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Alternative vs. Traditional News: A Content Analysis of News Coverage of the 10th Anniversary of Sept. 11

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ABSTRACT

This research sought to understand the differences in framing used by alternative media outlets and traditional or mainstream media outlets. Researchers used a sampling of articles about the 10th anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks from alternative media publications and traditional media publications to conduct this study. Computer software analyzed these articles to determine themes and concepts within both data sets. The analysis revealed traditional media was less varied in themes than was alternative media, with the latter clearly showing an effort to be analytical of different aspects surrounding the Sept. 11 attacks. Traditional media largely provided routine coverage of commemorative services and very little critical analysis.

KEY WORDS: Alternative media, traditional media, Sept. 11, framing, routines

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I. Introduction

Research on alternative or independent media coverage of news events is limited, despite a rather vibrant and organized alternative media in America and around the world. Given the ease with which people today can publish information online, the present research sought to analyze the two separate paradigms of traditional and alternative media for news coverage of the 10th anniversary of Sept. 11. This work is an attempt to understand better the types of newsreaders are getting in today's interconnected, digital world, through which access to anything is limited only by access to the Internet.

Numerous media outlets around the globe recorded the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. Television, newspaper, radio, and online reporters all rushed to get as much information as possible, even in news markets far away from the carnage of that day. Therefore, there was a wealth of information about the event available to researchers to see how one single event was reported, how it was framed, and how audiences perceived reports of the attacks. Scholars and media professionals have analyzed many aspects of this coverage, including follow-up stories years removed from the actual event. The scope of Sept. 11 coverage is likely unprecedented. That universal coverage is still happening 10 years later, making the subject a good resource for communication research.

II. Review of Literature

Researchers used framing as the theoretical foundation for the present study. Entman (1993) argued that frames in the news are influenced by the communicator, the text, the receiver, and the culture. This means reporters hold a certain belief system that influences the words they publish, and that belief system may or may not be identified by the readers, which are influenced in their beliefs by a particular culture. Journalists highlight certain aspects of a story to make them more salient, or identifiable, to the reader, Entman argued. Entman's explanation here is important, because it provides a good argument for why it would be reasonable to think alternative and traditional media would frame stories differently; in fact, it predicts it. Other researchers have supported Entman by arguing that frames can unify information and can be culture-based (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009). This macro-level framing is important, because as Tewksbury and Scheufele argued, social constructs serve to help citizens process information and to influence decisions. However, audiences may not even be aware of the frames in the material to which they are exposed (Tewksbury, Jones, Peske, Raymond, & Vig, 2000). If this is indeed the case, understanding how alternative media and traditional media frame topics is important.

The notion of routinization of news also helps to ground this research. The frames used by journalists in the traditional media can result from the nature of the job that creates a routine procedure for gathering and reporting the news. As Tuchman (1972) argued, reporters, specifically newspaper reporters, work under conditions that create pressures for libel suits, reprimands, and criticisms, and this reality leads to the claim that reporters are being objective in their reporting. The claim of objectivity by reporters creates a defense against the aforementioned pressures, Tuchman argued. This strategy helps establish a routine process for news stories. Shoemaker and Reese (1996) pointed out that the routine of the inverted pyramid helps journalists edit newspaper stories to fit in the corresponding space in newsprint. Shoemaker and Reese also supported the notion that objectivity is a practical routine of journalism that serves as a defense mechanism for journalists. Additionally, Shoemaker and Reese pointed out

that media are generally owned by large corporations that seek to satisfy the largest segment of the audience. Routines help do this. In fact, the pair credited the Associated Press in helping strengthen the objectivity routine for newspapers.

Traditional Media

Bagdikian (2004) helped define mainstream media by identifying five corporations that own most of the media in the world, including newspapers, television stations, book publishers, and radio stations. These conglomerates were Time Warner, The Walt Disney Company, News Corporation, Viacom, and Bertelsmann. Bagdikian said these entities set the tone for the public discourse as the majority of Americans claim to get their news from them. But the five conglomerates compete in a limited fashion, Bagdikian said, because they all share assets when it is mutually beneficial. This environment leads to many news outlets carrying the same content. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that much of the content carried by traditional media regarding the Sept. 11 anniversary would be framed in the same manner. Using this argument, one way to determine a mainstream or traditional newspaper would be to see if it used Associated Press content, which is widely disseminated to newspapers across the country. According to Chomsky (1997), elite media set the framework within which other media around the nation operate. Chomsky argued that the Associated Press takes its cues from the elite media, which would be the *New York Times* or other similar large newspapers or news outlets. Each day, Chomsky said, editors of small newspapers around the nation get stories from the Associated Press that have been approved by the elite media as important stories for the public to read. Herman and Chomsky (1988) argued that dominant media outlets are for-profit organizations that must acquiesce to the demands of owners and advertisers. By this logic, it is reasonable to say that traditional media tend to operate in a corporate and structured environment.

Some researchers have challenged the notion that the media are monolithic bastions of globalization and the status quo. Archetti (2008) in a study of Sept. 11 framing by U.S. and world media found no media marching orders handed out globally. The homogenized media coverage did not reveal itself. Entman (2003) studied the coverage of Sept. 11 and found that there were some challenges to the White House's official framing of the "war on terrorism" and its focus on Afghanistan. He notes that two mainstream journalists, Seymour Hersch and Thomas Friedman, produced a counter frame that focused on Saudi Arabia as the source for terrorism support and funding. Though small, the counter frame did find an audience and did make its way into the mainstream, traditional media, suggesting that they are not simply mouthpieces of the government. But Schildkraut (2002) found that despite the media's attempts to cover the events of Sept. 11 in a much more racially, ethnically, and religiously sensitive manner than they did after the Pearl Harbor attacks, the greater public's response has been strikingly similar to that previous war, veering into racist nationalism. So it would seem that dissention from the media is present but is not being embraced by an American audience. Thus, the traditional media, beholden to the bottom line as Herman and Chomsky (1988) have pointed out, will ultimately reflect that.

Abrahamian (2003) argued in an essay that mainstream media in the United States framed Sept. 11 in terms of civilization and cultural differences playing out in the extreme. He used a governmental paradigm put forth in the early 1990s by Samuel Huntington, who argued that states and nations were no longer determining the course of international politics as much as

historic regional paradigms did. Abrahamian pointed to article headlines that appeared in national media outlets as evidence of the framing used by U.S. news media that radical Islam had attacked America on Sept. 11. The authors wrote these articles in the months after the attacks as an attempt to explain the event. It is relevant now to bring up how follow-up articles were framed because analyzing the 10th anniversary coverage of Sept. 11 will look at articles written with a retrospective lens, as this research has done.

While weblogs may be different from a professional media site that operates outside the mainstream, these outlets may still influence news reported through traditional outlets and because of that are worth mentioning here. Today, most newspapers have staff writers who operate blogs. In fact, many of the examples used in this research were called blogs by both traditional and alternative media; therefore, research on blogs is worth mentioning here. Much research conducted about blogs focuses on credibility and not framing. Moreover, that research has shown that established news organization websites rated highest among credible online options, with personal websites rating lowest in terms of credibility (Flanagin & Metzger, 2007). This means that the *New York Times* website could be seen as a reliable news source, whereas a random person's blog may not. Contradicting that study was one by Johnson et al. (2007) that indicated blogs, which are essentially personal websites, rated more credible than mainstream media among politically interested web users. This research is essentially supportive of an argument that online information is gathered, whereas television news, for instance, is passively obtained.

Alternative Media

In order to conduct research about differences in framing between traditional and alternative (non-traditional) media, it is important to define the latter. Researchers have analyzed alternative media in the past. Lewes (2000), in a study that looked at how alternative media in the 1960s perceived its audience, argued that by and large the underground press, as he called it, were largely community newspapers that operated counter to the conventions of the mainstream media. According to Kessler (1984), alternatives to mainstream media have been present throughout American history. Today, it is much easier for a fringe group to do this because the Internet allows anyone with a computer to begin a blog at no cost. For instance, Ramirez (2013), in a study of alternative media in the Puerto Rican punk scene, found that the computer became the disseminator of choice because of its low cost and ease of use. The format was different, but the counterculture message remained the same. So one item used to define non-traditional media is to claim it operates counter to the perceived status quo in order to provide access to alternate ideas.

Alternative media organizations offer a framework for differentiating them from traditional outlets. In 1978, the Association of Alternative Newsmedia (AAN) formed. The association is still operating with 130 member publications from across North America. According to the bylaws section of the AAN website, "Independence from media conglomerates or other entities deemed detrimental to the interest of the alternative press and the maintenance of media diversity," (altweeklies.com 2011) is one of the tenets of membership in the organization. There are many more alternative publications than the 130 currently in the AAN ranks. In *Annotations: The Alternative Press Center's Guide to the Independent Critical Press* (Jones, 2004) there appear 385 publications that are generally described as operating to put forth

a viewpoint that is not usually considered by the mainstream media. The Independent Media Center (IMC) is another organization similar to the AAN in its goals and purpose, claiming on its website that it is for people “who continue to work for a better world, despite corporate media's distortions and unwillingness to cover the efforts to free humanity” (indymedia.org 2011, para. 1). Established in 1999 in Seattle in response to the World Trade Organization meeting there that year, the IMC has grown significantly over the years to include contributors from all over the world (Kidd, 2003). The IMC also functions by the efforts of volunteers and donations.

The AAN does not clearly define mainstream media, but a definition can be inferred by what was excluded in the organization’s requirements for inclusion in its ranks. The AAN presumes to take the responsibility of reporting on issues and subjects the mainstream media does not. Therefore, it seems likely the AAN would report on the anniversary of Sept. 11 from an angle either not reported on widely or completely ignored by their definition of the mainstream media.

Hypotheses

Based on the review of the literature regarding alternative media and its history, the researchers proposed three hypotheses. For the first hypothesis, the researchers looked to Glessing’s (1970) work, which highlighted the fact that underground press publications sought to challenge the status quo, as did Kessler’s (1984). Though not included in the data set for alternative publications, the Independent Media Center’s similarity to the AAN and its assertion that it is for people who recognize what it called “corporate media distortions” (para. 1), further adding to the argument that alternative media will be critical. Therefore, the researchers posed the following hypothesis.

H1: Alternative media coverage of the anniversary of Sept. 11 will be more critical of the U.S. government than will traditional media.

Li and Izard (2003) found that both major national newspapers and television stations focused on business or financial coverage in relation to the Sept. 11 attacks, which would fall under the definition of traditional media for this research project. That finding, coupled with information from Glessing (1970) that alternative publications of the past were not too concerned with finances, led to the following hypothesis:

H2: Traditional media will emphasize the financial facets of the Sept. 11 anniversary than will alternative media.

The researchers based the third hypothesis on Kessler’s (1984) work that argued alternative publications grew out of a desire to highlight issues, news, and topics the mainstream media ignored. They also based it on the AAN’s (2012) statement that its member publications seek to provide content outside the scope of the mainstream media. And they based it on Chomsky’s (1997) assertion that the mainstream media sets the tone for most of the nation’s news outlets.

H3: There will be a significant difference between the manner in which alternative media and traditional media cover the Sept. 11 anniversary.

III. Methodology

This study was a content analysis of the text-based coverage of the 10th anniversary of Sept. 11 as done by traditional media outlets and independent or alternative media outlets to determine differences used in framing that story. Because of the universal appeal of covering the anniversary and the attacks' impact on this country, the topic was deemed suitable to yield a large enough data sample. For alternative media, the publications listed in the AAN website were scoured for articles pertaining to Sept. 11 anniversary coverage between the dates of Aug. 25 and Sept. 30. The same date range was used for traditional media, which was obtained by running a LexisNexis search for newspapers. This date range was thought to be suitable to capture enough stories leading up to the anniversary and to account for weekly publications that may have published after the anniversary date.

The AAN's member publication websites were searched for Sept. 11 articles by using the search terms of "Sept. 11 anniversary," "Twin Towers," and "Ground Zero." The same search terms were used to search LexisNexis for Sept. 11 anniversary-related articles. These terms were thought suitable enough to yield sufficient data. Hundreds of articles were provided for each data set using this method. To further identify and differentiate the traditional media, a search for Associated Press content was done on each newspaper website pulled by the LexisNexis database. The inclusion of Associated Press content was determined to be indicative of the mainstream traditional media, as argued by Chomsky (1997). Each newspaper website published Associated Press content, therefore the data set was determined to be valid for this research. Additionally, traditionally accepted elite media newspapers were included in the traditional data set. These included newspapers that appeared in Herman & Chomsky's (1988) work and also those publications identified by Li and Izard (2003). Newspapers published and distributed by the same corporation were also considered to be mainstream. The alternative set was considered alternative, because the news publications included in the set were defined as such by their inclusion in the AAN, regardless of whether they published Associated Press content. Incidentally, a survey of the alternative media sites revealed mention of the Associated Press usually only as a means to provide a counter angle to a particular story.

This search yielded 143 separate articles for the traditional data set and 234 articles for the alternative data set. The two data sets were analyzed by the content analysis program Leximancer, which identified major themes and concepts within the text. Leximancer groups concepts into clusters that it refers to as themes and demonstrates how those themes are connected by providing a visual map of the concept clusters (see Figures 1 & 2). These themes were also ranked by how often the concepts within them were identified by the software (see Tables 1 & 2). The software also provided name-like concepts that were proper nouns that kept recurring throughout a data set. Leximancer ranked these by the number of times each word appeared and by relevance to the overall data set (see Tables 3 & 4). The software also provided word-like concepts that were common words that appeared often.

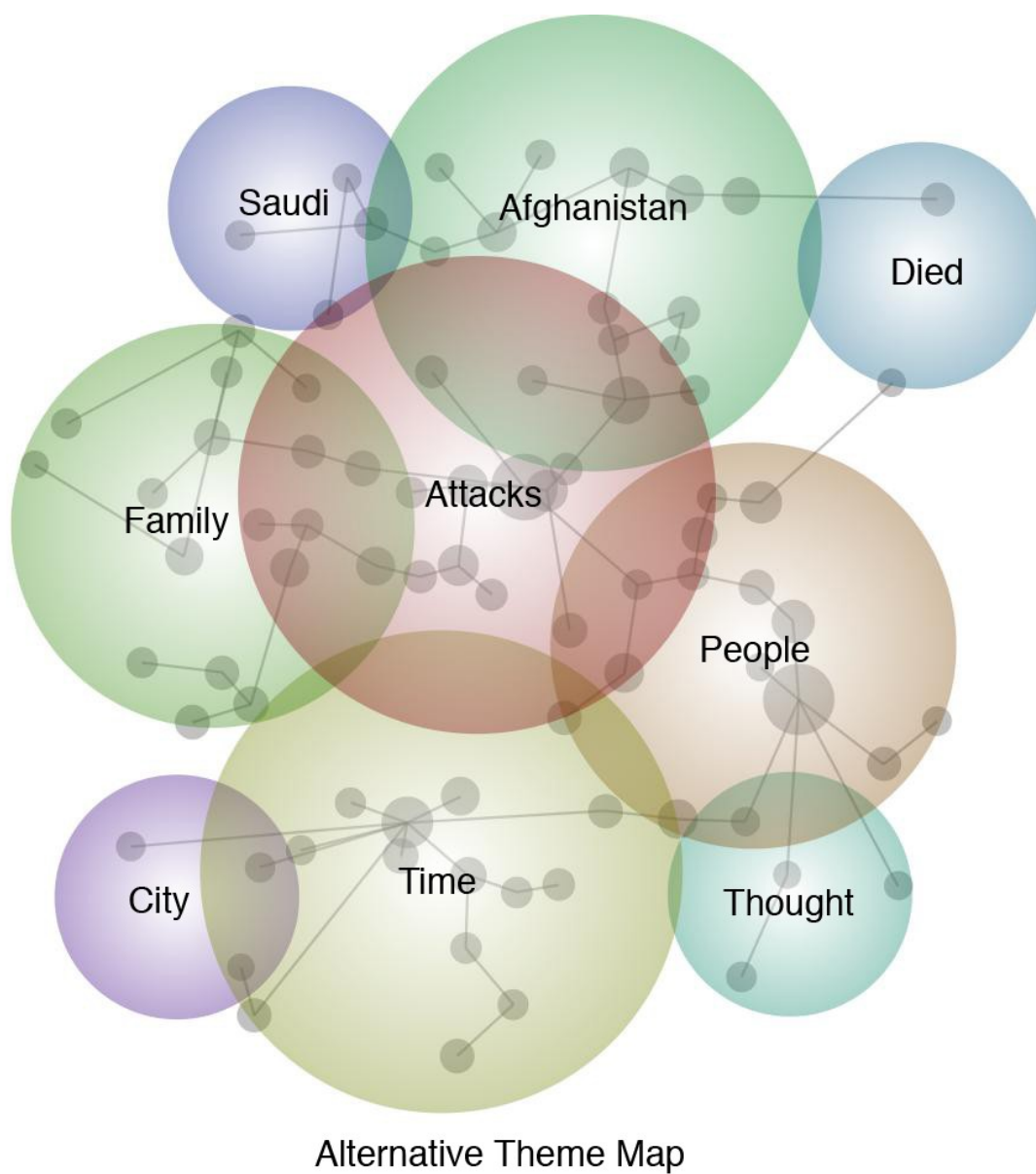


Figure 1. Theme map of Sept. 11 anniversary coverage by alternative media.

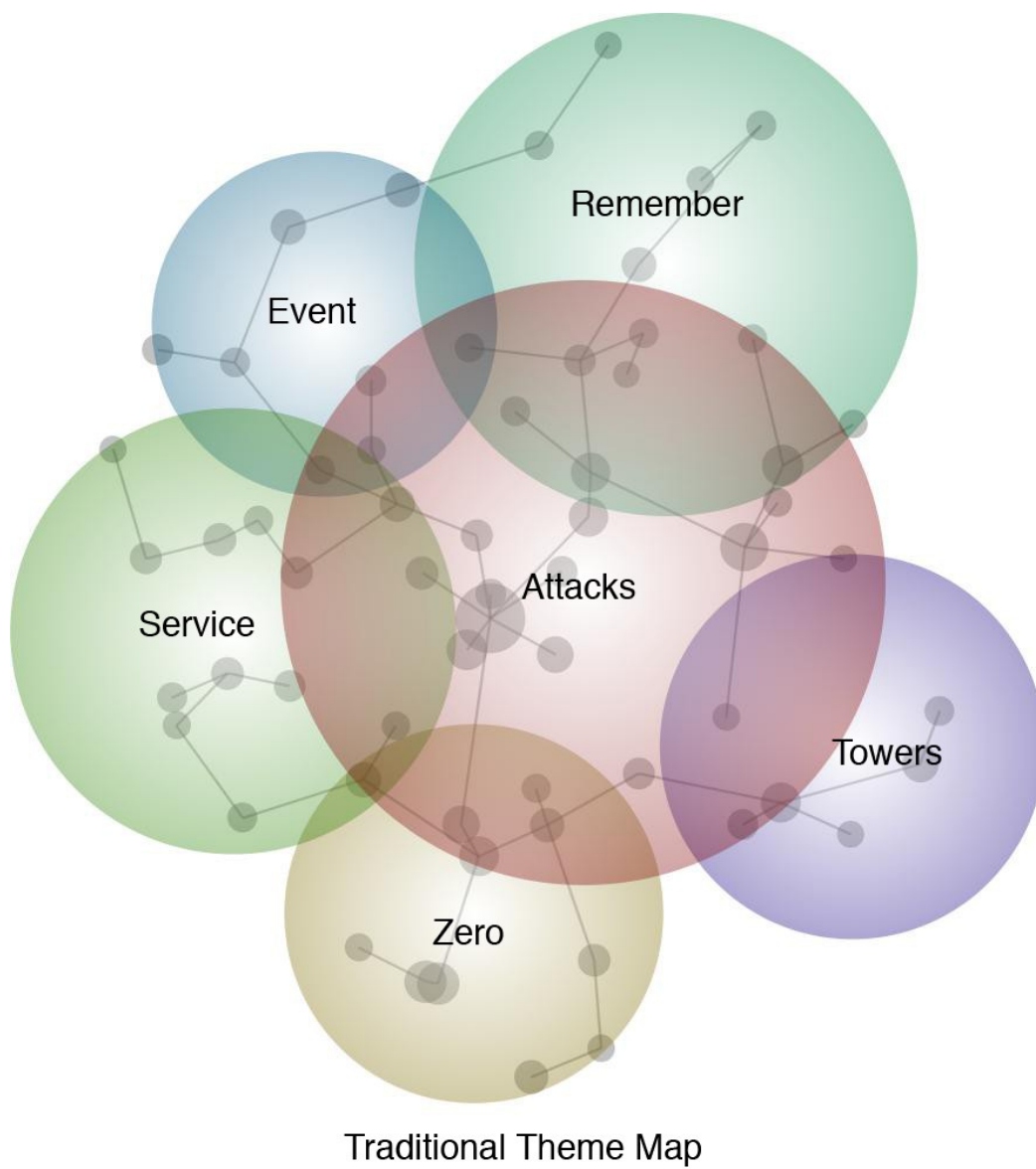


Figure 2. Theme map of Sept. 11 anniversary coverage by traditional media.

Table 1

Alternative Theme Summary

Theme	Connectivity Relevance Percentage
Attacks	100
People	80
Time	74
Family	64
Afghanistan	59
Thought	12
Died	07
Saudi	06
City	05

Table 2

Traditional Theme Summary

Theme	Connectivity Relevance Percentage
Attacks	100
Zero	55
Service	36
Remember	29
Event	28
Towers	18

Table 3

Concepts for Traditional Media Data Set

Name-like Concepts	Count	Relevance Percentage
World Trade Center	132	40
Ground Zero	121	37
New York	109	33
Twin Towers	72	22
New York City	62	19
American	61	19
Pentagon	59	18

Table 4

Concepts for Alternative Media Data Set

Name-like Concepts	Count	Relevance Percentage
American	190	38
World Trade Center	150	30
Afghanistan	140	28
New York	128	26
Iraq	122	24
America	109	22
Americans	109	22
Muslim	67	13
Saudi	65	13

To simplify the following discussion of the results, the researcher will refer only concepts within themes. To generate concepts and themes, Leximancer uses algorithms to analyze text relationships based on Bayesian theory (Leximancer, 2011). “As evidence accumulates, the degree of belief in a relationship or hypothesis changes. When applied to text, the words that make up a sentence predict the concepts that emerge and can be discussed” (Campbell, Pitt, Parent & Berthon, 2011, p.92). Leximancer captures context of term use for additional qualitative analysis to enhance concept and theme understanding. As of 2012, Leximancer’s content analysis software has been used in 655 academic publications. Therefore, its use across multiple disciplines has been well established and has been considered consistently valid by academia. Papers published using this software include Campbell et al. (2011), Zhu and McKenna (2007), and Junco, Elavsky, and Heiberger (2012).

IV. Results

The analysis software yielded stark differences in the overall themes that appeared in traditional media and alternative media. For traditional media, the software identified the overall themes of “attacks,” “zero,” “service,” “remember,” “event,” and “towers.” The alternative data set yielded the themes of “attacks,” “people,” “time,” “family,” “Afghanistan,” “thought,” “died,” “Saudi,” and “city.” To begin with, the alternative data set provided more and varied themes, whereas the traditional data set provided fewer overall themes that were more closely related. Based on these themes, it could be argued that traditional media were providing coverage by journaling the Sept. 11 anniversary as suggested by the themes of “remember,” “event,” and “service.” Traditional media, it seemed, were content to record observances and remembrances. Conversely, the alternative media seemed to be using the 10th anniversary of Sept. 11 as an opportunity to give critical analysis, which was suggested by the “Afghanistan” theme and “Saudi” theme. Another interesting point about the alternative media data set was that the theme of “people” appears as the second largest theme, which means that word was mentioned many times throughout the data set. It is important to note here that “people” meant the alternative media gave enough attention to people to cause that word to be identified with its own theme. Many examples of “people” focused on Sept. 11 victims, personal remembrances as well as “truthers,” or those people who believe that not all the facts have been presented regarding the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. Another “people” example can be illustrated by the critical

analysis of a quote from President George W. Bush capture by the software, “I can hear you, the rest of the world hears you, and the people who knocked these buildings down will hear all of us soon.” (Bowers, 2011). The author went on to say that he was not impressed with that speech and that he had heard war mongering from pastors. In fact, the theme of “people” had an 80 percent connectivity relevance, according to the software, suggesting a heavy focus on people as a way to tell the narrative of Sept. 11.

That “attacks” was the first theme to appear in both data sets is not surprising, given the fact that the premise of news coverage was terrorist attacks in New York City and at the Pentagon. Every theme in both sets of data seemed to be closely tied to the “attacks” theme. A visual analysis of the maps for each set of data provided interesting inferences (See Figures 1 and 2). For instance, the map for traditional media contained the five theme spheres identified for this data set arranged rather neatly around the core theme of “attacks.” The concept words within these theme spheres were all connected clearly back to the “attacks” theme. An example of “attacks” from traditional media was about schoolchildren, “Middle-schoolers make paper quilt to commemorate Sept. 11 attacks” was an actual headline pulled out by the software (Migdail-Smith, 2011). Perhaps, though, the example that best sums up the “attacks” concept for traditional media is the following headline taken from the *Victoria Advocate*: “Community gathers to commemorate 10th anniversary of Sept. 11 attacks” (Miles, 2011).

Alternative media seemed to have a sharp contrast and more of a scattered concept word branching for “attacks” compared to traditional media. Many concepts and their connected contexts were often highly critical of the mass media. Another example was in a story about who financed the Sept. 11 attacks, “But Motley’s most ambitious, challenging, and politically charged endeavor is still yet to be decided—a \$1 trillion lawsuit against the alleged financiers of the Sept. 11 attacks,” (Gore, 2011). Motley is a reference to a law firm. This story appears several more times throughout several themes in the alternative data set. It is one of what appeared to be only a handful of stories regarding Saudi Arabia and is likely largely responsible for the “Saudi” theme as well.

While everything did tie back in to the “attacks” theme, some of the smaller themes like “city,” “died,” and “thought” were clearly farther from the core “attacks” theme. In any case, the theme maps indicate a rather well planned message on the part of the traditional media and no central organized effort on the part of the alternative media. This seems to support Chomsky’s (1997) argument that traditional media set a tone for the national dialogue. The maps also give support to the claim from the alternative media organization that it is different from traditional media.

The software also generated name-like concepts and word-like concepts for each set of data. The traditional data set yielded the following name-like concepts: “World Trade Center,” “Ground Zero,” “New York,” “Twin Towers,” “New York City,” “American,” and “Pentagon.” It is clear the most common proper nouns that appeared in traditional media were of the places that were attacked on Sept. 11, 2001. The name-like concept of “America” is the only reference to a non-specific place that was attacked; however, the argument could be made that the nation was attacked. Therefore, it seems clear that traditional media were focusing on the actual attacks themselves in the coverage of the 10th anniversary of Sept. 11. A similar list was generated for the alternative media data set and included the name-like concepts of “American,” “World Trade

Center,” “Afghanistan,” “New York,” “Iraq,” “America,” “Americans,” “Muslim,” and “Saudi.” The only clear reference to places that were attacked on Sept. 11 in this grouping of words was “World Trade Center” and “New York.” Once again, the argument could be made that “America” was a place that was attacked. The interesting point about these alternative name-like concepts is that included are places where the American military fought, or attacked, after Sept. 11 in the name-like concepts of “Iraq” and “Afghanistan.” Also interesting is the inclusion of the name-like concepts that are basically identifiers with “American,” “Americans,” “Muslim,” and “Saudi.” The argument can be made that alternative media were providing coverage based on the nation and the world while traditional media focused mainly on the nation, specifically New York City.

V. Discussion

Based on the analysis conducted, data supported two of the three hypotheses. The alternative media were more critical of the government and did differ significantly from the traditional media.

H1, which predicted alternative media coverage of the Sept. 11 anniversary would be more critical of the U.S. government than would traditional media, was supported. Evidence supporting this hypothesis was abundant throughout most of the software-identified alternative media themes, with stories calling government representatives liars, editorials encouraging citizens to question the official truth of the attacks, writers pointing out facts that portrayed the U.S. military in a poor light, the highlighting of the alleged Saudi Arabian connection to Sept. 11, and personal reflections that wondered why the response to the violence of Sept. 11 was more violence. One example found by the researcher but missing from the software did not support the hypothesis, but it was only one of hundreds of examples of highly critical analysis, so this example was considered an outlier. Traditional media was not critical at all of the government, according to the data. This finding supports Chomsky (1997), who argued that elite traditional media influenced all other traditional media and was basically an extension of the national power structure.

H2, which stated that traditional media would emphasize the financial facets of the Sept. 11 anniversary more often than would alternative media, was not supported. The researchers found that alternative media mentioned financial aspects of Sept. 11, whereas the traditional media mostly ignored this angle in covering the anniversary of Sept. 11. According to the software, there was no theme devoted to finances, nor was there a concept for finances. The software identified a “money” concept for alternative media and that was used in the analysis to determine no support for **H2**. Additionally, qualitative analysis revealed financial facets were mentioned across many of the themes identified in the alternative data set. Much of the financial analysis done by the alternative media focused on the fact that the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have cost the American taxpayers \$1.3 trillion to date. Alternative media also gave special attention to those alleged to have financed the attacks on Sept. 11, 2001.

H3 stated there would be a significant difference between the manner in which alternative media and traditional media covered the anniversary of Sept. 11. This was supported through data gleaned from the software and through qualitative content analysis of the data sets. The alternative data set yielded considerably more and varied themes, including one critical theme on war, a theme on death, a theme on the kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and a theme on

people. The traditional data set did not include any of these themes. The alternative data set also included articles on “truthers,” or people who questioned the government’s official account of the Sept. 11 attacks and sought the true answers. “Truthers” were not even mentioned in the traditional data set. In fact, the traditional data set mainly had themes that dealt with commemoration events for the 10th anniversary of Sept. 11 and personal reflections on the day of the attacks. Alternative media had those reflective and informative themes too, but oftentimes the content was markedly different, taking on a critical tone that the traditional media did not touch. In fact, the majority of the criticism given by traditional media was leveled against themselves for providing, ironically, too much coverage of the 10th anniversary of Sept. 11.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This research was limited in its scope. Not every single alternative publication in the nation was identified and used for data for the alternative data set. The same was true of the traditional data set. This limitation did not likely hinder the outcomes, though, which were largely predicted based on the literature review, due to the fact that the alternative publications came from across the country, as did the traditional media examples gathered by a LexisNexis search. Another limitation could be the use of the AAN members. While the use of an organization or an association may seem antithetical to the concept of alternative media, the researcher had to begin somewhere and the AAN provided a boundary, a specific area, from which to pull data. Had there been no such thing as the AAN, this researcher would have been faced with the insurmountable task of seeking out every website, blog, and web posting across the Internet. Perhaps in future research, more publications that self-identify as alternative or opposite-of-mainstream can be included.

The present research is further limited by search terms used to select the content for analysis. Anytime researchers select words to narrow database searches, there is a risk of leaving out potentially important material. And though the search terms used in this study are valid and germane to the topic at hand, the researchers acknowledge the potential for having left out equally pertinent terms.

A direction for future research would be to investigate how the medium of alternative news affects the message put forth by that segment of the news world. McLuhan (1967) argued that the grammar of print construes the unseen message of institutions, and this has the effect of providing the unwary reader with assumptions. That is to say that it frames the argument for the reader. McLuhan went beyond printed words in his argument, but it is relevant here because news media is considered an institution. The whole premise of this research is the divide within that institution that creates alternative and traditional media. This ties back in to Phillipson’s (1997) work on speech codes and the establishment of a separate culture. Is the alternative media influencing the national culture and dialogue, taking that privilege away from the mainstream? Future research should investigate that topic and whether readers find the news credible between the media.

Future researchers should also take note of the outcome of **H2**, which predicted the financial aspects of Sept. 11 would be more likely to be covered by traditional media, because the research suggested alternative media were not as concerned with finances, Wall Street, and the markets. The data showed the opposite to have occurred. The reason or reasons for this were

not investigated in this research; however, the qualitative analysis of the financial aspects mentioned in the alternative data set all supported **H1**, which stated the alternative media would be critical of the government. The costs of the wars that have been waged post-Sept. 11 were a target for criticism by the alternative media. The alternative media also mentioned finances in the context of who was responsible for the attacks. Was this hypothesis not supported because of the topic researched? It is not known at this time, but it raises an interesting question about how alternative media do cover or view financial news. A future research project should focus on investigating financial coverage in alternative and traditional media.

VI. Conclusion

The data showed a clear difference between traditional media and alternative media. As was found in the review of literature, modern alternative media was born when those opposed to the status quo thought it necessary to produce news products that told the “truth” as they saw it. The alternative media of today are still maintaining the news products that offer a view that is different from traditional, mainstream media. The role of critical observer of the government is still the role of the alternative press network today. That the alternative media, according to the software, developed a theme dealing with war in connection to Sept. 11 was not in and of itself surprising. That the traditional media did not have a theme dealing with war while the alternative media did was interesting at the least, if not surprising.

Stemple and Hargrove (2002) predicted that newspapers would play a larger role in telling the broader narrative of Sept. 11. However, based on this research it seems newspapers in the mainstream media are practicing more of the routine, objective, defensive journalism about which Tuchman (1972) and Shoemaker and Reese (1996) wrote. The argument was that objectivity helps with credibility, but it seems that objectivity is an excuse for and possibly a reason for providing “safe” news that will not result in criticism for the author or their respective news organization. The tradition of alternative news continues today, in part, under what could be called a mantra of offering views, information, and news the mainstream objective media will not touch. Based on the news stories read by the researcher, it seemed as though traditional media were reporting on simple stories that were easy to get, like what school children were learning or attending an official public service commemorating the Sept. 11 anniversary. In contrast, the alternative media were publishing subjective opinions that were often highly critical of the government, calling for more facts about the number of dead from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, or requesting more information about the cost of those wars.

Today, in the age of high-speed Internet and social media that encourages everyone to contribute to the national conversation, understanding the kind of news people are consuming seems all the more important. Today’s world affords anyone with access to the Internet the capability to launch a website dedicated to providing news or spreading rumors, whichever the case may be. The researcher wanted to know what kind of news Internet users were finding and consuming on the Internet, where most of the alternative publications can be found, without needing membership or paying an access fee. This project was considered to be a first step toward the larger goal of analyzing the state of news consumption in America. This research was important, because most newspapers today have websites (Peng, Tham, & Xiaoping, 1999), and much news is blogged about by millions of users on a daily basis. Today, many independent news media exist apart from the corporately published news of the *New York Times*, *The*

Washington Post, CNN, NBC, Fox News, or others. Much of this independent, alternative media was easily accessible online, yet, as the AAN and the Alternative Press' *Annotations* (2004) shows, it is also still published in print form. Anyone can access the alternative media as easily as they can the traditional media.

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