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THE IMPACT OF INSTANT ANALYSIS  
OF A TELEVISED POLITICAL DEBATE

by

MARY ANNE COURTNEY HENDERSON

A thesis  
presented to the University of Windsor  
in partial fulfillment of the  
thesis requirement for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
in  
Communication Studies

Windsor, Ontario, 1988  
Mary Anne Courtney Henderson, 1988

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## ABSTRACT

The current study examines political instant analysis from a critical framework provided by Smythe (1981) who argues that the media determine our very consciousness. The media draw explicit conclusions rather than allowing audiences to draw their own, and in this way, instant analysis is one of the tools used by the media in the production of consciousness. Hence, according to Smythe, tools such as instant analysis form the means by which the media impact on public attitudes, values, and behaviour.

This investigation examines the influence of a news commentator's instant analysis of neutral segments of the August 1987 Ontario Provincial election debate among the three major party leaders. An experiment was conducted on 130 undergraduates randomly assigned to one of four experimental conditions, one each favouring the three party leaders and a control group. Significant treatment effects were demonstrated for whom students thought won the debate. In addition, supposedly 'objective' news stories written by students were dramatically influenced by, the instant analyst's version of who won the debate, positive

statements made about the candidate favoured in the experimental manipulation and negative statements about the opponents, and actual words used to described the favoured candidate.

Results such as these should provide food for thought for policy makers in terms of the impact of instant analysis and the myth of objectivity.



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## DEDICATION

In memory of the most intelligent person I have ever known,  
who always taught me to strive for the top. Thanks Mom.

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**Introduction:**

This chapter discusses the positivist approach taken by the mainstream science inquiry. Positivist social scientists in areas such as sociology and psychology, subscribe to the notion of "objectivity". Additionally, journalists, who may also be referred to as amateur sociologists, have adopted this approach and also strive for the ideal of objectivity. Consequently, journalists perceive the news media as a mirror of society.

The concept of objectivity in social science has been criticized because, in dealing with human behaviour, emotions and values are involved - thus subjectivity. The concept of objectivity, as a canon of journalism is even more problematical. The news media distort reality due to bias resulting from legal, organizational, and economic constraints. However, the public considers television to be the most believable and credible medium. As a result, the public is not aware of the bias, power and profit-making motives of the Consciousness Industry. The audience is subject to manipulation, and distortion, all the while being produced and sold to advertisers of consumer goods and political candidates as an audience

commodity. It has been argued that the election of political leaders has been reduced to a mechanism of the marketplace, which is something that stands in the way of attaining the ideal of democracy.

This background leads us to the purpose of the current study: to examine the role of political instant analysis. Instant analysis refers to the commentary provided by media "experts" immediately following televised events such as election debates. In the past, instant analysis mainly has been studied in the administrative research vein. Two such examples are Persuasion Theory and agenda setting. The present study will use a more critical framework provided by Smythe (1981) for its examination of political instant analysis. Smythe's position extends beyond agenda setting, which says the media tell us what to think about. He argues that the media determine our very consciousness, and accordingly, he refers to the media as "Consciousness Industry". Smythe maintains that in order to produce consciousness, the media use tools of manipulation such as drawing explicit conclusions, rather than letting the audience draw their own. Instant analysis can be considered one of the tools by which the media impart our attitudes, values and behaviours, such as the products we buy and the candidates for whom we vote.



### **Positivisistic Approach**

The dominant North American research paradigm and philosophy of social science inquiry has been positivist in nature. Smith (1983, p. 28-42) provided an historical background with respect to theoretical approaches to social inquiry. In the late nineteenth century, the investigation of human social life using the methods of the physical sciences began. Studies of the social world lagged behind those of the physical world, therefore, from its inception theorists such as Auguste Comte believed that a scientific approach to social life would result in orderly controlled progress.

This philosophy was referred to as "positivism", which is the formulation of principles or laws in the social world that have the same objective status as natural scientific laws. These laws are used to explain social events. Adherents of positivism concluded that there are no fundamental differences between the natural and social sciences. Therefore, knowledge of social phenomena is based on sense experiences, as is our knowledge of physical objects. Social science investigators exist independently of social objects, as physical objects do for their counterparts in the natural sciences, and he or she cannot define them or give them a reality they do not already possess (Smith, 1983, p. 30).

Wilson (1983, p. 8) argues that positivists believe that, as in the world of natural phenomena, all that can be known about the social world is experienced by us. Positivists systematically investigate the events and happenings we experience in order to reveal regularities, determine causes, and formulate laws which govern the world of social groups and organizations.

Positivists consider the study of social life to be a "neutral" activity. Smith (1983, p. 30) states that, "The social scientist was not to evaluate or make normative judgements but was confined to discussing what existed or what is. The investigator was as such, to be objective and to prevent bias from entering the research process."

Smith (1983) identifies Durkheim as the most important theorist in terms of how positivist social inquiry is conducted, due to his development of methodology and his studies which employed these rules.

Durkheim's approach is based on the principle that social phenomena are external to the individual, or independent of human consciousness. This is the same as physical phenomena, which require observation and experiments for their understanding. Social scientists investigate subject matters similarly to physical

scientists, according to Durkheim's theory:

First they must eliminate all bias, presuppositions, and common-sense beliefs about the inquiry; second, they should not be emotionally involved or have preconceived attitudes about the subject. In other words, Durkheim's social scientist was to be neutral and objective like his physical science counterpart. Science itself was to be strictly confined to what is as opposed to what should be. A social scientist has no business discussing how a society should operate because he or she can only discover how in fact it does operate. (Smith, 1983, p. 33)

Durkheim's theory also involves the relationship of social facts to other social facts, resulting in the discovery of cause. This goal made social science similar to the physical sciences.

Smythe (1981, p. 194) refers to the application of physical sciences to social beings, as "scientism" which he defines as, "a mechanical view of men and women with implicit denial of the reality of their consciousness, and their apparently disorderly political behaviour."

Smythe argues that psychology adopted the positivistic philosophy even prior to the behaviourist development of the stimulus-response school. He indicates that communication theory and research fall primarily under the behavioristic category of science. This includes the study of public opinion, once studied in "broad theoretical and philosophical terms", and which now involves research

projects conducted by technicians on specific subjects, using quantitative analysis. (Smythe, 1981, p. 195).

Smythe (1981, p. 196) also maintains that social science was intended to be "value-free and apolitical". In mass media research this involved Lasswell's process of "who says what to whom through which channel". This also includes quantification of phenomena and the use of scientific methods.

The positivistic approach, therefore, was used extensively in sociology and psychology by the start of the twentieth century, and had begun to filter through to other social sciences such as public opinion research in the political science and communication fields. Just as the social sciences, such as sociology, imitated the more respected physical sciences, so too has journalism patterned itself, in turn, after sociology.

### **Objectivity in Journalism**

Schudson (1978) discusses the history of journalism in terms of its use of the scientific approach. The term "objectivity" was unknown in journalism prior to World War I. Objectivity is defined as, "...dealing with outward things, exhibiting actual facts uncoloured by exhibitor's feelings or opinions..." (Oxford, 1976, p. 752). This

ideal of objectivity became necessary due to the doubt and skepticism of the democratic market society following the war. Reasons for the despair about democracy at that time included the growing strength of dictatorships in Germany and Italy and the apparent helplessness of the United States government in dealing with the depression. Consequently the separation of facts and values was required in order to gain the trust of the American people.

Altshull (1984, pp. 129-131), Gans (1979, p. 186) and Siebert, Peterson, and Schram (1956, p. 60) offer the explanation that the origin of objective reporting may be traced back to the growth of the Associated Press (AP) wire service in the United States. Economic factors were cited as the main reason for this. At the turn of the century, the press in Canada and the United States was partisan in nature. The problem faced by AP and Canadian Press (CP) was: how do you provide a satisfactory wire service for both Whigs and Tories? The answer was "objectivity", which meant eliminating all political bias in the news as far as possible. Subscriber newspapers could either use the inexpensive wire services for international reports, or provide their own -- expensive -- foreign correspondents. Thus, the need for cheap foreign news on the part of North American newspapers was met by the introduction of

objectivity into journalism. Reporters and writers began to write material that would be acceptable to clients from both parties, and from this point on, objective reporting has permeated North American journalism.

In 1920, Walter Lippman's essay, Liberty and the Press expressed his concern about the subjectivity of facts and the professionalization of journalism. He warned that subjectivity in journalism could result in problems for democracy. He stated that:

...where all news comes at second-hand, where all the testimony is uncertain, men cease to respond to truths, and respond simply to opinions. The environment in which they act is not the realities themselves, but the pseudo-environment of reports, rumours and guesses. The whole reference of thought comes to be what somebody asserts, not what actually is. (pp. 54-55)

Lippman (1920, pp. 67, 82) believed that a possible solution to the problem could be "science". These practices would include legislating false documentation as illegal, identification of news sources, and the establishment of non-partisan news agencies. In short, Lippmann successfully propagated a scientific approach to journalism.

Schudson (1978, p. 156) maintains that in the 1920s and 30s, the notion of objectivity provided a much needed

framework within which journalists could take their own reporting seriously and persuade the readers and critics to take it seriously as well. By the mid thirties, the ideal of objectivity in journalism had become an articulated political value. Schudson (1978, pp. 5-6) defines the belief in objectivity as:

...the belief that one can and should separate facts from values. Facts, in this view, are assertions about the world open to independent validation. They stand beyond the distorting influences of any individual's personal preferences. Values in this view, are an individual's conscious or unconscious preferences for what the world should be; they are seen as ultimately subjective and so without legitimate claim on other people. The belief in objectivity is a faith in 'facts,' a distrust of 'values,' and a commitment to their segregation.

The notion of "precision journalism" is an indication of objective, positivist scientific methods currently used in journalism. This type of journalism involves the application of social science tools, including quantitative research methods, in order to become more systematic. These techniques enable journalists to present and interpret "facts", without using the "philosopher's armchair" approach (Meyer 1973, pp. 13-15). Here, one need only think of the newspaper public opinion poll, replete with a final paragraph intoning: "samples of this size are

accurate to within four percentage points, 19 times out of 20".

Gans (1979, pp. 182-187) argues that journalists strive to live up to their definition of objectivity, which means that values and ideology are excluded. The notion of objectivity is reinforced by the need to protect journalistic credibility. If journalists were not considered to be objective, every story could be criticized as a product of journalistic bias, and distrust in the news would expand.

Gans also indicates that journalists mainly view objectivity in positive terms. Objectivity brought an end to the partisan newspapers and bribing of journalists by their sources. Journalists believe their role is to supply information in order for the audience to arrive at its own conclusion.

The statement of principles for the Canadian Daily Newspaper Publishers' Association includes a section on accuracy and fairness, indicating the importance of objectivity as an ideal in professional journalism standards. These include:

The newspaper keeps faith with its readers by presenting the news comprehensively, accurately and fairly, and by acknowledging mistakes promptly.



Fairness requires a balanced presentation of the relevant facts in a news report, and of all substantial opinions in a matter of controversy. It precludes distortion of meaning by over or under-emphasis by placing facts or quotations out of context, or by headlines not warranted by the text. When statements are made that injure the reputation of an individual or group those affected should be given the earliest opportunity to reply. (Kent, 1981, p. 286)

People have little direct awareness of many of the events of the world that they talk or think about. Therefore, news has been described as a window to the world. Another metaphor widely used is that the news media hold a mirror up to reality. These both imply that the news is to serve as a "conduit" between its audience and the happenings in the world. (Weaver, Graber, McCombs, & Eyal, 1981, p. 3)

Many television news personnel claim they are holding up an "electronic mirror" to society, so that viewers can see what is really going on (Ranney, 1983, p. 35).

This metaphor is defended by television executives. Robert D. Kasmire, a vice president of NBC in 1973, told the United States. National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence that, "There is no doubt that television is to a large degree a mirror of society. It is also a mirror of public attitudes and preferences." (Epstein, 1973, p. 13). Frank Stanton, then president of

CBS explained while testifying before a United States House Committee that, "What the media do is to hold a mirror up to society and try to report it as faithfully as possible." (Epstein, 1973, pp. 13, 14). Elmer W. Lower, president of ABC News in 1973, also described television as "the television mirror that reflects... across oceans and mountains" (Epstein, 1973, p. 14). Altheide (1974, p. 17) indicated that the common phrases, "We don't make the news, we report it," and CBS anchorman Walter Cronkite's expression, "That's the way it is," show that the stories told by news media are believed to mirror reality. A Canadian example of this was the CBC radio news program which until recently claimed to report "The World at 8".

The very terms we use, such as media, channels or conduits, rather than "Consciousness Industry" which Smythe (1981) uses for the mass media, imply accurate, objective mirroring or reporting of the world. Only rarely is the notion raised, in Marshall McLuhan's terms, that the medium is the message.

Bennett (1983, p. 77) summarizes the professional practices employed by journalists in their attempts at objective-reporting. These include the following:

1. The journalist assumes the role of a politically neutral adversary by examining all sides of an issue.

2. The journalist observes prevailing social standards of decency and good taste.
3. The journalist uses documentary reporting practices which result in reporting only what can be observed or supported with physical evidence.
4. Stories are written with the use of a standardized format which requires reporters to gather all the "facts" (i.e., who, what, where, when, how, etc.).
5. Reporters are trained as generalists in order to separate any personal bias from the subject matter.
6. The practice of editorial review is used to regulate and enforce the above.

### **The Critique of Objectivity**

There is a growing body of evidence which confronts the seeming paradox of objectivity and therefore, opposes the metaphor that television news mirrors reality. In this respect, of course, journalism is not unlike traditional sociology, and the positivist social sciences generally.

These have come under considerable criticism, especially in recent years, from those representing the more subjective humanist or idealist tradition.

The idealist approach assumes that social life differs from natural phenomena and completely different methods are required for its analysis. This approach recognizes that

human beings are freely choosing, autonomous individuals, and that the sociologist must understand action from within, rather than as a detached, objective observer. Since social science deals with human behaviour including subjectivity, emotions, and values, idealists believe that there is no objective reality as such. Consequently, the investigator cannot separate himself/herself from life's events and then describe their meaning with confidence. Even the decision about what to research, let alone how to do it, is based on social scientists' values (cf. Smith, 1983; Wilson, 1983).

Those opposed to positivism have not restricted their criticism to other academics, but have also turned their attention to "amateur sociologists" such as journalists as well. "Man on the street" surveys are one such example of journalism as amateur sociology.

Bennett (1983) contends that news is biased because of these professional journalism standards; due to the creation of conditions that systematically favour the reporting of narrow, official perspectives. Consequently journalism standards bring about a distorted political perspective in the news even though journalists boast that their perspective is broad and realistic.

Ranney (1983) identifies bias in network television news as structural rather than political. He argues that television news is what it is largely due to the constraints involved in its operation. These include economic constraints created by the objective of making a profit, organizational constraints such as the limited amount of time, and legal constraints.

According to Hofstetter (1979 p. 370), "...news reporting, like all other forms of communication, involves high levels of bias or selectivity. All news is biased in the sense that information is selected to be communicated or not communicated about an issue, event, or personality according to sets of implicit rules that define the "newsworthiness" of a story. Altheide (1974) agrees that the organization behind news channels enables a few people to select what is significant for everyone.

A number of authors show that news is the construction of reality, rather than a picture of reality, and the process of making news is due to a complex organization. Professional journalism is part of the institutional process in which newswork is embedded. (cf. Altheide, 1974; Gans 1979; Epstein, 1973; Tuchman, 1978). Clarke (1981) conducted a study of this process in Canadian news production which also focussed on the complexity of the organization.

According to Altheide (1974), news reports reflect the organization that produces them. In his study of television news he described the news director and assignment editor as those who run the organization. The reporters and cameramen are newsroom soldiers, who are in turn backed by writers and researchers. However, this organization leads to several problems. Each of these parties has its own goal to fulfill, and these interests sometimes conflict.

Altheide (1974, p. 112) points out that events are sometimes newsworthy for practical reasons and not due to their objective character. Events are often selected based on scheduling needs, capacity, and time to film the event, as well as entertainment value. Therefore he defines news as, "...the product of an organized process which entails a practical way of looking at events in order to tie them together, make simple and direct statements about their relationship, and do this in an entertaining way."

Clarke (1981) discusses the nature of the news source as a production constraint. In her study of Canadian news production, she found that reporters rely on "accredited, legitimate news sources". Therefore, those in powerful, institutional positions have greater access to the media compared to those less privileged. The extensive use of

these prime sources is a result of time constraints, and professional journalistic rules about reliable sources and objectivity.

Epstein (1973) identifies the shortcomings of the mirror metaphor due to the news organization. He contends that the mirror analogy neglects the fact that television coverage can be controlled by "policy." For example, decisions are made in advance whether or not to cover certain types of events. Policy can also determine how a story is to be depicted. Epstein gave the example of a decision made by the executive producer of the ABC Evening News in March, 1969, that Vietnam staff were to alter the focus of their coverage from combat pieces, to interpretive ones, depicting the eventual pull-out of U.S. forces. Therefore reality was not mirrored because the troops were still fighting and not pulling out, however, battlefield scenes were not depicted as extensively on ABC.

Epstein emphasizes that television news is not like a mirror, because it is not automatic. There is an important chain of decisions made both before and after the fact by executives and newsmen, also known as the "organizational process."

As a result, Epstein views television news as that which is shaped and constrained by a number of forces

including government regulation, economics of networks, procedures for selecting and evaluating information and reaching decisions. In addition news organizations have practices of recruiting newsmen and producers who hold or accept values that are consistent with those of the organization. This has fostered a long research tradition stretching back to Warren Breed (1955), an American Sociologist whose dissertation on social control in a newspaper newsroom in the United States is a classic in the communication field.

Tuchman (1978) argues that newsworkers and news organizations define what is newsworthy, not social norms produced by the social structure. Notions of newsworthiness are defined from moment to moment, as, for example, the newspaper editors decide which items will be carried on the first page. Therefore, news does not mirror society, because in the process of describing an event, news defines and shapes that event. For example, the early period of the modern woman's movement was construed and constructed by news stories as, "the activities of the ridiculous bra burners" (Tuchman, 1978). Therefore, the media focussed on some isolated incidents which were considered to be newsworthy, resulting in a distortion of the overall picture.



As a result of selection and bias in the news due to economic, organizational, and legal constraints, news is subjective. According to Altheide (1974), TV news does not inform us about news in terms of who, what, where, and when, rather, it provides a scene for events. More and more, public events are recognized, selected, reported, and presented through the television news medium. Nimmo and Combs (1983, p. 2) argue that the pictures people have of politics are not developed through direct involvement, but are instead perceptions that have been, "focused, filtered, and fantasized" by mediators in the press, on television, in magazines, and election campaigns, among others. With respect to public events that can sway a person's vote, Lee (1970, p. 149) argues that, "Television is more like a prism than a mirror. The light rays of events are bent as they pass through so that the picture of public life conveyed over television is a refracted image."

Altheide (1974, p. 113) also argues that current news practices treat events as though they have objective qualities, without giving consideration to motives, purposes, and understanding of those involved. Therefore, in the process of presenting events-as-news, everyday life is transformed for news purposes. This means taking an event out of its context and embedding it in a foreign

situation -- a news report. This process involves shaping events by distorting, and by greater emphasis on some points than others. He says that in order to make events news, the information is "decontextualized" by news reporting and is thereby changed. Therefore, news stories are selected for specific reasons and in addition the treatment by newswriters significantly alters "what happened".

The media's construction of reality is also prominent in sports commentary. Comisky, Bryant, and Zillman (1977, pp. 343-344) argue that sports commentators go beyond verification of the live action. They point out that:

The sportscasters help create the media event by embellishing the actual happening,... The role of the contemporary sports commentator has expanded to include the responsibility of dramatizing the event, of creating suspense, sustaining tension, and enabling the viewers to feel that they have participated in an important and fiercely contested event,... It would appear that these dramatic embellishments might provide the spectators at home with a very different impression of the game than that received by the viewers in the stadium or arena.

Therefore, sports commentary can also significantly alter what happened in order to present the event in an entertaining way, as can theatre, film, and concert reviews, as well as all reporting.

## **The Public and News Credibility**

It appears that the "ideal" of objectivity is actually a "myth". However, the public seems to believe in mass media news, especially on television.

Over the past two decades television increasingly has become the dominant news source of North American society. Research conducted in Canada for the Kent Royal Commission on Newspapers (1981) indicated that 55 percent of Canadians chose television, and 30 percent newspapers, as the medium for keeping them informed about world and international news (Kubas, 1981; p. 26). Newspapers were still ahead on local news, 59 percent to 19 percent for television, but trailed at both the provincial and national levels.

Television news is the most believable mass medium. According to Roper (1987), in the United States television replaced newspapers as the most believable medium in 1961, and has remained in first place since that time. There have been a number of studies conducted regarding the credibility of television news versus other media sources. Kubas (1981) reported that 53 percent of Canadians chose television as the most fair and unbiased, while 29 percent chose newspapers. In addition, 54 percent chose television as the most believable and 34 percent chose newspapers. Wilson and Howard (1978) conducted a study of public

perception of accuracy of the news media in London, Ontario. Television was chosen by 52 percent of the respondents as giving the most accurate impression of a news event or situation. The newspaper was chosen by 32 percent and radio by 13 percent.

Studies conducted in the United States show similar results. Lee (1978) found that in the relative credibility of newspaper and TV news, TV was favoured with a three-to-one lead over newspapers by a college sample, for national/international news and local/state. Reagan and Zenply (1979) found that 62 percent regarded TV local news as more believable when confronted with the forced choice between TV and newspapers. Abel and Wirth (1977) also found that local news was more believable on TV (43 percent) than newspapers (23 percent).

A number of reasons are given for these differences, including: TV news is perceived as more "trustworthy, dynamic, expert, objective, intimate, convenient, easy, etc. than newspaper news" (Lee 1978, p. 287); "television was manned by better, more experienced, more skilled journalists" (Wilson & Howard 1978, p. 74). "Newspapers are not careful about getting their facts straight" (Stevenson & Greene 1980, p. 115); television is more believable because it is "live", "you can see it happen,"

and due to its "immediacy" (Carter & Greenberg, 1965, p. 34); and the people assign greater credibility to television due to the relative anonymity of the newspaper reporter (Chang & Lement, 1968).

### **Consciousness Industry Motives**

In sum, news media, especially television, are highly credible with the public. But if objectivity is a myth, and yet the media are believed by the public, does this not leave open the possibility of manipulation? The focus of the discussion will now turn to potential motives on the part of the media or Consciousness Industry, a term coined by Enzensberger (1974).

Epstein (1973) found that all network news divisions operate under economic and political structures which also impose requisites and restraints on them.

Economic constraints in the media result from the pressure to make profits. Since network television is in the business to attract and hold large audiences, the news operation also is expected to attract as large an audience as possible (Epstein, 1973).

Altheide (1974) also indicated that television news makes money by selling a certain portion of the audience to the advertiser for a specific period of time. The cost

depends on the number and demographic characteristics of the audience, and this information is provided through the "ratings." According to Altheide, the use of ratings indicates that television programming, including news, will be a market place first, and a forum for ideas and issues second.

Bennett (1983) considers the news to be above all, a consumer product. He emphasizes that it would not exist in the diverse forms we know it without the influence of marketing strategies used to deliver or "sell" news audiences to advertisers. Before the audience can be sold to the advertisers, the news must be "sold" to the audience. Therefore, according to Bennett news is a product which must be packaged to fit into the social image, life style, and daily schedules of the audience.

Smythe (1981, pp. 4-9) takes this further. He argues that: "The mass media produce audiences and sell them to advertisers of consumer goods and services, political candidates, and groups interested in controversial public issues". He refers to the audience as a "commodity" which is produced and sold to advertisers because of the valuable services audiences perform. These are:

1. They market consumer goods and services to themselves.

2. They learn to vote for one candidate (or issue) over another in the political arena.
3. They learn and reaffirm belief in the rightness of their political system.

### **Media, Politics and Democracy**

It was demonstrated above that the major underlying motive for the Consciousness Industry, as with industries generally, is profit. The position taken by some of the above academics, such as Smythe (1981), is that audiences are manipulated behind the screen of objectivity, to serve the economic interests of industry. But there is another concern which revolves around the related issue of power.

Smythe (1981) elaborates on the role of the audience as a commodity in the political arena. Political parties and candidates advertise heavily in the media. Events such as 'press releases and other publicity-attracting situations are staged in order to appear as news content. These events can be classified as pseudo events (Boorstin, 1961), which are events planned for the immediate purpose of being reported: in other words, a media event. The objective is the same as that for advertisers of consumer goods. The intent is to produce an audience which is ready to support one policy over another, or one candidate rather than another, instead of buying brand X over brand Y.

Real (1977, p. 142), argues that voters make choices, but their choices and motives are structured by mass mediated information and images. These in turn are structured through the economics of the privately owned media and other institutions. Real gives the example that heavy promotion through the mass media can "sell" political candidates in the same way that a multi-million dollar advertising campaign can make a success out of a brand of orange juice, cat food, or tooth paste.

In light of this quest for power and profit by the Consciousness Industry, it is important to discuss the ramifications for democracy.

Picard (1985, pp. 4-15) argues that the harm inflicted on the interests of democracy by capitalistic activities is evident in the press. The press has grown to become large commercial entities with the concentration of ownership and the establishment of local monopolies. This involved a change from fulfilling its political role and providing information for aristocratic subscribers, to the press' major role as a marketplace of goods and services. Dallas Smythe (1962, p. 6) describes the way this marketing approach to information and audiences changed the way



political information is presented:

Our constitutional system originally rested on the procedure of submitting ideas and policies to public review, criticism and deliberate choice between candidates. It assumed both rationality and free access of advocacy to the electorate. Cultural industry, by introducing a commodity view of politics has gone far toward altering this system.

Commercialization of the press introduced new constraints on the marketplace of ideas, resulting in, "...new definitions of news, new norms of ethics and propriety, new organizational policies, and new economic considerations" (Picard, 1985, p. 13). Consequently, editorial decisions about what information is disseminated and how it is conveyed, have been influenced. These decisions depend upon media owners and managers, professional organizations, the values of reporters and editors, and the structure of the organization itself.

The commercial nature of the media has resulted in a reduction of both the choice in the marketplace and the expression of diverse opinion. Picard (1985, p. 18) argues that among those interested in the newspaper's contribution to society, these economic developments have promoted concern that, "...the press has abandoned its role in democratic society and has contributed to a decline in society".

Qualter (1987, pp. 8-11) argues that the very practice of advertising agencies handling election campaigns and the treatment of political parties as commercial products, presents a serious challenge to the actual practices of liberal democracy. The commercial advertiser seeks to influence consumer spending habits, and therefore, may have an impact on eating and drinking habits, on fashion, music and entertainment, and on "lifestyles" in general. However, choosing a politician because a television commercial makes someone like his image, may have very different consequences and, "...may drastically change the whole fabric of society".

Qualter maintains that election campaigns are perceived solely as advertising problems by politicians and advertising agencies, and consequently, "...politics can become simply a matter of technique without substance". Due to the treatment of a party or candidate as the product to be sold, politics is no longer about governing, leading, alternative world views, and issues. Instead, politics has become little more than the assembly of the most attractive package for the purchaser or voter.

The major criterion has become voter appeal and therefore, Qualter argues, democracy is reduced to a "marketplace mechanism". Selling a candidate or party in a

way similar to a consumer product thus poses a real threat to liberal democracy.

However, Qualter (1987, p. 11) also points out that political television commercials often provide as much information about issues as news programmes, which tend to focus on the "...visual, the spectacular, and even the accidental". In addition, "public affairs" televised specials, which attempt to deal with significant issues, are too brief to deal with the issues behind the events. Consequently, Qualter argues that the media do not provide a contest of ideas, principles, values and policies for voters to evaluate, and therefore, the democratic ideal of an informed electorate making rational decisions has almost completely disappeared.

Nimmo and Combs (1983, p. 63) maintain that the key rationale for presidential debates is to give the audience an opportunity to receive events first hand, giving them an opportunity to make more informed choices than through mediated events. However, Nimmo and Combs argue that presidential debates are pseudo events and can hardly be classified as "spontaneous, and unrehearsed confrontations".

Nimmo and Combs also suggest that these debates are not always informative. Often at the end, the outcome of the

debate is not clear. There is a considerable "thirst" to determine immediately "what happened". The first question asked is "Who won?"

Indeed, during political campaigns, media have been accused of "horse race journalism," which involves a greater emphasis on who is winning or losing, rather than on the substance of the campaign. This also entails greater coverage of the personas of the candidates rather than the issues, and of the daily campaign events rather than enduring trends. (Nimmo & Combs, 1983, p. 48; Ranney, 1983, p. 57).

Lang and Lang (1979) point out that the exact meaning of communication in the media is not always evident to the audience when encountered initially. First impressions are often modified when compared to supplementary information, such as the reaction of credible mass media resources. Significant communication events, such as televised United States presidential debates, elicit further communication, including interpretive comment by the media. For example, Bennett (1983, p. 36) argues that the reason given by Ronald Reagan's top aide for the president's unwillingness to compromise on a tough budget proposal submitted to Congress was because any show of compromise or weakness was undesirable, since the media cast everything in terms of "winning" or "losing".

### Political Instant Analysis

The notion that the media depict winners and losers is demonstrated in their use of "instant analysis." According to Robinson (1977, p. 17), "Instant analysis is a critical, extemporaneous commentary provided by either the network journalists or their invited guests immediately following a major television address." The Nixon-Agnew administration viewed instant analysis as a plot to neutralize potential political gains from major television appearances (Lang & Lang, 1979, p. 298).

With respect to instant analysis, Avery (1979) argues that:

It is through 'instant analysis' of television newscasts following a state of the union message, that many Americans gain their only understanding of what the president's goals and legislative objectives might mean to the country. Left to their own initiative, relatively few citizens would make the necessary effort to place important events into their proper historical and social context.

Since television is considered to be the most believable and credible news medium, the public appears to have fallen for the "myth" of objectivity. However, news does not mirror reality but distorts it due to a number of organizational, legal and economic constraints. In addition, the outcome of events is instantly analyzed for

the public by media experts of questionable objectivity. If the people were to accept this information at face value, the result of all of this could be a misinformed or uninformed voting public, which could potentially affect democracy.

In the past, instant analysis has been examined as part of what has been termed an "administrative approach" to research in the Social Sciences (Lazarsfeld, 1941). Administrative researchers employ methodology which permits support of the status quo as they strive to defend or strengthen the existing political economic order. An example of this is Persuasion Theory. This theory is based on the assumption that opinions, like other habits, will persist, unless the person undergoes a new learning experience. This can be accomplished through exposure to a persuasive communication which contains arguments why the new opinion should be accepted. An individual is considered to have accepted a new opinion, if "...when presented with a given question, the individual now thinks of and prefers the answer suggested by the communication to the one held prior to exposure to the communication (Hovland, Janis, and Kelley, 1953, p. 10). The main factors in persuasive communication assumed to be responsible for producing opinion change were considered by Hovland et al., (1953) to

be: exposure to the recommended opinion, which stimulates the individual to think of his initial opinion and the new opinion; incentives or reinforcements in the message such as arguments or reasons which constitute "rational" or "logical" support in order to acquire acceptance of the new opinion.

Persuasion Theory involved such experiments as those conducted by Hovland and his associates for the Information and Education Branch of the United States Army (Hovland, Lumsdaine & Sheffield, 1949). The purpose of these studies was to measure the impact of the seven "Why We Fight" films used to indoctrinate recruits in the United States. The most notable of these was a 50 minute film called The Battle of Britain, which was designed to increase motivation and to instill confidence in the British allies.

Additionally, Hovland et al., (1953) reported experiments involving the use of instant analysis. The studies showed that rebuttal from credible sources, or from anonymous sources which reflect the audience's original predispositions, can erase or weaken the effects of a personal or mass media appeal.

Robinson (1977) based his instant analysis experiment on Persuasion Theory. The experimental groups were used to

assess the impact of the controversial CBS documentary, "The Selling of the Pentagon," when presented with or without some form of analysis. One experimental group viewed opinions by the following "credible" sources: Vice President Agnew; the chairman of the House Armed Services, Edward Hebert, and the president of CBS News, Richard Salant.

A second group viewed confederates, acting as local journalists, paraphrasing the remarks of the three sources above. Based on Persuasion Theory (Hovland et al., 1953), as predicted, viewing of either set of interpretation tended to reduce changes in opinion brought about by the documentary. However, those who viewed the instant analyses by Agnew, Hebert and Salant displayed negative attitudes toward the offices and authorities involved.

The use of news commentary on the 1976 presidential debates and on "who won" also was studied in an experiment by Lang and Lang (1979). Groups completed pre-and-post-debate questionnaires. A control group viewed the debate together in a classroom and completed the questionnaire immediately afterward. The other group viewed the debate at home, in school dorms or whatever setting was available, and completed their questionnaire



four to seven days following the debate. Their responses were considered to be contaminated because within that time period, the news media had provided commentaries with respect to the outcome of the debate. A Gallup poll indicated that Ford had won the debate, and a local poll conducted by Newsday had concluded that Ford was the victor.

The results showed that the control group said that Carter won the debate by roughly a seven-to-four margin. The splits were mainly along partisan lines, but Carter did better among persons who were not partial to either candidate. The contaminated group judged Ford to be the winner by roughly the same margin. Those with no prior preferences believed that Ford had won. The reason for this difference could be attributed to the exposure to post-debate commentaries experienced by the contaminated group, which were not available to the control group. However, of course, experimental controls were lacking here.

It may be argued that Persuasion Theory is not "appropriate" for the study of instant analysis, because administrators may use it to focus on how they can better manipulate. In this respect the social scientist,

"...wants to control man's reactions as physical scientists want to control and manipulate other phenomena." (Smythe, 1981, p. 251).

Smythe also argues that the model for Persuasion Theory is Harold Lasswell's paradigm, "Who says what to whom through what channels with what effect?" With the use of this model only a one-way flow of messages is looked at, from the Consciousness Industry to the audience. Audiences are defined in terms of the types of messages addressed to them (e.g. soap operas, violence, etc.) rather than beginning with audiences as commodities, doing a particular kind of work, such as buying a specific product, or voting for a political candidate.

Another approach in the administrative research vein that has been applied to instant analysis is agenda setting. McCombs and Shaw (1977, p. 5) argue that people learn not only factual information about public affairs from mass communication but also the amount of importance to attach to an issue. In the selection process, editors and broadcasters shape our social reality. During election campaigns, to a large degree, the news media determine the salient issues, thus setting the "agenda" for the

campaign. McCombs and Shaw stress that:

This impact of the mass media - the ability to effect cognitive change among individuals, to structure their thinking - has been labeled the agenda-setting function of mass communication. Here may lie the most important effect of mass communication, its ability to mentally order and organize our world for us. In short, the mass media may not be successful in telling us what to think, but they are stunningly successful in telling us what to think about.

McCombs and associates have conducted a number of studies which verify the agenda-setting function of the mass media. McCombs and Shaw (1972) investigated agenda setting during the 1968 United States presidential campaign. The results showed that among undecided voters in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, the political issues emphasized in the news media and those voters regarded as key election issues were highly correlated.

However, there are also problems associated with the use of agenda-setting to study instant analysis. Some agenda-setting research takes an overly-simplistic, positivist approach (Winter, 1981, and Eyal, Winter and DeGeorge, 1981). They tend to serve the purpose of the Consciousness Industry by focussing efforts on finding scientific and irrefutable evidence for minor media effects. However, these effects are not only minor, but,

it may be argued, intuitively obvious. While focussing on these media effects, agenda-setting researchers have ignored important issues, such as the ramifications for democracy.

An alternative approach is needed to study the effects of instant analysis.

Smythe (1981) maintains that social science has avoided recognizing and dealing with the reality of the audience commodity. Mass media produce audiences to market commodities, candidates, and issues.

Smythe argues that for virtually everyone, all the time, their "consciousness" comes from the mass media.

Smythe (1981, p. 271) defines consciousness as:

The total awareness of life which people have. It includes their understanding of themselves as individuals and of their relationships with other individuals in a variety of forms of organization as well as with their natural environment. Consciousness is a dynamic process. It grows and decays with the interaction of doing (or practice) and cognition over the life cycle of the individual in the family and other social formations. It draws on emotions, ideas, instincts, memory, and all of the sensory apparatus.

In his view, today's mass media are the central means of forming attitudes, values, and buying behaviour, which he refers to as consciousness in action. Smythe (1981, p. 26)

stresses that the principal function of commercial mass media is to set an agenda for the production of consciousness with two mutually reinforcing objectives:

1. to mass market the mass-produced consumer goods and services generated by monopoly capitalism by using audience power to accomplish this end;
2. to mass market legitimacy of the state and its strategic and tactical policies and actions, such as election of government officials...

Therefore, Smythe argues that the principal function of commercial mass media is simply, "audience power", defined as, "...the concrete product which is used to accomplish the economic and political tasks which are the reasons for the existence of the mass media".

Smythe maintains that consciousness comes from real life experience, which includes interactions with other people and the environment. The mass media of communication produce consciousness through the use of the following tools. The media have the advantage of being first. Smythe (1981, p. 255) claims that, "To the extent that the mass media present new issues they have immense power to create the kind of opinion they wish to create on such issues." This refers to the agenda-setting function,

or the process that the media go through to select possible topics. The media also have the power of canalization and conversion. The former refers to the notion that opinions or behaviour presented in the media appear to the audience to be a mode of satisfying their existing needs. The "bandwagon effect" is a form of conversion which involves the media switching sides to be on what is generally perceived to be the winning side. Another tool employed by the mass media is the drawing of explicit conclusions, rather than allowing the audience members to draw conclusions for themselves. One way in which the media draw explicit conclusions is through instant analysis. The use of these tools is another indication of how the television news media distort reality, in addition to the biases and constraints discussed above.

Although television news employs these devices, audiences still perceive it to be the most credible and believable medium. Altheide (1974) reminds us that television newscasts are the main source for news and are considered to be significant events, therefore, there will be a significant public impact. He states that, "While TV news may give us superficial acquaintance with some events, the reports are helping to shape the public consciousness, and, therefore, the future of our society" (p. 27).

This is a serious consideration, when looking at the democratic process, and the election of public officials. Devices such as instant analysis may appear to be relatively innocuous. However, the media produce consciousness in order for audiences to purchase particular products and vote for particular candidates. This is very powerful since their livelihood depends on the actions of the audience as consumer. In addition, the audience perceives television to be believable and credible. Therefore, voting decisions may be made as a result of information received from "expert", credible sources of instant analysis. The use of instant analysis in the media is one way in which the ideal of democracy can be threatened, due to the potential influence on the electorate's decision making.

#### Summary

In sum, in this chapter it has been argued that positivism has formed the dominant research paradigm and philosophy of social science inquiry. This world view has been the mainstay not only of disciplines such as psychology and sociology, but of their amateur imitators in the field of journalism. Just as the positivist social sciences have subscribed to the notion of 'objectivity', so

too has journalism. This despite telling criticisms of the application of this approach to academic and popular forums alike.

Although relied upon by journalists, the concept of objectivity is far less defensible as a media canon than it is as a pillar of positivist social sciences. News credibility, especially TV news, remains high, despite a plethora of critical literature. As a result, the public remains unaware of the political-economic motives of the Consciousness Industry, and at the same time vulnerable to manipulation, distortion and salesmanship which reflect those motives. By reducing democracy to merely another mechanism of the marketplace, this process is one way in which its continued survival is threatened.

This discussion leads to the focus of the current study: the role of political instant analysis. In the past, instant analysis either has been ignored as a topic of research, or has been viewed from an "administrative" perspective. Persuasion theory and agenda setting provide two examples of the latter. The present study will examine political instant analysis from a more critical framework provided by Smythe (1981). Unlike McCombs et al., who assert that the media only tell us what to think about, or how to prioritize certain issues, Smythe argues that they



determine our very consciousness: hence the term "Consciousness Industry". In the process, the media use such tools as drawing explicit conclusions, rather than allowing audiences to draw their own. In this way, so-called "instant analysis" is a tool used by the media in the production of consciousness. Hence, according to Smythe, tools such as instant analysis form the means by which the media impact on public attitudes, values and behaviour.

#### **The Current Study**

There are three potential major effects of political instant analysis that will be closely examined in the current study. The first involves the notion of horse race journalism (Nimmo & Combs, 1983; Ranney, 1983), and whether people perceive certain candidates as winners, and others as losers, due to the information received by the media. The second major effect to be studied is which particular candidate is chosen as the winner, specifically, will the subjects choose the candidate favoured in the instant analysis. The third effect that requires examination is whether the subjects use the same language as used in the instant analysis. These three potential effects of instant analysis are based on Smythe's view of agenda-setting

theory. Therefore, the use of instant analysis in the media will result in the production of consciousness, and subjects will more likely say there is a debate winner, say the candidate favoured in the instant analysis won the debate, and use the same language to describe the event as used in the instant analysis.

The current study extends a pilot study conducted by the Communication Studies Department at the University of Windsor in 1982 (Courtney, Anderson, Candussi & Hermanutz, 1982). In that study, a second year journalism class was used. The class was divided into two groups, and each was shown a 15 minute videotape of a "neutral" portion of a debate between the two main mayoral candidates in a municipal election in the City of Windsor. The videotape included a summary by the local anchorperson following the debate. However, in one version, viewers were told that candidate A was the clear winner, with a summary of the supposed 'strong' points of their answers and a critique of the responses by candidate B. In the second version, viewers were told the reverse, that candidate B was the clear winner with a summary of the 'strong' points of his answers and the 'weak' points of candidate A.

After viewing the videotape, students were instructed to write a news story, as a normal class assignment, and to complete a questionnaire.

The results of the study indicated that subjects were more likely to say they would vote for the candidate favoured in their experimental group. With regard to the articles written by the student journalists, group A made more favourable and fewer unfavourable statements about candidate A. The reverse held with Group B. The subjects also were more likely to say "their" candidate won the debate, rather than calling it even. Finally, subjects used similar words and phrases used by the anchorperson in their description of the debate.

The hypotheses for the current study were based on the results of the pilot study and Smythe's (1981) theoretical framework.

#### Hypothesis One

Subjects will be more likely to say they will vote for the candidate favoured in the experimental manipulation.

#### Hypothesis Two

Subjects will be more likely to say the candidate favoured in the experimental manipulation won the debate.

#### Hypothesis Three

In the news stories the students write, subjects in the experimental groups will be more likely to say there is a winner than will those in the control group.

#### Hypothesis Four

In their news stories, subjects will more likely mention positive statements about the candidates favoured in the experimental manipulation, and mention more negative statements about their opponents.

#### Hypothesis Five

In their news stories, subjects likely will use the same words as the anchorman did in his description of the candidates as part of the experimental manipulation.



## II

### METHODOLOGY

This section discusses the experimental design used in the current study, and the threats to validity involved in the design. A detailed description of the treatment conditions, the experiment, the dependent measures, the control variables, coding, and a description of the sample are also included.

The experiment involved a four group post-test only design, with three treatment groups and one control group.

This type of experimental design controls for threats to internal validity, including: selection, history, maturation, testing, instrumentation, and mortality. However, it does not control for threats to external validity, or the generalizability of the results. One problem with using university students as subjects in experiments is generalizability, because the students are not "typical" of the public at large. In the present experiment, subjects viewed an edited version of an election debate that had been televised over two months previously. With respect to external validity, one can argue that in real life, people would not have the opportunity to view a televised debate more than once. Yet only 22 percent of the subjects said they had seen

at least a little of the televised debate, and 37 percent said they had read about or seen the outcome of that debate.

However, Campbell and Stanley (1963, p. 18) maintain that "...the 'successful' sciences such as physics and chemistry made their strides without any attention to representativeness (but with great concern for repeatability by independent researchers)". Experiments are beneficial in that they are attempts to get at causal factors by controlling for other variables. Although the present study cannot be generalized to the population at large, it can provide a framework within which future studies can be conducted.

The treatment conditions involved four videotapes. Each tape included the same 15 minute segment of the 90 minute televised debate held in August 1987 between the three Party Leaders, David Peterson, Larry Grossman, and Bob Rae, for the Ontario provincial election of September 10th, 1987. The debate was edited down to a 15 minute version consisting of three segments. Peterson and Grossman debated in the first segment with respect to the budget surplus. The second segment regarding help for the disabled was debated between Rae and Grossman, and the final segment between Peterson and Rae dealt with auto insurance. The three segments of the debate were selected

because they were thought to be equal, with no particular candidate outperforming the others.

The debate segments were shown to a panel of nine people selected from a Communication Studies class. Six of the nine people on the panel said there was no clear winner, and Peterson and Rae were each selected as the winner by 1 person. Most of the panel of nine had not seen the debate. The edited version of the debate selected for the study was considered to be neutral, based on the judgment of the panel.

Four copies of the quarter-hour debate were made, and the assistance of one of the news anchors for the only local television station was obtained for the experimental manipulation. An identical introduction was added to each of the four videotapes with the news anchor explaining that the viewers were being taken to Queen's Park in Toronto for a debate between the leaders of Ontario's main parties.

The local anchorperson provided a statement when each segment finished about which leaders had just debated and who was to be featured in the upcoming debate segment. This served to reinforce the identity of the leaders. In addition their names were chroma-keyed as the leaders spoke.


A summary by the local anchorperson followed the debate. In all four versions this included the names of

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the three leaders and parties and the fact that three themes were debated: use of the budget surplus, help for the disabled, and auto insurance. Following this, in one version, the news anchor said Peterson won both his debate segments, and Grossman and Rae tied on the disabled, with a summary of the 'strong' points of Peterson's answers and the 'weak' points of the other two leaders. In the second version, viewers were told that Grossman had won both of his segments and that Peterson and Rae tied on auto insurance, with a summary of Grossman's 'strong' points, and Peterson's and Rae's 'weak' points. A third version involved Rae winning both of his debate segments and the other two coming to a tie on the budget, with a summary of Rae's 'strong' points and 'weak' points of the others. In the fourth version, only the introduction of the summary portion was used, indicating the names and three themes; no mention was made of anyone winning, nor were strong or weak points of any leaders mentioned (See Appendix A for news anchor's introduction and summaries).

One hundred and thirty-five undergraduate students served as subjects. Five cases were later removed from the study because the subjects indicated in response to a question on the questionnaire, that they understood the correct purpose of the experiment.





Two classes, made up of 91 students, each were randomly assigned to four treatment conditions. One group remained in their classroom and the other three were taken to other classrooms on the University campus with a group supervisor. A third class, made up of 39 second year journalism students was also used but subjects were not randomly assigned into groups. The four journalism labs for that class were held separately on three days during one week and were used instead.

Although this third class was not randomly assigned, there should not be a selection bias. Since students had already selected themselves into that particular class, the labs chosen by the students were based on their timetable, making all groups comparable. Crosstabulations were used to determine if there were any differences between the four treatment groups in the journalism labs with respect to the following control variables: party voted for in the recent Ontario election, party affiliation, whether subjects saw the televised debate between the three leaders, whether they read or heard about the debate's outcome, their knowledge about who won the election, subject's university major, year of study, sex, perceived believability of television news, and their level of interest in politics. None of the control variables were significantly related to

treatment groups. Therefore, although the treatment groups were not randomly assigned for this class, it appears that there was not a selection bias.

Crosstabulations were also used to determine if there was any relationship between the four treatment conditions overall and the control variables listed above. None of these control variables were significantly related to treatment condition. In other words, as far as one can determine with a post-experimental test, the randomization seems to have worked, so that there is no selection effect.

In total, there were 34 subjects in the Control Group, 31 in the 'pro Peterson' group, 32 in the 'pro Grossman' group, and in the 'pro Rae' group there were 33 subjects.

Each of these four groups viewed a different version. The students were told at the beginning of the class that a Communication Studies Department wide study on newswriting was being conducted. They were also informed that for this exercise they would view a 15 minute videotape of an election debate, and then they would be asked to write a brief news story and answer some questions. The two classes, in which three groups moved to other rooms, were told that the class was being divided into smaller rooms so that everyone could see and hear the television monitors. (See Appendix B).

When the groups were ready to view the videotape, the group supervisor reminded everyone to pay close attention and take notes for the news story. After viewing the videotape, subjects were asked to write a brief news story, two or three paragraphs long, about the debate. Subjects also were asked to complete a brief questionnaire after they handed in their stories. The reason given for the questionnaire was that some background information was needed for comparison purposes in this exercise, and that no names were used so the information was anonymous. Subjects were given a 30 minute deadline to complete both stories and questionnaires (See Appendix C for Instructions given).

The questionnaire administered after the news writing exercise consisted of 20 questions. The dependent measures included the questions which asked subjects: who would they vote for if they could vote directly for one of the Party Leaders for the Office of Premier of Ontario; and who would they say won the debate having just watched it. A number of affective measures were also included in the form of scales from one to ten, which rated the leaders on the following: competency, caring, nervous, experienced, prone to argue, emotional and prepared to lead government.

Questions for control variables were asked throughout the questionnaire. These included: university major, year of study, sex, whether subjects viewed the televised debate in August, whether subjects read or heard about the outcome of the debate, how subjects voted in the recent Ontario Provincial Election, political party affiliation, whether subjects knew who won the recent election, level of interest in politics, believability of television, and an open-ended question to determine whether subjects were aware of the purpose of the exercise. The ranking of the three debate themes from most to third most important was also included as a control measure.

Other questions were included to tie in with the news-writing exercise disguise, such as whether subjects took communication courses in high school, or had taken the Communication Studies journalism course (See Appendix D for questionnaire).

The newstories were coded by a total of 11 people, with the author coding the majority (67 percent). The coefficient for reliability was .96. There was a different coding sheet for each treatment group. For all four groups the coding sheet was broken down into several sections. The number of times each leader was mentioned in a negative, neutral and positive way was coded. The

stories were also coded as to whether there was mention of a clear winner or not. In addition, whether the stories included a specific leader winning both segments or each separate segment was also coded. The mention of a tie between leaders was also included. The use of the news anchor's introductory comments was coded into "not mentioned", "some similarity" or "very close/exact" categories. Two further sections were included for the three groups that received experimental manipulation, but not the control group. These coded the number of specific words used, which were included in the news anchor's summary, and the number of the news anchor's phrases that were either copied very closely or had some similarity (See Appendix E for coding sheets).

#### **Description of Sample**

The sample consisted of 56 subjects from a first year introductory Communication Studies class, 35 students from a second year communication theory class, and 39 students from a second year journalism class. About half the subjects had taken more than five communication courses. Eight-two percent of the subjects listed Communication Studies as their major in university with others in Political Science, other Social Sciences, and Arts. Most

of the subjects (71 percent) were in first or second year university. There were slightly more females (57 percent) than males. More than half (56 percent) of the subjects said Windsor/Essex County was their home town. Both of, these latter figures reflect the makeup of University of Windsor Communication Studies students.

## RESULTS

This section discusses the effect of the treatment on: whom subjects would vote for, based on their response to the questionnaire; whether or not subjects perceived there was a winner in response to the open-ended news story; whether or not subjects chose the same debate winner as depicted in the experimental manipulation in response to both the questionnaire and the open-ended news stories; the use of positive statements about the favoured candidate, and negative statements about the opponents in the news stories; and the use of the same words as the news anchor's in the description of the candidate in the news stories.

For each Hypothesis the bivariate results are discussed first in terms of causality, followed by a discussion of control measures, which go beyond causation. Two different types of variables were used as controls. The first, is whether or not subjects have a directional commitment to a party, which can have a possible direct as well as possibly an interaction effect. Believability in television news and level of interest in politics were also used as controls to determine whether or not there were any interaction effects, because they provide conditions under which the effects could be expected to be stronger or weaker. It is expected that those who have low believability in television news would be less likely to be

affected by instant analysis. With respect to interest in politics, those with lower interest in politics should more strongly be influenced by instant analysis than those with high interest in politics, who would be expected to have their own strongly held views.

### **Hypothesis One**

The first hypothesis suggested that subjects would be more likely to say they would vote for the candidate favoured in the experimental manipulation.

A crosstabulation was used to determine whether there were any differences among the subjects in the four treatment conditions, in whom they would vote for directly among the three leaders, if direct election of a Premier were possible. Voting behaviour is used as a dependent variable in the study because voting directly for the Premier of Ontario is a hypothetical situation and does not refer to past behaviour as in the control variable used, which measures how subjects actually voted in the last Provincial election.

As indicated in the analysis presented in Table 1, a significant relationship was found between the leader subjects would vote for and treatment group. (Please note that throughout the analysis, the .05 level of significance is used.)



Forty-five percent of those in the Control group said they would vote for Peterson, compared to 61 percent in the 'pro Peterson' group and only 22 percent in both the 'pro Grossman' and 'pro Rae' groups. In the control group, 24 percent said they would vote for Rae, while as many as 47 percent in the 'pro Rae' chose Rae. This compares to 28 percent in the 'pro Grossman' group; and only 10 percent in the 'pro Peterson' group. Only nine percent of those in the control group said they would vote for Grossman, while 22 percent of the subjects in the 'pro Grossman' group said they would vote directly for Grossman. In comparison, only 13 percent in both the 'pro Peterson' and 'pro Rae' groups said they would vote for Grossman. While Grossman fared less well in his group than the other leaders, he does better here than in any other group. In the 'pro Peterson' group a majority of subjects said they would vote for Peterson, and in the 'pro Rae' group, a plurality said they would vote for Rae.

Crosstabulations were used to control for party affiliation. The relationship between which leader subjects would vote for directly and the experimental manipulation disappeared for those who said they were Progressive Conservative, Liberal, or Independent. The relationship held for subjects who said they were

affiliated with the New Democrat Party (results not shown). Therefore, the results showed only partial support for Hypothesis One. The subjects' choice of the leader they would vote for was primarily related to partisanship for those subjects who said they were affiliated with all political parties except the NDP.

TABLE 1  
TREATMENT GROUP AND WHO WOULD VOTE DIRECTLY FOR

Vote Directly for	Treatment			
	Peterson	Grossman	Rae	Control
Grossman	13	22	13	9
Peterson	61	22	22	45
Rae	10	28	47	24
Undecided	16	28	19	21
Total	100%	100%	101%	99%
N	31	32	32	33

Totals may not add up to 100 due to rounding

$$\chi^2 = 20.78, \text{ d.f.} = 9, p. = .0137$$

## Hypothesis Two

The second hypothesis maintained that subjects in the treatment group would be more likely to choose the candidate favoured in their experimental manipulation as the winner of the debate. This was operationalized through both the responses to the questionnaire, and the news stories.

Table 2 presents the crosstabulation conducted to determine whether there were any differences among the subjects in the four treatment groups on the question of who won the debate, as asked in the questionnaire. As a baseline, in the control group 57 percent said there was no winner. This compares to 26 percent or less in the three treatment groups. Among those in the control group who chose a winner, 30 percent selected Peterson, 10 percent chose Rae, and only three percent (i.e. one person) thought Grossman had won the debate. In contrast, 48 percent of the subjects in the 'pro Grossman' group said Grossman won, compared to 14 percent in the 'pro Rae' group and no one in the 'pro Peterson' group. In the 'pro Peterson' group, 73 percent said Peterson won, whereas only seven percent of the 'pro Grossman' group, and no one in the 'pro Rae' group chose Peterson. Sixty-eight percent of the subjects in the 'pro Rae' group said Rae won, compared to 19 percent in the 'pro Grossman' group and four percent in the 'pro Peterson'

group. Thus the majority of subjects within both the 'pro Peterson' and 'pro Rae' groups were likely to say the favoured candidate won, and a plurality of the subjects influenced by the 'pro Grossman' segment chose Grossman, while in the "neutral" control group a majority did not choose a winner at all.

In all cases, the results showed that significantly more subjects chose the candidate favoured in the experimental manipulation within their group. Again, crosstabulations were used to control separately for party affiliation, believability of television news, and interest in politics. First, when controlling for partisanship, the relationship held. Second, subjects were divided evenly into groups of "high" and "low" levels of interest in politics and TV believability. For both low and high interest in politics, and low and high believability in television news, there were no interaction effects on who subjects said won the debate (results not shown).

The subjects' news stories were also used to test Hypothesis Two. The news stories were content analyzed, and the number of debate segments said to be won by each leader in the subjects' news stories was coded. Since each candidate participated in two debate segments, the variable ranges from zero to two.

**TABLE 2**  
**TREATMENT AND WHO WON DEBATE**  
**(Questionnaire Response)**

Who Won Debate	Treatment			
	Peterson	Grossman	Rae	Control
Grossman	0	48	14	3
Peterson	73	7	0	30
Rae	4	19	68	10
No Winner	23	26	18	57
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
N	26	27	28	30

$$\chi^2 = 92.89, \text{ d.f. } = 9, p = .000$$

Tables 3 to 5 represent the results of Oneway ANOVA, which determined differences among the four treatment conditions on the average number of debate segments said to be won by each candidate.

The mean number of debate segments won by Peterson in the 'pro Peterson' group was 1.14, which was significantly different from all other groups as determined by the Scheffé test (Table 3).

Table 4 indicates that the mean number of debate segments won by Grossman (.69) was highest in the 'pro

Grossman<sup>sa</sup> group, significantly different from all other treatment groups based on the Scheffé test.

**TABLE 3**  
**TREATMENT AND MEAN DEBATE SEGMENTS WON BY PETERSON**  
**(News Story)**

F Value	F Probability	DF
15.3539	.0000	3/126
Group	N	Mean
1. Control *	34	.00
2. Peterson	31	1.14
3. Grossman *	32	.19
4. Rae *	33	.00

\* Denotes groups significantly different from the 'pro Peterson' group at the .05 level (Scheffé).

The mean number of debate segments won by Rae in the 'pro Rae' group was 1.03, which is again significantly higher than all other groups based on the Scheffé test (Table 5).

Thus, in writing their news stories, in all cases, subjects were significantly more likely to say the candidate favoured in their experimental manipulation won the debate. Multivariate ANOVA results indicated that when party affiliation was controlled for, the relationship

held. When interest in politics and believability in television news were separately controlled for, there were no interaction effects (results not shown).

For both the questionnaire and the news stories, subjects were more likely to say the candidate favoured in the experimental manipulation won the debate. The relationships held when controlling for partisanship. For both measures, there were no interaction effects when controlling separately for interest in politics, and believability in television. Therefore, the results showed support for Hypothesis Two.

TABLE 4

TREATMENT AND MEAN DEBATE SEGMENTS WON BY GROSSMAN  
(News Story)

F Value	F Probability	DF
13.1062	.0000	3/126
Group	N	Mean
1. Control *	34	.09
2. Peterson *	31	.03
3. Grossman	32	.69
4. Rae *	33	.03

\* Denotes groups significantly different than the 'pro Grossman' group at the .05 level (Scheffé).

**TABLE 5**  
**TREATMENT AND MEAN DEBATE SEGMENTS WON BY RAE**  
**(News Story)**

F Value	F Probability	DF
29.2262	.0000	3/126
Group	N	Mean
1. Control *	34	.06
2. Peterson *	31	.00
3. Grossman *	32	.06
4. Rae	33	1.03

\* Denotes groups significantly different from the 'pro Rae' group at the .05 level (Scheffé).

### Hypothesis Three

This hypothesis maintained that in their news stories written in the experimental groups, subjects would be more likely to say there is a winner than would those in the control group, a result which was obtained with a question on the questionnaire.

Table 6 shows the results of a Oneway ANOVA. A debate winner was mentioned in a mean number of .58 stories in the 'pro Rae' group, the mean for the 'pro Grossman' group was .47, and the 'pro Peterson' group mean was .39; in contrast the mean number of stories that mentioned a winner in the control group was only .12. All groups were significantly different than the Control group.



ANOVA results indicated that when party affiliation was controlled for, the relationship held (Treatment  $F=5.3$ ,  $p<.01$ , Party Affiliation  $F=1.3$ , non significant at  $p=.28$ ).

Perceived believability of television news was controlled for. There was still a significant treatment effect among the high believability group (Treatment  $F=7.02$ ,  $p<.01$ ). As expected, there was an interaction effect: when analyzing the group with low trust in television news the treatment effect vanished ( $F=2.1$ , non significant at  $p=.109$ ). This result was as expected.

When interest in politics was controlled for, there was still a significant treatment effect when the high interest group was analyzed alone (Treatment  $F=5.49$ ,  $p<.01$ ). However, there was an interaction effect: when the low interest group was examined, the treatment effect ( $F=1.85$ ) became non significant ( $p=.109$ ). These results were the opposite of what was expected. Those who said they were highly interested in politics may have been more attentive to the videotape because they found it to be more interesting. They may not be highly committed to politics, but at least committed enough to pay attention. Those who said they had a low interest in politics may have been less interested in viewing the videotape and, consequently, paid less attention. This may explain why

those with higher interest in politics were more likely to be influenced by the instant analysis in terms of stating there was a debate winner in the open-ended news stories.

Therefore, the results overall showed support for Hypothesis Three. All experimental groups were significantly more likely to say there was a winner when writing their news stories, than was the control group; the effects were stronger where the medium TV was believed more, and where interest in the subject matter politics was higher.

TABLE 6

TREATMENT AND WINNER OF DEBATE  
(News Story)

F Value	F Probability	DF
6.0169	.0007	3/126
GROUP	N	Mean
1. Control	34	.12
2. Peterson*	31	.39
3. Grossman*	32	.47
4. Rae*	33	.58

\* Denotes groups significantly different from the control group at the .05 level.

Hypothesis Four

The fourth hypothesis suggested that in their news stories subjects would be likely to mention more positive

statements about the candidate favoured in the experimental manipulation and more negative statements about the respective opponents.

Oneway ANOVAs were conducted to determine whether there were any differences among treatment groups on the number of positive and negative statements made for each candidate.

The dependent variable in the analyses below measures overall evaluation of the candidate in terms of the statements made in the news stories. Thus negative statements were subtracted from the positive ones. If there were more positive comments than negative ones, the overall evaluation would be positive. Conversely, if negative statements outnumbered positive ones, the evaluation would be a negative number.

Tables 7 to 9 indicate the results of the Oneway ANOVAs.

In the 'pro Peterson' group, the mean evaluation was .98, while the 'pro Grossman' ( $\bar{x} = -.44$ ) and 'pro Rae' ( $\bar{x} = -.46$ ) groups gave negative evaluations of Peterson. The mean for the control group was slightly negative (-.09) but not significantly different from zero. All three groups were significantly different from the 'pro Peterson' group using the Scheffe test (Table 7).

The 'pro Rae' group's mean Rae evaluation (1.52) also was significantly higher than Rae's evaluation was in the other treatment groups, (Peterson  $\bar{X}$  = -.39, Grossman  $\bar{X}$  = -.19, and Control  $\bar{X}$  = -.06) (Table 8).

Table 9 shows that the 'pro Grossman' group gave a positive evaluation of Grossman ( $\bar{X}$  = 1.00) whereas the 'pro Peterson' ( $\bar{X}$  = -.13) and 'pro Rae' ( $\bar{X}$  = -.09) groups gave negative evaluations of Grossman. All groups were significantly different from the 'pro Grossman' group (Scheffé test).

In all cases, more positive statements were made about the candidate favoured in the experimental manipulation, and more negative statements were mentioned about the two opponents. ANOVA results indicated that when party affiliation was controlled for, the relationship held, and when believability in TV news, and interest in politics were separately controlled for, there were no interaction effects. Therefore, the results strongly supported Hypothesis Four.

TABLE 7

TREATMENT AND EVALUATION OF PETERSON  
(News Story)

F Value	F Probability	DF
17.7706	.0000	3/126
Group	N	Mean
1. Control*,**	34	-.09
2. Peterson	31	.97
3. Grossman *	32	-.44
4. Rae*	33	-.46

\* Denotes groups significantly different from the 'pro Peterson' group at the .05 level (Scheffé).

\*\* Not significantly different from zero.

TABLE 8

TREATMENT AND EVALUATION OF RAE  
(News Story)

F Value	F Probability	DF
25.5164	.0000	3/126
Group	N	Mean
1. Control *,**	34	-.06
2. Peterson *,**	31	-.39
3. Grossman *,**	32	-.19
4. Rae	33	1.52

\* Denotes groups significantly different from the 'pro Rae' group at the .05 level (Scheffé).

\*\* Not significantly different from zero.

TABLE 9

TREATMENT AND EVALUATION OF GROSSMAN  
(News Story)

F Value	F Probability	DF
13.0151	.0000	3/126
Group	N	Mean
1. Control *,**	34	.06
2. Peterson *,**	31	-.13
3. Grossman	32	1.00
4. Rae *,**	33	-.09

\* Denotes groups significantly different from the  
'pro Grossman' group at the 0.05 level (Scheffé).

\*\* Not significantly different than zero.

#### Hypothesis Five

This hypothesis maintained that in their news stories, subjects would be more likely to use the news anchor's words to describe the candidate favoured in the experimental manipulation.

Table 10 shows the results of the Oneway ANOVA. Examples of the news anchor's words include the following: relaxed, confident, emotional, technical, concerned,

self-assured, weak, and defensive. The subjects in the 'pro Peterson' group were more likely to use the news anchor's words to describe Peterson ( $\bar{X}=.81$ ). This was significantly higher than the mean number of news anchor's words used for Peterson in the other treatment groups using the Scheffe test. The mean number of the news anchor's words used to describe Grossman in the 'pro Grossman' group was .38, which was significantly higher than all other groups (Scheffé). The mean number of the news anchor's words used to describe Rae was highest in the 'pro Rae' group which was significantly different from the other groups using the Scheffe test. In all cases subjects were more likely to use the news anchor's words to describe the candidate favoured in the experimental manipulation. When partisanship was controlled for, ANOVA results indicated that the relationship held. ANOVA results indicated that when believability in television news and interest in politics were separately controlled for there were no interaction effects. Therefore, these results supported Hypothesis Five.

TABLE 10

TREATMENT AND MEAN NUMBER OF WORDS  
COPIED FROM NEWS ANCHOR  
(News Story)

	MEAN NUMBER OF PETERSON WORDS	MEAN NUMBER OF GROSSMAN WORDS	MEAN NUMBER OF RAE WORDS
Group			
1. Peterson	.81*	.03	.39
2. Grossman	.09	.38*	.09
3. Rae	.03	.00	1.03*
DF	2	2	2
	126	126	126
F Value	12.1201	7.2509	9.4954
F Probability	.0000	.0001	.0000

\* Denotes means significantly different from all other groups at the .05 level (Scheffé).

Other than specific words, other comments made by the news anchor and copied in the news stories were tabulated, although no hypotheses were made. This includes phrases used by the news anchor as part of the experimental manipulation such as the following: "concerns for the problems of ordinary working people", "drew upon his past experience as Provincial Treasurer", and "confidently argued that his government acted wisely". There were 29 phrases in the news stories that were somewhat similar to those used by the news anchor and 8 phrases appeared exactly the same. The number of times subjects wrote that



the non-favoured candidates tied, as the news anchor said in the manipulation, was also examined. Thirteen percent of the total subjects referred to a tie in their news stories. In addition, summary descriptive comments made by the news anchor immediately following the debate in all four treatments, were repeated with some similarity in 39 percent of the stories, and were copied very closely by 22 percent of the subjects.

Out of the three issues presented, auto insurance is the most salient for a group of students. Help for the disabled would only directly affect a small proportion of the students, if any, and the budget surplus would not directly affect them. Due to the possible bias on the issue of auto insurance among students, it was examined whether there were any differences among the subjects in the four treatment groups on the relative importance of the budget surplus, help for the disabled, and auto insurance.

No significant differences were found among experimental groups on the first, second or third most important issue. It is important to point out, however, that more than half of the subjects in all the groups chose auto insurance as the most important issue. In the control group, auto insurance was selected as first choice by 52 percent of the subjects, 53 percent in the 'pro Peterson'

group, 61 percent in the 'pro Grossman' group, and 63 percent of the 'pro Rae' group (difference not significant at .05).

Although no hypotheses were formulated, oneway ANOVA was used to determine whether there were any differences among subjects in the four treatment conditions on their ratings of the candidates for closed-ended affective measures included in the questionnaire. An index for each leader was created by adding the scales which were highly correlated. These included, competent, caring, experienced, and prepared to lead government. In order to eliminate the impact of systematic variation of intra-personal means, a person's overall mean value for all four scales was subtracted from the means of his or her own separate scales, in order to standardize the variable. Rationale and procedure of this manipulation are explained by Evans and Hildebrandt (1979).

The ANOVA results showed that the ratings for Peterson on these affective measures were significantly higher in the 'pro Peterson' group than in the 'pro Rae' and 'pro Grossman' groups. With respect to Rae's ratings, they were significantly higher in the 'pro Rae' group than in the 'pro Peterson' group. Grossman's ratings were not significantly different among any of the four treatment conditions.

The relationship among all three groups held for the Peterson ratings when party affiliation was introduced as a control. Party affiliation also did not have an effect on the relationship between the 'pro Peterson' and 'pro Rae' groups on their ratings of Rae.

These results confirm the impression from analyses reported earlier, namely that the Grossman message was "hardest to swallow", since Grossman personally and his party had lost so spectacularly at the polls a few months before the experiment.

### III

#### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

For the most part, the results showed that instant analysis had a rather dramatic impact on the experimental subjects.

In responding to the questionnaire subjects were more likely to say that the candidate favoured in the experimental manipulation won the debate. Even when party affiliation, believability of television news, and interest in politics were separately controlled for, the relationship held. The subjects also were more likely to write in their news stories that the candidate favoured in the experimental manipulation won the debate. This relationship held when individually controlling for party affiliation, interest in politics, and believability in television news. These results showed support for Hypothesis Two. Therefore, the instant analysis of the debate by the local news anchor had an effect on which leader was said to have won the debate.

In the news stories written by the subjects, students in the experimental groups were more likely to say there was a winner than were those in the control group, therefore, supporting Hypothesis Three. The relationship held when party affiliation was introduced as a control.

Believability in television news, and interest in politics were also controlled for. An interaction effect occurred when analyzing believability in television news. It was expected that those with higher believability in TV news would be more easily influenced. However, among the low interest in politics group, the opposite of what was expected occurred. The reason for this could be due to the higher amount of attention paid to the videotape among those who said they were highly interested in politics, compared to the low interest group.

In their news stories, subjects were more likely to write positive statements about the candidate favoured in the experimental manipulation and more negative statements about the opponents. This relationship also held when controlling for party affiliation, believability in television news, and interest in politics, which supported Hypothesis Four. The instant analysis by the news anchor mentioned positive statements about the favoured candidate, and negative statements about the others, which had an effect on the stories written by the subjects.

The subjects also were more likely to use the news anchor's words to describe the candidate favoured in the experimental manipulation, in their news stories. This

relationship also held when controlling for party affiliation, interest in politics, and believability in television news, therefore, supporting Hypothesis Five. The impact of the instant analysis apparently even extended to the use of the news anchor's exact words.

In addition to words copied, subjects also copied whole phrases used by the news anchor, and repeated the comments made by the news anchor immediately following the debate regarding the three debate themes.

To put the strength of these experimental effects into perspective, it is important to consider that not only had the debate been televised previously, (although only 22 percent of the subjects said they had seen any of the debate), but the election already had been held. This is very important, considering the one-sided outcome of the election. In the Ontario Provincial election held on September 10, 1987, the Liberals, with David Peterson as the leader, won 95 seats, (i.e., 73 percent of the seats) with an electoral vote of 47.3 percent. The Progressive Conservatives won only 16 seats, while losing 34 seats, including that of the PC party leader. The New Democratic Party, with leader Bob Rae, won 19 seats, losing 4 seats.

Therefore, considering the outcome of the election, the instant analysis had quite a considerable impact. Even though Grossman lost in his own riding, and both the

Progressive Conservatives and the New Democratic Party did not fare well in the last Provincial election, the instant analysis, as noted in the above hypotheses, had an impact for all three leaders in their respective experimental groups.

Hypothesis One was partially supported. Although the results showed the subjects were more likely to say they would vote for the candidate favoured in the experimental manipulation, when party affiliation was controlled for, the relationship held only for those who said they were affiliated with the NDP. It is not surprising that the relationship did not hold for the other parties, since one would expect that instant analysis would have a greater impact on subjects' decisions about a debate winner than it would on voting intention, a more behavioural measure. In addition, due to the fact that the election had recently been held, subjects may have responded according to the party they had just voted for. The fact that Grossman had lost his own riding could also have influenced the results. Under these conditions party affiliation has a stronger effect in some cases, when it comes to even hypothetical voting behaviour, than did the treatment.

Exposure to only three minutes of instant analysis resulted in a striking impact in the current study. This

brief segment of the media expert's analysis contained information about the debate winner, and words and phrases used to emphasize 'strong' points about the winner and 'weak' points regarding the two opponents. Although subjects' hypothetical voting behaviour was not related to the manipulation, the instant analysis had a dramatic effect on their opinions about the favoured candidate. Subjects were more likely to say the favoured candidate won the debate, wrote more positive statements about the candidate favoured in the experimental manipulation and more negative statements about the opponents, and were more likely to use the news anchor's words to describe the candidate favoured in the experimental manipulation. Therefore, this brief exposure to instant analysis had an impact on the subjects, even though the election had been held and the outcome was very one-sided.

In Chapter One it was pointed out that objectivity is considered to be an ideal in journalistic standards through such principles as presenting all substantial opinions in a matter of controversy (Kent, 1981, p. 286). Television news personnel perceive that they are holding up an "electronic mirror" to society (Ranney, 1983; Epstein, 1973; and Altheide, 1974). However, there is a growing body of evidence that opposes the metaphor that television news mirrors reality, and suggests that the "ideal" of



objectivity is a myth (Altheide, 1974; Gans, 1979; Epstein, 1973; and Tuchman, 1978). In the current study, the news anchor's instant analysis shaped the event by stating who was the winner of the debate, and by emphasizing parts of the debate to sound positive for one candidate and negative for the opponents. Therefore, as Altheide (1974, p. 113) argues, the information is "decontextualized" and the treatment by newswriters altered "what happened".

However, even though television news is distorted through such processes as instant analysis, it is the dominant news source for North Americans (Kubas, 1981, p. 26) and is perceived to be the most believable and credible mass medium (Roper, 1987; Wilson and Howard, 1978; Lee, 1978; Reagan and Zenply, 1979; and Abel and Wirth, 1977).

Objectivity appears to be a myth, yet the public consider television news to be believable and credible. Instant analysis opens the possibility for manipulation. Putting the effects of instant analysis in the context of the myth of objectivity demonstrates its importance. The impact of instant analysis found in the current study indicates that the public is vulnerable to manipulation and distortion.

In Smythe's (1981) view, audiences are manipulated behind the screen of objectivity to serve the economic interests of the Consciousness Industry. Smythe points out that in the political arena, the intent of the media is to produce an audience which will choose one policy over another, or one candidate rather than another, which is the same objective as that for advertisers of consumer products. He argues that our "consciousness" comes from the media, and is produced through the use of tools of manipulation.

Instant analysis can be considered as one of these tools used by the mass media. The current study shows that the use of instant analysis appears to have resulted in the production of consciousness. In both the news stories and the questionnaire the subjects stated that the candidate favoured in the experimental manipulation won the debate. In the news stories, subjects also said more positive statements about the favoured candidate and negative statements about the opponents. The news anchor's words were even copied to describe the 'pro' candidate. Apparently, consciousness was produced due to instant analysis.

The ramifications of instant analysis are important, as shown in the current study. Other examples of instant analysis situations include sports commentary, as

previously summarized, presentation of budgets, pseudo events staged by political parties or candidates, and even entire political elections themselves.

The importance of this media influence goes beyond instant analysis. As pointed out in Chapter One, selection and bias in the news due to economic, organizational, and legal constraints, demonstrates the subjectivity of news (Altheide, 1974; Epstein, 1973; Gans, 1979; and Tuchman, 1974). Everyday, people are exposed to television news which is subjective as a result of filtering by the media. The process of making news is due to a complex organization, and news reports reflect this organization. A number of policy decisions are made in the news organization with respect to selection of events and the way in which they are reported. As a result of media filtering, under a number of constraints, everyday life is transformed for news purposes.

Therefore, the ramifications of instant analysis situations can be broadened to all television news. Manipulation can occur due to exposure to television news, as a result of filtering by the media in the complex news organization.

While there are many other things that influence the degree of democracy in our society, the mass media are one. Blumler (1983) points out that the institution long

considered central to the aims of Western democracies is the news media. Jacklin (1975) argues that, "A society is democratic to the extent that all its citizens have equal opportunity to influence the decision-making process." Clearly, communication is essential to this process - just as essential as voting itself. The impact of instant analysis found in the current study leads one to seriously ask: "What are the ramifications for democracy?" Due to the political economic motives of the Consciousness Industry, the media can possibly produce consciousness through the use of these tools in order for audiences to purchase particular products and vote for particular candidates. Picard (1985) argues that commercialization of the press has placed new constraints on the marketplace of ideas, and has resulted in a reduction of choice in the marketplace and the expression of less diverse opinion. Therefore, the ideal of democracy may not be attained under the current media system. Qualter (1987) also argues that democracy has been reduced to a mechanism of the marketplace, because, the media do not provide a contest of ideas, principles, values, and policies for voters to evaluate. The result of this process may be a misinformed or uninformed electorate, and their ability to make rational decisions may be questioned.

Communication is essential to democratic society, and information can be referred to as the "currency" of democracy. The public has become victims of tools such as instant analysis and media filtering. The use of these tools can pose threats to democracy because the victims may be said to be "short changed".

#### **Future Studies and Policies**

Further research in the same vein as the current study would be beneficial. Although Hypothesis One was only partially supported, one could speculate that increased exposure to the experimental manipulation could have a greater effect on voting behaviour. The results are startling even though only three minutes of instant analysis were viewed by the subjects. However, greater exposure to manipulation in an experimental setting may affect hypothetical voting behaviour regardless of partisanship.

In addition, conducting the study during the election campaign, rather than after the election could be done as future research. The current study was not conducted until after the debate had been publicly televised and the election was held. The interest in the election may be higher during the campaign, and therefore attention paid to the experimental manipulation may increase. The election

outcome, especially possible one-sided results would not influence subjects if the study were held prior to the election. The way in which the subjects voted at the last election would probably not influence subjects as much as they may have in the current study. Therefore, removing these possible confounding variables, may provide a truer picture of media influence during election campaigns, when political instant analysis is quite predominant.

Future research should be conducted which studies the effect of other forms of instant analysis and media filtering. This would include replication of such studies as one conducted by Comisky, Bryant, and Zillman (1977), concerning the influence of television sports commentary. The results showed that the newscasters' commentary can potentially alter the subjects' perception of the game, and also be an apparent factor in the enjoyment of the televised sports event. The authors concluded that,

...The viewer seems to get "caught up" in the way the sportscaster interprets the game, and they allow themselves to be greatly influenced by the commentator's suggestion of drama in the event.... It appears that, to a high degree, the sportscaster is a critical contributor to the spectator's appreciation of televised sports."

Therefore, studies other than political analysis are also important in media influence in people's daily lives.

Gans (1983, pp 179-180) recommends future research to study the news media, news policy, and democracy. One of Gans suggestions is news policy research as an important frontier for the future of democracy. This includes, for example, whether news media are best funded and/or regulated by private or public enterprise, or a mixture of both. In terms of solutions to this problem of instant analysis and media filtering, changes to news policy is one recommendation. By presenting striking results of studies, such as the current one, policy makers should convince the press, especially the electronic media, to reevaluate the use of instant analysis in order to determine how it can best meet the demand of the voting public rather than the Consciousness Industry.

As far as the relationship between the media and public is concerned, those working in the policy field should also recommend that the press bury the myth of objectivity. The public should be made aware that the press is not mirroring reality. In addition, there is a need to inform Communication Studies students about the subjectivity of news, and the criticism objectivity. As a result, the public might stop perceiving the press as objective, and would not be subject to the same extent to the media manipulation as they are currently, due to media filtering and tools such as instant analysis.

## **Appendix A**

### **1. News Anchor's Introduction:**

Hello, I'm David Compton from TV Nine News. We now take you to Queen's Park in Toronto for a debate between the leaders of Ontario's main parties.

Your host in Toronto is Dr. David Johnston who will introduce the leaders.

### **2. News Anchors Transitions:**

(After the first debate segment:)

You've just heard Conservative Leader Larry Grossman debate Mr. Peterson, the Liberal Leader.

The next part of the debate features New Democratic Leader Bob Rae, and Conservative Leader Larry Grossman.

(After the second debate segment:)

You've just heard New Democratic Leader Bob Rae debate Larry Grossman, Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party.

The final part of the debate features David Peterson, the Liberal Leader, and NDP Leader Bob Rae.



### 3.1 News Anchor's Coda (Neutral)

You've just heard the leaders of Ontario's three main parties, Progressive Conservative Larry Grossman, the NDP's Bob Rae and Liberal David Peterson debate three themes: the use of the budget surplus, help to the disabled, and auto insurance.

I'm David Compton for TV Nine News.

### 3.2 News Anchor's Coda (Pro Peterson)

You've just heard the leaders of Ontario's three main parties, Progressive Conservative Larry Grossman, the NDP's Bob Rae and Liberal David Peterson debate three themes: the use of the budget surplus, help to the disabled, and auto insurance.

While Grossman and Rae debated to a tie on the disabled, it is clear from the way questions were answered that Peterson won both of his debate segments.

In his discussion of the budget surplus, Premier Peterson appeared relaxed and in control. While Larry Grossman persistently brought up small percentage differences, Peterson confidently argued that his government acted wisely. Part of the surplus went to reduce Ontario's deficit, but the larger share went to Universities, Hospitals, road construction and sewers, all areas badly in need after years of underfunding.

In rejecting Bob Rae's extreme call for government-run auto insurance, Premier Peterson showed his command of government policy. While Rae complained emotionally about insurance rates, Peterson calmly outlined his five-point plan to help Ontario motorists, thus blunting opposition rhetoric.

I'm David Compton for TV Nine News.

### 3.3 News Anchor's Coda (Pro. Rae)

You've just heard the leaders of Ontario's three main parties, Progressive Conservative Larry Grossman, the NDP's Bob Rae and Liberal David Peterson debate three themes: the use of the budget surplus, help to the disabled, and auto insurance.

While Grossman and Peterson debated to a tie on the budget, it's clear from the way questions were answered that Rae won both of his debate segments.

In contrast to Grossman's technical review of small financial details, Rae showed both his understanding of the issue and his personal interest for the disabled. Rae focussed on a concern, the right of the disabled to job opportunities. He advocated the use of government authority to help this disadvantaged group of citizens.

Relaxed and confident, Bob Rae also effectively countered arguments against co-operative automobile insurance when he pointed to positive experiences elsewhere in Canada. While Peterson weakly called for further studies, Rae's frustration with government inaction clearly showed his concern for the problems of ordinary working people, and his willingness to be their advocate.

I'm David Compton for TV Nine News.

### 3.4 News Anchor's Coda (Pro Grossman)

You've just heard the leaders of Ontario's three main parties, Progressive Conservative Larry Grossman, the NDP's Bob Rae and Liberal David Peterson debate three themes: the use of the budget surplus, help to the disabled, and auto insurance.

While Peterson and Rae debated to a tie on auto insurance, it's clear from the way questions were answered that Grossman won both of his debate segments.

Self-assured and relaxed, Grossman drew upon his past experience as Provincial Treasurer, to detail weaknesses of the current government's policy toward the disabled. While Rae emotionally called for more government interference, Grossman called for private initiative based on his knowledge of the inability of government bureaucracies to meet individual needs.

In the first debate segment Grossman confidently put Peterson onto the defensive. Visibly nervous, Peterson admitted that the budget surplus was spent putting thousands of new bureaucrats on the government payroll. Grossman forcefully showed that the Liberal government's so-called achievements are so far mostly promises for the future.

I'm David Compton for TV Nine News.

## Appendix B.

### Introduction to Experiment

I'm supervising a Communication Studies department-wide study on newswriting ability.

As part of this exercise, we'll have you view a 15 minute videotape of an election debate, and then we'll ask you to write a brief news story, and answer some questions.

We'll be dividing the class into smaller groups so you can all see and hear the monitors.

## Appendix C

### Instructions Given To Group Supervisors

1. Set up the videotape and ensure that it's working (as early as possible).
2. Announce the group number and make sure they're in the right place.
3. Before playing the videotape, tell them:

"Pay close attention to the videotape and take notes because you'll have to write a news story about it afterwards."
4. Afterwards, tell them: (after handing out blank sheets)

"Write a brief news story 2 or 3 paragraphs long, about the debate. Include any information you think is important. When you've finished bring your own story to me and I'll give you a brief questionnaire. We need some background information for comparison purposes in the exercise. No names will be used so the information is anonymous."

"Remember, when you've finished, hand in your story to me right away."
5. Don't answer any questions about the debate. Tell them you don't know anything, but that Dr. Winter will be answering all questions later.
6. Make sure students hand in their own stories, and that someone doesn't gather up a bunch to hand in. When they give it to you, give them the questionnaire with the same number marked on it.
7. When they've finished, thank them for their help.

. Appendix D

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION STUDIES  
FALL 1987 NEWSWRITING EXERCISE

Course Number: 40 \_\_\_\_\_ ID \_\_\_\_\_ GR \_\_\_\_\_

1. Did you take a Communication or Journalism related course in high school?

1 yes  
2 no

2. How many other Communication Studies Courses have you taken (include the current semester)

3. Have you taken, or are you currently enrolled in, Communication Studies 250?

1 yes  
2 no

4. What is your major? Comm. Studies \_\_\_\_\_  
Other (what: \_\_\_\_\_)  
No major yet \_\_\_\_\_

5. Are you a: (please circle) 1 first year  
2 second year  
3 third year  
4 fourth year  
5 graduate student  
6 part-time student

6. Please circle 1 female 2 male

7. What is your home town \_\_\_\_\_ /Province \_\_\_\_\_

8. If you could vote directly for one of the Party Leaders for the office of Premier of Ontario, for whom would you vote, having seen the debate?  
(Please circle the number next to the leader)

1 Larry Grossman  
2 David Peterson  
3 Bob Rae  
9 could not decide

9. Using the scales below, please rate each of the three leaders: first, how competent do you think each of them is? Write in a number next to their name from the scale where "1" is not competent, and "10" is very competent.

a) not competent 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 very competent

Grossman \_\_\_\_\_ Peterson \_\_\_\_\_ Rae \_\_\_\_\_

- b) and how caring are the leaders, where "1" is not caring and "10" is very caring.

not caring 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 very caring

Grossman \_\_\_\_\_ Peterson \_\_\_\_\_ Rae \_\_\_\_\_

- c) and how nervous are the leaders, where "1" is not nervous and "10" is very nervous.

not nervous 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 very nervous

Grossman \_\_\_\_\_ Peterson \_\_\_\_\_ Rae \_\_\_\_\_

- d) and how experienced are the leaders, where "1" is not experienced and "10" is very experienced.

not experienced 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 very experienced

Grossman \_\_\_\_\_ Peterson \_\_\_\_\_ Rae \_\_\_\_\_

- e) and how prone to argue are the leaders, where "1" is not prone to argue and "10" is very prone to argue.

not prone to argue 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 very prone to argue

Grossman \_\_\_\_\_ Peterson \_\_\_\_\_ Rae \_\_\_\_\_



- f) and how emotional are the leaders, where "1" is not emotional and "10" is very emotional.

not emotional      1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10      very emotional

Grossman \_\_\_\_\_ Peterson \_\_\_\_\_ Rae \_\_\_\_\_

- g) and how prepared to lead government are the leaders, where "1" is not prepared to lead government and "10" is very prepared to lead government.

not prepared to lead government      1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10      very prepared to lead government

Grossman \_\_\_\_\_ Peterson \_\_\_\_\_ Rae \_\_\_\_\_

10. Did you see the complete debate between the three leaders in August? (circle the number)

1 all of it  
2 most of it  
3 a little of it  
9 no, did not have a chance to see the debate

11. Did you see, read or hear anything about the outcome of the debate in August?

1 yes  
2 no  
9 don't know

12. How did you vote in the Ontario Provincial Election on September 22?

1 for a PC candidate  
2 for a Liberal candidate  
3 for an NDP candidate  
4 did not vote (but was eligible)  
5 not eligible to vote, e.g. not an Ontario resident

13. Generally speaking, in Ontario politics, do you consider yourself:

- 1 a Progressive Conservative
- 2 a New Democrat
- 3 a Liberal
- 4 an Independent

If independent, do you lean toward a political party?

- 1 PC
- 2 Liberal
- 3 NDP
- 4 No

SKIP TO QUESTION 15

14. How close do you feel toward this political party?

not close    1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10    very close

15. Do you happen to know who won the recent provincial election in Ontario, or did you not pay too much attention to it?

- 1 PC
- 2 Liberals
- 3 NDP
- 4 did not pay much attention

16. After watching the debate today, who would you say won the debate?

- 1 Grossman
  - 2 Peterson
  - 3 Rae
  - 4 no clear winner
- tie between \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_

17. On the scale below, please indicate how interested you are in politics.

not interested    1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10    very interested

18. Which of the 3 issues in the debate: the budget surplus, help for the disabled, or auto insurance, is the most important issue to you?

most important \_\_\_\_\_  
2nd most important \_\_\_\_\_  
3rd most important \_\_\_\_\_

19. How believable is television news on the 10 point scale below? (Please circle)

unbelievable 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 very believable

20. Last question: In your view, what was the purpose of this questionnaire?

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APPENDIX E  
E.1. Coding Sheet: Control Group

INSTANT ANALYSIS PROJECT. Group: C O N T R O L G R O U P (Gr: \_\_)

ID \_\_ (2-3) Class \_\_ (4-6) Coder:.....( \_\_ )(7-8)

Leaders mentioned: (code NUMBER of mentions for each leader)

	Peterson	Grossman	Rae
Positive	__(9)	__(10)	__(11)
Neutral	__(12)	__(13)	__(14)
Negative	__(15)	__(16)	__(17)

WINNING (check as applies) Any winner ? YES \_\_ NO \_\_ (18)

	Peterson	Grossman	Rae
Both his debates	__(19)	__(20)	__(21)
Budget	__(22)	__(23)	__(24)
Disabled	__(25)	__(26)	__(27)
Auto Insurance	__(28)	__(29)	__(30)

Tie: Pet/Gross \_\_[1] Gross/Rae \_\_[2] Pet/Rae \_\_[3] All \_\_[4] (31)

Opening comments: Not used \_\_[0] some simila \_\_[1] close \_\_[2] (32)

## E.2. Coding Sheet: Peterson Group

INSTANT ANALYSIS PROJECT.      Group: P E T E R S O N (Gr:\_\_) (1)

ID \_\_ (2-3) Class \_\_ (4-6) Coder Name:.....(\_\_\_\_) (7-8)

Leaders mentioned: (code NUMBER of mentions for each leader)

	Peterson	Grossman	Rae
Positive	__(9)	__(10)	__(11)
Neutral	__(12)	__(13)	__(14)
Negative	__(15)	__(16)	__(17)

WINNING (check as applies) Any winner ? YES \_\_ NO \_\_ (18)

	Peterson	Grossman	Rae
Both his debates	__(19)	__(20)	__(21)
Budget	__(22)	__(23)	__(24)
Disabled	__(25)	__(26)	__(27)
Auto Insurance	__(28)	__(29)	__(30)

Tie: Pet/Gross \_\_ [1] Gross/Rae \_\_ [2] Pet/Rae \_\_ [3] All \_\_ [4] (31)

Opening comments: Not used \_\_ [0] some simila \_\_ [1] close \_\_ [2] (32)

WORDS (code NUMBER of mentions)

	Word is associated with:		
Word	Peterson	Grossman	Rae
relaxed	__(33)	__(34)	__(35)
In control	__(36)	__(37)	__(38)
confident	__(39)	__(40)	__(41)
governmt act wise	__(42)	__(43)	__(44)
command	__(45)	__(46)	__(47)
calmly	__(48)	__(49)	__(50)
persistently	__(51)	__(52)	__(53)
extreme	__(54)	__(55)	__(56)
complaining	__(57)	__(58)	__(59)

PHRASES (code number of quotes under each heading)

Exact quote/very close \_\_ (66)    some similarity \_\_ (67)

E.3. Coding Sheet: Rae Group

INSTANT ANALYSIS PROJECT.

Group: B O B R A E, (Gr: \_\_ (1))

ID \_\_ (2-3) Class \_\_ (4-6) Coder:.....( \_\_ ) (7-8)

Leaders mentioned: (code NUMBER of mentions for each leader)

	Peterson	Grossman	Rae
Positive	__ (9)	__ (10)	__ (11)
Neutral	__ (12)	__ (13)	__ (14)
Negative	__ (15)	__ (16)	__ (17)

WINNING (check as applies) Any winner ? YES \_\_ NO \_\_ (18)

	Peterson	Grossman	Rae
Both his debates	__ (19)	__ (20)	__ (21)
Budget	__ (22)	__ (23)	__ (24)
Disabled	__ (25)	__ (26)	__ (27)
Auto Insurance	__ (28)	__ (29)	__ (30)

Tie: Pet/Gross \_\_ [1] Gross/Rae \_\_ [2] Pet/Rae \_\_ [3] All \_\_ [4] (31)

Opening comments: Not used \_\_ [0] some simila \_\_ [1] close \_\_ [2] (32)

WORDS (code NUMBER of mentions)

Word	Peterson	Grossman	Rae
understanding	__ (33)	__ (34)	__ (35)
personal interest	__ (36)	__ (37)	__ (38)
advocated	__ (39)	__ (40)	__ (41)
relaxed	__ (42)	__ (43)	__ (44)
confident	__ (45)	__ (46)	__ (47)
effective	__ (48)	__ (49)	__ (50)
frustration	__ (51)	__ (52)	__ (53)
concern	__ (54)	__ (55)	__ (56)
ordinary/			
working people	__ (57)	__ (58)	__ (59)

PHRASES (code number of quotes under each heading)

Exact quote/very close \_\_ (66) some similarity \_\_ (67)

# E.4. Coding Sheet: Grossman Group

INSTANT ANALYSIS PROJECT. Group: G R O S S M A N (Gr: \_\_ (1)  
ID \_\_ (2-3) Class \_\_ (4-6) Coder:..... (7-8)

Leaders mentioned: (code NUMBER of mentions for each leader)

	Peterson	Grossman	Rae
Positive	__ (9)	__ (10)	__ (11)
Neutral	__ (12)	__ (13)	__ (14)
Negative	__ (15)	__ (16)	__ (17)

WINNING (check as applies) Any winner ? YES \_\_ NO \_\_ (18)

	Peterson	Grossman	Rae
Both his debates	__ (19)	__ (20)	__ (21)
Budget	__ (22)	__ (23)	__ (24)
Disabled	__ (25)	__ (26)	__ (27)
Auto Insurance	__ (28)	__ (29)	__ (30)

Tie: Pet/Gross \_\_ [1] Gross/Rae \_\_ [2] Pet/Rae \_\_ [3] All \_\_ [4] (31)

Opening comments: Not used \_\_ [0] some simila \_\_ [1] close \_\_ [2] (32)

WORDS (code NUMBER of mentions)

Word	Peterson	Grossman	Rae
assured	__ (33)	__ (34)	__ (35)
relaxed	__ (36)	__ (37)	__ (38)
experienced	__ (39)	__ (40)	__ (41)
private initiative	__ (42)	__ (43)	__ (44)
knowledge	__ (45)	__ (46)	__ (47)
confident	__ (48)	__ (49)	__ (50)
forcefully	__ (51)	__ (52)	__ (53)
emotionally	__ (54)	__ (55)	__ (56)
government	__ (57)	__ (58)	__ (59)
interference	__ (57)	__ (58)	__ (59)
defensive	__ (60)	__ (61)	__ (62)
nervous	__ (63)	__ (64)	__ (65)

PHRASES (code number of quotes under each heading)

Exact quote/very close \_\_ (66) some similarity \_\_ (67)

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IV

VITA AUCTORIS

Mary Anne Courtney was born on August 24, 1959 in Guelph, Ontario. She graduated from the University of Windsor in 1982 with an Honours Bachelor of Arts degree in Communication Studies. Mary Anne enrolled in the Graduate program in Communication Studies upon receiving a University of Windsor scholarship in 1982. During that time she conducted a study on the impact of instant analysis, and was also involved in a number of public opinion research projects which included assignments with the Windsor Star and the United Way of Windsor.

In 1984 May Anne was married to John Henderson and at that time she accepted a position as Management Trainee with the Ontario Ministry of Transportation and Communications. After completing the training program, Mary Anne worked as Executive Assistant to the Assistant Deputy Minister, Safety and Regulation, and at the present time is a policy advisor in the Municipal Transit Office, primarily working in the area of transportation for disabled persons.