

# THE YEAR OF THE GOAT:

## An analysis on *Honolulu Star-Advertiser* and its news coverage of goats

Wilnette Ortega

This paper is an analysis of Hawaii's largest newspaper, *Honolulu Star-Advertiser*, and its news coverage of goats in 2015. The main purpose of this paper is to understand what content newspapers regard to as newsworthy and why. Newspapers' content usually revolves around interesting/odd stories that will entice readers and that's important to the culture they are catering to. To retain and gain readership, newspapers give their audience the kind of content they want and are used to seeing. In this paper, I argue that *Honolulu Star Advertiser's* reporters write many goat stories, but they lack to address the serious issues feral goats have on Hawaii's ecosystem because goats, very much like cats, are seldom taken seriously in the media.

Keywords: newsworthy; domesticated goats; feral goats; environment; biodiversity; ecology; animals; invasive species; native species; Hawaii

## Introduction

It's the Year of the Goat ("Chinese Zodiac"), according to Chinese astrology and to the *Honolulu Star-Advertiser* as well. Hawaii's largest daily newspaper can't stop reporting about goats ("Hawaii Newspapers Online"). Their news coverage of goats mostly revolves around stories like: goats hanging off a cliff ("2 goats remain stuck on cliff above Makapuu"), a goat walking into a bar ("Goat walks into a Montana bar, is taken to shelter"), a movie star goat (Gordon, 2011), etc. These are the kind of goat stories readers are used to seeing. These are the kind of stories the media uses to give their audience a good laugh. Just like cats, goats are portrayed in the media as "mascots" and not taken seriously (Dewey, 2014).

Among all the funny and odd goat stories that are being covered in this news outlet, there's one serious goat story that's not getting much coverage and that's the story on the negative effects feral goats have on Hawaii's biodiversity. Feral goats are one of the most destructive herbivores that have been introduced to islands worldwide (King, 1995). They roam wherever they please because they can live in nearly all habitats from low to high elevations. They eat any vegetation in their path, leaving lands that were once vegetated exposed to erosion and invasive plants. They eat plants that are avoided by sheep or cattle which has increasing impacts on native plants and animals. Also, they can spread diseases to native animals such as rabies ("Threats to Birds - Feral Goat (*Capra hircus*)").

A solution to the lack of coverage of the effects of feral goats in Hawaii's ecosystem is for the media to take goats more seriously and inform the public about important issues regarding goats. Other organizations take this issue seriously already, like The Hawaii

Conservation Alliance, which has already conducted some research on effective methods of controlling ungulate populations, like feral goats. It came up with four methods to resolve this issue. The first method is to develop ungulate barriers such as fences. While the process is costly, it's extremely important to separate the invasive animals from the native habitat. The second method is to remove or kill animals faster than they can reproduce. While this process isn't supported by animal rights advocates, it helps regulate goats from overbreeding. The third method is inspecting and maintaining barriers that are already in place. Finally, the fourth method is diligently monitoring the animals and the barriers (Dixon, 2011). These kinds of methods work. A great example of native vegetation recovery after feral goats are removed from the area is the recovery of the endemic vine in the annual grassland (Mueller-Dombois and Spatz, 1972).

This paper will discuss the history of *Honolulu Star-Advertiser*, the newspaper's demographic, perceived audience and actual audience, a network analysis of three of its reporters and the methods used to get all the information for this paper. This paper will also discuss the history of goats in Hawaii, the difference between domesticated goats (*Capra aegagrus hircus*) and feral goats (*Capra aegagrus hircus*), the ecological disadvantages feral goats have in Hawaii and the proposed solutions for this problem. The concept on how newspapers choose content that revolves around interesting/odd stories that will entice readers and is important to the culture they are catering to will be explored more in this paper. The issues that derive from newspapers' selection of what is newsworthy or not will be explained through the *Honolulu Star-Advertiser's* abundance of goat stories, but lack of coverage on their destructive nature against Hawaii's native species.

## **Background**

*Honolulu Star-Advertiser* is a daily newspaper based in Honolulu. It was formed in 2010 from the merger of *The Honolulu Advertiser* and *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*. Its parent company is Oahu Publications Inc. The local owners are Dan Case, Dennis Francis, Larry Johnson, Duane Kurisu, Colbert Matsumoto, Jeffrey Watanabe and Michael Wo. After the merger, it became the biggest daily newspaper in Hawaii. Its newsroom staff is nearly 120, making it the state's largest news-gathering organization. It is read by 7/10 Oahu adults each week. Its website, staradvertiser.com, averages over 18 million page views per month. The newspaper's overall focus is on Hawaii news and some local Honolulu news. National news articles are usually syndicated from the Associated Press (*Honolulu Star-Advertiser*).

## **Reporters/Analysis**

The three reporters I chose to do a network analysis on were John Berger, Nelson Daranciang and Mike Gordon. This analysis helped me get a general idea on how reporters in this newspaper work, the sources they go to and the topics they cover.

John Berger does mostly feature stories on art shows and concerts. His sources are mostly people who work or attend the University of Hawaii, are city/state representatives or are a spokesperson of a company.

Nelson Daranciang covers Hawaii news. He constantly uses local police officers, judges, lawyers and even the FBI as sources. He seldom quotes witnesses or anyone without much authority.

Mike Gordon does mostly feature stories on films and TV shows. He uses statement from companies in his stories and uses casting directors, film writers, filmmakers and actors as his sources.

## **Audience**

*Honolulu Star-Advertiser's* perceived audience is well-educated, middle-aged Hawaiians and its actual audience is Asian men, 55 or older, with household income of \$100,000 or more. Their perceived audience was found by what their advertising revolves like: jewelry, cars, real estate, nursing homes, furniture stores and restaurants (especially seafood and Asian restaurants). Their actual audience was found in their Media Consolidation Report where their actual readers were categorized by age, sex, household income, etc.

## **Geography**

Hawaii is the United States 50th state and it's made out of eight islands: Kauai, Niihau, Oahu, Molokai, Lanai, Maui, Hawaii and Kahoolawe. The state's capital is Honolulu which is located in the island of Oahu. Whenever I mention Hawaii in this paper, I'm including all eight islands as a whole.

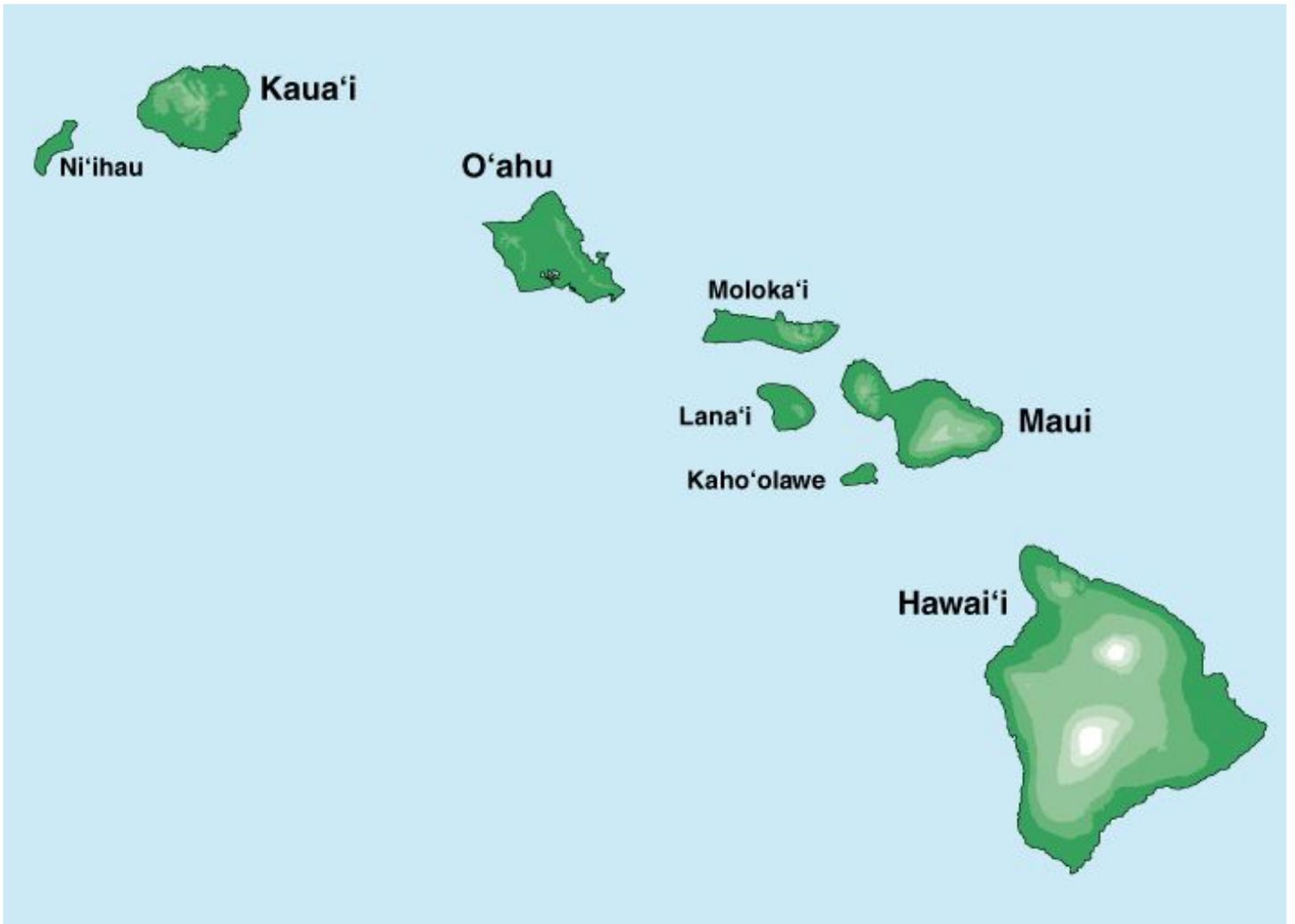


Image by: Virtually Hawaii

## **Population/Demographics**

The newspaper is located in Honolulu where the population is 991,788. The race statistics in Honolulu are American Indian and Alaska Native alone 0.4%; blacks 3%; Hispanic or Latino 9.2%; Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone 9.4%; White alone, not Hispanic or Latino 19.7 %; Two or More Races 21.7%; White alone 23% and Asian alone 42.6%. The sex statistics are female 49.3% and male 50.7%. The age statistics are five years and under 6.5%, 18 years and under 21.7% and 65 years and over 15.5% (Honolulu County QuickFacts from the US Census Bureau).

## **History of Goats in Hawaii**

Goats, along with sheep and cattle, were introduced to Hawaii in the late 1700s by European explorers. Before their arrival, there were no mammals browsing or grazing around the islands (“Threats”). The intentions of the explorers to bring these animals were good, but the animals resulted to be detrimental to the fragile ecosystem of Hawaii. Goats started escaping domestication, became feral and reproduced larger populations rapidly that inhabited the lava fields and mountain rainforests. “Goats, along with pigs, are responsible for the extinction of a number of native Hawaiian plants. They forage and destroy all ground cover and damage ancient rock-work with their hooves” (“Hawaiian Creatures - Wild Mountain Goat”). In the mid-1900s, the goat population was immense and the forest destruction was enormous. It had stripped Nu‘uanu Valley of its greenery which stirred concerns about the city’s future water supply (“Last Stand, The Vanishing Hawaiian Forest”).

## Goats/Feral Goats

In this paper, I use both goats and feral goats as examples to support my argument. Not to be confused, goats and feral goats are different. When I mention goats, I'm talking about *Capra hircus*, which are domesticated goats adapted from the wild. When I mention feral goats, I'm talking about *Capra aegagrus hircus*, which were once domesticated goats that were introduced to the wild. Most of the stories the reporters from the *Honolulu Star-Advertiser* wrote about revolved around domesticated goats and not feral goats. The purpose of this paper is to explore the reasons behind the lack of coverage of feral goats in the newspaper compared to the abundance of coverage of domesticated goats ("Bezoar (*Capra hircus aegagrus*) - Information on Bezoar - Encyclopedia of Life").

## Issues

Newspapers lack to address important issues or different sides to a story if they are not popular/desirable topics for their readers. Journalists are usually fixated in finding stories quickly that are newsworthy instead of finding stories the public needs to have knowledge about and taking time to do research. A lot of time it has to do with the pressure of tight deadlines, picky editors and maintaining/gaining readership. It's quicker and easier to do a human-interest story or a crime story than spending weeks developing a story some readers might not even be interested in.

*Honolulu Star-Advertiser* has a lot of coverage on goat theft (Daranciang, 2015), goats stuck on a cliff ("2 goats remain stuck on cliff above Makapuu"), a goat walking into a bar

(“Goat walks into a Montana bar, is taken to shelter”), a goat that starred in “The Descendants” (Gordon, 2011), but not much talk about the negative effects feral goats have on Hawaii’s native species. The lack of coverage on important issues regarding goats could be a result of goats being covered in the media as cute, funny mascots. There is a lack of serious coverage in the news when it comes to certain animals like goats and cats because viral videos and funny memes are what everyone wants to talk about (Dewey, 2014).

## **Concept**

News outlets are expected to be reliable and credible sources that let the public stay up-to-date with current events. It’s their duty to inform people what they need to be aware of. They are supposed to be the watchdogs of the world. The kind of news being covered, and to the extent it’s being covered, reflects on the ideology of that society and the things they value most. News outlets aren’t unbiased, independent organizations on the outside looking in and reporting what they find. They are an integral part of society. “News contributes to dominant notions of place- geography that imbue cultural meaning- and dominant interpretations of the economic and civic value of such location” (Shumow and Gutsche, 2015, p.4).

If news outlets in Hawaii only talk about goats when it relates to goats hanging off cliffs (“2 goats remain stuck on cliff above Makapuu”) and not when it relates to the destruction of Hawaii’s biodiversity, then what that says about Hawaiians is they place more value on goats than the preservation of Hawaii’s biodiversity. It’s not a far-fetched argument since a story about goat thefts was regarded as a “high-profile case” in the *Honolulu Star-Advertiser* (Daranciang, 2015). It seems the public and the newspaper are invested in this case so much that there are

about five stories talking about the same case with a few updates in each. But, a story on a vandalized fence that kept feral goats from damaging vegetation only got initial coverage and absolutely no follow-up to let readers know if a new fencing went up or not and if any real damages happened already ("Fence that protects native plants vandalized"). If there's little to no coverage on this issue, then the audience will be blind to what's going on in their own backyard.

Feral goats are a critical threat to Hawaii's forest watersheds, which provide a lot of Hawaii's drinking water supply, because of their damaging effects to forests. They consume and trample native plants, and disrupt soil nutrient cycling. They also distribute non-native plants. These destructive animals have led to the decline of intact native ecosystems, including the decline of suitable habitat for threatened and endangered species. "Native Hawaiian plants are often the preferred food for introduced hoofed animals because these plants have evolved in isolation and lost their defensive mechanisms," said Deborah L. Ward, public information specialist at the Department of Land and Natural Resources. Ward said, goats directly lower water quality by removing vegetation and disturbing soil, which can result in erosion and sediment Hawaii's coral reefs. Unlike Chinese astrology's notion about goats being charming ("Chinese Zodiac"), feral goats are known to be destructive wild animals (King, 1995).

News outlets could talk viral videos about screaming goats singing hit pop songs (Hooton, 2013), but they should also talk about goats and other animals when it pertains to serious topics. News coverage shouldn't simply be "a misguided effort to 'be all things to all people' and keep readers by any means possible (Schwarz, 2012). Journalism can be relatable and entertaining, but it also needs to be informative and enlightening. 'If real news dies, there's

no way people will be able to intelligently discuss issues and ideas with their fellow citizens” (Barton, 2014).

## **Method**

This paper is based on an analysis of about 30 stories regarding goats that were published in 2015 in the *Honolulu Star-Advertiser*. I had to pick a newspaper within the states, but it couldn't be a mainstream newspaper. I ended up choosing this news outlet for my research paper because it was a daily newspaper, it was on Access World News, it was on Newseum and because of its circulation size. Weekday average total paid circulation is 196,020, Saturday average paid circulation is 191,038 and Sunday average paid circulation is 212,277 (Editor Publisher International).

To get acquainted with the news outlet, I followed the newspaper's official account on Twitter and I subscribed to have access to its digital content and print replica of the newspaper online. Also, I got in contact with Patrick E. Klein, the director of advertising for *Honolulu Star-Advertiser*, to get the Consolidated Media Report they give advertisers that included the newspaper's demographic, circulation and other important information.

The three reporters I chose, John Berger, Nelson Daranciang and Mike Gordon, were picked at random. For each reporter, I did an individual search on Access World News with their name and limited the search to the publication “Honolulu Star-Advertiser” and the year “2015.” For John Berger, I got 106 results. For Nelson Daranciang, I got 111 results. For Mike Gordon, I got 39 results. Then, I chose 30 stories from each reporter and analyzed their sources.

From my analysis, I found out John Berger does mostly feature stories on art shows and concerts. He used the same quote from the same person on similar stories (Janet Jackson concerts). His sources are mostly people who work or attend the University of Hawaii, are city/state representatives or are a spokesperson of a company.

Nelson Daranciang covers Hawaii news. He mostly deals with criminal cases and some civil cases. He constantly uses local police officers, judges, lawyers and even the FBI as sources. He seldom quotes witnesses or anyone without much authority.

Mike Gordon does mostly feature stories on films and TV shows. He uses statement from companies in his stories and uses casting directors, film writers, filmmakers and actors as his sources. A lot of emphasize on movies set in Hawaii like Cameron Crowe's movie "Aloha."

The topic on goats was chosen because of a trend I saw on the newspaper's coverage of the animal. For the purpose of this paper, I did a search on all text for "goat" and limited my search to the publication "Honolulu Star-Advertiser" and the year "2015" on Access World News and I got 24 results. I analyzed all the goat stories and chose my concept to be on newspapers aim for content their audience is interested in reading and chose my major issue to be about newspapers lack to address important issues or different sides to a story if they are not popular/desirable topics for their readers.

For my concept, I chose eight out of the 24 goat stories to support it. For the issue, I argue *Honolulu Star-Advertiser* has a lot of coverage on goat theft (Daranciang, 2015), goats stuck on a cliff ("2 goats remain stuck on cliff above Makapuu"), a goat walking into a bar (Goat walks into a Montana bar, is taken to shelter, 2013), a goat that starred in "The Descendants"

(Gordon, 2011), but doesn't tap into the biodiversity loss in Hawaii caused by feral goats. The only reference I found to this issue was in one story that briefly talks about a fence that was vandalized which was in place to keep feral goats and other invasive species from disturbing native species ("Fence that protects native plants vandalized"). There were no follow-up stories regarding the issue.

To become more acquainted with goats in general, I found out the differences between goats and feral goats and researched their history and journey into Hawaii. For the purpose of this paper, I focused my research on the negative effects feral goats have on native vegetation and animals in Hawaii. I found over 15 sources with extensive information on the matter. Also, I contacted the Department of Land and Natural Resources Communications Office located in Honolulu.

## **Analysis/Discussion**

In the analysis below, I argue that newspapers' main focus is finding newsworthy content that will please their audience and cater to what their culture cares about. This analysis is about newsworthy content, newspapers as audience pleasers and the way goats are covered in the media

### *Newsworthy content*

One of the first things reporters learn about when entering the field is how to find a story that's newsworthy. There are five main factors: timing, proximity, significance, prominence and human interest. Usually, the more factors a story has, the better. Editors expect reporters to

follow this criteria to get the best stories. Reporters are usually on tight deadlines and have set rules and restrictions from their editors. This pressure hinders the process of making truly well-thought out and solid newsworthy content for readers. Instead, human-interest stories or stories about prominent figures get chosen a lot because they fit the newsworthy criteria and they are easy to do ("What Makes a Story Newsworthy?").

### *Newspapers as audience pleaser*

Newspapers have a lot of competition not just with other newspapers, but with digital media. It's no surprise it's a survival instinct for newspapers to depend on readership and advertisers to stay afloat. The major problem with this dependency is that newspapers become more about pleasing the people that are invested in the organization than providing news as a means to democratize knowledge and to serve as a watchdog to society. This is not to say having the audience in mind is wrong, but there should be more to the story than simply keeping the readers and advertisers happy. After all, "a good story is about something the audience decides is interesting or important. A great story often does both by using storytelling to make important news interesting" (Dean).

### **Conclusion**

This paper explores how newspapers aim to find newsworthy content that will entice readers. The content they choose relates to what the culture they are writing for cares about. By using odd/interesting content that their readers want to see, they retain and gain readership. I used the *Honolulu Star-Advertiser* and its news coverage on goats in 2015 to support my

argument. They have coverage of goats in funny and off situations, but not much serious coverage of goats and their effects on Hawaii's ecosystem.

To have an understanding on how the *Honolulu Star-Advertiser* functions, I discussed its history, demographic statistics, perceived/actual audience, a network analysis of three of its reporters and the methods used to gain all this information. To have a better understanding on the topic of goats, this paper explored the history of goats in Hawaii, the difference between domesticated goats (*Capra aegagrus hircus*) and feral goats (*Capra aegagrus hircus*), the biodiversity disadvantages feral goats have in Hawaii and several solutions for the issue.

This paper analyzes the newspaper's stories about goats. They usually revolved around interesting/odd sceneries like a goat walking into a bar ("Goat walks into a Montana bar, is taken to shelter"), a goat that starred in "The Descendants" (Gordon, 2011) or goats hanging off a cliff ("2 goats remain stuck on cliff above Makapuu"). The main problem with these stories is that news regarding goats isn't taken seriously by the newspaper or the readers. While these funny and enticing stories about goats make it to the newspaper, there's barely any coverage on the seriously destructive nature feral goats have on Hawaii's native species because it's not a popular/desirable topic for readers.

For journalists to better report on goats and other animals that are seldom taken seriously in their newspapers, they need to, more times than less, regard them in a meaningful way when writing their stories, they should take time to research the issues regarding these animals so that their readers are well informed and an effort needs to be made to understand the cultural meaning of the animals they are reporting on.

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