**A Critique of Huffington Post’s Investigative Article: “Trump’s Travel Ban Forever Changed The Lives Of Muslims Around The World”**

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Last week, Huffington Post published an excellent and sobering article about the effects of Trump’s travel ban on hundreds of Muslim lives. The article is based on over a year-long investigation by HuffPost reporters, and the gripping presentation of their findings is reflective of the amount of time they spent working on this. HuffPost is not exactly known for being a pillar of investigative journalism, but I thought this piece showcased incredible work.

I was struck by how this was set up in a much more visually engaging way than your average news article. The webpage loads in dark mode, with a header image of an older man staring somberly at a picture of (presumably) a young relative on his cellphone. The font of the article is slightly larger than average, and the words are given plenty of breathing space so that the reader’s eyes never feel taxed by tight, thick blocks of text.

The tone is set perfectly from the very first sentence: “Mohammed Saleh never got a chance to say goodbye to his son.” Wow. This first graf immediately pulls the reader in with a heartbreaking anecdote: Mohammed’s 20-year-old son, Ayman, died of a congenital heart condition in Yemen because he was refused a visa that would have allowed him to join Mohammed in the U.S. and receive life-saving treatment.

HuffPost’s reporters attempted to quantify the repercussions of Trump’s travel ban – a daunting task. Over the course of a year, they interviewed dozens of immigrant families, poured over hundreds of legal documents, and gathered data from organizations like the ACLU, the National Iranian American Council, Muslim Advocates, and various law offices specializing in immigration and travel issues. The reporters make it very clear that their data is (obviously) not comprehensive, but they claim to have conducted the first quantitative analysis of its kind on this issue.

The results of their research are visualized in a series of graphs scattered throughout the article. The graphs are set up in a style much like the Pew Research Center is known to favor, which I liked. Some of them were more easily understandable than others. My least favorite was one called “Wait time from visa application to visa interview,” because it took me a solid couple minutes to fully grasp what I was looking at (though maybe that says more about me than the graph-maker).

I also loved how the article included powerful, intimate images to humanize the subject matter. Sometimes data-heavy articles risk compromising emotional appeal by focusing too much on numbers and charts. HuffPost’s excellent use of pictures made empathizing with the families in the story feel effortless.

Even with the use of pictures, in my opinion the writers didn’t capture the story’s full emotional punch. There were several number-heavy grafs that made my eyes start to glaze over (again, though, might say more about me than the story). I know writing a data-driven story is a hard balancing act, and I doubt many journalists get it just right. HuffPost made the data come to life by using anecdotes, pictures, and graphs to illustrate key points, but there were still moments when all the dates and numbers and percentages started to feel more surgical than human.

My favorite part about this article is the fact that the journalists included a [link](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/11w02tTBHguxfQljb2--fN-c3kEaiSpHhnpW6CYkBgQY/edit#gid=0) where readers can access an abridged, anonymized version of the raw data they relied on for the story. When I clicked through, lo and behold, I found a Google Docs spreadsheet set up exactly like the ones we made in class! The reporters utilized 874 unique records, each entry representing facts about a Muslim individual affected by the ban. The attributes included the person’s reported nationality, country of residence, date they applied for a visa to the U.S. (of any kind), date of their visa interview, and various potential losses they may have experienced as a direct result of the travel ban.

I may or may not have had a bit of a nerd moment when I realized I could create a copy of the spreadsheet and manipulate the data myself. Hello, pivot tables! The people represented in the data came from a variety of countries — everywhere from Syria and Iran to Somalia, Kyrgyzstan, and even Norway. I was interested to know which of these nationalities appeared to be the most targeted by the ban. So I created a pivot table and found that when the columns for “Iranian” and “Iran” are combined (I thought that was a little sloppy of the journalist), over 300 individual data sets are from people of Iranian nationality — far and away the highest represented group in the spreadsheet. The second highest group was actually people from the United States (over 155), which I found interesting.

On this note, I do have one significant critique of their data. I thought the column on nationality could have been cleaned up quite a bit. For example, there are multiple entries denoting U.S. nationality, but then in brackets within that cell there might be clarifying information like “U.S. [Libyan origin]” or “U.S. [in U.S. since 1992, Yemeni origin]” or “U.S. [LPR].” This makes it difficult to calculate exactly how many people reported being of U.S. nationality. If I were the journalist, I would have split the cells and created a separate column for clarifying information or details about nationality, leaving the country name by itself.

I thought HuffPost did an absolutely incredible job with this article. The story presented remarkable data on a topic that affects hundreds of lives, and it did so in an accessible way. The reporters presented their findings in a visually gripping and emotionally authentic manner, and for the sake of transparency they even shared a version of their raw data for readers like myself who might be interested in delving deeper.