CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Mass Media Effects: Mobilization or Media Malaise?
Author(s): Kenneth Newton
Source: *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 29, No. 4 (Oct., 1999), pp. 577-599
Published by: Cambridge University Press
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/194239
Accessed: 06-04-2017 11:46 UTC

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at http://about.jstor.org/terms

Cambridge University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *British Journal of Political Science*

This content downloaded from 103.21.127.76 on Thu, 06 Apr 2017 11:46:35 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

B.J.Pol. **29**, 577–599
Printed in the United Kingdom
© *1999 Cambridge University Press*

Mass Media Effects: Mobilization or Media Malaise?

KENNETH NEWTON*

According to some, the modern mass media have a malign effect on modern democracy, tending to induce political apathy, alienation, cynicism and a loss of social capital – in a word, 'mediamalaise'. Some theorists argue that this is the result of media content, others that it is the consequence of the form of the media, especially television. According to others, the mass media, in conjunction with rising educational levels, help to inform and mobilize people politically, making them more knowledgeable and understanding. This study investigates the mobilization and mediamalaise hypotheses, and finds little to support the latter. Reading a broadsheet newspaper regularly is strongly associated with mobilization, while watching a lot of television has a weaker association of the same kind. Tabloid newspapers and general television are not strongly associated with measures of mediamalaise. It seems to be the content of the media, rather than its form which is important.

MEDIA MALAISE

The modern mass media are thought by some to have an immense effect on modern government and politics, but the nature of these effects are controversial. Some claim that their effects on democracy are malign and have coined the term 'videomalaise' to encapsulate the argument.[1] It is claimed that market competition and the search for bigger audiences and circulation figures force the media to dwell on dramatic news, especially bad news about crime and conflict, death and disaster, political incompetence and corruption, sex and scandal, anything else that is sensational.[2] If there is little conflict, the media will exaggerate what exists, or try to create it.[3] 'Attack journalism', said to be more

* Department of Government, University of Essex. I would like to thank the Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin, where I spent the sabbatical year during which most of this article was written, and particularly Andreas Dams for help with computing. The article is based on data collected by the British Social Attitudes survey of 1996, conducted by Social and Community Planning Research. I am grateful to John Curtice and Katarina Thomson of SCPR for very helpful comments on an early version of the article, and to two anonymous reviewers who helped to improve the final version.

[1] Michael J. Robinson, 'Public Affairs Television and the Growth of Political Malaise: The Case of "The Selling of the Pentagon" ', *American Political Science Review*, 70 (1976), 409–32.

[2] Michael J. Robinson and Margaret Sheehan, *Over the Wire and on TV* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1983), p. 97, pp. 211–12; Murray Edelman, *Constructing the Political Spectacle* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Ralph Negrine, *Politics and the Mass Media in Britain* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 141–2.

[3] Kurt Lang and Gladys Lang, *Politics and Television* (Chicago: Quandrangle, 1968), p. 307; Matthew Kerbel, *Remote and Controlled: Media Politics in a Cynical Age* (Boulder, Colo. Westview, 1995), p. 22.

This content downloaded from 103.21.127.76 on Thu, 06 Apr 2017 11:46:35 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

common, undermines politicians and political institutions,[4] and encourages politicians to campaign negatively by attacking their opponents, not stating their own case.[5] This combination of bad news, attack journalism and negative politics tends to create a pervasive sense of cynicism, distrust and suspicion of modern politics and politicians.[6]

Moreover, news is a perishable commodity; yesterday's events are washed over by today's headlines, as the media pursue new news in the race to break a fresh story. There is also more news because it is collected globally and broadcast almost instantaneously. As a result, most items are covered in an increasingly brief and superficial way, and the public is presented with a ceaseless flow of fast changing and barely explained events – news bites – which roll over each other with bewildering speed.[7] This 'fast forward' effect is said to create political confusion, fatigue, alienation and distrust among the many citizens who lack the information, understanding and the motivation to make sense of the news.[8]

British evidence suggests that the huge media coverage of elections causes political overload in some people who tend to avoid news and current affairs

[4] Michael J. Robinson, 'American Political Legitimacy in an Era of Electronic Journalism: Reflection on the Evening News', in Douglass Cater and Richard Adler, eds, *Television as a Social Force* (New York: Praeger, 1975), p. 106; Thomas E. Patterson, *Out of Order* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), pp. 147–74; Daniel C. Hallin, 'Sound Bite News: Television Coverage of Elections', in Shanto Iyengar and Richard Reeves, eds, *Do the Media Govern*? (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1997), p. 64.

[5] Kathleen Hall-Jamieson, *Dirty Politics: Deception, Distraction and Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 184–5; Stephen Ansolabehere, Shanto Iyengar and Adam Simon, 'Evolving Perspectives on the Effects of Campaign Communication', in Philo C. Wasburn, ed., *Research in Political Sociology: Vol. 7, Mass Media and Politics* (Greenwich, Conn.: JAI Press, 1995), pp. 24–6; Bob Franklin, *Packaging Politics: Political Communications in Britain's Media Democracy* (London: Edward Arnold, 1994), p. 10; John Rentoul, Nick Robinson and Simon Braunholtz, 'People-Metering: Scientific Research or Clapometer?' in Ivor Crewe and Brian Gosschalk, eds, *Political Communication: The General Election Campaign of 1992* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 109. But see also Lynda Lee Kaid and Christina Holtz-Bacha, 'Political Advertising Across Cultures: Comparing Content, Styles, and Effects', in Kaid and Holtz-Bacha, *Political Advertising in Western Democracies: Parties and Candidates on Television* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1995), p. 211–13.

[6] Jay G. Blumler and Michael Gurevitch, *The Crisis of Public Communication* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 1–4, 212–15; James Fallows, *Breaking the News: How the Media Undermine American Democracy* (New York: Vintage, 1997), pp. 203–4; Montague Kern and Marion Just, 'How Voters Construct Images of Political Candidates', in Pippa Norris, ed., *Politics and the Press: The News Media and Their Influences* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1997), pp. 121–43.

[7] Neil Postman and Steve Powers, *How to Watch TV News* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992), p. 39; Robert M. Entman, *Democracy Without Citizens: Media and the Decay of American Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 152–3; Shanto Iyengar, *Is Anyone Responsible? How Television Frames Political Issues* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 14.

[8] Robinson, 'Public Affairs Television'; Austin Ranney, *Channels of Power: The Impact of Television on American Politics* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), pp. 64–87; William Shawcross, *The Quality of Mercy* (London: Deutsch, 1984), pp. 74–9, 152–5; Postman and Powers, *How to Watch TV News*, p. 153; Robert D. Putnam, 'Tuning In, Tuning Out: The Strange Disappearance of Social Capital in America', *PS*, 28 (1995), 664–83, at p. 679.

This content downloaded from 103.21.127.76 on Thu, 06 Apr 2017 11:46:35 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

programmes, and stop buying newspapers in the later stages of the campaign.[9] In the United States experimental and survey research argues that television news tends to de-motivate and immobilize people politically and to make elected officials and public institutions less accountable to the public.[10]

The strongest form of malaise theory concentrates on television rather than the print media, making the case that it is not merely the content of television but its very form which makes it impossible for it to inform and educate in the best Reithian tradition.[11] At best, it can only amuse and entertain; at worst it confuses and alienates politically, de-legitimizes the political system and undermines democracy.[12] Robinson argues that that those who 'fall into the news' – those who happen to watch television news because the television is on – are particularly likely to suffer from videomalaise because they do not have the background of a good newspaper and political discussion with friends to help them understand and interpret the news.[13] Those who turn on the television in order to watch the news are likely to be better equipped to interpret and understand what is otherwise a bewildering barrage of information and conflicting opinions.

Although most malaise theory concentrates on television (hence video-malaise), the problem does not lie only with television but with all forms of modern mass media, both print and electronic. Hence the term 'mediamalaise' is preferred here. The term is used broadly to cover those types of democratic pathology which are supposed to be caused, at least in part, by the modern mass media – political apathy, alienation, distrust, cynicism, confusion, disillusionment and even fear.

Most recently, Putnam has argued that television is the prime suspect for causing the decline of social capital in the United States. Television pulls people out of the community and its voluntary associations, and hence is responsible, in large part, for civic disengagement, loss of community and the privatization of modern life. Quoting research showing that television tends to privatize people, to make them scared, alienated, isolated and disoriented, Putnam argues that television is associated with rising levels of distrust and alienation in the United States.[14]

[9] Bob Franklin, *Packaging Politics: Political Communications in Britain's Media Democracy* (London: Edward Arnold, 1994), pp. 131, 151; Mallory Wober, *Televising the Election* (London: ITC, 1992), p. 2; Brian MacArthur and Robert M. Worcester, 'Preaching to the uninterested', *UK Press Gazette*, 6 April 1992, p. 5.

[10] Ansolabehere *et al.*, 'Evolving Perspectives on the Effects of Campaign Communication', pp. 24–5; Iyengar, *Is Anyone Responsible?*

[11] Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (London: Methuen, 1986).

[12] Fallows, *Breaking the News*, pp. 52–65; Robinson, 'American Political Legitimacy'.

[13] Robinson, 'Public Affairs Television'.

[14] Robert D. Putnam, 'Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital', *Journal of Democracy*, 6 (1995), 65–78; Putnam, 'Tuning In, Tuning Out'. For a rather different view, see Michael Schudson, *The Power of News* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 16–25.

This content downloaded from 103.21.127.76 on Thu, 06 Apr 2017 11:46:35 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

Some research finds little or only qualified support for videomalaise theory. According to Norris the charge that television is the root cause of the lack of confidence and trust in American democracy is at best unproven, and at worst deeply implausible.[15] She also finds that watching television news in Britain is associated with high levels of political knowledge, participation and personal efficacy.[16] In Germany, Holtz-Bacha's analysis of the first-wave of a panel study finds that exposure to television news and newspapers is not associated with videomalaise, although political alienation and low participation are associated with heavy doses of entertainment media.[17]

FORM AND CONTENT

Although mediamalaise theorists generally agree about the effects of the mass media, they do not always reach this conclusion by the same route. There is a difference between those who stress form and those who emphasize content. Postman, for example, claims that modern television must, by its very nature, be amusing and entertaining rather than educational. He states: 'You cannot do philosophy on television. Its form works against the content.'[18] Other writers emphasize media content; the fast forward syndrome, for example, or the presentation of news in an episodic rather than a thematic framework.[19] If it is form that counts most, then there is little hope for the modern mass media, especially television, which is doomed by its very nature to have a corrupting influence. If it is content that matters, then there is room for both good and bad in each type of mass media and, therefore, for different kinds of effects caused by the same type of media.[20]

MOBILISATION THEORY

Another school of thought, also with a substantial body of empirical evidence, seems to contradict mediamalaise theory. It can be called 'mobilization' theory because it argues that a combination of rising educational levels and easier

[15] Pippa Norris, 'Does Television Erode Social Capital? A Reply to Putnam', *PS*, 29 (1996), 474–80.

[16] Pippa Norris, 'The Effects of the News Media on Civic Engagement and Social Capital', paper pepared for the Workshop on Social Capital and Political Science, European Consortium for Political Research Joint Sessions, University of Warwick, March (1998). See also Eric M. Uslaner, 'Social Capital, Television, and the "Mean World": Trust, Optimism and Civic Participation', *Political Psychology*, forthcoming; John Brehm and Wendy Rahn, 'Individual Level Evidence for the Causes and Consequences of Social Capital', *American Journal of Political Science*, 41 (1998), 888–1023.

[17] Christina Holtz-Bacha, 'Videomalaise Revisited: Media Exposure and Political Alienation in West Germany', *European Journal of Communication*, 5 (1990), 73–85.

[18] Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, p. 7

[19] Iyengar, *Is Anyone Responsible*?

[20] Jay G. Blumler and Denis McQuail, *Television in Politics: Its Uses and Influences* (London: Faber, 1968), and Joseph Trenamen and Denis McQuail, *Television and the Political Image* (London: Methuen, 1961), present both sides of the form–content debate.

This content downloaded from 103.21.127.76 on Thu, 06 Apr 2017 11:46:35 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

access to ever larger amounts of political information have helped to mobilize citizens, both cognitively and behaviourally. Dalton shows a slow but steady increase in political interest, discussion and ideological sophistication in the United States, Britain, France and Germany over the past few decades.[21] Inglehart claims that the rising level of cognitive mobilization is one of the predominant features of modern politics, and that it is associated with higher levels of political participation, more political discussion, greater political information, heightened political awareness and more refined ideological skills among the mass publics of the West.[22]

Jay Blumler captured the essential differences between mediamalaise and mobilization theories almost thirty years ago in a percipient essay on the political effects of television. One school of thought claims that 'democratic standards are deteriorating, and that TV is hastening the decline by trivialising and personalising what it covers.' Another expects 'the quality of life to improve with rising material and cultural standards, and they are inclined to lean on TV (potentially at least) as a powerful instrument of political education.'[23]

Although lack of data makes it difficult to draw firm conclusions about trends in political education and knowledge,[24] cross-sectional and cross-national comparative research suggests that the quality of national news media may have a big impact on how well informed citizens are about politics.[25] Norris finds that watching television news is associated with rather higher levels of political knowledge, participation and subjective efficacy.[26] These studies suggest that it is not the form but the content of the media which is more important: serious, in-depth treatment of the news in both the electronic and the print media can inform and mobilize, whereas a superficial and sensational treatment may induce malaise. Similarly entertainment media, both electronic and print, may have one effect, and a good treatment of the news, both electronic and print, quite another.

[21] Russell J. Dalton, *Citizen Politics in Western Democracies* (Chatham, NJ: Chatham House, 1996), pp. 26–7. On the United States, see Russell Neumann, *The Paradox of Mass Politics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 40; and Sidney Verba, 'The Voice of the People', *PS*, 26 (1993), 677–86, at p. 679. On Western Europe, see Richard Topf, 'Beyond Electoral Participation', in Hans-Dieter Klingemann and Dieter Fuchs, eds, *Citizens and the State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 52–91.

[22] Ronald J. Inglehart, *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp. 335–70.

[23] Jay G. Blumler, 'The Political Effects of Television', in James Halloran, ed., *The Effects of Television* (London: Panther, 1972), pp. 70–104, at p. 72. For a more recent account of a similar theme, see Franklin, *Packaging Politics*, pp. 9–12.

[24] Michael Delli Karpini and Scott Keeter, 'Stability and Change in the US Public's Knowledge of Politics', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 55 (1991), 583–61. See also Entman, *Democracy Without Citizens*, pp. 24–6, who provides information showing that, notwithstanding more education and information, Americans were no better informed about politics in 1984 than they were in 1974.

[25] Michael Dimock and Samuel Popkin, 'Political Knowledge in a Comparative Perspective', in Shanto Iyengar and Richard Reeves, eds, *Do the Media Govern?* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1997), pp. 217–24.

[26] Norris, 'Does Television Erode Social Capital?' p. 478.

This content downloaded from 103.21.127.76 on Thu, 06 Apr 2017 11:46:35 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

In sum, the huge weight of argument and evidence about mediamalaise, which has recently been built into the debate about social capital, appears to contradict the no less plausible, but smaller, body of writing which claims that cheaper and easier access to growing amounts of political news and information have the effect of mobilizing mass publics. The malaise and mobilization literatures rarely engage each other directly, or even recognize each other's existence. Another part of the problem is that both are usually cast at a high level of generalization and make broad statements about 'the effects of the media'. They might be reconciled by specifying which types of media have what types of effects on which types of people.

The competing hypotheses examined in this article are:

1. *Mediamalaise.* High levels of exposure to the mass media in Britain, especially the news media, are associated with low levels of political mobilization, and high levels of political malaise. Variations on this general theme argue that (1) the entertainment media (both television and print) are mainly responsible for malaise,[27] that (2) television, with both a news and an entertainment content, is particularly responsible for malaise,[28] and (3) those who inadvertently watch television news are most likely to suffer from videomalaise.[29]
2. *Mobilization.* High levels of exposure of the British public to the mass media, especially the news media, including television news, will tend to inform people about politics, give them a better understanding of politics, heighten their subjective efficacy and, therefore, mobilize them politically. The 'knowledge gap' literature emphasizes the interaction between education and quality media in the form of good newspapers and television.[30]
3. *Media form.* High levels of exposure to television, whether entertainment or news programmes, will result in higher levels of political malaise, than exposure to newspapers.
4. *Media content.* High levels of exposure to entertainment media, whether television or print, will result in higher levels of political malaise than exposure to good news media, whether television or print.

METHODS

Media impact research is bedevilled by the difficulties of unravelling cause-and-effect relations. First, media use is closely associated with many

[27] Kaid and Holtz-Bacha, 'Political Advertising Across Cultures', pp. 211–13.

[28] Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death.*

[29] Robinson, 'Public Affairs Television and the Growth of Political Malaise'.

[30] Barrie Gunter, *Poor Reception: Misunderstanding and Forgetting Broadcast News* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1987), pp. 301–17; Jens Kleinnijenhuis, 'Newspaper Complexity and the Knowledge Gap', *European Journal of Communication*, 6 (1987), 499–522; Kaisisomayajula Viswanath and John R. Finnegan, 'The Knowledge Gap Hypothesis: Twenty Five Years Later', in Brant R. Burleson and Adrianne W. Kunkel, eds, *Communication Yearbook 1996* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1996), pp. 117–35.

This content downloaded from 103.21.127.76 on Thu, 06 Apr 2017 11:46:35 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

other variables, which may be independently related to indicators of mobilization and malaise. Broadsheets are read by the better educated whose class, income and status may make them less prone to political malaise. To complicate matters, different social groups use different combinations of media (broadsheet readers may watch a lot of television news, tabloid readers may watch a lot of entertainment television), making it difficult to untangle the effects of any particular type or sub-type of the mass media.

Secondly, audiences select their media, making it difficult to know whether the media create or merely reinforce attitudes and behaviour. And the media go to enormous and expensive lengths to research their audiences and it is likely that they will do their best to reflect the attitudes and values of the markets they want to appeal to. This makes the chicken-and-egg problem of media impact research particularly acute, and also makes it easier to get away with broad and sweeping statements about the topic. To put the same point another way, broadsheets are read by the politically mobilized and tabloids by some who are alienated or suffering from malaise. To this extent newspaper reading itself might be regarded as a measure of mobilization or malaise, and hence as a cause, an effect or a symptom (or all three) of democratic beliefs in the population. None the less, some progress may be made by carefully controlling and comparing different groups of media users, different types of media and different media content. In addition, evidence about patterns of television news watching in Britain shows us a possible way of out of the tautological dilemma created by the fact that the media target their audiences, and audiences select themselves.

Comparing different groups of media users with a control group of non-users is a first step. Broadsheet readers can be compared with tabloid readers, to estimate the broadsheet effect, but newspaper readers and non-readers may also be compared to estimate the newspaper effect. According to the British Social Attitudes survey of 1996 about 60 per cent of the population reads a national daily paper more than three times a week, while 50 per cent claimed to have read a paper the day before they were interviewed.[31] About 10 per cent of the population read a national broadsheet three or more times a week, and 54 per cent are regular national tabloid readers.

In theory, it is possible to estimate the television effect by comparing those who watch television with those who never do, but only 3 per cent of British adults do not own a television, and in the 1996 BSA sample of 1,171, one solitary person claims to have a television but never watch it. As videomalaise theorists point out, television is ubiquitous and its effects all pervasive, so that it is now virtually impossible to understand what a world without television might be like. More than half the British population watches television every day, and the average is twenty hours a week. Close to 10 per cent watch it seven or more hours

[31] Kenneth Newton, 'Politics and the News Media', in Roger Jowell *et al.*, eds, *British Social Attitudes: The 14th Report. The End of Conservative Values*? (Aldershot: Ashgate and SCPR, 1997), pp. 151–68.

This content downloaded from 103.21.127.76 on Thu, 06 Apr 2017 11:46:35 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

a day, or fifty or more hours a week. Nevertheless, it is possible to compare those who watch little television with those who watch a lot, and to compare those who watch a lot of television news with those who watch little.

Education is a crucial control variable. Most research from *The Civic Culture* onwards finds that it has a strong influence on the use of different kinds of media, and it has a powerful effect on both mobilization and malaise. Education is also tangled up with a range of other variables – such as class, income, unemployment, ethnicity and party identification – that might have a direct influence on both media use and mobilization and malaise.

Comparing and controlling in this systematic way cannot solve the chicken-and-the-egg problem, especially if cross-sectional rather than time-series or panel data is used, but it can take us a big step further. If, after controlling and comparing, we find persistent relationships between media use and measures of political malaise or mobilization, then there is reason to press on with research in an effort to sort out the complexity of the cause and effect interactions. If, by contrast we find a set of weak or non-existent relationships, we have reason to accept the null hypothesis that there is no association between media use and either mobilization or political malaise.

DATA AND MEASURES

Evidence about media use, political knowledge, and political attitudes is drawn from the two component parts of the British Social Attitudes survey of 1996.[32] The first involved interviews with one person, aged 18 or over, in 3,622 randomly selected private households in Britain. This includes a set of questions about media use and political knowledge and attitudes, as well as the standard socio-demographic variables such as gender, age, class, income, and so on. The second was a self-completion questionnaire administered to a sub-sample of 1,143 of those interviewed. This asked a further battery of questions about political attitudes and interests, which serve as good indicators of mobilization and malaise.[33]

Media Use

The BSA survey asks about newspaper reading habits, ownership and use of television (terrestrial, cable and satellite) and home video recorder, and about cinema attendance. It does not ask about radio listening, and while this is a gap, it is not a great disadvantage in Britain because 62 per cent claim that television is their main source of political information, 23 per cent claim the same of newspapers, and only 14 per cent rely most on radio.[34] In the best of all possible

[32] The same media questions are not necessarily asked in other years.

[33] For further technical details of the survey, see Jowell *et al.*, *British Social Attitudes: The 14th Report*, pp. 215–31.

[34] Negrine, *Politics and the Mass Media in Britain*, p. 1.

This content downloaded from 103.21.127.76 on Thu, 06 Apr 2017 11:46:35 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

worlds we also need quantitative measures of how much people use different media, and qualitative indicators of how much attention they give them over a long period of time. Lacking this, we have to rely on more practicable and approximate measures of media use.

The BSA survey asks respondents how many hours of general television and television news they watch during the week, and how much attention they pay to items about political and economic news. The survey does not go into greater detail about what kind of general television is watched, but given the audience figures for entertainment television such as soap operas, films, sport, game shows and drama, as against educational television such as science, current affairs and documentaries it is probable that most of the general television watched is entertainment television. The BSA also asks questions about newspaper reading, and how much attention is paid to items of economic and political news. This enables us to compare (1) newspaper readers and non-readers, (2) broadsheets and tabloid readers, (3) those who watch a lot of television with those who watch little, and (4) those who watch a lot of television news and those who watch little. It is also possible to compare combinations of media use and interactions between them.

A series of regressions was run to establish the associations between media use, on the one hand, and measures of malaise and mobilization, on the other, while controlling for income, education, identification with the party of government, gender and age. To do this a set of dummy variables was created to isolate various types and combinations of newspaper readership (see Table 3 on p. 589). Similarly, different measures of electronic media use were tried. The two simplest for television proved to be the most powerful in the regressions – the number of hours of television watched each day, and the number of times television news was watched during a week. A more complicated measure of the ratio of television news to general television was tried (total number of television hours per week divided by hours of television news), but on balance this single variable proved to be a slightly less powerful variable than the two scores together. The BSA survey also collects information about access to cable and satellite television, ownership and use of home video-recorder, and cinema attendance. These variables were tried individually and collectively in regressions.

Mobilization and Malaise

Measures of political mobilization and malaise are built from a battery of questions about political knowledge and attitudes in the BSA study. The survey asks a set of twenty questions about factual knowledge of party policies, self-rated political interest and understanding, trust in public officials, subjective efficacy, system efficacy, and beliefs about elections, politicians and British democracy.[35] In order to reduce the volume of data and increase question

[35] The interview and self-completion questionnaires are reproduced in Jowell *et al.*, *British Social Attitudes: The 14th Report*: Aldershot, pp. 235–341.

This content downloaded from 103.21.127.76 on Thu, 06 Apr 2017 11:46:35 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

TABLE 1 *Principle Component Analysis of Responses to Questions about Political Knowledge and Attitudes*

	Component					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Which party most favours:						
Proportional representation	0.46					
Tax and spending cuts	0.63					
Privatize rail	0.75					
Minimum wage	0.74	0.43				
Political interest and understanding						
Self-rated political interest		0.79				
Self-rated information		0.71				
Self-rated understanding of gov.		0.80				
Gov. too complex to understand		−0.57	−0.47			
Internal (or personal) efficacy						
People like me have no say			−0.62		0.41	
Voting only influence on gov.			−0.60			
Trust						
Trust gov. to put country before party				0.71		
Trust MPs to tell truth				0.55		
Trust civil servants				0.68		
Trust councillors				0.73		
Trust police				0.58		
Trust judges				0.78		
Political cynicism						
MPs lose touch				0.42	0.71	
Parties only interest in votes		−0.37		0.38	0.66	
Doesn't matter which party in power					0.47	
British democracy (one question)						0.43

Note: Principal component analysis, using varimax with Kaiser normalization ($n = 885$).

This content downloaded from 103.21.127.76 on Thu, 06 Apr 2017 11:46:35 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

reliability the questions were factor-analysed. They clustered neatly into six components as follows (Table 1).

1. *Political knowledge*. Answers to four factual questions about party policies (a five-point scale from 0 to 4).
2. *Political interest and understanding*. Four questions asking respondents to rate their own interest in and understanding of politics (a twenty-point scale).
3. *Personal efficacy*. Two questions tapping respondents' views about their own capacity to wield political influence (a ten-point scale).
4. *Trust*. Six questions about trust in public officials – the government, MPs, civil servants, local councillors, the police, and judges (a twenty-four point scale).
5. *Political cynicism*. Three questions about MPs losing touch, parties being interested only in votes, and whether it matters which party is in power (a fifteen-point scale).[36]
6. *British democracy*. A single question about how well or badly British democracy works (a four-point scale).

Since the factors make both statistical and intuitive sense it was decided to use them as the dependent variables in the analysis. The first two factors serve as measures of mobilization, and the last four as measures of political malaise.[37]

Control Variables

Not surprisingly, the British Social Attitudes survey shows that the better educated are much more likely to read broadsheet newspapers and watch less television, but are slightly *less* likely to watch television news than the less well-educated (Table 2). Education is also strongly associated with various indicators of malaise and mobilization (knowledge, trust, cynicism, subjective efficacy and interest in politics) and with other important control variables such as class, income and economic activity. The economically inactive (especially the old, the chronically ill and the unemployed) watch a lot of television, and the unemployed do not indulge in the journey-to-work habit of reading a paper. Table 2 also suggests that gender may be an important control variable. Last, party identification is not strongly related to media use, but it might well be a powerful influence on measures of mobilization and malaise.[38] In particular,

[36] Some may prefer to label this factor 'external' or 'system efficacy'.

[37] Cross-tabulations for each question by media use were also examined to ensure that each individual question performed in much the same way as the factor scores.

[38] Ethnicity was also tried as a control variable in regressions but was rarely significant. Age, economic activity and unemployment were also dropped from the regressions because they were rarely significant. Class was a strong variable but caused severe problems of multi-colinearity with income and education, both of which had larger and more consistent associations with both media use and measures of malaise and mobilization. Accordingly, class was also dropped from the regressions.

This content downloaded from 103.21.127.76 on Thu, 06 Apr 2017 11:46:35 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

TABLE 2 *Social, Economic and Political Correlates of Media Use*

	Age	Income	Class	Educ.	Gov. ID	Econ. Activity	Unempl.	Gender
Broadsheet	0.05***	0.24***	0.13***	0.33***	0.08***	0.06***	−0.05**	−0.10***
Total television per week	0.18***	−0.29***	−0.29***	−0.29***	−0.05	−0.26***	0.02	0.03
Television news per week	0.30***	−0.09**	0.04*	−0.05**	0.01	0.19***	0.02	−0.03

Notes: The table reports zero-order correlations.
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$ using a two-tailed test.
Income is scored from 1 to 16. *Class* is scored from 1 (unskilled manual) to 6 (professionals/employers/managers). *Education* is scored from 1 to 5 (no qualifications, O-level/GCSE, A-level, further education, degree or equivalent). *Government identification* is scored 2 for Conservatives, and 1 for supporters of opposition parties. *Economic activity* is scored 2 for the active and 1 for the inactive. *The unemployed* are those who are registered as unemployed, those not registered but actively seeking work, and those not registered or actively seeking work, but wanting a job for at least ten hours per week. *Gender*. Women are scored 2, men 1.
Broadsheet (*The Times, Guardian, Telegraph, Independent* and *Financial Times*) readers are scored 2, all others (regular tabloid and irregular newspaper readers) are scored 1.

This content downloaded from 103.21.127.76 on Thu, 06 Apr 2017 11:46:35 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

those who identify with the government party may suffer less from malaise than those who identify with opposition parties.[39]

EMPIRICAL RESULTS

Newspapers

Preliminary regressions were run with each permutation of newspaper readership to estimate their power separately. For reasons of space, only the four most important are presented in Table 3 and for the moment this table reports only the results of the newspaper variables, not the social and economic control variables, nor the television variables. The figures show there is little difference, in terms of mobilization or malaise, between those who read a tabloid regularly and those who do not read a newspaper regularly. There is a significant difference between those who read a paper and those who do not, but this mostly reflects the contribution of broadsheet readers. Although they account for only 11 per cent of the adult population, they are markedly different from those who read either a tabloid or do not regularly read a paper of any kind. Therefore, later regressions in the study use the variable named 'broadsheet readers' which

TABLE 3 *Newspapers: Regressions of Different Combinations of Newspaper Readership on Measures of Mobilization and Political Malaise*

	Knowledge	Understanding	Internal efficacy	Trust	Cynicism	Democracy works
Broadsheet readers	0.20*** (4.5)	0.27*** (5.7)		0.18*** (3.6)		
Newspaper readers	0.07* (2.1)	0.09** (2.4)				
Tabloid readers					0.07* (2.1)	
All readers/ non-readers	0.16*** (3.4)	0.23*** (4.8)		0.12** (3.1)		

Notes: *Broadsheet readers*: tabloid and non-paper readers are scored (0); broadsheet readers scored 1. *Newspaper readers*: non-readers scored 0; newspaper readers scored 1. *Tabloid readers*: non-readers scored 0; tabloid readers scored 1. *All paper/non-paper readers*: non-readers scored 0; tabloid readers scored 1; broadsheet readers scored 2.

Entries are standardized regression coefficients with t ratios in brackets. Variables are entered simultaneously in the regression equation, with pairwise deletion. *** Significant at 0.001, ** Significant at 0.01, * Significant at 0.05.

Control variables not shown in this summary table are TV General and TV News per week (see Table 4), and education, socio-economic group, government identification, gender, and age (see Table 2).

Empty spaces/columns denote absence of significant coefficients.

[39] Max Kaase and Kenneth Newton, *Beliefs in Government* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 92–4.

This content downloaded from 103.21.127.76 on Thu, 06 Apr 2017 11:46:35 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

contrasts them, on the one hand, with tabloid readers and, on the other, with irregular readers. This has the double advantage of being a strong newspaper variable, which covers the entire adult population, not a sub-section of it.

Electronic Media and the Cinema

Table 4 summarizes regressions between electronic and film media and measures of mobilization and malaise. The figures suggest that all but two of the variables can be dropped from the analysis. The ratio of television news to general television tells us less than the two separate scores.[40] Weighting the

TABLE 4 *Electronic Media and the Cinema: Regressions of Electronic Media Use on Measures of Mobilization and Political Malaise*

	Knowledge	Understanding	Internal efficacy	Trust	Cynicism	Democracy works
TV General	−0.07* (2.4)	−0.09* (2.6)			0.10** (3.2)	
TV News	0.19*** (6.6)	0.22*** (6.8)				0.12*** (3.2)
News Score	−0.11*** (3.7)	−0.16*** (4.9)				−0.08* (2.2)
TV News Attention	0.17*** (6.3)	0.20*** (6.8)	0.09** (3.0)			
Other electronic film media	−0.07* (2.4)	−0.07* (2.4)				

Notes: TV General measures the average hours of television watched during weekdays and scored from 1 (an hour or less per day) to 5 (five hours of more). *TV News* is the number of times television news is watched per week, scored from 0 to 3 (none, 1–3 days a week, 4–6 days a week, and 7 days a week). *News Score* is TV General divided by TV News. This produces a scale from 0 to 174, but the small number of zero scores were deleted from the analysis. *TV News Attention* is TV News multiplied by 1.5 for those who claim to have paid close attention to an item of economic news yesterday, plus TV News multiplied by 1.5 for those who claim to have paid close attention to an item of political news yesterday. This produces a scale from 0 to 21. *Other electronic/film media* is a composite score of those who have cable TV, satellite TV, a home video recorder, and who are more than average cinema-goers. The scale ranges from 0 to 4. Each of these items was tried individually in regressions but to no greater effect than the composite score shown in the table.

Entries are standardized regression coefficients with *t* ratios in brackets. Variables are entered simultaneously in the regression equation, with pairwise deletion. *** Significant at 0.001 ** Significant at 0.01 * Significant at 0.05.

Control variables not shown in this summary table are: All paper/non-paper readers (see Table 3), and Education, Socio-Economic Group, Government Identification, Gender and Age (see Table 2).

Empty spaces/columns denote absence of significant coefficients.

[40] This is because it is not ratios or proportions of television viewing hours that matter, but absolute hours spent watching the television and television news.

This content downloaded from 103.21.127.76 on Thu, 06 Apr 2017 11:46:35 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

amount of television news watched according to the attention paid to political and economic items on the news tells us nothing more than a simple count of the number of times television news was watched during the week. And while simple correlations show that access to cable, satellite and video, and (to a lesser extent) cinema-going habits are quite strongly associated with television use, they are not associated with the mobilization and malaise scores. Therefore, the analysis concentrates on hours of television watched during a working week, and the number of times television news was watched during the week. These two turned out to be the strongest of the home media and cinema variables.[41]

Newspaper and Television

Table 5 shows the final regressions, which run the strongest media variables and the strongest of the social, economic and political controls together. The figures

TABLE 5 *Regressions of Social, Economic, Political and Media Variables on Measures of Mobilization and Political Malaise*

	Knowledge	Understanding	Internal efficacy	Trust	Cynicism	Democracy works
Broadsheet	0.10*** (3.3)	0.17*** (5.2)		0.12*** (3.3)	− 0.07* (2.2)	
TV Total	− 0.07* (2.4)	− 0.09* (2.5)	− 0.09* (2.6)		0.10** (3.1)	
TV News	0.19*** (6.6)	0.22*** (6.8)				0.12** (3.2)
Income	0.14*** (4.2)				− 0.12*** (3.5)	
Education	0.22*** (6.6)	0.24*** (6.5)	0.21*** (5.8)	0.13*** (3.3)	− 0.20*** (5.7)	
Gov ID			0.18*** (5.8)	0.21*** (6.1)	− 0.17*** (5.6)	0.22*** (6.3)
Gender	− 0.25*** (8.7)	0.23*** (7.4)			0.07** (2.2)	
Age		0.10** (2.7)				0.09** (2.6)
R^2	0.27***	0.26***	0.13***	0.08***	0.17***	0.09***
F ratio	45.5	33.9	17.7	9.3	24.1	9.7

Notes: Entries are standardized regression coefficients with t ratios in brackets. All variables are entered simultaneously in the regression equation, with pairwise deletion. ***Significant at 0.001 **Significant at 0.01 *Significant at 0.05. Variables are those defined in Tables 2, 3 and 4.

[41] In turn, hours per working day, and hours per week of television and television news exposure were tried in the regressions but there were little differences between the measures. 'Hours per working day' was used in the final regressions.

This content downloaded from 103.21.127.76 on Thu, 06 Apr 2017 11:46:35 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

confirm the strength of the association between broadsheet reading and political knowledge. Not surprisingly, broadsheet readers also score well on the other measure of mobilization – they rate their own interest in and understanding of politics significantly higher than the rest of the population. At the same time, there is little evidence that newspaper reading is associated with political malaise. On the contrary, broadsheet readers are rather more trusting and slightly less cynical than the rest of the population, while (as Table 3 shows) tabloid and irregular readers do not differ significantly on any of the four measures of malaise. The one statistically significant figure in Table 3, between tabloid reading and political cynicism, is substantively small and does not constitute strong evidence of tabloid-induced political malaise. The tabloids, it seems, are not associated with mobilization, but then nor are they associated with much political malaise either.

The more general television people watch, the less they know about politics, although the regression coefficient is comparatively weak (− 0.07). There is a similarly significant but substantively small and negative association (beta = − 0.09) between watching a lot of television and self-rated political interest and understanding. In other words, watching a lot of general television is weakly associated with political de-mobilization. Of course, at this stage of the argument it should also be made clear that watching a lot of television might also be regard as a measure of de-mobilization. Nevertheless, there is rather little to indicate that general television is associated with political malaise. Heavy television users show some slight signs of low subjective efficacy (beta = − 0.09) and cynicism (beta = 0.10), but watching a lot of television is not associated with political distrust or a poor regard for British democracy. In short, there is some evidence supporting the de-mobilization and videomalaise effects of general television, but it is not at all strong and it is patchy. Watching television news has exactly the opposite effect of watching a lot of television in general. The more people watch television news, the more they know about politics and the higher they rate their own interest, information and understanding of politics. Those who watch television news seven days a week scored 2.5 on the four factual questions, compared with those who watch no television news who score 1.9 (the lowest of any group). Similarly, watching television news is associated with a relatively high self-rated understanding, knowledge and interest in politics.

At the same time, there is little evidence that television news induces political malaise. Television news addicts are no different from those who avoid television news altogether so far as subjective efficacy, distrust and cynicism are concerned. For what it is worth, Table 5 shows a modest association between watching television news and a positive evaluation of British democracy.

There is an interaction effect between types of media use; the more time broadsheet readers spend with general television, the less they know about politics (beta = − 0.12). However, watching a lot of television news does not add significantly to the knowledge of broadsheet readers (beta = 0.05) and it makes little difference to how they rate their interest in and understanding of

This content downloaded from 103.21.127.76 on Thu, 06 Apr 2017 11:46:35 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

politics. Conversely, among tabloid readers, those who watch a lot of television news are better informed than those who watch little (beta = 0.11), and news-watching tabloid readers are also likely to rate their interest in and understanding of politics more highly (beta = 0.20). Once again, the strong associations are with broadsheet newspapers, weaker ones with television news, and little of substantial significance shows up among tabloid readers.

What makes these results particularly interesting is the large and heterogeneous nature of the television news audience. Whereas few (the better educated and higher income groups) read a broadsheet, many spend so much time in front of the television that they also watch a lot of television news, although as much by chance as design apparently. On the one hand, the mobilizing effect of television news is weaker than that of the broadsheet. On the other hand, the penetration of television news is so widespread among the general population that it gets to a far larger and more diverse section of the population than the good newspapers. Fifty-five per cent of the population, most of them tabloid readers, claim to watch television news seven days a week, and 68 per cent claim to have watched the day before they were interviewed. Half of them claim to have paid at least some attention to news items about politics and about the economy.[42]

So ubiquitous is television news watching that regular tabloid readers see as much of it as regular broadsheet readers – both watch the news an average of 5.3 times a week. Compared with the broadsheet figures, the statistical association between television news and the mobilization scores is weaker, but the association is still significant and positive, and it relates not to the 11 per cent of the population which reads a broadsheet, but to half the population which watches television news daily. In short, television news seems to have a mobilizing effect on a large portion of the population, many of whom would not otherwise be exposed to much political news or information. To this extent there is little evidence here to support the idea that falling into the news is associated with videomalaise.

The half of the population that watches television news seven days a week is important in another respect because it helps to resolve one of the cause-and-effect problems created by audience self-selection. The great majority of those who regularly watch television news do not seek it out because they are already interested in politics but, on the contrary, watch television news by accident, as part of their large daily diet of television. They do not watch the news because they are in some way already primed or mobilized or motivated to do so, like broadsheet readers. On the contrary, many have little interest in politics and watch television news only because they are watching television.

[42] An interaction term between the amount of television news and whether attention was paid to items of political and economic news was tried in the regressions (see Table 4), but it does not add significantly to the variance explained by the simple number of hours spent watching television news. Perhaps the measure of attention paid to the news is too blunt, or perhaps it is quantity not quality of news watching that matters.

This content downloaded from 103.21.127.76 on Thu, 06 Apr 2017 11:46:35 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

None the less, they are politically better informed than those who do not watch a lot of television news, although not as well informed as broadsheet readers.[43]

To the extent that those who 'fall into' the news are not self-selected on political grounds, but represent a broad cross-section of the general population, and to the extent that television informs them, we may conclude that this is a television effect, and not some artefact of audience self-selection. Contrary to those who claim that the form of television means that it cannot educate, inform or mobilize, television news seems to do so, politically at least. Television in general is a different story; there is no evidence that watching a lot of television as such does anything to inform or educate the population politically, but at the same time there is not a lot of evidence to suggest that it induces malaise either. It seems that it is not the form of television that counts so much as its content – television news as against general entertainment. In other words, there is no general television effect, as the videomalaise literature tends to assume. Television pulls in different directions according to its content: television news has a mobilizing effect; there are some signs that entertainment television may have an alienating effect, although the signs are not clear or strong. Similarly, it is not the form of the printed word that seems to count as much as its content – tabloid readers are little different from irregular readers in that neither are mobilized or alienated, compared with broadsheet readers who are strongly mobilized.

MEDIA USE, MOBILIZATION AND MALAISE

Mobilisation

Table 6 fleshes out the regression results with factor scores on the six measures of mobilization and malaise for each combination of newspaper reading and television watching. The figures are bi-variate cross-tabulations with none of the important controlling variables that appear in Table 5. None the less, the figures support the conclusions suggested by the regressions. Irrespective of television habits, broadsheet readers are generally more mobilized than tabloid or irregular readers. The latter two groups differ little, whatever their television habits. This underlines the strength of association of mobilization with broadsheet reading, and the lack of any difference between tabloid and irregular readers. Among tabloid and irregular readers, however, those who 'fall into' a lot of television news are as well or better mobilized than those who do not. The least well-mobilized groups in the population are the regular tabloid or irregular paper readers who also avoid general television, or who watch a lot of general television but little television news. The figures in Table 6 support the

[43] In this respect the basic principles seem not to have changed much in the past thirty years, or at least since Blumler observed: 'It is a general rule that TV reaches a less selected audience for any of its fare than does any other medium', and that, as a result, it retains its 'power to inform right down to the lowest motivation group in the sample' (Blumler, 'The Political Effects of Television', pp. 80–1).

This content downloaded from 103.21.127.76 on Thu, 06 Apr 2017 11:46:35 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

TABLE 6 *Mobilization Scores by Newspaper and Television Use*

		Type	% of pop.	Knowledge	Understanding
Irregular paper readers					
TV News	*TV General*				
High	High	TV addicts	13.0	2.1	11.1
Low	High	Entertainment TV	7.0	2.1	9.9
Low	Low	TV avoiders	16.0	2.3	11.0
High	Low	TV news watchers	9.0	2.5	11.7
Tabloid readers					
TV News	*TV General*				
High	High	TV addicts	18.0	2.2	11.2
Low	High	Entertainment TV	9.0	1.9	9.4
Low	Low	TV avoiders	8.0	2.1	10.2
High	Low	TV news watchers	10.0	2.6	11.8
Broadsheet readers					
TV News	*TV General*				
High	High	TV addicts	1.0	3.6	15.1
Low	High	Entertainment TV	0.6	2.4	13.2
Low	Low	TV avoiders	4.0	3.3	13.7
High	Low	TV news watchers	1.0	3.0	14.0

Note: The divisions between 'High' and 'Low' are designed to break the sample, as near as possible, into two equal halves. High TV News is 7 days a weeks (54.8 per cent of the sample) and Low TV News is less than 7 days a week (45.2 per cent). Low TV General is less than 4 hours a day (48.4 per cent), High TV General is more than 4 hours a day (51.6 per cent).

This content downloaded from 103.21.127.76 on Thu, 06 Apr 2017 11:46:35 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

conclusions that watching television news is associated with mobilization, that broadsheet reading and mobilization are strongly associated, and that watching a lot of general television is sometimes weakly associated with indicators of de-mobilization.

Table 7 shows that the malaise scores vary rather little and unsystematically among different groupings of media users. Broadsheet readers tend to show lower levels of malaise whatever their television habits, but, once again, there is little difference between regular tabloid and infrequent paper readers. There is rather weak and patchy evidence that those who watch a lot of television, whatever their newspaper reading habits, tend to suffer rather more from malaise and, conversely, that those who watch a lot of television news, whatever their paper, tend to suffer rather less. However, the differences between groups according to media use are neither large nor consistent and there are enough exceptions to be found in Table 7 to cast doubt on any generalization linking media use and malaise.

Of course, it may be that watching a lot of television is, in itself, a form of political de-mobilization, or at least a good indicator of it. No doubt this is part of the story but it does not seem to be the whole of it because it does not explain why those who happen to watch a lot of television news are more highly mobilized and informed than those who do not. We come back to the idea that television has different effects according to its content and that depending on how it is used by its audiences, deliberately or otherwise, its may be a (weak) force for malaise, or a (rather stronger) force for mobilization.

CONCLUSIONS

The evidence in this article provides qualified support for media malaise theory, in that it shows weak and patchy evidence of an association between political malaise and watching a lot of general television. However, it provides stronger and more systematic evidence for mobilization theory in that reading a broadsheet newspaper is significantly and quite strongly associated with higher levels of political knowledge, higher levels of self-assessed interest and understanding of politics, and, if anything, somewhat lower levels of malaise. Watching a lot of television news has the same sorts of associations, though they are weaker. The associations between tabloid reading and both mobilization and malaise are quite weak, and tabloid readers differ little from non-readers.

The evidence points to three general conclusions. First, even after controlling for income, education, gender, age and party politics, reading a broadsheet is strongly connected with mobilization, not malaise. Secondly, television pulls in different directions, according to its content: television news seems to inform, and mobilize; general television has a weak and patchy association with malaise. And thirdly, television news may have a pervasive effect because a large and diverse portion of the population watches it regularly. Although many 'fall into' the news – rather than 'jumping into' it – they do not seem to suffer from it but, on the contrary, are informed, educated and mobilized. The fact that this large

This content downloaded from 103.21.127.76 on Thu, 06 Apr 2017 11:46:35 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

TABLE 7 *Malaise Scores by Newspaper and Television Use*

		Type	% of pop.	Internal efficacy	Trust	Cynicism	Democracy works
Irregular paper readers							
TV News	*TV General*						
High	High	TV addicts	13.0	4.7	7.2	11.5	3.8
Low	High	Entertainment TV	7.0	4.5	7.2	11.5	3.6
Low	Low	TV avoiders	16.0	5.2	6.5	10.5	3.7
High	Low	TV news watchers	9.0	4.7	6.3	11.6	3.7
Tabloid readers							
TV News	*TV General*						
High	High	TV addicts	18.0	4.3	6.3	12.1	3.7
Low	High	Entertainment TV	9.0	4.5	6.7	11.9	3.6
Low	Low	TV avoiders	8.0	4.8	7.2	11.3	3.8
High	Low	TV news watchers	10.0	4.9	6.5	11.1	3.8
Broadsheet readers							
TV News	*TV General*						
High	High	TV addicts	1.0	5.2	7.4	11.0	3.8
Low	High	Entertainment TV	0.6	5.2	11.6	8.9	4.1
Low	Low	TV avoiders	4.0	5.6	8.8	9.7	3.8
High	Low	TV news watchers	1.0	5.2	7.6	10.0	4.1

Note: For definitions of 'High' and 'Low' see Table 6.

This content downloaded from 103.21.127.76 on Thu, 06 Apr 2017 11:46:35 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

and heterogeneous group of television news watchers is not self-selected, on political grounds, at least, suggests that the association between television news and mobilization is not an artefact of audience self-selection and may well be a genuine media effect.

The evidence suggests that whatever loss of social capital Britain may be suffering is not obviously attributable to the effects of television or the mass media in general. The figures in Tables 6 and 7 show that attitudes of political distrust and cynicism were quite widely spread in Britain in 1996, but neither the regressions nor the cross-tabulations show much variation according to media use, except broadsheet reading.

It is not the form but the content of the media, which matters. In the case of the print media there is a difference between broadsheet readers, on the one hand, and tabloid and non-readers, on the other. In the case of television, the difference is between television news and general television. Contrary to the claim that the television can only amuse and entertain, there is clear evidence in the British survey that watching a lot of television news is associated with higher levels of political information, interest and understanding.

None the less, we should be cautious about making cause and effect statements. This article has talked in terms of associations – variations in indicators of mobilization and malaise that coincide with different types of media use. This is partly because it is exceedingly difficult to untangle cause and effect relationships in mass media research, and because the data analysed here are cross-sectional, not time-series. However, the absence of causal analysis does not detract from the main thrust of the article which shows little association between media use and political malaise: the evidence suggests accepting the null hypothesis that there is little or no association between different types of media use and either mobilization or political malaise. It does not seem sensible to pursue cause-and-effect research when there is little association between the key variables in the first place. Moreover, in so far as many 'fall into' the television news, there is reason to believe that the informing, educating and mobilizing effects of television news are real, rather than an artefact of self-selection.

This conclusion is at odds with a great deal of the American literature, though by no means with all of it.[44] Among the possible explanations for this, two seem to deserve closer investigation. First, it is possible that media effects are deeper, subtler and more pervasive than the sorts of things measured in this article. This is quite possible, but one might expect something to show up in the twenty items in the BSA, which cover a wide variety of questions about political knowledge and attitudes. It might be argued that the impact of the mass media is ubiquitous, and that there is little variation in attitudes because everyone has the same high exposure to the same sort of messages. Yet there is clear evidence of differences

[44] Schudson, *The Power of News*, pp. 16–33; Norris, 'Does Television Erode Social Capital?; Uslaner, 'Social Capital, Television, and the "Mean World" '; Brehm and Rahn, 'Individual Level Evidence for the Causes and Consequences of Social Capital'.

This content downloaded from 103.21.127.76 on Thu, 06 Apr 2017 11:46:35 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms

between broadsheet readers and others, and between television news watchers and others. At the same time, there is little evidence of such differences between television addicts and others, in spite of the fact that 10 per cent of the sample watches less than an hour a day while another 10 per cent watches more than six times as much.

The second possibility concerns the different media systems of Britain and the United States. Britain has four quality national daily papers (five if one counts the *Financial Times*), and four quality Sunday newspapers. Americans rely more heavily on less heavyweight local papers.[45] More importantly, perhaps, commercial television in the United States (McNeil–Lehrer, the main in-depth television news programme in the United States, notwithstanding) may have a particular set of associations different from whatever is left of Britain's Reithian public service television.[46] This suggestion, however, takes us into uncharted comparative waters, which will probably have to be thoroughly explored before much more headway can be made on the issue of mass media effects. Meanwhile, the British data does not suggest a strong connection between mass media use and either media malaise or a decline in social capital.

[45] Russell J. Dalton, Paul A. Beck, and Robert Huckfelt, 'Partisan Cues and the Media: Information Flows in the 1992 Presidential Election', *American Political Science Review*, 92 (1998), 111–26, at p. 113.

[46] Dimock and Popkin, 'Political Knowledge', p. 233, suggest this when they write: 'The difference between NBC and BBC matters.' Differences between BBC, ITV and Channel 4 news may also matter, but this takes us far beyond the scope of the BSA survey.

This content downloaded from 103.21.127.76 on Thu, 06 Apr 2017 11:46:35 UTC
All use subject to http://about.jstor.org/terms