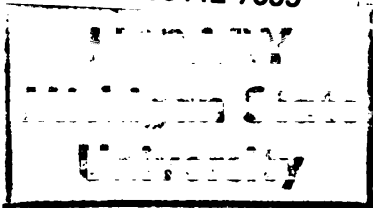




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USA Today: Its Influence on the Color, Design,  
Graphics and Photography of Daily U.S.  
Newspapers.

presented by

Ron Cioffi

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M.A. degree in Journalism

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**USA TODAY:  
ITS INFLUENCE ON THE  
COLOR, DESIGN, GRAPHICS AND PHOTOGRAPHY  
OF DAILY U.S. NEWSPAPERS**

**By  
Ron Cioffi**

**A THESIS**

**Submitted to  
Michigan State University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of**

**MASTER OF ART**

**School of Journalism**

**1986**

ABSTRACT

USA TODAY:  
ITS INFLUENCE ON THE  
COLOR, DESIGN, GRAPHICS AND PHOTOGRAPHY  
OF DAILY U.S. NEWSPAPERS

By

Ron Cioffi

Has the publication of USA Today--with its striking color, design, graphics and photography--influenced American journalists and daily newspapers? Have newspapers used more visual elements since USA Today was introduced in 1982?

Daily newspaper editors and designers in four states responded to a written questionnaire on the influence of four visual characteristics in USA Today. Graphics was listed first, color was close behind in second, design was third and photography was a distant fourth.

Journalists from dailies of more than 40,000 circulation said they and their newspapers were slightly more influenced by USA Today than those from 20,001-40,000 circulation newspapers (3.8 percent). Journalists from less than 20,000 circulation dailies were slightly less influenced.

Journalists said their newspapers have increased their use of visual elements by 50 percent since USA Today began publishing.

USA Today was considered a greater influence on the journalists' personal feelings than on their habits as journalists.

To  
Keith,

To  
Kathy,

To  
Rose & Al

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My sincerest and deepest appreciation--professionally and, more importantly, personally--goes to Dr. Howard Bossen. His knowledge, guidance, patience and warmth is evident on every page of this thesis and it could not have been completed without him.

Many thanks to Darcy Drew Greene, who blessed me with her kind and continuing support, and to Boyd Miller.

Unending personal thanks to my best buddy, Keith Kenney. Extra thanks to Leslie Kenney, Kathy Bossen and Kenton and Sandy Pfister.

The professional help of the following is also deeply appreciated: Dr. Stan Soffin and the faculty and staff of the Michigan State University School of Journalism; Melvin Clarke, Sheila Gibbons, Richard A. Curtis, George Rorick and the USA Today graphics staff; Jim Butler and the management of the Alexandria Daily Town Talk; Dr. Mario Garcia; Dr. Robert A. Logan and the nineteen journalists who so kindly answered my questionnaire.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

USA Today is the third largest newspaper in the United States with a circulation of 1.4 million. It is the country's only uncondensed, general interest, national newspaper. It has spent an unprecedented but undisclosed amount of money on promotion. It is only four years old but has probably received more press coverage than any other daily in that period.

While these are all admirable accomplishments, none address the real significance of USA Today. What has made the newspaper most noticeable in the journalism community is not its size, nor its circulation area, nor its aggressive promotional campaign nor its interest to reporters. The answer is that USA Today is influential because of its color, design, graphics and photography.<sup>1</sup> Most every newspaper and magazine article written about it has cited USA Today's accurate color reproduction, innovative and frequently used graphics and striking layout. Commentators describe it as color television--<sup>2</sup> bright, bold and flashy. Each page one usually features at least four color photos, one color graphic and sometimes a colored box. Other section fronts are emblazoned with green, red and purple logos and a similar number of color photos and graphics. All pages are made up in nearly identical, formatted design, considered attractive enough to win numerous awards from the Society of Newspaper Design.

What has all this color, graphics and design meant to American journalism? To many newspaper design experts, instructors and top practitioners, it has been one thing--<sup>3</sup> influential. They have said USA Today has set newspaper editors and designers on their ear. Many say the colorful USA Today profile represents the wave of the future. Others sneer at USA Today, claiming if it is the wave, they want to get off.<sup>4</sup> What stands out about the newspaper is that American journalists read it, see it and talk about it. It seems nearly everyone has an opinion about it--declaring they love the color or hate the short stories. No matter their opinions, it is clear USA Today has influenced American journalists. |

The main question of this thesis is what is that influence. Exactly how have American journalists been influenced by the color, design, graphics and photography of USA Today? Have they copied USA Today's visual style, have they been mildly influenced by it or have they ignored it? Also, have small circulation size (less than 20,000), medium circulation size (20,001 - 40,000) and large circulation size (more than 40,000) newspapers been affected differently? These two questions are directly answered by the thesis. Also, other information is provided on how daily newspaper journalists have been influenced by USA Today.

The thesis is based on a four-page questionnaire mailed to thirty-eight randomly selected editors and designers of 141 newspapers in four states--Delaware, Maryland, New

Jersey and Pennsylvania (figures #1-#3). Three mailings were sent to those who did not reply. Nineteen questionnaires were received.

The four states were selected because they were the first states completely covered by USA Today circulation (according to a newspaper spokesman). This qualification was made so the respondents had the maximum amount of time to be influenced by USA Today and to react to that influence.

The twenty-one-question questionnaire includes eight questions from which statistics have been compiled (figure #1). Four questions asked for a numerical gauge of influence and four asked for a categorical gauge. Each question asked information about one of the four visual elements: color, design, graphics and photography. The results have been compared between newspapers in the three circulation size categories.

FIGURE #1

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Please write your name, job title and publication.
2. Please describe your control over your newspaper's appearance.
3. Do you oversee any of the following departments?
  - Design
  - Photography
  - Graphics/Art
  - Reproduction
  - Editorial
4. Three years ago (in the summer of 1982) did your newspaper use the following elements? If so, how prominently?
  - Color photographs
  - Color graphics
  - Spot color
  - Black and white photographs
  - Black and white graphics

5. At this time is your newspaper using the following elements more or less often and/or more or less prominently?

-Color photographs

-Color graphics

-Spot color

-Black and white photographs

-Black and white graphics

6. In the past three years has there been a change in the importance of design, make-up and layout? If so, more or less? To what extent?

7. Has there been an increase or decrease in the number of members of the following departments or in the money spent there? If so, please describe.

-Design

-Make-up/Layout

-Photography

-Art

-Reproduction

8. If there's been changes in the past three years in these areas, are they because of a specific editorial or newspaper policy? If so, please describe.

9. Is USA Today available in your area?

10. If it is, how often do you read it?

- Five times a week
- Three times a week
- Once a week
- Never

11. Has the look of USA Today affected the way you perceive newspapers? If so, how?

12. Which of the following visual elements do you associate with USA Today? If so, please describe.

- Color photographs
- Color graphics
- Color weather map
- Spot color
- Color coordinated sections
- Design formula repeated daily
- Others (please specify)

13. Has USA Today influenced the use of color in your newspaper?

Please rate on a scale of 0 - 10

14. Has USA Today influenced the use of design in your newspaper?

Please rate on a scale of 0 - 10

15. Has USA Today influenced the use of graphics in your newspaper?

Please rate on a scale of 0 - 10



16. Has USA Today influenced the use of photography in your newspaper?

Please rate on a scale of 0 - 10

17. Has USA Today influenced your personal views on newspaper color? Please pick one.

-Greatly influenced

-Mildly influenced

-No influence

18. Has USA Today influenced your personal views on newspaper design? Please pick one.

-Greatly influenced

-Mildly influenced

-No influence

19. Has USA Today influenced your personal views on newspaper graphics? Please pick one.

-Greatly influenced

-Mildly influenced

-No influence

20. Has USA Today influenced your personal views on newspaper photography? Please pick one.

-Greatly influenced

-Mildly influenced

-No influence

21. Has your newspaper's look changed because of the following reasons:

-Changes had been planned before USA Today came out

-Personnel, either veteran or hired in the last three years

-Other

FIGURE #2

COVER LETTER

28 Havemeyer Lane  
Old Greenwich, CT 06870  
30 June 1985

(Journalist  
Newspaper Name  
Address  
Address)

Dear (Journalist),

My name is Ron Cioffi and I am a graduate student in journalism at Michigan State University.

I am conducting a survey of editors and/or designers at selected newspapers on the influence of USA Today on the design of daily newspapers. The survey will be the basis of a thesis that will measure this influence in relation to newspaper circulation size and four visual elements--color, design, graphics and photography.

Please fill out or designate an appropriate employee to fill out the following survey and mail it back to me in the enclosed envelope.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Ron Cioffi

FIGURE #3

LISTING OF NEWSPAPERS AND JOURNALISTS SURVEYED

	Date Survey Received
Mr. Frank Fantini <u>Maryland State News</u> <u>PO Box 737</u> Dover, DE 19901	-----
Mr. William Tudor <u>The Morning News/News Journal Co.</u> <u>Box 1111</u> Wilmington, DE 19899	7/12/85
Mr. Edward D. Casey <u>The Capital</u> <u>PO Box 911</u> Annapolis, MD 21404	7/5/85
Mr. Richard C. D'Agostino <u>The Baltimore Sun</u> <u>Clavert &amp; Centre Sts.</u> Baltimore, MD 21278	7/8/85
Mr. Jim Pokrant <u>The Banner</u> <u>302 High St.</u> Cambridge, MD 21613	7/5/85
Mr. George B. Delaplaine <u>The News</u> <u>PO Box 578</u> Frederick, MD 21701	7/5/85
Ms. Linda Searing <u>Prince George's Journal</u> <u>9426 Annapolis Rd.</u> Lanham, MD 20706	7/18/85
Mr. William Chanin <u>Courier-Post</u> <u>PO Box 5300</u> Camden, NJ 08034	-----

Mr. H. C. Jackson <u>The Daily Advance</u> PO Box 30 Dover, NJ 07801	-----
Mr. Wayne Mogielnicki <u>The Home News</u> PO BOX 551 New Brunswick, NJ 08903	8/3/85
Mr. Arthur Z. Kamin <u>The Daily Register</u> <u>One Register Plaza</u> Red Bank, NJ 07701	8/3/85
Mr. Emil G. Slaboda <u>The Trentonian</u> Southard at Perry Sts. Trenton, NJ 08602	-----
Mr. Jerry Covella <u>Vineland Times Journal</u> 891 E. Oak St. Vineland, NJ 08360	8/22/85
Mr. Thomas R. Klevon <u>Altoona Mirror</u> PO Box 2008 Altoona, PA 16603	-----
Mr. Leonard R. Brown <u>Beaver County Times</u> 400 Fair Ave. Beaver, PA 15009	7/10/85
Mr. Mike Zastudil <u>The Telegraph</u> 16-18 Bridge St. Brownsville, PA 15417	7/5/85
Mr. Frank J. Keegan <u>Public Opinion</u> <u>77 N. Third St.</u> Chambersburg, PA 17201	7/29/85
Lee Elby <u>The Daily Courier</u> <u>127 W. Apple St.</u> Connellsville, PA 15425	-----
Mr. Herb Martin <u>The Courier-Express</u> PO BOX 407 DuBois, PA 15801	-----

Mr. Edward M. Mead <u>Erie Daily Times</u> <u>Times Square</u> Erie, PA 16534	7/24/85
Jaci Carroll <u>Greenville Record-Argus</u> Box 711 Greenville, PA 16125	-----
Mr. Joseph L. Donnelly <u>The Indiana Gazette</u> PO Box 10 Indiana, PA 15701	7/5/85
Geo Fattman <u>Tribune-Democrat</u> 425 Locust Johnston, PA 15907	7/5/85
Mr. Richard Coleman <u>The Kane Republican</u> 200 N. Fraley St. Kane, PA 16735	-----
Mr. Robert Parfitt <u>The Times-News</u> First & Iron Sts. Lehighton, PA 18235	7/5/85*
Mr. Harold Prentiss <u>The Milton Standard</u> 21 Arch St. Milton, PA 17847	7/15/85
Mr. Paul D. Hess <u>Valley News Dispatch</u> Box 311 New Kensington, PA 15084	7/5/85
Mr. Mark Bulik <u>The Evening Phoenix</u> 225 Bridge St. Phoenixville, PA 19460	-----
Caroll Shelton <u>The Times Herald</u> PO Box 591 Norristown, PA 19404	7/15/85** 7/27/85**

Mr. J. Bruce Baumann  
The Pittsburgh Press  
34 Blvd. of the Allies  
Pittsburgh, PA 15230

7/8/85

Mr. James A. Dippold  
The Daily Press  
PO Box 353  
St. Marys, PA 15857

-----

Mr. Harold Lewis  
Tribune  
338 N. Washington Ave.  
Scranton, PA 18501

-----

Mr. Henry B. Reiley Jr.  
The Daily American  
PO Box 638  
Somerset, PA 15501

-----

Mr. Dan Meckes  
Tyrone Daily Herald  
1018 Pennsylvania Ave.  
Tyrone, PA 16686

-----

Mr. Donald P. Davis  
Herald-Standard  
PO Box 848  
Uniontown, PA 15401

-----

Mr. Gregory Brown  
The Democrat Messenger  
32 Church St.  
Waynesburg, PA 15370

-----

Mr. Clifford A. Thomas  
Williamsport Sun-Gazette  
252 W. 4th St.  
Williamsport, PA 17701

-----

Mr. Henry R. Merges  
The York Dispatch  
PO Box 2807  
York, PA 17405

-----

---- Did not return a questionnaire

\* Recorded comments on questionnaire but included  
insufficient statistics for data tabulation.

\*\* Returned questionnaire with no comments nor statistics.

## II. USA Today

### Gannett and the Founding of USA Today

Gannett Co. Inc., was founded in Elmira, New York, in 1906 before moving to its base in Rochester, New York, in 1928.<sup>6</sup> Between 1957 and 1979 the already large chain grew under the leadership of Paul Miller and Allen H. Neuharth, the present chairman. Today, the corporation owns ninety-one dailies, thirty-seven other publications, fifteen radio stations, eight television stations, a national billboard concern and the Louis Harris poll.<sup>7</sup>

The seeds of USA Today were sown in Florida when Gannett started Today in Cocoa Beach.<sup>8</sup> The paper was filled with short articles, inaugurating the USA Today style. Today also covered a large region of northeastern Florida with a lightning delivery service. Gannett then expanded this concept with Today newspapers in Westchester County, New York, and Eastbay, California.

According to an article printed in Gannetter and written by the newspaper's staff, the USA Today concept germinated in a beach front cottage in Cocoa Beach. There, five top level corporate executives developed Neuharth's<sup>9</sup> concept of a general readership national daily. (There are presently four major national dailies beside USA Today: The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, The Washington Post



and The Christian Science Monitor. The Wall Street Journal and The Christian Science Monitor have specialized slants-- business and religious orientation, respectively. The New York Times and The Washington Post both offer a general interest newspaper but print a considerable amount of news of their own cities and regions with a noticeable localized slant. None of these newspapers is a truly national daily.)

A national daily was Neuharth's idea. He wanted a newspaper which would cover the entire nation--both in circulation and news--with no preference for certain areas of the nation. (USA Today is presently available in all states and about 75 percent of the nation.<sup>10</sup> The four other national dailies restrict their circulation to metropolitan areas.) Neuharth also wanted a newspaper which would appeal to the largest segment of American readers. He employed his corporation's Louis Harris poll and spent about \$2 million to research exactly what news would make his national newspaper popular.<sup>11</sup> More than 20,000 persons were interviewed on their newspaper preferences. The results said, as described by Katharine Seelye in the Columbia Journalism Review:

(Readers) wanted short stories. They wanted sports. They would not follow a jump. They liked charts and graphs--information presented in ways that could be absorbed quickly or, as one Gannett executive put it "in ways that are not words, ways that are not spelled out, and not interpreted."<sup>12</sup>

## Research and Direction

Throughout 1980 Gannett executives contemplated the results of their studies. Vince Spezzano, USA Today executive vice president, said in the Gannetter, "Sometimes, we wished that this had been done before, so we could learn from someone else's mistakes."<sup>13</sup>

Among the editors brainstorming at those sessions was Richard A. Curtis, presently assistant managing editor for graphics and photography. Many of his suggestions, along with input from his colleagues, molded the final product's ground breaking look.

By the end of that year they had composed an outline for a newspaper almost exactly like the present USA Today. A testament to their planning and foresight is the fact that the newspaper has added only a crossword puzzle, the "Must Reading" denotations and inserted head photos into the upper corner ears of page one and other section fronts. The management has also expanded color printing capacity from eight to sixteen pages, added occasional special sections (the World Series, for instance) and increased the maximum number of pages per issue to forty-eight. The overall look and purpose of the newspaper has not changed. From the beginning editors packed as much color and as many graphics as they could throughout its pages. Editors cut many major stories down to five to ten paragraphs. Page one stories have run as short as three paragraphs and

have carried two bylines. Each issue has carried four, and only four, "cover" stories which jump from the section fronts to the second page of that section.

Editorial direction has never varied from an upbeat style which highlights America's potential, spirit and optimism. Every time our country is mentioned it is called "USA" as a word and not as initials (seemingly as a house advertisement for the newspaper). The word "America" and the name "The United States" rarely, if ever, appear.

Another concept woven into USA Today was referred to by Time magazine as "staking a fortune on 'gypsies'".<sup>14</sup> The Gannett hierarchy believed travelers would be drawn to a newspaper that treated every town as hometown. Once under production USA Today was given away in mass in airports, zeroing in on travelers needing a connection with their homes. An in-house survey showed 26 percent of USA Today readers had taken six or more airplane round trips in the last year.<sup>15</sup> The newspaper's allure with travelers has not provided much of a readership base, but it did point the management in the right direction. They soon realized most prospective buyers were displaced Americans who had moved at least once. The time-tested journalistic notion that people only care about news close to home did not discourage the USA Today innovators. They understood that a majority of Americans had had more than one home and wanted to read

hometown news from any number of states. One column, "Across The USA," exploits this trait with a two-paragraph look at news in each of the fifty states. A similar column runs in the sports section.

The newspaper demonstrates its belief that most Americans want national sports news. Each sports team in all the major and minor sports gets equal coverage, depending, of course, on its success and news value. Sports fans can always read about their hometown team even if 3,000 miles from their home city newspaper. Media writers have called it the best sports section in the nation.

One of the most prominent USA Today characteristics is its use of short stories and news capsules. The extensive prepublication research showed readers want their news quickly and concisely. Except for the four cover stories, no USA Today story jumps. And, this only makes sense because most stories are no longer than 300 words anyway.

Media critics have lambasted USA Today for its bite-size news. Some have noted USA Today stories are so short they seem to have little substance. Major news events are usually covered in four or five articles instead of the usual main piece and a sidebar or two. The general consensus is that a good deal of news falls through the cracks. Well-known media commentator Ben H. Bagdikian wrote:

Basic news is handled capriciously. In the first week of January (1983) the paper missed a number of important stories: Soviet denials that its nuclear satellite was falling to earth; reversal of human rights sanctions against Guatemala with resumption of

military aid...That same week the paper brushed off important stories with briefs or upbeat little features: the Interstate Commerce Commission will let railroads enter the trucking business,... state election defeats for Indian Prime Minister Gandhi..."<sup>19</sup>

USA Today has employed a formula which greatly reflects most Americans' concept of news--make it look like television. The visual luster, the short pieces, the nation-within-your-living-room impact of television has been copied by this newspaper.

The television influence on USA Today is most noticeable in its visual elements. The newspaper is an explosion of color. It employs color information graphics as readily as television news does. Often the information in the newspaper's four daily graphics is not worthy of a graphic, according to some critics.<sup>20</sup>

#### TECHNOLOGY AND EARLY PRODUCTION

There is an old story around the USA Today newsroom that on the first day of publication, 15 September 1982, Neuharth opened the daily news conference with this question about the first issue: Had it published the late night baseball scores? Indeed, it had. And it continues to publish most late-breaking news, but it does frequently miss the West Coast scores.

How does USA Today move so fast? First, they investigated the technology used by competing publications. According to Gannett personnel, the satellite transmission of news and advertising is "a triumph of technology over

geography" and was first employed by the International  
<sup>21</sup>  
Herald Tribune. Each page is written, edited and produced  
in the newspaper's headquarters in Arlington, Virginia. The  
pages are scanned through ATEX terminals--three-and-a-half  
minutes for stock tables and fifteen minutes for color  
pages--and then transmitted through a seven-meter disc atop  
the building.<sup>22</sup> The signal is relayed by WESTAR III, a  
communications satellite orbiting 22,300 miles above the  
earth.<sup>23</sup> The signal is received at twenty-six earth stations  
and then printed at a respective number of printing plants  
throughout the nation. (The sixteen-page international  
edition, begun in July, 1984, is printed in greater New York  
and then flown nightly to Western Europe, the Middle East  
and northern Africa.)<sup>24</sup> The incoming signal is translated by  
state of the art technology--black and white hardware used  
by the Wall Street Journal and color hardware used by  
<sup>25</sup>  
Time. If a satellite fails (which has not happened), USA  
<sup>26</sup>  
Today can still complete production via telephone wires.  
The publication carefully checks its reproduction quality in  
a usually successful effort to maintain consistent color  
hues and shading at every printing plant. As part of its  
quality control efforts, the newspaper prints on newsprint  
from only eight paper mills and prints with ink from only  
two vendors.<sup>27</sup>

A cornerstone of the early days of USA Today was the  
employing of approximately 175 of 250 editorial personnel  
from Gannett chain newspapers. Obviously, the "nation's

newspaper" wanted only the cream of the vast chain's reporters, editors and photographers. And, in most instances, that is exactly who they got.

For nearly a year Gannett employees were paid by their original newspapers, a tactic which reduced the growing USA Today debt. However, the national daily added \$125 a week pocket money, offered a free air flight home once a month and free lodging in apartments close by the newsroom.<sup>28</sup>

Of the original recruits seventy became permanent USA Today employees and of the 105 temporary recruits at least sixty-nine stayed on full-time.<sup>29</sup>

After the voluminous research and a number of practice runs, the first editions of USA Today were produced smoothly and on time. And it has never missed a day (except major holidays) in its Monday through Friday schedule.

#### THE EXECUTION OF THE USA TODAY CONCEPT

Call it McPaper. Most media critics do. Catchy phrases equating the bite size news of USA Today have popped up in influential magazines along with notable journalism publications like the Columbia Journalism Review, the Washington Journalism Review and Quill. A Newsweek story was entitled "The Big Mac of Newspapers"<sup>30</sup> and Time said "journalists likened the rainbow-bright, telegram-terse new entry to fast food."<sup>31</sup> Julius Duscha wrote in the Washington Journalism Review, "One newspaper consultant calls USA Today

a delicious assortment of hors d'oeuvres and desserts with  
no main course."<sup>32</sup>

Neuharth similarly makes comparison to food. He was  
quoted in the Columbia Journalism Review as saying:

Through the years, a number of us felt that there was a  
greater hunger out there...for news and information of  
all kinds than was being satisfied....Our readings  
indicated that the more people got, the more they  
wanted.<sup>33</sup>

However, let us look more closely at Neuharth's statements  
and how they support the USA Today editorial concept.

It is said "necessity is the mother of invention."  
Also, necessity is the parent of good business. For many  
Americans being well-informed is an economic necessity. This  
fact is especially true of the mobile middle-class working  
in the business, technological and communication fields.  
And, thanks to the growth of television news, magazines and  
other publications, Americans are demanding more and more  
information, knowledge and insight. Neuharth said filling  
that void would make USA Today profitable.<sup>34</sup> Americans do  
not want the hard crime stories of the New York Daily News  
nor the yellow-journalism distortions of the National  
Enquirer, he believed. According to Neuharth, digestible  
information which relates to the average American's life,  
pocketbook, aspirations and concerns will sell well.

The synthesis of these theories can be found in the USA  
Today stylebook. Here are some quotations:

The writing in USA Today...must emphasize what is new  
and what is coming. It must be pointed, compelling,  
crammed with details...KEEP IT TIGHT. Propel the story  
with punctuation. Colons, semi-colons, bullets and



dashes can replace some words. Condense background information. Don't prattle on for several grafs explaining what happened at Love Canal, or spend an entire graf telling who Phyllis Schlafly is. Our readers are well-informed....Don't over-attribute....35

This style is adhered to throughout the newspaper. Most stories, including page one stories, run about ten paragraphs. Occasional inside stories, especially in the "Life" section, may run between fifteen and twenty-five paragraphs. However, the norm is little more than ten.

The USA Today writing style is always crisp and concise. Words used are descriptive but rarely obscure; you do not need a dictionary to read it. Additionally, there is little meditation or emotion, even in the editorials and sports columns. It seems the conformity to delivering information and optimism has squeezed out a good deal of humanistic mulling which make great literature and journalism.

Another important component of the USA Today concept is articles describing trends, rather than describing hard news or features. Its journalists trace a trend in nearly every flickering nuance of American culture by interviewing numerous academic and technological experts. The "Life" section showcases stories on, say, the emergence of men's suspenders or rising women's hemlines. In November, 1984, it ran a five-part series on the changing role of the American male.

An intelligent use of the trend piece is seen in the "Money" section. Here the newspaper tries to reach consumers

and spenders instead of just business persons, investors and capitalists. Trends in all aspects of American life can be tied to a business connection in this section.

#### THE "NEWS" SECTION

"News" is the first section, running from twelve to sixteen pages. Page one contains the index for all sections. In addition, it runs columns similar to those in the other sections: "Newslines," "USA Snapshots" and a cover story. The USA Today banner is in blue, the section's color, and is placed in the center of the top of page one.

Inside columns include "Newsmakers;" "Nationline," a page-long column of news shorts on page three; "Across the USA;" "USA Journal," a feature or newsfeature from an American municipality; "World;" and "Washington;" briefs on news from all fifty states and other areas called "Across the USA." Often "World" and "Washington" share one page, meaning much of the world is often covered in a half page.

Two unique USA Today features are on their editorial pages. Two pages from the last in the section is "Opinion." It consists of comment on one issue per day. Twelve staff editorial writers contribute to one editorial. There are usually four other essays written by expert "guest columnists," one of which is tagged "An Opposing View." There is usually a table of quotations or a timeline and "Voices From Across the USA," seven paragraph-long opinions and photos of Americans picked at random from the

newspaper's large file compiled for just that purpose.

On the next page is "Inquiry," an extensive interview with one person which wraps around an advertisement. The persons interviewed are often relatively unknown experts but subjects have included columnist Russell Baker and entertainer Ed McMahon.

#### THE "MONEY" SECTION

"Money" is an innovative name and concept for a business section. Many metropolitan dailies do not have section fronts for business and the ones that do cater their coverage to business executives. USA Today tailors "Money" to anyone who spends or saves or earns money. Its articles cover the more practical side of the money world. An article on multi-national corporations might run along side a story explaining how to figure out bank checking account charges. One article on the humanistic angle of money was headlined "Money troubles: Third part in most divorces."

Other articles in the four- to ten-page, green-colored section cover the more traditional business beat. They include "Moneyline," "Insiders," "Tax Talk," "Marketline" and "Investment Trendline," which consists of nearly a half page of black and white graphs. Some of these features do not run daily.

## THE "SPORTS" SECTION

It has been said some USA Today buyers put their fifty cents in the honor box and then throw back three sections. Who are they? They must be sports fans.

USA Today has the nation's largest and most comprehensive sports section. "Almost from the paper's first day...it has, arguably at least, been the best sports section in the country," wrote Fred Barnes.<sup>36</sup> He explained his qualification, adding the daily strays away from the trendy, sociological and highly personal coverage of other major newspaper sports staffs.

USA Today has centered its sports coverage on the fan-- meaning the fanatic. It believes sports fans love statistics and details and knowing how each and every player is performing. So the newspaper uses blanket coverage on all games of every major sport league, usually with a game summary or box score. It publishes a full page for each major baseball league during the season.

Additionally, the sports news is supplemented with sports commentary. Columns in the red-colored, ten- to sixteen-page section include "For The Record," "Arena," and "Across the USA in Sports." "For The Record" appears on the next to last page in the section and contains television listings and agate results from major and obscure sports.

Whom is this saturation coverage reaching? Mostly it is reaching the transplanted sports fan. The newspaper's national (read "nonparochial") stance strips it of bias for

any home team. This enables its sportswriters to be more objective than most metro newspaper writers.

#### THE "LIFE" SECTION

Life--it is an awfully big subject for from four to ten pages a day. But the purple-colored "Life" section zeros in on entertainment, the arts, lifestyle, fashion, health, fitness, etc. Much like "Money," it changes slightly each day. Columns such as "Show," "Travel and Leisure," "Music," "Topic," "Good Living," "Books and Magazines" and "New Tech" appear one to three times a week. "People," "Crossword," "TV," and a page of television listings appear daily.

The USA Today artistic coverage concentrates on movies and television. An occasional dance or architecture review will be published. Record reviews come in four categories: Popular, Country, Jazz and Classical.

A noticeable number of trend pieces on lifestyle are run, with a growing number on physical and emotional health. Articles dealing with "touchy" subjects such as intimacy or sex appear often and are written in straightforward language.

The quality of writing in "Life" is the best in USA Today. Writers are given the latitude to break out of the prescribed, concise style demanded of writers for other sections. A lack of space remains a problem for this section, along with the others.

### III. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The question of the thesis is: Has USA Today influenced the use of color, design, graphics and photography in daily newspapers? If so, which size newspapers (circulation of less than 20,000; 20,001-40,000; more than 40,001) has it influenced the most? Why? Also, what newspaper characteristics--color, design, graphics, photography--have been influenced the most? The secondary question is also--why?

This question can be tested. First, the hypothesis has been tested in a similar fashion by the Changing Newspaper Committee of the Associated Press Managing Editors Association.<sup>1</sup> Its 1983 survey and report, entitled "A Look at USA Today," focused on the newspaper's influence on fifteen major newspapers in a variety of editorial and circulation categories. This thesis will concentrate on the visual side of editorial content.

Second, the question was tested with a survey of daily newspaper publishers, editors and designers. The survey consisted mostly of ranking, multiple choice and open-ended questions.

The problem, which relates to research on the influence of USA Today on other newspapers is useful for numerous reasons.

Research performed in the summer of 1985, about thirty-three months after USA Today began publishing on 15

September 1982, showed the effects of its influence, if any exists. While changing a newspaper's printing, design, graphics and photo equipment, policies and procedures can be costly and time-consuming endeavors, enough time has passed for the newspapers surveyed to show any changes they might have made due to USA Today.

The research related to a practical communications question: does one newspaper directly influence another? It also attempted to uncover whether USA Today, in particular, has affected other newspapers with its revolutionary design concepts. During a time when an unprecedented interest is being taken in the effect and use of visual elements in newspapers, this research attempted to answer some important questions on whether publishers, editors and design directors are influenced by USA Today.

The research related to a wide population, meaning all daily newspapers in the United States. The research was drawn from a survey of top administrators of a random sample of newspapers in four states. The four states--Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey and Pennsylvania--were selected because they were reported to be the first states covered by the circulation of USA Today.<sup>2</sup> Research drawn from these four states is of particular interest because it reflected the opinions of managers who have had the most time to not only be influenced by USA Today, but also to act upon any influence.

The research filled a gap. One major study by Dr.

3

Robert Logan compiled the general journalistic opinions of and a definition of USA Today's characteristics. However, the study did not survey a large number of journalists systematically and concentrated on all aspects of the newspaper, not just its color, design, graphics and photography. Those included the use of indexes, short stories, the limitation of using only four jump stories per issue, the optimistic tone of most news coverage, the large amount of sports coverage and statistics. The large amount of USA Today promotion and marketing along with the research before publication of readers' preferences were also included in the paper.

The same holds true for the Changing Newspaper Committee report, which looked at all aspects of the newspaper's editorial content. It also surveyed circulation changes. The report looked for influence on what it considered the country's fifteen most influential newspapers.

The most recent major journalistic research on newspaper design--"Front Pages of U.S. Daily Newspapers" by Sandra H. Utt and Steve Pasternack --on the interest of various size newspapers design and graphics did not look specifically at USA Today's influence.



## LITERATURE REVIEW

The influence of USA Today on other newspapers has been studied in two major written surveys, the Changing Newspaper Committee report and Logan's paper. Logan cited the Changing Newspaper Committee report in his 1984 paper.

The committee consisted of nineteen high-ranking journalists from around the country. The journalists conducted interviews with three USA Today executives. They conducted a content analysis of the 1 March 1983 edition of eleven newspapers--USA Today, the Wall Street Journal, the New York Times, the Washington Post, the Chicago Tribune, the Los Angeles Times, the Madison Capital Times, the Miami Herald, the Milwaukee Journal, the Milwaukee Sentinel and Newsday.<sup>7</sup> They also wrote twelve stories on the results of these two studies and other research.

They also sent questionnaires to top executives of sixteen newspapers--the Boston Globe, the Chicago Tribune, the Christian Science Monitor, the Courier-Journal/Louisville Times, the Desert (Salt Lake City) News, the Los Angeles Times, the Milwaukee Journal, the Minneapolis Star-Tribune, Newsday, the New York Times, the Rochester Democrat and Chronicle, the St. Petersburg Times and the San Francisco Examiner, the Wall Street Journal, the Washington Post and the Worcester (Mass.) Telegram.<sup>8</sup>

The survey asked the executives to respond to five questions relating to general impressions, consideration of USA Today as a top national newspaper and circulation

changes. Two of the questions related directly to USA Today's influence. They were: (1) Has USA Today plowed any new ground in newspapering? and (2) Do you plan to adapt, or have you adapted, any of these innovations for your newspaper?

Twelve of the newspaper executives replied with statements of from 200-500 words. Three of the newspapers-- the Christian Science Monitor, the New York Times and the Washington Post--replied saying they had no response.

The general tone of the report was that USA Today has greatly influenced American daily newspapers. San Francisco Examiner editor David E. Halvorsen said:

What we all seem to be watching is USA Today. That newspaper celebrated its first anniversary in September and is still the talk of the trade, as it has been for nearly two years.<sup>9</sup>

According to the stories, the major influence on journalists is USA Today's insistence on short stories, whether in major articles or in news capsules. The second most influential characteristic was the use of four-color (in both photos and graphics) and the third was the heavy use of color and black and white graphics.

The content analysis showed that USA Today published 2.475 photos and graphs on 1 March 1983. Only three other newspapers used more than one photo or graph per page (1.104, 1.082 and 1.033) and one newspaper (the Wall Street Journal) used .058 per page.<sup>10</sup>

The responding news editors varied greatly in their responses. Washington Post Executive Editor Ben Bradlee

(whose one sentence response was not counted as a full response in the above breakdown) said, "If it can (qualify among the top newspapers in the country), I'm in the wrong business."<sup>11</sup> Others complimented USA Today's graphics and design and said they were influenced. Some said the influence was noticeable but overrated.

On the whole, the report supports the notion that USA Today has been a major influence, pro or con, on daily American newspapers.

Robert Logan of the University of South Florida followed the Changing Newspaper Committee's lead in his paper. He studied the literature supporting USA Today's influence but did not perform any surveys or content analyses.

Logan split the influences into seven "impact" areas, three of which pertain to visual communication. He discussed the impact of color, information graphics and newspaper design. On color, he noted:

Although USA Today is not the first American newspaper to use four-color photographs and graphics, its nationwide circulation introduced color reproduction into many markets where some newspapers were traditionally gray.<sup>12</sup>

Logan said the newspaper is also the "most enthusiastic advocate of charts, maps, lists and graphs in the history of the U.S. newspaper business."<sup>13</sup> Logan said the newspaper put into practice design techniques that newspaper designers and instructors have been calling for for years.

Noted journalism periodicals--especially the Columbia

Journalism Review, the Washington Journalism Review and Editor & Publisher--have published numerous articles in the last three years on USA Today and its influence on other newspapers. A recent article, published in the Columbia Journalism Review, noted:

...the influence USA Today continues to have on news papers throughout the country. Splashes of color, graphs, charts, and a move toward short, easily digestible news nuggets are some of the ideas which a growing number of local papers are borrowing from "The Nation's Newspaper."<sup>14</sup>

Some academic research on color, design and readers perceptions laid the groundwork for the more pointed research mentioned above. Two studies with conflicting findings concentrate on the color use of daily newspapers. The Utt and Pasternack study found that larger circulation dailies are less likely to use color than newspapers with less than 50,000 circulation. They said 30.3 percent of larger dailies never use four-color on their front pages while only 6.8 percent of smaller dailies never use four-<sup>15</sup> color. On the other hand, a 1974 study by J.W. Click and Guido H. Stempel III said larger newspapers are more likely<sup>16</sup> to use color than smaller dailies.

The Utt and Pasternack study also found that 82 percent of larger circulation newspaper editors were satisfied with their graphics and design while only 56 percent of smaller<sup>17</sup> circulation dailies felt similarly. This contradiction, on top of the findings of Click and Stempel, only muddied the picture. Further research with newspaper circulation sizes is necessary.

A 1979 study by Theresa G. Siskind found readers prefer contemporary to traditionally designed newspaper front pages. She also found they preferred "well-designed pages to those of average design."<sup>18</sup> The difference between what she considered contemporary and traditional and well-designed and average is difficult to decipher, especially in reference to USA Today. USA Today employs a neo-traditional newspaper style with a high, page one story count and many rules. Its design does not cleanly fit into any of her categories.

Another Click and Stempel study, "Reader Response to Front Pages with Four-Color Halftones," concentrated on the effect of color photos on readers. They found that readers liked color better than black and white in nineteen of twenty comparison questions. Readers not only responded to questions on appearance but also content.<sup>19</sup> A 1985 study by Drs. Mario Garcia and Robert Bohle also found readers favored color and spot color to black and white and less colorful pages. Respondents choose color in such categories as responsible over irresponsible and accurate over inaccurate. This study was conducted in four cities, using a diverse mix of readers.<sup>20</sup>

Three masters theses looked at the influence of a number of sources on the appearance of today's newspapers. Harry Stapler wrote in 1981 newspapers are "slaves of tradition on design," that they are slow to use professional designers, that interest in design is growing in journalism

and that the newest tool of newspaper design is the  
21  
computer.

Daniel Joseph Smith wrote in 1971 newspapers must  
increase their graphics use to compete with the exploding  
22  
use of television graphics.

A theses on newspaper formats and whether readers jump  
to continued stories was written by Chic Bain in 1979. He  
found that 15 percent less readers continue with a jumped  
23  
story.

All these theses provide research backing many of the  
innovations used by USA Today. Because USA Today has not  
released much information on the type and extent of testing  
it did before publication, it is not known if they exploited  
previous research or conducted their own research.

#### HYPOTHESES

Which circulation size category (less than 20,000,  
20,001-40,000 or more than 40,001) has been most affected by  
USA Today?

I propose USA Today influenced 20,001-40,000  
circulation newspapers the most. Newspapers with more than  
40,001 circulation were influenced almost as greatly.  
Newspapers with less than 20,000 were influenced the least.

I propose newspapers were more influenced in their use  
of color. Use of graphics was the second most influenced  
characteristic. Design was the third and photography was

last.

The hypotheses set up a framework to determine how a newspaper, specifically USA Today, affected specific methods of visual communication in newspapers in circulation size categories. The specification of one newspaper will further the knowledge of one publication's influence. It also differentiated between the USA Today influence on newspaper circulation size, which hopefully furthers our knowledge of that phenomenon. Also, it hopefully furthers our knowledge of the influence on four characteristics of visual communication in newspapers.

The independent variables of the hypotheses were USA Today's color, design, graphics and photography styles. The dependent variables were the newspapers influenced by USA Today. The newspapers were split into three categories-- those with less than 20,000 circulation, from 20,001-40,000 and more than 40,001.

Four influences were measured. They were measured with a rank order of 0 to 10 and on a scale of greatly influenced, mildly influenced and no influence for all categories. Whether the influence was positive or negative was determined from answers to open-ended questions and responses to informational questions on changes in the dependent variables' visual policies in the last three years.

There were more intricate and influential problems with the selection of the four visual elements cited for study.

Few newspaper experts will disagree that color, design, graphics and photography are four of the major components of a newspaper's visual make-up.

The major problem was segregating USA Today's visual elements from its overall editorial concept. The most important and obvious USA Today characteristic was its use of short stories, news capsules and indexes and sports statistics.<sup>24</sup> These characteristics were not included in the study because the study concentrated on visual elements. USA Today's design policy is determined by its journalistic style of small blocks and long, well-stocked indexes. Another overall concept formed by Gannett Co. Inc., the parent corporation of the newspaper, is keeping each of the USA Today components in the same spot or section every day. This policy determines the design must be repeating and boxed according to formula. These concepts affect the newspaper's look just as much as its color reproduction, its informational graphics and its photography.

By disregarding these overall USA Today precepts, the thesis study has a sharper focus than the Changing Newspaper Committee report or the Logan article. However, a major flaw could be isolating four specific visual elements from the overall editorial designs on which the newspaper's personality is based.



## DESIGN OF THE STUDY

The ideal design would show USA Today's color, design, graphics and photography affecting the same elements in the newspapers surveyed. It also would show the most effect in newspapers with 20,001-40,000 circulation, and a shade less effect in the following groups in a descending order, more than 40,001 and less than 20,000. The survey idealistically would show that newspapers changed their color use and then, in descending order: graphics, design and photography.

Of course, the survey couldn't be perfectly designed. Other questions were included in the questionnaire to help find the survey's faults. The survey's open-ended and informational questions attempted to reveal any interfering variables, such as newspapers which were planning visual element changes before the appearance of USA Today, the hiring of staff who subscribe to the same tenets as USA Today personnel and the appearance of any other publications or media outlets which also subscribe to the same tenets as USA Today personnel.

The study quizzed newspaper publishers, editors and design directors on their beliefs of USA Today's influence on their newspapers.

The subjects were asked to describe the newspaper's overall design in the summer of 1982 and in the summer of 1985. Questions zeroed in on each of the four elements mentioned in the hypotheses--color, design, graphics and

photography--and asked for descriptions of the look in the summer of 1982 and the summer of 1985. Then the subject was asked how often he/she sees USA Today and reads it. Then the subject was asked if USA Today influenced him/her to make changes in any one of the four visual elements. The subject was asked to evaluate if changes had been made which subconsciously were affected by USA Today. Lastly, the subject was asked open-ended questions for comment on the effect of USA Today.

#### SAMPLING PROCEDURES

To determine the most effect of USA Today's influence, journalists must have seen and read the newspaper. Additionally, for newspapers to react to USA Today's visual style, they should have the maximum amount of time to plan, implement and pay for the relatively costly improvements in color reproduction and photography equipment, and hiring of art, photo and design staffers. So, the research was directed at the newspapers which have had the longest exposure to USA Today.

Research was limited to four states because of cost considerations. USA Today spokesman Melvin Clarke was asked to disclose which four states were first completely covered by USA Today circulation. He said those states were  
25  
Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

A mail survey was sent to a random sample of the daily newspapers in those states. The survey was addressed to the

editor of small- and medium-sized dailies and the design directors or other executives of any newspaper which lists such a similar position in the 1984 International Year Book published by Editor & Publisher. Each recipient was asked to determine which executive at the newspaper is best suited to answer the questionnaire and direct the questionnaire to that person (figures #1-#3).

The states have 141 daily newspapers. There are sixty-one with a circulation of less than 20,000, thirty-eight with a circulation of 20,000-40,001 and forty-two with a circulation more than 40,001.<sup>26</sup>

Each newspaper was put in alphabetical order by states and then by hometown and assigned a position. The numbers one through four were put in a hat. A family member of mine picked out number one. That meant the first, fifth, ninth, etc. newspapers were selected for surveying.

Thirty-eight newspapers were selected. There were fifteen in the less than 20,000 circulation category, twelve in the 20,001-40,000 circulation category and eleven in the more than 40,001 circulation category.

This amount should make for an ample survey. If half were returned (an average return with this type of survey), there will be a small sample size for review of statistical significance. However, it was decided to keep the sample size small so ample open-ended questions and comments could be asked.

Each journalist was given three weeks to reply. If no response is received, a second and third questionnaire was mailed with three-week deadlines.

#### METHODS OF GATHERING DATA

Quantitative data was obtained with a mail survey on the influence of USA Today's four visual elements: color, design, graphics and photography. Recipients were asked to judge how much these elements have influenced their publications with a rank order for each element. They were also asked to describe USA Today's influence on their personal feelings on the four elements with a three-rung nominal scale (figure #1).

The survey contained twenty-four questions. It should have taken a knowledgeable editor about fifteen minutes to fill out. If an editor was not with the newspaper three years ago, that editor would have needed to interview a former editor or employee of at least three years experience at the newspaper. That would have probably extended the time to about thirty minutes.

Because of the previous research performed about USA Today and the general opinion the newspaper has greatly influenced American journalists, it is believed that no preliminary testing is necessary.

#### IV. THE VISUAL ELEMENTS OF

#### USA TODAY

For all the controversy about the USA Today tight writing style and editorial concept, nothing has matched the whirlwind of awe and applause the newspaper has received for its impeccably precise color and distinct graphics. The section fronts glisten with as many as seven color photos and blocks of color in nearly any imaginable shade. With its specially designed honor box stand, USA Today looks like a Sony television with the color on high. The New Republic said the newspaper employed "high-tech glitter of charts, graphs and dazzling color. USA Today is a child of the video revolution...."<sup>1</sup> Editor & Publisher asked, "Has USA Today ushered in the era of the four-color daily newspaper? Quite possibly so."<sup>2</sup> In the same article it cited the newspaper as strongly influencing the Detroit News weather map and another noted journalism publication quoted Atlanta Journal and Constitution President David Easterly as admitting, "We flat out stole that idea (the USA Today weather map) from<sup>3</sup> them.

The pervasive influence of the USA Today look made a special mark on the journalism community. Editor & Publisher, the well-known weekly publication covering the journalism industry, has chronicled the impact of the publication in the last three years. During the first eighteen months of USA Today publication Editor & Publisher printed at least sixteen stories about the newspaper. Many

dealt specifically with its visual style and impact on other journalists. In a story entitled, "What's black & white and red all over?" the underline said, "Good color reproduction is no picnic, but once you get it right, it pays off." The article began:

The birth of USA Today, Gannett's national daily newspaper, has led newspaper publishers throughout the industry to take a second look at color.<sup>4</sup>

Another article was headlined "A colorful USA Today enters its second year."<sup>5</sup>

The Columbia Journalism Review, a leading monthly on the field, has published at least three major pieces on the newspaper, including "Al Neuharth's technicolor baby" and a follow-up "Al Neuharth's technicolor baby, Part II." In the latter piece Tom McNichol and Margaret Carlson wrote:

While his full-color paper continues to run only in the red, Neuharth can rightly claim a less tangible victory for his pet project--the influence USA Today continues to have on newspapers throughout the country. Splashes of color, graphs, charts, and a move toward short, easily digestible news nuggets are some of the ideas which a growing number of local papers are borrowing from "The Nation's Newspaper."<sup>6</sup>

Another noted monthly, the Washington Journalism Review, also has published at least three articles on USA Today.

The newspaper has attracted notice among newspaper designers with numerous awards from the Society of Newspaper Design in the past four years.<sup>7</sup>

According to Editor & Publisher, Ralph Bubis, a newspaper graphics expert told the society's 1984 conference:

USA Today is responsible for much of (the recent) change in graphics thinking....One of the most important reactions to USA Today has been the increased use of the technical arts--graphics and charts.8

These remarks bolster the perception that USA Today is a leader in newspaper visual techniques. More importantly, design experts and other journalists throughout the nation see and read it, making its influence greater than many other older and better-selling newspapers. The newspaper's numerically large and widespread circulation has made it probably the best known user of newspaper color and graphics. It is also recognized as an important example of newspaper design and as a newspaper which publishes an abundance of photographs.

#### COLOR

Probably the most famous part of USA Today is its weather map. The only other major trait is its bite-size news stories and capsules. Unquestionably, the most noticeable visual characteristic is color--the brash, stunning spot color, color graphics and color photos throughout the pages. At least one business commentator has said the size and beauty of the USA Today full-page and double truck advertisements have been its best selling point to clients. In this respect, the newspaper is banking on the editorial and advertising draw of its immaculate color reproduction. Editor & Publisher

alluded to the acceptance of USA Today's leadership in color reproduction when it published this headline, "USA Today's color is no miracle/Production manager says any newspaper can achieve the quality color reproduction of USA Today." <sup>10</sup>

What sets USA Today apart from its competitors in color is not the source of its materials but its reproduction quality. According to executives entrusted with maintaining color quality, the newspaper does not rely on unheard of techniques or technology. Guido Gomez, USA Today print manager, said in a telephone interview:

Our equipment is no different than that any is already out there. Some other newspapers have even better technology....We surpass other papers because of our training is very extensive and our standards are very high.<sup>11</sup>

Earlier this year Gannett launched the four-color network which linked ninety-five newspapers with USA Today's headquarters. Participating newspapers are paying a percentage of sales to receive color advertisement separations which will allow them to print them at USA Today standards. Gannett Senior Vice President William Shannon said the high and immediate response rate shows newspapers envy USA Today's color quality. "They jump at the opportunity to get the color quality of USA Today," he <sup>12</sup> explained in a telephone interview. As Gomez did, Shannon cited education, high standards and dedication as the reasons the "nation's newspaper" is producing top-notch



color.

What makes USA Today's color so imposing? Is it just accurate reproduction? No, it is extensive use of spot and four-color which makes the average reader notice it. The average page one has from eight to twelve different spot colors. The logo is in blue, the phrase "Sports Update" is printed on red and the day of the week is printed on yellow. Under each is a head shot rimmed in other spot colors. The index features the logo colors of the other three sections. The main photo is usually bordered in a mix of spot colors, as is a boxed story (which is sometimes bordered in a primary color). Additionally, there is always a graphic in the lower left-hand corner, which carries a variety of colors and hues. Presently the newspaper can print sixteen pages of color per edition, with at least five reserved for editorial.

The amount of color distinguishes USA Today from other newspapers. Other papers--notably the St. Petersburg Times and Today in Cocoa Beach, Florida--have used color since the 1960s. Assistant Managing Editor/Graphics & Photography Richard A. Curtis said extensive use of color in USA Today was "a natural progression" from what had been an industry trend to publish frequent and more extensive editorial color. He added many media analysts have exaggerated USA Today influence and denied that the newspaper had been a pioneer in color use. Still, very few major metropolitan newspapers printed four-color photographs and graphics

before USA Today came out.

## DESIGN

USA Today design is like a jigsaw puzzle. Everything fits into a preset mold. Everything is almost exactly the way it was yesterday. Everything is repeated. It just goes on and on.

USA Today design fits formulas. Below are some examples of this style:

### PAGE ONE

- Blue masthead in middle,
- "Sports Update" in left ear, day of the week in right ear, teasers on gray, each with a color head shot bordered in spot color,
- Main story in a 19.06-pica column with Times Bold display face,
- Two-column second story on mid-upper right side with Folio Bold Condensed,
- Main illustration, usually a color photo, in center, accompanying the cover story,
- Under main illustration is "Cover Story" in Helvetica and two-column story and headline in Helvetica Bold,
- "Newsline" in Helvetica Bold over a 19.06-pica column,

--Helvetica headline (one or two words) starting story briefs with black squares to delineate different stories under same subject,  
--Below is an index with the four spot colors of each section,  
--In lower left is a four-color graphic,  
--Usually one story is boxed on a field of spot color and bordered in spot color--more often than not in the lower right-hand corner.

#### OTHER SECTION FRONTS

Same as Page One except for:

--Logo is in the section's color and is in the left ear,  
--"Today's Tip-off" is in the upper-middle area with two teasers on gray, set on a slight upward angle with a box containing the standing sig's name and a white check mark.

The rest of the newspaper is similarly planned. Most of each story classification--whether it be "Opinion" or "Investor Advice" or "Sportstalk" or "Television"--appears in the same place on the same page with the same design and standing sigs each day. Some of these pieces change each day, but then another one is plugged into the same spot, the same column width, the same headline face, etc.

Beside the design tools described above, USA Today

frequently uses the following tools:

- Broken boxes around every story, employing hairlines and six-point lines,
- Hairline boxes and shadow boxes in hairline and nine-point accents around most of two sides,
- Extensive use of hairlines to separate type in display lines,
- Reverse Helvetica type on top of two-pica strips,
- Black Helvetica on top of spot color strips,
- Agate and other smaller body face sizes and style, especially in sports statistics and stock tables,
- Mixing of type thicknesses and style within the same standing sigs, especially in bylines and two-tier type lines.

Additionally, Richard Curtis and the USA Today designers seem to follow the following general design rules:

- Fill up the page and reduce white space,
- Box everything with lines to segregate stories,
- Supply the maximum amount of information in graphs, information boxes and lists,
- Use strong simple photographs, with a high percentage of head shots,
- Use shading of gray and spot color to highlight stories,
- Break the traditional rule: Never have a photograph look off the page,

--Use more white space, more simplicity and less congestion on the "Opinion" and "Inquiry" pages.

Design experts favoring USA Today usually mention the impact of its color and illustrations instead of its design. However, some support it. Dr. Mario Garcia, noted author and an instructor at the Poynter Institute for Media Studies in St. Petersburg, Florida, said he is impressed with the newspaper's orderliness and organization.<sup>15</sup> He called it extremely readable, both at a glance and at close range. Barry Bingham Jr., Editor and Publisher of the The Louisville Times and Courier-Journal, wrote in the 1983 Report of the Changing Newspaper Committee of the Associated Press Managing Editors Association, "Graphically (USA Today)<sup>16</sup> is one of the best newspapers in the country."

Other journalists take the opposite point of view, that USA Today is too jammed with elements--color, photos, graphics, boxes and lines. Curtis admitted in an interview the design was "busier than I would want if I was designing my own newspaper. But our readers like it."<sup>17</sup> Professor Lucas G. Staudacher, writing in the Associated Press report,<sup>18</sup> criticized its use of too many, narrow columns. In the same report John S. Driscoll, Executive Editor of the Boston Globe wrote:

Reading USA Today is like staring at a light bulb. It causes me to blink a lot. It's not just the splashy use of color, but also the blinding array of tidbits and half-stories.<sup>19</sup>

Jim Houck, managing editor of the Baltimore Sun, was quoted

in the report as saying:

USA Today may be teaching us some things that we shouldn't do. There's a certain sameness to it everyday....(It's) over-formatted.20

## GRAPHICS

With at least four four-color graphics in each issue, USA Today is undoubtedly one of the nation's leading users of that visual item. Richard Curtis said he drew from many influences in championing the daily use of graphics. He cited Time magazine and other magazines and newspapers as giving him the notion that readers wanted more informational graphics in their news.

The unveiling of USA Today's graphics coincides with the growing use of breathtaking and innovative graphics in television news. Most USA Today informational graphics are bar graphs. However, they usually do not employ straight bars, unless they are explaining the condition of prisons or drinking establishments. Most employ a symbol to draw out the statistic, either a baseball bat to show batting averages or pastries to display sales in cakes. Other USA Today graphics will simply be a list of statistics, but the words and numbers will be surrounded with a drawing depicting what is being written about. Rarely do the graphs contain no drawn symbols.

Often the information is timely. However, when there is no information which can be displayed in a graph, USA Today

prints an odd list or comparison in their graphics.

Sometimes the main illustration on a section front will be a large graphic. It will run in addition to the obligatory graphic in the lower left-hand corner. The "Money" section has the highest percentage of graphic illustrations.

On the last page of the "News" section appears the now-famous national weather page with a seven-column wide map of the United States, a second color illustration and the predicted high temperature of twenty-four cities color coded near the bottom. The Atlanta Journal and Constitution and the Detroit News now publish almost identical maps and scores of other newspapers have begun printing maps--in color and black and white--which nearly copy the map. Graphics Editor/Senior Illustrator George Rorick created the map and has slowly increased the map's dimensions and visual personality. <sup>22</sup> Added were a second, often striking graphic and a variety of techniques to boost the product's attractiveness and readability.

USA Today also publishes numerous black and white graphs, especially in the "Money" section. Black and white graphics picture a variety of subjects in numerous forms. In the 10 July 1985 issue, the black and white graphics were:

- a map showing the location of an airplane attack,
- a drawing of the innards of an underwater robot,
- a list of the student loans outstanding in the fifty states and Washington, D.C.,

- an editorial cartoon on legal advertising,
- a bar graph on recent Dow Jones averages,
- nine bar graphs on a variety of daily trends in stock market and monetary prices,
- ten lists of trends in daily stock market and monetary prices,
- a business editorial cartoon,
- two pages of stock market prices,
- four lists of baseball standings and leaders,
- a sports editorial cartoon,
- nearly a full page of American League statistics,
- a list of top high school track records,
- a list of American League attendance figures,
- a list of football playoff schedules,
- a list of lotteries,
- a lifestyle editorial cartoon,
- a list of the weekly television ratings,
- a boxed diagram of television listings,
- a crossword puzzle.

This total of twenty black and white graphics is the average for USA Today. I counted every drawing, graph, chart, table or listing of information outside of traditional newspaper text as a graphic. The Associated Press report cited earlier counted three black and white "graphs" in the 1 March 1983 edition. Undoubtedly, it used a different method of counting in their research than I did. In that report only the Chicago Tribune published more



graphs (four) than USA Today. The Chicago Tribune published  
24  
sixty pages that day to the USA Today's forty.

The Associated Press report also noted USA Today ran eleven color graphs that day. Of the ten other major American dailies surveyed, only two ran color graphs--the  
25  
Chicago Tribune, four, and the Milwaukee Journal, two.

Where does USA Today's graphics stand in contemporary journalism? Dr. Robert Logan of the University of South Florida wrote in "Assessing USA Today's Impact: Seven Innovations and Their Implications for the Newspaper Industry and Journalism Ethics:"

USA Today is the most enthusiastic advocate of charts, maps, lists and graphs in the history of U.S. newspaper business....few newspaper editors disagree that USA Today has accelerated the industry's increasing adoption of information graphics...26

Logan also credits USA Today with such innovations as "color-coded weather charts plus free-standing tables and graphs to meet anticipated reader curiosities and  
27  
interests."

#### PHOTOGRAPHY

News photographers do not consider USA Today a photographer's newspaper. Why? Because USA Today does not cater to most photographers' wishes to have many large-sized photographs and multi-picture essays published.

USA Today is a gallery for tiny head shots of celebrities and a showcase for three or four color

photographs each day. It rarely runs photo spreads and stand alone photographs. Occasionally an inside story is accompanied by two or three black and white photographs. Personality portraits are infrequently used. For the most part, USA Today illustrates most stories with portraits or, as they are called in the newspaper business, mug shots.

Of the four visual elements studied in this thesis, photography is certainly the least influential. Logan's paper lists seven USA Today innovations. Photography was not included. The first three are the impact of color, the impact of informational graphics and the impact of newspaper design. The four others are not connected with visual communication.

Throughout the numerous articles written about USA Today, little has been written on its photography. In the Associated Press report, of the eight top level newspaper editors who wrote extensive critiques of USA Today most mentioned color, graphics and design but no one talked of photography. None used the words "photography,"  
"photographs" or "photos."<sup>28</sup>

## V. THE SURVEY

The four-page, twenty-one-question surveys (figure #1) and accompanying cover letters (figure #2) were mailed to thirty-eight newspaper editors and designers on 29 June 1985. Fifteen surveys were filled out, mailed and received by the end of the first of three three-week periods allowed for each mailing. A second mailing was made on 20 July 1985 and three were received. A third mailing went out on 3 August 1985 and one was received before the 25 August 1985 cutoff date (figure #3).

Each survey and letter was also accompanied with a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

Of the nineteen surveys received, one was deemed incomplete. Bob Parfitt, the editor of the Times-News of Lehighton, Pennsylvania, filled out most of the questions except for the eight influence rating questions. The four rank order questions were not answered with numerals but with four "no" answers. The four categorical ranking questions were not answered. Because of the lack of numerical questions, this survey was not counted in the rating statistics. However, the survey was counted in other question analyses (figure #3).

Two surveys sent to Carroll Shelton of the Times Herald of Norristown, Pennsylvania, were mailed back with no responses. Neither were counted in any analyses (figure #3).

Newspapers in the four states were divided into three

categories by circulation. The circulation size of one newspaper--The News of Frederick, Pennsylvania (circulation 14,430)--was changed after the surveys were received. General Manager George Randall of the newspaper listed both The News and the Frederick Post as the newspapers he represented. The combined circulation of the newspapers is 35,907. The newspaper was transferred from the less than 20,000 category to the 20,001-40,000 category.

Of the fifteen randomly selected newspapers in the less than 20,000 category, four returned completed surveys and one (mentioned above) returned a statistically incomplete survey. The return rates were 33.3 percent and 26.7 percent, respectively. Of the twelve newspapers in the 20,001-40,000 category, six returned surveys for a 50 percent rate. Of the eleven newspapers in the more than 40,001 category, eight returned surveys for a 72.7 percent rate (table #1, figure #2). According to this small sample size survey, the larger circulation newspaper journalists responded more frequently. Most of the respondents--fifteen of nineteen--listed their job titles as editor, executive editor, co-publisher, managing editor, assistant managing editor and general manager. All of these journalists, as described by their job descriptions in the survey or job titles, seem to be top editors with a reporting or editing background. One respondent listed himself as the assistant managing editor for graphics. One listed himself as a design director. Two others--a Sunday

TABLE #1

COMPARISON OF RANK ORDER/NEWSPAPER INFLUENCE TO  
NOMINAL ORDER/PERSONAL INFLUENCE QUESTIONS

NEWSPAPERS	RANK ORDER/ NEWSPAPER	NOMINAL ORDER/ PERSONAL	TOTAL
Less than 20,000	13.2	13.9	27.1
20,001- 40,000	9.6	19.1	28.7
More than 40,001	12.3	17.5	29.8

newspaper editor and a sports editor--listed themselves as their newspapers' "unofficial" design or layout experts. Of those four with a visual background or interest, only the sports editor worked for a newspaper with less than 20,000 circulation. The other three worked for newspapers with more than 40,001 circulation.

USA TODAY INFLUENCE BY VISUAL CHARACTERISTICS:

BREAKDOWN OF STATISTICAL QUESTIONS #13-20

The most important questions in the survey were the rank order and categorical ranking questions (table #2). Questions #13 through #16 asked journalists to rate USA Today's influence on four visual characteristics--color, design, graphics and photography in their newspapers. Journalists were asked to use numerals 0-10 to rank the influence. Questions #17 through #20 asked journalists to rate USA Today's influence on their personal view of visual newspaper communication in the same categories. Journalists were asked to mark one of three categories--"greatly influenced," "mildly influenced" and "no influence."

Two different frames of influence--on a newspaper and on a journalist--were questioned to expand the survey's scope. Two different methods of describing influence--rank order and categorical--were used to further flush out the thoughts of the journalist on USA Today's influence. While using four different groups of questions instead of two

TABLE #2

USA TODAY'S INFLUENCE ON NEWSPAPERS

QUESTIONS #13-#16

	COLOR	DESIGN	GRAPHICS	PHOTO
NEWSPAPERS				
Less than 20,000	3.7	3.0	5.0	1.5
20,001- 40,000	2.0	2.9	3.7	1.0
More than 40,001	3.9	2.7	4.6	1.1
SUBTOTAL	9.6	8.6	13.3	3.6

TABLE #3

USA TODAY'S INFLUENCE ON PERSONAL VIEWS

QUESTIONS #17-#20

	COLOR	DESIGN	GRAPHICS	PHOTO
NEWSPAPERS				
Less than 20,000	6.2	2.5	5.0	1.2
20,001- 40,000	5.8	5.0	5.8	2.5
More than 40,000	6.9	4.4	6.2	0.0
SUBTOTAL	18.9	11.9	17.0	3.7
TOTAL	28.5	20.5	30.3	7.3

might have been more definitive, the more extensive alternative was dropped. It would have lengthened the survey to five pages and have made response time too long.

The overall average of the eight questions was disappointingly low (tables #2 and #3). The most influential rank order characteristic--graphics--only scored an average 4.4, below a median rating of 5. In the categorical questions, color rated highest but still only pulled a 6.4 score. (This score is based on giving "greatly influenced" a 10 rating, "mildly influenced" a 5 rating and "no influence" a 0 rating).

The results of the four visual characteristic groups was correctly predicted in the categorical section but slightly off in the rank order section (table #1). As predicted, color was the most influential choice in the categorical, personal preference section. Graphics came in second, design third and photography a lackluster fourth. In the rank order, newspaper influence section, graphics was a strong first, color second, design third and photography a poor fourth.

If we look at the compilation of both sets of average scores, graphics was given the highest influence factor. By adding its ratings (4.4 and 5.8) graphics compiled a 10.2 total rating. As expected color, design and photography finished in the order listed here (table #1).

What is most distinctive about these ratings is the relative distance between the scores (table #4). Each of the



TABLE #4

BREAKDOWN BY RESPONDING NEWSPAPER

QUESTIONS #13-#16, #17-#20

20,000 OR LESS

Newspaper	Questions #13-#16				Questions #17-#20			
	Col.	Des.	Gra.	Pho.	Col.	Des.	Gra.	Pho.
Cambridge, MD	8	0	8	0	10	0	5	0
Vineland, NJ	2	7	7	3	5	5	5	5
Brownsville, PA	5	5	5	3	5	5	5	0
Milton, PA	0	0	0	0	5	0	5	0
TOTAL	15	12	20	6	25	10	20	5
AVERAGE	3.7	3.0	5.0	1.5	6.2	2.5	5.0	1.2

20,001-40,000

Annapolis, MD	0	0	5	0	5	0	5	0
Frederick, MD	0	0	1	0	0	0	5	0
Lanham, MD	0	8	8	0	5	10	5	0
Shrewsport, NJ	7	6.5	5	6	5	5	5	5
Chambersbury, PA	0	3	0	0	10	10	10	10
Indiana, PA	5	0	3	0	10	5	5	0
TOTAL	12	17.5	22	6	35	30	35	15
AVERAGE	2.0	2.9	3.6	1.0	5.8	5.0	5.8	2.5

**TABLE #4  
(continued)**

BREAKDOWN BY RESPONDING NEWSPAPER

QUESTIONS #13-#16, #17-#20

Newspaper	Questions #13-#16				Questions #17-#20			
	Col.	Des.	Gra.	Pho.	Col.	Des.	Gra.	Pho.
Wilmington, DE	2	1	4	0	5	5	5	0
Baltimore MD	2	0	2	3	5	5	0	0
New Brunswick, NJ	3	3	5	0	5	5	5	0
Beaver, PA	4	1	1	4	5	0	5	0
Erie, PA	7	5	2	2	10	5	10	0
Johnston, PA	3	2	3	0	5	5	5	0
Tarentum, PA	10	10	10	0	10	10	10	0
Pittsburgh, PA	0	0	10	0	10	0	10	0
TOTAL	31	22	37	9	55	35	50	0
AVERAGE	3.9	2.7	4.6	1.1	6.9	4.4	6.2	0.0

first three characteristics are nearly a full point apart. This signifies a robust difference in the journalists' perceptions of USA Today's influence. There is no hair splitting between the fact that graphics was first, color and design came in second and third respectively and photography was a clearly insignificant factor. Noteworthy is the lack of influence of photography. Whenever photography was mentioned in the responses, it fared poorly. Mostly it was not mentioned at all.

There are some other questions to be answered on these scores. Firstly, why was there a difference between the two orders? The use of rank order and categories probably had some significance. What is more decisive is the actual effect of USA Today's influence. The newspaper has been given high marks for its use of graphics, especially its use of at least four color graphics daily. The presence of these graphics has seemingly made a strong impression on editors. The impression has contributed to editors' expanded use of graphics, as seen in responses to other survey questions (tables #5-#11).

Secondly, why does color rank higher in journalists' personal preferences? There is the strong indication that the responding journalists' newspapers changed to using more color in the last three years, with an increase from twenty-six average and frequent uses of color to forty uses (table #5). While these responses show color usage is increasing, for many newspapers conversion to and expansion of color use

TABLE #5

USE OF VISUAL ELEMENTS

NUMBER OF RESPONSES BROKEN DOWN INTO FIVE CATEGORIES

QUESTIONS #4 AND #5

QUESTION #4 The Summer of 1982

	Yes	Frequently	Moderately	Rarely	No
Color Photographs	0	1	3	6	9
Color Graphics	0	3	4	5	7
Spot Color	2	8	5	3	1
B & W Photographs	6	8	5	0	0
B & W Graphics	3	6	5	4	1
TOTAL	11	26	22	18	18

QUESTION #5 The Summer of 1985

	Yes	Frequently	Moderately	Rarely	No
Color Photographs	3	3	5	3	5
Color Graphics	3	8	3	1	4
Spot Color	5	6	4	4	0
B & W Photographs	8	8	3	0	0
B & W Graphics	6	6	5	2	0
TOTAL	25	31	20	10	9
Difference between 1985 and 1982	+14	+5	-2	-8	-9

TABLE #6

CHANGES IN IMPORTANCE OF DESIGN, MAKE-UP AND LAYOUT

QUESTION #6

Yes	13
No	3

TABLE #7

STAFF CHANGES BETWEEN 1985 AND 1982

QUESTION #7

Design	+4
Make-up/Layout	-1 (Three dropped, two added)
Photography	+6
Art	+8
Reproduction	+3

TABLE #8

CHANGES IN EDITORIAL POLICY

QUESTION #8

Yes	6
No	6

TABLE #9

FREQUENCY OF READING USA TODAY

QUESTION #10

Five times a week	8
Three times a week	2
(Two times a week)	1
Once a week	6
Never	2

TABLE #10

USA TODAY INFLUENCE ON PERSONAL PERCEPTION

QUESTION #11

Yes	8
No	9

TABLE #11

VISUAL ELEMENTS ASSOCIATED WITH USA TODAY

FREQUENCY OF RESPONSES

QUESTION #12

Color Photographs	17
Color Graphics	19
Color Weather Map	15
Spot Color	11
Color Coordinated Sections	16
Design Formula Repeated Daily	17
Others (Readability) (Short stories)	2

is an expensive proposition. That financial block may have caused some editors and designers to have wanted to add color but couldn't do so for economic reasons.

The statistical breakdown of the three newspaper group size categories in reference to the eight questions raised a host of interesting findings. Many findings did not agree with the hypotheses.

The highest overall influence average was recorded by the large newspaper size (more than 40,001 circulation) group. The medium newspaper size (20,001-40,000 circulation) group came in second and the small newspaper size (less than 20,000 circulation) group finished last (table #1).

The results did not match the hypotheses. I had predicted the middle circulation group would finish first and that the large circulation group would finish second.

I also predicted the small circulation group would finish last, which it did.

#### RESULTS ANALYSES

What do the results mean? I predicted the middle circulation group newspapers would finish first because they have a reasonable amount of capital to make the expensive changes in visual newspaper equipment and methods. The middle circulation group newspapers also are, I believed, more flexible to make extensive changes than the large circulation group. I predicted the large circulation newspapers would also have less of a need to change



according to USA Today influence because many presently have identities all their own (note the often caustic and unyielding responses from the Pittsburgh Press and Baltimore Sun journalists that are cited later).

What pushed the large circulation newspaper group into the lead was second place scores in both question blocks-- 12.4 in the rank order questions and 17.5 in the categorical questions. The small and medium circulation groups both scored first in one question block and last in the other (table #1).

Why was the large circulation group strong enough in both question blocks to take the lead? Because it scored high in six of the eight questions, finishing first in three questions and second in three questions. In other words, journalists in large circulation newspapers felt and recorded USA Today's visual influence in all areas, using both rating methods (rank order and categorical) and using both areas of influence scope (organization and personal).

The large circulation newspapers recorded a more general and widespread influence. The question is why? Large newspaper journalists read and looked at USA Today often. (A number of small-sized newspaper journalists scored USA Today very high but hardly wrote any comments.) The responses of large circulation newspaper journalists were usually longer and more involved than journalists representing small- and medium-sized newspapers. Their responses seem to show they have a more thorough and comprehensive knowledge of other

newspapers and journalism in general.

Overall, the scoring of each of the three newspaper circulation size groups did not have any great bearing on any of the four visual characteristics being studied (tables #1-#3). The only figures which were slightly out of kilter were the large circulation group's score on personal preference in photography (large circulation-0, medium-2.5 and small-1.2) and the small circulation group in the personal preference in design (large circulation-4.4, medium-5 and small-2.5). Their zero score in the photography question could be a statistical flaw. No clear-cut reasons were given but many journalists and photographers have complained about the numerous "head shots" and emphasis on color over black and white photographs, regardless of content, published by USA Today.

Journalists responded with comments on the types of influence of each characteristic. Following is a synopsis of those comments on each characteristic's influence.

#### COLOR

Most of the comments on color were positive. The most complimentary comment came from Prince George's (PA.) Journal Editor Linda Searing, who underscored some of her comment for emphasis. She wrote, "Color is the big ID factor. They use it frequently--and generally (tho <sic> not always), they use it quite well." She also added that her

newspaper had been publishing color before USA Today appeared.

Paul Hess, executive editor of the Valley News Dispatch, Tarentum, Pennsylvania, wrote USA Today "has driven home the importance of color and graphics as tools to attract and keep readers."

Indiana (PA.) Gazette co-publisher Joe Donnelly said USA Today has generated the "need for improved color by all newspapers."

Dick D'Agostino, who is the design director of the Baltimore Sun, had a negative comment. he said, "We developed a 'pastel' color chart to help prevent the use of garish colors like those in USA Today." While this is far from complimentary, the comment does demonstrate the scope of negative responses to USA Today color.

#### DESIGN

The importance and influence of USA Today design was noted by the journalists. However, it did not get a unanimous vote but a healthy display of notices.

Michael K. Zastudil, who is the editor of The Telegraph of Brownville, Pennsylvania, said USA Today "has made everyone more aware of the importance of eye-catching design, graphics, etc."

Wayne Magielnicki, Sunday editor of The Home News of New Brunswick, New Jersey, wrote, "Me personally, very little; but I recognize the effect it has had on others,"

meaning journalists. He also noted the newspaper commissioned a redesign by top-flight newspaper designer Robert Lockwood. He described the redesign as "very un-USA Today--more like the Baltimore Sun/Philadelphia Inquirer." The last comment shows USA Today design is well-known, but not always well liked.

One journalist went to the heart of the matter. Arthur Z. Kamin, former editor of The Daily Register of Shrewsburg, New Jersey, proclaimed, "I think many of us are trying to capture or emulate the USA Today look and some of its packaging qualities."

Vineland (N.J.) Times Journal Sports Editor Jerry Covella wrote about the USA Today repeating design style, "Yes, we've tried to incorporate the modular look into our paper."

However, the repetition of USA Today design and make-up has riled some detractors. They criticize the newspaper for looking too similar day in and day out. D'Agostino labeled this feeling with this description, "Brief and compact packaging of information is a point well taken. USA Today's 'design' is a daily 'fill-in' the material."

#### GRAPHICS

Statistically, graphics was the big winner among the characteristics (tables #1-#3). However, it did not receive a vast number of compliments nor comments. That may be

because its prominence is not contested.

Searing of the Prince George's Journal gave a blanket explanation of the USA Today influence. She wrote, "Our information-graphics style is a take-off from USA Today--as it is at most papers."

J. Bruce Baumann, assistant managing editor/graphics of the Pittsburgh Press, said, "USA Today brought us great graphics and superb reproduction."

George Fattman, editor of The Tribune-Democrat of Johnstown, Pennsylvania, mentioned his newspaper looks to magazines and other sources for graphics influence.

#### PHOTOGRAPHY

Photography's influence was so minimal there was hardly a mention of it in the comments. The one most acidic and pointed comment was by the Pittsburgh Press' Baumann. He said USA Today "set photojournalism and design back 50 years." The lack of comments goes along with the lack of influence noted in the low rankings in the statistical questions.

#### HAS THE LOOK OF USA TODAY AFFECTED THE WAY YOU PERCEIVE NEWSPAPERS?

(QUESTION #11)

This was a major question of the survey (table #10). Seventeen journalists answered the question and nine said no

or something akin to that. Eight said yes or wrote positive comments. One answer was neutral and another did not respond.

"No." That's all seven of the nine negative respondents wrote. Of the other two, one said it was a model for quality reproduction but answered negatively to its use of photographs and graphics and its journalistic philosophy. The other said, "not really."

Six of the positive responses said "yes" and then added positive comments. One of the surveys (which did not specify a yes or a no answer) had a definitely positive comment. The other survey, defined as a positive answer, had the following response, "Need for improved color use by all newspapers."

The positive comments were very generous and well-rounded. Among them were, "Yes, it shows how a paper can be more eye-catching...", a response from Fattman of The Tribune-Democrat. Frank Keegan of the Public Opinion of Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, said, "Yes. USA Today has proved what is possible." Searing of the Prince George's Journal wrote, "Yes--I think it's helped 'tree' papers (editors, actually) from stodginess--& opened their minds to new/different ways of looking at what we do."

When these positive and negative responses are broken into the three newspaper circulation size categories (table #10), two categories did not split evenly between positive and negative responses. Of the six more than 40,001

categories responses, four were in the negative camp. On the other hand, of the six responses from the 20,001 to 40,000 category, four were in the positive camp. This can be supportive of the original hypothesis that the medium-sized newspapers will be the most affected by USA Today. (The smaller newspaper size category was almost equally divided.)

HAS THERE BEEN A CHANGE IN THE VISUAL ELEMENTS  
IN YOUR NEWSPAPER DURING THE LAST THREE YEARS?

(QUESTIONS #4 AND #5)

The journalists were asked to rate the use of five visual elements--color photographs, color graphics, spot color, black and white photographs and black and white graphics--in their newspaper (table #5). One question asked for a listing of frequency of use in the summer of 1982 and in what was the "present," the summer of 1985. Three years ago was selected as a comparison date because USA Today was first published on 15 September 1982.

Most journalists noted increase or decrease of use or, in some cases, inception of use with responses like "more," "less," "frequently and prominently" and "less frequently and less prominently." There were no other descriptive comments than the aforementioned.

The responses showed a marked increase in use of visual elements during the last three years. In 1982, a total of thirty-seven elements were used or used frequently, twenty-

two were used moderately and thirty-six were used rarely or not at all, according to all responses. In 1985, fifty-six visual elements were used or used frequently, twenty were used moderately and nineteen were used rarely or not at all. That is a 51.4 percent increase in frequent use and a 47.2 percent decrease in rare and no usage. This is an important change in daily newspapers.

The vast increase was in color photographs and color graphics. The journalists said four newspapers used these two visual elements frequently or regularly in 1982. Three years later there were seventeen newspapers using the elements frequently or regularly. In the same period spot color usage went up slightly and black and white photographs and graphics were used moderately more.

Why was there such a pronounced increase in the use of visual elements? The most obvious answer is the general increase and interest in newspaper graphics, design and color use. Nearly every journalism publication has written about this increase. Citations to this trend were made earlier in this thesis. Clearly, American daily newspapers are more aware of the power, popularity and informational impact of visual communication.



HAVE ANY CHANGES IN YOUR NEWSPAPER'S LOOK  
CHANGED BECAUSE OF THE FOLLOWING REASONS:

(QUESTION #21)

This question listed the following responses:

--Changes had been planned before USA Today came  
out

--Personnel, either veteran or hired in last three  
(years)

--Other.

⋮

Three respondents said that changes had been planned before USA Today appeared. Five said personnel had changed, one of which said an artist had been hired. Two listed both of the above choices. Two cited all three choices and one cited only "other." Six did not respond.

Wayne Mogielnicki of the Home News said the newspaper had increased color capacity and had hired a "G.M." (presumably a general manager) and "new artists."

Dick D'Agostino of the Baltimore Sun expressed a general feeling of independence from any USA Today influence. He wrote:

Although USA Today is in our market--our changes originated from managerial & editorial redirection. We feel our product has great integrity and should not emulate in design or tone a product which is directed to a different readership.

## VI. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

USA Today has vastly influenced today's daily newspapers. Its visual characteristics--especially graphics, color and design--have pioneered a new era in American journalism. Before USA Today's 1982 inception, daily top-quality newspaper color was noticed in some parts of the country, in only some newspapers. What USA Today did was to explode its color and informational graphics to the mass of Americans, to make it a daily offering in thousands of honor boxes on hundreds of hometown street corners. Its brassy, technicolor look has contributed to its 1.4 million daily circulation.

We know the average person on the street is reading and buying USA Today. What about American journalists?

The survey of top journalists at daily newspapers in four states indicate USA Today had a noticeable impact. Their comments showed a clear knowledge of the newspaper and its graphics, color and design. Comments indicated the journalists thought their peers had had their heads and minds turned by USA Today. The consensus was that the "nation's newspaper" had been obviously copied and imitated by their own newspapers and by other dailies. Increases in graphics and color use were tied to USA Today. An important aspect of this influence was that all respondents knew of the product. Some respondents said the newspaper had little influence but none had any questions about the newspaper and its look. Whether it be love or hate, everyone seemed to

know what they were praising or lambasting.

The survey found that graphics was the most influential visual characteristic, beating out color by a 30.3 to a 27.5 average score, a 10.1 percent lead. Design was third with a 20.5 average score and photography was a distant third with a 7.3 average score (tables #1-#3). Color scored a slight bit better than graphics when it came to the personal feelings of the designers and editors. Not only did photography place last in all eight questions, but it was scored 0.0 by journalists on large circulation dailies.

Broken down by circulation sizes, one general statement can be made: The larger the newspaper, the more the influence. The larger circulation category had a 29.8 average score, the medium circulation category had a 28.7 average score and the small circulation category had a 27.1 average score (tables #1-#3). Those are leads of 3.8 and 9.9 percent for the large circulation group. The most significant in these scores came in comparing the two questions, one on the influence on the newspaper and the other on the influence on the journalist. While there was more of a personal influence, the scores for the small circulation category were about the same (13.2 for newspaper and 13.9 for personal/a 5.3 percent difference). The medium circulation group showed a huge difference (9.6 and 19.1/a 98.9 percent difference). The same pattern was noticeable but not as strong in the large circulation category (12.3 and 17.5/a 42.3 percent difference) (tables #1-#3).

In one question the respondents were asked if USA Today had influenced their newspaper's look. Eight responded yes and nine responded no.

Why were larger newspapers and their journalists more influenced by USA Today? I believe larger newspapers are staffed with more designers, more persons who possess advanced graphics, design and reproduction skills and who are flexible to industry innovations. Also, the large circulation size and massive circulation distribution network of USA Today makes it more of a concern to large newspapers.

Other survey questions showed the concern of journalists for visual communication in newspapers. In 1982 the journalists surveyed said they used visual elements at a rate of thirty-seven times (as asked in this survey). In 1985 they were up to a rate of fifty-six, an increase of 51 percent (table #5). Their answers about not using visual elements dropped accordingly, from thirty-six to nineteen.

Asked if there had been changes in their newspapers during that time, thirteen said yes and only three said no (table #6). Only one paper reported reducing its design/layout/photo/art/reproduction staffs by one member while the others reported adding twenty-four persons.

When asked which USA Today design characteristics they most attached to the newspaper, color graphics were mentioned nineteen times, color photos and its design formula repeated daily were next with seventeen mentions and

color coordinated sections was fourth with sixteen mentions (table #11).

When asked if their newspapers had made any policy changes because of USA Today, six said yes and six said no (table #8).

What has been the influence of USA Today? I believe it has been on its readers more than on journalists. That's why the journalists commented strongly on its effect but didn't score it very highly when considering its impact on their newspapers. Notice how much higher scores on personal feeling were than on the affect on newspapers. The personal feelings registered by journalists conformed to the feelings of most USA Today readers and the readers of their daily newspapers. These feelings are--they like attractive, complex graphic presentations of the news.

What USA Today has done is influence its readers? It's those readers--many of whom also subscribe to a hometown daily--who have shaped the response to USA Today. Journalists who are perceptive enough hear, understand and respond to their readers wishes and desires, realize USA Today has influenced in their changing habits of American readers. Newspapers are turning to color and graphics. Why? Because they are informative and look good and also because they must compete with the colorful and informative USA Today.

For too long American newspapers have not been responsive to their markets and the needs of their

consumers. USA Today took a radically new stance by studying its market and designing a product attractive to those consumers. It is that approach--along with the stunning graphics, color, design and photos of USA Today--which will prove to be its most weighty influence.

## VII. ENDNOTES

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