HAPPINESS IN THE AGE OF INFORMATION

Information Sources and Well-being: Japan and the U.S.

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Summary

This study explores the impact of various factors, particularly information sources, on the cognitive dimensions of subjective well-being (SWB) in Japan and the United States. Drawing on data from the World Values Survey Wave 7, we find that different sources of information influence well-being, measured by happiness and life satisfaction, in distinct ways across countries. We analyze the implications of these findings and offer policy recommendations in the context of the ongoing debate on information censorship.

Literature Review

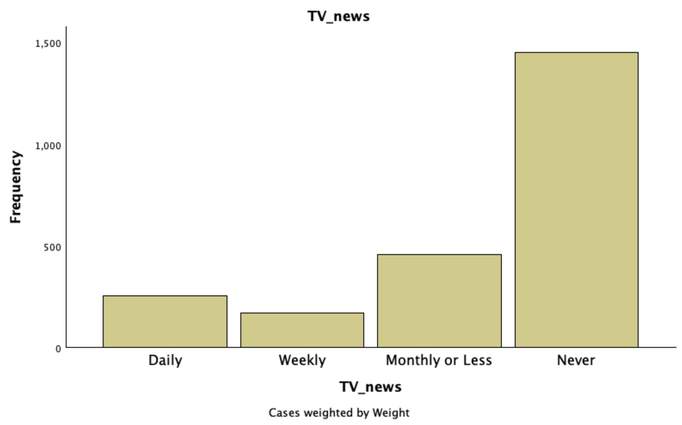
Diener et al., 2002 | Subjective well-being refers to how individuals experience and evaluate their lives and it varies across people/time.
Dolan, Peasgood, & White, M., 2008 | There are three pillars to subjective well-being: economic, sociopolitical, and environmental.
Helliwell, Diener, & Kahneman, 2010 | Differences in evaluation within and across countries tend to be greater for life satisfaction rather than emotions.

Ordinal Probit Regression Model

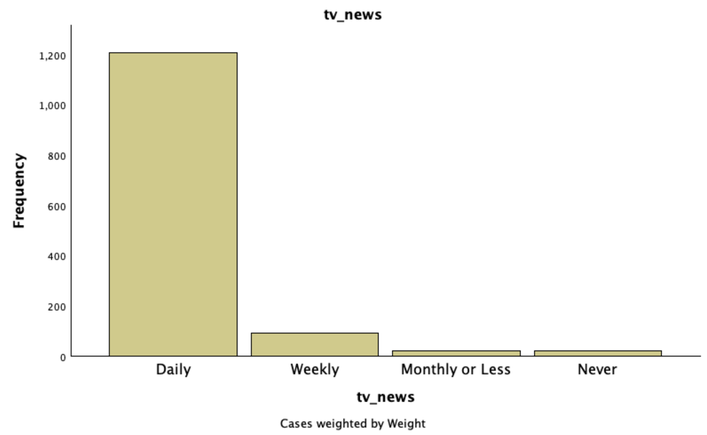
$$Y_{ij} = \beta_{0i} + \beta_{1i} V_{ij} + \beta_{2i} O_{ij} + \beta_{3i} X_{ij} + \cdots + \varepsilon_{ij}$$

where Y_{ij} is SWB of individual j in country i, V TV News, O Closeness to Town, X other variables.

The United States & Japan



Frequency of TV News consumption, US



Frequency of TV News consumption, Japan

Variables	B Japan	Std. Error Japan	B U.S.	Std. Error U.S.
DV | Happiness | Not at all happy	-7.373***	1.1521	-2.891***	.4172
DV | Happiness | Somewhat happy	-5.301***	1.0910	-1.530***	.4050
DV | Happiness | Happy	-2.928***	1.0773	.797**	.4036
Political Importance | Not at all important	-.704**	.2790	.035	.1532
Political Importance | Somewhat Important	-.267*	.1572	-.081	.0967
Political Importance | Important	.006	.1368	-.217**	.0927
Political Importance | Very Important	0[a]	.	0[a]	.
Government Confidence | Not at all Confident	-.588	.3822	-.469***	.1367
Government Confidence | Somewhat Confident	-.374	.3506	-.451***	.1312
Government Confidence | Mostly Confident	-.359	.3437	-.390***	.1314
Government Confidence | Very Confident	0[a]	.	0[a]	.
Lower Class	-1.341***	.4875	-.151	.2645
Lower Middle Class	-.834*	.4847	.302	.2616
Upper Middle Class	-.453	.4927	.496*	.2619
Upper Class	0[a]	.	0[a]	.
Not Close to Town	.081	.2989	-1.016***	.1701
Somewhat Close to Town	-.305	.2026	-.442***	.0896
Mostly Close to Town	-.177*	.1071	-.362***	.0744
Very Close to Town	0[a]	.	0[a]	.
Education | Primary Education	.469	.3176	.452***	.1059
Education | Post Secondary (Non-Degree)	.670**	.3209	.101	.0991
Education | Bachelor's or Equivalent	.256	.3119	-.031	.1054
Education | Master's/Doctoral or Equivalent	0[a]	.	0[a]	.
Poor Health	-.724***	.1743	-1.017***	.1553
Medium Health	-.637***	.1154	-.711***	.0782
Healthy	0[a]	.	0[a]	.
Little/No Control of Life	-1.048***	.1688	-.672***	.1231
Some Control of Life	-.341***	.1224	-.493***	.0716
Control of Life	0[a]	.	0[a]	.
Employment | Full-Time	-.564	.6466	.136	.1074
Employment | Part-Time	-.499	.6508	.299**	.1209
Employment | Not in Labor Force	-.454	.6562	.226*	.1193
Employment | Unemployed	0[a]	.	0[a]	.
Age	-.057**	.0206	.041***	.0117
Age Squared	.000 *	.0002	.000***	.0001
Political Scale | Left	.162	.1360	-.165	.0864
Political Scale | Middle	.207*	.1224	.000	.0799
Political Scale | Right	0[a]	.	0[a]	.
Info Source | TV News | Daily	.069	.3924	-.130	.1012
Info Source | TV News | Weekly	.128	.4289	-.410***	.1194
Info Source | TV News| Monthly or Less	-.264	.5388	-.019	.0798
Info Source | TV News | Never	0[a]	.	0[a]	.

Japanese SWB is positively influenced by TV News

- In Japan, increasing consumption of TV News yields an increasingly positive effect on SWB (opposite effect in the United States).
- 86% of Japanese respondents feel 'close' or 'very close' to their communities, compared to only 71.4% of United States respondents.

United States		TV News	Local Vote
TV News	Pearson Correlation	1	.178**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001
	N	2340	2308
Voting in Local Elections (Local Vote)	Pearson Correlation	.178**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	
	N	2308	2550

*In the US, as TV News consumption increases, voting in local elections decreases.

Implications: Localizing News

What makes the difference between Japanese News and American News?

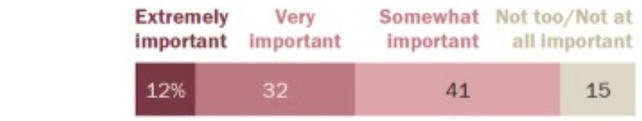
1 | QUALITY & RELIABILITY: In Japan, there is penal code to punish crimes of defamation, the Broadcasting Act which states that a broadcasting service must publish, in good faith, factual information. If disinformation is published, the broadcasting service must, within three months, issue a correction of the misreported information.
2 | PREVALENCE: Japanese news is distributed mostly via a nationally funded channel, NHK. Due to densely populated areas, this is an efficient tactic, which provides relevant news to much of the population.

How can we, in America, build a sense of local community and unity with the increasing sprawl, socially and physically?

According to the **Aspen Institute**, there are three ways that **local journalism** can bring a community together:

1 | HOLD POWERFUL PEOPLE ACCOUNTABLE
2 | PROVIDE USEFUL INFORMATION
3 | BUILD A SENSE OF COMMUNITY

From a survey by **Pew Research Center**, 85% of Americans believe that local media is at least somewhat important.



Note: Respondents who did not answer are not shown.
Source: Pew Research Center survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 22-28, 2024.
"Americans' Changing Relationship With Local News"

Importance of Local Media in US Community, Pew Research Center

Press Forward

Press Forward is a national initiative gaining momentum as they work to strengthen local newsrooms, satisfy news deserts, and combat disinformation.

With stronger, more localized newsrooms, we can accommodate the needs of our sprawling population and increase consumer utility of news.

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