

Media and Conflict: The Effect of Media Coverage on American Students' Beliefs and Attitudes
toward Muslims after Ground Zero Mosque/ Muslim Cultural Center debate

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Abstract

Existing research have several findings on how the media coverage influences our understanding on diverse social and political issues. This study aims to explore whether this influence may go beyond their mainstream context and affect our understanding on local issues. The results of an undercover experimental study on college students regarding the establishment of a bogus Muslim Student Center reveal that media frames on Manhattan Muslim Community Center have an influence on the local context. While the media frames favoring the establishment of a bogus lounge, interfaith dialogue and positive message to the community were able to shift participant's understanding, the media frames favoring the contestation of a bogus lounge, understanding that the lounge only belonged to Muslims, and negative message to the community were unable to shift participants' understanding. The reasons for the success and failure of study predictions were discussed following the announcement of study results.

Keywords: framing, media frames, individual frames, schemata, media coverage, Ground Zero Mosque, college campus, Muslims.

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Media has a significant influence in shaping people's attitudes toward important social and political debates. According to Reese (2001), public opinion is influenced by how news media frame the issues at stake. Existing research has traced the effect of framing on a variety of social and political debates such as racial and ethnic health disparities (Kim A.E., Kumanyika S., Shive D., Igweatu U., & Kim S.-H., 2010; Leask J, Hooker C, & King C, 2010), election campaigns (Esser & D'Angelo, 2007; Rhee, 1997), performance of political leaders (Caliendo & McIlwain, 2007; Gan, Teo, & Detenber, 2005), environment disputes (Brummans B.H.J.M. et al., 2008; Groffman P.M. et al., 2010; Kim S.-H., Carvalho J.P., Davis A.G., & Mullins A.M., 2011), immigration issues (Azrout R., van Spanje J., & de Vreese C., 2011; Kim S.-H. et al., 2011), global climate change (Nielsen K.H. & Schmidt Kjaergaard R., 2011; Nisbet M., 2009), and so on. For example, Kim, Kumanyika, Shive, Igweatu and Kim (2010) examined how racial/ethnic disparities are covered by the American media. Through content analysis of 40 newspapers between 1996 and 2005, they coded articles for diseases and racial/ethnic groups mentioned; whether causes and solutions were framed as genetic, behavioral, health care, or societal responsibility. They found that behavioral explanations dominated the discourse and only 4% of articles invoked a social-justice rationale. Therefore, they concluded that the dominant "behavioral" frame may influence public opinion and limit public support for policy solutions to resolve the issue. Another example is Nielsen and Kjaergaard's (2011) study on the news coverage of climate change. After examining Nature News and ScienceNOW, they compared how the two magazines covered the climate change, its severe consequences and its anthropogenic sources in ways that fitting their agendas.

Overall, the existing research on the effect of media coverage demonstrates how news media can frame and influence our beliefs and attitudes towards certain nationwide debates. However, this research tells us little about how our understanding of these nationwide debates might also frame our local community debates. This study focuses on examining this question. Specifically, I will

assess whether news media frames cut across nationwide debates and influence the understanding of local debates. In this study, I will focus on the media coverage of Manhattan Muslim Community Center debate to assess whether media framing of this center as either a Muslim cultural center or as a mosque impacts people's beliefs and attitudes toward a Muslim Community Centers in one's community. In this way, this study will provide a better understanding of the interaction between national news frames and local debates.

Origins and definition of framing

Media framing is a highly used framework in communication studies to understand how individuals make sense of news information (Bryant & Miron, 2004; Buist E.A. & Mason D.S., 2010). As a result of this popularity, the term "framing" has been employed in many different ways. Some researchers use the term to mean agenda-setting, priming, script, schema, etc (Scheufele, 1999). Others claim that frames are the cognitive equivalents of "attitudes" in social psychology (Kuklinski, Luskin, & Bolland, 1991; Wildavsky, 1987). Ultimately, we can say that frames are indispensable tools for communicating complex issues (e.g. stem cell research) "in a way that makes them accessible to lay audiences because they play to existing cognitive schemas" (D. A. Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007).

Several researchers define framing as "schemata of interpretation" (Buist E.A. & Mason D.S., 2010; Gandy, Grant, & Reese, 2001; Goffman, 1974; D. A. Scheufele, 2000). In the current study, I will take a similar approach. Schemas are the mental "theories" by whose light we perceive, construe, and remember the kaleidoscopic flow of experience (Kuklinski et al., 1991). To make it easier, we can imagine schemas as slots that can be instantiated with particular understandings of certain experiences (Anderson, R. C., Pichert, J. W., Goetz, E. T., Schallert, D. L., Stevens, K. V., Trollip, S., 1976). For example, a schema about "dining-at-a-fancy restaurant" would incorporate the general knowledge of making a reservation, dress to impress, arrive punctually, check with the waiter, order pre-drinks, have a starter, main course and desert, leave a fat tip and so on. Therefore, we can say that schema is a mental package that helps individuals to cluster certain understandings

together.

In addition, research on schemas confirm that information that fit into an existing schema is more likely to be remembered and learned than information that does not fit into the same schema (R. C. Anderson, Spiro, & Anderson, 1978). We tend to see, understand, and remember things the way we expect them to be, that is, in conformity with our schema (Kuklinski et al., 1991). To exemplify, returning to the “dining-at-a-fancy restaurant” example, making a reservation and leaving a fat tip are more likely to be remembered than a walk-in visit and no tip because the former acts are more congruent with the schema of “dining-at-a-fancy restaurant” than with the latter. Because of this self-perpetuating characteristic, schemas help remember understandings consistent with the information stored in the schema, while discouraging inconsistent information.

Schemas have important functions. Anderson (1977) argues that schemas help individuals to create mental shortcuts to communicate more efficiently by skipping complicated details. Continuing with the dining example, the schema of “dining-at-a-fancy restaurant” help us communicate this dining experience to other individuals, without having to mention its every detail presumably because other individuals share the “dining-at-a-fancy restaurant” schema. Telling a friend that “Last night I had a great dinner at a fancy restaurant” should evoke the “dining-at-a-fancy restaurant” schema, thus communicating a lot of information about one’s experience without necessarily describing it in every detail. For this reason, schemas work as a simplifying tool to expedite understanding of others, similarly with the auto-fill function of a cell phone where it is usually sufficient to write half of the word for the device to fill the rest of the word.

Similarly, framing—defined as “schemata of interpretation”—can serve to help individuals mentally package and interpret news information conveyed by the mainstream media (Buist E.A. & Mason D.S., 2010; Goffman, 1974). According to this approach, public issues are presented within certain story frames by the journalists (Gamson, 1992). These frames often reflect broader cultural themes and narratives, and they supply citizens with a basic tool kit of ideas they use in thinking about and talking about politics (V. Price, Tewksbury, & Powers, 1997). The approach also

presupposes that the way journalists package and present these frames essentially influence audiences' understanding of the issues (V. Price et al., 1997). Many researchers (Entman, 1993; Pan & Kosicki, 1993; V. Price et al., 1997; D. A. Scheufele, 1999) recognize this approach as the framing affect and this study will mainly use this framework.

Framing types and dynamics

Since early 1980's, researchers in mass communication studies developed a new approach on the study of framing, which was influenced by social constructivism (D. A. Scheufele, 1999). This approach proposed that individuals understand the social reality through public discourse which is primarily influenced by the mainstream media (Gamson & Modigliani, 1994; McLeod, 1987; D. A. Scheufele, 1999). Media provides the content that generates the news frames for individuals' use and interpretation of public events and debates (Tuchman, 1978). However, the audience are not passive listeners. Rather, this social reality is based on an active audience model where individuals also participate in the construction of social reality by actively accepting or rejecting news content. In other words, "the interaction between the attributes of the message and the schemas of the audience" shape our social reality (Entman, 1989).

Departing from this idea of the interaction between the media frames and influences and the "internal structures of the mind" of the people who absorb the news (Kinder & Sanders, 1990), Scheufele emphasized the importance of examining each of these elements separately. That is, he introduced the notion that the media and the individual interacted with each other through distinct "media frames" and "individual frames". While media frames are used by journalists to classify and package news content to deliver to the audience (Gitlin, 1980), individual frames are used by individuals for the purpose of processing the new information acquired about the news content (Conaway & Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics, and Public Policy., 1996).

The following examples can illustrate how media and individual frames interact with each other. First, let's assume that a journalist was given the task to write an article on the current situation of Muslim women in Afghanistan, and gathered the necessary data for the article. At least

five factors influence the journalist writing the article: his/her social norms and values, organizational pressures and constraints, pressures of various interest groups, journalistic routines, and journalist's ideological or political orientations (D. A. Scheufele, 1999). Let's say that this journalist's boss favored portrayals of Afghan women as illiterate, the journalist believed that Afghan men oppressed their wives cruelly, and a human rights organization kept sending him aggressive emails regarding human rights abuses on Muslim women in Afghanistan. Thus, the journalist might portray Afghan Muslim women as "deprived from basic human rights", "illiterate" and "oppressed by their husbands." The elements of this discourse can be a part of a text, an occurring word or phrase, or even in absence of certain elements within a journalistic narrative (Entman, 1993). Subsequently, "Muslim Afghan women" media frame is built and ready to be delivered to the audience.

Second, let's assume that an ordinary person read this article. According to Entman (1993), this new information is processed by the reader to fit the reader's existing schema about Afghan women. There are two options for the reader. First, it may be the case that the reader has seen similar articles on Afghan Muslim women where these women were depicted as "deprived from basic human rights", "illiterate" and "oppressed by their husbands." In this case, the new information is consistent with the reader's previous knowledge. Subsequently, "Muslim Afghan women" individual frame is set and used to help the individual to make sense of the current situation of Muslim women in Afghanistan. Second, it may be the case that the reader either has not seen similar articles on Afghan Muslim women where those women were depicted as "deprived from basic human rights", "illiterate" and "oppressed by their husbands, or their existing knowledge and beliefs about the situation of Afghan Muslim women are contradictory with the news article. In this case, the new information is inconsistent with the reader's previous knowledge. Subsequently, "Muslim Afghan women" individual frame is not set and the individual maintains to make sense of the current situation of Muslim women in Afghanistan with his existing knowledge.

Framing, then, impacts our evaluation of issues "by invoking interpretive schemas that

influence the interpretation of incoming information” (D. A. Scheufele, 2000). On the one hand, media has the potential “to provide and / or activate information, thereby shaping individual frames” (Tewksbury, Jones, Peske, Raymond, & Vig, 2000). On the other hand, the individual is not completely dependent on the media coverage of an event or issue; rather, each individual brings his/her own knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs in understanding the news and drawing their own conclusions (V. Price et al., 1997). In sum, framing is a process in which the individual actively interprets the incoming information and integrates it to his existing knowledge in order to generate meaning and take action (Pan & Kosicki, 1993).

Impact of knowledge activation on media and individual frames

This section explores how frames are activated via media and individual frames. Specifically, I examine how our understanding of issues is shaped through the interaction between activated media frames and existing individual frames.

Price and Tewksbury (1997) stated that media frames influence audiences by activating certain news content. In their view, news content can evoke distinct “trains of thought by activating certain ideas rather than others” in order to guide the audience towards endorsing particular beliefs and attitudes (p.176). Thus, once a frame is activated, the activation spreads to other associated information which increases the likelihood of their activation. Keeping the dining at a fancy restaurant example in mind, we can similarly say that, if “Richard Nixon” is activated, it is likely that “Watergate”, “détente” or “distrust” are more likely to be activated(V. Price & Tewksbury, 1997).

However, the influence of media frames on knowledge activation is limited to a certain extent:

“Although an author tries, in creating a message, to evoke particular thoughts and feelings, those will inevitably compete for attention with whatever is already on the minds of readers or viewers (including but not limited to those ideas already in general circulation in the media). Audiences may thus summon to mind other ideas, previous evaluations, and the like,

well beyond those stimulated by a particular frame. So a message can serve to direct in various ways, but not completely control, a message recipient's train of thought (V. Price et al., 1997).

In other words, even though mainstream media have the powerful capacity to influence individuals towards certain beliefs and attitudes by activating related media frames, individuals still have the control over their understanding of issues by referring to their previous knowledge and beliefs.

Price et al (1997) also showed that individual frames are capable of rendering ideas and feelings to a person, even if these ideas and feelings are not activated within the given situation (V. Price & Tewksbury, 1997). Returning to Nixon example, an individual with strong conservative political orientation is capable of rendering ideas and feelings other than “Watergate”, or “distrust” when Richard Nixon” is activated by the media. Consequently, we can say that individual’s prior knowledge and salient attributes of the current knowledge has an impact on making sense of news information (V. Price & Tewksbury, 1997).

How do these trains of thought get activated from media and individual frames? In his “synapse” approach, Higgins (1989) stated that excitation level plays a role in knowledge activation. According to this approach, frames with a high excitation level are more likely to be activated compared to those with a low level of excitation. Higgins also underlines the *recency* and *frequency* of frequent activation as key determinants for a frame to have high excitation levels and get activated. In other words, a frame is far more likely to be activated when it is frequent and recent with a high excitation level. Likewise, a frame –media or individual- is less likely to be activated when it is not frequent and recent with a low excitation level. For instance, returning to the Afghan women example, the key determinants for “Muslim Afghan women” media frames to be activated are how frequent and recent it was exposed to the reader. However, in that case, individual’s frames of prior beliefs and knowledge were more frequent and recent than the exposed media frames. Therefore, “Muslim Afghan women” media frame is not set and the individual frame is preserved.

In this section, I have demonstrated the interaction between media and individual frames through knowledge activation. I have also underlined two elements, frequency and recency, as the key determinants for the activation of frames. Now, I will proceed with showing this framework in local contexts.

Existing research of framing in local contexts

So far, I have discussed the influence of framing on people's understanding of debates in nationwide contexts. Similarly with nationwide contexts, there is research pointing out the influence of framing on people's understanding of local contexts and their communities. Buist and Mason underline the role of the local newspaper in shaping readers' understanding about an issue (Buist E.A. & Mason D.S., 2010). To do so, local newspapers take two different roles: first, they provide a discussion forum for civic actors to express their opinions, and second, they supply information concerning local business and political information (Stempel, 1991). As a result of this, the news coverage in a local newspaper can significantly influence how important local citizens feel specific issues are. In other words, local newspapers have a strong potential to influence framing of issues as well as national newspapers (Buist E.A. & Mason D.S., 2010).

The local framing effects research focus on three main characteristics: Framing analysis of a local issue from a local perspective (Buist E.A. & Mason D.S., 2010; Castello E., 2010; Hovardas T. & Korfiatis K.J., 2008), comparative local vs. national newspaper analysis (Guo S., 2011; Holt, 2008) and local understanding of nationwide issues (Reese & Buckalew, 1995; Soini & Aakkula, 2007).

However, these studies provided little understanding on how a certain national issue covered by the mainstream media can influence the understanding of our similar local issues. This study is aiming to fill that gap by focusing on a specific case: How the nationwide debate on Muslim Community Center in Lower Manhattan might influence the understanding of local contexts of Muslim community centers in one's local surroundings.

Background of Ground Zero Mosque/ Muslim Cultural Center debate

In 2010, the planned construction of a Muslim Community Center in Lower Manhattan has increased tension by provoking debates about 9/11, Islam and freedom of religion (Times Topics, 2010). Located only two blocks from the Ground Zero, the Cordoba House (Muslim community center) was planned to include a Muslim prayer space, as well as a memorial to 9/11 attack victims, a space for multi-faith worship and other cultural facilities. Cordoba Initiative, the founder of the project, said that the center is aiming to amplify a multi-faith approach by honoring “people of all faiths”, inspired by Cordoba city where Muslims, Christians and Jews co-existed in the Middle Ages (Rauf, 2010). However, opponents of the project said that the establishment of a mosque near Ground Zero would be disrespectful to 9/11 victims and encourage further Islamic fundamentalism. The debate ensued to a national controversy after the media coverage.

The controversial coverage in the media began when the New York Post broke the story referring to the project as the “W.T.C. Mosque” (Topousis, 2010), on May 6, 2010, the day after the approval for the building of the Muslim Community Center. The same day, another Associated Press ran a story on May 6, 2010 that covered the opinions of September 11 victims’ family members concerning the proposed community center, which were overwhelmingly negative (Jarvis, 2011). Moreover, the controversy in the media manifested its influence in the public in various ways such as protests (Halper, 2010), death threats to project organizers (Boyle, 2010) and sporadic calls by specific individuals, such as a Floridian Pastor, to burn a Koran (Hooper, 2010).

There has been a fair amount of coverage and debate around the issue and there might still be more to come. Overall, two opposing narratives have dominated the debate over this issue. First narrative (Bernard, 2010a; Bernard, 2010b; Rauf, 2010; Times Topics, 2010), which was associated with the liberal political spectrum, presented the proposed construction as a culture center (inspired by the YMCAs and Cordoba where Muslims, Christians and Jews co-existed peacefully in medieval Spain) and as an opportunity to enhance dialogue with Muslims in the country. All things considered, Park51 resembled more closely a YMCA than a mosque (Jarvis, 2011).

The second narrative (Goodwin, 2010a; Goodwin, 2010b; McFarland, 2010; Pinkerton, 2010), which was associated with the conservative political spectrum, presented the proposed construction as a mosque (inspired by terrorist cells in Europe and Cordoba where Muslims symbolized their victory against Christians by transforming churches into mosques in medieval Spain) and as an indignity to 9/11 victims and a potential recruit station for terrorists. The project was criticized by right-wing of being a “symbol of victory” for the orchestrators of 9/11 attacks, which would serve as a monument for terrorists (Jarvis, 2011).

In order to assess how our understanding of these nationwide debates might also frame our local community debates, this study explored the influence that these media frames –MCC for Muslim Cultural Center frame and GZM for Ground Zero Mosque frame- have on Americans vis-à-vis the function of local mosques/community centers. Specifically, the study investigated whether these media frames influence how Americans view relevant issues in a local context. That is, do media frames on this issue shape individuals’ thinking beyond Muslim Community Center in Lower Manhattan to local mosques/community centers in general.

Based on the theoretical overview above, I hypothesized that these media frames serve as schemas which will influence people’s understanding of similar issues in their local communities. Therefore, this study tested the following hypotheses:

H1a: Individuals exposed to a Muslim Cultural Center frame will be more favorable towards the establishment of local mosques/community centers than individuals exposed to Ground Zero Mosque frames.

H1b: Individuals exposed to a Muslim Cultural Center frame, compared to those exposed to Ground Zero Mosque frames, will be more likely to understand local mosques/community centers as friendly and educative environments where all members of the community would be welcome to learn about Islam by interfaith dialogue than individuals exposed to Ground Zero Mosque frames.

H1c: Individuals exposed to a Muslim Cultural Center frame will be more likely to

recommend the establishment of local mosques/community centers to other local community members than individuals exposed to Ground Zero Mosque frames.

On the contrary,

H2a: Individuals exposed to a Ground Zero Mosque frame will be less likely to favor towards the establishment of local mosques/community centers than individuals exposed to Muslim Cultural Center frames.

H2b: Individuals exposed to a Ground Zero Mosque frame will be more likely to consider local mosques/community centers as unfriendly and isolated environments where Muslims exclusively would pray than individuals exposed to Muslim Cultural Center frames.

H2c: Individuals exposed to a Ground Zero Mosque frame will be less likely to recommend the establishment of local mosques/community centers to other local community members than individuals exposed to Muslim Cultural Center frames.

First, we can say that MCC frame influences study subjects to understand MSAL as follows: it leads to favorable support of a local project and recommend others to support it; given that it is focused on interfaith dialogue, its aim is to include all students on campus; its components are interfaith items; its role is community inclusion. Therefore, H1a, H1b and H1c will be confirmed if participants in MCC condition will be likely than participants in other conditions to have an understanding of the local project in line with the MCC narrative.

Second, we can say that GZM frame influences study subject to understand MSAL as follows: it leads to uncertain or unfavorable views about this project; its aim is to include only Muslims; its components are religious items and it offers no positive role for the campus community. H2a, H2b and H2c will be confirmed if participants in GZM condition will be likely to have an understanding towards GZM narrative than in other conditions.

METHODS

Participants

Ninety-seven undergraduate students (53 men, 41 women, 3 undeclared) from the University of Massachusetts Boston volunteered to participate in the study. All participants were American citizens. The majority of participants were White (67.7%). The rest of the participants were Hispanic (7.5%), Afro-American (4.3%), Asian (4.3%) and other ethnicities (8.6%). With regard to religious beliefs, 39 participants (41.5%) reported to be of Christian faith, 12 (12.8%) reported to be atheists, 19 (20.2%) reported other beliefs, whereas 21 participants (22.3%) preferred not to respond. In terms of political affiliation, participants mostly identified themselves as democrat, $M = 2.7$, $SD = 1.26$ (1 = very liberal; 6 = very conservative).

Design and procedure

Participants were recruited from several locations on UMass Boston Campus (cafeteria, library, gym, etc). They were informed that their participation in the study was voluntary, and that it involved completing a short feedback questionnaire about the student newspaper of University of Massachusetts Boston. To decrease the likelihood that participants will guess the hypothesis of the study and also to maximize the authenticity of participants' input, the study was conducted as part of the readers' review questionnaire of The Mass Media (the student newspaper of UMass Boston). The study was introduced as an assessment of the journalistic quality of The Mass Media articles by UMass Boston students. After being introduced to the study, participants were asked to read the article, respond to a short questionnaire and to complete a letter to the editor (which was promised to be published). (See Appendix 1 for the full study materials).

Stimulus Article

First, participants read an article on a bogus story about the establishment of "Muslim Student Association Lounge" on campus. This article informed the participant of the establishment of the student lounge as well as its potential influences on the student body on campus. There were three versions of the bogus article: Muslim Cultural Center (MCC) condition, Ground Zero Mosque (GZM) condition and control condition.

The bogus article consisted of two sections. The first section was identical across conditions and included eight paragraphs describing the establishment of the Muslim Student Association Lounge in UMass Boston Campus Center Building. The story dealt mainly with the opening date of the lounge, remarks from university vice chancellor regarding the student diversity, Muslim student statistics and current activities of the Muslim Student Association. This section of the article underlined that the new lounge would be an opportunity to discuss Islam on campus and concluded with a promise of future coverage over the issue.

The second section included inserted media frames in the mainstream American media regarding the Muslim Community Center in Lower Manhattan. The bogus article on the Muslim Student Association Lounge was designed to have a parallel scenario with Muslim Community Center in Lower Manhattan: its approval process, funding and emphasis on the religious diversity. In this way, the bogus article aimed to make the participant link these two scenarios.

In the first experimental condition ($n = 30$), MCC frames were inserted in the second section of the article. These frames aimed to facilitate participants' understanding of the Manhattan Muslim Community Center as a "Muslim Cultural Center" which housed a mosque as well as an auditorium and pool. The article stated that, inspired by YMCA and Jewish Centers, the center was expected to be a symbol of respectful coexistence between Muslims and Christians (See Appendix II to read the MCC condition article).

In the second condition ($n = 33$), GZM frames were inserted in the second section of the article. These frames aimed to facilitate participants' understanding of the Manhattan Muslim Community Center as a "Ground Zero Mosque" which was portrayed as a prayer exclusively for Muslims. Inspired by Muslim conquerors in Medieval Spain, the center was expected to raise tensions and might end up becoming a recruitment station for terrorists (See Appendix III to read the GZM condition article).

In the third condition ($n = 34$), participants read only the first section. In other words, participants were not given any of these national media frames. The responses to this control story

served as a baseline to which the responses of the two experimental conditions were compared (See Appendix IV to read the control condition article).

Measures

Journalistic quality. After reading the article, participants were asked to assess the quality of the article in a series of 6 point scales (1 = strongly disagree; 6 = strongly agree). These questions were asked to increase the authenticity of the study.

Letter to the editor. After filling out the journalistic quality questionnaire, participants were asked to "write down their thoughts and reactions to The Mass Media" and were informed that "the editor would finalize the article according to their comments on the issue". The letter to the editor section consisted of a three-paragraphed letter template with six blanks to fill. The letter was addressed to the Editor of the The Mass Media and aiming to provide a reaction from the reader. Participants were asked to give their written reactions to the article by filling six blanks in the template. The six blanks represented six variables in this study: (1) *support* for the establishment of the lounge; (2) the *reason* or rationale for their support of the establishment of the lounge; (3) perceived *beneficiaries* of the lounge (i.e., who would benefit from the lounge); (4) the *components* of the lounge (i.e., participants' perceptions of what the lounge space constitutes of); (5) the *role of* the lounge ; and (6) the *message* they would give to the campus community regarding the lounge. See the "letter to the editor" measure in Appendix V.

Thus, I will investigate whether participants in the MCC condition are more likely to give the most prominent response in the following categories: (a) Favorable and (b) pro-interfaith dialogue for H1a, (d) all students, (e) interfaith items and (f) community inclusion for H1b, and (g) positive for H1c.

RESULTS

Data Analysis Procedure

In order to assess whether MCC and GZM media frames caused a shift in participants' understanding towards Muslim Student Association Lounge (MSAL), I examined participants' responses in completing the letter-to-the-editor. Specifically, each blank in the letter-to-the-editor represented the six variables as follows: support/opposition for Muslim Student Association Lounge, reason for support/non-support, function of the lounge, components of the lounge, role of the lounge and message to community. All entries in the letter-to-the-editor format underwent a content analysis of participants' responses. To do this, I adopted Price et al. (1997)'s thought-listing exercise methodology. The content analysis of the participants' open-ended responses in each blank (i.e., variable) led to groupings of their answers onto three categories each, as follows: (1) support for the establishment of the lounge: Favorable, undecided, unfavorable; (2) reason or rationale for their support of the establishment of the lounge: Muslim rights focused, pro-interfaith dialogue, non-supportive; (3) perceived *beneficiaries* of the lounge: all students, only Muslims, critical; (4) the *components* of the lounge: interfaith items, religious items, miscellaneous items; (5): the *role of* the lounge: Muslims right advocacy, enhancing community, skeptical; (6) the *message* they would give to the campus community regarding the lounge: endorse, boycott, undecided.

Finally, each category was assigned to one of the experimental frame conditions, MCC and GZM. In order to do this, I defined each category in full detail, explaining its context vis-à-vis Muslim Student Association Lounge discussion. The definitions included citation from participants' responses, which aimed to demonstrate how participants expressed their view on issues. (I define all the categories in detail while announcing the results.)

Consequently, based on the general hypotheses of the study:

H1a predicted that individuals exposed to a Muslim Cultural Center frame will be more favorable towards the establishment of local mosques/community centers than individuals exposed to Ground Zero Mosque frames.

H1b predicted that individuals exposed to a Muslim Cultural Center frame, compared to those exposed to Ground Zero Mosque frames, will be more likely to understand local mosques/community centers as friendly and educative environments where all members of the community would be welcome to learn about Islam by interfaith dialogue.

H1c predicted that Individuals exposed to a Muslim Cultural Center frame will be more likely to recommend the establishment of local mosques/community centers to other local community members than individuals exposed to Ground Zero Mosque frames.

H2a predicted that individuals exposed to a Ground Zero Mosque frame will be less likely to favor towards the establishment of local mosques/community centers than individuals exposed to Muslim Cultural Center frames.

H2b predicted that individuals exposed to a Ground Zero Mosque frame will be more likely to consider local mosques/community centers as unfriendly and isolated environments where Muslims exclusively would pray than individuals exposed to Muslim Cultural Center frames.

H2c predicted that individuals exposed to a Ground Zero Mosque frame will be less likely to recommend the establishment of local mosques/community centers to other local community members than individuals exposed to Muslim Cultural Center frames.

Results

1. Support for the Muslim Lounge

Table 1 indicates percentages of participants' responses in the support variable according to the MCC, GZM and control conditions. The support variable measured participants' tendencies towards the establishment of the lounge, and provided data for testing H1a and H2a. According to H1a, individuals exposed to a Muslim Cultural Center frame will be more favorable to the establishment of the lounge in this category. According to H2a, on the other hand, individuals exposed to a Ground Zero Mosque frame will be less likely to be favorable to the establishment of the lounge in this category.

Concerning the support to the establishment of the lounge, participants' responses fit into

three distinct categories. First category response clearly supports the establishment of the lounge. The most common responses by which participants preferred to express this opinion are as follows: "Go for it", "Positive", "Continue" and "Yes." Second category responses remain undecided or express a hesitation or indifference regarding the lounge. The scope of participants' responses range from being hesitant to the establishment of the lounge to being indifferent to the project in general. The most common responses by which participants preferred to express this opinion are as follows: "Hesitant", "Undecided." Third category responses clearly state a disapproval concerning the establishment of the lounge. The scope of participants' responses ranges from totally oppositional to the lounge to being reluctant to the project in general. The most common responses by which participants preferred to express this opinion are as follows: "No", "Reluctant", "Why?" The percentages in Table 1 represent the distribution of participants' responses within each category.

Among participants in the MCC condition, 89.7% were in favor of the establishment of the mosque in campus, as compared to 68.8% in favor in the GZM condition. In the control condition, however, 78.5% of the participants were in favor of the establishment of the MSAL. Clearly, there was a large difference of about 20% between MCC and GZM condition, such that when participants read MCC framing, they were more likely to be in favor of the establishment than when they read an article with GZM framing. When comparing to the control group, in which the participants were not exposed to any media scenario on recent Manhattan Muslim Community Center debates, MCC framing increased favorability toward the establishment of MSAL, whereas GZM decreased favorability.

Table 1

Percentages of Responses in the Support variable according to the Experimental Conditions

Category	MCC	GZM	Control
Favorable	89.7	68.8	78.5
Unfavorable	10.3	9.4	12.1

Undecided	0	21.9	9.4
Total	100	100	100

Note. The values represent mean percentages of correctly recognized participant responses. Maximum score for each line is 100 (percent). The number of participants in each condition are 30 (Muslim Cultural Center), 33 (Ground Zero Mosque), and 34 (Control).

There were no differences across conditions in the number of participants who did not support the MSAL: roughly 10% of participants in each condition were unfavorable to the establishment. Interestingly, the most differences across conditions were among the undecided: 22% of participants in the GZM condition as compared to no participant in the MCC condition, and 9% in the control condition were undecided. Looking at the data from a different angle, the number of undecided participants in the GZM condition constitutes 70% of all undecided participants in the sample. The prominence of undecided GZM participants can be interpreted as a different way to oppose the establishment of the lounge due to reasons like political correctness, social desirability, etc. In the light of this, it is quite possible that the same undecided response pattern may reoccur among GZM participants while evaluating other variables.

Overall, with regard to H1a (i.e., support for the establishment of the lounge) the data supported the prediction that participants who read MCC frames would be more favorable towards the establishment of local mosques/community centers than participants who read GZM frames. However, the same data did not show support for H2a with regard to the number of participants being unfavorable of the establishment of the lounge.

2. Reasons for support/opposition of the Muslim Lounge

Table 2 indicates percentages of participants' responses in the *reason* variable according to the MCC, GZM and control experimental conditions. The *reason* variable measured participants' general understanding of the lounge, which shows participants' justification of why they favor or oppose the establishment of the lounge. These justification statements provide further data for testing H1a and H2a. According to H1a, individuals exposed to a Muslim Cultural Center frame will be more likely to justify the establishment of the lounge because it is promoting interfaith

dialogue (similar to the reasons made for the Cordoba center). According to H2b, on the other hand, it is sufficient that individuals exposed to a Ground Zero Mosque frame will be more likely to express their opposition to the establishment of the lounge, not necessarily with a specific prediction for their rationale.

Concerning their justification towards the establishment of the lounge, participants' responses fit into three distinct categories. The first 2 categories included reasons for supporting the lounge. The reasons for support of the lounge in the first category were based on beliefs that MSAL would represent Muslim students and assure their rights on campus. Participants' responses in this category ranged from Muslim students' right to pray on campus to the general student need of having a lounge for meetings of people with similar background. The most common responses by which participants preferred to express this opinion are as follows: "I believe it will provide a useful service to UMB students who identify as Muslim", "All organized groups should have an area to host events", "People should be able to identify with their religion." The reasons for the support of the lounge in the second category included beliefs that the lounge would foster interfaith dialogue and tolerance on campus. In these responses participants emphasized education and interfaith dialogue. The most common responses by which participants preferred to express this opinion are as follows: "Education is the key to understanding. In my eyes, fear is simply not knowing", "Interfaith conversations are important", "It would bring students together." Third category responses include all reasons that participants who did not support the lounge used. These responses included: (a) finding the lounge unhelpful for improving interfaith dialogue, (b) emphasizing on other problems on campus, (c) making indifferent statements. Examples of these opinions included: "The Muslim Student Association is not affecting my life in any way", "There are other issues at UMass Boston that need to be taken care of first", "I feel that if Muslim community has a place for prayer and fasting then so should all other religions, and here lies the impossibility." The percentages in Table 2 represent the distribution of participants' responses within each category.

Table 2

Percentages of Responses in the Reason variable according to the Experimental Conditions

Category	MCC	GZM	Control
Muslim rights focused	58.6	41.9	28.1
Pro-Interfaith dialogue	24.1	29	37.5
Non-supportive	17.2	29	34.4
Total	100	100	100

Note: The values represent mean percentages of correctly recognized participant responses. Maximum score for each line is 100 (percent). The number of participants in each condition are 30 (Muslim Cultural Center), 33 (Ground Zero Mosque), and 34 (Control).

Among participants in the MCC condition, roughly 60% (as compared to 42% of GZM and 28% of the control participants) justified their support of the establishment of the lounge by emphasizing Muslims' fundamental right to have a lounge and practice their religion on campus.

When it came to justifying the establishment of the lounge from a pro-interfaith dialogue angle, the most prominent response came from the control group (37.5%) and not from the MCC condition (24.1%) as hypothesized in H1a. Overall, the data of the reason variable did not show support for H1a with regard to justifying the establishment of the lounge from an interfaith approach as predicted (pro-interfaith dialogue category).

Summary

Based on H1a, participants from the MCC condition were supposed to be positive towards the establishment of the lounge and justify it with pro-interfaith reasons. Thus, H1a was partially confirmed because MCC increased favorability toward the establishment of the lounge, but failed to justify it with sufficient reasons.

According to H2a, participants from the GZM condition were supposed to be negative towards the establishment of the lounge and justify it with non-supportive reasons. Interestingly, GZM frame did not reveal the predicted effects. Participants in the GZM condition did not oppose

the establishment of the lounge (unfavorable category) or justify it with a negative statement. Thus, H2a was not confirmed.

3. Perceived beneficiaries of the Muslim lounge

The beneficiary variable measured participants' understanding of the student group that would benefit from the lounge. I predicted that the data would show support to H1b and H2b. According to H1b, individuals exposed to a Muslim Cultural Center frame, compared to those exposed to Ground Zero Mosque frames, should be more likely to believe that all students on campus would benefit from the lounge. On the other hand, according to H2b, individuals exposed to a Ground Zero Mosque frame compared to those exposed to Muslim Cultural Center frame, should be more likely to believe that only Muslims would benefit from the lounge.

Table 3 shows the percentages of participants' responses in the beneficiary variable according to the MCC, GZM and control experimental conditions. As shown in the Table, participants' responses fit into three distinct categories. The first category includes those participants who expressed the belief that only Muslims would be beneficiaries of the lounge. That is, only Muslim students would use the lounge for their cultural and religious purposes. The most common responses by which participants preferred to express this opinion included: "Beneficial to those in the Muslim community", "For religious and social benefit to the Muslim group", "Beneficial to those who observe Muslim religion." The responses in the second category include participants who expressed the belief that all students regardless of religion would be beneficiaries of the lounge. In general, these participants believed that all UMass Boston students would use the lounge for interfaith dialogue, cultural exchange and learning purposes. The most common responses by which participants preferred to express this opinion are as follows: "Beneficially for people to learn more about Muslims", "A good, relaxing area for all to enjoy", "To increase dialogue between religious and cultural groups."

The responses in the third category include participants who expressed critical remarks concerning the lounge which did not fit in either of the first two categories. Participants here

explain in detail their opposition to MSAL by emphasizing on its possible segregative function among UMass Boston students. These responses come from students who oppose the Muslim lounge to start with. Participants' responses in this category range from criticizing the exclusive nature of the lounge to simply finding the idea useless. The most common responses by which participants preferred to express this opinion are as follows: "Alienate them from us (non-muslims)", "Religious profiling and it would create inter religious controversy for underrepresented religions", "Useless." The percentages in Table 3 show the distribution of participants' responses within each category for each condition.

Table 3

Percentages of Responses in the Beneficiary variable according to the Experimental Conditions

Category	MCC	GZM	Control
Only Muslims	55.6	48.5	49.5
All students	33.3	24.2	28
Critical	11.1	27.3	22.6
Total	100	100	100

Note: The values represent mean percentages of correctly recognized participant responses. Maximum score for each line is 100 (percent). The number of participants in each condition are 30 (Muslim Cultural Center), 33 (Ground Zero Mosque), and 34 (Control).

As shown in Table 3, when asked about the potential beneficiaries of the lounge, 33% of participants in the MCC condition, as compared to 24.2% and 28% in the GZM and control conditions believed that all students in campus would be beneficiaries of the lounge. Thus, the data showed support for H2a, as MCC frame increased the understanding that students from all religions would benefit from the lounge. On the other hand, about half of participants in each condition responded that the beneficiaries of MSAL would be only Muslims. Surprisingly, GZM frame failed to shift participants' understanding of who would benefit from the lounge towards only Muslims. Participants from the MCC condition had higher response rates than participants from the GZM

condition. Thus, the data did not show support for H2b.

The critical category referred to participants' responses that did not emphasize on the beneficiaries of the lounge but consisted of comments regarding the lounge. Interestingly, a large number of participants in the GZM condition (27.3%) gave the most ambiguous responses, while a much lower number of ambiguous responses were observed in the MCC condition. Thus, GZM article might have influenced the participants to give critical responses concerning the lounge, a similar reaction with the undecided responses concerning the establishment of the lounge previously.

4. Perceived components of the Muslim lounge.

The components variable measured participants' understanding of what sort of materials and components the lounge might be housing. According to H1b, individuals exposed to a Muslim Cultural Center frame, compared to those exposed to a Ground Zero Mosque frame, would be more likely to believe that the lounge would house interfaith items for learning and cultural exchange. According to H2b, on the other hand, individuals exposed to a Ground Zero Mosque frame, compared to those exposed to Muslim Cultural Center frames, would be more likely to believe that the lounge would only house religious items related to Muslim prayer.

Table 4 indicates percentages of participants' responses in the components variable according to the MCC, GZM and control experimental conditions. Concerning the components of the lounge, participants' responses fit into three distinct categories. The responses in the first category included beliefs that the lounge would house only Muslim religious items. The most common responses by which participants preferred to express this opinion are as follows: "Space and materials for prayer and other practices", "Muslim holidays and prayer service [components]." The responses in the second category included beliefs that the lounge would house interfaith items. Participants' responses included mentioning of elements that teach about Islam to components that allow all religions to interact. The most common responses by which participants preferred to express this opinion are as follows: "Information about how it is to be a Muslim and general info

about it", "Learning and practice [materials], [Materials for] creating an understanding atmosphere." The responses in the third category included beliefs that the lounge would house miscellaneous items unrelated to religion. The most common responses by which participants preferred to express this opinion are as follows: "Couches, chairs, vending machine", "Snacks, chairs, projectors", "etc", "I don't know about components you are talking about." The percentages in Table 4 show the distribution of participants' responses within each category for each condition.

Table 4

Percentages of Responses in the Components variable according to the Experimental Conditions

Category	MCC	GZM	Control
Religious items	47.6	41.7	14.3
Interfaith items	38.1	33.3	25
Miscellaneous items	42.3	38.5	19.2
Total	100	100	100

Note: The values represent mean percentages of correctly recognized participant responses. Maximum score for each line is 100 (percent). The number of participants in each condition are 30 (Muslim Cultural Center), 33 (Ground Zero Mosque), and 34 (Control).

As shown in Table 3, when asked about the possible components of the lounge, 38.1% of participants in the MCC condition and 33.3% in GZM conceived that the lounge would house interfaith components. This is a larger number compared to 25% of participants who gave this response in the control condition. It was predicted that MCC frame would affect participants' understanding to think more likely that the lounge would house interfaith items. Thus, the data shows support for H2a.

Regarding the participants who conceived that the lounge would house religious items, the MCC condition outnumbered the others by 47.6%, followed by GZM (41.7%) and control condition (14.3%). Here we observe that MCC and GZM frames have a direct effect on subjects' understanding of the nature of lounge's components. However, the data did not show support for

H2b. Participants from the GZM condition, compared to participants from other conditions, did not believe that the lounge would only house religious items.

Among participants who listed miscellaneous as the component of the lounge, a significant percentage of responses came from MCC (42.3%) and GZM (38.5%) conditions. Here again, the data shows the continuing pattern of GZM participants giving ambiguous responses to the letter to the editor tool.

5. The perceived function/role of the Muslim lounge

The role variable measured participants' understanding of what role the lounge might be playing on campus. According to H1b, individuals exposed to a Muslim Cultural Center frame, compared to those exposed to a Ground Zero Mosque frame, will be more likely to think that the role of the lounge is to include Muslims in the campus community. According to H2b, on the other hand, individuals exposed to a Ground Zero Mosque frame, compared to those exposed to Muslim Cultural Center frames, will be more likely to think that the role of the lounge is no good for the campus community and they are very skeptical towards any of its roles.

Table 5 indicates percentages of participants' responses in the role variable according to the MCC, GZM and control experimental conditions. Concerning the role of the lounge, participants' responses fit into three distinct categories. First category responses were towards defending Muslims on campus. These participants regarded the lounge as an umbrella for Muslim students on campus and supported it. The scope of participants' responses range from providing support for Muslim students to doing something beneficial for UMass Boston Muslim community. The most common responses by which participants preferred to express this opinion are as follows: "To provide support for Muslim students", "To offer a place for Muslims to connect and pray". Second category responses were towards enhancing community on campus. These participants regarded the role of the lounge as a platform for different religious or cultural groups to come together with Muslim students and enhance their relations. The scope of participants' responses ranges from informing people about Islamic culture to unifying Christians and Muslims on campus. The most

common responses by which participants preferred to express this opinion are as follows: "Play a huge role in bringing the Christians and Muslims together", "To live in harmony and be respectful to others' beliefs", "A unifying role, I suppose", "To establish a peaceful understanding." Third category responses were skeptical to the role of the lounge. The scope of participants' responses ranges from leaving the question unanswered to criticizing the unifying role of MSAL. The most common responses by which participants preferred to express this opinion are as follows: "I don't know really. The article did not mention UMass Boston Christians", "Negative to the purpose of religion because each religion stands on its own. You shouldn't try to make religion look the same", "I don't understand the point." The percentages in Table 5 show the distribution of participants' responses within each category for each condition.

Table 5

Percentages of Responses in the Role variable according to the Experimental Conditions

Category	MCC	GZM	Control
Muslim rights advocacy	38.5	30	25.8
Community inclusion	42.3	50	54.8
Skeptical	19.2	20	19.4
Total	100	100	100

Note: The values represent mean percentages of correctly recognized participant responses. Maximum score for each line is 100 (percent). The number of participants in each condition are 30 (Muslim Cultural Center), 33 (Ground Zero Mosque), and 34 (Control).

There were differences between conditions with regard to seeing the role of the lounge as defending Muslim rights on campus (Muslim rights advocacy category), with participants in MCC condition being more likely (38.5%) to believe in this role than participants in the GZM (30%) and control conditions (25.8%).

However, the results among participants who responded to the community inclusion role were surprising: The framing did not matter. Participants from the control condition (54.8%) were

more likely to think that the lounge had community inclusion role than participants from MCC (42.3%) and GZM conditions (50%). Thus, the data did not show support for H1b.

With regard to seeing the role of the lounge as negative of any sort (skeptical category), the distribution of participants' responses according to the experimental conditions was as follows: MCC 19.2%, GZM 20% and control condition 19.4%. Apparently, the differences between 10 and 20 % are negligible. Thus, the data does not show support for H2b.

Summary

In order to confirm H1b, participants from the MCC condition, compared to participants from the GZM condition, were supposed to consider all students to be benefiting from the lounge, imagine components to be used for interfaith purposes and perceive an inclusive role for the lounge. Participants showed support for all above except the inclusive role of the lounge. Thus, H1b was partially confirmed because MCC frames increased favorability toward regarding the lounge as a friendly and educative environment where all students would be welcome to learn about Islam by interfaith dialogue.

In order to confirm H2b, participants from the GZM condition, compared to participants from the MCC condition, would consider only Muslim students to be benefiting from the lounge, imagine components to be used for religious purposes and be skeptical about the role of the lounge. H2b was not confirmed because GZM frames did not influence participants toward regarding the lounge as an unfriendly and isolated environment where Muslims exclusively would pray.

6. Perceived message to the community

Table 6 indicates percentages of participants' responses in the message to the community variable according to the MCC, GZM and control experimental conditions. The message to the community variable measured what action the participants would like to see others take regarding the lounge project. According to H1c, individuals exposed to a Muslim Cultural Center frame, compared to those exposed to a Ground Zero Mosque frame, will be more likely to give a positive endorsement concerning the lounge. According to H2c, on the other hand, individuals exposed to a

Ground Zero Mosque frame, compared to those exposed to Muslim Cultural Center frames, will be more likely to give a boycott message concerning the lounge.

Concerning the message to the community, participants' responses fit into three distinct categories. First category responses were towards endorsing the lounge. Participants who endorsed the lounge invite other campus community members to support the MSAL project. The scope of participants' responses range from simply telling others to support the MSAL project to giving conciliatory messages. The most common responses by which participants preferred to express this opinion are as follows: "Support the project", "Support it and work to further establish trust between people of all faiths", "Move forward." Second category responses were towards being undecided or needing more information to decide about the lounge. The scope of participants' responses range from giving no reply to inquiring student opinion by conducting surveys or providing more information on the student newspaper. The most common responses by which participants preferred to express this opinion are as follows: "Provide more information", "Conduct a survey", "Beware as the heavy debate and strong sayings this will cause." Third category responses were towards boycotting the lounge. Participants here invited other campus community members not to support the lounge project. The scope of participants' responses ranges from simply not supporting the project to giving religious messages. The most common responses by which participants preferred to express this opinion are as follows: "Protest against it because it's not a matter of co-existence but a matter of bringing light to this world through Christ." The percentages in Table 6 show the distribution of participants' responses within each category for each condition.

Table 6

Percentages of Responses in the Message variable according to the Experimental Conditions

Category	MCC	GZM	Control
Endorse	79.2	71.4	70
Undecided	12.5	25.0	23.3
Boycott	8.3	3.6	6.7
Total	100	100	100

Note: The values represent mean percentages of correctly recognized participant responses. Maximum score for each line is 100 (percent). The number of participants in each condition are 30 (Muslim Cultural Center), 33 (Ground Zero Mosque), and 34 (Control).

The majority of the responses across conditions pointed out an endorsement of the lounge. Among participants from the MCC condition, 79.2% said they would endorse the lounge, as compared to 71.4% in GZM and 70% of the control condition. This data shows support for H1c showing slightly more endorsements in MCC than the other two conditions. On the other hand, among participants from the MCC condition, 8.3% said they would want others to boycott the lounge, as compared to 6.7% in GZM and 3.6% of the control condition. This data does not show support for H2c failing to show more boycotts in GZM than the two other conditions. It was worth noting that 25% of GZM participants, compared to MCC and control conditions (12.5% and 23.3% respectively) demanded more information to decide on whether they would want others to endorse or boycott the lounge. Throughout the results, we have observed the pattern that GZM participants gave the most undecided responses.

Summary

In order to confirm H1c, participants from the MCC condition were supposed to ask other students to endorse the lounge project. Thus, H1c was confirmed because MCC increased favorability toward the endorsement of the lounge. In order to confirm H2c, participants from the GZM condition were supposed to want other students to boycott the lounge project. Interestingly, GZM frame did not make the predicted effect on participants. Thus, H2c was not confirmed.

DISCUSSION

This study examined how media frames in national news -Ground Zero Mosque and Muslim Cultural Center narratives- influence American students' beliefs and attitudes towards the Muslim Student Center on campus. Even though media frames are known to shape people's attitudes toward important social and political issues, my focus was on processes by which individuals' understanding of local issues are affected. My analysis developed a theoretical rationale to integrate two types of framing, called media and individual frames, to understand how the media coverage shapes individuals' beliefs and attitudes on a local scale. Overall, the results indicated that both experimental frames somewhat influenced the understanding of the participants regarding the Muslim Student Center on campus.

Curiously, all the predictions for Muslim Cultural Center frames (H1a, H1b and H1c) were confirmed, while none of the predictions for Ground Zero Mosque frame (H2a, H2b and H2c) were confirmed in the study.

When participants read sample articles inserted with MCC frames, their understanding towards the Muslim Lounge shifted. As predicted, compared to participants in the GZM condition, participants in the MCC condition were more likely to favor the establishment of the lounge with a positive justification, imagined an inclusive space where all students benefit to make interfaith interactions, and agreed to endorse the lounge project to other students. Being reminded of the Muslim Community Center in Manhattan shaped participants' understanding of the Muslim lounge in campus. Participants' existing knowledge regarding the Manhattan Muslim Community Center fit with the new information on the Muslim Student Center on campus.

When participants read sample articles inserted with GZM frames, their understanding towards the Muslim Lounge also shifted. Though, unexpectedly, these participants, compared to MCC condition participants, were not more likely to (1) oppose the establishment of the lounge, (2) imagine an exclusive and unfriendly space where only Muslims use for praying, and (3) ask other students to boycott the lounge more likely than the students who read the MCC article. Regarding

the Ground Zero Mosque frames, the results indicated that individuals were not influenced at all by the propositions in the stories they read. We can make two conclusions out of this: First, participants' individual frames and existing knowledge might have played a dominant role in determining the understanding Muslim Student Association Lounge. Participants' understanding was more likely to be shaped by their prior knowledge regarding Muslims in general and on campus, and Muslim Community Center in Manhattan, rather than the Ground Zero Mosque frames in the article. Moreover, I pointed out the findings of a significant number of GZM participants who gave skeptical, undecided, and ambiguous answers throughout the study. For example, when asked about their support to the lounge, GZM participants were unfavorable by 9.4%, while other participants opposed the lounge by 10.3% (MCC) and 12.1% (control). However, the percentage of GZM participants (21.9%) who were undecided about the establishment of the lounge was far more than in other conditions (MCC 0% and control 9.4%). For two other variables--perceiving the beneficiaries of the lounge and sending a message to the community--we also observed a similar pattern, in which GZM participants were more likely to give ambiguous statements concerning their opinion. One plausible explanation for this result is political correctness where participants might have avoided to be perceived as being prejudiced towards Muslims, hence the more by giving ambiguous responses. Moreover, most of the participants were politically liberal and in principle defended religious freedoms (as shown by their responses to questions assessing political ideology in the questionnaire). This might explain why they might have refrained from being a "religiously intolerant" person, but instead be undecided and ambivalent on this issue.

Doubtlessly, the study has certain implications for media reporting and conflict. Similarly with the process of writing the bogus experimental articles, media reporting involves the combination of several different types of information – interviews, statistics, polls, historical facts and background information of issues. Journalists usually refer to many of these elements which contain media frames. For example, if a journalist is writing an article about hunger strikes in Turkey, s/he most likely cites information taken from different sources related to the topic. This

formation might be the appeal coming from Abdullah Ocalan, the leader of Kurdistan Workers Party, an organization currently in conflict with Turkish military authorities. In this study, I have demonstrated how insertion of information with specific media frames can fundamentally influence readers' understanding of issues. Similarly, in the case of Ocalan, he might be mentioned as a villain who is responsible for the death of 40,000 people in Turkey and the reason why hunger strikes began in the first place or he might be mentioned as the leader of Kurdish national movement and the hero who saved thousands of hunger strikers in Turkish prisons by sending an appeal to end their protest. On the other hand, one journalist can use media frames where Turkish military authorities are being depicted as an oppressing military force or as defenders of Turkish soil from terrorists. Journalists therefore hold a huge responsibility when taking sides in a conflicting situation: A reporting relied on imbalanced media frames of the conflicting parties might even perplex and escalate ongoing around the world or even in local contexts.

Although the present results are intriguing and suggest a variety of theoretical implications, there are a number of limitations to the study that are worthy of careful consideration. Thought-listing measures like those employed in this study are one of the most commonly used ways of observing cognitive responses, but they are not without their drawbacks (Spiro, 1977). One major problem is that participants may not have the ability to report accurately on their own mental processes, and we are unable to assess what they had in mind at a particular time. Shapiro (1994) concludes that, even with its limitations, the approach remains a tested and valuable one for communication research. Unfortunately, recording subject's cognitive processes is almost unavoidably obtrusive and dependent on self-reports.

Also our sample also consisted entirely of college undergraduates who were mostly liberal in their political orientation. College students are atypical of the general population, both in terms of their news media use and their knowledge of political affairs. Although an issue was selected that was "real" and of direct import to students, the homogeneity and unique character of the sample clearly limits the generalizability of our findings.

CONCLUSION

Our big world is becoming gradually tinier as the communication technologies advance relentlessly. Thanks to internet, social media and mass communication devices, we are able to learn, share and participate whatever is happening now – in our small community and elsewhere. In a world where copy cat murders/suicides of same pattern occur in different countries, where terrorism is global, where Arab Spring revolutions spread from one country to another, we should reconsider how the media affects the way we learn and make sense of our lives.

My project aimed to examine the effect of mainstream media in my campus community. I needed a conflicting situation in the U.S. to create a copy cat version on my campus. Then I came up with the Manhattan Muslim Community Center Debate and decided to select it as a bogus scenario to test the study hypotheses. My purpose was to demonstrate how the effect of the media through the media frames influenced people's understanding of similar local issues.

Apparently, my project was relevant with the current context in the U.S., as real-time mosque debates were reported in the media. Contra Costa Times, a California based local newspaper, reported a similar mosque construction debate where several local community members are expressing an opposition (Saunders, 2012). Researchers now have the opportunity to observe real time conflict. It is possible that the dynamics of that conflict do not necessarily lead to the influence of media frames and mainstream media, though this modest study might still offer them a tiny perspective.

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APPENDIX I

Consent form of the experimental study**READERS' REVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE**

The Mass Media needs your feedback. You are asked to take part in a **research project** that will improve our journalistic quality and understand the reaction of students in campus community related events. The researcher is Baris Mumykmaz, the managing editor of The Mass Media. Please read this form and feel free to ask questions. If you have further questions later, Baris will discuss them with you. His telephone number is 617-388-1903.

This questionnaire has **two objectives**. First, we aim to assess the journalistic quality of The Mass Media articles by getting critical feedback from readers. To fulfill this purpose, you will read an article from The Mass Media and fill out a questionnaire regarding the objectivity, credibility, and professional quality of the article. Second, we want to receive student reactions about events related to campus community. For this purpose, in a letter to the editor, you will have the chance to contribute your personal reactions to the article. At the end, we will ask you to answer some questions regarding your views on the topic of the article.

For your contribution to this massmedia study, you will be eligible for \$10 gift certificate raffle. Participation in this study will take not take more than 20 minutes.

This research is of **minimal risk** to you. The stress level experienced during this study will be no different from your experiences in your daily life. No unique risks (e.g., physical, social, economical) are associated with this study.

Your participation in this research is **confidential**. That is, the information gathered for this project will not be published or presented in a way that would allow anyone to identify you. Information gathered for this project will be stored in a locked file cabinet and only the research team will have access to the data.

The decision whether or not to take part in this research study is **voluntary**. Refusal to participate or withdrawing from participation will involve **no penalty or loss of benefits** for you.

You have the **right** to ask questions about this research before you sign this form and at any time during the study. You can reach Baris Mumykmaz at baris.mumykmaz001@umb.edu. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact a representative of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, which oversees research involving human participants. The Institutional Review Board may be reached at the following address: IRB, Quinn Administration Building-2-015, University of Massachusetts Boston, 100 Morrissey Boulevard, Boston, MA 02125-3393. You can also contact the Board by telephone or e-mail at (617) 287-5370 or at human.subjects@umb.edu.

APPENDIX II

Sample article on MCC condition**Muslim Student Association Lounge planned in Campus Center**

The establishment of MSA Lounge may be an occasion to discuss about Islam

By [Tim Arsenault](#)

Over the spring break, the UMB administration initiated a long-time pending project: The Muslim Student Association Lounge. The project details and budget from the UMass System funds required for the establishment of the new center is currently being discussed behind closed doors by the UMB Administrative Commission of Diversity and Student Life.

"Muslims are as much a part of our university as the people of any faith and they are as welcome to live and culturally express their religion on campus as any other group," said Ellen M. O'Connor, UMB Vice Chancellor for Administration and Finance, in a statement published on the university website over the winter break.

The possible realization of the Muslim Student Association Lounge is announced to be mid-May, according to the project report. The lounge is to be located in the Campus Center building.

According to the diversity statistics report of 2009, UMB hosts 327 students (256 undergraduates, 71 graduates) who identify themselves as Muslim. Established in fall 2006, UMB Muslim Student Association (MSA) is the main organization to represent the Muslim community on campus.

Besides celebrating Eids and organizing fast breaking dinners during Ramadan, MSA holds Jumma (Friday) prayers in the Wheatley Lounge at 1 pm, as well as provides space – a cubicle next to club's office used occasionally for praying - for Muslims students to catch up with their daily prayers.

"We are a small community," remarked Syed-Taha A. Jafri, the president of Muslims Students Association at UMass Boston. "However," Jafri continued, "we have a huge responsibility of representing more than 1 billion people in a country where there are lots of prejudices against them." Further on, he expressed his excitement about the lounge: "This center will be a chance for UMB students to connect with Islam and learn it without prejudices. We are planning to organize many events."

Lately, there have been several discussions over a similar type of Muslim building in the national level. Last August, the New York City's Landmarks Preservation Commission cleared the way for the construction of Muslim Community Center on Park 51. The tower of as many as 15 stories will house a mosque, a 500-seat auditorium, and a pool. Its leaders say it will be modeled on the Y.M.C.A. and Jewish Community Center in Manhattan.

Inspiring its name from the city in Spain where Muslims, Christians and Jews co-existed in the middle Ages, the Cordoba Project is aiming to amplify a multi-faith approach by honoring "people

of all faiths" and reserving them a space for worship, contemplation and meditation.

Given the fact that Manhattan already hosted several mosques, the establishment of the new Muslim Center was an opportunity to expand Muslim New Yorkers' choices as well as a symbol of respectful coexistence between Muslims and Christians in our country.

Overall, the Muslim Student Association Lounge offers a remarkable increase in the representation of Muslim students on our campus. In addition, it looks like the ongoing project will be a learning experience for UMB students to raise their opinions on Islam.

The Mass Media will be your ultimate source of information for future updates of the project, as well as the platform for your thoughts concerning the topic.

APPENDIX III

Sample article on GZM condition**Muslim Student Association Lounge planned in Campus Center**

The establishment of MSA Lounge may be an occasion to discuss about Islam

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Lately, there have been several discussions over a similar type of Muslim building in the national level. Last August, the New York City's Landmarks Preservation Commission cleared the way for the construction of a mosque, two blocks from ground zero. The Cordoba Project, which refers to the capital of Muslim conquerors who symbolized their victory over the Christian Spaniards by transforming a church there into the world's third-largest mosque complex, raised concerns of 9/11 victims families as being a disrespect for their losses.

In addition, the question of whether there is any guarantee that the Ground Zero Mosque would

never be used, officially or secretly, as a recruitment station for terrorists, remained unanswered.

Given the fact that Manhattan already hosted several mosques, the establishment of the new Muslim Center has little to contribute to enrich Muslim New Yorkers' lives or give a message of respectful coexistence between Muslims and Christians in our country. Instead, it raised tensions.

Overall, the Muslim Student Association Lounge offers a remarkable increase in the representation of Muslim students on our campus. In addition, it looks like the ongoing project will be a learning experience for UMB students to raise their opinions on Islam.

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APPENDIX IV

Sample article on control condition**Muslim Student Association Lounge planned in Campus Center**

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Overall, the Muslim Student Association Lounge offers a remarkable increase in the representation of Muslim students on our campus. In addition, it looks like the ongoing project will be a learning experience for UMB students to raise their opinions on Islam.

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APPENDIX V

Sample form for the letter to the editor



READERS' REVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

PART 2: Please write your thoughts and reactions to The Mass Media editor by filling in the blanks.

This is crucial, because the editor will finalize this article according to your comments on the issue.

If you have any questions, please ask.

To the Editor:

I am writing this letter in reaction to the article concerning the establishment of the Muslim Student Association Lounge on our campus. If I were to decide on the continuation of this project, my response would be..... because

.....

I believe the function of such a lounge on our campus would be

.....

Because such a lounge would include the components of

.....

Therefore, the role of Muslim Student Association Lounge for Christians and Muslims on our campus and UMass Boston Community would be

.....

As a member of this community, I would like all other students and The Mass Media to take the following action regarding this project:.....

.....

Thank you,