

Remembering 9/11:

An analysis of the editorial coverage of the anniversaries of 9/11

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Introduction

This paper deals with the analysis of editorials about the 9/11 remembrance published in three different newspapers: the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* and *USA Today*. All the analyzed articles are editorials, there are 33 in total. There is a discrepancy in the number of editorials between the three newspapers, because the *Washington Post* did not publish an editorial about the 9/11 remembrance in 2004, 2007 and 2009, and the *New York Times* published multiple editorials about the subject in 2002, 2003, 2006 and 2010. The discussion of the editorials will examine three different elements of the texts. The first analysis deals with the newspapers' views on the appropriate government response to the terrorist attacks and the commemoration of the victims. The second analysis is based on the agenda-setting theory, and looks at topic choice and external topics connected to the 9/11 attacks and memorial services. The last analysis focuses on the stylistic elements of the editorials, to see how newspapers frame their editorials. The conclusion combines the three analyses and compares the outcome with the assumed political positions of the newspapers.

Selection of newspapers

These newspapers were chosen based on their size, their political position and their connection to the anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. This table shows the top five best-selling newspapers in the US and their average daily circulation, compiled by the Audit Bureau of Circulations for the six month period ending on the 31st of March 2010

#	Newspaper	Daily circulation
	<i>The Wall Street Journal</i>	2,092,523
	<i>USA Today</i>	1,826,622
	<i>The New York Times</i>	951,063
	<i>The Los Angeles Times</i>	616,606
	<i>The Washington Post</i>	578,482

<http://abcas3.accessabc.com/ecirc/newstitlesearchus.asp>

These figures are a combination of the amount of paying subscribers and the amount of single copies sold in newsstands and other outlets. Readership is the total number of readers, which is higher than the average daily circulation, since a single newspaper is often read by multiple people. An analysis by Scarborough Research and Newspaper National Network LP has shown that readership per copy has increased from 3.07 in 2007 to 3.30 in 2009. Figures that determine the readership of a specific newspaper are not available, but the study illustrates that newspaper have a much bigger reach than is suggested by circulation data.

Wall Street Journal is the biggest newspaper in the United States, and published in New York, but is unsuitable for this research because of its focus on financial and economic news. The *New York Times* is analyzed instead, because of its affiliation with the local communities in New York and their (inter)national prestige in the news industry.

USA Today is included because it is the second bestselling newspaper in the United States, it is available throughout the country and it is orientated towards national news.

Finally, the *Washington Post* is selected instead of the *Los Angeles Times*, because the *Los Angeles Times* is mainly orientated towards the southern-Californian regions, while the *Post* has a more national character, which focuses on politics throughout the country. The *Post* is also more suitable for this research because of their geographical location, since the Pentagon was also attacked on September 11th.

The newspapers were also selected based on their presumptive political positions. The *Times* for example, has the reputation of a left-liberal newspaper, and a research conducted by Riccardo Puglisi of Massachusetts Institute of Technology has discovered a preference for the Democratic Party during presidential campaigns: “My main finding is that *the New York Times* has a Democratic partisanship, with some watchdog aspects, in that during the presidential campaign it systematically gives more emphasis to Democratic topics, but only so

when the incumbent President is a Republican” (2006). The *Post* is considered right-leaning, and supportive of the Republican Party. In 2002 for example, The *Post* published the editorial “9/11/02” which approved of President Bush’s plans to invade Iraq:

The challenge for the administration is to offer a coherent and persuasive explanation of how the Iraq danger is connected to the 9/11 attacks and how action there would fit into the larger war against terrorism. Its arguments have ranged from a contention, unproven though plausible, that Saddam Hussein supported al Qaeda; that he could, undetected, slip chemical weapons to al Qaeda suicide bombers and thus wreak havoc through an avenue that deterrence cannot block; that his overthrow would further the cause of democracy in the Muslim world, which in turn would undermine al Qaeda; and that, even if Saddam Hussein had no part in 9/11, the attack should remind us of the folly of waiting for our sworn enemies to gather strength. We find merits in each of these arguments, and we believe the status quo in Iraq is not acceptable.

This fragment illustrates the right leaning nature of the *Post*, since they support a war in Iraq, based on republican arguments, even if those arguments are not entirely clear. Colman McCarthy, who has written editorials and columns for the *Post* for 28 years, wrote an article about the *Post*’s op-ed page, illustrating the slant to the right in their opinionating texts:

“[R]ightists and centrists dominated during the three-month period ... Only rarely during those three months did anyone from the left break those ranks ... Fifty or so rightwingers and centrists to every lefty: That's balance.”

USA Today has a reputation of being a centrist newspaper, and a research conducted by Daniel E. Ho and Kevin M. Quinn of Harvard University, titled “Measuring Explicit Political Positions of Media” shows that *USA Today* is indeed in the middle of the American

political spectrum, based on their editorials on Supreme Court decisions between 1994 and 2004.

The newspapers are thus selected based on the combination between the range of distribution and connection to the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and because they represent the full American political spectrum. The political stance of the three newspapers is reassessed to see if the views on the 9/11 terrorist attacks expressed in editorial columns are consistent with their presumed political positions.

9/11

On September 11th, 2001, terrorists attacked the United States. The attack was coordinated by Al-Qaeda, which is an Islamic terrorist organization. 19 terrorists hijacked four commercial airplanes, and crashed them into the two towers of the World Trade Center in New York, the Pentagon in Washington, and a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania. The plane that crashed in the field was guided to Washington D.C. by the hijackers, but the passengers managed to retake the plane. Unfortunately they were unable to land the plane safely. None of the passengers of the four planes survived and nearly 3000 people died because of the attacks. The first memorial is located in Washington D.C. next to the Pentagon, the memorial in New York will be completed before the tenth anniversary of the attacks, and there is a temporary memorial near the field where the plane crashed in Shanksville.

The attacks have had a tremendous impact in the United States. The aftermath spawned two wars, in Iraq and Afghanistan, and has led to several policy changes, such as the implementation of the USA PATRIOT Act, which gave federal agencies the ability to access privacy sensitive information such as cell phone and e-mail communications and financial records more easily, and also lowered the requirements for detaining or deporting suspected terrorists. 9/11 has also led to the creation of a new federal department: the Department of

Homeland Security (DHS), which focuses on responding to terrorist attacks and natural disasters. 9/11 has caused several political conflicts, such as the violation of prisoners civil rights in Guantanamo Bay and the invasion of Iraq. 9/11 has thus had several implications for political and governmental issues, and the U.S. government's response to the attacks has been the subject of fierce debate in the global media.

Editorials and influence

Every year, there have been memorial services to commemorate the victims of the attacks, and newspapers have used the anniversary to critically assess issues related to 9/11, such as the government's response and in which manner the victims should be commemorated. The opinion of a newspaper about a certain issue can be found in an editorial, which Zelizer and Allen define as "a statement of opinion written under the collective responsibility of a news organization's editor or publisher" (33). Conclusions can be drawn between the political positions of newspapers by examining their editorial coverage of the same issues. But other than just giving an opinion to the reader, editorials also have a persuasive function. The persuasion of readers is a helpful tool for newspapers to exert political influence. The agenda setting theory illustrates the way in which the media can influence politics, namely by salience transfer, which is the ability of the media to transfer issues from the mass media agenda to the public agenda by giving certain issues more coverage than others. In editorials, not only the fact that a certain issue is covered more than others can affect politics, but also the way an issue is presented. Christiane Eilders's research "The Impact of Editorial Content on the Political Agenda in Germany: Theoretical Assumptions and Open Questions Regarding a Neglected Subject in Mass Communication Research" illustrates how this happens:

In the opinion sections of the various media outlets the media assign relevance to certain issues or events by selecting them for commentary and thereby communicate their perception of issue salience to the audience and the political system. By emphasizing particular aspects of these issues and events and presenting them in a certain context they frame them in a particular way and thus establish a mode of interpretation that is already a political statement. (19)

Newspapers can therefore influence decision making in politics by giving certain issues more attention than others based on the newspaper's view on what is important and by presenting issues in a certain political frame.

Analyses:

The editorials are first analyzed to determine the opinions of the newspapers on the government's response, and the way in which the victims of the 9/11 terrorist attacks should be commemorated. By covering these topics, newspapers can exert influence on public opinion, which can lead to changes in governmental policies. It is therefore useful to analyze these topics, because they can have a direct influence on society. The second analysis will determine the difference in topic choice and coverage of issues related to 9/11, and is based on the agenda-setting theory. The last analysis will determine how the newspapers frame their editorials, by looking at the stylistic characteristics of each newspaper.

Governmental response

In the first editorials after the terrorist attacks, all three newspapers state firmly what the government response should be. They all agree on the need to gather intelligence to identify the treat, but the newspapers have different views on how the treat should be

eliminated. *The Times* sees the best solution as a combination of “good timely intelligence” and “light but lethal weapons”, while recognizing that “the roots of terrorism lie in economic and political problems in large parts of the world.” (“The War”) The *Post* does not identify the roots of terrorism, but their solution is similar to the one proposed by the *Times*: “identifying and punishing the authors of yesterday's mass murder ... until the sources of support for the terrorists have been eliminated and the country's defenses against such unconventional warfare decisively strengthened.” (“September 11, 2001”) The difference lays in the way the sources of support should be eliminated, either by military force or by addressing religious fanaticism and poverty. *USA Today* has the most outspoken solution, stating that a response must always be “proportionate”: “By that measure the gloves are off, given the scale and toll of this havoc.” (“A Day That”) This is a similar solution as proposed by the *Post*, but the tone of the editorial is different. For example, all three newspapers agree that the fight against terrorism is global, and that the U.S should reach out to other countries for support, but the way they present this message differs. The *Post* places the initiative at the U.S. government, which “must seek to assemble an international alliance”, while the *Times* imagines a more forceful approach “America must let its economic partners and allies know that they can no longer stay on the sidelines of this global conflict.” *USA Today* foresees a wholly different approach which is based on persuading allies through fear: “Every nation, even those with which the United States has major differences, must know today that its cities, its landmarks, its centers of commerce and government are just as vulnerable as ours.”

Four years later, hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans just before the 9/11 remembrance and each of the three newspapers connect the disaster to the attacks in 2001. There are similarities in the way hurricane Katrina is linked to 9/11, such as the conclusion that homeland security is not prepared enough for major disasters or terrorist attacks. However, the three newspapers focus on different aspects of the similarities between 9/11 and

hurricane Katrina. The *Times* focuses on how hurricane Katrina forced the American people to rethink the actions taken after 9/11: “We felt that 9/11 had changed our lives in an instant, that we had been jerked out of a pleasant dream. The difference in the blow that Katrina struck was not merely that we could see it coming. It was that, as a nation, we thought we were already fully awake.” (“Revising 9/11”) It thus shows that the feeling of Americans that the measures after 9/11 were sufficient to protect the country have to be revised after hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans. The *Post* uses hurricane Katrina to give a detailed account of the mistakes of the DHS, and mainly criticizes the department for basing their strategies on the past, instead on possible worst-case scenarios: “But if there is any point to having a department of homeland security, surely it is to think the unthinkable. And we see only slim evidence, so far, that DHS is engaged in that undertaking.” (“Four Years Later”) *USA Today* links hurricane Katrina and 9/11 in a very different way, namely by focusing on the response of the American people to the two events. It notices that the response of the government was far from perfect, but it chooses to focus on the help provided by the American people, instead of the inadequate response of the government: “Katrina might have overshadowed the 9/11 commemorations this year. But both in their own way have reminded us of the warm-hearted purpose and sense of unity that have faded. They're worth holding as ideals to best honor those who died.” (“Four years later, Katrina”) The three different newspapers thus use three different ways to link hurricane Katrina to 9/11: the *Times* emphasizes on the emotional connection, while the *Post* uses a more political approach. *USA Today* focuses on the humanitarian aspect of both disasters.

Commemoration of the victims:

In the newspaper editorials covering 9/11 and the annual remembrance of 9/11, a lot of attention is given to the government's response, but another topic that occurs frequently is the

way the victims should be commemorated, or have been commemorated. From the process of rebuilding the community around Ground Zero to the annual reading of the names, the three newspapers have different views on how the tragic losses of 9/11 should be commemorated. The *Post* published the editorial “9/11/02” in which it becomes clear what it thinks is the best way to commemorate the victims of the terrorist attacks: “as a lesson of 9/ 11, and as a memorial to the dead, nothing can matter more than defeating the terrorists who would attack the nation and holding accountable the regimes that harbor them.”

The best memorial in their eyes is thus pursuing the war on terror by any means necessary, to avenge the victims and to give a clear signal to other terrorists or groups that are plotting to attack the United States. The clearest statement given in the 9/11 editorials of *USA Today* published in the editorial “Four years later, Katrina casts 9/11 in a new light”:
“Katrina might have overshadowed the 9/11 commemorations this year. But both in their own way have reminded us of the warm-hearted purpose and sense of unity that have faded. They're worth holding as ideals to best honor those who died.” It thus focuses on the response of the American people instead of the terrorists who attacked the country, underlining the importance of remaining united as a country. The *Times* shares this view as illustrated in their editorial “Sept. 11, 2010: The Right Way to Remember”, which was published during the heated debate about the construction of a mosque near Ground Zero: “It [the construction of a memorial and transportation hub at Ground Zero] is a far more fitting way to defy the hate-filled extremists who attacked the United States on Sept. 11, 2001, and to honor their victims, than to wallow in the intolerance and fear that have mushroomed across the nation.” Its main point is thus that the people of the United States should not fall back on xenophobia or intolerance, because that will cause a division among the American people, which is, according to the *Times*, what the terrorists want. It also stresses the importance of

constructing a memorial, and the reconstruction of the neighborhood and community around Ground Zero, in an older editorial called “A Day to Look Forward”:

[H]e [Gov. George Pataki] should be more aggressive in making sure that the public keeps participating in this process [...] the people making these choices may regard them as a natural part of their jobs, but others will help make sure they aren't subtly eroding the Libeskind design or neighborhood hopes for the layout of their reinvented and renewed community.

The *Times* hence sees the construction of memorials and rebuilding of the neighborhood around Ground Zero as an important part in the commemoration of the victims, and connects it with the emotions of the American people, suggesting that a memorial can help in the processing of traumas. It also underlines that different standpoints should not cause a division in the country. It thus uses an approach that is similar to the emotional approach they applied when writing about the government's response. The *Post* also stays on the same track, using a political approach, focusing more on the government's part in the memorials than on the communities or individuals. *USA Today* focuses again on the humanitarian aspect which connects the people throughout the country, appealing to the common sense of unity and purpose that emerged after the terrorist attacks and hurricane Katrina.

Agenda Setting

According to Zelizer and Allen, agenda setting is defined as the following process:

[N]ews reporting selectively emphasizes certain concerns over and above others ...

The ranking of salient issues on the 'news agenda' can be set in relation to their

standing on the 'public agenda' (whether local, national or international) so as to ascertain the relative degree of correlation between the two agendas. (2)

The media can thus influence the public's sense of what is important news by giving certain issues more coverage than others. Newspapers can thus exert political influence by pushing issues from the news agenda to the public agenda, which can in turn result in a change of the political agenda.

The role of agenda-setting in editorials is researched by analyzing the use of secondary topics, which shows how newspapers use the 9/11 remembrance to broach other issues and by examining which aspects of 9/11 are highlighted, which illustrates what the newspapers see as the most important aspects of the attack and its aftermath.

In the 9/11 editorials of the *Times*, the most important aspects of 9/11 are the reconstruction of Ground Zero and the state of the DHS. The reconstruction of Ground Zero and the construction of a memorial at the site have been given considerable attention by *The Times*, which is not surprising because of the newspaper's affiliation with the city. In four of the fourteen editorials, it gives elaborate descriptions of the reconstruction process, as well as its view of which aspects of the process are most important, namely the participation of the local residents, as illustrated in the first analysis, and the creation of a vibrant community apart from the economical center: "But around that somber space, there should be more than skyscrapers that grow dark at night. There should be a vibrant, 24-hour community of people who live, work, play and thrive in Lower Manhattan." ("Eight Years")

The *Times* also frequently cover the DHS, and the measures it has taken to enhance national security since its creation in 2002. There is one editorial that focuses solely on the slow progress of the DHS ("Lagging on Homeland Security), and there are two editorials that use the progress of the DHS to criticize the government's actions after 9/11. ("Revising 9/11")

and “9/11/06”) In “Lagging on Homeland Security” written as a response to the assessment of the DHS by the Government Accountability Office, the *Times* underscores the shortcomings of DHS:

Two years ago, Hurricane Katrina glaringly and shamefully demonstrated the unreadiness of that shield. [DHS] ... Critical barriers remain in such basic areas as emergency communications, computer integration, border defense and an effective program for information sharing among the various intelligence-gathering agencies.

As another grim anniversary approaches, the G.A.O. assessment is an urgent reminder of how much more still needs to be done.

The most important topic that the *Times* connects to 9/11 in its editorials is the way people have reacted to and should react after the terrorist attacks, which provides the readers with morals and ideals to live by, and condemns the behavior of certain political figures. For example, the *Times* stresses that the actions taken after 9/11 are more important from a historical perspective than 9/11 itself: “What we suffered on that day will be an important part of the story of this country. “But in the long run it will not be as important a part of the story as what we choose to do in response to what we suffered” (“9/11/02; America”) The same editorial elaborately describes the emotions and reactions of the American people, and uses them to illustrate the importance of the actions taken after 9/11. One year later, the *Times* published the editorial “Two Years On” which again describes the sentiment of the American people, but this time focuses on the sense of generosity and the sense of patriotism that emerged after 9/11. It criticizes the way patriotism has become “[A] more brittle expression of national sentiment -- a blind statement of faith that does more to divide Americans from one another than to join them together” and encourages the reader to think critically about the war

in Iraq: “It is not the least bit unpatriotic to question some of the arguments that led to war in Iraq. No national purpose is served by losing our sense of political and historical discrimination in an upwelling of patriotic fervor” The *Times* thus connects the editorials about 9/11 and the memorial services to the sentiment of the American people, and offers the readers a way to think about the actions after 9/11.

The *Post*'s editorials are mainly political in nature, which is logical because the newspaper is specialized in politics. The *Post* uses the 9/11 remembrance editorials to comment on the government and its policies. One specific reoccurring topic is the government's foreign policy in Iraq and Afghanistan, which is, according to the *Post* based too much on military force rather than American engagement on other levels:

It is right that the United States must be fighting for liberty and opportunity and not just against Islamic terrorists, as the president has said. But in practice he still balks at rebuilding Afghanistan, devoting sufficient money for schools in poor countries, and promoting democracy among U.S. allies. (“9/11/02”)

Four years later, it admits that Mr. Bush now understands “... that diplomacy and the promotion of democratic values are as important to winning the war as military action” (“The Fifth Anniversary”) Yet it criticizes the plans to maintain the CIA's secret prisons, and the request by Mr. Bush to cancel protections of certain prisoners who are protected by the Geneva Conventions because it damages the diplomatic position of the United States:

...abusive interrogation techniques are ineffective and counterproductive; they do not produce reliable intelligence. At the same time, they make it impossible for the United States to obtain full cooperation from key allies in Europe and elsewhere, damage its

reputation around the world, and make it more likely that captured Americans will be tortured. (“The Fifth Anniversary”)

The *Post* repeatedly addresses to the improvement of safety measures to prepare the United States for attacks with nuclear or biological weapons: “It's questionable whether many communities are more prepared for biological attack than they were a year ago.” (“9/11/02”) The editorial “Four Years Later” gives an elaborate critique on the DHS, mainly emphasizing that the department should base policies on worst case scenarios instead of politics, and illustrating in which cases the department’s spending is not logical. Here again it stresses the unreadiness of the DHS for larger terrorist attacks or natural disasters: “Meanwhile, neither DHS nor anyone else has focused hard enough on the major disasters for which the United States is still least prepared, namely a nuclear disaster or a biological attack”

The *Post* also uses the editorials to praise the local community of Washington D.C., in the editorials “Washington’s Response” and “Sept. 11 Remembrance” In the first editorial it praises Washington’s response to the terrorist attack directed at the Pentagon, because even though it was a very chaotic event, the people did not resort in to full scale panic which “...denied the terrorists the victory they sought. And it revealed a core of strength in our region that will prepare us for whatever may come next.” Seven years later, it writes about the dedication of The Pentagon Memorial, and after a detailed description of the memorial and the process that made it possible, it praises the local community by comparing the memorial to the one that is being build in New York, which has had much more problems: “That the project came together quickly and with minimal rancor is a testament to the collective outpouring of support that makes this outstanding memorial to loss a symbol of shared sacrifice.” (“Sept. 11 Remembrance”)

In the 9/11 editorials of *USA Today*, the most salient implication of 9/11 is the importance of the consequences of capturing Osama bin Laden. In “Today’s Topic, Remembering 9/11: The day, the hunt, the task” *USA Today* depicts bin Laden as “a potent symbol of the daunting job the U.S. faces in waging war on terror” and the capture of bin Laden “would bring some sense of closure to the families of nearly 3,000 people killed on a crisp clear day in September three years ago.” In 2007, *USA Today* reminds the reader of the importance of catching bin Laden: “capturing or killing bin Laden, or his equally menacing partner Zawahri, would serve the cause of justice and remove the men who built al-Qaeda. The hunt deserves renewed focus.” (“Six years later”) Finally, in 2009, it publishes the editorial “9/11’s unfinished business” which is devoted entirely to the importance of catching bin Laden and summarizes why it is important to catch him:

For Islamic extremists, bin Laden's death or capture would deprive them of their charismatic leader. For the nearly 3,000 people who died on 9/11, it would bring justice. And for all other Americans, it would reinforce the message that anyone who attacks the USA will be hunted to the ends of the earth.

USA Today frequently addresses the necessary improvement of homeland security, just like the *Post* and the *Times*. The topic first occurs in the editorial “Nation that defined freedom strives to redefine itself”. In the editorial “Air-Security plans don’t reflect post -9/11 realities” they focus on the security of airplanes which it considers as still too vulnerable: “Two years after the threats to air travel were exposed, the system is safer but dangers remain. Only a long-range national vision can meet the challenges of this new era.” The focus on homeland security is such an important issue for *USA Today*, that it even inspires readers to make it a key issue in the 2006 midterm elections: “voters could make it clear to those seeking office

that they expect them to get serious about patching the major holes in homeland security, from ports to chemical plants to cargo in airplane holds.” (“Nation Struggles”) In 2008, it still sees the improvement of homeland security as a key issue for the war on terror, together with the destruction of Al-Qaeda and “the battle for hearts and minds in the Muslim world.

USA Today connects the 9/11 remembrance to the war on terror, which is mentioned in eight of the eleven analyzed editorials. *USA Today* uses the editorials to raise awareness for the war and to comment on the course of the war.

For all three newspapers, the state of homeland security is a very important issue, but *USA Today* uses a less critical approach than *The Post* or *The Times*, focusing on extra safety measures instead of criticizing the DHS on their existing policies. *The Post* uses the editorials to focus on the political aspects of 9/11, while *The Times* uses them to provide readers with the emotions of the American people, and ways to deal with those emotions. *USA Today* focuses more on the war on terror, than to comment on the way American society deals with life after the attacks.

Framing:

Zelizer and Allen define framing as: “the way in which the news media organize reality for presentation to the public.” The way newspapers frame their editorials is analyzed by looking at the use of sources and citations, and the writing style of the editorials.

The same sources and quotations can be used by different newspapers, each linking them to different issues or topics. Both the *Post* and the *Times* quoted president Obama from his speech at the 2010 remembrance: “We’re not at war with Islam. We’re at war with terrorist organizations.” (“It’s just us” and “Sept. 11: The Right”) The *Times* uses the quote to condemn the bigotry that was displayed during protests against the construction of a mosque near ground zero, while *The Post* uses an extended excerpt of the speech to illustrate that

xenophobia is very un-American. This is not a major difference, but there are striking differences in the use of quotes and sources in general. The usage of polls for example, is far more frequent in *USA Today* editorials (7 instances) than in the *Post* (1) and the *Times* (0) editorials. The frequent use of polls by *USA Today* is explained by the focus of the newspaper on the war on terror, using the polls to enhance its arguments on what course the war should take, and to illustrate how the terrorist attacks have changed the sentiment of the American people. However, as noted in the earlier analysis, the *Times* editorials also focus on the emotional aspects of the attacks and the sentiment of the American people, but they do not use any polls. The difference between the editorials of the two newspapers is that *USA Today* uses the polls to link the sentiment of the American people to its arguments on the war on terror, while the *Times* uses the sentiment as the topic, and thus do not need to rely on statistics. The *Post* also does not rely on polls, but since its topics are mainly political instead of emotional and polls are used as a barometer for public opinion, it does not need to. Another reason why *USA Today* uses a lot of polls in their editorials is that several of the polls are conducted in cooperation with the newspaper itself, and basing its editorials on the outcome of those polls will concur with the readers' opinions, thus enhancing the readers' affiliation with the newspaper. The *Times* have also used this technique, promoting its "Portraits of Grief" project in an editorial about the memorial service at Ground Zero, and thus improving their relationship with the readers.

Style

The three newspapers all have a very distinct style, since they all have different target markets, and as shown earlier, different approaches to the use of editorials. An example of how the styles differ can be found in the usage of the word first person plural pronoun. The *Post* and *USA Today* both use 'we' almost only to refer to themselves, the newspapers. There

are instances when they refer to the American people, but only when writing about universal truths, as shown in the editorial “September 11, 2001”: “It will be days or weeks before we can know the particulars of the death and destruction at the World Trade Center” The *Times* uses the pronoun in a far less neutral way, there are numerous occasions where they refer to the American people while not being able to assume that their statement concurs with the American people as a whole: “We became so intent on our disbelief that we also disbelieved in ourselves.” (9/11/02; America”) This usage suggests that the *Times* wants to establish a closer relationship with the reader and creates a ‘we’ that includes the readers and the newspaper, to present their opinions as universal truths.

Other differences in style can be distinguished by comparing the first editorials written after the attacks. The styles in those three editorials are very suitable for comparison because they all have the same main subject, and offer a description of the attacks. *USA Today* stands out for the literary richness of their editorial as illustrated in the introduction:

Somewhere today in the dens of terrorists, there is glee. Isolated and imprisoned by their preconceptions, the architects of the horrors inflicted on this nation Tuesday will see the United States as a nation gripped by fear, cowering at the discovery of newfound vulnerability and eager to withdraw from the world's tempests. (“A day that changes”)

The introduction is filled with adjectives and vivid imagery, and *USA Today* uses words which are emotionally loaded, such as ‘glee’ and ‘tempests’. It also uses multiple words with similar meanings to enhance the emotional aspect of the situation; the definition of ‘cowering’ for example is very similar to ‘gripped by fear’ and ‘isolated’ and ‘imprisoned’ both share the same meaning in the sentence because it is linked to ‘their preconceptions’. It thus uses a

literary style to catch the reader's attention. *The Post* uses a more formal approach, which can be attributed to the political nature of the newspaper, focusing on the factual, instead of the emotional aspects of the event. It must be noted that even though *The Post* uses less emotive language, the editorial still draws on emotions, only less than *USA Today*:

THE HORRIFIC TERRORIST attacks yesterday in New York and Washington will rank as one of the greatest calamities in American history, and will confront the United States with one of its most demanding challenges. Not since Dec. 7, 1941, has the U.S. homeland sustained such an aggression. ("September 11, 2001")

The formal style is illustrated by its comparison of the attacks with Pearl Harbour, linking the attacks to a historical event to illustrate its severity, instead of using emotional language. The use of adjectives is limited, and far less emotional than *USA Today*. *The Times* uses a style that is less emotional than *USA Today*, but is not as formal as *The Post*:

As the nation assays the horrific human and physical losses of yesterday's brutally efficient terrorist attacks, it must also begin the urgent work of determining how an open and democratic society can better defend itself against a threat that conventional armies and weapons cannot defeat. ("The War")

Even though they use more vivid adjectives than *The Post*, the style of *The Times* does not rely on imagery, but gets straight to the main point of the editorial, namely the measures that have to be taken after the attacks. The style of *The Post* is thus the most formal, *The Times* uses a style that is less formal but as direct, and *USA Today* uses the most imaginative style. The use of the imaginative style might be explained by the target audience of *USA Today*. The

demographic profile of the readers and the academic class model by Thompson and Hickey illustrate the class difference between readers of the three newspapers. The median household income of *USA Today* readers is \$76,073, which means they belong to the lower middle class, while the readers of the *Times* (\$119,317) and the *Post* (\$109,260) belong in the upper middle class. Since the average *USA Today* reader belongs to the lower middle class, the style of the newspaper is more imaginative and thus more accessible to the reader. This also explains the numerous references to pop culture in the *USA Today* editorials, such as in “Today’s Topic: Remembering 9/11: The day, the hunt the task”: “The explanation, as Oprah or Dr. Phil might suggest, is that keeping an outrage-fueled focus is neither possible nor part of the natural process from shock to recovery.” The *Post*’s style is also in line with their target audience, but is less class related. Because the *Post* is specialized in politics, readers expect to find a style that fits with the description of political events, based on facts instead of emotions. The *Times*’ style is formal, because the average reader belongs to the upper middle class, and imaginative, which is explained by the literary background of the newspaper.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the differences in topic choice, style and opinion about the memorial of the victims and the government’s response to the attacks illustrate that the three newspapers write about the same events in very different ways. When compared with their positions on the American political spectrum, the positions of the *Times* and the *Post* are in line with the predictions. *USA Today* however, seems to be more to the right than in the center, mainly because the topics of their editorials (the war on terror, the DHS and capturing Osama bin Laden) fit the right-wing political agenda, similar to the *Post*’s political focus on the war on terror. The *Times* focuses on the reconstruction of Ground Zero and the emotions of the American people, which fit better in the left-liberal agenda.

The differences in style do not reveal much about the political positions of the newspapers, but illustrate the different target markets of the newspapers. The *Post* uses a formal style which fits the politically interested readers, *USA Today* uses a more vivid literary style, written in a popular fashion, which suits the lower middle class readers and the *Times* uses formal yet literary style which fits the upper middle class readers with a literary interest.

The different views on what the government's response should be and the most fitting way to commemorate the victims underline the same point as before. The *Post* views the topics from a political angle, mainly focusing on the facts instead of the humanistic aspects of the attacks. *USA Today* uses a humanitarian angle, which uses the emotions of the American people to fortify their arguments about the correct memorial and the government's response. The *Times* approach the issues from an emotional angle, but instead of using the emotions to enhance their points like *USA Today*, they use the emotions as main topics and offer ways to deal with the emotional backlash of the attacks.

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