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## **Analysis of Newspaper Coverage of Offshore Wind Energy in the United States**

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ANALYSIS OF NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF OFFSHORE  
WIND ENERGY IN THE UNITED STATES

BY

CHRISTINE GILBERT

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

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MASTER OF ARTS THESIS  
OF  
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## **ABSTRACT**

The Block Island Wind Farm (BIWF) is the first operational offshore wind farm in the United States. Two different theoretical frameworks are applied in an attempt to understand the nature of media coverage about offshore wind energy in the United States. Chapter 1 utilizes gatekeeping theory (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009) in comparing the local and regional newspaper coverage of the BIWF. Specifically, chapter 1 is focused on understanding the use of sources. The data from chapter 1 suggests that the gatekeeping processes at regional and local outlets are more similar than different, but business sources are more dominant than has been proud in previous research. Chapter 2 uses Stephens et al. (2009) and Smith et al.'s (2016) adaptation of Luhmann's theory of ecological communication (1989) comparing the first five years of local newspaper coverage of the Cape Wind offshore wind farm and the BIWF. The data from chapter 2 suggests coverage of the Cape Wind offshore farm utilized more risk narratives than the local coverage of the BIWF, yet coverage of both wind farms centered around the political dimensions related to the projects.

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**CHAPTER 1**

MANUSCRIPT 1

**Source gatekeeping in local and regional newspaper coverage of the Block Island**

**Wind Farm**

To be submitted to *Energy Research & Social Science* in May, 2018

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## **1. Introduction**

A little before 6:00 AM on May 1, 2017, Block Island, a small island community off the coast of Rhode Island, began receiving energy powered by offshore wind. The five-turbine offshore wind farm, built by Deepwater Wind, is the first in the United States. The wind farm's completion is being seen by those in the offshore wind industry as a pivotal moment and many are hopeful that this will be a catalyst event that spurs additional development in the United States (Shuman, 2017). While the Block Island Wind Farm (BIWF) was successful, the permitting process was complicated, intensive, and took almost a decade (Dennis & Mooney, 2016). The nine-year process however, is short when compared to the first proposed offshore wind farm by Cape Wind Associates in Nantucket Sound, Massachusetts. Cape Wind Associates recently ended its 16-year battle when it terminated its lease with the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) in 2017 (Chesto, 2017).

Despite the complexities in permitting and building offshore wind farms in the United States, there remains strong interest in the future of the offshore wind industry, as evidenced by the numerous ocean area leases granted to companies by BOEM in the past decade (BOEM, 2017). Deepwater Wind, the company responsible for the BIWF is proposing offshore wind farms off the coast of Maryland, New Jersey, and Massachusetts (Kalish, 2017). In addition, states like Massachusetts have announced aggressive renewable energy goals calling for 1,600 megawatts of energy to be produced by offshore wind by 2027 (Marcelo, 2017).

The BIWF remains the only realized offshore wind farm in the United States at the time of this thesis, and for this reason it has become a site of academic research in

numerous fields (Batel & Devine-Wright, 2015; Bidwell, 2017; Klain, Satterfield, MacDonald, Battista, & Chan, 2017; Firestone, Bidwell, Gardner, & Knapp, 2018). No research to date has analyzed the media coverage of the BIWF to understand the nature of the coverage and identify any discursive themes or narrative structures that were used to describe the wind farm and its impacts. Given the infancy of the offshore wind industry in the United States and the numerous projects currently on the horizon, this is an ideal opportunity to study the media discourse of the BIWF. Of particular interest in this research study are the sources present in newspaper coverage of the BIWF; in other words, who were the frequently quoted individuals and groups in framing the BIWF? To answer this question, we turn to gatekeeping theory.

### *1.1 Theoretical Framework: Gatekeeping Theory*

There is a strong history in the communication discipline of studying media representations of complex issues. Framing theory, agenda-setting theory, priming theory, and a myriad of other nuanced theoretical frameworks are continuously being updated to help explore the relationship between the media and the public (Cacciatore, Scheufele, & Iyengar, 2016). Research across theoretical approaches, has shown that media representations or coverage of complex stories has some link to public perceptions (Berkowitz, 2009; Cacciatore, Scheufele, & Iyengar, 2016). Offshore wind energy, given the ever-improving technical nature of the turbines, and the public perceptions about these “green energy machines,” can be a complicated issue for reporters to cover (Wüstenhagen, Wolsink, & Buerer, 2007).

The premise of gatekeeping theory is that journalistic choices, either at the level of an individual journalist or an entire media organization, are key factors in the

construction of media narratives. One key tenet of the theory that serves as the foundation for this study is that source selection and the presence or lack of source diversity is a result of the gatekeeping process (Shoemaker, Eichholz, Kim, & Wrigley, 2001; Shoemaker & Vos, 2009; Maddison & Watts, 2012; Smith & Norton, 2013). This theoretical framework suggests that information that makes it “past” the proverbial gatekeepers in the media is reflective of underlying assumptions about who is a credible source and whose voices should be heard (Cassidy, 2006; Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). Recent gatekeeping theory research has also suggested that the individual and routine forces that influence media coverage are applicable across print and online journalists and organizations (Cassidy, 2006; McElroy, 2013).

In a study on source diversity, Ross (2007) found, “the use of sources in news narratives is an extremely important part of not only the story’s construction but also its orientation and, ultimately, the point of view being supported in a given story” (p. 449). Assuming that gatekeeping theory’s proposition that the information and sources included in newspaper stories are reflective of what journalists deem as important, evaluating the newspaper coverage of the BIWF could provide insight into the broader narrative of offshore wind energy in the United States; particularly focusing on identifying which sources are telling the story. As Armstrong (2004) notes, “If journalists serve as legitimizers, reflecting events in society to readers and viewers, the sources and subjects of those stories are going to present and reinforce certain ideals” (p. 140).

### *1.2 Local versus Regional Newspaper Coverage*

Previous media research using gatekeeping theory to analyze source use has found justification for analyzing newspaper coverage based on geographical location (Lacy & Coulson, 2000; Powell & Self, 2003; Wakefield & Elliott, 2003; Maddison & Watts, 2012). Research has shown that source diversity “differs between wire services and local, state or national newspaper coverage” (Maddison & Watts, 2012, p. 50). Additionally, research into the concept of NIMBYism (“not in my backyard”) suggests that there may be meaningful differences between local newspaper coverage, national newspaper coverage and corresponding public perceptions when it comes to environmental issues (Devine-Wright, 2005; Crawley, 2007; Firestone, Kempton, Lilley, & Samoteskul, 2012). Despite this research, there has been limited research into local newspaper coverage of renewable energy or biotechnology stories (Wakefield & Elliot, 2003; Devine-Wright, 2005; Thompson, 2005; Crawley, 2007).

Local and regional in the context of this study are directly related to geographical setting. *The Block Island Times* (BIT), which provides a large portion of articles to be analyzed in this study, is a newspaper located on Block Island that is intended for visitors and year-round residents: it will be the only newspaper in this study considered “local.” The initial intent of this study was to compare three levels of BIWF newspaper coverage, but due to the limited number of national newspaper articles (n=24), all newspaper articles that are not from the BIT will be considered regional. This differentiation is not based on readership or circulation numbers; it is rather based on the physical proximity of the newspaper outlet to the BIWF.

## **2. Hypotheses and research questions**

Given the newness of the BIWF, there are more questions than answers when considering the nature of media coverage about the BIWF. It seems reasonable to expect that there would be more local newspaper articles on the BIWF than national newspaper articles, but in what ways would the sources relied on differ, if at all? Would local and regional stories about the BIWF rely more heavily on government or elected officials because “they (government/elected officials)” can provide a steady stream of newsworthy information” and smaller newspapers do not have as much capital as national outlets (Maddison & Watts, 2012, p. 41)? Or are the processes of source gathering so routine that they bridge geographies (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009)?

Therefore, based on gatekeeping theory, the research question was:

**RQ1:** Are there statistically significant differences in the people/organizations used as sources between the local and regional coverage of the BIWF?

Ultimately, we hope to evaluate the source coverage as a way to understand the broader newspaper coverage of offshore wind in the United States. The role of the BIWF as a first presents a unique research opportunity to assess if previous research on source diversity and geographical source differences are consistent in the coverage of this new media topic. With that in mind, the research question is purposefully broad in order to present the findings in their entirety.

### **3. Methods**

#### *3.1 Data Collection*

All newspaper articles identified for analysis were found utilizing online databases including LexisNexis Academic (now Nexis Uni), National Newspapers Core (ProQuest), Google News, the *Boston Globe* archives, Infotrac Newsstand, and

the BIT archives. Search terms and dates were consistent in using the terms “Block Island Wind” OR “Deepwater Wind” AND “Rhode Island” with a date range of January 1, 2008 to July 1, 2017. January 1, 2008 as the beginning date is reflective of Rhode Island announcing interest in offshore wind development late in 2007 (Voskamp, 2008). July 1, 2017 was selected as the end date in order to create a bounded data set. July 1, 2017 allowed for articles to be included that were published during the first summer season in which the BIWF was operational, but ultimately allowed the research to move from the data collection phase into the analysis phase.

The only exception to search terms occurred in using the Infotrac Newstand database to find *Providence Journal* articles; the search terms were narrowed down to “Block Island Wind” due to the heavy prevalence of articles about the company Deepwater Wind with *no* mention of the BIWF. Articles were then skimmed by the primary researcher to determine if the newspaper reporting was appropriate and if so, the article was catalogued into NVivo software.

All articles from the BIT were labeled as “local newspaper articles” and all other newspaper articles were catalogued as “regional newspaper articles.” Again, due to the small number of national articles found between 2008 and 2017, all national newspaper articles are being included in the “regional” category. All editorial or opinion articles were omitted and no articles from global newspapers were included (Smith & Norton, 2013; Smith et al., 2016).

A total of 483 newspaper articles were identified and included in the data set for analysis.

### *3.2 Coding Procedure*



A preliminary codebook was developed by the primary researcher based on previous source analysis research (Salwen, 1995; Lacy & Coulson, 2000; Powell & Self, 2003; Armstrong, 2004; Ross, 2007; Sumpter & Garner, 2007; Maddison & Watts, 2012; McElroy, 2013; Smith & Norton, 2013; Artwick, 2014). The codebook emphasized that a source will be “(a) named or anonymous individual(s) that provided information or opinion in a direct quote, partial quote, or paraphrase” (Sumpter & Garner, 2007, p. 460). When an article is specifically attributing a statement, whether fact or opinion, to an individual or a larger organization, this inclusion of ownership is important to identify (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009).

The codebook, identical for identifying sources in both the local newspaper articles and the regional articles, had six dominant or parent source codes: no sources identified, business or for-profit representative, government or elected official, scientist or expert, individual, or nonprofit representative (see Appendix A). These six sources are reflective of previous research into source diversity: Brown et al’s (1987) work on the inclusion of government officials, at all levels, in newspapers; Lacy and Coulson’s (2000) inclusion of business representatives, consumers or individual source categories; and the work by Maddison and Watts (2012) on the citing of experts and scientists. The nonprofit category was included based on preliminary readings of the articles and the presence of individuals quoted who were members or leaders, often times, of environmental organizations. Smith & Norton (2013) note that in regards to environmental topics, nonprofit environmental groups are given a voice where they might not have previously had one: “But this is an age of organizations and in no sector is this more true than non-profit environmental social movement

organizations” (p. 53). A critical piece of gatekeeping theory is that journalists and media organizations are dynamic; the most dominant source is limited to a specific time frame and media environment (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; Shoemaker & Vos, 2009).

Within each of these parent codes, the primary researcher identified more specific sub or child codes during preliminary readings of the articles (Frey, Botan, & Kreps, 2000; Kempton, Firestone, Lilley, Rouleau, & Whitaker, 2005). An example of a child code within “business” was “developers of offshore wind.” In the case of an individual from Deepwater Wind, the company behind the BIWF, being quoted, the entirety of that statement would be included in both the child code of “developers of offshore wind” and the parent code of “business.” By being more specific within each of the six dominant codes, researchers hoped for a more nuanced understanding of the most common voices in newspaper coverage (Brown et al., 1987). Instances of no sub-code being identified occurred, but it was necessitated that one of the six dominant codes always be referenced in coding a citation.

Given the narrative structure of the articles coded, researchers emphasized coding based on identifiers in a specific article. Even if a source had been mentioned in a previous article, coders analyzed a source based on what was presented in each piece of data. In other words, while “Dr. Patel” may have been identified as a marine biologist in a previous article, if he was noted only as being a Block Island resident in a subsequent article, Dr. Patel should be coded as an “individual” despite the previous information.

The six dominant codes were also mutually exclusive. Citations where individuals were introduced by multiple attributes, researchers identified the dominant code. In other words, it seems safe to generally assume that an elected member of local government is *also* a local resident. But to code any local government official as *also* a local resident would be misleading if a quote did not identify a source in this way. While previous research has allowed non-mutually exclusive source coding, given the heavy presence of local newspaper coverage in the data, researchers decided it would more appropriately reflect the coverage to identify a dominant code for each source and remain consistent throughout a specific article (Salwen, 1995). This is consistent with media research that identifies a primary or dominant frame given the presence of multiple narratives (Smith et al., 2016). Curtin and Rhodenbaugh (2001) suggested coding as source using the first qualifier provided in maintaining mutually exclusive source categories. Hermida et al (2014) used a consensus method to come to an agreement among researchers in cases of ambiguity or disagreement about a source's primary identifier.

The frequency of specific sources referenced was also of interest in this study. If throughout an article, for example, the same state government official was quoted in three separate, different paragraphs, this seems to suggest not only the importance of this individual, but also the multiple areas in which this organization has been given credibility (Dimitrova & Strömbäck, 2009; Smith & Norton, 2013). The codebook specified that if an individual was cited in one part of the article and again in another part of the article, if those two quotes were separated by at least another line of text, sentence, etc., those two quotes would be counted as two citations from the same

coded category. Additionally, if multiple people from the same organization or dominant code were quoted, they were quoted as two different codes, as the inclusion of two voices from the same group is important to consider.

To ensure intercoder reliability, a random sample of 10% of the dataset (n=49) was coded by both researchers (Frey, Botan, & Kreps, 2000; Dimitrova & Strömbäck, 2009). Krippendorff's alpha for all six of the dominant codes (no codes identified, business or for-profit representative, government or elected official, scientist or expert, individual, or nonprofit representative) reached at least 0.80 (the range was .878 to 1.0). A p-value of 0.01 was used to determine significance.

#### **4. Results**

Researchers coded a total of 483 articles; local articles, n=352; regional articles, n=131. The two tables below show the total number of articles that included a quote from one of the six parent codes (code present) and the total number of quotes included from that parent code (total code count); table 1 details the local newspaper coverage data and table 2 the regional newspaper coverage. The most commonly cited source for both local and regional newspapers were business and for-profit representatives. Of local articles that included at least one source (n=328), 82% cited at least one business representative. For regional articles with at least one source quoted (n=121), 83% had at least one business or for-profit individual cited. A two-tailed z-test did not support a statistically significant difference between how local and regional newspapers used business citations (p=0.77182). The raw data is being provided here as suggested by Simmons, Nelson, and Simonsohn (2011).

Code Present	Parent Code	Total Code Count
24	No sources coded	24
270	Business/For-profit Representative	923
24	Expert/Scientist	78
189	Government Official/Group	643
89	Individual	249
25	Nonprofit Representative/Group	45

Table 1. Local newspaper coverage coding data (n=352)

Code Present	Parent Code	Total Code Count
10	No sources coded	10
101	Business/For-profit Representative	285
16	Expert/Scientist	27
74	Government Official/Group	172
15	Individual	58
19	Nonprofit Representative/Group	30

Table 2. Regional newspaper coverage coding data (n=131)

*For-Profit Businesses*

Within this business or for-profit representative parent code, the majority of quotes came from “developers of wind farms.” 81% of local articles that included a quote from a business or for-profit representative had a quote from a representative of a wind farm company: company examples included Deepwater Wind, Allco, and Cape Wind. For regional articles, 84% of articles that included a quote from a for-profit representative included a quote from a wind farm developer. The code “developers of wind farms” is inclusive of onshore wind farm developers, but the data came overwhelmingly from offshore wind developers, particularly Deepwater Wind, the

company that developed the BIWF. A two-tailed z-test did not support a statistically significant difference between the way local and regional newspapers used wind farm representatives as sources ( $p=0.44726$ ).

### *Scientists*

Local newspaper stories that included at least one source ( $n=328$ ) included a citation from an expert or scientist 7% of the time. Regional newspapers, using the same parameters, included a quote from an expert in 13% of articles. While the majority of newspaper articles did not include a quotation from a researcher, those articles that did, seemed to select who to include based on geographical proximity. In local newspaper stories that included a quotation from an expert, 88% of those quoted were identified as being scientists working in the New England area (i.e. local experts). However, in regional coverage, 38% of expert citations belonged to local scientists. A two-tailed z-test showed that this difference was significant at the 0.01 level ( $p=0.00094$ ). Regional newspapers relied more heavily on national experts, using them 56% of the time, versus local newspapers using national scientists in 21% of articles that quoted an expert. A two-tailed z-test showed that this difference was not statistically significant at the 0.01 level ( $p=0.02144$ ). International experts were almost never used and were quoted in a total of four articles across both local and regional newspapers ( $n=483$ ).

### *Government and elected officials*

The second most frequently cited source for both local and regional newspapers were government or elected officials. 58% of local articles that included at least one citation included a quote from a government official. 61% of regional articles

using the same parameters cited at least one government official. A two-tailed z-test did not support a statistically significant difference between the use of local and regional governmental citations ( $p=0.50286$ ). Table 3 shows the presence of the four sub-codes for government or elected officials for local articles and table 4 shows the same data for regional articles.

Code Present	Sub Code (Government; local)	Total Code Count
18	Federal gov't	33
115	Local gov't	417
1	Other state gov't (not Rhode Island)	1
89	State gov't	206

Table 3. Local article use of government sub-codes (n=352)

Code Present	Sub Code (Government; regional)	Total Code Count
30	Federal gov't	46
13	Local gov't	34
8	Other state gov't (not Rhode Island)	11
40	State gov't	82

Table 4. Regional article use of government sub-codes (n=131)

In local articles that quoted at least one elected official (n=189), 61% of these articles specifically cited a local government official. In regional coverage, the percentage of local officials cited in an article that quoted at least one elected official (n=74) was 18%. This difference in local government citation was statistically significant at the 0.01 level ( $p=0.00000$ ). The most commonly cited government official for regional coverage were Rhode Island state-level government officials, such as the governor or state house representatives (54%). Less than half of local articles

that cited at least one governmental source (n=189) quoted a state government official (47%). However, this difference was not statistically significant at the 0.01 level (p=0.30772).

### *Individuals*

In local articles that included at least one source (n=328), 27% included a quote from an individual. Almost all (92%) of these individuals were noted as local residents; local residents include both Block Island residents and residents of neighboring towns, such as Narragansett and Kingston. Regional articles with at least one citation (n=121) included an individual 12% of the time; 93% of these individuals were local residents as defined by the parameters above. The difference in the use of individuals between local and regional newspapers was shown to be statistically significant at the 0.01 level (p=0.00104). Tourists, coded within the dominant code of “individuals,” appeared in almost no articles (n=3) across local and regional coverage (n=483).

### *Non-profit organizations*

Local newspapers cited nonprofit representatives in less than 10% of articles that included at least one citation and regional newspapers quoted nonprofit representatives in 16% of the articles with at least one quote. The difference in usage between local and regional newspapers of nonprofit representatives was not statistically significant at the 0.01 level (p=0.01046). 84% of all nonprofit quotations, from both local and regional newspapers, came from environmental groups, such as the Conservation Law Foundation.

## **5. Discussion**



### *For-Profit Business Sources Most Common*

What is immediately clear is that the prevalence of for-profit company quotations in local and regional newspaper coverage of the BIWF suggests a similar gatekeeping process in source selection. This strong reliance on business sources is a surprising finding. Previous research has empirically supported the hypothesis that journalists commonly defer to “elite” sources of information, but much of this work has found that government officials fulfill this role (Ross, 2007; Sumpter & Garner, 2007; Shoemaker & Vos, 2009; Maddison & Watts, 2012; Smith & Norton, 2013). Researchers have also found that this reliance on politicians or government officials is commonplace on social media sites, such as Twitter (Artwick, 2014). Additionally, the focus of the news stories that this research has been conducted on has spanned numerous topics: national disasters (Salwen, 1995), business crises (Powell & Self, 2003), political elections (Ross, 2007), technological disasters (Sumpter & Garner, 2007), and environmental issues including carbon emissions and federal land policies (Maddison & Watts, 2012; Smith & Norton, 2013). This highlights the strong reliance of journalists on government sources, regardless of “beat.”

It should be noted that Lacy and Coulson (2000), in their work on newspaper coverage of the Clean Air Act, did find that governmental sources, while most common, were closely followed by business sources: 43% of total sources came from government sources and 39% from business sources (Lacy & Coulson, 2000, p. 18). But, it appears that this study is the first instance where business citations have outpaced governmental sources.

Given the similarity between the local and regional business source usage in this study, gatekeeping theory might suggest that there is something distinct about the BIWF that is impacting the historical channels between journalists and sources (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). Considering that previous research into environmental topics and the use of sources did *not* find that business sources were most common, it may be the nature of the BIWF as the “first in the nation” that is influencing the newspaper source coverage.

There was a prevailing feeling of uncertainty present in the data, particularly in regards to the permitting process from government officials. Local government officials, the most prominent type of governmental source in local newspaper coverage, were repeatedly quoted commenting on unknowns: “Town Manager Nancy Dodge said too many questions remained unanswered, including whether the island could purchase electricity from the mainland grid through the wind farm’s cable and sell excess energy back” (Barrett, 2008); and: “‘I’m sure there are downsides we don’t know about,’ said John Warfel (town councilman). ‘There are a lot of unknowns. We can’t truly predict what’s going to happen’” (Turaj, 2012).

It stands to reason that in this circumstance, while an elected official remains an “elite” source, the overwhelming unknowns related to permitting an offshore wind project might make these traditional relationships less attractive (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). It may be that in previous studies, the government officials *literally* knew more than any other source, leading to their source domination (Sumpter & Garner, 2007; Maddison & Watts, 2012; Smith & Norton, 2013). In this circumstance however, the data suggest that business representatives, particularly those from developers of wind

farms, served the function of the “elite” source more often than governmental sources. Additionally, while previous research that has suggested that the use of diverse sources increases credibility to readers, there continues to be a heavy reliance on “elite” sources (Brown et al., 1987; Slovic, 1987; Cozma, 2006).

Again, the finding that business sources are the most common type of citation is present in both the local coverage, as noted above, and the regional coverage; this finding suggests that at least in relation to the BIWF, the developer of the wind farm, Deepwater Wind, held a powerful position in building the narrative about the project. Whether this was an intentional tactic is a topic for future research.

#### *Local vs. Regional Differences*

Beyond the similar routines utilized by both local and regional newspapers in relying on for-profit sources, much of the data support previous research findings related to gatekeeping theory. Namely, that geographic difference in newspaper location appears to impact the coverage of a particular story (Salwen, 1995; Lacy & Coulson, 2000; Powell & Self, 2003; Ross, 2007; Sumpter & Garner, 2007; Maddison & Watts, 2012). This research study does not propose to understand the broader mechanism underlying these differences, but in relation to the BIWF, there were statistically significant differences between the local and regional coverage related to the use of local experts, local government officials, and individuals. This suggests that continuing to differentiate between newspapers based on geographic proximity, particularly in relation to renewable energy projects, is meaningful. Salwen (2009) suggests, “the local media organization might turn out to have more influence in the outcome of an issue or event” (p. 105). Future research may attempt to determine if

the differences in local and regional coverage is reflective of the geographical proximity to the sited offshore wind farm project *or* is more representative of the resources available to local reporters.

While the original research question of this study was supported, *RQ1: Are there statistically significant differences in the people/organizations used as sources between the local and regional coverage of the BIWF*, it is interesting to note that the data appear to emphasize the similarities in coverage rather than the differences when it comes to the BIWF.

## **6. Conclusion and implications**

The development of the BIWF is an important research area where we can apply previously supported theoretical frameworks. Offshore wind energy, while not a new technology, continues to be novel in the United States: at the time of publication, the BIWF remains the only offshore wind farm in the United States.

As the data above suggest, there are interesting differences between the coverage of the BIWF and previous topics studied through gatekeeping theory. Most notably, the domination of the business sources across both local and regional coverage has surpassed governmental officials who had previously been most common.

In addition, it is always important to consider the sources who were *not* present in the coverage. Neither experts (i.e. scientists or researchers) nor non-profit organizations were major sources in the coverage of the BIWF. Additionally, perhaps surprisingly given the dependence of Rhode Island on tourism and recreation for the state economy, almost no tourists were cited in either the local or regional coverage.

Gatekeeping theory suggests this is because of the heavy dependence on traditional channels of information by journalists, and this also suggests that a particular story is less important than routine source relationships (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009).

The particular nuances of siting large renewable energy projects will continue to be a topic of importance assuming the United States continues to lean less heavily on energy produced by fossil fuels. The offshore wind industry, if one believes the industry publications and projections, is poised to begin historic growth in the United States. It is the intention of this study that the analysis of the newspaper coverage presented here will serve as a window into understanding the groups and individuals shaping the social discourse about offshore wind energy production.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

A limitation of this study is that the regional coverage is inclusive of national newspaper coverage due to the low number of articles returned (n=24). A potentially meaningful follow-up study should investigate whether the reliance on business sources is as strongly reflected in the national coverage as in the local and regional (specifically New England geographically-situated newspapers) coverage.

It is also important to point out that gatekeeping theory, while originally theorized in the pre-electronic media age, has empirical support for continuing to be an appropriate theoretical frame through which to analyze newspaper coverage (Cassidy, 2006; McElroy, 2013; Hermida et al., 2014). Future studies may suggest adaptations, but there is strong experimental support for its continued use.

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## Appendix A

### Block Island Wind Farm Codebook (local and regional)

“Only named or anonymous individuals that provided information or opinion in a direct quote, partial quote, or paraphrase were coded. Coders were instructed to ignore anonymous sources when they were used casually in collective attribution like “Engineers predicted” or “Several senior accident investigators say”” (Sumpter & Garner, 2007, p. 460)

#### General Rules

- Typically, anytime a sentence includes “said,” “says,” “noted,” “stated,” etc. it should be coded.
- Anything in quotes will be coded, including references to a written document.
- A general sentence such as “Deepwater Wind said” will **not** be coded. Nor will sentences such as “according to a state press release” be coded.
  - A more specific individual must be responsible for a sentence in order to be coded.
- If the same person is quoted multiple times and these quotes are separated by other sentences, quotes etc., that same person should be coded multiple times.
  - This provides frequency of singular source use.
- In the case where an individual is introduced by numerous identities, the coder will need to determine the *primary* or dominant category; there will be no double coding. Parent codes are to remain mutually exclusive.
  - Also, each quote should be identified *only* by the information provided in that article; no knowledge from previous articles should be used in the coding process.
- Quotes from different individuals from the same group will be coded as *unique* codes.
- A quote from a lawyer will be coded as being from the *company* that they work for.
- An individual who is introduced as a seasonal resident will be coded as a “local resident” *not* a “tourist.”

#### Code Specific Rules

***All sub-codes must also be coded as the dominant code. There will be instances of quotes just being coded as the dominant code with no sub-code.***

**Example:** Block Island resident Bryce Ye noted, “I haven’t really seen sharks lately, but I know they are out there” would be coded as “LOCAL RESIDENT (sub-code)” and “INDIVIDUAL (dominant code)”

*Blue color indicates notes/examples of how quotes should be coded*

- 1) Business or for-profit representative

- a) BIPco
    - i) Block Island Power Company
  - b) Developers of wind farms
    - i) Includes: all Deepwater Wind representatives; Cape Wind; Allco; AWEA (American Wind Energy Association), etc.
    - ii) Offshore wind companies AND onshore wind companies (there are very few onshore wind companies quoted)
  - c) National Grid
  - d) Unions or job alliances
    - i) Individuals representing groups such as labor unions, worker's groups/associations (ex. Rhode Island Lobsterman's Association)
    - ii) Also look for organizations to have the word "association" or "alliance" or "commission"
  - e) Wind farm related companies
    - i) Companies that are providing goods or services critical to the wind farm
      - (1) Such as Siemens (building the turbines); Fred Olson Windcarrier (boat builder); Blount Boats (boat builder), etc.
        - (a) Companies that have an inherent connection to the building or maintenance of the wind farm
        - (2) Also companies provide financial support
- 2) Expert or scientist
- a) International
  - b) Local
    - i) New England scientists (ME, MA, RI, CT, VT, NH) researchers/professors/academics
  - c) National
    - i) All researchers/professors/scientists/academics outside of New England
- 3) Government or elected official
- a) Federal gov't
    - i) US Army Corps of Engineers; National Park Services (NPS)
    - ii) All United States representatives and senators (work in DC)
  - b) Local gov't (geographical)
    - i) Individuals who are part of organizations or councils that serve a public function at the local level
    - ii) Local government representatives include Block Island officials *and* Narragansett officials
    - iii) Tourism council representative; Electric Utility Task Group (EUTG); Zoning board (for Block Island and Narragansett); Homeowner's association; Town manager; Advisory group member; First warden; Second warden; Task force member
  - c) State gov't
    - i) All state gov't representatives must be from Rhode Island
    - ii) Governor; state representatives and senators; Coastal Resource Management Council (CRMC) representatives; Rhode Island Public Utilities Commission (PUC); State office of energy; State office of energy management

- (1) CRMC has it's own sub-section because of it's strong presence
- d) Other state gov't
  - i) State officials from any state that is not Rhode Island
- 4) Individual
  - a) Local resident (geographical)
    - i) Includes current residents of Block Island, Narragansett, or other nearby towns in Rhode Island
  - b) Tourist
- 5) Non-profit representative
  - a) Tribal representatives will be coded as non-profit representatives
  - b) Environmental group
    - i) Conservation Law Foundation (Fund)
      - (1) Sub-group because of its strong presence
    - ii) Includes "Alliance to Protect Nantucket Sound"

## **APPENDIX B**

### **ACTUAL CODEBOOK**

- 1) No codes
- 2) Business or for-profit representative
  - a) BIPco (Block Island Power Company)
  - b) Developers of wind farms
  - c) National Grid
  - d) Unions or job alliances
  - e) Wind farm related companies
- 3) Expert or scientist
  - a) International
  - b) Local
  - c) National
- 4) Government or elected official
  - a) Federal gov't
  - b) Local gov't
  - c) Other state gov't (non Rhode Island)
  - d) State gov't
    - i) CRMC (Coastal Resources Management Council)
- 5) Individual
  - a) Local resident
  - b) Tourist
- 6) Non-profit representative
  - a) Environmental group
    - i) Conservation Law Fund

**CHAPTER 2**

MANUSCRIPT 2

**Local newspaper risk and benefit framing of the Block Island Wind Farm and  
Cape Wind**

To be submitted to *Environmental Communication* in May, 2018

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## **Introduction**

In late 2017, the company behind the first proposed offshore wind farm in the United States, Cape Wind Associates, rescinded their ocean area lease rights to the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) following pressure from opposition groups (Chesto, 2017). Despite steady growth of onshore wind farm development in the United States, offshore wind development, at the time of this publication, has resulted in a single operational farm: the Block Island Wind Farm (BIWF) (AWEA, 2017). First proposed in 2008 by Deepwater Wind, the five-turbine BIWF went through seven years of political and legislative review prior to the 2015 “steel in the water” moment at the beginning of construction: a moment previously never achieved in the United States (Kuffner, 2015; Dennis & Mooney, 2016).

Many in the offshore wind industry are hopeful that the BIWF’s success in reaching the end of the permitting process will lead to the construction of more offshore wind farms off the coast of the United States. BOEM has active ocean leases for offshore wind development on the outer continental shelf off the coasts of Rhode Island, Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, Delaware, Virginia, Maryland, and North Carolina (BOEM, 2017). While obtaining a federal lease is merely the first step in a long and multi-agency permitting process, numerous companies have begun exploratory research into offshore wind siting locations through environmental impact studies (Kalish, 2017).

To be sure, these proposed projects have been met with opposition from certain groups who have a relationship to the areas being leased (Firestone & Kempton, 2007). In an Associated Press (AP) article published in late 2017, the headline read

“Winds of worry: US fishermen fear forests of power turbines” (Marcelo). In the recreational and commercial fishing industry along the east coast of the United States, there is fear that expanding offshore wind farms will result in limited fishing grounds (Marcelo, 2017; Firestone & Kempton, 2007). Regulatory agencies and even the developers of offshore wind have attempted to address these fears by excluding specific habitats and fishing grounds, but uncertainty remains (Marcelo, 2017).

While the opposition to the Cape Wind farm was not orchestrated primarily by fishermen or union groups, the broader lesson learned was that unrelenting, well-funded resistance can be effective at stalling development (Thompson, 2005; Bush & Hoagland, 2016; Rand & Hoen, 2017; Seelye, 2017; Firestone, Bidwell, Gardner, & Knapp, 2018). Jim Gordon, the business leader behind the proposed Cape Wind farm, noted this about the opposition: “In a football game, if you have a tie, there’s an overtime period, a sudden death period...We were kept in a repeated sudden death period, and the goal posts kept moving” (Seelye, 2017). The Alliance to Protect Nantucket Sound, the opposition group supported by Senator Edward M. Kennedy and funded by William I. Koch, was determined in its argument that Nantucket Sound was not the place for an offshore wind farm (Seelye, 2017). It was during these repeated negotiations that the BIWF marched, albeit slowly, through the permitting process eventually obtaining the first in the nation title. Both the failure of Cape Wind and the success of the BIWF will remain important historical markers for the offshore wind industry in the United States for decades to come.

Of interest in this study is the utilization of risk frames by local newspapers covering the proposal and subsequent processes of permitting these offshore wind



projects: the *Cape Cod Times* for the Cape Wind farm and *The Block Island Times* for the BIWF. Are the different outcomes of the wind farms reflective in any way, of the coverage received from the local newspapers?

#### *Cape Wind and the BIWF*

Cape Wind did have supporters, including the two-time governor of Massachusetts, Deval Patrick; and the BIWF had its detractors, including an opposition group titled Deepwater Resistance who brought numerous lawsuits against Deepwater Wind (Schoetz, 2006; Cotter, 2014). Researchers have very recently started to look at why the Cape Wind project failed while the BIWF was ultimately successful (Thompson, 2005; Klain, Satterfield, MacDonald, Battista, & Chan, 2017). One possible reason is that the Cape Cod community, which stood to receive the power generated from Cape Wind, did not stand to gain economically from the project because electricity costs were already low (Klain, Satterfield, MacDonald, Battista, & Chan, 2017).

Residents of Block Island, on the other hand, frequently paid some of the highest electricity costs in the nation due to their reliance on aging diesel generators (Abel, 2016). Additionally, installation of the underwater electrical cable, a necessity for the offshore wind farm, would connect Block Island to mainland Rhode Island for the first time. The cable held the promise of a fiber optic cable, which would increase internet speeds, allow for more stable connection for business owners, and lessen the occurrences of brownouts and electricity surges (Abel, 2016). For many, the cost of building such a connection cable without a company like Deepwater Wind fronting the cost would be impossible (Abel, 2016). In the same year that the BIWF was proposed

(2008), local government official Barbara MacMullan was quoted as saying, “I do think that given the possibility that we may get a cable from this project should weigh heavily on any decision to invest ratepayer funds” (Barrett, 2008).

The circumstances surrounding Cape Wind and the BIWF are unique; it is not the intention of this research to suggest otherwise. However, while acknowledging the disparate situations into which these two projects were proposed, comparing the local newspaper coverage in regards to the use of risk framing is meaningful. Given the geographical presence of offshore wind farms, analyzing local newspapers may present a more direct understanding of the risks as understood by the local citizens (Wakefield & Elliott, 2003; Batel & Devine-Wright, 2015).

### **Theoretical perspective**

#### *Local newspaper coverage*

Neither Cape Cod nor Block Island are isolated communities; their local energy decisions impact neighboring communities. Previous research has suggested that in siting renewable energy projects, social acceptance can be a powerful barrier (Wüstenhagen, Wolsink, & Bürer, 2007; Batel & Devine-Wright, 2015).

In the case of Cape Wind, the wind farm was sited for Nantucket Sound, and both Martha’s Vineyard and Nantucket populations would have had their viewsheds impacted (Firestone & Kempton, 2007). And while Block Island was promised lower electricity rates, Narragansett, Rhode Island, the town across the ocean, was quite concerned about the potential increase in their electricity prices as a direct result of the offshore wind farm; this concern extended statewide (Abel, 2016; Donnis, 2016).

The theoretical concept of NIMBY (not in my backyard), while cognitively attractive, has struggled to be supported empirically as an explanation for geographical differences in opinions about wind energy (Devine-Wright, 2005; Firestone, Kempton, Lilley, & Samoteskul, 2012). It seems rational to expect that those closest to a proposed offshore wind farm, the turbines of which can reach over five hundred feet in the air, would be more opposed than those geographically farther away (Kuffner, 2015). In other words, people may have positive opinions of offshore wind energy, until confronted with a very real, potential project that affects them directly (Firestone, Kempton, Lilley, & Samoteskul, 2012). Yet, the “NIMBY theory has not been substantiated with empirical evidence as a major source of opposition” which suggests that there is need for additional research into local contexts and the reasons for opposition or support for renewable energy projects (Firestone, Kempton, Lilley, & Samoteskul, 2012, p. 1372).

Outside of the NIMBY framework, research into newspaper representations of emerging renewable energy technologies has found substantial support for evaluating coverage in regards to a newspaper organization’s proximity to the proposed site (Stephens et al., 2009; Feldpausch-Parker et al., 2013; Fischlein, Feldpausch-Parker, Peterson, Stephens, & Wilson, 2014; Smith, Smith, Silka, Lindenfeld, & Gilbert, 2016). A 2013 study analyzed the level of coverage related to carbon capture and storage programs in four states and found meaningful differences between Massachusetts and Minnesota, where there is a high standard for climate change policy but little infrastructure, and Montana and Texas where there is substantial space for infrastructure, but less state-level regulation (Feldpausch-Parker et al.).

Researchers emphasized that media coverage differed “partially related to regional attributes, needs, and the perceived appropriateness of CCS (carbon capture storage)” (Feldpausch-Parker et al., 2013, p. 347). That is to say, the specific local or state context impacts the newspaper coverage: “Perhaps there really *is* a better understanding of local readers’ needs amongst local journalists because, unlike the nationals, local journalists are also local readers: crucially, are local” (Ross, 2007, p. 452).

The lack of a comprehensive framework to understand these geographical nuances makes clear the need for additional studies into local newspaper representation of renewable energy topics. Media research suggests that how a complex story is covered is reflected in the public understanding and conceptualization of that issue (Berkowitz, 2009; Cacciatore, Scheufele, & Iyengar, 2016). Regardless of the circulation numbers of a newspaper organization or the clout provided to the journalists, the construction of a news article is intentional in what sources are used, what information is provided, and importantly, what information is omitted (Ross, 2007).

Local newspapers, occasionally referred to as “community” newspapers, are media organizations that provide services for a specific geographical area (Gilligan, 2011). While this definition has changed given the geographic boundlessness of the internet, for the purposes of this research, local and community will be used interchangeably. A local newspaper will be understood as a media organization that writes for a small, well-defined group of individuals (Gilligan, 2011). Given the distinct audience for local newspapers, there is an increased likelihood for daily

coverage of stories directly impacting the community that might not be covered extensively in larger newspaper outlets. Research has also suggested that while there exists a more robust understanding of elite newspaper coverage, such as stories from *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, there is a dearth of research that has focused specifically on local, geographically based newspaper coverage (Wakefield & Elliott, 2003; Crawley, 2007; Gilligan, 2011).

We argue that given the uncertainties related to building the first offshore wind farm, local newspaper coverage, whether on Cape Cod or Block Island, would include discussion of risks. And while the United States has had power generated from onshore wind farms since the 1980s, offshore wind should be considered as a distinct and new (to the United States) technology (Hall & Lazarus, 2015). Priest and Ten Eyeck (2004) have suggested that stories focused on emerging technology are first framed as stories of risk at the local level which then inform how these topics are subsequently covered in elite, national newspapers (Crawley, 2007). To explore the differences in coverage of Cape Wind and the BIWF, we turn to Stephens et al (2009) adaptation of Luhmann's (1989) theory of ecological communication.

#### *Theoretical Framework*

Stephens et al (2009) proposed a theoretical approach to risk communication and media coverage of wind energy based on Luhmann's theory of ecological communication. Luhmann's theory of ecological communication (1989) proposes that humans, while unable to communicate directly with the environment, are able to understand the relationship between people and nature through analysis of communication (Peterson, 1992). Essentially, rather than trying to understand the

relationship between humans and the environment by evaluating physical interactions between these two systems, the communication within the human sphere is reflective of the underlying relationship (Luhmann, 1989; Peterson, 1992). Luhmann (1989) titled these communicative activities “internal resonance” and noted that the process is ongoing and dynamic.

For the sake of this research, the adaptation first operationalized by Stephens et al. (2009) is the framework for this study. Stephens et al. (2009) adapted theoretical framework of Luhmann’s theory posits that a newspaper story focused on an environmental topic, such as wind energy as a climate change mitigation tool, can be narrated in six distinct frames: technical, economic, environmental, health and safety, political, and aesthetic/cultural. Within each of these frames, either the risks or the benefits can be emphasized (Stephens et al., 2009). Following previous media research, a frame here is defined as the “central organizing idea” used to make sense of a news event (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989, p. 3). The frame selected reflects underlying power structures and basic assumptions about the relationship between humans and their environment: “each operation (communicative event) of a system reproduces the system’s boundary by further embedding itself into a network of future operations” (Feldpausch-Parker et al., 2013, p. 338). For example, if a newspaper outlet writes about environmental topics exclusively through the economic frame, i.e. emphasizing the job impacts of closing a coal mine, this may suggest that the news outlet considers these environmental issues meaningful *only* in connection with monetary risks and benefits.

Subsequent research (Feldpausch-Parker et al., 2013; Smith et al., 2016) has applied this framework in studying state-level newspaper coverage of carbon capture technology (Feldpausch-Parker, 2013) and the relationship between regional newspaper coverage about renewable energy stories and the introduction of bills in the Maine state legislature (Smith et al., 2016). Smith et al. (2016) updated the codebook by including a “none” category for articles in which no frame was identifiable.

Stephens et al. (2009) adaptation of Luhmann’s theory of ecological communication is an appropriate lens through which to evaluate newspaper coverage of offshore wind because offshore wind as a technology is a deliberate mechanism through attempting to offset fossil fuel emissions (Stephens et al., 2009; Fischlein et al., 2014). Renewable energy, at least in the United State’s context, is understood as intimately connected to the environment (Laird & Stefes, 2009). Utilizing Stephen’s theoretical adaptation will also help to test and apply this adapted framework to more cases, assessing its validity across contexts.

This article will focus on the following research questions:

*RQ1: Are there thematic differences in the use of risk/benefit narratives between coverage of the Cape Wind farm and the BIWF?*

*RQ2: Does The Cape Cod Times will include more risk narratives in its coverage of the Cape Wind project than The Block Island Times in its coverage of the BIWF?*

## **Method**

### *Data Collection*

Both the *Cape Cod Times* and *The Block Island Times* were selected for analysis based on their geographical proximity to a proposed offshore wind farm site (Massachusetts and Rhode Island, respectively) and their roles as community focused newspapers (Firestone & Kempton, 2007). While the *Block Island Times* is the only newspaper produced on Block Island it should be noted that Martha's Vineyard has two local newspapers, *Vineyard Gazette* and *The Martha's Vineyard Times* which could have been selected for analysis. Researchers ultimately decided that because readership of the *Cape Cod Times* included residents of Martha's Vineyard, the *Cape Cod Times* would provide the most comprehensive newspaper coverage.

All *Cape Cod Times* articles were found using the online database Newsbank with the search term "Cape Wind" and a date range of January 1, 2001 to December 31, 2006. *The Block Island Times* articles were accessed by utilizing an online catalogue managed by the newspaper that archives all internally published articles about the BIWF; the date range was January 1, 2008 to December 31, 2013. All identified articles received a preliminary scan by the primary researcher before being catalogued in NVivo. No opinion or editorial pieces were included (Smith & Norton, 2013; Smith et al., 2016).

In order to remain as consistent as possible in comparing the newspaper coverage of the two projects, the first five years after the initial proposal were selected to be analyzed. This follows previous research which has used important dates or meaningful events to inform the time period selected for analysis (Wakefield & Elliott, 2003; Sumpter & Garner, 2007; Stephens et al., 2009; Ahern & Formentin, 2016).

#### *Coding Procedure*



Based on Stephens et al (2009) thematic codebook and the updates provided by Smith et al (2016), researchers analyzed each article for the presence of one of the six proposed frames, differentiating between articles that articulated risks or benefits. The codebook drew heavily from the operational definitions provided in Stephens et al (2009) and Fischlein et al (2014), but was updated iteratively by the two researchers coding, based on the data itself (Kempton, Firestone, Lilley, Rouleau, & Whitaker, 2005; Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 2005). The final codebook is provided in table 1.

<b>Frames</b>	<b>Risks (barrier)</b>	<b>Benefits (facilitator)</b>
<b>Technical</b>	Technological limitations and uncertainty <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Decommissioning issues</li> <li>- Cable issues</li> <li>- Unreliability</li> <li>- Uncertainty</li> </ul>	Technological reliability, sophistication, and advancements; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Coming off unreliable diesel power</li> <li>- First in the nation</li> <li>- Renewable resource</li> </ul>
<b>Economic</b>	Expensive, destabilizes local economy, i.e. reduces tourism; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increase in taxes</li> <li>- Uncertainty in electricity rates</li> <li>- Decreased housing market value</li> </ul>	Low cost, strengthen economy, free resource (jobs, tourism, etc.) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- New industry</li> <li>- High paying jobs</li> <li>- Available market</li> <li>- Increased tourism</li> </ul>
<b>Environmental</b>	Negative environmental consequences (bird-kills, habitat loss) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Noise impacts from cable</li> <li>- Whale migration impacts</li> <li>- Need for env. protection</li> </ul>	Positive environmental consequences (reduce carbon emission, reduce air pollution) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Climate change impact reduction</li> <li>- Local resource adaptation</li> </ul>
<b>Health and safety</b>	Health or safety concerns (glare, navigation, radar, worker safety) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Noise impacts from turbines</li> <li>- Sleep disturbances</li> </ul>	Health and safety improvements (i.e., reduce respiratory problems) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Decrease in asthma rates</li> </ul>
<b>Political</b>	Negative political ramifications, image, reputation of state, or political leaders. Threat to military or political security <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Not bipartisan</li> <li>- Difficult permitting process</li> <li>- Absence of legal framework</li> <li>- Uncertainty about the process</li> </ul>	Positive political ramifications, i.e., being a leader, closer to political goals, energy independence, and energy security <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Bipartisan</li> <li>- Successful use of the permitting process</li> <li>- Reputation of the state</li> <li>- Transparency of the process; public participation</li> </ul>
<b>Aesthetic and cultural</b>	Negative visual impacts. Negative impacts on cultural, historical, or recreational sites, negative community impact	Positive visual impacts, i.e., positive community impact, enhance local culture, bring community together <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Proud of the community</li> </ul>

Table 1. Final codebook

The final dataset consisted of 299 articles from *Cape Cod Times* and 186 articles from *The Block Island Times*. Researchers used a constructed week sampling method (Anderson, 2012). Previous media research has utilized constructed week sampling as a more intentional sampling method that is reflective of the nature of newspapers to vary coverage based on the day of the week (Sunday vs. Monday coverage) (Riffe, Aust, & Lacy, 1993). Constructed week samples have varied in length with previous research having been conducted on two randomly constructed weeks including Saturday and Sunday coverage (Hester & Dougall, 2007; Sumpter & Garner, 2007; Matthes, 2009; Artwick, 2014). Recent work has advised that in considering the impact of online newspaper content, constructed week sample sizes need to be larger (Hester & Dougall, 2007).

A four-week constructed sample, 28 days, was utilized to analyze the data set. For each newspaper, four randomly selected dates were selected for each day of the week (inclusive of Saturday and Sunday). All articles published on that random day were included in the sample set. However, there were no instances of days on which multiple articles had been published, resulting in samples from both newspaper consisting of 28 articles.

Each article, the unit of analysis, was coded as having a dominant narrative structure reflective of one of the six frames provided by Luhmann's theory of ecological communication (Stephens et al., 2009) or no frame (Matthes & Kohring, 2008; Matthes, 2009; Anderson, 2012; Smith et al., 2016). Within each of these frames, coders identified the article as portraying risks or benefits (Stephens et al., 2009; Feldpausch-Parker et al., 2013; Fischlein et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2016).

Coders were instructed to emphasize the title and leading paragraphs of an article in identifying the focus of the narrative (Fischlein et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2016). In the case of lengthy investigate pieces where multiple frames were utilized, coders were instructed to count paragraphs belonging to each frame to determine the dominant narrative structure (Smith et al., 2016).

To ensure the validity of the findings, intercoder reliability metrics were calculated following researchers' initial training and before the entirety of the sample set was coded (Frey, Botan, & Kreps, 2000). Due to the small sample size (n=56), 20% of the articles were selected for intercoder reliability testing (Stephens et al., 2009). The codebook achieved a Krippendorff's alpha of 1.0 between the two researchers.

## **Results**

As previously noted in the methods section, a total of fifty-six articles, twenty-eight articles per newspaper, were analyzed as a representative sample of the total data set (n=485). Only one article out of the four-week constructed sample was identified as having no frame. This article, published in *The Block Island Times*, was less than one hundred words and was accompanied by simulation photos of the proposed wind farm. Figure 1 shows a breakdown of the identified themes between the two newspapers as separated by risk and benefit

frames.

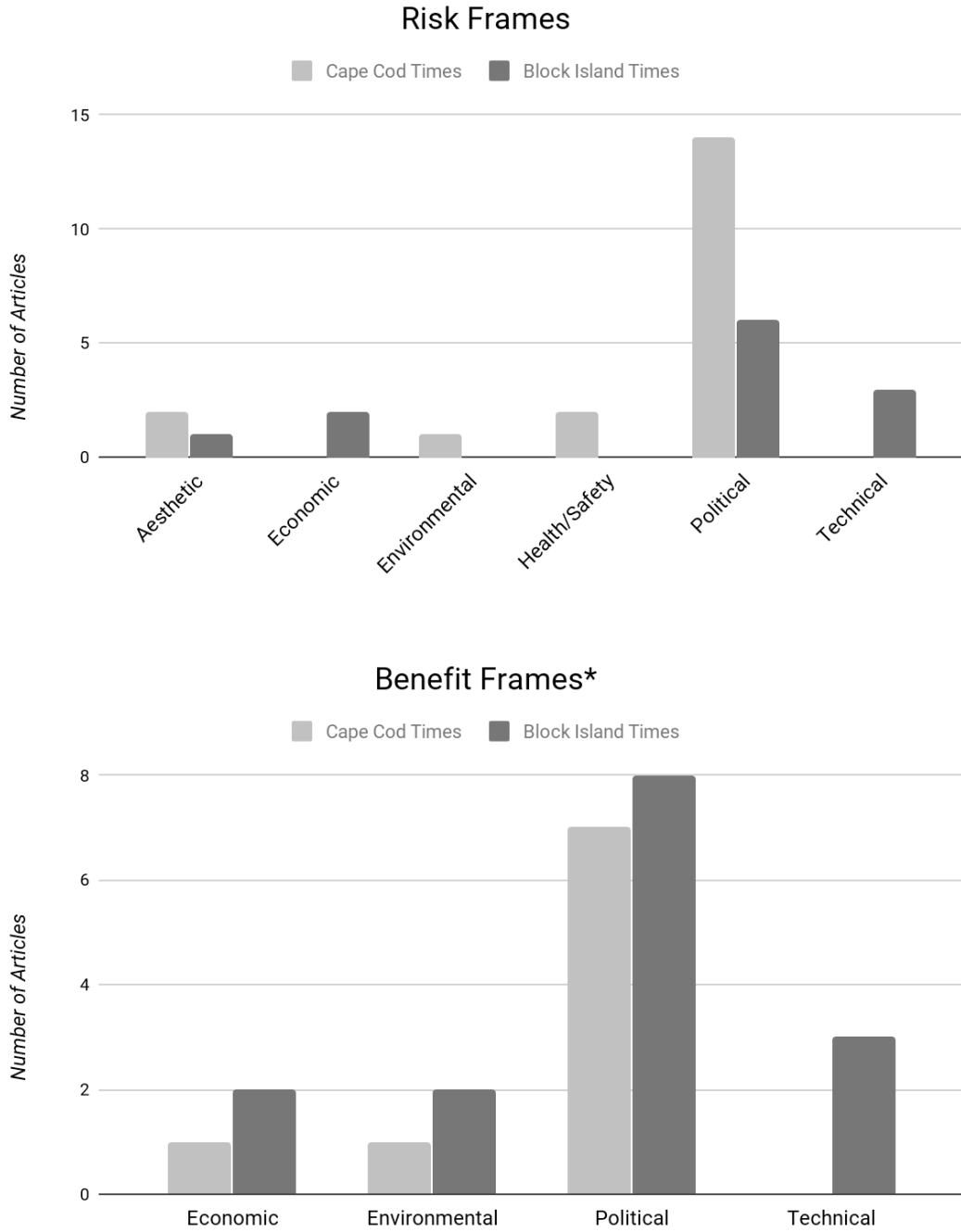


Figure 1. Risk and benefit frame results from *Cape Cod Times* and *The Block Island Times*

\*If neither newspaper used a specific benefit frame, it was not included in the chart.

Overall, the *Cape Cod Times* utilized a risk frame in 68% of its articles. *The Block Island Times*, on the other hand, emphasized a risk frame in 43% of articles.

Figure 2 shows the percentage of articles from each newspaper that utilized a particular theme (regardless of risk or benefit).

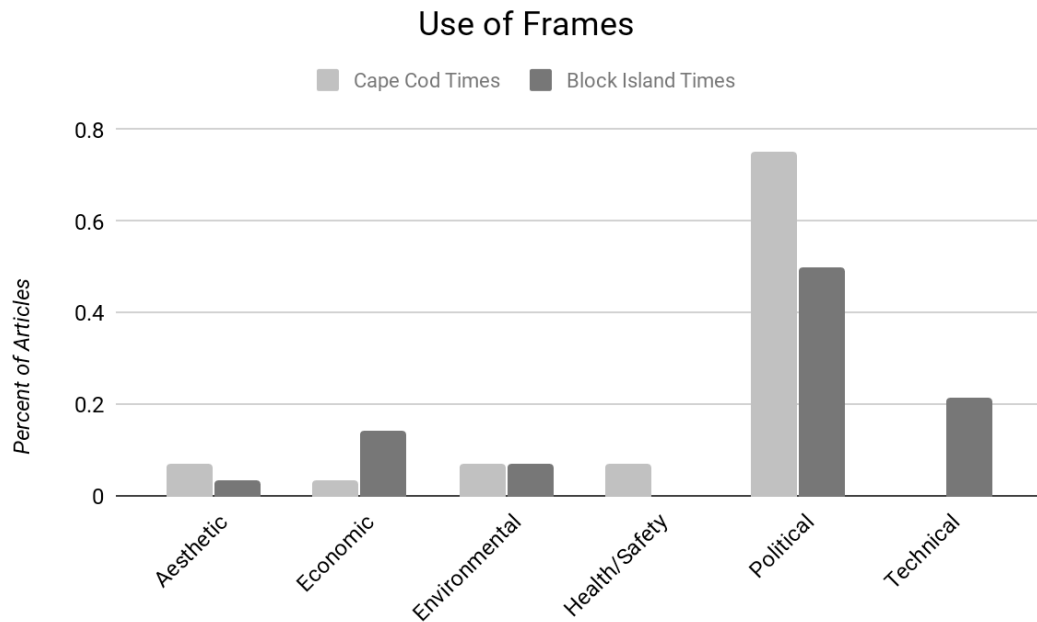


Figure 2. Overall frame results from *Cape Cod Times* and *The Block Island Times*

Again, this analysis focused on identifying the dominant frame of an article rather than the presence or lack thereof in any one newspaper article.

*Research question 1 stated: Are there thematic differences in the use of risk/benefit narratives between coverage of the Cape Wind farm and the BIWF?*

Due to the exploratory nature of this analysis, no statistical tests of significance were used to assess the data, rather emphasis was placed on trying to understand the context of the articles. The inclusion of percentages and frequency counts is in an attempt to provide as much of the data as possible. Interestingly, at first glance, the data seem to suggest that the coverage from the *Cape Cod Times* and *The Block Island*

*Times* was actually more similar than different. The salience of the political theme dominated both newspapers: 75% of *Cape Cod Times* and 50% of articles from *The Block Island Times* utilized this theme.

However, even within this political framework, 67% of articles from the *Cape Cod Times* emphasized risks, while more than half (57%) of articles from *The Block Island Times* asserted benefits. This discrepancy within a single frame suggests the need for deep thematic reading in order to identify situational differences.

There are also instances where a theme was used exclusively by only one of the newspapers. Two articles (7%) from the *Cape Cod Times* presented information about Cape Wind using a health and safety risk frame; these articles focused on the disruption to radar and navigation systems from the proposed wind farm. *The Block Island Times* did not use a health and safety frame in any articles. It should be acknowledged that while 7% of the total twenty-eight articles sampled from the *Cape Cod Times* is not a large proportion of the set, this study is focused on meaningful thematic differences identified in close reading and comprehensive presentation of the data.

Similarly, the *Cape Cod Times* in the constructed four weeks did not publish any articles that utilized a technical theme, while 21% (n=6) of *The Block Island Times* articles were coded as writing with a technical theme; 50% emphasized risks and 50% emphasized benefits.

The discussion section will focus on placing these findings into the unique contextual settings of each wind farm and newspaper.

*Research question 2 stated: Does The Cape Cod Times include more risk narratives in its coverage of the Cape Wind project than The Block Island Times in its coverage of the BIWF?*

The data showed that the *Cape Cod Times* did have more risk frames than the *Block Island Times*. The *Cape Cod Times* presented articles in a risk frame in 68% of published articles while *The Block Island Times* utilized a risk frame in 43% of published articles.

## **Discussion**

Given the different outcomes of the two proposed wind farms, it is perhaps unsurprising that the newspaper coverage also differed. The constructed week samples from both newspapers employed the same majority theme -- politics -- to cover their respective wind farms. What this suggests is that rather than emphasizing or focusing on the differences between the wind farm coverage, the similarities should also be explored. The data suggest that the process of trying to become the “first” offshore wind farm shaped the newspaper coverage. The following discussion will focus on two themes: political uncertainty, which was dominant in both newspapers; and the unique coverage from *The Block Island Times* about the underwater cable.

### *Political uncertainty*

Perhaps the most apparent feeling within the entire constructed sample set was that of uncertainty. Even in articles that included the potential benefits of a future offshore wind farm, there were sections dedicated to the unknowns. For example, in an article published about the preemptive environmental monitoring Deepwater Wind was conducting prior to siting the wind farm, the article noted, “Spar buoys have been



used for years as aids to navigation; however, this is the first buoy of its kind that will be used to collect wind data. It is still experimental” (West, 2011). In the same sentence, the journalist noted Deepwater Wind’s acceptance of the due diligence related to building an offshore wind farm but explicated the potential possibility that the technology utilized might not be appropriate.

This uncertainty was presented in connection with the political frame, which was the most common theme, for risks and benefits across both newspapers. The domination of the political theme is distinct from previous work about onshore wind. Stephens et al. (2009) found that the environmental benefit frame was the most common benefit frame across three state newspapers (Massachusetts, Texas, and Minnesota), while the most common risk frame differed depending on location: aesthetic and cultural, economic, and technical, respectively. Smith et al. (2016) did find that the political frame was the most common theme, but the economic theme was an extremely close second.

While both Stephens et al. (2009) and Smith et al. (2016) focused their analyses on coverage about wind energy, the focus of this study was specifically on offshore wind, which, during the timeline of this study, had not yet become a reality in the United States. The narrative focus on political themes is perhaps representative of these offshore wind farms being the first in the nation to use these permitting processes.

A more direct example of the political uncertainty is the coverage focused on individual politicians mired in the controversy of supporting or opposing the proposed

wind farms. In a 2003 article published by the *Cape Cod Times* titled “Cape Wind CEO plans Kerry benefit” the awkward political position of John Kerry is detailed:

The developer of the proposed offshore wind farm in Nantucket Sound will help raise money next month for U.S. Sen. John Kerry, a Democratic candidate for president who could be central in the debate over the project...Kerry has not taken a position on the wind farm proposal. In an effort to boost Kerry’s presidential prospects, James Gordon, the president and CEO of Cape Wind, will host a fund-raiser for Kerry on April 22 in the library and dining room of the Belvedere Residential Condominiums in Boston’s Back Bay. Gordon said he expects the invitation-only event to draw up to 50 people, with no minimum donation expected of attendees. He denied the fund-raiser was an attempt to sway Kerry’s views on the offshore wind project (Coleman, 2003).

The uncertainty explicated above is reflective not only of Kerry’s unknown position, but also of a potential relationship between the wind developer and state politicians. Given that offshore wind development is a new industry in the United States, there are no established or historical rules. For the readers of the *Cape Cod Times*, this article suggests a level of ambiguity among the key players in the state.

It should be noted that previous research has found that media coverage of energy projects is likely to detail potential political risks for politicians, but this research vein has been confined to fossil fuel energy projects (Dusyk, Axsen, & Dullemond, 2018). This comparable finding in offshore wind coverage suggests that political backlash may be an inherent theme in covering energy development projects, regardless of the type of power production. In fact, a 2006 *Cape Cod Times* article

summarizing the governor's race in Massachusetts was titled "Wind farm stance didn't hurt Patrick" (Schoetz, 2006).

Feldpausch-Parker et al. (2013), in their study on state media coverage of carbon capture and storage technologies, write "Science and technology become part of the public conversation when they encroach on other social functions such as politics and economics" (p. 351). The reliance on political framing was clear in both datasets. It was not uncommon in either newspaper for an entire article to detail a permitting meeting, no matter how miniscule in the broader timeline. What this suggests is that in cases of new renewable energy technologies, no news is too small. The next theme that appeared frequently was that of the underwater cable that would connect Block Island to mainland Rhode Island.

#### *Block Island Cable*

As the results above note, in the sample set of the Cape Wind farm coverage, neither researcher identified technical frames. However, 20% of the total articles from *The Block Island Times* were coded as technical and without exception, the focus of these technical articles was the proposed underwater cable; this cable would connect the wind farm to the mainland and by default, Block Island, for the first time, to mainland Rhode Island.

From the coverage of the underwater cable, it was clear that the idea of the connection between Block Island and Rhode Island was not a new idea. From the perspective of Block Island residents, the proposed wind farm meant that an underwater cable would be built, without having to be funded by the town (Turaj, 2012). Block Island, which swells from a year-round population of 1,000 residents to

20,000 during the summer, is notorious for electrical brownouts and internet connectivity issues (Benson, 2016; Block Island Tourism Council). And as a 2012 article in *The Block Island Times* summarizes:

There was great news for technologically challenged Block Island at this week's Town Council meeting. The group approved an agreement to allow placement of a fiber optic cable within the submarine power cable that Deepwater Wind is planning to install between here and Narragansett as part of its Block Island Wind Farm project (Turej).

While the domination of the political frame cannot be overstated in the broad *Block Island Times* coverage, there was also a clear focus on the singular issue of the underwater cable. It is perhaps no surprise that topics where Block Island was poised to gain advantages from the project were newsworthy.

However, the definition of "local" in the case of the BIWF is complicated. Nowhere is this clearer than in the split between the articles coded as technical risks versus the articles coded as technical benefits. All of the technical risk articles were focused on the proposed mainland landing sites of the underwater cable: first at the Narragansett town beach and then at the Scarborough State Beach. Opposition from Narragansett and Scarborough residents, who could be considered local residents in relation to the BIWF, was strong. Narragansett Town Council president James Callaghan is quoted as saying:

You have to look at it from our perspective. You have to look at it as offensive that you want to come to the town beach. When it was first proposed, I was surprised. When you think about it, this is not the best for the town when it

goes through our most precious resource (Hewitt, 2013).

There was an overall feeling that while Block Island residents may be benefitting from an underwater cable, the mainland residents of Rhode Island would be placed at a disadvantage; particularly because of the potential that the underwater cable could impact beach tourism. This dynamic between Block Island residents and local mainland Rhode Islanders remains contentious, now due however, to the increased electricity rates being paid by Rhode Island, in general due to costs associated with building the wind farm. Block Island electricity rates are expected to decline, but this is more reflective of the previously high power costs on the island rather than direct savings related to the BIWF (Trodson, 2018).

The issue of the underwater cable makes clear that what is good for one community may not be good for its neighbors. It also emphasizes the importance of context in analyzing renewable energy projects. It is interesting to consider what would have been the fate of the BIWF had Block Island not had additional reasons to support the wind project.

Finally, perhaps most clear, is the difference in this type of “topic” coverage between the *Cape Cod Times* and *The Block Island Wind Farm*. While the Cape Wind coverage included more discussion on aesthetic risks and health and safety risks, there was no single issue that occupied the amount of news coverage in the *Cape Cod Times* that the cable did in *The Block Island Times*. This may be reflective of Deepwater Wind (the company that built the BIWF) leveraging incentives they knew that Block Island would truly need to consider, or it may be reflective of Cape Wind’s true role as the first *proposed* wind farm in the nation. Cape Wind Associates was the first

company to try to court a community to allow an offshore wind farm off its shores; there was no precedent on how to accomplish this goal. The coverage suggests that rather than offering something in conjunction with the wind farm, Cape Wind Associates tried to simply sell the project on its own merits. Deepwater Wind, potentially having learned from the Cape Wind project, combined the idea of a wind farm with a connection cable that Block Island desperately needed.

### **Conclusion**

Ultimately, this article hopes to serve as an introductory analysis into the media coverage of offshore wind. Given the newness of the industry in the United States and the current momentum in the field, studying offshore wind is poised to become an interesting line of research. By applying previous theories to this new renewable energy project, the literature can become stronger and more useful.

What the findings of this research study suggest is that the process of permitting a new technology is not only complicated, but also news-making. For both the *Cape Cod Times* and *The Block Island Times*, the numerous steps and permitting victories and defeats overwhelmingly framed the media conversation during the first five years after each project was proposed. It also supports previous findings that there are meaningful differences in the newspaper coverage of different types of renewable energy projects and that these are influenced by location (i.e. state) (Stephens et al., 2009; Smith et al., 2016).

This study also adds to the body of literature utilizing Luhmann's theory of ecological communication as adapted by Stephens et al. (2009) and suggests that

multiple types of renewable energy projects are appropriate areas to apply this framework.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

There are a number of limitations to this study. The sample size, while supported by previous literature, should be expanded in future studies to strengthen the findings. And as previously noted, the inclusion of multiple local newspapers may help to give additional insight into the broader local and regional media coverage. Subsequent analysis should also allow for the coding of multiple frames in a single article. While this is a more complicated research method, this would allow for a more nuanced comparison between the coverage of different newspapers.

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## Appendix A

	<b>Cape Cod Times</b>	<b>Block Island Times</b>
<b>Aesthetic Benefit</b>	0	0
<b>Aesthetic Risk</b>	2	1
<b>Economic Benefit</b>	1	2
<b>Economic Risk</b>	0	2
<b>Environmental Benefit</b>	1	2
<b>Environmental Risk</b>	1	0
<b>Health/Safety Benefit</b>	0	0
<b>Health/Safety Risk</b>	2	0
<b>Political Benefit</b>	7	8
<b>Political Risk</b>	14	6
<b>Technical Benefit</b>	0	3
<b>Technical Risk</b>	0	3
<b>No Frame</b>	0	1

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