Is Current Affairs Knowledge General or Domain-Specific?

A Cross National Analysis of Hard and Soft News Knowledge

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Abstract

Soft news is an increasingly important ingredient of the information environment. In market-based media systems, it is possible for consumers with limited political interest to bypass hard news altogether and become "specialists" in soft news. In public-service systems, however, we expect that there is some minimal exposure to hard news, even among the least politicized strata. Using two cross-national surveys, we examine systemic variations in the dimensionality of current affairs knowledge. Our findings indicate that as domains of knowledge, hard and soft news are most distinguishable in the United States. In most European countries with a tradition of public service broadcasting, hard and soft news knowledge are part of the same underlying dimension. We replicate this pattern by comparing the effects of self-reported media exposure on indices of hard and soft news knowledge. In the US, media exposure has no effect on level of hard news knowledge, but significant effects on soft news knowledge. In most European societies the opposite pattern holds -- media exposure is a stronger predictor of hard news than soft news knowledge.

The depth and breadth of citizen's political knowledge has long interested students of public opinion (Kreisberg, 1949; Smith, 1970; Luskin, 1987). On the question of depth, there is general agreement that the public is not only uninformed about current issues and events, but also misinformed (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Kull et al., 2004). The significant proportion of the American public (20 percent) that believes their president is a Muslim provides vivid, but representative evidence of the latter.

Explanations of public ignorance include both demand and supply-side factors. In most industrialized democracies, political debates rarely have a direct impact on individuals' quality of life, thus weakening the incentives for acquiring political knowledge. Rational citizens invest time and effort acquiring information that has personal utility (Popkin, 1991).

Information is also attributable to variations in supply (Jerit, Barabas & Bolsen,, 2006). Despite spectacular advances in the mode and speed of information delivery, the greater availability of media sources that provide a continuous stream of entertainment programming has made it possible for people with little interest in politics to avoid public affairs information altogether (see Iyengar et al., 2009). Political knowledge is thus distributed unequally; a small number of political junkies self-select into the news audience and are highly informed. The much larger group of apolitical citizens opts out of the news audience and encounters little, if any information about political matters.

Although there is agreement about the generally shallow level of political knowledge, questions about the breadth of the political attention span remain unresolved. The ongoing debate pits the "generalist" position against those who advocate a domain-specific account of knowledge acquisition. The generalist or global view holds that citizens attend to all matters covered by the media and current affairs knowledge encompasses a single, overarching

dimension (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Price & Zaller, 1993; Zaller, 1986). The domain-specific view, on the other hand (Iyengar, 1990; Iyengar et al., 2008; Krosnick, 1990; Burns, Schlozman, & Verba, 2000), posits that people acquire information about different subject matter in proportion to the degree they find these subjects personally compelling. Domain-specificity thus implies that knowledge is multi-dimensional; the informed are specialists rather than generalists. Individuals who are relatively knowledgeable about global warming, for instance, may be underachievers when queried about their knowledge of prevailing economic conditions.

Previous tests of domain-specificity have focused exclusively on traditional "substantive" classifications of information domains, i.e. knowledge about government institutions, party positions on issues, current events, or the identity of major public officials. In fact, the evidence in favor of domain-specificity is limited entirely to knowledge about policy domains. In an early analysis of NES data, for instance, Iyengar found that African-Americans were significantly more informed than whites about the issue of civil rights, while knowledge about the state of the stock market was higher among the relatively affluent (Iyengar, 1990).

In this paper, we extend the domain-specificity argument by comparing "hard news" knowledge -- defined as knowledge about international and domestic political events and the identity of major public officials -- with "soft news" knowledge, defined as knowledge of events and people with minimal political relevance. Soft news knowledge has become an increasingly relevant information domain especially in societies where media are subject to intense competitive pressures (see Curran et al., 2009; Iyengar et al., 2010; Aalberg, Breeken & Thorbjornsrud, 2010). Our argument about the distinctiveness of soft news knowledge applies most to these societies where previous studies have demonstrated that the hard news knowledge

"gap" between the more and less attentive strata is significantly enlarged (Curran et al., 2009; Iyengar et al., 2010).

The enlarged knowledge gap for hard news in market-based countries implies that where soft news flows more freely, individuals are likely to self select into separate audiences for hard and soft news. In short, we predict that the distinction between hard and soft news as domains of knowledge should be most apparent in market-based media systems. When considerable number of people encounter soft, but not hard news, we anticipate that hard and soft news represent separate dimensions of current affairs knowledge. In societies where the broadcast media are required to deliver news programming more frequently and where the news occasionally reaches the politically inattentive, we expect that the distinction between hard and soft news knowledge may be blurred.

We assess the dimensionality of current affairs knowledge using survey data from two cross-national studies. Study 1 focuses on the US and five European nations and Study 2 is a more detailed comparison of the US and UK. In both studies, we find that in the US soft news and hard news knowledge are separate dimensions of knowledge. In most of the European countries, however, the evidence indicates that political knowledge is generic or global encompassing both forms of news.

Research Design

The six countries in Study 1 and the two featured in Study 2 represent two major categories of national media systems. Two of the countries (the US and UK) have attributes that place them in the liberal or market-oriented category (see Hallin & Mancini, 2004) while the remaining four (Belgium, Netherlands, Norway and Sweden) are representative of "democratic corporatist," public service-oriented systems. These latter countries are characterized by strong

state regulation of broadcast media, a tradition of public service broadcasting, and high levels of newspaper circulation. Countries in the liberal or market-based category have less government regulation of media, a tradition of commercial rather than public broadcasters, and weaker newspaper circulation.

The strength of public broadcasters vis-à-vis commercial broadcasters is perhaps the most telling discriminator between market-based and corporatist media systems. In the US, public broadcasting has a trivial (2 percent) audience share, compared to the European countries where public broadcasters average more than 35 percent of the market (OECD, 2007). The presence of a strong public broadcaster means that the UK is in fact a hybrid case that falls somewhere between the corporatist and market ideal types (Norris, 2009).

In both studies, we contracted with Yougov-Polimetrix (YGP), a market research company than maintains online research panels across the world, to administer web surveys on national, adult samples. The surveys making up Study 1 were administered in January 2009. In the case of Study 2, the survey data were collected between May 28 and June 4, 2007.

YGP has developed a two-stage methodology for drawing matched samples from large online panels (see Bailey & Rivers, 2009; Vavreck & Rivers, 2009). To construct a specific sample from their online panels, YGP first constructs a synthetic sampling frame from a RDD study. In the US, the frame is derived from the American Community Study (ACS), a high-quality probability-based survey conducted by the U.S. Census. Variables from the Current Population Study (CPS) Registration and Voter Supplement (for 2004 and 2008), the Pew Study of Religious Life, and state voter lists are matched to the ACS using nearest neighbor matching. The key to a matched sample is having very many people in nearly any category determined by the cross-classification of the frame variables. In the US, YGP has 1.4 million people in its

Polling Point panel – this means that they can easily populate every cell of the cross-classifications generated by the frame variables. The size of the online panel is thus critical to the validity of the matching methodology (see Bailey & Rivers, 2009).[1]

The quality of the YGP matched samples has been demonstrated using a variety of criteria. In the case of the US, Bailey and Rivers (2009) use the 2008 Current Population Survey (CPS) November Voting Registration Supplement as a baseline from which to compare samples drawn by Knowledge Networks (another major vendor of online samples), YGP, and the American National Election Studies (ANES) during the 2008 election. Overall, both online samples come close to the population estimates in the CPS, and for some categories (gender and less than high school education), the online samples provide a closer fit than the ANES data. The online YGP sample does especially well across the race categories providing the closest match in all racial groups. Similarly, the YGP sample estimates are closest for gender and marital status. The YGP sample has bigger misses on education, slightly over-representing the lower levels of education and under-representing the higher levels. In a different form of validation, Blumenthal and Franklin (2007) show that the YGP pre-election polling in the 2006 US congressional elections provided a closer fit to the election results than most conventional, telephone-based samples.

In the case of one of the studies we report on in this paper (Study 1), we validated the online samples in two countries -- the US and Norway -- by carrying out parallel telephone surveys. Using the responses to the various knowledge questions as the basis for comparison, we

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[1] The online samples for Norway and Sweden were drawn from the Nordic Panel (N=140,000) maintained by Zapera. The Netherlands and Wallonia samples were drawn from online panels maintained in those countries by ResearchNow panel. In the UK, the sample was drawn from the YGP online panel and in the US, from the Polling Point panel maintained by YGP.

found no significant differences in the average level of knowledge associated with sampling mode (see Strabac & Aalberg, forthcoming).

Indicators

The survey instrument in both studies included a large battery of questions tapping hard news knowledge. We defined hard news as encompassing coverage of the activities of both domestic and international leaders, political organizations, and the state of national and international economic indicators. In Study 1, respondents in all six countries were asked to identify three international political figures -- Hamid Karzai, Nikolas Sarkozy, and Robert Mugabe. Domestic leaders represented in Study 1 included the ministers of defense and economics (Secretaries of Defense and Treasury in the US), and one member of the national legislature. Other hard news questions probed familiarity with OPEC, Hamas, the Hang Seng stock index, and Barack Obama's position on the withdrawal of US troops from Iraq. Finally, respondents were asked to identify the national unemployment rate, the head of the national central bank, and a major act passed by the national legislature.[2]

Our measure of soft news knowledge in Study 1 was limited to three country-specific questions. Respondents were asked to identify a professional sports team (Tampa Bay Devil Rays in the US) and a pair of entertainment celebrities (the comedian Tina Fey and actor Jeff Bridges in the US).

The survey instrument developed for Study 2 included a more extensive (N=28) set of knowledge questions. Fourteen common questions tapped awareness of international events

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[2] In all the six countries, we first assessed the level of news coverage accorded particular events and leaders before deciding on their inclusion in the survey. In general, we attempted to include a mix of highly, moderately, and rarely covered "targets."

(both hard and soft). This common set included an equal number of relatively 'easy' (international news subjects that received extensive reporting within each country) and 'difficult' (those that received relatively infrequent coverage) questions. For example, questions asking American respondents to identify "Taliban" and the incoming President of France (Sarkozy) were deemed easy while questions asking respondents to identify the location of the Tamil Tigers separatist movement and the former ruler of Serbia were considered difficult. In the arena of soft news, easy questions provided highly visible targets such as the popular video sharing website YouTube and the Spanish actress Penelope Cruz; more difficult questions focused on the site of the 2008 summer Olympics and the Russian tennis player Maria Sharapova.

The non-common items in Study 2 tapped awareness of domestic news, both hard and soft. Here, hard news questions spanned recognition of public officials and current political controversies. Soft news questions focused primarily on national celebrities, either entertainers or professional athletes. We also asked a set of country-specific questions relating to international events, but limited to the particular geo-political zone in which each country is situated. Americans, for example, were asked to identify Hugo Chavez (President of Venezuela), while British respondents were asked to identify Angela Merkel (Chancellor of Germany). Once again, we took care to vary the difficulty level of the questions.

Analysis and Results

The Structure of Current Affairs Knowledge

In both studies, we carried out a within-nation exploratory factor analysis of the full set of knowledge items. Since our measures of knowledge are not continuous, conventional factor analysis is inappropriate. Instead, we adopted the fully Gaussian latent trait model approach where both the latent traits and measurement errors are assumed to be normally distributed. This

approach extracts factors from an input matrix of tetrachoric correlations (see Knol & Berger, 1991; Parry & McArdle, 1991). We used the iterated principal factor analysis (IPFA) method[3] to calculate factor loadings while utilizing the scree test of eigenvalues from the tetrachoric correlation matrix to determine the number of factors to be retained. The final solution was subject to Varimax rotation.[4]

The results -- presented in Table 1 -- revealed patterns generally consistent with our expectations. Thus, a separate soft news knowledge dimension emerged in the US (Factor 3) and the UK (Factor 2). Contrary to expectations, we also observed a separate soft news factor in Sweden (Factor 2). In each of these countries, the three soft news questions loaded together and the soft news factor consisted almost exclusively of the soft news questions. No soft news factor emerged in Belgium, the Netherlands, or Norway.

In Study 1, the factor analysis further demonstrated that international and domestic news were not separate domains of knowledge. In most countries, the questions about international and domestic news stories loaded on the same factors. The exception to this pattern was the Netherlands where international (Factors 2 and 3) and domestic (Factors 1 and 4) knowledge proved distinct. In general, however, the factor analysis results indicated that there is a wider divide between hard and soft news than that between domestic and international news.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

We obtained similar results from Study 2 (see Table 2). In both countries, the divide between hard and soft news knowledge was unmistakable. In the US, all the hard news

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[3] Knol and Berger (1991) note that this estimation method works well with most data.

[4] Previous research has demonstrated that this approach yields results comparable to the full-information maximum-likelihood (FIML) approach (see Mislevy, 1986; Takane & de Leeuw, 1987)

questions loaded on one factor (Factor 1) whereas only two soft news questions (Don Imus and the location of the 2008 summer Olympics) loaded somewhat weakly (.664 and .547 respectively) on this same factor. The inconsistent location of the Imus question is understandable given that Mr. Imus was the subject of considerable hard news coverage during the month before the survey because of his racist comments concerning the Rutgers University women's basketball team.

Except for the Imus and Olympics questions, the soft news questions in the US comprised two distinct soft news factors (Factors 2 and 3) which included not a single hard news question. Factor 2 consisted of three major domestic celebrities, one international celebrity (Penelope Cruz) and the question on Youtube. The third factor corresponded to soft news with more international flavor -- the French soccer player Zidane, the Russian tennis star Sharapova, the English actress Helen Mirren, and the question on the Indian movie industry.

The UK results confirmed the distinctiveness of hard and soft news knowledge. There was a single hard news knowledge factor (Factor 1) which included all but two of the hard news questions and a single soft news question (Olympics). The soft news questions, however, were spread over three different factors (Factors 2, 3, and 4) none of which included a single hard news question. Factor 2 for the UK consisted primarily of international soft news questions whereas Factor 3 consisted of three domestic questions. Three of the UK soft news items (Bollywood, Sharapova, and Turner) failed to load on any of the soft news factors.

One of the reasons for the finding of multiple soft news factors in Study 2 concerns the number of questions. Unlike Study 1, which included only three questions, Study 2 featured more than ten soft news questions. These questions spanned both domestic and international celebrities and sporting events. The multiple soft news factors in Study 2 generally correspond

to the division between international and domestic soft news. However, there is no similar divide between the international and domestic domains in the case of hard news knowledge in both the US and UK. Study 1 also demonstrated the unidimensionality of hard news knowledge. This pattern indicates that geography may be a meaningful basis for classifying soft, but not hard news knowledge. People who follow soft news are more interested in domestic than international stories. Those who follow hard news, however, do so regardless of location.

[Insert Table 2 about here]

In summary, the factor analysis results suggest that hard and soft news represent distinct domains of current affairs knowledge, especially in countries where soft news programming is extensive. Hard news knowledge encompasses both domestic and international news, while soft news knowledge is organized separately into domestic and international subject matter.

A Formal Test of Unidimensionality

The factor analysis results are only suggestive of the existence of separate dimensions for hard and soft news; in this section, we use the Martin-Lof test (Martin & Lof, 1976), a formal test of departures from unidimensionality, to validate the distinction between hard and soft news knowledge. Most item response theory (IRT) models (e.g. Rasch, 1961) rest on the assumption of unidimensionality, i.e. any difference between subjects responding to a set of items corresponds to a single latent trait. If the unidimensionality assumption does not hold, the conclusions reached on the basis of IRT models may be misleading. Not surprisingly, measurement researchers have devoted considerable attention to validating the unidimensionality assumption.

One such test, developed by Martin and Löf (1973), uses a likelihood ratio (LR) test for testing the null hypothesis that the Rasch model holds for the whole set of test items

(unidimensionality) against the alternative hypothesis that the same model holds for two disjoint subsets of test items identified by the researcher in advance. In this case, we predict the existence of two (disjoint) groups of knowledge questions corresponding to hard and soft news and test whether there is sufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis specifying unidimesionality. The obtained results are shown in Table 3.

[Insert Table 3 about here]

The unidimensionality assumption was rejected in all six countries indicating that the knowledge questions tap more than one underlying latent dimension. However, as shown in Table 3, the LR ratio was highest in the US, showing that the hard-soft news division was "cleanest" in the US. Norway was also characterized by a relatively sharp hard-soft news division. From the earlier Norwegian factor analysis results, it can be seen that two of the three soft news items strongly loaded on one factor (Factor 3). However, the third soft news item (on the Lerkendal stadium) did not load on this factor, making the hard-soft news distinction somewhat ambiguous.

We obtained parallel results in Study 2. Once again the null hypothesis of unidimensionality was rejected in both countries, but the log-likelihood ratio was greater in the US than the UK. Thus hard and soft news knowledge measure more distinct domains of current affairs knowledge among American respondents. Across both studies, our results show that a domain-specific account of knowledge corresponding to separate dimensions of hard and soft news knowledge is most applicable to the US.

Effects of News Exposure on Hard and Soft News Knowledge

Our final set of analyses assessed whether self-reported exposure to news sources differentially affects knowledge of hard and soft news. Our argument concerning domain-

specificity is based on the assumption that the specialization of audiences stems from differences in the supply of news. In the US, news media provide more soft news, making it easier for citizens to gain soft news knowledge. In most European systems, the news media provide more hard than soft news, making it easier for citizens to acquire hard news knowledge. If this assumption is valid, it can be deduced that media exposure in market systems will have a stronger effect on soft news than hard news knowledge. In public-service oriented systems, however, exposure to news sources is likely to show the opposite pattern, i.e. have a greater impact on knowledge of hard news.

We examined the independent impact of media use on indices of hard and soft news knowledge while controlling for a variety of background variables associated with the acquisition of generic political knowledge. These included respondents' age, gender (0 = "Male", 1 = "Female"), education (ranging from 1 = "Less than High School" to 4 = "College and Post-Graduate School"), and political interest.[5] The measure of media use was the average response to two questions measuring level of exposure to newspapers (ranging from 1 = "Seldom or never" to 5 = "Everyday") and national television news (ranging from 1 = "Seldom or never" to 5 = "Everyday"). This measure was rescaled to range between 0 and 1.

We used multiple regression to compare the effects of media use across hard and soft news knowledge. After obtaining the regression coefficient for media use in each of the two news domains, we conducted a Wald test assessing the null hypothesis H_0: $\beta_{Hard}=\beta_{Soft}$ in each country. These results are presented in Tables 4 and 5.

In Study 1, as can be seen from Table 4, media use exerted the weakest effects on hard

[5] Political interest was measured with a single question asking, "How interested would you say you are in politics?" The response ranged between 1 ("Not at all interested") and 4 ("Very interested"). Subsequently, the measure was rescaled to range between 0 and 1.

news knowledge in the US (b=.025, n.s.). In contrast, it most substantially impacted hard new knowledge in Sweden (b=.115, $p < .01$). The other countries fell somewhere between the US and Sweden. It is important to note that in every country but the US, the media use coefficient in the hard news domain was positive and statistically significant. Although media use also increased soft news knowledge significantly in all countries except Norway (b=.041, $p < .10$), the coefficient was strongest in the US (b=.124, $p < .01$). In the European countries, the effects of media use on soft news knowledge ranged between .041 (Norway) and .059 (Belgium), which is half of the effect size estimate in the US.

The formal test of the strengthened effects of media use on soft news knowledge in the US is based on rejection of the null hypothesis H_0: $\beta_{Hard}=\beta_{Soft.}$ We can reject the hypothesis of consistent media use effects across knowledge domains in only two countries -- the U.S. ($p < .01$) and Sweden ($p < .05$). In the US, the difference in the two coefficients is exactly as predicted; media use exerts greater effects on soft news knowledge. In Sweden, the difference is in the opposite direction; media use has a much greater impact on hard news knowledge. This finding is consistent with our earlier factor analysis results demonstrating a distinctive soft news factor in Sweden. Furthermore, the test statistic showed that the difference between the coefficients was more pronounced in the US than Sweden ($\chi2=11.55$ versus $\chi2=5.70$). Overall, these findings are consistent with the assumption that the division of current affairs knowledge into hard and soft news domains is at least partially attributable to the media system.

In the remaining four countries (i.e., Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway, and the UK), news exposure had similar effects in both news domains. Although the coefficient estimates were generally slightly larger in the hard news than the soft news domain, these differences were not statistically significant. In these four countries, media use affected both hard and soft news

knowledge.

[Insert Table 4 about here]

In Study 2, the evidence was not as unequivocal. In comparison with Study 1, the two countries represented in Study 2 represent similar rather than different media systems. We would thus expect only modest differences in the effects of media use on hard and soft news knowledge. As shown in Table 5, the Wald test results indicated that the effects of media use on hard and soft news knowledge were no different in the two countries. However, a closer look at the coefficient estimates for media use revealed an interesting pattern. In the US, the media use coefficient was not significant in either of the two domains. In contrast, in the UK, the media use coefficient was significant in both hard (b = .124, $p < .01$) and soft news (b = .081, $p < .01$) domains. Thus, while media use boosted both hard and soft news knowledge in the UK, it had no effect on either in the US. This difference in the impact of media use is masked by the Wald test showing that media use has similar effects across domains in the two countries. In the UK, the effects are positive and significant in both domains. In the US, they are non-significant in both domains.

[Insert Table 5 about here]

Conclusion

We have uncovered significant differences in the dimensionality of current affairs knowledge associated with attributes of national media systems. Measures of hard and soft news knowledge converge in Europe, but diverge in the US. Europeans attend to both hard and soft news, Americans to one but not the other. Thus, self-reported media exposure predicts both hard and soft news knowledge in Europe, but only the latter in the US.

Our findings concerning the two-dimensional structure of current affairs knowledge in

the US and the one-dimensional structure in most European nations reflect corresponding cross-national differences in the composition of broadcast audiences. In countries where broadcast media are free to scale back on traditional forms of news programming and to offer soft news as a means of gaining market share, there is a niche audience for soft news. As this audience increases in size and economic power, the supply of soft news will only increase further. In countries where broadcast media are still obligated to deliver news during periods of peak viewership, there is a larger inadvertent audience for hard news. Mainstream news programming in these countries represents some mix of hard and soft news (see Aalberg et al., 2010) and the audience becomes informed about both subjects in proportion to their visibility in the news stream.

As the "liberalization" of media systems progresses on a global basis, cross-national differences in the availability of soft news are likely to shrink making systemic factors less relevant than individual-level attributes as determinants of consumers' focus of attention. By this alternative demand-based account, not considered here, the closer fit of the specialist model of knowledge in the US has more to do with weaker civic and cultural norms that create a preference for soft news. As Prior (2003) has argued, actual consumption of soft news is driven by people who especially enjoy watching "infotainment" and other forms of soft news. Prior's data, collected in early 2002, indicate that that the soft news audience in the US still lags behind the audience for mainstream (e.g. network news) hard news. Thirty percent of his respondents indicated that instances of soft news programs were among their three most liked television programs. A much higher figure (72 percent) included network newscasts in their top three. This high level of interest in hard news is likely to reflect some degree of social desirability bias in the sense that exposure to hard news reflects well on the respondent's civic motivation. But even

allowing for some inflation, Prior's results suggest that the American audience for soft news is smaller than the audience for hard news. We are not aware of any European data on news preferences; given the evidence demonstrating higher levels of hard news knowledge in Europe, we presume that the preference for hard news is significantly stronger in Europe.

A related demand-related explanation for the greater integration of hard and soft news knowledge in Europe concerns differences in political culture. Europeans are socialized to acquire the predispositions associated with the attentiveness-knowledge syndrome including the sense of political efficacy, feelings of civic duty, and a stronger sense of attachment to the community at large. In the US, there is considerable evidence suggesting that these predispositions are not as well developed. Citizens are cynical about the political process, socially isolated, and increasingly polarized along party lines (for representative evidence, see Putnam, 1995; Hetherington, 2001; Jacobson, 2006). These are sentiments that motivate individuals to avoid information about the world of politics. The sharp distinction between hard and soft news knowledge in the US may thus reflect the increasing number of individuals who tune out the political world.

In closing, it is clear that exposure and attention to hard and soft news varies with both properties of the information environment and the motivations of the individual consumer. We have provided evidence showing that market-based media systems cultivate dual audiences for hard and soft news while public service systems are characterized by an overarching news audience that learns about both hard and soft news. We look forward to research that examines the structure of current affairs knowledge as a function of both variations in consumer demand and the tendency of news organizations to deliver particular genres of news coverage.

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Table 1: Dimensions of Current Affairs Knowledge in Study 1

Belgium					Netherlands					Norway			
	F1	F2	F3	F4		F1	F2	F3	F4		F1	F2	F3	F4
D. Minister(H, D)	.846	.184	-.121	.189	*De Kuip(S)*	.870	.035	.095	.250	Karzai(H, I)	.762	.121	-.039	
F. Minster(H, D)	.834	.067	-.118	.351	F. Minister(H, D)	.851	.345	.145	-.108	Mugabe(H, I)	.725	.197	.012	
Gennez(H, D)*	.784	.368	-.115	.084	*Leeuw(S*)	.833	-.243	.366	-.033	Handlingsregele(H, D)*	.717	.267	-.030	
Tersago(S)	.748	-.269	.384	-.246	Ballin(H, D)*	.736	.250	.072	.514	Sarkoz(H, I)	.671	.383	.031	
Stadion(S)	.547	.306	.154	.083	*Zomergasten(S)*	.733	.261	.100	.122	Hang Seng(H, I)	.665	.010	.255	
OPEC(H, I)	.515	.391	-.191	.225	Bank(H, D)	.583	.453	.290	.332	Hamas(H, I)	.555	.492	.020	
Karzai(H, I)	.161	.763	-.084	-.202	D. Minister(H, D)	.550	.382	.383	.164	Iraq Plan(H, I)	.428	.366	.095	
Bank(H, D)	.481	.659	-.070	-.030	Hang Seng(H, I)	.025	.825	-.042	.141	*Lerkendal(S)*	.040	.788	.217	
Hang Seng(H, I)	-.129	.648	.139	.180	OPEC(H, I)	.211	.652	.129	.416	Pedersen(H, D)*	.365	.734	-.044	
Mugabe(H, I)	.183	.633	-.233	-.235	Karzai(H, I)	.275	.598	.483	-.102	D. Minister(H, D)	.462	.705	-.139	
België(H, D)*	.219	.563	.024	.144	Mugabe(H, I)	.142	.572	.409	.070	Bank(H, D)	.519	.691	-.029	
Hamas(H, I)	.167	.536	-.268	.450	Iraq Plan(H, I)	.129	.044	.785	.113	F. Minster(H, D)	.391	.598	.328	
Iraq Plan(H, I)	.119	.476	.013	.356	Hamas(H, I)	.232	.257	.607	.390	OPEC(H, I)	.493	.591	-.262	
Wittekerke(S)	.256	.045	1.017	.078	Sarkoz(H, I)	.391	.378	.407	.264	Norge i dag(H, D)*	.045	.515	.005	
Sarkoz(H, I)	.441	.129	-.916	.159	Werkloo(H, D)*	-.053	.201	.367	.761	*Fritt vilt(S)*	.004	-.190	.843	
Vilvoorde(H, D)*	.205	-.053	.001	.719	Kilometerheffing(H, D)*	.536	.073	-.010	.705	*Mira Craig(S)*	.099	.373	.829	

Sweden					UK					US			
	F1	F2	F3	F4		F1	F2	F3	F4		F1	F2	F3	F4
OPEC(H, I)	.796	-.014	.030		Mugabe(H, I)	.794	-.001			Hamas(H, I)	.801	.088	.230	
Hamas(H, I)	.792	-.014	.041		Bank(H, D)	.788	.268			Bank(H, D)	.770	.403	.259	
F. Minster(H, D)	.787	.364	.088		Osborne(H, D)*	.781	.230			F. Minster(H, D)	.760	.367	.258	
D. Minister(H, D)	.717	.194	.413		OPEC(H, I)	.779	.035			Stevens(H, D)*	.748	.292	.300	
Leijonborg(H, D)*	.658	.364	.126		F. Minster(H, D)	.757	.293			Patriot Act(H, D)*	.737	.170	.361	
Bank(H, D)	.634	.097	.420		Hang Seng(H, I)	.722	.179			D. Minister(H, D)	.728	.396	.253	
Sverige dag(H, D)*	.597	.064	.264		Sarkoz(H, I)	.703	.126			Unemp(H, D)*	.722	.217	.100	
Mugabe(H, I)	.569	.124	.323		Hamas(H, I)	.692	.249			Sarkoz(H, I)	.671	.443	.112	
Sarkoz(H, I)	.562	.145	.538		Karzai(H, I)	.683	-.188			Karzai(H, I)	.626	.576	.076	
Iraq Plan(H, I)	.480	.154	.304		Point Sys(H, D)*	.629	.164			OPEC(H, I)	.463	.353	.424	
Kronér(S)	.077	.896	-.101		Unemp(H, D)*	.626	.002			Mugabe(H, I)	.275	.744	.084	
Picasso(S)	-.005	.767	.221		D. Minister(H, D)	.600	.272			Hang Seng(H, I)	.240	.672	.251	
Råsunda(S)	.217	.710	-.143		Iraq Plan(H, I)	.519	.047			*Bridges(S)*	.212	.180	.734	
Sverige(H, D)*	.267	.373	.316		*Ross(S)*	.155	.872			*Rays(S)*	-.010	.363	.675	
Hang Seng(H, I)	.050	-.118	.837		*Katona(S)*	-.099	.791			*Fey(S)*	.405	.025	.633	
Karzai(H, I)	.324	.030	.631		*Anfield(S)*	.483	.663			Iraq Plan(H, I)	.489	-.222	.511	

Note: entries are factor loadings, H-Hard News; S-Soft News; I-International News; D-Domestic News

Table 2: Dimensions of Current Affairs Knowledge in Study 2

	UK							US		
	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6		F1	F2	F3
Kofi Annan (H, I)	.828	.067	.245	.110	-.104	.177	Kofi Annan (H, I)	.879	.100	.193
Kyoto (H, I)	.818	.128	.103	.158	.001	-.005	Gonzales (H, D)	.861	.233	.033
Merkel (H, I)	.781	.164	.333	.090	.097	.009	Kyoto (H, I)	.859	.057	.202
Sri Lanka (H, I)	.763	.057	.054	.064	.091	-.010	Chavez (H, I)	.839	.064	.142
Sudan (H, I)	.747	-.024	.076	.084	.194	.026	Wofowitz (H, D)	.818	.111	.170
Melosevic (H, I)	.736	-.040	.071	.045	-.004	.005	Melosevic (H, I)	.799	.090	.209
Mugabe (H, I)	.715	.067	.138	.360	.004	.201	Al Mailiki (H, I)	.768	-.077	.254
Taliban (H, I)	.707	.096	-.030	-.034	.039	.063	Pelosi (H, D)	.742	.290	-.003
Campbell (H, D)	.696	-.077	.323	.154	-.065	.164	Sarkozy (H, I)	.731	.005	.295
Gaza (H, I)	.621	.020	-.012	.103	.419	-.048	Taliban (H, I)	.727	.267	.097
Sarkozy (H, I)	.605	.106	.425	-.072	.162	-.019	Sudan (H, I)	.691	.157	.241
Olympics (S, I)	.584	.174	.198	.063	.213	.177	Cuba (H, D)	.679	.197	.130
Al Maliki (H, I)	.580	.131	.264	-.393	.073	-.030	Obama (H, D)	.676	.508	-.003
Cruz (S, I)	-.054	.761	.210	.055	-.025	.166	Mugabe (H, I)	.675	-.090	.470
Spears (S, I)	-.185	.726	.013	.067	.337	-.080	*Imus (S, D)*	.664	.476	.049
Youtube (S, I)	.285	.642	-.181	.026	.036	.094	Sri Lanka (H, I)	.657	.085	.311
Zidane (S, I)	.436	.542	-.009	.019	.228	.451	Oreilly (H, D)	.637	.436	.083
Mourinho (S, D)	.315	.456	.295	.020	-.002	.442	Brown (H, I)	.626	-.008	.395
Mccann (S, D)	-.013	.077	.589	.171	.409	.310	*Olympics (S, I)*	.547	.150	.358
Hewitt (S, D)	.400	-.006	.583	.074	-.020	.049	*Gibson (S, D)*	.056	.813	.071
Butler (S, D)	.535	.035	.542	.102	.036	.029	*Trump (S, D)*	.261	.738	.043
Branson (H, I)	.174	.314	-.055	.798	.256	-.179	*Spears (S, D)*	-.111	.725	.303
Inman (S, D)	.247	-.276	.358	.644	.004	.157	*Youtube (S, D)*	.377	.597	.197
Mirren (S, D)	.122	.444	.418	.606	-.309	.036	*Cruz (S, D)*	-.061	.585	.528
Turney (H, D)	.131	.153	.110	.006	.705	.120	*Zidane (S, I)*	.254	.055	.717
Bollywood (S, I)	.333	.393	.021	.368	.412	.272	*Mirren (S, I)*	.165	.252	.607
Sharapova (S, I)	.124	.234	.132	-.006	.206	.627	*Sharapova (S, I)*	.187	.378	.506
Turner (S, D)	.395	.106	.498	.034	.148	-.514	*Bollywood (S, I)*	.439	.184	.492

Note: entries are factor loadings, H-Hard News; S-Soft News; I-Int'l News; D-Domestic News

Table 3: Martin-Lof Test of Unidimensionality

	log-Likelihood	*p*-value
Study 1		
Belgium	593.228	.000
Netherlands	255.061	.000
Norway	929.965	.000
Sweden	478.175	.000
UK	526.327	.000
US	959.214	.000
Study 2		
UK	4580.824	.000
US	5392.991	.000

Table 4: Differential Effects of News Exposure in Study 1

	Belgium		Netherlands		Norway	
	Hard News	Soft News	Hard News	Soft News	Hard News	Soft News
Constant	.386 (.022)**	.829 (.028)**	.390 (.025)**	.842 (.018)**	.329 (.025)**	1.078 (.028)**
Age	.001 (.000)**	.000 (.000)	.003 (.000)**	.001 (.000)*	.002 (.000)**	-.006 (.001)**
Female	-.074 (.009)**	-.043 (.012)**	-.102 (.010)**	.002 (.007)	-.107 (.011)**	-.006 (.012)
Education	.030 (.005)**	.010 (.006)	.044 (.006)**	.015 (.005)**	.049 (.006)**	-.004 (.007)
Partisanship	-.001 (.010)	.000 (.013)	.020 (.011)	.022 (.008)**	.013 (.013)	-.002 (.014)
Interest	.273 (.018)**	.041 (.023)	.210 (.021)**	.038 (.016)*	.312 (.025)**	.039 (.027)
Media Use	.047 (.017)**	.059 (.022)**	.056 (.019)*	.034 (.014)*	.075 (.020)**	.041 (.023)
Adj. R^2	.412	.049	.373	.065	.420	.146
N	981	981	991	991	962	962
H_0: $\beta_{Hard}=\beta_{Soft}$[1]	χ^2=.23		χ^2=1.13		χ^2=1.42	
	Sweden		UK		US	
	Hard News	Soft News	Hard News	Soft News	Hard News	Soft News
Constant	.318 (.025)**	.964 (.022)**	.271 (.029)**	.915 (.025)**	.003 (.032)	.506 (.042)**
Age	.002 (.000)**	-.001 (.000)*	.004 (.000)**	.000 (.000)	.002 (.000)**	-.001 (.001)*
Female	-.109 (.011)**	.006 (.009)	-.112 (.012)**	.003 (.010)	-.123 (.013)**	-.058 (.018)**
Education	.041 (.006)**	-.008 (.005)	.029 (.008)**	-.004 (.006)	.074 (.009)**	.054 (.012)**
Partisanship	.002 (.011)	.007 (.010)	.015 (.013)	-.011 (.011)	.070 (.016)**	.065 (.022)**
Interest	.266 (.022)**	-.008 (.019)	.360 (.023)**	.030 (.020)	.473 (.025)**	.140 (.033)**
Media Use	.115 (.020)**	.056 (.018)**	.055 (.021)**	.054 (.018)**	.025 (.022)	.127 (.029)**
Adj. R^2	.418	.014	.449	.016	.530	.127
N	971	971	945	945	935	935
H_0: $\beta_{Hard}=\beta_{Soft}$[1]	χ^2=5.70*		χ^2=.00		χ^2=11.55**	

Note. Cell entries are regression coefficient estimates and their standard errors in parenthesis.
[1]The Wald test assesses the null hypothesis that the coefficient estimates of media use are equal in the two news domains; *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$.

Table 5: Differential Effects of Media Use in Study 2

	UK		US	
	Hard News	Soft News	Hard News	Soft News
Constant	.244 (.026)**	.753 (.022)**	.204 (.023)**	.726 (.020)**
Age	.002 (.000)**	-.002 (.000)**	.001 (.000)	-.003 (.000)**
Female	.110 (.012)**	.001 (.010)	.147 (.013)**	.025 (.012)*
Education	.049 (.007)**	.010 (.006)	.102 (.009)**	.066 (.008)**
Partisanship	.027 (.017)	.020 (.014)	-.027 (.013)*	.007 (.012)
Interest	.362 (.024)**	.155 (.020)**	.422 (.026)**	.123 (.023)**
Media Use	.124 (.027)**	.081 (.022)**	.044 (.027)	.044 (.023)
Adj. R^2	.179	.148	.546	.169
N	920	920	903	903
H_0: $\beta_{Hard}=\beta_{Soft}$ [1]	χ^2= 2.91		χ^2= .00	

Note. Cell entries are regression coefficient estimates and their standard errors in parentheses.
[1]The Wald test assesses the null hypothesis that the coefficient estimates of media use are equal in the two news domains. *p < .05; **p < .01.