

Coverage of the Coronavirus on Web and Social

Mar 2020

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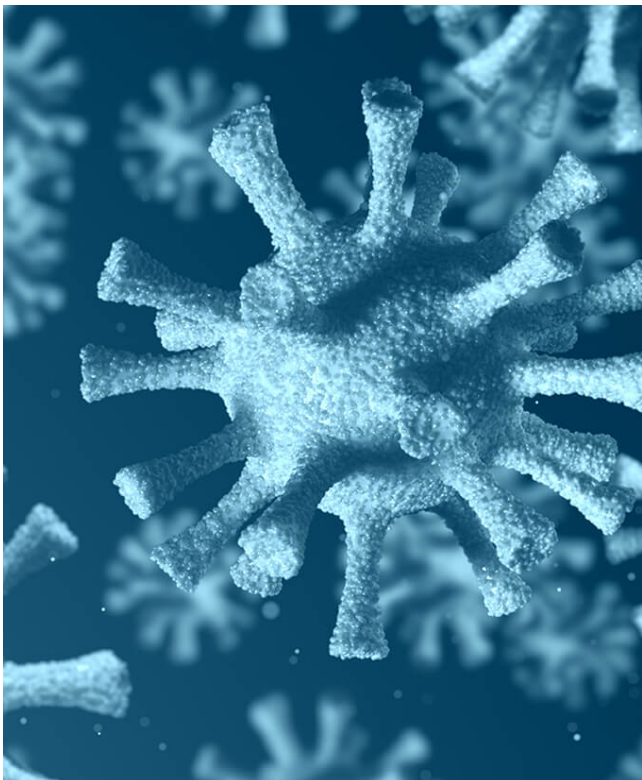
Coronavirus coverage

COVID-19 has been one of the most written about events in the modern era, with more than 1.5 million articles already published about it since the beginning of January this year.

The novel coronavirus now known as COVID-19 has become one of the most talked about topics in history, as the world faces its first pandemic in the truly social age of the internet.

With so many different ways for information to spread, it can be difficult to keep track of everything that is being reported. This means that it is not always clear what it is that is actually breaking through to the point that it sticks in the memory of audiences and readers.

It is important to know that the information is accurate when narratives emerge around a public health issue. We also must know when inaccurate information is spreading so that it can be combatted.

*i*

In this report we will look at some of the narratives that have emerged, including:

- The publishers that have driven the conversation
- The political and scientific responses to the virus
- How brands have been taking action and communicating with their customers



Coronavirus coverage On the web

Coronavirus:

Engagement over time

2020 began with relatively little engagement to coronavirus content, at least in the English language, as the virus was localized to China and South East Asia at the time.

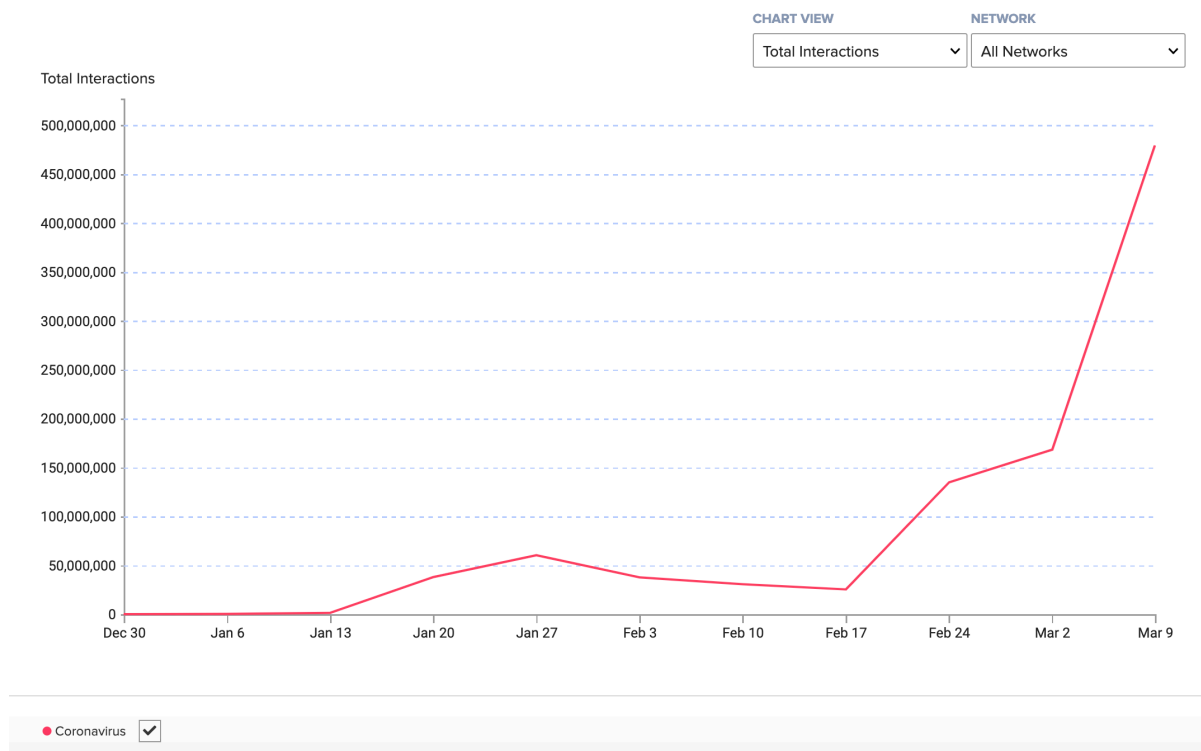
This began to change towards the end of January as the first deaths began to be reported inside China, and the world realized that it was an epidemic in the making. Engagement rose until the last week of January, and then began to fade away as public interest moved on, with the disease still relatively well confined to China.

In the last week of February this all changed. This was when we began to see cases pop up

around the world in Iran, Europe, and America. Engagement to coronavirus stories has exploded since then as we seek and share snippets of information about the dangers of the virus and how it is affecting our lives in relation to a number of themes, from the scientific response, to the political response, to how it affects the economy.

Engagements last week rose to truly mammoth proportions, topping 500 million in a week. For context, this is roughly double how many articles about Trump received the week of his acquittal in the Senate impeachment trial.

Engagement to web content about coronavirus in 2020



**Engagements, otherwise referred to as interactions, include the combined impact from Facebook (shares, likes, comments), Pinterest Pins, and Twitter influencer shares.*

Coronavirus overview:

Engagement with websites

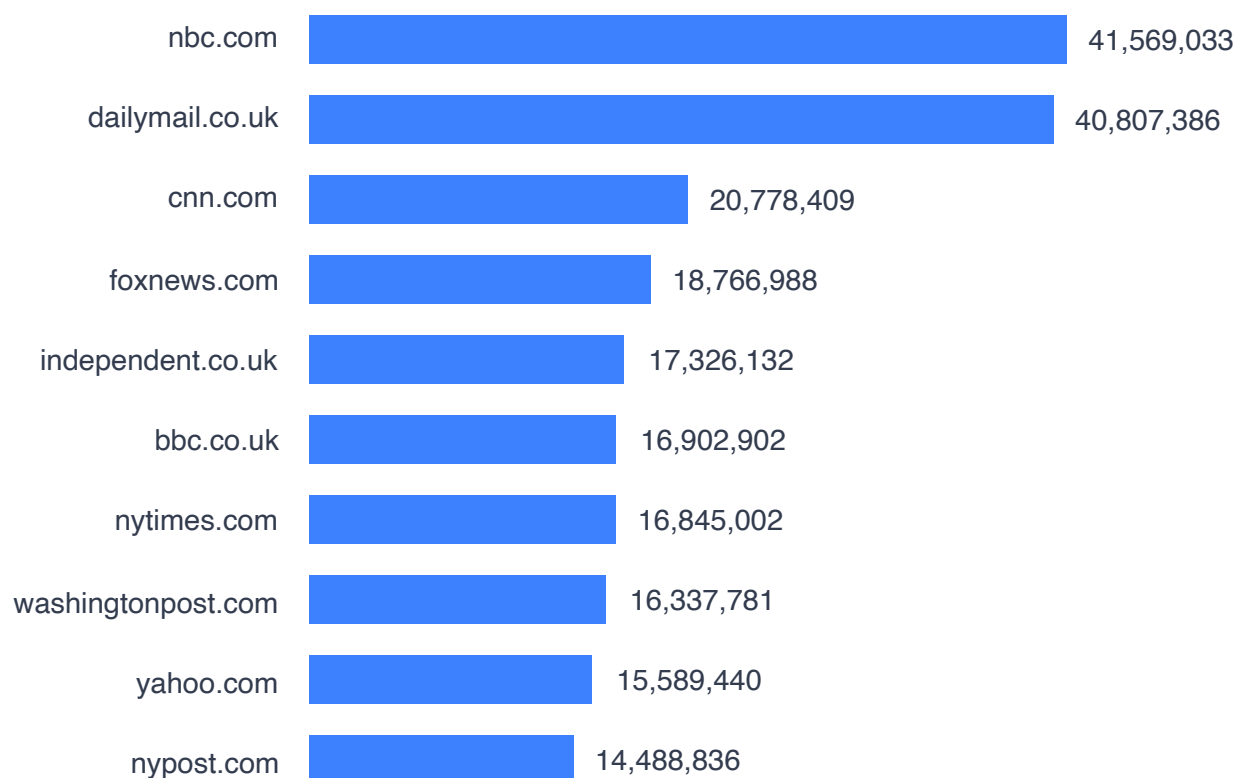
In terms of who is driving that conversation and seeing the most engagements to its content, that is laid out in the graph below.

NBC and its local affiliates had the most engagements to their content so far this year, with more than 41 million engagements. Some of this is due to the fact that they were writing early and often about the disease while it was still in China.

The Daily Mail was one of the other top publishers in the space, with some 41 million engagements, while CNN was the most engaged of the rest with 20 million.

The top ten is made up broadly of traditional American publishers, though the BBC, The Independent and The Daily Mail break that up in terms of being the most engaged.

Most engaged websites for content about coronavirus



Coronavirus scientific response:

Most engaged articles

In terms of the scientific response, there were a number of different angles.

Two of the most engaged articles came from Vox and The Washington Post, who focused on the scientific basis of social distancing to flatten the curve and decrease the rate at which people get sick.

The biggest article about the scientific makeup of the disease itself came from NBC San Diego, and explained the difference between the COVID-19 strain and the flu.

Other responses included the reaction from health authorities such as the WHO confirming the coronavirus as a pandemic, which was reported by the BBC to nearly a million

engagements, or the CDC telling Americans to prepare for the spread of the infection.

Perhaps the most important scientific content, and fortunately also some of the most highly engaged, was about how best to combat the threat of infection and mitigate the spread of the disease.

In addition to the Vox and Post explainers, the local Miami CBS station ran a piece on how washing hands is the most effective method, rather than a face mask, which was echoed by a similar Forbes article.

These were all highly engaged stories, suggesting that people are engaging with expert opinion on this matter.

Most engaged articles about coronavirus and science in 2020

Website	Headline	Engagement
washingtonpost.com	These simulations show how to flatten the coronavirus growth curve	4,355,017
vox.com	How canceled events and self-quarantines save lives, in one chart	2,561,896
nbcсандiego.com	Distinguishing Between Coronavirus and Flu	2,028,235
miami.cbslocal.com	Washing Your Hands Is Best Defense Against Coronavirus, Not A Facemask	1,188,193
koaa.com	Colorado's first drive-up COVID-19 testing facility opens in Denver, is free of charge	1,176,151
newshub.co.nz	Coronavirus: Volunteers to be infected in race to find vaccine	1,123,904
bbc.co.uk	Coronavirus declared global health emergency	962,983
kevinmd.com	A COVID-19 coronavirus update from concerned physicians	948,876
bbc.co.uk	Coronavirus confirmed as pandemic	940,507
forbes.com	No, You DO NOT Need Face Masks For Coronavirus—They Might Increase Your Infection Risk	812,625

Coronavirus political response:

Most engaged articles

In terms of the political response, much of that has been focused on what that has looked like in America, though there were other countries mentioned too.

These principally consisted of China and Italy, with the government's decision to quarantine all of Lombardy, including some 16 million people, being a particularly highly engaged article.

Most of the other stories consisted of President Trump's reaction to the crisis, or examining the situation as it is.

Examples included a Snopes article examining whether Trump fired the US pandemic response

team (which they determined that he had), receiving more than 850,000 engagements.

There were also articles that were highly engaged about the administration barring experts from speaking freely, and flip-flopping on whether a vaccine would be available to all for an affordable price. Both of these came from Business Insider and received around a million engagements each.

The most engaged article was about President Trump's gesture of donating his fourth quarter salary to HHS, as reported by The Daily Mail.

Most engaged articles about coronavirus and politics in 2020

Website	Headline	Engagement
dailymail.co.uk	Trump donates his fourth quarter salary to HHS to help coronavirus	2,110,538
nytimes.com	Pence Will Control All Coronavirus Messaging From Health Officials	1,082,206
businessinsider.com	The Trump administration reversed course after saying the coronavirus vaccine might not be affordable for all Americans	1,037,257
businessinsider.com	The Trump administration has barred the top US disease expert from speaking freely to the public after he warned the coronavirus may be impossible to contain	1,001,242
huffpost.com	Senate GOP Blocks Emergency Paid Sick Leave Bill	937,065
fastcompany.com	What would happen if the world reacted to climate change like it's reacting to the coronavirus?	927,461
snopes.com	Did Trump Fire the US Pandemic Response Team?	855,062
bbc.co.uk	Northern Italy quarantines 16 million people	839,350
latimes.com	Under pressure, Trump administration opens door to mobilizing Medicaid to fight coronavirus	809,403
msn.com	Experts baffled as Trump asks why they can't just use flu vaccines to prevent coronavirus	767,048

Coronavirus & flu:

Most engaged articles

One of the early narratives that emerged in some quarters was that the coronavirus was no more serious than flu.

This has since been debunked. Experts have estimated that the coronavirus is between 10 and 20 times more lethal than the seasonal flu.

Science Watch Francois Balloux, Professor of Computational Systems Biology at University College London, said the following:

"There is still considerable uncertainty around the fatality rates of COVID-19 and it likely varies depending on the quality of local healthcare...

that said, it is around two percent on average, which is about 20 times higher than for the seasonal flu lineages currently in circulation."

There have been, however, a number of articles that garnered huge engagement that suggested this was not the case, or that flu was a bigger risk, particularly early in the emergence of the disease.

As such, it is crucial to keep pushing the point that this is a much more deadly disease than the seasonal flu to counter the previous narrative that had emerged.

Most engaged articles about coronavirus and the flu in 2020

Website	Headline	Engagement
medium.com	Coronavirus and the Sun: a Lesson from the 1918 Influenza Pandemic	2,943,831
nbcсандiego.com	Distinguishing Between Coronavirus and Flu	2,028,235
nypost.com	More than half of coronavirus patients globally have recovered	1,692,202
washingtontimes.com	Please stop the coronavirus hysteria. Now.	840,952
msn.com	Experts baffled as Trump asks why they can't just use flu vaccines to prevent coronavirus	767,048
nypost.com	California girl Aliyah Cardoza hospitalized with a strain of coronavirus	626,279
realclearpolitics.com	Dr. Drew Pinsky: Coronavirus Panic Must Stop, Press Needs to Be Held Accountable for Hurting People	599,536
westernjournal.com	Numbers Show Coronavirus Appears Far Less Deadly Than Flu, But Gov't, Media Keep Promoting Panic	565,864
washingtonpost.com	Trump 'didn't know people died from the flu.' It killed his grandfather.	460,260
dailywire.com	Dr. Drew On Coronavirus: Media 'Hurting People,' 'Need To Be Held Accountable' For Causing Panic	411,627

Coronavirus sensationalism:

Most engaged articles

Some publishers also chose to write through less of a scientific or political lens in response to the crisis.

Especially early on in the spread of the virus, there were a number of speculative articles, principally in British publications that guessed towards the origins of the crisis.

There were also similar articles that focused on Chinese reactions to the crisis.

NBC also published one of the most highly engaged pieces, about young people capitalizing on cheap flights as a result of the virus, which saw some 1.5 million engagements.

Though not quite sensationalist in the same way as some of the others, this is a much more human narrative driven headline than we have seen in some other areas of coverage.

Most engaged articles covering sensationalist angles about coronavirus in 2020

Website	Headline	Engagement
nbcnews.com	"If I die, I die": Young people capitalize on cheap coronavirus flights	1,888,977
dailymail.co.uk	ICUs 'should stop treating elderly if coronavirus outbreak worsens'	1,645,264
dailymail.co.uk	Gyms are confirmed as a high-risk location for coronavirus to spread	1,644,210
thesun.co.uk	Coronavirus - Cats and dogs 'thrown from tower blocks' in China after fake news rumours animals are causing spread	968,398
nypost.com	Don't buy China's story: The coronavirus may have leaked from a lab	821,741
dailymail.co.uk	China's coronavirus DID come from bats, study claims	820,649
nypost.com	Coronavirus vaccine could be ready by April, Chinese officials say	784,179
dailymail.co.uk	China's first coronavirus hospital OPENS today	772,266
thegospelcoalition.org	C. S. Lewis on the Coronavirus	753,830
dailymail.co.uk	US scientists have completed a coronavirus vaccine	716,662

Coronavirus & panic:

Most engaged articles

In amongst the scientific responses and political responses, there were also some outlets who were critical of the media for causing a panic.

It tended to be that the most highly engaged of these, with a few exceptions, were partisan publishers that skewed to the right politically, including the Spectator and The Daily Wire.

The Spectator also ran a piece saying that the most dangerous aspect of coronavirus is the hysteria that received hundreds of thousands of engagements. With global deaths rising on a daily basis and hospitals beyond capacity in a

number of countries, media attention of the matter appears more than justified.

Dr. Drew was the most featured voice in this section, having spoken out about what he believed was mismanagement of reporting by the press. This was reported in the Washington Times, WDRB, The Daily Wire, and Real Clear Politics, to a combined total of more than a million engagements. This perhaps goes some way to explaining why, according to a recent [Rasmussen poll](#), 60% of Republicans saw coronavirus as a tactic by the media to “get Trump”.

Most engaged articles about coronavirus and panic in 2020

Website	Headline	Engagement
washingtontimes.com	Dr. Drew says press should be ‘held accountable’ for coronavirus panic: ‘They are hurting people’	3,017,118
theconversation.com	Coronavirus: Ten reasons why you ought not to panic	2,217,114
news.yahoo.com	Don't panic' says US woman who recovered from coronavirus	1,277,838
washingtontimes.com	Please stop the coronavirus hysteria. Now.	840,952
realclearpolitics.com	Dr. Drew Pinsky: Coronavirus Panic Must Stop, Press Needs to Be Held Accountable for Hurting People	599,536
westernjournal.com	Numbers Show Coronavirus Appears Far Less Deadly Than Flu, But Gov't, Media Keep Promoting Panic	565,864
weforum.org	Coronavirus: how to keep things in perspective	525,859
wdrb.com	Dr. Drew: Media-driven panic over coronavirus is a bigger problem than the virus	489,523
dailywire.com	Dr. Drew On Coronavirus: Media ‘Hurting People,’ ‘Need To Be Held Accountable’ For Causing Panic	411,627
theintercept.com	Gaetz Voted Against Florida Paid Sick Leave. He’s Using It in Congress.	403,375

Coronavirus & brands:

Most engaged articles from brands

It is vital that brands take steps to explain how they are approaching this crisis, as they face almost unprecedented expectation to take unilateral action to combat the virus.

America has some unique challenges, including employees relying on healthcare through their employer, and a lack of paid sick leave for some workers.

Companies such as Google, Microsoft, and Walmart very quickly released statements to say what they were doing not only to protect their workers but to make sure that they had protections under the company policy. These

received as many as tens of thousands of engagements as people shared and encouraged other companies to follow suit.

Though it is not featured here, Olive Garden also tweeted about a change in their policy, to provide guaranteed permanent paid sick leave to all of their hourly employees.

Most engaged articles about coronavirus from brands in 2020

Website	Headline	Engagement
blogs.microsoft.com	As we work to protect public health, we also need to protect the income of hourly workers who support our campus - Microsoft on the Issues	119,512
corporate.walmart.com	The Latest on Walmart's Response to the Coronavirus	22,023
jnj.com	What You Need to Know About the Latest on the Coronavirus—and a Potential Preventive Vaccine	14,060
blog.google	Coronavirus: How we're helping	6,426
thechickenwire.chick-fil-a.com	Chick-fil-A President on preparation and response for COVID-19	4,441
blog.klm.com	Coronavirus: What do I need to be aware of? - KLM Blog	3,103
usbank.com	U.S. Bank announces assistance for customers affected by coronavirus	1,276
about.fb.com	Keeping People Safe and Informed About the Coronavirus - About Facebook	1,082
thedisneyblog.com	Walt Disney World is closing through end of month due to Coronavirus / COVID-19 concerns The Disney Blog	967
thedisneyblog.com	Disneyland closing its parks starting Saturday in response to Coronavirus restrictions The Disney Blog	681

Coronavirus & brands:

Most engaged articles

Brands don't get to entirely control their own narrative when it comes to a pandemic, of course, and some were covered by the press.

This generally took one of two forms. Either a worker at a specific employer's facility had tested positive, or the brand was tied up in some way with the virus.

The former happened to Amazon, with several reports of a worker who had contracted the disease and Amazon's response to that.

The biggest coverage of a brand that drove engagement online was a number of brands that

had sold hand sanitizer to a man who was then price gouging on Amazon. The New York Times piece that featured this story received almost 2.5 million engagements.

Beyond that, the most engaged narrative when it came to brands was Disney making the decision to shut down its parks as a precaution against the spread of the virus, which saw more than a million engagements when you add together all of the stories.

Most engaged articles about coronavirus and brands in 2020

Website	Headline	Engagement
nytimes.com	He Has 17,700 Bottles of Hand Sanitizer and Nowhere to Sell Them	2,362,785
vice.com	A Disturbing Number of People Think Coronavirus Is Related to Corona Beer	1,520,551
edinburghlive.co.uk	Edinburgh shop goes viral giving elderly free 'coronavirus packs'	1,313,155
variety.com	All Disney Theme Parks, U.S. Universal Studios Closing Amid Coronavirus Pandemic	746,116
abc7.com	Disneyland, California Adventure to temporarily close due to coronavirus threat	480,279
washingtonpost.com	White House likely to pursue federal aid for shale companies hit by oil shock, coronavirus downturn	402,112
washingtontimes.com	Amazon employee tests positive for coronavirus	398,832
cnn.com	Disney World closes because of the coronavirus outbreak	376,717
wxyz.com	Comcast offering 'Internet Essentials' package free for low-income customers for 60 days	362,180
orlandosentinel.com	Disney World closes theme parks for rest of March as coronavirus concerns swell	338,239

Coronavirus & canceled events: *Most engaged articles*

When it came to canceled events, the biggest by far in terms of engagement was the Vox article explaining why canceled events are so crucial to public health.

The NBA suspending its season after members of the Utah Jazz team were found to have tested positive for virus was also a huge narrative.

This, alongside the almost simultaneous announcement from Tom Hanks that he and his wife had contracted the disease, is widely seen as one of the events that truly broke through with the general public, after some had downplayed the virus's significance.

It is not difficult to see why the most engaged version of the article on the NBA, from ESPN,

received nearly 1.5 million engagements less than 12 hours after publication.

Other events that caused high engagement because of cancellations were the Houston Rodeo, and a coronavirus conference, the irony of which was not lost on the public.

It is crucial to note that although the Babylon Bee is a well known satire site, the article claiming Trump canceled the election due to the virus is a potentially dangerous one if people do not click through to the article itself, as it has the potential to escalate an already tense situation if readers take a headline at face value without knowledge that it is satire.

Most engaged articles about coronavirus and events in 2020

Website	Headline	Engagement
vox.com	How canceled events and self-quarantines save lives, in one chart	2,561,896
bloomberg.com	Coronavirus Conference Gets Canceled Because of Coronavirus	1,903,198
espn.com	NBA suspends season due to coronavirus	1,566,193
babylonbee.com	Trump Cancels 2020 Election Over Coronavirus Concerns	637,561
click2houston.com	Houston Rodeo canceled amid growing concerns over coronavirus	517,528
espn.com	NCAA tournaments canceled over coronavirus	346,470
spectator.co.uk	The most dangerous thing about coronavirus is the hysteria The Spectator	342,709
wptv.com	Mark Cuban says he plans to set up a program to pay Dallas arena workers furloughed by COVID-19	279,925
abc13.com	RodeoHouston closes, cancels several concerts amid coronavirus concerns	258,139
theweek.com	The entire country of Norway is 'shutting down'	240,255

Coronavirus & markets:

Most engaged articles

The markets have taken a particularly hard hit from the coronavirus, seeing some of their biggest drops in history the week of March 9th.

The Independent had the most engagements on a piece predicting mass bankruptcies.

The interesting thing to note beyond that is which publishers received engagements talking about which narratives.

The markets did rebound strongly on Tuesday having fallen heavily on Monday, before falling to new lows once more on Wednesday and Thursday, and rebounding again on Friday.

CNN, CNBC, and the New York Times all had highly engaged coverage of the stock market's terrible week. On the other side of the coin, Fox Business and The Daily Wire both had high engagements to coverage focused on the bounce in the markets that occurred on Tuesday, and the Western Journal repeated a baseless claim that the media was using the virus to tank the economy.

There was also more general coverage of the stock market panic, contextualizing the administration's actions in the wake of the crisis. This came from the likes of Esquire, among others.

Most engaged articles about coronavirus and stock markets in 2020

Website	Headline	Engagement
independent.co.uk	Coronavirus will bankrupt more people than it kills — and that's the real global emergency	3,391,319
cnn.com	Dow falls 1,191 points -- the most in history	371,093
usatoday.com	New York Federal Reserve injects \$1.5 trillion into markets amid coronavirus chaos for stocks	330,893
cnn.com	Stock market upheaval exacerbating Trump's concerns over coronavirus	297,736
foxbusiness.com	Dow, S&P and Nasdaq score biggest point gains ever as stocks make coronavirus comeback	297,463
esquire.com	Who the Hell Wants Another Four Years of This?	283,579
businessinsider.com	The US stock market has now wiped out the entire \$11.5 trillion of value it gained since Trump's 2016 election victory	265,522
cnbc.com	Coronavirus wipes out \$1.7 trillion in US stock market value in two days	222,252
westernjournal.com	Rush: Coronavirus Being Used by Media To Tank Trump's Economy	187,470
dailywire.com	Stock Market Surges Back With Biggest Day In Years	174,813



Key Takeaways

What to Remember

- The absolute scale of the engagement to the coverage of coronavirus has been enormous for a number of weeks, and still growing
- The Daily Mail and NBC were the most engaged publishers writing about the coronavirus, with almost 30 million engagements each
- Some of the big themes that emerged included the political response, the scientific response, and how businesses and markets have reacted
- Articles explaining why canceled events are so crucial in implementing social distancing policies were some of the most engaged of any stories written this year
- Left and right wing publishers have covered different angles, especially when it has come to coverage of markets
- Corona beer has been particularly hard hit by changes in public perception following the virus, as many people associated the beer brand with the virus due to the name

Coronavirus will bankrupt more people than it kills — and that's the real global emergency

We may look back on coronavirus as the moment when the threads that hold the global economy together came unstuck

Omar Hassan New York | 4 days ago | 36 comments



Health

Why outbreaks like coronavirus spread exponentially, and how to “flatten the curve”

By **Harry Stevens** March 14, 2020

Coronavirus: Deserted Italian street rings out with song as people lean out of windows to sing together during lockdown

'We shine our best in the darkness. Thank you Siena'

Kate Ng | 3 days ago | 21 comments





Thank you!

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daily COVID-19
briefing newsletter