

Use of framing in online healthcare reporting by local news stations

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Introduction

This research project aims to look critically at what differences in quality and style, if any, could be identified in online news coverage of healthcare in the Orlando-Daytona-Melbourne Nielsen market area. With the internet accounting for an ever-increasing portion of how consumers get information, it is crucial that local news websites keep up with the demands of their audiences. Since Florida is known to have an older population, a topic like healthcare arguably should carry more weight to stations here than it does to those in other locations. Regarding health communications specifically, there is a unique dynamic of newsworthiness that is often limited by legal or

confidentiality issues. An option for expanding this research could be to cross-reference the online articles with broadcast footage to see how a change in medium impacts the way the information is presented. Most of the news-produced content is highly episodic in nature, focusing more on individual struggles and situations rather than holistic analysis. However, while is can be less visually compelling, thematic coverage often allows for a deeper kind of analysis that explicitly references societal and governmental factors that played a role in creating the circumstances of the article or news segment at hand.

Methods

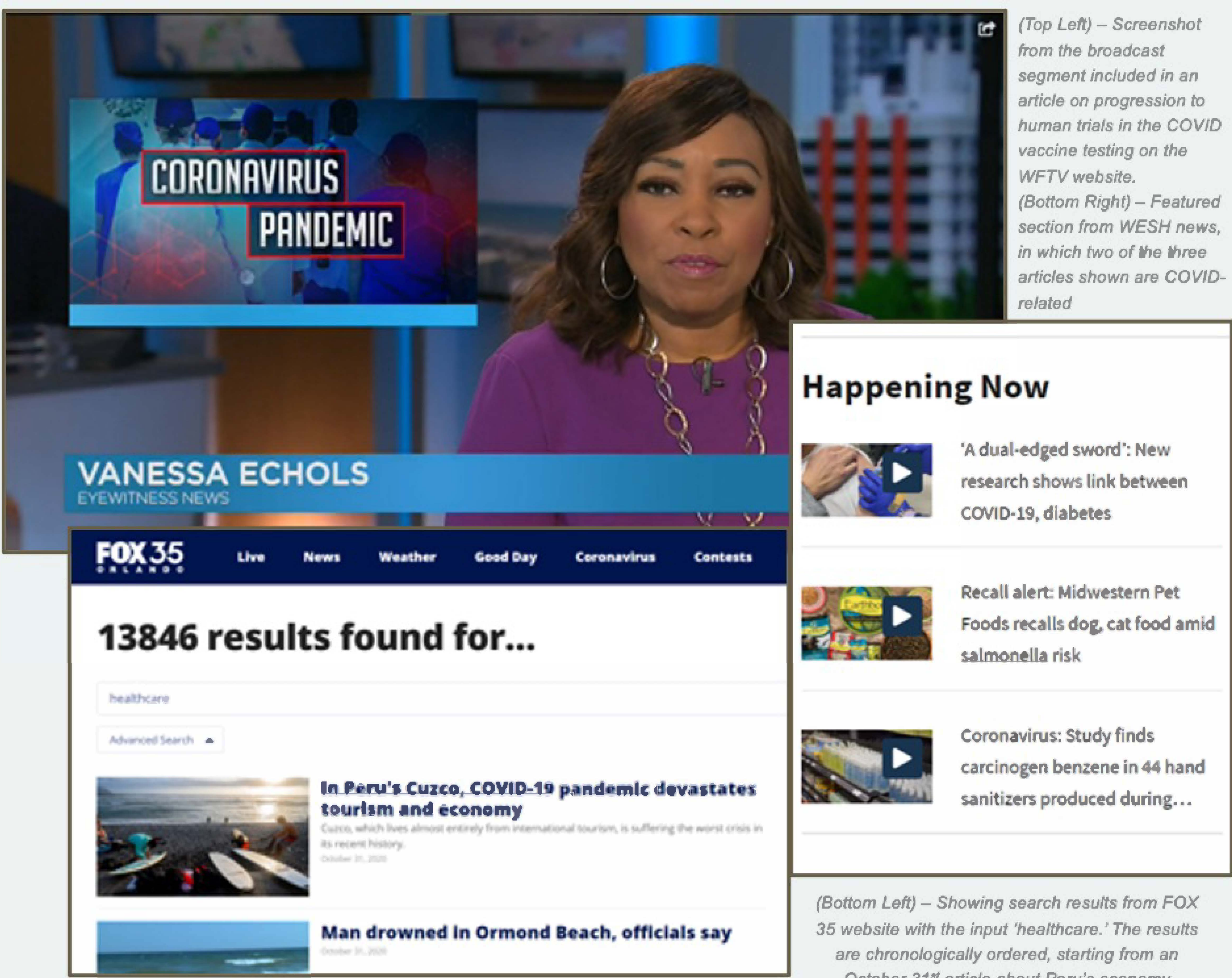
In terms of selecting online articles to review from these organizations, the goal was to collect 10 articles from each station over the course of five months - the beginning of June 2020 to the end of October 2020, which leads directly into the 2020 Presidential election. The search functionality of websites differed across each of the four usable stations, so the keyword was simplified to just ‘healthcare.’ ‘Usable stations’ (Table 1-A in data), are the ones with a network affiliation that also run original newscasts, as determined by using a TV guide/schedule service. Factors like headline subject, length, and quote usage contributed to the process of coding stories as either mostly episodic or thematic in nature.

Data

Searching the term ‘healthcare’ produced 23 results for WESH, 1,269 for WFTV, and 132,853 for WOFL.

Table 1-A				
Usable stations				
Callsign	Network	FCC Licensee	Location	Listed on...
WESH	NBC	Hearst Properties	Daytona Beach	NoCable, Station Index, Changing Newscasts
WKMG-TV	CBS	Orsaham Media Group, Orlando	Orlando	NoCable, Station Index, Changing Newscasts
WFTV	ABC	N/A	Orlando	NoCable, Station Index, Changing Newscasts
WOFL	FOX	Fox Television Stations	Orlando	NoCable, Station Index, Changing Newscasts

Callsigns for the four used stations in the Orlando-Daytona-Melbourne area, as well as their license affiliate and what major network they are run by.



Results

Utilizing the mass communications theory of framing, it is possible to distinguish whether a piece of media is thematic or episodic in nature, just as Wu et al. 2018 did in their 2018 study, which made a differentiation between negative or positive images in vaccine-related articles.

June 11	FOX	LV police, Breonna Taylor	1,380 words	6 photo, embedded tweet, 2 docs, embedded FB, 1 vid	Crystal Bonvillian (Cox Media Group)	Episodic
June 16	FOX	Fed reserve warns damage	635 words	3 vids	Martin Coutsinger (AP)	Thematic

Categories used to analyze sampled news articles, including multimedia components, author, and whether it is thematic or episodic. Word count and headline topic were also used to evaluate the context of how the frames were applied.

Conclusions

One of the most basic functions of news analysis projects is to continue to hold news stations accountable. Even local stations are guardians of information and can do a lot to decide what the public information level is on certain topics

In current times, public health has become a hot button issue, but it hasn’t always been that way and soon the spotlight will inevitably fade. That’s why it’s so important to use this time of higher-than-average attention to look at the reporting methods used and overall quality of information, so we know what standards should be expected going forward. An option for expanding this research could be to cross-reference the online articles with broadcast footage to see how a change in medium impacts the way the information is presented.

(Top Left) – Screenshot from the broadcast segment included in an article on progression to human trials in the COVID vaccine testing on the WFTV website. (Bottom Right) – Featured section from WESH news, in which two of the three articles shown are COVID-related

Happening Now

'A dual-edged sword': New research shows link between COVID-19, diabetes

Recall alert: Midwestern Pet Foods recalls dog, cat food amid salmonella risk

Coronavirus: Study finds carcinogen benzene in 44 hand sanitizers produced during...

(Bottom Left) – Showing search results from FOX 35 website with the input 'healthcare.' The results are chronologically ordered, starting from an October 31st article about Peru's economy