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

[Diagram of a test tube with labels: If you're NOT part of the solution, you're part of the precipitate.]

[Picture of a child standing with a plus sign between them.]

[Image of Buzz Lightyear and Woody from Toy Story with text: BAD JOKES BAD JOKES EVERYWHERE]
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Guest</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Appearances on TDS</th>
<th>Appearances on TCR</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fareed Zakaria</td>
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<td>19</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brian Williams</td>
<td>Journalist</td>
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<td>Tom Brokaw</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>Mike Huckabee</td>
<td>Politician</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neil deGrasse Tyson</td>
<td>Academic</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td>Reza Aslan</td>
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<td>Ricky Gervais</td>
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<td>13</td>
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<td>Bill Kristol</td>
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<tr>
<td>Denis Leary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Will Ferrell</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bill Clinton</td>
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<td>Doris Kearns Goodwin</td>
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<td>Paul Rudd</td>
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<tr>
<td>Arianna Huffington</td>
<td>Journalist</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

2/27/12: TDS
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
Thank you!

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