

Consumer Demand for Cynical and Negative News Frames | The International Journal of Press/Politics

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In this research article from 2014, Marc Trussler and Stuart Soroka argue that one reason why negative and strategic/horse-race coverage is so common is because this type of news is what consumers prefer.

Abstract: Commentators regularly lament the proliferation of both negative and/or strategic (“horse race”) coverage in political news content. The most frequent account for this trend focuses on news norms and/or the priorities of news journalists. Here, we build on recent work arguing for the importance of demand-side, rather than supply-side, explanations of news content. In short, news may be negative and/or strategy-focused because that is the kind of news that people are interested in. We use a lab study to capture participants’ news-selection biases, alongside a survey capturing their stated news preferences. Politically interested participants are more likely to select negative stories. Interest is associated with a greater preference for strategic frames as well. And results suggest that behavioral results do not conform to attitudinal ones. That is, regardless of what participants say, they exhibit a preference for negative news content.

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