

RESEARCH MEMO · DEEP SOUTH TODAY · ARKANSAS SURVEY

Video vs. Slideshow

Does format change how important readers think a story's subject is?

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Cohort 1 · 2026

The question

As Deep South Today prepared to launch Arkansas Today, it wanted to understand how different social media formats might shape audience response. Specifically, would presenting the same information as a short video rather than a static slideshow change how readers viewed the newsroom, the reporting or the issue itself?

Does watching a video version of a story, rather than viewing the same information in a slideshow, make readers see the AI data center issue as more personally important or more important relative to other issues facing Arkansas?

What we did

371

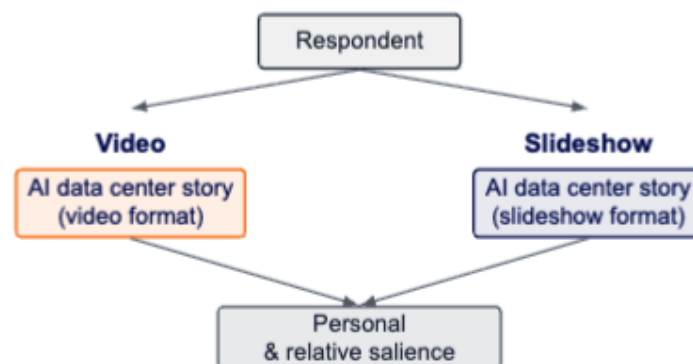
Arkansas adults surveyed
(YouGov)

2

Format conditions

2

Salience measures



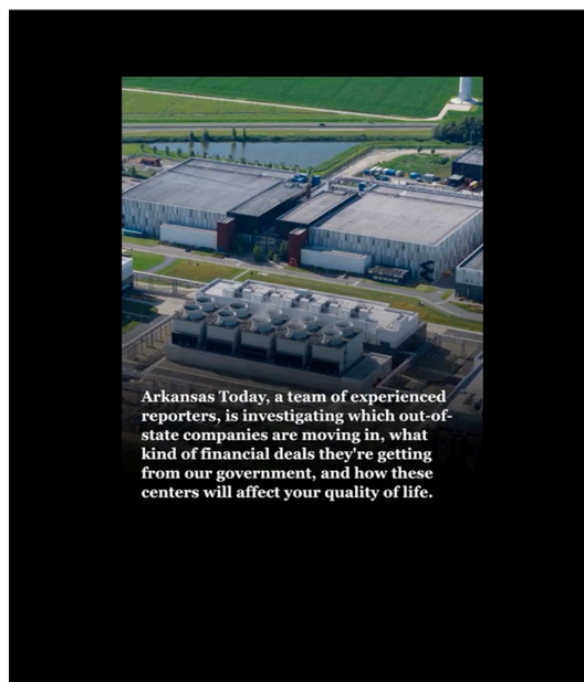
HOW WE DID THIS

We conducted an experiment with 371 Arkansas adults recruited through YouGov. Respondents were randomly assigned to see the same content about AI data centers in Arkansas, presented under the Arkansas Today name as either a short vertical video or a slideshow.

Afterward, respondents rated how important the data center issue was to them personally and relative to other issues facing the state. We also measured their evaluations of the story and intentions to engage with the issue and news outlet. All estimates use survey weights to reflect the sampling design.

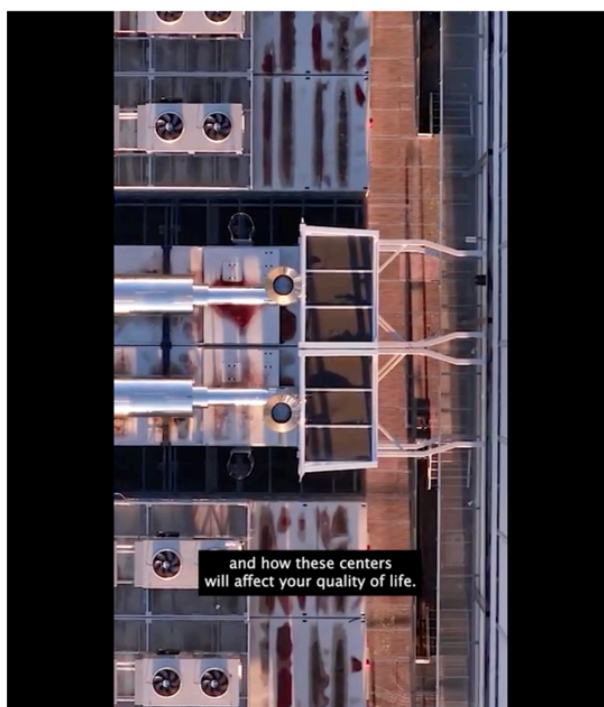
The treatments

Note: This video does not contain audio. Please watch the video and the forward button will appear momentarily.



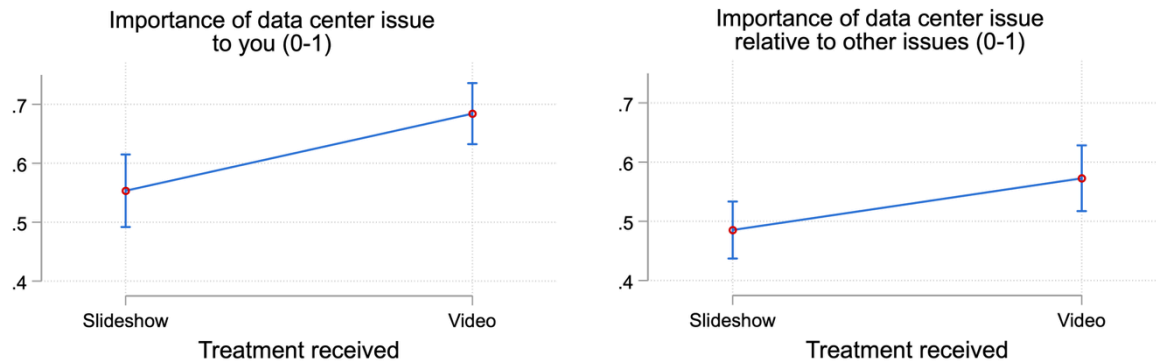
→ You can view the slideshow treatment [here](#).

Note: This video contains audio. Please watch the video and the forward button will appear momentarily.



→ You can view the video treatment [here](#).

What we found



KEY FINDINGS

Video format increased how important readers considered the data center issue, both personally and relative to other issues facing Arkansas.

- Readers who saw the video version rated the issue as more personally important than readers who saw the slideshow version.
- The same pattern held on a second, independent measure: how important the issue seemed relative to other issues facing the state.
- Both effects were statistically significant and moved in the same direction, showing a consistent pattern across two measures of perceived importance.
- Format **did not** have a statistically significant effect on evaluations or intentions to engage.

Applying the findings

The experiment suggests that format can influence whether audiences see an issue as relevant and important, even when the underlying information remains the same. In this case, video increased the perceived importance of an emerging, complex issue compared with a slideshow, although it did not significantly change evaluations of the story or intentions to engage.

For newsrooms and others sharing public interest information, the findings point to a few opportunities:

- **Think about format as part of the information strategy.** Video may be worth testing when the goal is helping audiences understand why an unfamiliar or complex issue matters to them or their communities.
- **Match the format to the desired outcome.** Increasing perceived importance is different from increasing engagement. Being clear about the desired outcome can help determine both the format and what to measure.
- **Test the finding in other contexts.** This experiment focused on one story about AI data centers. Future tests could explore whether similar effects appear across topics, audiences and types of video.
- **Explore why video made a difference.** Future tests could isolate whether movement, narration, human presence, pacing or another characteristic of video is responsible for the effect.

- **Support learning alongside production.** Relatively small experiments can help newsrooms and their partners learn not only what information to share, but how different approaches to presenting it shape audience response. Building testing and learning into journalism investments can generate insights that inform future work.

Questions about this study or the Local NExT Lab? Reach out at jpdarr@syr.edu.

About Local NExT Lab

Local NExT Lab, part of the Institute for Democracy, Journalism & Citizenship (IDJC) at Syracuse University, brings together local newsrooms, funders and academic researchers to test approaches to how news is collected, framed and delivered. Through real-world experiments, the Lab generates practical insights that participating newsrooms and the broader local news field can use to inform their work.

A NOTE ON SCOPE

These outcomes were specified as secondary, not primary, in the study's preregistration. Both formats were programmed by YouGov to display for their full length, and a manipulation check confirmed that respondents nearly universally recalled the story topic.

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