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Using Comedy to Increase Public Interest and Understanding of Political and Science Issues

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The State of Science Humor?

Corny Jokes



Bad Delivery



Science Humor



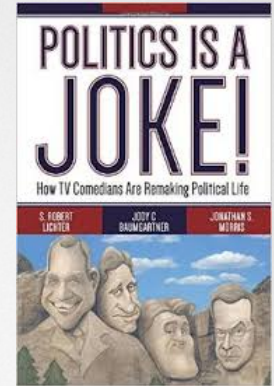
Political Comedy to the Rescue



Outline

- Generalized Effects of Political Comedy
- How Political Comedy Covers Science
- Case Study: Climate Change
- Comedy Effects on Science Engagement
- The Future of Comedy & Science

The Political Comedy Effect



1. Attracts a younger audience
2. Acts as gateway for exposure to news content
3. Sparks interest in & knowledge about campaigns
4. Feel better about our ability to influence politics
5. Primes our attitudes towards politicians
6. Sparks low-involvement political participation

*Effects dependent upon prior political interest, partisanship, affinity for political humor, etc.

The Daily Show: We ♥ Science



- TDS devotes 50% more of its news hole (2.6%) to science coverage than traditional news (Brewer, 2013)
 - Focuses on a range of stories including environment & biotech
 - Viewers list as trusted source for science news (Feldman et al., 2011)
- Coverage:
 - Critical of the war on science
 - Unbalanced vs. balanced (think climate change)
 - Mocks the way the news covers science
 - Deliberative interview conversations w/scientists & policymakers
 - Deference to scientific authority

Comedy Interviews = A Conversation about Science

Table 3. Frequent Interview Guests

| Guest | Category | Appearances on <i>TDS</i> | Appearances on <i>TCR</i> | Total |
|----------------------|------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|-------|
| Fareed Zakaria | Journalist | 17 | 2 | 19 |
| Brian Williams | Journalist | 16 | 0 | 16 |
| Tom Brokaw | Journalist | 10 | 6 | 16 |
| Mike Huckabee | Politician | 8 | 7 | 15 |
| Neil deGrasse Tyson | Academic | 7 | 8 | 15 |
| Reza Aslan | Writer | 9 | 3 | 12 |
| Ricky Gervais | Comedian | 13 | 0 | 13 |
| Bill Kristol | Journalist | 10 | 1 | 11 |
| Denis Leary | Comedian | 12 | 0 | 12 |
| Will Ferrell | Comedian | 11 | 0 | 11 |
| Bill Clinton | Politician | 9 | 2 | 11 |
| Doris Kearns Goodwin | Academic | 6 | 5 | 11 |
| Paul Rudd | Actor | 10 | 1 | 11 |
| Arianna Huffington | Journalist | 5 | 5 | 10 |



2/27/12: TDS

WATCH

Video from television appearances, documentaries, and speeches.

LATEST WATCH POSTS

Moyers & Company: On Science Literacy
January 24, 2014

Moyers & Company: On Science, Religion and the Universe
January 17, 2014

Moyers & Company: Cosmos
January 10, 2014

C-SPAN's BookTV: The Space Chronicles
March 15, 2012

Past, Present, and Future of NASA - U.S. Senate Testimony (Video)
March 7, 2012

SELECT VIDEOS



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How Political Comedy Covers Climate Change

- *TDS* & *TCR* talked about climate change more than traditional news broadcasts (1999-2012; 2005-2012)
 - Interviews represent 20-35% of that conversation (Feldman, 2013)
- Affirm the reality and science of climate change, rather than focus on conflict frame or skepticism
 - Satire actually centers on mocking climate change skeptics
 - Also makes fun of current policy proposals & inaction on issue



Influence on Climate Change Perceptions

- Those who watch political satire pay greater attention to news about science, tech, & the environment
 - Comedy viewers while young, male, and liberal also tend to be more educated and follow public affairs news content
- Viewing climate change content on TDS & TCR:
 - Greater certainty of climate change existing
 - Correct understanding of each comic's view on climate change
 - Biased processing of Colbert's message: Republicans less likely to think he believes in climate change (Brewer & Knight, 2015)



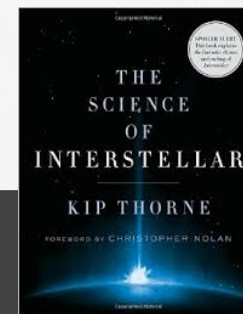
Comedy's Effect on Science Engagement

- Much like politics, comedy coverage of science issues can act as a catalyst for scientific engagement:
 - Increased interest in science issues
 - Greater attention to science coverage in traditional news
 - Modest increases in scientific literacy and understanding
 - More positive evaluations of scientists
 - Willingness to engage in low-cost political acts on key science issues

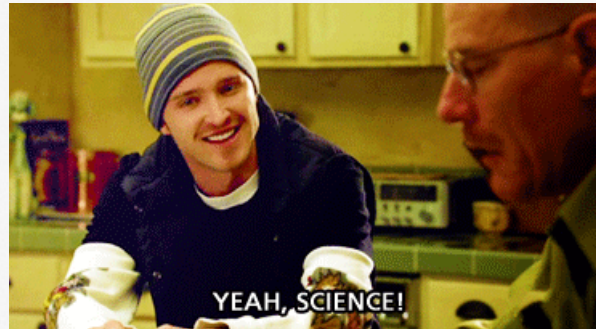
(Brewer, 2013; Brewer & Knight, 2015; Feldman et al, 2011; Feldman, 2013)

Future Opportunities for Comedy & Science

- Promote increasing coverage of science on comedy programming
 - Think strategically about the way information regarding new discoveries is released
 - Craft talking points & punch lines for scientists and spokespeople
 - Encourage scientists to speak about science via comedy outlets (interviews, panels, and more)
- Continue to promote public engagement with science via entertainment content beyond comedy



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Thank you!

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