WRITING TO INSPIRE

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ABSTRACT

Journalists have for many years used narrative tools to write impactful news stories. Men like new journalism pioneer Tom Wolfe may not have been surprised that a narrative-style feature story made the majority of research participants in this small study — intended to show which types of news stories garner the greatest level of social action from readers — report feeling more desire to be socially active in aiding disaster recovery efforts on The Participant Index’s Social Actions Scale. As hypothesized through the research premise, narrative elements implemented in the story played a major role in many of the participant’s positive reactions toward the story, as compared to institutional and economic stories that implemented these writing techniques to lesser degrees. The feature story didn’t include much context around the story it told, but it offered a perceivable scene for the readers to relate to and detailed characters for them to empathize with. Although the story was able to prompt a desire to be socially active and aid in the situation, it did not offer enough information for the participants to feel prepared to help. For a news story to have true impact in the world outside of a reader’s mind, it needs to offer an outlet for the emotional reactions it creates by answering questions, such as how readers can participate in relief efforts, both immediately and in the future.