

The Infotainment of Weather Broadcasting: A Case Study in Taiwan

Yi-Jung Lee¹, Mei-Ling Hsu²

¹Master Program in Communication, National Chengchi University, Taipei, Taiwan

²Department of Journalism, National Chengchi University, Taipei, Taiwan

Abstract

Taking a social constructionist approach, this study aims to investigate the phenomenon of infotainment in TV weather broadcast. The research questions include: (1) What are the narrative strategies to present the contents of the infotainment-featured weather broadcast? And (2) What are the strengths and potential problems when transferring scientific meteorological knowledge via such infotainment-featured weather broadcast? The study adopted Chatman's (1980) framework to conduct a narrative analysis of 166 episodes of the EBC (Eastern Broadcasting Company) weather program from 2016 to 2019.

Based on the analyses, five narrative contents of the infotainment-featured EBC weather program were identified: agricultural products, cultural arts, leisure activities, general science education and livelihood tips and suggestions. In addition, the study found that the invited guests of the EBC weather broadcast include domain experts, industry representatives, government officials, celebrities, and supporting roles. Except for the domain experts, the invited guests may not deliver scientific weather-related knowledge, but they could help cast the interests of the audience.

The EBC weather program is characterized by a mixed text of science and non-science related discourses. For the latter, the narrative characteristics dilute scientific knowledge by adopting prominence and human-interest views, leading the audience to the program context. As for the meteorological forecasting, the narrative characteristics include timeliness, prominence and importance.

The EBC weather program achieves infotainment by organizing visual and oral stimuli on the audience, such as lens setting and combining props with descriptions. They allow the audience to capture weather-related knowledge and information efficiently. However, excessive additional elements of infotainment in the weather program could be misleading and blurring the focus, particularly in the narratives of agricultural products and leisure activities. It deserves our attention that when the industrial representatives or government officials were invited as guests, embedded advertising or product placement marketing became an issue, which may involve violation of the regulations. Thus, the advertising information is often represented in the form of consumer news.

Keywords: infotainment, narrative analysis, science communication, weather broadcasting