

Content Analysis:

Assessing Bias of Local Newspapers toward Local Learning Institutions

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Grant Warren Sherson
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Definitions

This paper is an exercise in content analysis that is concerned with the perception of a university as more newsworthy than a polytechnic. One factor that indicates this bias is the number of articles mentioning a university, compared with a polytechnic, in a paper local to both institutions

Sample

The universe includes all local newspapers in Palmerston North. The Tribune, Evening Standard and Guardian all fit this category. The Guardian was selected initially as it is delivered free and contains more news than the Tribune. The Evening Standard is a daily and was originally discounted as it would require further sample selection to spread analysis over a reasonable time period to avoid 'systematic bias' (Wimmer & Dominick, 1997, p118) The first trial analysis consisted of a sample of one years copies of the weekly Guardian newspaper as held in the city library.

Coding

Two measures were to be used where any editorial heading (specifically excluding advertisements) plus any picture caption (only the caption of the image not the representation or text within the image was to be measured). The unit of observation was any item mentioning either Massey University or UCOL [Universal College of Learning]

Where the measures contained the text Massey or UCOL they were to be counted as instances of the theme being measured. Terms relating to Massey other than the university were not to be counted.

Where both terms were contained in the measure they were both to be recorded.

A trial coding revealed that the sample was not going to provide enough instances and therefore was not an appropriate measure. From a total of 10 copies of the Guardian only three instances were counted.

A sample change to the Evening Standard also revealed low instances when confining the instance to the title or caption. A new unit of observation was defined as the occurrence of either of the texts appearing in the content of editorial within the local focussed section of the paper, specifically the first three pages. As mentioned, the Evening Standard is a daily paper so a shorter time frame was defined - A six week period from 7th February to 20th March.

Coders were asked to read through the articles on the first three pages of the Evening Standard from 7th February to 20th March and record the number of articles on each page that mentioned Massey University and record the number of articles on each page that mentioned UCOL

Coding

The first three pages of thirty eight newspapers were coded providing 114 coded pages. 102 of the pages were coded the same by both coders giving an intercoder reliability of 0.9 using the Holsti formula (Wimmer & Dominick, 1997, p128). Where the coding was not in agreement there was often a pair of disparate results where it appears that an article was simply coded to the wrong page of the paper. (Bold results in the table Appendix 1 identifies items coded differently by the coders.)

Results

The text for this analysis is a commercial local newspaper in Palmerston North. It is the only daily newspaper serving the city of 70,000 people. There are two free weekly papers in Palmerston North. The Guardian delivered on Thursdays and the Tribune (printed by the same group as the Evening Standard) delivered on Sundays (the only day not covered by the Evening Standard).

A tabulated count of the results identified 66 articles mentioning Massey University and 29 articles mentioning UCOL. As a ratio Massey gets reported nearly two and a half times more often than UCOL. (2.3). A closer look at the front page data reveals an even greater

disparity. Mentions of Massey on the front page of the Evening Standard are close to three and a half times greater than a mention of UCOL. (3.3)

What have you learned.

It appears from the numbers that the hypothesis is correct and that the Palmerston North Evening Standard reports a disproportionate amount relating to the local University in comparison to the local Polytechnic.

The conclusion however is not as simple as that. There are areas that need to be considered to be able to correctly confirm the hypothesis. The size and significance of the two institutions has not been included in the measure. Massey University teaches around four times the number of local students and this means four times as much chance for a student from that institution to be involved in a newsworthy event. There is considerably more research undertaken at Massey (UCOL only has 3 degree programmes that demand a research component).

Another issue is the timing of the sample. The sample was coded for a period when UCOL was in the middle of first birthday celebrations for its new innercity campus and also the time before many of the students at Massey had enrolled (a quiet time in the Massey year).

The results provide a good starting point for further analysis that would need to allow for the influence of institution size and the timing.

References

Wimmer, R.D. & Dominick, J.R. (1997) Mass media research, an introduction. Belmont.
Wadsworth Publishing Company

Appendix 1

Data for Content Analysis of the terms 'Massey University' or 'UCOL' on pages of the Palmerston North Evening Standard. Discrepancies between coders indicated as bolded dates.

Date	Page	Massey	Ucol
7/02/00	1	0	0
7/02/00	2	0	0
7/02/00	3	0	0
8/02/00	1	1	0
8/02/00	2	0	0
8/02/00	3	0	0
9/02/00	1	1	0
9/02/00	2	0	0
9/02/00	3	1	1
10/02/00	1	1	0
10/02/00	2	2	2
10/02/00	3	1	1
11/02/00	1	0	0
11/02/00	2	0	1
11/02/00	3	0	1
12/02/00	1	0	0
12/02/00	2	1	0
12/02/00	3	0	0
13/02/00	1		
13/02/00	2		
13/02/00	3		
14/02/00	1	0	1
14/02/00	2	0	0
14/02/00	3	3	0
15/02/00	1	1	0
15/02/00	2	0	0
15/02/00	3	3	0
16/02/00	1	0	0
16/02/00	2	0	0
16/02/00	3	0	0
17/02/00	1	0	0
17/02/00	2	2	0

17/02/00	3	1	1
18/02/00	1	0	0
18/02/00	2	0	0
18/02/00	3	0	0
19/02/00	1	0	0
19/02/00	2	0	0
19/02/00	3	0	0
20/02/00	1		
20/02/00	2		
20/02/00	3		
21/02/00	1	1	1
21/02/00	2	0	0
21/02/00	3	0	0
22/02/00	1	1	1
22/02/00	2	0	0
22/02/00	3	1	1
23/02/00	1	0	0
23/02/00	2	0	0
23/02/00	3	0	1
24/02/00	1	1	0
24/02/00	2	5	2
24/02/00	3	0	0
25/02/00	1	3	0
25/02/00	2	1	1
25/02/00	3	0	0
26/02/00	1	0	0
26/02/00	2	1	1
26/02/00	3	1	0
27/02/00	1		
27/02/00	2		
27/02/00	3		
28/02/00	1	0	0
28/02/00	2	0	0
28/02/00	3	0	0
29/02/00	1	0	0
29/02/00	2	0	1
29/02/00	3	0	0
1/03/00	1	0	0
1/03/00	2	0	0

1/03/00	3	0	0
2/03/00	1	0	0
2/03/00	2	3	2
2/03/00	3	1	0
3/03/00	1	0	0
3/03/00	2	0	0
3/03/00	3	0	0
4/03/00	1	1	0
4/03/00	2	0	1
4/03/00	3	1	1
5/03/00	1		
5/03/00	2		
5/03/00	3		
6/03/00	1	0	0
6/03/00	2	0	0
6/03/00	3	2	0
7/03/00	1	1	0
7/03/00	2	0	0
7/03/00	3	1	0
8/03/00	1	0	0
8/03/00	2	0	0
8/03/00	3	0	0
9/03/00	1	1	0
9/03/00	2	4	0
9/03/00	3	2	0
10/03/00	1	0	0
10/03/00	2	0	0
10/03/00	3	0	0
11/03/00	1	2	0
11/03/00	2	1	0
11/03/00	3	0	0
12/03/00	1		
12/03/00	2		
12/03/00	3		
13/03/00	1	0	0
13/03/00	2	0	0
13/03/00	3	0	1
14/03/00	1	0	0
14/03/00	2	0	0

14/03/00	3	1	0
15/03/00	1	0	1
15/03/00	2	0	0
15/03/00	3	0	1
16/03/00	1	0	0
16/03/00	2	3	2
16/03/00	3	2	0
17/03/00	1	1	0
17/03/00	2	0	0
17/03/00	3	1	1
18/03/00	1	1	1
18/03/00	2	0	0
18/03/00	3	0	0
19/03/00	1		
19/03/00	2		
19/03/00	3		
20/03/00	1	1	1
20/03/00	2	0	0
20/03/00	3	0	0
21/03/00	1	2	0
21/03/00	2	1	0
21/03/00	3	0	0