Measuring #MeToo: The Effects of Political Satire Coverage of Sexual Assault Allegations

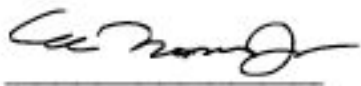An essay submitted in partial fulfillment of

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Abstract

Based on the 2017 Harvey Weinstein sexual assault allegations that surfaced, this research looks into how political satire shows cover the allegations and how the coverage impacted college aged viewers. By categorizing political satire shows into three categories: political comedies, late night variety shows, and hybrid shows, there can be a better understanding of how the different categories vary in their influence on viewers in areas such as interest, knowledge, information seeking, and social media activism. The results suggest that while there is no significance that the type of show watched effects areas such as knowledge, level of interest, and social media activism, there is some significance in the overall evaluation of the video clips provided by the viewers.

Introduction

Spanning centuries, political satire has always been a staple in society. Coming in the form of poetry, songs, movies, and television, political satire is a multi-functioning device used all over the world to cover current and past political events (Holbert, 2005). Unlike traditional news, which is considered hard news, political satire television programming is categorized as soft news. Political satire programming is focused on presenting political current events and information through satire. Examples includes shows like *The Daily Show*, *Saturday Night Live*, and *The Tonight Show.* The soft news category is often explained as shows that inform viewers in entertaining ways or that have little informative content. Since political satire shows infuse their content with humor hoping to engage viewers, the shows are considered soft news. Soft and hard news shows may discuss the same information, but the two categories engage viewers through different means. The distinction between soft and hard news matters because viewers may respond differently to the material based on how it is presented. For example, the use of humor in some soft news programs could help engage viewers compared to regular hard news programs. Over the years, various studies have been conducted in order to understand the relationship of soft news and its viewers (Baum, 2003; Baumgartner & Jones, 2006). Topics such as political knowledge, interest, and activism have all been examined previously by researchers (Baum, 2003; Baumgartner & Jones, 2006; Hoffman, 2015; Xenos & Becker, 2009). The entertainment aspect of soft news is intriguing because the shows within this category are designed to engage viewers. However, there is a consistent problem among most of the soft news research involving political satire. Political satire shows examined in most soft news research are often lumped into one category with little attention paid to varying content

features and formats of different shows. It is the main contention of this Bachelor's Essay that political satire programming is a broad, diverse category that can be more meaningfully studied by breaking it down into multiple sub-categories based on content differences. This approach will allow researchers to take a deeper look at not only political satire shows, but also soft news, and to examine how the content is different and how these differences influence outcomes of viewers.

Political Satire Programs and the #MeToo Movement

Today, programs like *The Daily Show*, *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver, Saturday Night Live,* and *The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon* are just a few of the options where viewers can get the latest updates on political events happening. One of the events covered heavily by these programs was the #MeToo movement that began in October 2017 after notorious film producer Harvey Weinstein was accused of numerous sexual assault allegations. Originally coined by activist Tarana Burke, the #MeToo hashtag was used to support sexual assault survivors by letting them know they are not alone. The hash tag became popular on social media and was used by people all over the world to share their own stories of sexual assault and harassment.

However, the #MeToo movement was not the only form of reporting on these topics. Political satire shows took it upon themselves to showcase many of the latest allegations about famous figures. When the Weinstein allegations first surfaced, many political satire shows were hesitant to touch on the topic considering its sensitivity. Only two late night show hosts, Seth Meyers and Jimmy Fallon, touched on the topic, but as time when on, and more allegations surrounding Weinstein and other famous men surfaced, political satire shows

began covering the topic heavily. Examples include *Saturday Night Live*'s "Welcome to Hell" skit and *Full Frontal* host Samantha Bee's "Penis PSA." These skits, along with many others, were used to express the gravity of the sexual assault and harassment claims.

Considering the #MeToo movement was promoted primarily through social media, it attracted a lot of attention from individuals of a younger demographic. Since political satire shows are also geared toward younger audience members, their coverage of the #MeToo movement is important to study. Political satire is a popular genre, which can be not only entertaining, but also informative. The #MeToo movement is still happening, yet the impacts from political satire coverage remains unclear, which makes it an important area to examine. Given the serious nature of sexual assault and harassment, making the topic engaging for younger demographics could be hard as younger generations are known and often criticized for their lack of political involvement. Since political satire programming accounts for a variety of shows, research must be done to separate political satire shows into categories based on their key differences. If political satire programming is left as one category, the impact on viewers will not be fully understood since there are a variety of differences in formatting and content being unaccounted for. By breaking down political satire programming into three categories based on format and content, this essay seeks to get a better picture of what category is the most impactful in determining the interest, knowledge, and activism of college aged viewers.

Literature Review

Categorizing Political Satire Programs

Political satire shows encompass a broad range of shows with different formats. Before looking at the content of the show, the formatting of the shows must be examined. This research will be breaking down political satire shows into three categories: late night variety shows, late night political comedies, and hybrid shows. These categories were decided upon after countless hours were spent carefully viewing various political satire shows. After the viewing sessions, it was clear political satire shows differed in two different areas, structure and content. While this research is mostly focused on content differences, by looking at the structural differences of each category, one can have a better understanding of why these three categories differ in their content through their delivery, tone, and use of outside media.

Structure

The first area of political programming is late night variety shows. This category is made up of shows that are talk show based. While satire is a large part of the show, most of the segments are not parodying traditional news shows like late night political shows. These shows often cover a variety of issues, not just political issues, and they feature a variety of guests, some of which have political backgrounds. The late night variety shows typically feature similar formats with half of the program being comprised of sketches, and the other half being made up of guest interviews. Since this category is not solely focused on political issues, and is comprised of sketches that are headlined by the comedian host, the focus of the content is to entertain. Examples of this category include *The Tonight Show starring Jimmy Fallon*, *Jimmy Kimmel Live*, *The Late Late Show with James Corden*, and *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert.*

Late night political shows are founded in parodying traditional news programming by featuring a fake newsroom, fake reporters, and using humor when discussing current events. While these shows may make jokes in reference to something outside of the field of politics, they focus almost exclusively on political issues and the content of their message is mostly political. Just like late night variety shows, these shows may also feature guests; however, they are less focused on guests and may not have one in every episode. If these shows feature guests, they are more likely to be political figures. Much like the news programs they are parodying, late night political shows take a more informative approach when presenting their content to viewers. Examples of this show include *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver, Full Frontal with Samantha Bee,* and *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah.*

The third category for political satire shows is hybrid shows. These shows cover a variety of issues, just as late night variety shows do, but they also feature parodies of traditional news like late night political shows. Unlike the other two categories, hybrid shows do not feature interviews unless they are fake and part of the news parody segment. Since these shows feature both news parody and skits performed by comedians, their content is often a mix of both informative and entertaining. An example of this category is *Saturday Night Live (SNL).*

Content

Now that the differences in structure have been explained, a deeper look at the shows needs to be taken in order to point out the differences in content. The differences in content occur in three areas: tone, delivery, and use of outside media. This essay will be focusing on these areas because the content of the show is what will be most likely to influence the

perceptions and actions of the viewers. Through the content, the viewers are able to learn about the #MeToo movement, and based on how the information is presented, the viewers may have different outcomes in their levels of political interest, knowledge, and activism.

The tone is one important part of content to consider because a host's perceived emotion toward a topic can influence the viewers' feelings toward a topic. Among the three categories of political satire shows, late night political comedy shows often take a more negative and critical tone when discussing various political issues. For example, hosts like Samantha Bee, John Oliver, and Trevor Noah directly criticize Weinstein, Trump, and other men accused of assault, whereas late night variety shows and hybrid shows have a lighter tone due to their focus on punchline jokes and skits. Depending on the skit, hybrid shows may take a more critical tone toward issues.

The delivery of all three political satire show categories also varies, as seen in Table 1. Late night political shows tend to provide more background and context to current events and encourage activism. However, late night variety shows tend to give a general overview of the current event and crack a couple of jokes relating to the topic. Unlike political comedy shows, late night variety shows and hybrid shows rarely encourage activism. Late night political comedy shows also differ by focusing on informing viewers. The hosts of late night political comedies may crack many jokes, but their coverage of the current event is not based solely on those jokes. The purpose of late night political comedy shows is to inform the viewers. Hybrid shows differ in this area too because they do not give background and context of a current political event.

Instead, their focus on a topic depends on the type of skit. During a news parody skit, the delivery of hybrid shows is focused on punch-line jokes. While hybrid show skits focus on the topic longer, the coverage of the topic is broader and based in humor.

One reason for the differences in delivery can be attributed to the purpose of the show. As mentioned earlier, since late night political shows are focused on political current affairs, the host and writers focus on informing the viewers. Late night variety shows and hybrid shows, on the other hand, are not comprised entirely of political current affairs. They often feature coverage of other current events, such as celebrity news, therefore their purpose is more focused on entertaining viewers. If shows encourage activism and focus on informing, then these shows may be more influential in the knowledge and online activism of the viewers. These delivery tactics are used by the hosts and writers to engage viewers, therefore it's important to analyze if their tactics are motivating.

When it comes to the use of outside media, all three categories differ (see Table 1). Examples of outside media include news clips, online videos, images, and other graphics that may be used to attract the viewer. Media clips give viewers an interactive experience and also a visual to help explain the information. The interactive media could play a role in how viewers react to the content since most likely the interactive media will be more engaging. Further, the use of outside media serves as a reinforcement for the information being presented, so shows not featuring outside media clips could see a different outcome in their viewers. Late night political comedy shows feature a variety of media clips, especially news clips and video clips covering current events, whereas late night variety shows are less likely to do so. Hybrid shows may use media clips during their news parody sketches, but mostly

likely they will not use them during their other skits. If hybrid shows do use media clips during

their news parody sketches, they are often images and not video clips.

Table 1. Political Satire Show Categories

Categories	Purpose	Critical Tone	Use of Outside Media	Delivery (Background Info/Content Given)	Example(s)
Late Night Variety Show	To Entertain	Low	Low	Low	*The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon, Jimmy Kimmel Live, The Late Show with Stephen Colbert*
Late Night Political	To Inform	High	High	High	*Last Week Tonight with John Oliver, The Daily Show with Trevor Noah*
Hybrid	Mixed	Mixed	Mixed	Mixed	*Saturday Night Live*

Through these three categories, this research will be focusing on the different impacts

each one has on college students by analyzing knowledge, social media activism,

information seeking, and interest level. By dividing political satire shows into categories, the

typology of this research can dig deeper into the differences existing in the political content

of the shows. While political interest, knowledge, and activism has been studied before

under soft news research, this essay focuses on how the differences in the content and

structure of soft news programs relay differences in outcomes among viewers.

As discussed in the introduction, political satire programming is often categorized under

soft news research. Soft news research about political satire shows has delved into many areas

such as political interest, knowledge, motivation, and activism (Baum, 2003; Baumgartner & Jones, 2006; Hoffman, 2015; Xenos & Becker, 2009). Currently, most researchers seem to agree that political satire shows have the most influence on apolitical viewers (Baek & Wojcieszak, 2009; Baum, 2003; Xenos & Becker, 2009;Young & Tsinger, 2006). Despite this agreement among researchers, many continue to disagree about whether soft news, specifically political satire shows, has an overall positive or negative impact on viewers (Baek & Wojcieszak, 2009; Baum, 2003; Xenos & Becker, 2009; Xenos & Becker, 2011; Young, 2004). In order to understand the relationship between viewers and shows, other factors such as age and education have also been taken into consideration. However, one of the biggest areas researchers have failed in is providing an accurate typology to describe all of the shows that encompass political satire programming.

Past Typologies of Political Satire Programming

Various researchers have created typologies to categorize political satire programs, but since there are numerous political satire shows, the typologies do not account for all of the differences between the shows. Most of the research focuses on structural differences, but not the content presented to viewers. Considering content is most likely what will have the biggest impact on viewers, it's important to make sure there is an appropriate typology to show how political satire shows differ in their content. Previous research has divided up entertainment television and politics into various categories. For instance, Holbert (2005) divides these two areas into a 9 part typology featuring categories such as traditional satire, situational comedies, lifeworld content, fictional political dramas, political docudramas, reality based content,

entertainment talk shows, interviews with politicians, soft news, and entertainment television events. Holbert's approach takes a broader look into entertainment television and politics by looking at shows that rarely feature political content yet are still a part of entertainment television. Cao (2008) looks into these two areas by specifically targeting more politically oriented satire shows. He chose two categories to divide political satire television programming: political comedy shows and late night entertainment shows (2008). According to Cao, political comedies feature "parodies of political figures and humorous coverage of current issues and events" (p. 44). Consistent with my typology outlined above, Cao's approach points out how both programs feature satirical political messages, but both have different ways of showcasing their humor. For example, Cao mentions how late night entertainment shows have "quick punch lines," whereas political comedies focus mostly on political issues and "present humor in an information-rich format and to tackle political issues" (p. 44). While Cao's typologies resemble the categories analyzed in this research, he fails to explore the hybrid category for shows that feature both news parodies and talk show formats. While hybrid shows are a rarity in that not many are presently on-air, example show *Saturday Night Live* has been around since 1975 and is considered a staple in NBC's Saturday night line-up; therefore, the category is important to consider. Further, Cao fails to address differences in the content, which is why this three-category approach will be more encompassing of political satire programming.

Effects of Political Satire Shows

Since these shows are watched by millions of viewers, it's important to understand the impact the episodes have on viewers. Studies have shown various reactions to the impact of political satire on viewers. Some researchers (Xenos & Becker, 2009) see political satire as a

way to boost political knowledge, meanwhile other researchers found the impact on the viewers as minimal (Patterson, 1996). Even Jon Stewart jokingly suggested his show was not influential when he appeared on CNN's Crossfire in 2014 and called his show (*The Daily Show)* fake news. In order to better explain the impact of political exposure, Baum (2003) developed the gateway hypothesis. As he explained, the gateway hypothesis is the belief that exposure to political entertainment television could create interest in the minds of typical apolitical viewers (Baum, 2003, p. 111). Baek and Wojcieszak (2009) studied this trend and found late-night comedy viewing to result in minimal knowledge gain, but only among items that were low hanging fruit. They attribute these results to the uses and gratifications theory, which sees the media as reinforcement for knowledge. For example, those that are more knowledgeable about politics are more likely to seek it out, whereas those that are not as knowledgeable are more likely to not seek out political information. Since this is the case, individuals who watched the political satire show, but lacked political knowledge, were less likely to watch political programming as often, therefore they were able to gain more knowledge from the shows. Mental heuristics is another way of describing how viewers process the information from political satire programing. As discussed by Nabi, Guse, and Byrne (2007), some viewers may be able to understand the importance of the topic or event without having to know much about it. As they explain, the joke makes the viewer recognize the importance of the issue without having to put in a lot of mental effort processing the information surrounding the topic. The idea of mental heuristics could explain differences among interest level and knowledge of viewers as they watch different styles of political satire programming.

Beyond the mental processing of information, social behavior is another major outcome of political satire shows. As described by Hoffman (2015), shows like *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver* (which is in the late night political comedy category) feature calls to action after explaining their point. Most of the time these calls include use of the Internet through areas like social media. Hoffman (2015) points out how Oliver encourages viewers to tweet, use hashtags, visit websites, share links, and much more in order to garner support for a cause. Since this research will be focusing on college aged viewers, a generation known for its active online presence, calls to action used by late night political comedy hosts could be impactful in encouraging younger generations to become more politically active online. For example, John Oliver's net neutrality segment on his show *Last Week Tonight* in 2014 caused FCC's website to crash because of the overload of comments the site received. Considering this research is focused on the #MeToo movement, the use of calls to action by late night political comedy shows could mobilize viewers.

Beyond the processing of information, it's essential to look at the viewers of political satire programs. Putnam's book *Bowling Alone* (2000) takes into account younger generations when it comes to politics. His research shows young people have less interest in politics and tend to pay less attention to traditional news programming. Other research has found age is a common factor influencing the impact of political satire shows, along with education. As Cao's (2008) research mentions, "exposure to political comedy shows was positively associated with campaign knowledge among young people and those with higher education, whereas the relationship was negative among older people and those with less education" (p. 58). Part of this could be attributed to the nature of political satire shows. As Young (2004)

describes, "unlike traditional forms of political information they [political satire shows] require active audience participation" (p. 3). If this is the case, then viewers could become more engaged with the content, which could influence their social media activism and information seeking.

Research Question and Hypotheses

The following are the research questions and hypotheses that will be observed:

> RQ1: How do variations among political satire programs have differential effects on college aged viewers about the #MeToo Movement?

Since political comedy programs focus on informing, as opposed to entertaining, and often provide viewers with more background information and context, this hypothesis predicts political comedy shows viewers will be more likely to have rates of knowledge.

> H1: Viewers of the political comedy video clip will be more likely to have higher rates of knowledge.

Since political comedies often feature a "call to action" and feature outside media clips, they are more interactive with the audience compared to other types of political satire shows. Further, these shows have an informative purpose therefore they focus on providing background information and context, which will make viewers more likely to seek out additional information online.

H2: Viewers of the political comedy video clip will be more likely to have higher ratings for information seeking.

Since late night variety shows are focused solely on entertaining through punch lines and skits, this hypothesis predicts late night variety viewers will be more likely to rate their interest level as higher since they will be more likely to be entertained by the content of the show.

H3: Viewers of the late night variety show clip will be more likely to have higher rates of interest.

Since political comedies often feature a "call to action" and feature outside media clips, they are more interactive with the audience compared to other types of political satire shows. Given this information, this hypothesis predicts viewers of political comedies will have higher rates of social media activism because of the encouragement of the host and the viewer's interaction with the material being presented.

H4: Viewers of the political comedy video clip will be more likely to have higher rates of social media activism.

RQ2: How do variations among political satire programs have differential effects on college aged viewers' evaluations of the video clips they watched?

RQ3: How do variations among political satire programs have differential effects on college aged viewers' evaluations of the topics discussed in the video they watched?

Method

To examine my research questions and hypotheses, I conducted an experiment because of its advantage in establishing causality. The experimental procedure also allowed me to better control other variables within the study so that any variations in my outcome variables could be attributed to the category of show participants watched. The experiment was designed to measure the outcomes of how the three categories of political satire shows have differential effects on college-aged viewers. The entire experiment was conducted online through Qualtrics, an online survey hosting service. Study participants were randomly assigned to one of my three experimental conditions representing the three categories of shows eliminate any possible biases that may arise from the experiment if participants were able to choose their own video. Randomization was used to make sure participants were evenly and randomly divided among the videos they watched, so that the characteristics and backgrounds of individuals would not skew results.

Participants came from the College of Charleston and were recruited from classes within the communication and political science departments. Some students in communication classes were offered extra credit in order to entice them to participate. In addition, undergraduate students were recruited from social media to complete the survey. Before watching the video clip each student had to give consent to participate. All students were made aware that no risk or harm would be done during the process. Overall, there were 74 participants that ranged in age from 19 to 23. Females made up 71.6% of these participants, whereas males made up 28.4%.

Participants varied in majors, but political science and communication majors made up the largest percent with communication majors making up approximately 28% and political science majors making up approximately 39%.

Experimental Stimuli

After providing consent, each participant watched a video clip that was randomized by the Qualtrics website. Each student's survey was randomized to watch one of the three videos. For instance, some students watched a late night variety show clip, whereas others may have watched late night political comedy show clips or hybrid clips. Group 1 consisted of students who watched the clips from late night variety shows, Group 2 consisted of students who watched clips from late night political shows, and Group 3 consisted of students who watched clips from a hybrid show. With each category of political satire shows, clips were shown. Each clip was approximately five minutes and thirty seconds long and covered sexual harassment and assault topics from 2017. All clips touched on the topic of Harvey Weinstein's sexual assault allegations, which was recognized as the beginning of the #MeToo movement. The late night variety video featured clips from *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert* and *Late Night with Seth Meyers.* The political comedy video featured clips from *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver* and *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee.* The hybrid video featured clips from *Saturday Night Live.*

Outcome Measures

A post-test survey was used to measure the outcomes that occurred after watching clips from the different categories of political satire shows. After watching the random video clip, the Qualtrics survey directed students to a list of questions. The surveys asked a variety of questions to gauge knowledge, interest, information seeking, and social media activism about the topic.

Students were also asked about their partisanship, gender, age, and major as demographic information. All of the questions were the same in each survey. After watching the video clip they were randomly assigned, participants were asked to rate their feelings about the clip they watched, the hosts of the show, the topics discussed on the show, and the allegations toward Harvey Weinstein. Participants were asked to rate their feelings using the following categories: angry versus happy, not informative versus informative, boring versus interesting, and biased versus fair. For full question wording and reliability estimates, see the appendix.

Evaluations of Video Clips

Further, participants were asked to rate their feelings about the overall clip, the topics discussed on the shows, and the allegations toward Harvey Weinstein. Three questions were asked to gauge how viewers evaluated the video (see Appendix for questions). Students rated their responses on a scale from 1 to 7 in areas such as not informative vs. informative, boring vs. interesting, and biased vs. fair.

Knowledge about the #MeToo Movement

Questions related to knowledge were based on four true or false questions regarding content from the shows (see Appendix for questions). All of the questions were related to the Harvey Weinstein allegations and featured information mentioned in each video clip to ensure consistency.

Information Seeking

Nine questions related to information seeking asked participants to indicate the likelihood of seeking out information about political news, sexual violence, and the #MeToo movement through the Internet and social media sites like Facebook and Twitter (see Appendix for

questions). Participants were also asked to rate their likelihood of posting or sharing a #MeToo

post on their own Facebook and Twitter accounts.

Level of Interest

Five questions were asked to gauge the interest level of participants in areas such as

politics, political satire shows, topics discussed in the clip, and the #MeToo movement (see

Appendix for questions).

Social Media Activism

Eight questions related to social media activism asked participants to indicate their

likelihood of sharing or posting political messages on social media sites like Twitter and

Facebook (see Appendix for questions).

Analysis Strategy

When analyzing the results, an ANCOVA (Analysis of Covariance) test was used to

analyze if the type of political satire show was influential in how individuals reacted to the clips

in areas such as knowledge, interest level, information seeking, and social media activism.

Gender and partisanship were included in each test as covariates with the video set as a fixed

factor. If the relationship was significant, a pairwise comparison test was used to see how the

means differed among the videos watched.

Additionally, Cronbach's test was used to see measure internal consistency among

answers for categories such as information seeking, interest, and social media activism. If

answers within these categories had a Cronbach alpha over 0.6, then they were recoded and

added together to form an index (see Appendix for all examples). Beyond the variables recoded

due to internal consistency, the four questions used to test knowledge were also recoded in order

to simplify the number of variables being used. In this case, all four were added together and recoded with 1 representing correct answers and 0 representing wrong answers.
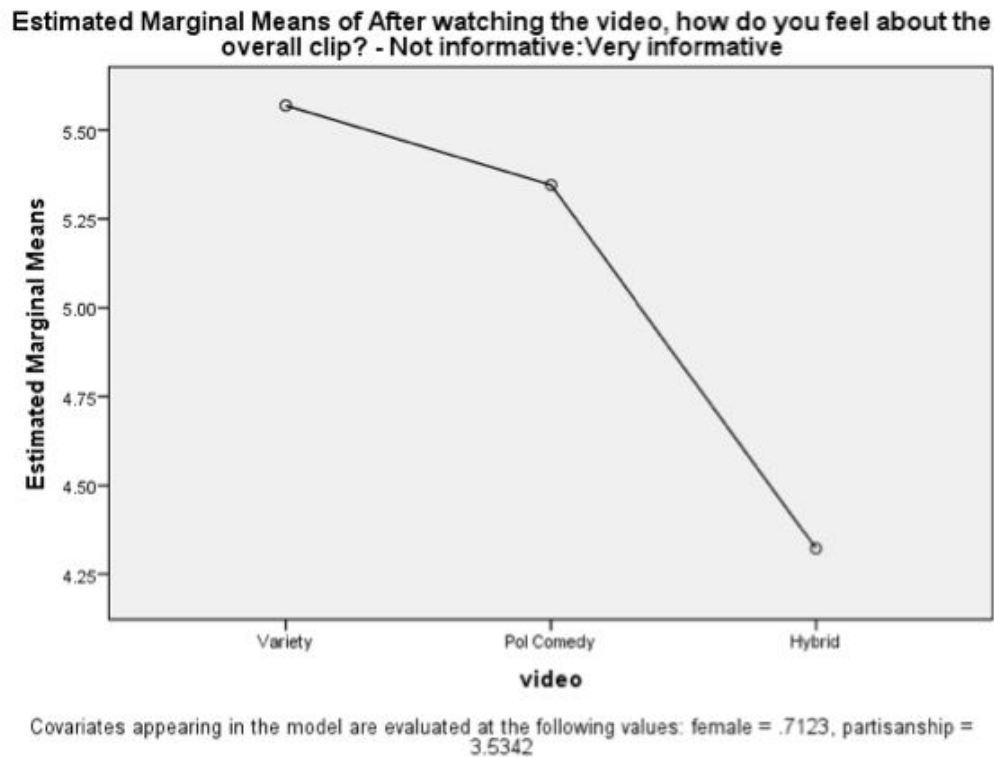
Results

Evaluations of Video Clips

After watching the video clip to which they were randomly assigned, participants were asked to rate their feelings about the shows. A series of ANCOVA tests, which were run to examine the effects of the video manipulation while controlling for gender and partisanship, indicate the participants rendered different evaluations depending on which category of shows they watched. First, the relationship between feelings on the informative nature of the show and the video clip that was watched was statistically significant,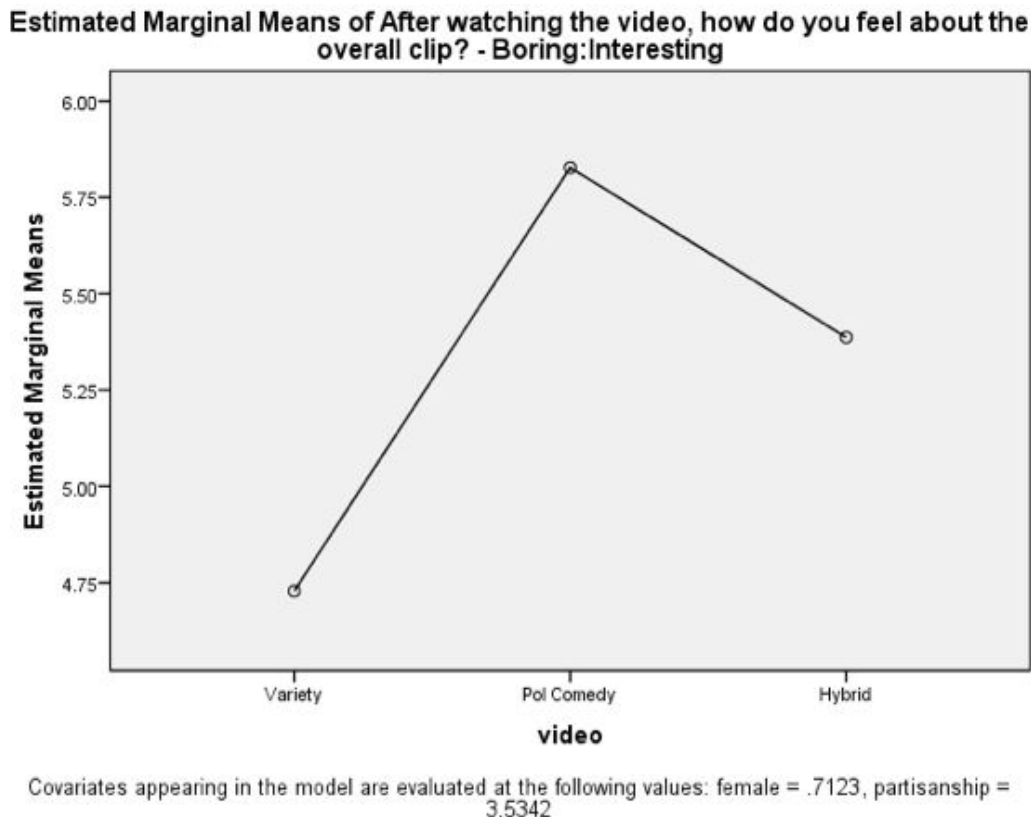 $F(2,68)= 7.308$, $p = 0.001$. A pairwise comparison test was conducted to see which videos contributed to such significant difference. With a p-value of 0.002, the post-hoc comparison between late night variety shows and hybrid shows was statistically significant. As displayed in Figure 1, hybrid shows were more likely to be ranked as not informative with an estimated mean value of 4.32. Late night variety shows had the highest mean out of the three videos with a 5.58. In addition, the relationship between hybrid shows and political comedy shows is also statistically significant, $p = 0.014$.

Figure 1: Mean comparison of the informative nature of the clip watched

Estimated Marginal Means of After watching the video, how do you feel about the overall clip? - Not informative:Very informative

Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: female = .7123, partisanship = 3.5342
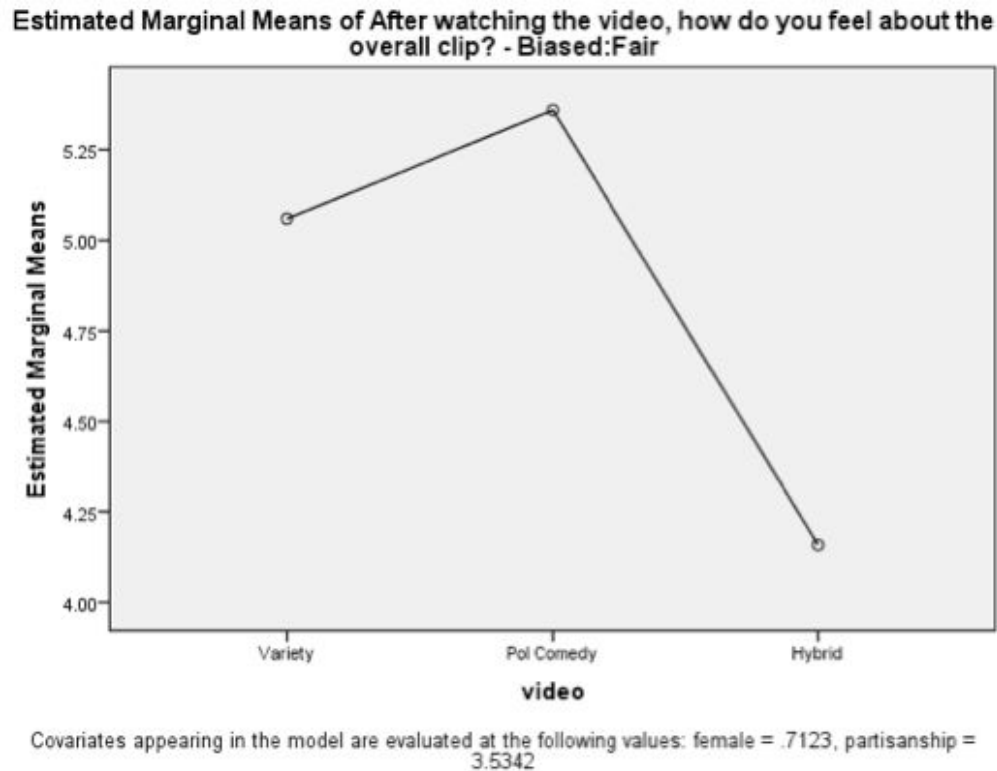
Second, when asked to rate if a clip was boring or interesting, the relationship with the video clip watched was also statistically significant, $F(2,68) =3.295$, $p= 0.043$. A pairwise comparison test showed that the difference between late night variety shows and political comedy shows was the most significant in determining whether participants found the video clip boring or interesting. Participants that watched the late night variety show clip were more likely to rate the clip as boring with a mean score of 4.73. In comparison, participants that watched the political comedy clip were more likely to rate the clip as interesting with a mean score of 5.83 (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Mean comparison of the nature of the clip watched (boring vs. interested)

Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: female = .7123, partisanship = 3.5342

Third, with F (2,68)=5.177, p = 0.008, the type of video watched was also significant in its effect on whether participants saw the clip as biased or fair. The difference between political comedies and hybrid shows was the most significant with a p -value of 0.009. However, the difference between hybrid shows and late night variety shows was also significant with a p-value of 0.074 (see Figure 3). However, despite the significance in bias evaluation, the type of video watched was not significant in its effect on whether participants felt angry or happy about the overall clip, F(2,69)=2.293, p=0.109.

Figure 3: Mean comparison of the biased nature of the clip watched

Estimated Marginal Means of After watching the video, how do you feel about the overall clip? - Biased:Fair

Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: female = .7123, partisanship = 3.5342

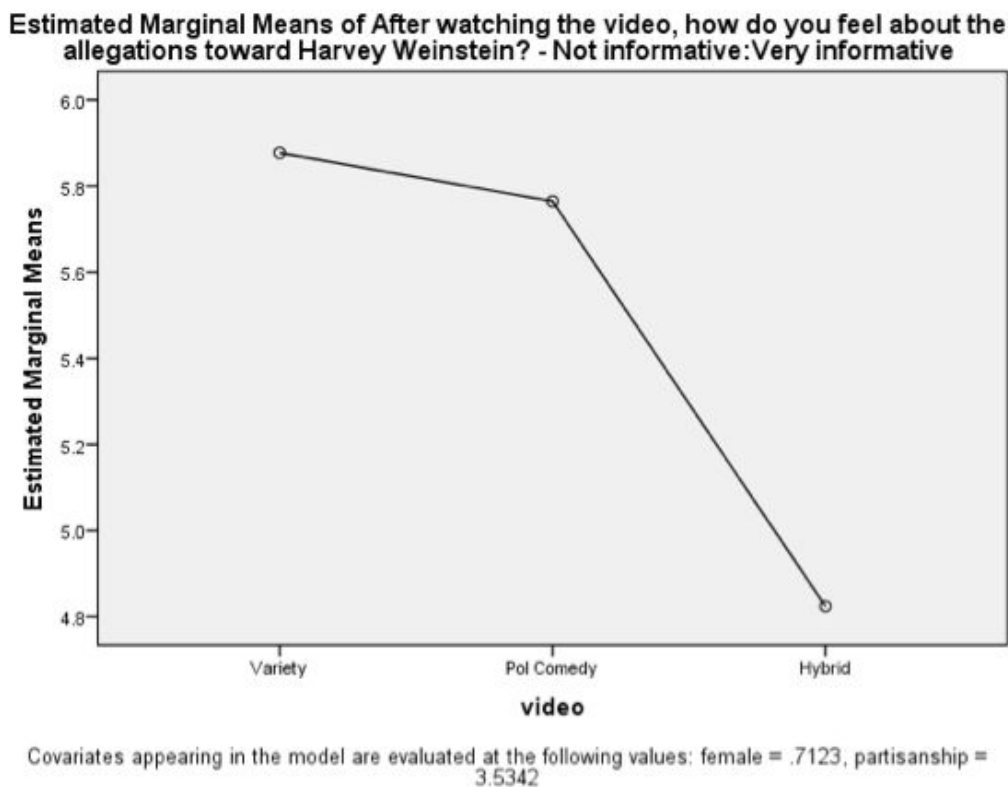**Evaluations of the Topics featured in the Video Clips**

In addition to their overall evaluations of the video clip they watched, participants were also asked to rate their feelings toward two additional objects: the topics featured in those clips and the allegations toward Harvey Weinstein, in particular. A series of ANCOVA test results clearly showed that participants' evaluations of the allegations were affected by the video clips. First, there was a significant relationship between the video watched and how informative the allegations were, $F (2,68)= 4.955$, $p = 0.010$. The differences between late night variety shows and hybrid shows and then one between political comedy shows and hybrid shows were the most significant with p-values of 0.018 and 0.039, respectively. Viewers of the late night variety shows were most likely to find the allegations informative with a mean ranking of 5.877,

whereas hybrid show viewers were more likely to find the allegations as not informative with a

mean ranking of 4.824 (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Mean comparison of the informative nature of the allegations

Estimated Marginal Means of After watching the video, how do you feel about the allegations toward Harvey Weinstein? - Not informative:Very informative

Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: female = .7123, partisanship = 3.5342
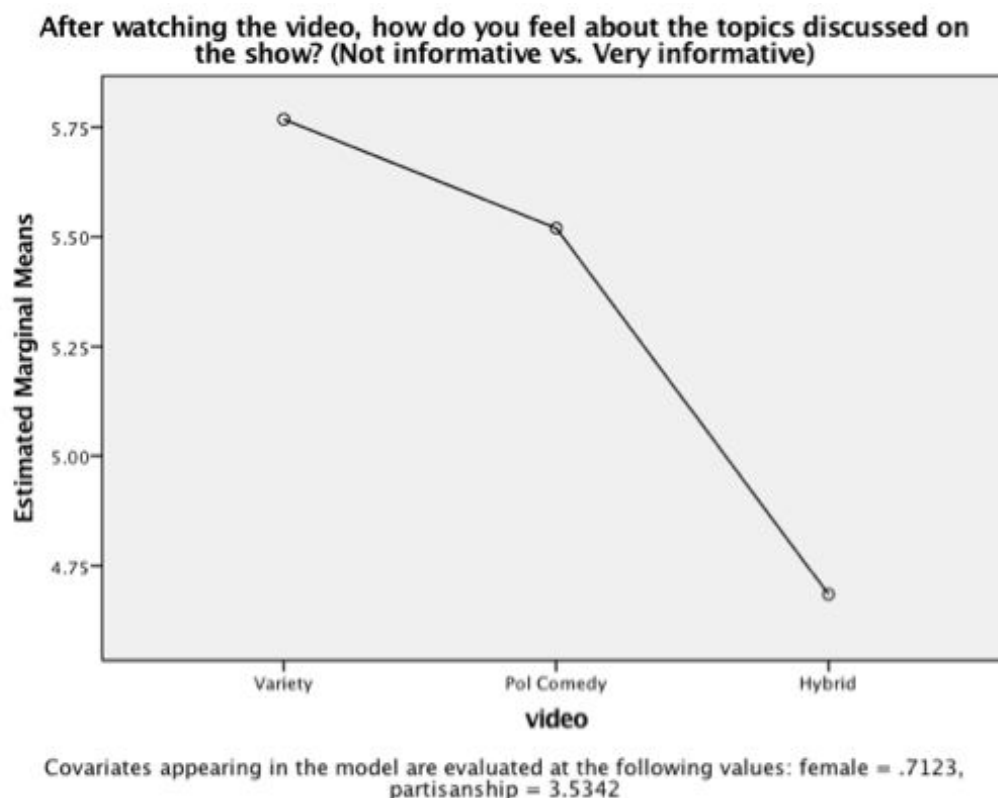
Similar results occurred when participants were asked to rate their feelings on the topics

discussed on the show. The relationship between the video and whether participants found the

topics informative was found to be significant with $F(2,68)=5.285$ and $p = 0.007$. A pairwise

comparison shows that the difference between late night variety shows and hybrid shows is the

most significant with a 0.009 p-value. As seen in Figure 5, participants that watched the late

night variety show were more likely to rate it higher for being informative, but participants that

watched the hybrid show clip were more likely to rank it as not informative. The mean of

rankings given by late night variety viewers was 5.768, whereas hybrid viewers gave a mean
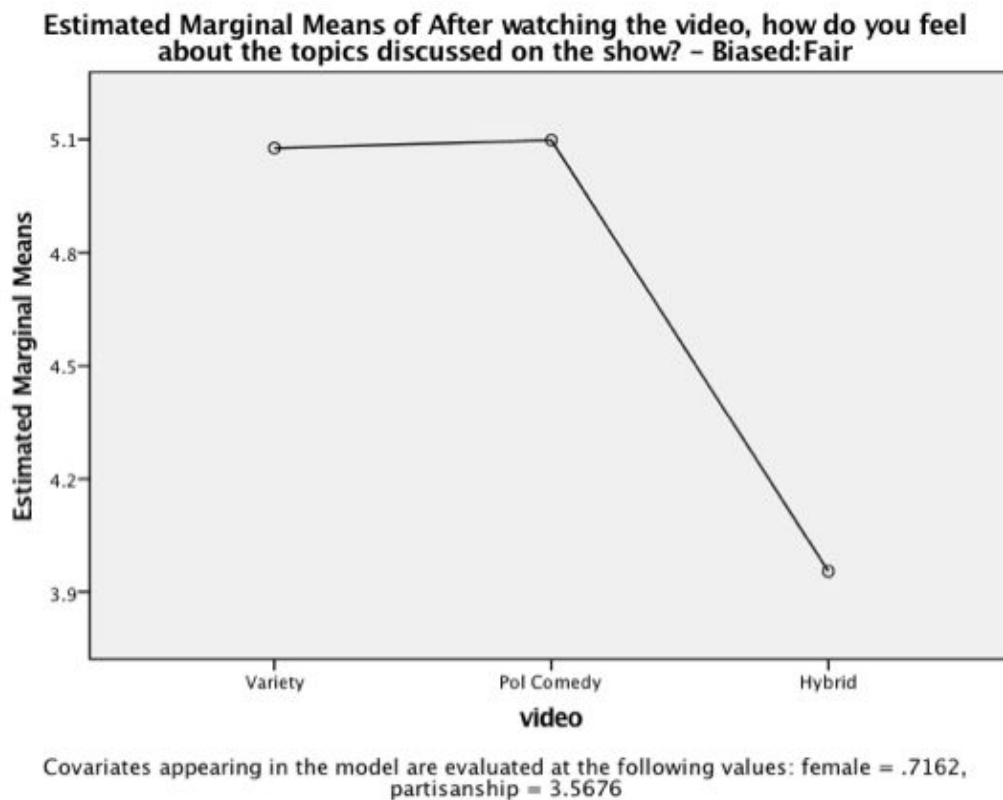
ranking of 4.684.

When asked about whether they found the topics discussed on the show as biased or fair,

the relationship with the video was found to be significant too with $F(2,69)=4.084$, $p = 0.021$. A

pairwise comparison showed political comedy and hybrid shows have the most statistically

significant difference with a p-value of 0.046. Political comedy viewers were more likely to feel

the topics discussed were fair with a mean score of 5.098, whereas hybrid viewers were more

likely to feel the topics discussed were biased with a mean score of 3.954 (see Figure 6).

However, there was no significant relationship between the video watched and whether the

topics discussed on the show made viewers feel angry or happy, $F(2,68)=0.785$, $p=0.46$.

Figure 5: Mean comparison of the informative nature of topics discussed

After watching the video, how do you feel about the topics discussed on the show? (Not informative vs. Very informative)

Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: female = .7123, partisanship = 3.5342

Figure 6: Mean comparison of the biased nature of the topics discussed

Estimated Marginal Means of After watching the video, how do you feel about the topics discussed on the show? – Biased:Fair

Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: female = .7162, partisanship = 3.5676

**Knowledge about the #MeToo Movement**

For knowledge, almost every participant correctly answered the first two questions regarding Harvey Weinstein. However, the last two true or false knowledge questions received divided answers. These questions asked if Harvey Weinstein was seeking help through rehab and if he apologized for his behavior. Responses were evenly divided with 39 participants responding true and 39 responding false for the question regarding Harvey Weinstein entering rehab. For the question about Weinstein apologizing for his behavior, 44 participants answered false (which was correct), whereas 34 answered true.

When analyzing the impact from the video, the video was statistically significant in regards to knowledge, F (2,69)=5.844, *p* = 0.005. However, the relationship is significant only

when comparing the mean difference between the late night variety video to the hybrid video. With a p-value of 0.004 the difference between the late night variety and hybrid videos is statistically significant. Participants that watched the late night variety video had a mean score of 2.710, whereas participants that watched the hybrid video had a mean score of 3.282 (see Figure 7). In this case, participants who watched the hybrid videos were more likely to answer more questions correctly. Since the hypothesis for this research expected political comedy viewers to have higher ratings for knowledge, these results provide no support for the hypothesis because hybrid video viewers had the highest scores, whereas participants that watched the political comedy clips had the second highest.

Figure 7: Mean comparison of knowledge based on the video watched
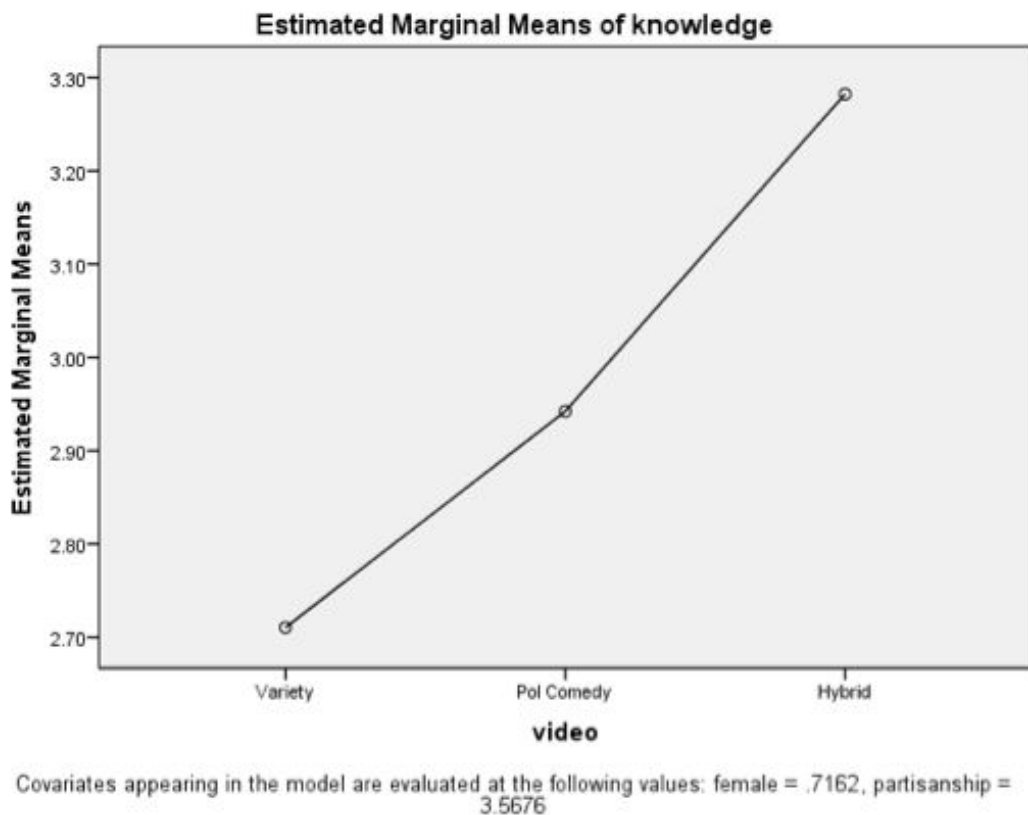
Information Seeking

For information seeking, participants were asked to rank their likelihood of searching for information online related to political news, sexual violence, and the #MeToo movement. While information seeking was not statistically significant with the type of video watched, the type of video watched did have a marginally significant relationship with the likelihood participants searched for political news on the Internet, $p = 0.072$. As shown in Figure 2, a pairwise comparison shows that late night variety shows had the lowest likelihood with a mean rating of 3.253, whereas political comedies and hybrid shows had mean ratings of 3.827 and 3.810, respectively. However, when participants were asked about their likelihood of searching for political news on social media, the p-value of 0.821 showed there was no statistically significant relationship between searching for political news on social media and the type of video watched. When participants were asked about their likelihood of searching for information on sexual violence online through the Internet and social media, the results were similar. The relationship between searching for sexual violence information online and what video was watched was not significant with a p-value of 0.871. After being asked about political news and sexual violence. Participants were then asked to rank their likelihood of searching for information on the Internet and social about the #MeToo movement. With a p-value of 0.275, there was no statistically significant relationship between searching for information on the #MeToo movement and what video was watched. Overall, there is a minimal amount of support for our hypothesis about information seeking since there was a marginally significant relationship with the likelihood participants searched for political news on the Internet and the video watched. However, since all of the other results were insignificant, the hypothesis is not strongly supported.
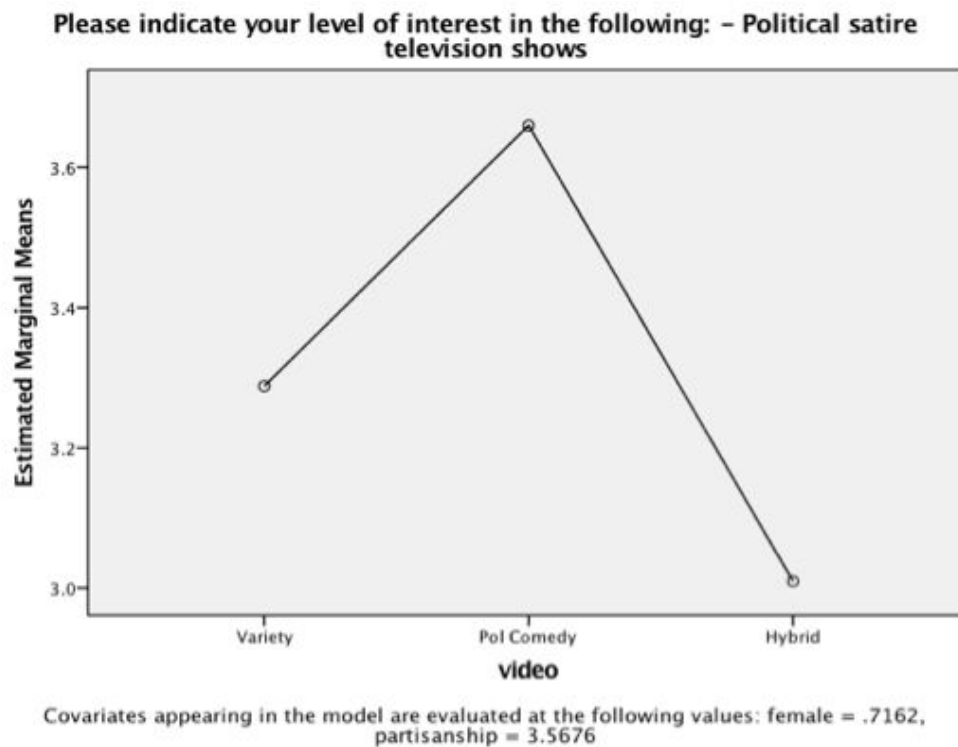
Level of Interest

In regards to interest, participants were asked to rate their level of interest in politics, political satire shows, the topics discussed in the clip, learning about sexual violence, and the #MeToo movement. With a p-value of 0.544, there was no statistically significant relationship between interest level in politics and the video watched. With a p-value of 0.544, there was no statistically significant relationship between interest level in politics and the video watched. With a p-value of 0.677, there was no statistically significant relationship between interest in learning about the topic of sexual violence and the video watched. With a p-value of 0.151, there was no statistically significant relationship between interest in the #MeToo movement and the video watched.

However, the results for interest in political satire shows differed. There was a statistically significant relationship between interest in political satire shows and the video clip watched, $p=0.040$. After completing a pairwise comparison test, results showed the difference between political comedy shows and hybrid shows is statistically significant with a p-value of 0.034. Participants that watched the political comedy video clip were more likely to rate their interest level as higher. Political comedies had the highest mean score for interest level in political satire shows with a mean of 3.660 (see Figure 8 below). Hybrid videos had the lowest mean score for interest level in political satire shows with a mean of 3.010. Since the hypothesis for level of interest predicted viewers of the late night variety clip would have the highest rate of interest, the hypothesis has no support since late night variety viewers had the second highest rating of interest in political satire shows and none of the other results were significant.

Figure 8: Mean comparison of level of interest in political satire shows

Please indicate your level of interest in the following: – Political satire television shows

Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: female = .7162, partisanship = 3.5676

Social Media Activism

For social media activism, results showed no statistically significant relationships with the type of video watched. Questions were asked to gauge how active participants were likely to be on the Internet and social media sites like Facebook and Twitter. Activism was focused on two areas such as general political activism and more specifically through #MeToo activism. In both scenarios, activism was not influenced by which video participants watched. For online political activism, the *p*-value was 0.366, and for #MeToo activism the *p*-value was 0.508. Overall, the hypothesis is not supported since none of the results were significant.

Effects of Covariates

Overall, partisanship was consistently significant in all of the results, whereas gender was consistently not significant. For example, partisanship was significant in all scenarios when

participants were asked to rate their likelihood of seeking out information such as political news, information on sexual violence, and the information on the #MeToo movement through the Internet and social media sites like Facebook and Twitter. For social media activism, partisanship was also significant in determining how likely participants were to post or share political messages on social media and how likely participants were to write or share #MeToo movement posts. Additionally, partisanship was significant when participants were asked to rate their level of interest in areas such as politics, political satire shows, topics discussed in the videos, and the #MeToo movement. Considering participants may identify with certain political parties that focus on different issues, some participants may see sexual assault as a more important issue than other participants. Further, some participants may be more likely to be active and interested in sexual assault problems because of the platforms their party supports.

Discussion

Overall, there was no support for the knowledge, level of interest, and social media activism hypotheses. However, there was minimal support that the category of political satire show is influential on the likelihood of seeking out more information. Further, there is a lot of support to suggest that the category of show is influential in how viewers evaluate the show and the topics discussed based on the following areas of evaluation: non-informative vs. informative, boring vs. interesting, and biased vs. fair.

In regard to the level of interest of participants, many participants responded with answers that favored political comedies. For example, when asked to rate their level of interest in political satire shows and their feelings toward the video clip, participants that watched political comedies had the highest scores. Since many of the students who participated in the survey came

from a political science background, it's possible that they were more likely to be interested in political comedies since the shows delved into political topics deeper. However, when the knowledge of participants was studied, participants that watched the hybrid clips were more likely to get the most questions correct, with political comedies getting the second highest amount of questions correct, and late night variety getting the lowest amount correct. Late night variety viewers were also more likely to rank the overall video clip as boring. Given this information, late night viewers were not interested in the clip and also obtained the least amount of knowledge from the clip. Since some of the students had a political science background, this could have been influential in why late night variety was seen as less interesting and less knowledge was gained from it. Students more interested in politics probably found the hybrid and political comedy clips more interesting since both categories of show give more background information and context on political news, therefore they were more likely to retain more information since they were interested.

Additionally, participants that watched hybrid shows may have retained the most information from these video clips because hybrid shows feature a mix of entertainment and information through having both parody news segments (like political comedies) and skits (like late night variety shows). The entertainment aspect of hybrid shows could have acted as reinforcement to the information presented on the show, therefore participants gained more knowledge from it because it was not presented solely for informing purposes or solely for entertaining purposes.

Other parts of this research that showed significance were whether participants found the video clip, the allegations, and the topics discussed as informative. For all of these questions,

participants were more likely to find late night variety shows as informative and hybrid shows as less informative. Considering these results, it's possible that Nabi, Guse, and Byrne's 2007 theory on mental heuristics holds value. Since late night variety shows are focused primarily on entertaining and getting to the next punchline, participants may recognize this humor as an indicator that the story being presented is informative without taking the time to fully process how and what the information being presented is. However, given that late night variety shows also got the lowest score for knowledge, clearly this information was not retained as well, which makes sense considering late night variety shows are less focused on informing.

One variable that was consistently seen as significant in feelings, knowledge, information seeking, interest, and social media activism was partisanship. Since the recent sexual assault allegations, especially those toward Harvey Weinstein, gained a lot of attention, it's possible that individuals that are Democrats are more likely to be interested, seek out information, and be active on social media about sexual assault issues since Democrats are known for supporting social issues and women's rights more often than republicans.

Limitations

It's important to point out that participants provided answers after watching a short video clip that was less than 6 minutes. Long term exposure to the different types of political satire shows may have yielded different results. Since the sexual assault allegations of Harvey Weinstein and other notable figures received a lot of media attention, it is possible answers were provided by students based on knowledge they had prior to watching the video. Many of the respondents were from political science backgrounds, therefore it's possible questions asking about knowledge, interest, and feelings could differ based on their political background. In the

future, research should take majors and field of study into account when analyzing student responses in order to have a better grasp of what results would be like for college students as a whole.

In addition, there may not have been enough questions to accurately grasp the outcomes and responses of students. For example, when testing knowledge, there were only four questions used. Since the video clips were pretty short, it was hard to find enough content that overlapped to produce more questions. Due to constraints with time and resources of the research, questions were worded to help gauge the likelihood of individuals seeking out information or being active on social media. In the future, research could be expanded by monitoring how participants react after watching political satire shows over a long period of time.

Conclusion

This past year, sexual assault has been put in the spotlight because of recent allegations toward numerous notable figures such as Harvey Weinstein, Kevin Spacey, and President Donald Trump. As more allegations came to light, movements such as #MeToo and Time's Up have increased in momentum. Given the sensitive nature of the topic, media coverage of the allegations becomes even more important, especially through political satire shows that are based in their comedic content. While this research found that partisanship and the informing and entertaining purposes of the shows may have influence on the reactions and outcomes of viewers, future research will need to feature a longer experimental approach in order to further explore these claims. Since sexual assault is a worldwide problem, the media coverage of the issue becomes even more imperative in today's society.

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Appendix A:

Question Wording

Covariates

Gender: Coded as 1=Female, 0=Else
Partisanship: Coded as 1=Strong Democrat, 2=Democrat, 3=Independent Leaning Democrat, 4=Independent, 5=Independent Leaning Republican, 6=Republican, 7=Strong Republican

Outcome Variables

Knowledge about the #MeToo Movement:
·   Please respond true or false to the following questions:
·   Harvey Weinstein is a Hollywood producer who has been accused of sexual assault (Coded as 1=True, 0=False)
·   Multiple Women have accused Harvey Weinstein of sexual assault (Coded as 1=True, 0=False)
·   Harvey Weinstein is seeking help after the allegations by going to rehab (Coded as 1=True, 0=False)
·   Harvey Weinstein apologized for his behavior (Coded as 0=True, 1=False)

Evaluations of the video clip
·   After watching the video, how do you feel about the overall clip? (Coded on a scale from 1 to 7, 1=Angry and 7=Happy, 1=Not Informative and 7=Informative, 1=Boring and 7=Interesting)

Evaluations of the topics discussed in the video
·   After watching the clip, how do you feel about the topics discussed on the show? (Coded on a scale from 1 to 7, 1=Angry and 7=Happy, 1=Not Informative and 7=Informative, 1=Boring and 7=Interesting)
·   After watching the video, how do you feel about the allegations toward Harvey Weinstein? (Coded on a scale from 1 to 7, 1=Angry and 7=Happy, 1=Not Informative and 7=Informative, 1=Boring and 7=Interesting)

Information Seeking
·   How likely are you to do the following:
·   Search for political news on the Internet? (Coded as 1=Never, 2=Not So Often, 3=Sometimes, 4=Often, 5=Not So Often)

·   Search for political news on Facebook? (Coded as 1=Never, 2=Not So Often, 3=Sometimes, 4=Often, 5=Not So Often)

·   Search for political news on Twitter? (Coded as 1=Never, 2=Not So Often, 3=Sometimes, 4=Often, 5=Not So Often)

·   Realistically, how likely are you to do the following:

·   Search for information on the topic of sexual violence on the Internet? (Coded as 1=Extremely Unlikely, 2=Somewhat Unlikely, 3= Neither Likely Nor Unlikely, 4=Somewhat Likely, 5=Extremely Likely)

·   Search for information on the topic of sexual violence on Facebook? (Coded as 1=Extremely Unlikely, 2=Somewhat Unlikely, 3= Neither Likely Nor Unlikely, 4=Somewhat Likely, 5=Extremely Likely)

·   Search for information on the topic of sexual violence on Twitter? (Coded as 1=Extremely Unlikely, 2=Somewhat Unlikely, 3= Neither Likely Nor Unlikely, 4=Somewhat Likely, 5=Extremely Likely)

·   Realistically, how likely are you to do the following? (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.765$) (Coded as 1=Extremely Unlikely, 2=Somewhat Unlikely, 3= Neither Likely Nor Unlikely, 4=Somewhat Likely, 5=Extremely Likely)

·   Search for information on the #MeToo movement on the Internet?
·   Search for information on the #MeToo movement on Facebook?
·   Search for information on the #MeToo movement on Twitter?

Interest
· Please indicate your level of interest in the following:

·   Politics (Coded as 1=Not At All Interested, 2=Not So Interested, 3=Somewhat Interested, 4=Very Interested, 5=Extremely Interested)

·   Political Satire Television Shows (Coded as 1=Not At All Interested, 2=Not So Interested, 3=Somewhat Interested, 4=Very Interested, 5=Extremely Interested)

·   The topics discussed in the video clip (Coded as 1=Not At All Interested, 2=Not So Interested, 3=Somewhat Interested, 4=Very Interested, 5=Extremely Interested)

·   Learning about the topic of sexual violence (Coded as 1=Not At All Interested, 2=Not So Interested, 3=Somewhat Interested, 4=Very Interested, 5=Extremely Interested)

·   The #MeToo movement (Coded as 1=Not At All Interested, 2=Not So Interested, 3=Somewhat Interested, 4=Very Interested, 5=Extremely Interested)

Social Media Activism
·   How likely are you to do the following (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.867$) (Coded as 1=Never, 2=Not So Often, 3=Sometimes, 4=Often, 5=Very Often)

·   Post political messages on Facebook?
·   Share political messages on Facebook?

·   Tweet political messages on Twitter?

·   Retweet political messages on Twitter?

·   Realistically how likely are you to do the following (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.807$)

(Coded as 1=Extremely Unlikely, 2=Somewhat Unlikely, 3= Neither Likely Nor Unlikely, 4=Somewhat Likely, 5=Extremely Likely)

·   Write a #MeToo post on Facebook?

·   Share a #MeToo post on Facebook?

·   Tweet a #MeToo post on Facebook?

·   Retweet a #MeToo post on Twitter?