

Delivering the news with humor makes young adults more likely to remember and share

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In the early decades of televised news, Americans turned to the stern faces of newsmen like Walter Cronkite, Tom Brokaw, and Dan Rather as trusted sources for news of the important events in America and around the world, delivered with gravitas and measured voices. The rise of comedy-news programs, helmed by the likes of Jon Stewart, Stephen Colbert, John Oliver, Trevor Noah, and Samantha Bee, raised concerns over the blending of entertainment and news. But could the merging of humor and news actually help inform the public?

In fact, new research suggests that humor may help keep people informed about politics. A study from the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania and the School of Communication at Ohio State University found that, when compared to non-humorous news clips, viewers are not only more likely to [share](#) humorously presented news but are also more likely to remember the content from these segments.

"For democracy to work, it is really important for people to engage with news and politics and to be informed about public affairs," says senior author Emily Falk, Professor of Communication, Psychology, and Marketing at Annenberg. "We wanted to test whether humor might make news more socially relevant, and therefore motivate people to remember it and share it."

The researchers recruited young adults (18-34 years old) to watch a variety of news clips, which they designed to vary, so that some ended with jokes and others did not. In addition to collecting data on participants' brain activity using fMRI technology, the researchers administered a [memory test](#) to determine how much information

participants retained from watching the clips. The researchers also asked participants to answer questions about how likely they would be to share the news clips with others.

Participants were more likely to remember information about politics and government policy when it was conveyed in a humorous rather than non-humorous manner and were more willing to share the information online. The findings also show that humorous news clips elicited greater activity in brain regions associated with thinking about what other people think and feel, which highlights the social nature of comedy.

"Our findings show that humor stimulates activity in [brain regions](#) associated with [social engagement](#), improves memory for political facts, and increases the tendency to share political information with others," says lead author Jason Coronel, Assistant Professor of Communication at OSU. "This is significant because entertainment-based media has become an important source of political [news](#), especially for young adults. Our results suggest that [humor](#) can increase knowledge about politics."

More information: Jason C Coronel et al, Political Humor, Sharing, and Remembering: Insights from Neuroimaging, *Journal of Communication* (2020). [DOI: 10.1093/joc/jqaa041](https://doi.org/10.1093/joc/jqaa041)

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