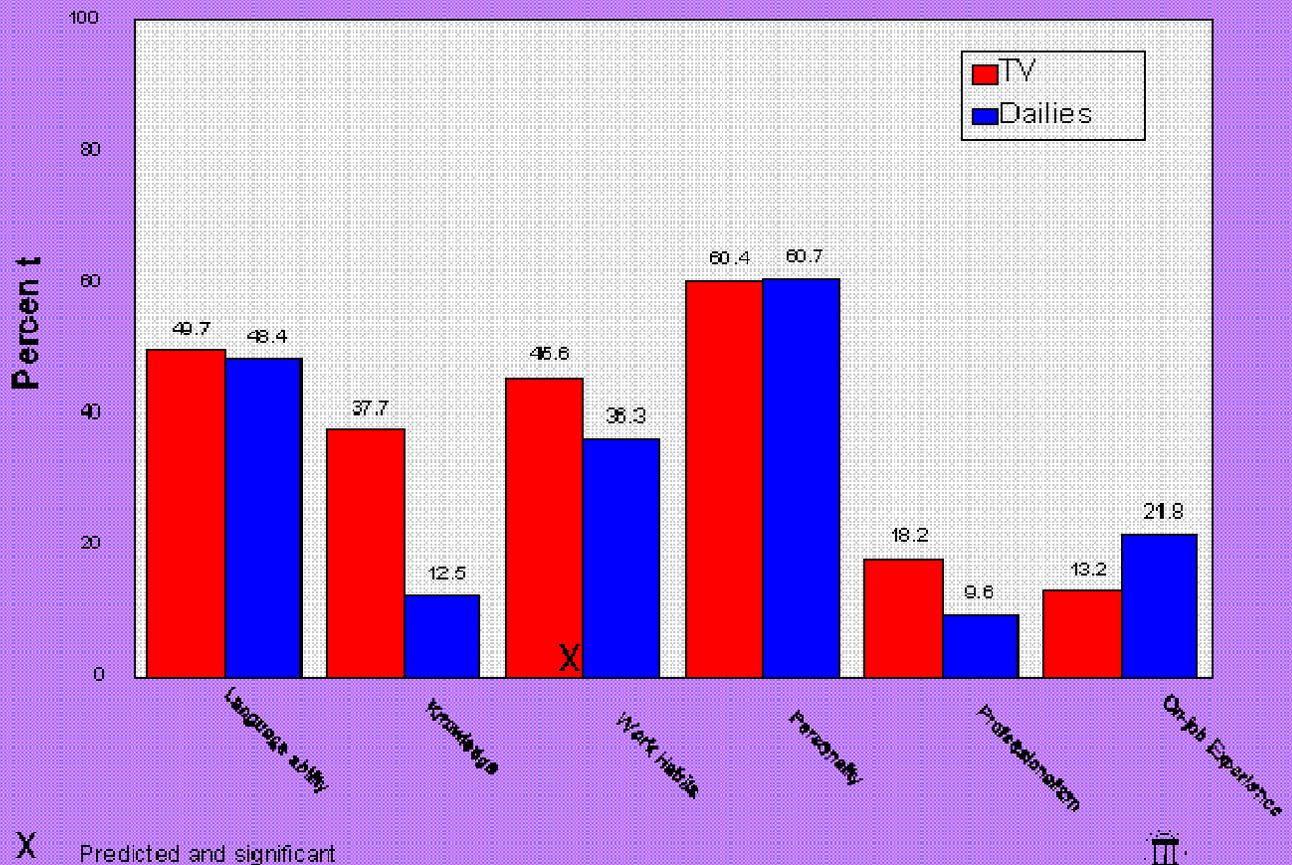
Hypothesis 1: Support for this hypothesis was mixed. When the data were analyzed based on the initial responses of editors and news directors, television news directors were found to be significantly more likely than newspaper editors to say that the ideal applicant would have strong

writing skills and/or that the person would have the ability to "tell a story/communicate well" (not shown). Newspaper editors, however, were significantly more likely to use other terms or phrases to indicate that their ideal applicant would have strong language skills.

Also suggesting support for the hypothesis were the findings that television news directors were significantly more likely than newspaper editors to say that they require applicants to take writing tests during the hiring process (Figure 2).

However, when data on candidates' ideal characteristics were aggregated, the differences in the characteristics listed for largely disappeared. Slightly less than half of all newspaper editors and television news directors mentioned some aspect of language ability as being a key characteristic for the ideal candidate to possess. Although television news directors seemed slightly more likely than newspaper editors to focus on language ability, the differences were not significant (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Characteristics of Ideal Candidate for Entry-Level Position



Despite the significantly higher percentage of television news directors who said that they require applicants to take writing tests, that was not the experience reported by recent graduates who had been hired into the field. New graduates working in television were slightly more likely than graduates working in newspapers to report having been given a writing test during the hiring process, but the percentage who reported being tested was less than half the percentage of news directors who reported giving such tests (Figures 2 and 3). Within newspapers, the discrepancy was less, with 33.3 percent of recent graduates reporting taking a writing test, compared to 57.1 percent of editors who reported giving one.

Figure 2. Materials Used in Evaluating Applicants for Entry-Level Positions

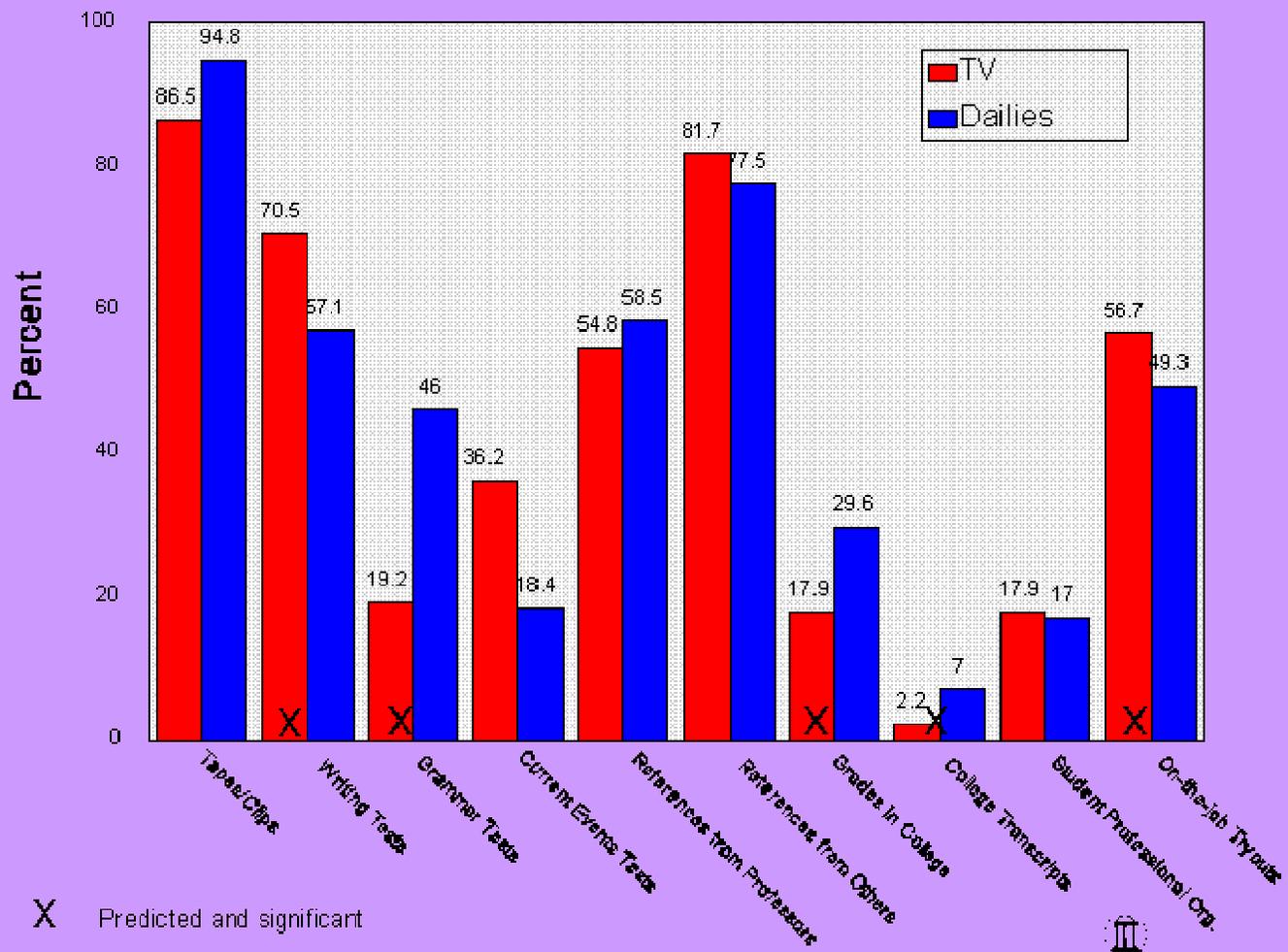
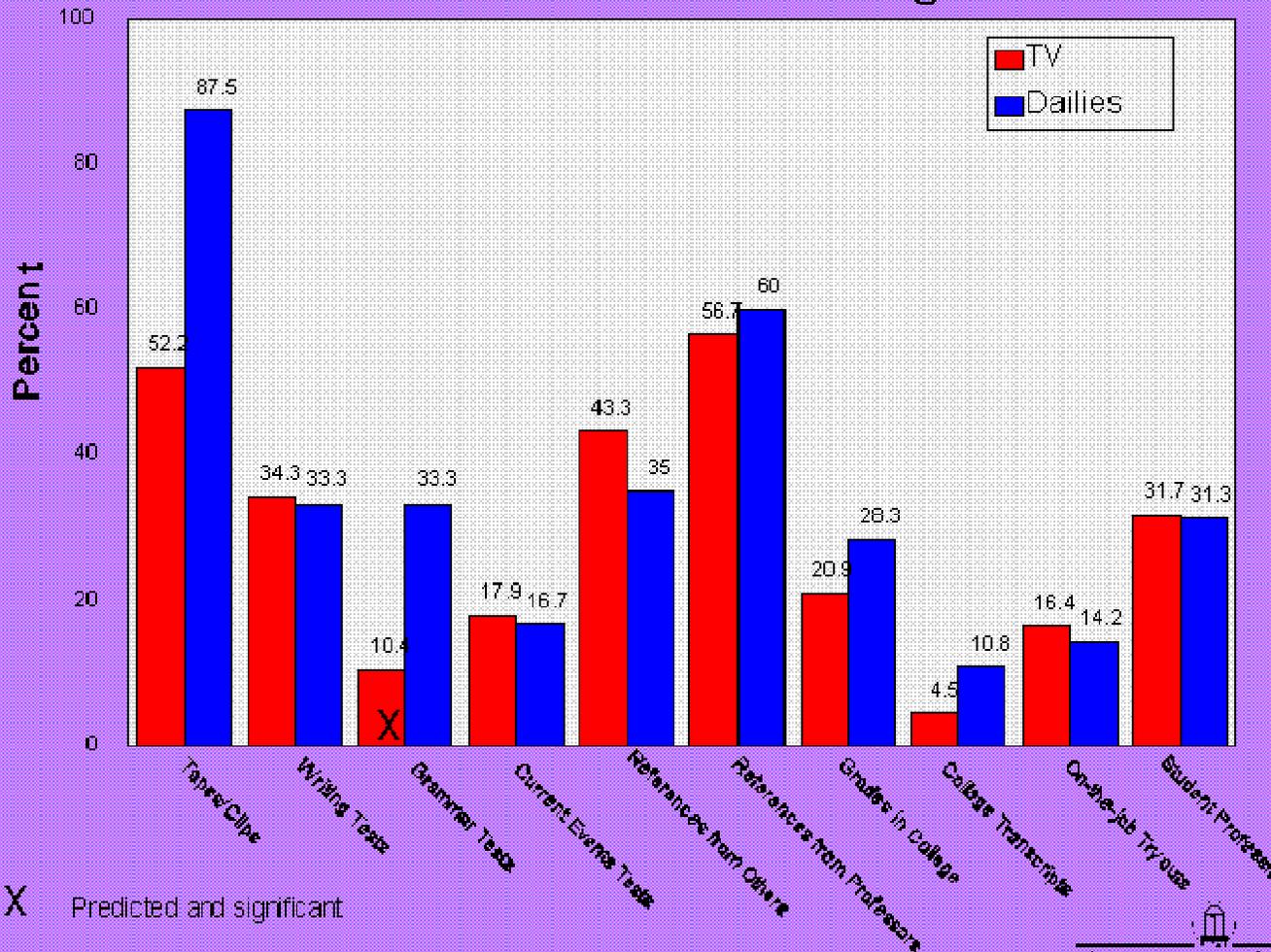


Figure 3. Reports of 1996 Graduates on Criteria Used in Hiring



Hypothesis 2: This expectation was supported. When data were analyzed according to initial categories, newspaper executives were significantly more likely than TV executives to mention knowledge of grammar as an important characteristic in the ideal candidate (not shown). Newspaper editors also were significantly more likely to say they give applicants grammar tests (Figure 2). And recent graduates hired by newspapers were significantly more likely than those hired by TV stations to report that they had been given a grammar test during the hiring process (Figure 3). Among recent graduates working for newspapers, 33.3 percent of applicants reported that they were given a grammar test, while 46 percent of editors said they gave such tests. In television, 10.4 percent of new hires said they had been given a grammar test, compared to 19.2 percent of news directors who said they required.

Hypothesis 3: The evidence for this hypothesis was mixed, but by and large the prediction was not supported. Both at the individual category (not shown) and the aggregate level (Figure 1), television news directors were much more likely than newspaper editors to mention some aspect of in-depth knowledge as being important in the ideal candidate. Categories included knowledge of current events, history, government, courts and economics. In each case, television news directors were more likely to have mentioned that area of knowledge as important.

Television news directors also were significantly more likely to say that they gave applicants current events tests in the hiring process (Figure 2). However, recent graduates hired into entry-level television positions were only slightly more likely than their newspaper counterparts to report having been given a current events test during the application process (Figure 3). Although 36.2 percent of news directors said they administer such tests, only 17.9 percent of recent hires said they had taken one. For newspapers the gap was much smaller, with 18.4 percent of editors saying they gave current events tests and 16.7 percent of recent hires saying they had taken one.

Despite their emphasis on the importance of widespread knowledge among applicants, television news directors were less likely than newspaper editors to ask applicants about their college grades or to request copies of their transcripts. This suggests at least some support for the hypothesis but also suggests there may be some differences in how television news directors and newspaper editors are likely to try to measure basic knowledge and education.

Among recent hires, the percentage who reported being asked for their transcripts or about their grades was higher than the percentage of editors and news directors who said they look at those measures. In the surveys, 28.3 percent of new hires in newspaper jobs reported having been asked about their grades, compared to 20.9 in television jobs. The compared to 29.6 percent of newspaper editors and 17.9 percent of news directors who reported asking about college grades. Only 10.8 percent of new hires at newspapers and 4.5 percent of new TV hires reported being asked to submit a copy of their transcripts, compared to 7 percent of newspaper editors who said they ask for transcripts and 2.2 percent of news directors who reported the same.

Hypothesis 4: This expectation was not supported. There was essentially no difference between the likelihood that TV news directors and newspaper editors would mention appearance and personality as important in entry-level television personnel (Figure 1). However, for both news directors and newspaper editors, a higher percentage of respondents listed personality characteristics as being important in an ideal hire than listed any other type of characteristics, including professional skills, values or work habits.

Hypothesis 5: The expectation that news directors would put more emphasis than newspaper editors on work habits was supported. Before data were aggregated, television news directors were more likely to mention almost every individual measure of work habits than were newspaper editors when discussing the profile of the ideal applicant. The exceptions were "talent," "ability to work under pressure," "willingness to follow instructions," and "enthusiasm/eagerness."

In the aggregate, television news directors were significantly more likely than newspapers to say good work habits and commitment to the job were important characteristics for applicants to have (Figure 1). They also were significantly more likely to report that they required on-the-job tryouts from applicants being seriously considered for an entry-level position (Figure 2). However, recent graduates were almost equally likely in both industries to say that they had had an on-the-job tryout. In both industries, the percentages of recent hires reporting that they had had a tryout was less than the percentage of executives saying they required tryouts in hiring process, although the discrepancy was smaller in the newspaper industry (Figure 3).

As another measure of concern with work habits, television news directors also were more likely than newspaper editors to say they sought references from non-university sources (Figure 2). Newspaper editors, however, were more likely than news directors to seek references from the applicant's former professors.

Among recent hires, the findings on references were the reverse of what was reported on the two executive surveys. Newspaper workers were more likely than TV newsroom employees to report that they were asked for non-university references, while TV job holders were more likely to report that they were asked to submit references from former professors (Figure 3).

Hypothesis 6: This expectation was not supported. Television news directors were almost twice as likely as newspaper editors to list professionalism or specific professional values as being important characteristics in a new hire (Figure 1). However, the percentage of respondents who mentioned professional values or ethics of any type was very low for both media.

When specific items were analyzed, television news directors were 11 times more likely to mention high ethical standards as being an important characteristic among applicants (not shown). Even so, only 4.4 percent of news directors mentioned that characteristic in their response to the open-ended question, while only 0.4 percent of newspaper editors did. News directors and editors were almost equally likely -- 3.1 percent and 3.5 percent respectively -- to say they looked for a "love of journalism" in the ideal candidate.

Television news directors were also slightly more likely than newspaper editors to say they looked for evidence that applicants has been members of student professional organizations such as Radio & Television News Directors Association or the Society of Professional Journalists as a measure of their commitment to professionalism (Figure 2). This statement was supported by the percentage of recent graduates working in television who reported being asked about their participation in student professional organizations (Figure 3). For recent graduates in television, that number was slightly higher than for those in newspapers. In both cases, the percentage corresponded relatively closely to the percentage of news directors and editors reporting that membership in professional organizations was a criterion for applicant evaluation.

Discussion

The findings for Hypotheses 1 and 2 support previous research that showed that television news directors put a premium on writing skills when considering applicants. Nor was the higher

priority newspaper editors place on grammatical knowledge surprising, given the differences in the two news formats.

More importantly, perhaps, the findings for these two hypotheses raise methodological issues for future research in this area. Although in the aggregate television news directors and newspaper editors were equally likely to identify some aspect of language-based ability as a crucial characteristic in an ideal candidate, the way they expressed those characteristics was markedly different. Television news directors were more likely to say that they sought "writing ability" and "ability to tell a story/communicate well," while newspaper editors were more likely to identify grammatical skills or some other more specific technical language ability. This suggests that researchers who wish to focus on the role writing and communication play in the construction of news will need to carefully choose the way the term their concepts in order to improve the validity of their measures. These results strongly suggest that while news directors and news editors place equal emphasis on the facility newsroom personnel have with language and communication, the way they describe the desired language abilities and the role those abilities play in news construction differ considerably.

The findings for Hypothesis 3 offer some surprises. Because of the more in-depth nature of newspaper reporting and the demand that newspaper reporters work with more sources, more data and more facts, it was expected that newspapers would place a larger premium on hiring well-educated individuals with broad knowledge. The data did not support that assumption.

One possible explanation may be the generally smaller size of television news staffs and the more limited role specialization therein. These limitations may force television news directors to seek individuals with both a broader and deeper knowledge base who will have the necessary background to be able to report well in a variety of settings and with little time to prepare for any specific story. Additionally, news directors reported in previous research (Becker, Fruit and Caudill, 1987) that they had little time to invest in training and developing employees and, therefore, sought employees who required a minimum of development and supervision to succeed. This also would suggest that news directors would place a higher value on applicants who brought with them to the job a strong foundation.

The fact that newspaper editors were more likely to request college transcripts or ask applicants about their college grades suggests that newspaper and television executives may use different criteria to satisfy themselves about the knowledge base of their applicant pool. Nevertheless, a minority of news executives in either media actually looked at grades.

Hypothesis 4 tested whether personality and appearance were mentioned more often by TV news executives describing an ideal applicant than they were by newspaper executives. The data showed no significant difference on the importance of these characteristics across media.

Considerably more interesting, however, is the fact that personality characteristics were the only items that more than half of all respondents in each medium mentioned as being important in an ideal candidate. Less than half of respondents mentioned any type of language skills, and only language skills, work habits and overall knowledge base were mentioned by even a third of

respondents when they were asked to list up to seven different ideal characteristics for entry-level newsroom employees.

What these data indicate is that personality characteristics are the most important criteria for hiring entry-level newsroom personnel, regardless of media type. Such characteristics are significantly more important to potential employers than any professionally related skill, including writing, employees' overall education and knowledge, or their sense of professional ethics, standards and values.

Hypothesis 5 examined the relative importance placed on work habits by television news directors and newspaper editors. These characteristics proved to be more important to news directors than to newspaper editors. This finding supports the assumption that the structure of television news operations and the fact that television news crews do most of their reporting away from the newsroom -- in contrast to newspaper reporters who are able to gather information and conduct interviews over the telephone -- means that TV reporters must be able to be productive in a highly autonomous work environment.

This explanation also may serve to understand the findings of Hypothesis 6, which found that television news directors are more than twice as likely as newspaper editors to cite professional standards, ethics and values as being important in an ideal hire. The autonomy with which television news reporters are forced to operate and the wide variety of stories they cover may increase their supervisors' perceived need to be able to depend on them to report a story correctly on their own without violating professional ethics or other standards. The time constraints on story development and the comparatively few supervisors who screen stories before they air give television news executives fewer opportunities to catch errors before they become public.

The findings regarding professional values and ethics are particularly interesting in light of previous research that shows that television news generally highlights the spectacle aspect of news and tends to be much more thematic and less balanced than newspapers covering the same story. Those differences in reporting style -- which previous scholars have attributed to constraints imposed by the format -- generally violate, or at least de-emphasize -- the traditional standards of journalism. The fact that news directors report themselves as placing a much higher value on professional standards than do newspaper editors suggests that reporting differences may, as suggested by previous research, stem more from format constraints than from a conscious strategy to market spectacle as the primary selling point of news.

In examining these data, it also must be considered a possibility that, in generating their lists of ideal characteristics for newsroom personnel, news executives were describing the strengths they find lacking in their current employee pool and which they hope to hire in the future. This would, of course, be a rather cynical explanation of the findings and, while it probably cannot be entirely ruled out, is unlikely as an interpretation for the overall results of the study.

Another element of the study's findings that should not be overlooked is the fairly consistent, and often substantial, discrepancy between the materials television news directors report that they require applicants to submit during the hiring process and those recently hired TV news employees report having been asked to submit. The large gap between the two data sets suggests

that self-report data from the television news industry may, as a general rule, need to be viewed with some caution.

It is also possible that some of the discrepancy may be explained by respondents' differing definitions of application materials. It is conceivable that a news executives may view examining an audition tape as a form of writing test, for example. Also, applicants, in some cases, may not be aware that they have been tested. For example, a casual lunch conversation during the interview process could be structured around a discussion of recent news events. For the news executive, that may be a current events test, while the applicant may perceive it as only a conversation.

Nevertheless, the size and consistency of the discrepancy between the data from the two surveys where television news is concerned cannot be overlooked. It suggests that future research in this area would benefit from field observation where the researcher could observe the hiring process, recording both the process and the conscious and unconscious criteria applied to screening entry-level applicants.

Finally, it must be concluded from these data that, despite what might be expected from previous research, the personnel screening and selection process in both television and newspaper newsrooms is primarily centered around finding individuals who will make good employees for a newsroom and who, secondarily, bring with them traditional journalism competencies. Except for descriptions of the type of language skills sought, which were focused around format-specific writing and communication skills, the study found little evidence that television news directors and newspaper editors are attempting to hire individuals who will help them maximize their ability to differentiate their news product from other news sources by maximizing their medium's communication strengths and style.

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