

RESEARCH ROUNDUP

MAKING NEWS FUN AND FUNCTIONAL FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

BY EMILY KIRBY

Many young people are turning away from traditional news sources such as the local newspaper or nightly news and opting for other sources such as John Stewart's *The Daily Show*.¹ Recent research by Susan Sherr of The Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University examines what news producers are doing to attract a younger audience and asks whether there are formats for news that would be more engaging and informative for young adults than current media offerings.

To test the effectiveness of different news formats Dr. Sherr utilized an experimental design where subjects were assigned to view one of four different news Web sites: 1) a traditional site 2) a site with a youthful design and traditional text 3) a site with traditional design and youth-oriented text and 4) a site with youthful design and youth-oriented text. The research included a total of 266 18-24 year old college students, mainly from Rutgers University.

Her research suggests that for young people there is a tradeoff between news that is informative and news that is enjoyable; to prepare this next generation to be politically engaged it is important that news producers find a way to balance fun and function. According to Dr. Sherr, "It is not clear how to strike a balance between what is informative and what is enjoyable to ensure that people are willing to consume the information they 'should' learn. The results of this research provide some clues as to where the boundaries between education and entertainment might lie and provides realistic suggestions for creating an informative youth news media."

WHAT THEY LIKE ISN'T ALWAYS WHAT THEY LEARN FROM

Dr. Sherr found that while young people preferred the news Web sites with the youthful design and youth-oriented text, they actually learned more from the traditional Web sites. One reason young people may have learned less from the youth sites is that the sites appeared to lack a certain amount of credibility. Interviews after the experiment revealed that many respondents did not like the use of quotes by people without obvious credentials or the inclusion of satire pieces on a news Web site. In addition, some reported that the moving ads on the youth sites made it difficult to concentrate on the articles. According

to Dr. Sherr, "It is very possible that the motion and bright colors found on the youth design sites reduced the number of cognitive resources available for learning the information provided."

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REFORM

The research suggests that presenting news using a modern, dynamic design format certainly makes the source more attractive to young audiences. However, these features must be employed judiciously. Overloading a TV program or Web site with too many moving elements or colorful features may not only distract consumers but may also make the information seem unreliable. The author notes, "People are not attracted to those things that would make them the most educated or best able to function in a democratic society. Instead they seek out those stimuli that are more likely to produce less lofty satisfactions. Those of us who would like to achieve the idealistic goal of creating an informed citizenry must acknowledge this reality." ■

YOUTH SOCIAL REPRESENTATION IN THE U.S. MILITARY

BY JARED SAGOFF

Although some minority groups are over-represented in the United States military as compared to the nation's population, there is no correlation between race and a willingness to join the military, according to a recent study.

A recently-released CIRCLE report by Capt. Mark Adamshick indicates that white and minority youth are roughly equally willing to join the U.S. Armed Forces, even though minority representation in the military has increased steadily since 1980. In 2002, for example, minorities comprised 36 percent of all active duty soldiers as well as 39 percent of enlistees. This figure is significantly higher than the minority representation (31 percent) in the U.S. civilian population. This difference can be largely attributed to the 22 percent of enlistees who are African-Americans as opposed to the 12 percent of the civilian population who are of that ethnicity.

GENDER AND EDUCATION PLAY A ROLE IN DECISION TO JOIN THE MILITARY

While the study demonstrates a discrepancy between the representation of African-Americans in the armed forces as compared to the civilian population, the author finds no significant difference

¹ <http://peoplepress.org/reports/display.php3?PageID=834>