

“I Am Not a Dingo”:

The Evolution of Fake News and Truthiness to Satirical Exposition

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Abstract

Fake and satire news programs have long been the staple of cable television. However, 2017 has seen a paradigm shift with the prominence of political comedy in mainstream media including Stephen Colbert, Samantha Bee, Bill Maher, Trevor Noah, Andy Borowitz, John Oliver, and the guests and cast of *Saturday Night Live*. Many of these comedians have reached the apogee of their comedic careers as the result of the current political climate. Satirists are challenging the media's lock on gatekeeping and may even be acting as the trigger that journalist use to frame the news. These satirists may be influential enough to lead stymied journalists from their status as lapdogs to the intended role of the Fourth Estate as watchdogs for the democracy.

Introduction

Colbert introduced most Americans to “Truthiness” over a decade ago on his satire program the Colbert Report. His definition of truthiness is “the belief in what you feel to be true rather than what the facts will support,” (Colbert, 2005). This definition may not diverge from the politically polarized rhetoric today that has resulted in the sharing and proliferation of fake news, of which a part maybe satire. When Kelly Ann Conway described Donald Trump’s exaggerations as “alternative facts,”

The satirical style of John Oliver on *Last Week Tonight (LWT)* is more akin to the cool high school teacher explaining the world to his students – issue by issue. Though Oliver adamantly denies that his show is anything but comedy, it seems apparent that his “explainers” are a type of journalism – a satirical exposition. When the Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission felt compelled to respond to Oliver’s “explainer” on Net Neutrality where Oliver likened him to using a dingo as a babysitter, “I would like to state for the record that I am not a dingo”(Oliver, 2014). Oliver’s impact exceeded the normative assumption of comedic impact and overwhelmed the FCC’s website.

This paper will review America’s long history of political satire and review how modern satire television programs may be assuming a gatekeeping role previously relegated to editors, producers, and journalists

Political thinkers and journalists have valued satire, and historically it has been deemed a form of “Freedom of Speech.” Satirists from Benjamin Franklin to the contemporary Samantha Bee have led the discussion of important issues and often challenge the current political rhetoric. Comedians and satirists often broach subjects that mainstream media will not confront.

The historical landscape of satirical writing includes *Puck*, the original United States humor magazine, and others of the genre such as *The Onion*, *Spy Magazine*, *Mad Magazine*, *The New Yorker*, and *Cracked*. The quantity of literature on print and traditional satire is plentiful. However, the literature seems limited on the topic of the relationship of news and entertainment/news as well as viewers' usage of both.

The literature on the broadcast side includes heavy references to *The Daily Show (TDS)*, *Bill Maher*, and *The Colbert Report (TCR)*. There are many books, academic papers, and journal articles dedicated to the study of the impact of *TDS* and *TCR* on the state of journalism and the gatekeeping responsibility of news outlets.

The literature suggests that humor-based news shows have the potential to educate viewers and “encourage them to think critically—or perhaps cynically---about traditional news coverage” (Brewer, 2007, p.250). Viewers may use the information garnered from these satirical news programs as a jumping off point for further investigation of a topic and to gain social capital through the expression of the information and humorous components on social media.

The literature indicates that the unlimited sources of information available through the Internet, cable television, and broadcast television are eliminating the gatekeeping role of the media (Delli Carpini & Williams, 2000). There seems a need for a scholarly review of the impact of *LWT*, *Samantha Bee*, and the other satirists on the gatekeeping model that has customarily been the function of journalism. It may be worthwhile to scrutinize the role of the satirist in light of the tremendous popularity of the genre.

The prospect of networks merging their news and entertainment divisions adds fuel to Cutbirth's notion that news reporting is being “subsumed within the larger field of mass

communication” and is competing with political satire (Cutbirth, 2011). Expanding Cutbirth’s research may lead to the revelation of the interdependent relationship of mainstream media and entertainment television.

The essay is an exploration of whether satirical dialogues are a form of journalism and are driving mainstream journalists to stories they may not otherwise cover or stirring-up and giving new life to existing themes. This study proposes to review the symbiotic relationship of satire television programs and mainstream news shows and the usage of mainstream television newscasts as fodder for comedy while these media outlets are using satire television as a basis for framing news.



Figure 1: Illus. in: Puck, v. 57, no. 1467 (1905 April 12), cover shows John D. Rockefeller standing on a ladder, dumping coins into a "Patent Disinfector" as a member of the clergy opens a slot and coins pour into a bucket labeled "Purified Cash for Missions". An open trunk labeled "Contributions", full of money bags, is at the base of the ladder.

The study will look at the satire television programs’ usage of media criticism and its potential impact on journalism to determine whether viewers are using entertainment television to acquire news content and the relationship between mainstream news and entertainment.

It may be beneficial to analyze whether “fake news” or satire television has a gatekeeping impact on other mediums and the possibility that satire programs are assuming a role previously relegated to producers, editors, and journalists. A relevant area of discussion is if a few satirists are taking the lead in developing

news themes and may gain substantial control of the political discourse. Finally, a discussion of the function of *LWT*'s role in expository journalism.

Historical Satire

Historically, satire was an often-used weapon. Stephen Koch wrote that is used as a weapon politically or personally “to laugh down whatever refuses to be laughed at” (Koch, 1997). Indeed, comedians are often the first to take shots at politicians and authority figures. Social media broke the story of rape allegations against Bill Cosby when a fan posted a clip from the stand-up act of African-American comedian Hannibal Buress. The comic essentially said that Cosby should stop talking down to young black men because he rapes women. He told the crowd to Google Bill Cosby rapes (YouTube, 2014). Traditional media then adopted the scoop, and a firestorm ensued concerning a story that had been whispered about for many years but not reported until it was verbalized by a comedian.

Benjamin Franklin's writings were perhaps the most acerbic of the colonial era. In fact, Franklin's *Rules by Which a Great Empire May be Reduced to a Small One* attacked the British rule of the colonies and was used by Thomas Jefferson in his Enlightenment prose –the Declaration of Independence (Koch, 1997). Also, Koch writes that it is *Rules By Which a Great Empire May be Reduced to a Small One* in which “we hear the laughter of minds setting themselves free” (Koch, 1977, p.).

In the case of *Rules by Which a Great Empire May Be Reduced to a Small One*, we may see the precursor of the mainstream media adopting and then adapting the work of satirists. The anti-Puritan businessman Thomas Morton named the colony he led “Merry Mount” and had a maypole constructed and encouraged “convivial merrymaking” which led to his repeated exile

and repatriation from the colonies. His *New English Canaan* is a satirical tale of colonial life in which he shares excerpts about Indian apparel and culture. Both Nathaniel Hawthorne and John Lothrop Motley noted the relevance of Morton's work. He was a character in two of Motley's novels and appeared in Hawthorne's *The Maypole of Merrymont*.

The 18th century's cutting satire was followed by the romanticism of the 19th century. Charles Dickens wrote his satiric novel *Life and Adventures of Martin Chuzzlewit* that lampooned the hordes of uneducated immigrants. The yokel character is also explored in Hugh Brackenridge's early 19th century satirical novel entitled *Modern Chivalry* that has fashioned a wandering Pennsylvania philosopher teamed with a dishonest oaf (Koch, 1997). Koch called Washington Irving's *A History of New York (1809)* the first American masterpiece of comic literature. He includes Irving's essays *Tales of a Traveler (1824)* in the anthology.

Americans of this era devalued women and desired liberty while still embracing slavery. Koch points out this plus the dearth of American satire that targeted slavery but noted poems and essays from James Russell Lowell's *Bigelow Papers (1846)*. Lowell used a folksy character to "author" his opinionated poems on social and political topics. Newspapers, notably *The National Anti-Slavery Standard*, published the poems.

The Harvard Lampoon was founded in 1876 and is still published today. The inspiration for the Lampoon came from the British humor magazine *Punch* (Harvard Lampoon, 2017). Following the Civil War, "often the satiric voice would be the sound of the common man's wisdom" or the yokel and could be laced with racism. In *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, satire again found its voice though "it is a little tainted by the sentimentalism of crudity of its premise" (Koch, 1997, p.18). In his earlier writings, Mark Twain parodied wealth, hypocrisy, and human weakness.

Twain's onslaught *Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses* is an amusing and unexpected piece of satire. It is suggestive of John Stewart's assault on the shortcomings of mainstream media in its ferociousness. In the most memorable section, Twain compared Cooper to a tone-deaf person. He said Cooper had a poor ear for words leaving the reader perceiving what he is attempting to say. "He was not a word-musician. His ear was satisfied with the *approximate* word." Twain provided a shopping list of examples of poor word choices including "verbal for oral," "preparation for expectancy," and "rebuked for subdued" (Bakalar, 1997, p. 234-235).

Another piece of satire that took a list format was Ambrose Bierce's *The Devil's Dictionary* (1906), a collection of sharply satirical definitions presented in alphabetical order on a large variety of social and political subjects." Few examples:

Absolute, adj. Independent, irresponsible. An absolute monarch is one in which the sovereign does as he pleases so long as he pleases the assassins...

Club, n. An association of men for purposes of drunkenness, gluttony, unholy hilarity, murder, sacrilege, and slandering of mothers, wives, and sisters.

Dictionary, n. A malevolent literary device for cramping the growth of a language... (Bakalar, 1997, p. 190-211).

Contemporary Satire

The 20th century brought new media to the forefront and went beyond theater and written word. Films, broadcasting, Vaudeville, and importantly *The New Yorker* (founded in 1925) led the modernist charge deep into the next century. *The New Yorker* cartoons and "The talk of the

Town” were often political and humorous. Today, the New Yorker’s Borowitz Report is shared ardently on social media in the left-leaning filter bubble.

Henry Louis (H.L.) Mencken, a literary critic, wrote a collection of satirical pieces satirizing the American middle class that he called “booboisie” (boo-bwah-zee). The collection entitled *Prejudices* attacks “their hypocrisy, pretension, and prudery” (Bakalar, 1997, p.345). In 1924, Mencken and George Nathan founded the *American Mercury* and took on the establishment, government, and prejudice. The pages of the *American Mercury* featured the writings of W.E.B. DuBois, Margret Sanger, and William Faulkner.

George Orwell’s satire *Nineteen Eighty-four* complimented his confrontational style of journalism. Orwellian satire is in the severe tradition of Swift, and its pages are “populous with the shades of his predecessors,” and contains an unconscious recall – “A genre memory” (Justman, 1999, p.112). Chaucer used the defunct fabliau to create freshness and Joyce, too, explored the ancient to evoke the present, according to Justman. Sinclair Lewis’s *Buzz Windrip* proposes declaring war on Mexico and outlaws dissent in “It Can’t Happen Here.” The *Buzz* character's totalitarian tendencies may be a foreshadowing of the politics of the 21st century. *Buzz* used media(radio) and demagoguery to identify populations left behind.

The *Harvard Lampoon* was established in 1876 and continues today. *National Lampoon* emerged from the founded in 1970; it took aim

Kurt Vonnegut's writing on the Republican Convention of 1972 defined the two political parties as the "Winners and the Losers" in his coverage for *Harper's Magazine*," Vonnegut dissected the convention, its Quaker invocation and the 2-party system. He explained that the Democratic Party has been traditionally larger because its leaders are less "openly contemptuous" of Losers and their religion. He suggested that the only religion of the Winners is Darwinism. Vonnegut's dismal view of what transpired at the republican convention was "that one must behave heartlessly toward Losers, if one hopes to survive."

In 1986, *Spy Magazine* burst onto the humor scene and had a run of about 12 years. They set up their offices in the *Puck* Building- home of America's first humor magazine (magculture.com 2013). The magazine often pranked the wealthy and powerful. Highlights included Check-cashing, which set up a dummy company and issued checks to celebrities for \$1.11. Those that cashed them (including Donald Trump and Cher) received another for 64 cents. Trump cashed one for as little as 13 cents (magculture.com 2013). The "Bunny Burgers" prank made contact with ad agencies for ideas to promote their new "bunny" burger joint. Four

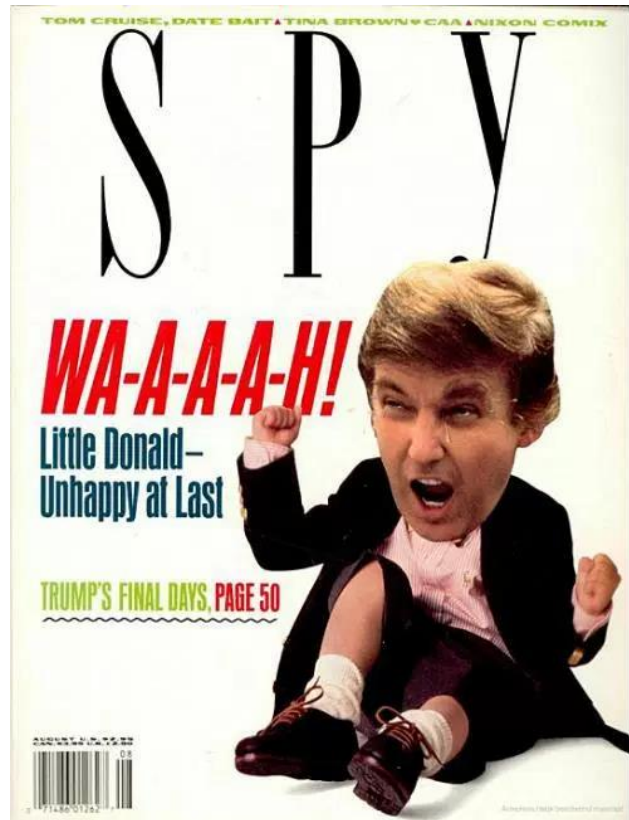


Figure 2: 1990 *Spy Magazine* cover featuring businessman Donald Trump following his bankruptcies. *Spy* often referred to Trump as "the short-fingered vulgarian."

agencies actually provided some noteworthy advice. “Separated at birth” provided celebrity look alike photos in each issue. *Spy* occasionally ran straight-news pieces on topics such as Bush I’s affair (See Figure 2). *Spy* co-founder Kurt Anderson credits Mencken’s *American Mercury* and *The New Yorker* for their satiric inspiration (Magcultyre.com 2013). In 2016, *Spy Magazine* made a brief reappearance because as *Spy Magazine* co-founder Kurt Andersen said, “*The withdrawal of Stewart and Colbert from Comedy Central, the death of Gawker, the return of Hillary, and especially the rise of Donald Trump ... As Trump became the Republicans' presumptive nominee, lots more people, pretty much every day, said to me, 'SPY really needs to be rebooted, if only just for the election' ... I guess maybe they're right* (Ad Age, 2016).

Post-911 Satire

Commentators and comedians struggled in the days following 9/11 trying to define the place of satire in the media during this painful time. One of the first late-night comedy shows to resume after 9/11 was *Politically Incorrect*. Host Bill Maher was uncharacteristically somber and even left a chair open in memory of the conservative CNN commentator Barbara Olson who was killed in the 9/11 attacks while en route to a *Politically Incorrect* appearance (Gurney, 2011).

“I do not relinquish, nor should any of you, the right to criticize, even as we support our government,” Maher said on his September 17, 2001 installment (*Politically Incorrect*, 2001). Maher ended up in hot water when conservative guest Dinesh D’Souza said that one of the themes we hear regularly is that the terrorists were cowards. D’Souza said the 9/11 terrorists were warriors and not cowardly. Maher agreed and said that lobbing missiles from 2,000 miles away is cowardly while staying in an airplane as it hits the building is not cowardly (*Politically Incorrect*, 2001). Maher had attempted to question the constricted framing of the 9/11 attacks

(Gurney 2011) and received widespread criticism from conservatives and lost sponsors for his show. This eventually resulted in the cancellation of *Politically Incorrect*. The issue is still a “hot button” topic for Maher as illustrated in the late summer of 2012 when he broached the subject when D’Souza was again his guest – this time on *Real Time with Bill Maher* (HBO 2012). Maher questioned why the conservative D’Souza did not stand up and say I said this first and Maher agreed with me. Maher told him he instead “slipped away like a rat.” D’Souza said that in the aftermath he defended Maher on free speech grounds (*Real Time with Bill Maher*, 2012).

Saturday Night Live treaded lightly following 9/11. In their somber first show following the tragedy, producer Lorne Michaels asked guest New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani, “Can we be funny?” Giuliani’s response in the form of a question, “Why start now?” seemed to open the floodgates and people laughed heartily “at the political comedian and the comedic politician” (Gournelos 2012, p.7).

The Bush administration pushed a GOOD versus EVIL framework for comprehending the 9/11 attacks. “Either you are with us, or you are against us,” Bush said in September of 2001 (Warner, 2011, p.59). This cemented the dichotomy *The Onion* exploited when exploring questions such as the meaning of GOOD that tortures and kills innocents (Warner, 2011).

Warner introduces the concept “Prophetic dualism,” which she contends is rigid and authoritative and only provides a “mutually exclusive choice between two morally soaked alternatives” (Warner, 2011, p.59). The Bush administration continued the drumbeat of prophetic dualism and there were not any competing frames from the media so the public adopted the President’s version of good and evil (Warner, 2011). Framing of the news has been

the subject of a wide variety of writings but a more specific area for future study may be the government controlling the news and media access.

In *The Onion*'s first internet newspaper after 9/11 lampooned the Bush administration for the adaptation of prophetic dualism since they did not know who actually attacked the U.S. The "news" piece was entitled "U.S. Vows to Defeat Whoever It Is We're at War With" (*The Onion*, 2001). "*The Onion* used satire to plant ambiguity into the carefully drawn and policed dualism of Good versus Evil, thus prompting the reader to reevaluate the frame" (Warner, 2011, p.62).

Warner also points out *The Onion*'s deft use of overstatement as a humor device in some articles, notably:

- "Bill of Rights Pared Down to Manageable Six"
- "U.S. Capitol Cleaning Turns Up Long Lost Constitution"
- "Freedom Curtailed in Defense of Liberty" (Warner, 2011, p.70-71)

Warner concluded that *The Onion* did not have the power to compete with the administration's message but was relevant culturally because of Internet sharing contagion until it became acceptable to again speak out against government actions (*The Onion*, 2001).

Saturday Night Live (SNL) was also instrumental in leading journalists to a previously unaddressed topic. In the 2008 campaign, the media had not questioned the credibility of candidate Sarah Palin. The first of two *SNL* Palin sketches was on September 13 and second was the parody of the Palin/ Katie Couric interview. Mainstream journalists began to discuss and "used the sketch as a frame through which they could discuss Palin's (un)suitability for the White House." (Gournelos & Greene, 2011, p. 14). Once comedian and satirists have broached topics, journalists may confront stories that have previously avoided.

The *SNL* sketches like many other comedy shows have garnered larger audiences and media coverage through the Internet (Gournelos, 2011). The ease of Photoshop and email has enabled these sketches and other images to become memes such as those created from Bush's infamous "mission accomplished" photo opportunity.

In most historical instances, the satirists were attempting to influence the government and public opinion as they do today. However, with the explosion of the Internet, cable television channels, and social media, satirists have found the media itself to be worthy of mockery.

Figure 3 shows a contemporary controversial *New Yorker* cover of Democratic nominee Barack Obama and his wife fist bumping (giving dab) in the Oval Office with many accouterments of a Muslim extremist lifestyle. This satirical cover lampooned right wing paranoia but led to fear among democrats that it could hurt the Obama campaign (Beam

2008). This cover art and the ensuing frenzy of media coverage then became fodder for satire news commentators Stewart and Colbert. Stewart reported that like most people, he gets his news from *The Daily Show* and his second choice is "the cartoon." He went on to discuss how the media had become inflamed over the "provocative cover for a smarty-pants magazine." He said that Obama's initial response that the cartoon was "tasteless and offensive" should have

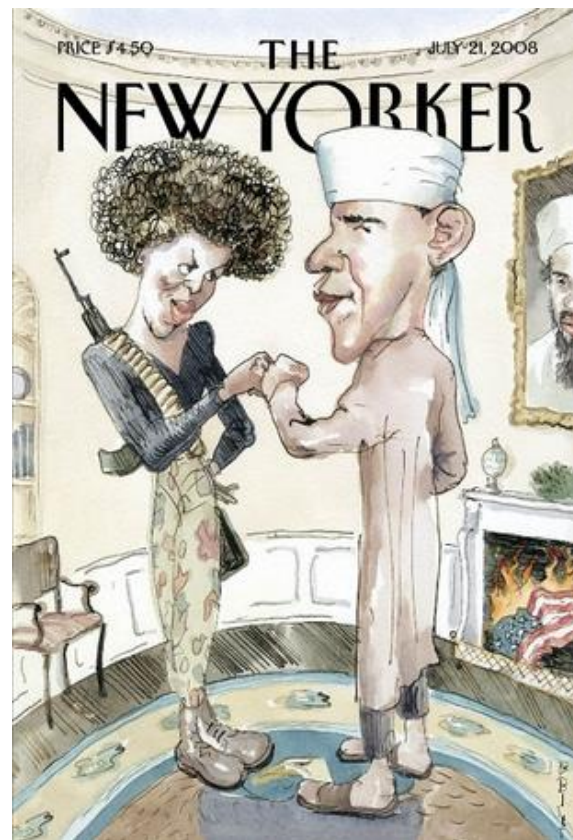


Figure 3: *The New Yorker* (2008). "The Politics of Fear." This cover art/cartoon and the ensuing media coverage of it was parodied by satire television hosts.

been that I am not upset by a cartoon that depicts me as a Muslim extremist because those who get upset at cartoons are Muslim extremists (Stewart 2008).

Stewart ridiculed the media horde's reaction and fake news hosts have found it very simple to satirize the mainstream media in their coverage of many news stories. Research literature suggests that the number of broadcast journalism programs has increased but the quality has dropped (Baym 2005). Academics suggest that the behavior of mainstream journalists regurgitating the official "party line" may provide the rich fodder for satirists. Sensational television personalities who propose ridiculous ideas may transform illegitimate topics into real news stories (McChesney, 2011). Difficult economic issues have hampered traditional media outlets when citizens are looking for someone to challenge the powerful that have failed Americans (Cutbirth, 2011).

Stewart's *The Daily Show* gained widespread popularity while journalists didn't question the reduction in freedom with the enactment of the Patriot Act, "fearing they might suffer recriminations of higher authorities who have the power to shut off their supply of privileged inside information" and threaten their livelihood (Harrington, 2009, p. 79). In the post-911 era, journalists had abandoned their role as the Fourth Estate, the watchdogs, for the more comfortable role of lap dogs – "sitting" and "begging" for tickets to the next White House black-tie affair. They lobbed softball questions at news conferences to insure access.

The fake news of *The Daily Show* displays humor more complex than the simple, joke-type of humor that is prevalent in the late night talk shows. Stewart employs satire and irony in contrast to the late-night jokesters. In contrast, "Stephen Colbert relies on deadpan satire" (Compton, 2011, p.11). Late-night comedy tends to influence viewers with lower political knowledge according to various studies conducted by Young in 2004 and 2006 (Compton,

2011). Various published papers stress a difference between typical late-night talk shows and the Stewart and Colbert fare. The latter attract a much younger audience with more than 40% younger than age 30 (Hoffman, 2011).

This audience demographic gives great power to the messages of the satirists. The newsy entertainment television shows appear to be usurping the roles of editors and producers who normally decide what is inappropriate for the viewer. This gatekeeping role, formerly firmly gripped by the media seems to be slipping from its aging hands. As entertainers, Jon Stewart, John Oliver, Bill Maher, and Stephen Colbert can note the absurdity of the statements and actions of our leaders, celebrities, and politicians in a way that journalists may be unable to because of reluctance to lose access and professionalism.

Stewart and Colbert are comedians and “By avoiding the absurd professional practices, they can get us much closer to the truth. Fake news becomes real journalism,” (McChesney, 2011, p. 2). *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* “invite” their audiences to scrutinize the news and evaluate it (Baym, 2005). In fact, Oliver’s expository satire piece on Net Neutrality was so engaging that I used it to explain net neutrality to my classes. Many students then chose to write about net neutrality as the topic for their module paper – attesting to the impact of this expository style of satire journalism. The piece on net neutrality was so powerful that the FCC’s comment website was brought down by the flood of comments from *LWT* followers

The growing number of news programming choices has left more than half of those surveyed unable to offer a name of their most-admired journalist. The 2007 Pew Research Center for the People and the Press Survey had John Stewart finishing a respectable fourth among the country’s most admired journalists – tied with Brian Williams, Tom Brokaw, Dan Rather, and Anderson Cooper (The Pew Research Center for the People and Press, 2008).

The Daily Show uses real news footage and focuses on politics and often the media itself. Many major news events go unmentioned on *TDS*, and in 2007 Republicans “tended to bear the brunt of ridicule” from *TDS* (The Pew Research Center for the People and Press, 2008). John Oliver takes a single issue and devotes a major portion of his show to explain that topic. Samantha Bee found her comedic footing as a correspondent for *The Daily Show*, as did Stephen Colbert, Larry Wilmore, Steve Carrell, and Mo Rocca.

Brewer and Marquardt wrote that studies referring to reporting on the media itself might be described as media process coverage, self-referential coverage, and meta coverage. For the purposes of this paper, I will adopt the term “meta-coverage” derived from the research of Esser and D’Angelo (2003) and defined as “news about the role, presence, and behaviors of the news media” (Brewer, 2007, p 254).

Stewart and Colbert often challenge and ridicule mainstream journalists for their inadequate or inappropriate performances. After the “*The Dark Knight Rises*” premiere shooting, Stewart ridiculed ABC’s Brian Ross for “Googling” the shooters name and announcing he had ties to the “Tea Party.” A few hours later, he reported that information was incorrect. Stewart chided Ross that he had entered the name and pushed the “I feel lazy button” (*The Daily Show* 201 ?). In this example of meta coverage, Stewart noted that Ross was not chastised or suspended. Baym wrote that *TDS* scrutinizes the mainstream media that is “arguably failing its democratic function.” He also emphasizes that the media is focusing on “the trivial at the expense of the consequential” (Baym, 2005, p 268). Satirical metacoverage of the mainstream news media “could promote the sort of critical thought that it pillories the traditional news media for failing to encourage (Brewer and Marquardt, 2007, p. 255).

The topics covered on *TDS* are “more limited” than those covered by mainstream media. Both focused most on the wars and foreign affairs as illustrated in the Pew Center Chart (See appendix A). Politics was the number two topic for both and then their courses diverged and mainstream media covered crime, disasters, and other topics and *The Daily Show*’s focus narrowed (The Pew Research Center for the People and Press, 2008).

Some literature indicates the evolution of the news media may be driven by computational journalism and will be collecting and analyzing memes and tweets (Francisco-Revilla, 2012). Memes can be a humorous method of communication or polarized political jabs. Sometimes the controversial memes are the only reason people hear about important events (Ross 2011). Memes will become a very important area of media discussion and research.

A dramatic case of the growth of a story through the World Wide Web occurred when Police Lieutenant John Pike casually pepper sprayed University of California students sitting peacefully at an Occupy protest. This led to a deluge of memes that display Pike casually pepper-spraying everything from the constitution to adorable baby kittens.

Sometimes news personalities become the memes as in the case of the former Fox News Reader Megyn Kelly (see figure 4) did when she casually dismissed this Lt. Pike pepper spray incident, saying pepper spray was “just a food product, essentially” (Ross, 2011).

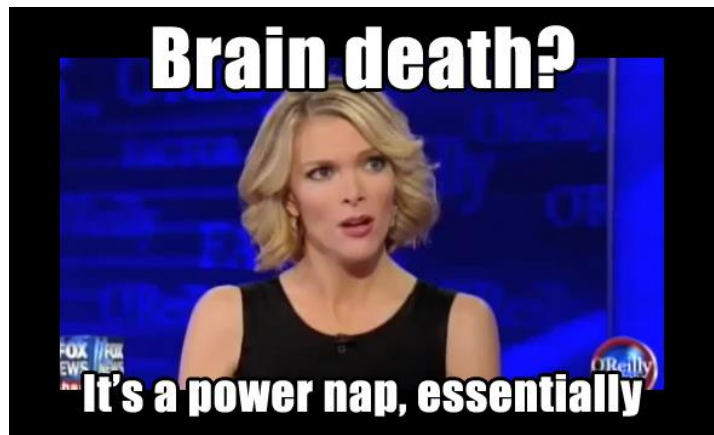


Figure 4 Fox News Reader Megyn Kelly became the subject of countless Internet memes when she said that pepper spray was essentially a food product. (Know Your Meme 2011).

The Current Comedy News Climate

The prominent satire news shows in 2017 are *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver*, *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah*, *Samantha Bee*, and *Real Time with Bill Maher*. With the end of *The Colbert Show*, there could have been a void in “truthiness” and satire if not for the emergence of John Oliver in February of 2014. John Oliver has changed the game with his expository journalism segments.

Mainstream news outlets make assumptions about the viewer's knowledge of issues that *LWT* does not and that helps to hold the interest of people who may otherwise disregard a topic as too complicated. The *Columbia Journalism Review* reported that “Networks largely avoided net neutrality” as they only have minutes to report on stories. HBO offers Oliver the luxury of uninterrupted segments giving Oliver the time to make difficult subjects such as Pay Day lenders, Indian elections, nutritional supplements, etc. understandable. These segments also offer viewers the cutting edge knowledge and social capital that increase the show’s contagion.

The *Columbia Journalism Review* contends that Oliver is not a journalist but concedes that “He does occasionally commit acts of journalism,” (Uberti 2014). Oliver enthusiastically declares that he is a comedian and not a journalist but his new expository style of satire seems to observers to be a valid form of journalism that has the potential to educate and influence consumers in an enduring fashion than most mainstream news outlets cannot.

Discussion

This era appears to be dominated by the internet and broadcast media, with the musings of satirists forcing issues into the media and the viewers’ consciousness. Satire news stories may infect the dialogue of social media users, television viewers and journalists. Satirists are

challenging the media's lock on gatekeeping and may be acting as the trigger that journalists use to frame the news. These satirists may be influential enough to lead stymied journalists from their status as lapdogs to the intended role of the Fourth Estate as watchdogs for the democracy.

“Orwell delves into the past to bring out the present. It is ironic that satire, with its grounding in the past, should underwrite journalism that now plays havoc with the sense of the past itself...In *Nineteen Eighty-four* it is as though the author sought to renew journalism by putting it back in touch with satire, which it originally was” (Justman, 1999. p.112). It appears that through *Last Week Tonight*, John Oliver is making a fresh connection between satire and journalism.

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