

ABSTRACT

As data visualizations and interactive graphics are gaining more significance in journalistic storytelling, more research is needed to study their impact. This study assessed the differences in the use and production of infographics and visualizations in hard and soft news and the built-in features that could help foster conversations and audience engagement. A content analysis and two in-depth case studies were conducted to analyze the common practice of employing infographics and visualization in newspapers' digital (web) forms for hard news and soft news at the New York Times in 2012. It was found that more infographics and data visualizations were used in hard news and more interactive features were used in soft news. The main design principles included simple layout, clear content, unique presentation and engaging exploration to viewers. Three NYT editors from the graphics and interactive teams were interviewed to provide an industry perspective on how infographics and visualizations could help audience engagement. They revealed that it was harder for editors and reporters to come up with unique features for hard news due to tighter deadlines. In contrast, visualizations for soft news are usually planned ahead of time and allow sufficient time to experiment with unique interactive features. Visualization that is entertaining and offers viewers an opportunity to figure out data related to them personally could improve audience engagement.