

do not vary greatly if one turns the television dial, but stations spend hundreds of thousands of dollars annually for audience research.

One rating service offers its reasons for monitoring viewer patterns:

"Arbitron Television News Barometer makes it possible for you to read the minds of known news viewers... Every area of your station's news performance is covered: content, personalities, environment, station image... You'll see what your strengths and weaknesses are, relative to your competition... If you want to stay or become the number one news program in town, contact...."

The pressures incumbent on all stations to be number one are felt in the newsroom. There is a real concern, however, among news editors to combine editorial competence with the necessary entertainment factor, and there are numerous examples of superb local and national news coverage. A 1973 Roper study shows that more Americans look to television than any other medium as their "most credible" news source, and Ben Bagdikian adds that "no entertainment program has ever reached more households than [major news] events."

How effective is local television news, however, in functioning, as Denis Stairs asks "as a bearer of intelligence, as a purveyor of prescriptions?"

Irving Kristol, quoted by Alexander Craig, in the International Journal, calls television "the greatest disaster that journalism has ever experienced... [it] magnifies and institutionalizes the ancient simplicities." One may debate Mr. Kristol, but it is true that even the largest stations have but several film crews available for service throughout a day. Enticing a crew to a planned "news event" is a difficult task -- even for professionals -- for the amount of events perceived as newsworthy by the news director far exceeds the filming capabilities of his crews.