

Media, Tigers, and Bats, Oh My: Hysteria in the Media

Darci Drylie Emily Renaud

Bats

Through curating bat-related cases on HealthMap, an apparent shift in attention is present in cases of diseases involving bats. In looking at the ongoing Ebola outbreak, a zoonotic disease, news outlets have turned reporting into a media frenzy. With very little information, right or wrong, news companies will publish their findings as quickly as possible just to be the first one on the story, later retracting or modifying their information to get the facts out. These “facts” should be presented the first time, and not kept as a mere afterthought. With the Ebola outbreak, a particular news story on the origins of the disease’s source was first posted on December 30, 2014. This single story started a media firestorm, in which large and small news corporations began presenting their own take of the story, embellishing and intensifying it along the way. HealthMap is able to keep an archive of these such stories and through curating the main story can be put at the forefront. On the particular story of Ebola’s origins, duplicates ran until January 19, 2015. In the 21 days following the original post, 64 duplicate stories followed suit, all pertaining to the same topic and coverage. In comparison, a disease only affecting bats, White-Nose Syndrome, kills millions of bats each year and is devastating their population. A story covering the recent decline of this disease in bats was posted to HealthMap in January and had a single duplicate. White-Nose Syndrome compared to Ebola has a far greater death rate, but because it does not infect humans or cause any direct major concern for them, the disease goes unnoticed and underreported. It is apparent that in this age of the media, news coverage targets audiences in a way to elicit excitement and hysteria. For this reason, news corporations only go after intense stories that will spark panic or commotion rather than hard-hitting stories that could produce a greater awareness of the issues around us.



Problem

The topic of our research is the media’s perception of breaking news and their approach in reporting information. Through working with Health Map, we have come to the conclusion that the media often portrays exciting and tantalizing information to its audience whether it is accurate or not. More often than not we see duplication after duplication of articles about a baby tiger being born or Ebola in your neighborhood, rather than an article on tiger poaching and trading or bats being a new source of sustenance leading to the spread of disease. Our focus for this research is to open the eyes of media viewers and to show them not to take every article they read verbatim; to look outside the media realm and educate themselves on the real issues.

Abstract

This research explores various news outlet coverage of breaking news. In an age where media is continuously developing and reaching larger audiences, news outlets are consistently writing to outdo one another and bring readers to their story. This often leads to misrepresentation of content and an urge of public hysteria. The research examines this issue by placing a focus on the poaching and trading of tigers, as well as the spread of zoonotic diseases in bats. These two areas of news represent two different aspects of breaking coverage. By exploring the issues associated with tigers, audiences will often discover news relating to a tiger being on the loose or an attack that has occurred. Very little is reported in terms of encroachment on their natural habitat or a poaching arrest that has been made. This type of breaking news represents an area of underrepresentation. On the other hand, research has demonstrated that through zoonotic diseases in bats, the recent Ebola outbreak took center stage across news media outlets. In this particular case, coverage was misrepresented, sensationalized, and induced hysteria across large audiences. Curating performed through Health Map lends direct access to the breaking of accurate, authentic, news stories. Outside of this manner of reporting, stories are often misconstrued and duplicated to reach broader audiences. However, by curating news stories this can be prevented while the reliable source is found and accurately portrayed as the breaking source. This research examines the accurate approach to news coverage and the effects that result from misrepresentation and intensification of false news.



Conclusion

When addressing media coverage of news stories, the primary issue that arises is misrepresentation of content. The research emphasizes that audiences must investigate their news source to ensure it is providing authentic and detailed information that adequately pertains to the topic at hand. In the process of distributing “hard hitting news” the information is generally manipulated to induce controversy and panic. Critical news should not need to be molded just to get the attention of the audience, but rather relays the information in a factual, unsaturated manner.

This form of true breaking news is becoming clouded by news sources that only seek excitement and over exaggeration in their delivery of content. Through overexposure of media headlines and stories, we have become accustomed to looking for the next exciting story and not necessarily stories of importance. This is where our research highlights the necessity to overlook the fabricated headlines, and look to the original sources. Through our involvement with Health Map, we are in direct link with content that is of high importance and in need of reporting, such as the tiger poaching and trading and spread of zoonotic disease via bats. However, in doing this work, there are often numerous stories found to be duplications and serve no purpose other than added attention and hysteria to a story that is superfluous. In identifying stories through this process, we have found that the original “breaking” source is predominantly based solely on the facts, there are no exaggerations, or catchy headlines, just the facts. This is the information that audiences need to strive for and be aware of.

Tigers

Too often news stories of significant value are brushed aside and more hysterical stories are on the forefront. In the case of tigers, news sources typically discuss stories of tigers on the loose or someone being attacked by tigers. However, the more significant events that need to be shared are stories on tiger poaching and tiger trade. Through curating stories about tigers on Health Map, the difference between hysteric media covered stories and factual breaking stories from HealthMap is very apparent. In a recent look at the CNN News website, after reviewing ten pages of stories on the keyword search “tiger”, only three articles pertained to trade and poaching. With that said, the majority of the articles were about Tiger Woods, baby tigers being born, a tiger loose in Disney Paris, and tiger attacks.



The focus for curating tiger stories on HealthMap is on tigers being poached or traded and those who are arrested for the illegal actions. The issue of tiger poaching and trading is vital because the species is near extinction. In the past 100 years, the population has decreased from 100,000 to less than 3,200 tigers. Poaching and trade has become prevalent in the past ten years and needs to be at the head of news reports. HealthMap depicts whether stories are breaking, warning, context, and no importance. Breaking stories get posted to the “map” because they are of high importance such as, arrests for poaching or trade. Warning stories will consist of content covering suspects for poaching or trade. Context stories are factual stories about tigers. Lastly, stories curated as no importance are stories that are about tigers being born in zoos, on the loose, etc. It is stories like these of no importance that headline news.

Methods

Our method has been the analysis of various media outlets’ depiction of breaking news. We work first hand with the literature through curating news articles in depth with Health Map. In following news relating to the poaching and trading of tigers and the spread of zoonotic diseases in bats, we navigate through various headlining stories and determine breaking news content. These breaking stories are based on new outbreaks of disease and arrests made in relation to tigers. In reviewing stories related to our focus on these animals, we have also taken into consideration other sources of media to support our research. These other sources of media stem from news outlets outside of Health Map and make reports on the same animals. Our analysis begins with where the stories start to differ in their presentations of what is worthy of breaking news and what becomes neglected and underreported.

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