

## **Pink Slime Memo**

Date: November 29, 2012  
To: Dr. Coppola, PTC 601 Colleagues  
From: Danielle German  
Subject: Pink Slime

By now just about everyone knows of the controversy this past year over a product called “Pink Slime.” Pink slime is a term coined by a USDA scientist describing the “lean, finely textured beef” that makes up most of America’s hamburger meat (“Lean Beef,” 2012). Most Americans have eaten at least a hamburger or two in their lifetime, but with all the information on pink slime, what sources are giving accurate, unbiased information? In this memo, I will examine two articles, both from the newspaper, *USA Today*, that discuss the recent controversy in different ways. The first, “Lean Beef or Pink Slime? It’s All in a Name” can be found [here](#), while the second, “LFTB is 100% Beef” can be found [here](#). I will describe how the former article is a less biased, more informative document and how the latter is an opinion masquerading as news.

### **Authority**

Although both articles were published by *USA Today*, one article comes from a reputable news source, while the other was penned at the request of the beef industry. “Lean Beef or Pink Slime? It’s All in a Name,” is an editorial, which means it was written by one of the editors of the newspaper. Generally, a professional journalist will try to give solid background information on the subject and have a more middle-of-the-road viewpoint, avoiding extremes. However, it is not clear who exactly wrote it, which generally makes an article less trustworthy. “LFTB is 100% Beef,” was written by Russell Cross, a former administrator of USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service, at the request of Beef Products, Inc. This article clearly states the name and profession of the author. Neither article provided phone numbers or email addresses through which the public may contact the author.

### **Accuracy**

Sources for factual information in these articles come from two different places. The editorial relies on links to other *USA Today* articles as sources of further information. These articles are written by various journalists who work for the newspaper. The piece mentions some factual information, but does not state the sources from which the specifics originate. The opinion article cites no evidence other than the words of the author, Russell Cross. Cross takes sole responsibility for the article and its contents.

## Audience

*USA Today* is a newspaper that provides short articles on a wide range of topics. Their target audience is the reader that “prefers to learn a little about a lot of things” (*USA Today*, 2006). According to the “USA Today::Audience” page on its website, most of their readers are male and only about half of them graduated from college. The median age of their readership is fifty years old. *USA Today* is intended for people that like to know what is generally going on in the world, without delving too much into one subject. It provides an opposing view to every editorial so the reader can come to his or her own conclusion about the subject presented.

## Objectivity

Objectivity is extremely important to note in any article of a newspaper. In the article, "Lean Beef or Pink Slime? It's All in a Name," objectivity is questionable. The author uses inflammatory words such as "yuck", "repulsed consumers", and "beauricratic mumbo jumbo" to describe the product and its advocacy (“Lean Beef,” 2012). Interspersed throughout the article are more objective statements about the product, such as blaming the unfortunate catch phrase of "pink slime" and claiming it is "probably safer than the rest of raw ground beef" (“Lean Beef,” 2012). The author is trying to present facts but also leans towards a particular, inflammatory point of view about the product. In the opinion article, however, the author has no objectivity. Cross is specifically writing the article at the request of Beef Products, Inc. Clearly, the views expressed in the writing serve only the beef industry. There is much advertising in the web pages for both works, but the advertisements are clearly differentiated from the content of the articles.

## Currency

It is important that an article be current, preferably within a year or less of the current date. Both articles were posted to the *USA Today* website on April 1st, 2012. The editorial was posted at 6 pm, and its last update was only a minute later. Cross's article was posted slightly before 6 pm, and updated at around 10 after. These articles are current because they were originally posted only a few months ago. Still, they have not been updated since then, and increasingly become less relevant.

## Coverage

An article should clearly indicate whether the author is finished with the work, or the work is still ongoing. In regards to these two articles, there is no sign to tell the reader that the author is still at work. Both web pages are completed with advertisements and a comments section. The editorial piece is slightly more confusing, as there is no author signature. Instead, it ends with a quip, which, sometimes, can be a great indicator of closure. The opinion article is signed by its author and looks to be complete.

## Quality of the Page

A website's quality goes a long way in determining whether or not the content can be trusted. The *USA Today* website is comprehensive, with links that work and that bring the reader to other

articles within the newspaper's online system. The web page has good design properties and is easy to navigate. Because these articles are editorial and opinion, respectively, the web pages clearly display a link to an article of the opposing viewpoint. Both articles also clearly explain the process with which the editorial and opinion articles are selected, and give the reader a chance to respond to the article in a "Comments" section at the bottom of the page.

In summation, neither article is free of bias. The editorial piece of work, while providing more facts and links to other articles within *USA Today*, is not devoid of the author's opinion. Cross's article, however, can only be called biased, as he is writing on behalf of the beef industry. The reader can pick out facts from the former article, but cannot assume any information is unbiased in the latter.

## References

Lean beef or pink slime? It's all in a name. (2012, April 1). *USA Today*. Retrieved from <http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/opinion/editorials/story/2012-04-01/pink-slime-lean-beef/53933770/1>.

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