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**Who Talks, What They Talk About, and
How Much They Say:**

**A Study of Bulletin Structure and Source Use in New Zealand
Free-to-Air Television News Programmes**

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Abstract

Free-to-air television news is an accessible and popular means through which audiences can gain knowledge and understanding about the world. Therefore, the nature of the news provided has important implications for the opportunities audiences have to become informed about events and issues, and to use this knowledge to participate in social decision-making. The structure and content of news bulletins reflect the decisions made by broadcasters about the topics that are considered to be important, and which sources should have the opportunity to be represented. Thus, the goal of this research was to compare the structure and content of the news provided by New Zealand's national free-to-air news programmes; *ONE News* (TVNZ), *3 News* (TV3), *Prime News* (Prime Television), and *Te Kāea* (Māori Television).

A content analysis of one constructed week of the four news programmes was undertaken, focusing on four general areas of interest. First, the profile of the news bulletins was examined (i.e., the proportion of the bulletin allocated to different segments of the news, the duration of main news stories, the origin of production of main news stories, the proportion of New Zealand and international news, and the topics included in the news). Second, the research investigated the identity of the types of sources selected by the broadcasters for inclusion in locally produced main news stories. Third, the frequency and duration of elite and non-élite source speech was examined. Finally, the extent to which journalists speak on camera in news stories was also investigated.

The study showed that the four programmes generally conformed to the 'standard profile' of modern television news bulletins; the programmes included considerable amounts of non-news content and the news topics often reflected entertainment values, rather than focusing on serious issues. A further significant characteristic of the bulletins was that elite sources were more likely to be included in news stories on all programmes and generally had greater opportunities to speak. However, in many respects it appears that *Te Kāea* provides an alternative news bulletin compared to the other three channels, by focusing on a wider range of news topics, including more non-élite sources in stories, and giving all sources considerably more time to share their views. *Te Kāea* seems to broadcast a news programme that makes a compromise between the entertainment values which are entrenched in contemporary television news, and the broader Māori Television mandate to inform and educate the public. This

contrasts with the more homogenous (in terms of the characteristics examined in this research) news programmes offered by the *ONE News*, *3 News*, and *Prime News*.

This study concludes that the nationally available free-to-air news programmes currently broadcast on New Zealand television fulfil the traditional news functions of informing and educating the public in only a very narrow sense. The deregulated news environment is poised to undergo further transformation with an anticipated increase in convergence among news media and the emergence of more television news providers. The challenge within this commercial environment is for *ONE News*, *3 News*, *Prime News*, and *Te Kāea* to deliver on their stated commitments to provide information and promote debate on the important issues of the day.

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