FANNING THE FLAMES: REPORTING TERROR IN A NETWORKED WORLD

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FOREWORD

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The use of fear as a weapon in political campaigning is long established, and often highly effective for candidates who deploy it. More often than not, spreading fear means the demonizing of a section of society: immigrants, unions, African Americans, bankers—and in this year's US presidential election, American Muslims.

Republican candidate Donald Trump's racist language and xenophobic pledges are tapping into an electorate made fearful by the perceived threats of global terrorism. The violent attacks over the past year—in the US and France, in particular—have provided a highly charged backdrop for an already polarized campaign. In December 2015 Trump's campaign released a statement on the mass shooting in San Bernardino by suspected ISIS sympathizers, saying, "Donald J. Trump is calling for a total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States until our country's representatives can figure out what is going on."

Trump's alarmist rhetoric, far from undermining his candidacy, spurred him to a resounding victory over other Republican contenders. The initial success of Trump's candidacy necessitates a widespread examination of the media's role in amplifying the divisive extremism and falsehoods of his campaign.

Covering terrorism brings its own challenges for media organizations and increasingly for social media companies too. Journalists and the press have historically played a dual role of both amplifying and interrogating campaign messages and political statements. Reporting terrorist attacks fulfills the aims of the terrorism itself in spreading fear, but stifling or limiting coverage can fuel both distrust in the news media and undemocratic practices such as censorship.

In the past decade, the mainstream media has been joined by a plethora of social platforms in forming the public discussion around terror. This has allowed candidates, propagandists, activists, and all citizens to contribute to an often unmediated political debate. As technology companies expand into publishing territory, they occupy an increasingly important and sometimes conflicted position. At a White House summit on combating terrorism, Facebook, Google, and Twitter were key participants.

The Tow Center for Digital Journalism at the Columbia Graduate School for Journalism has partnered with Democracy Fund Voice as part of a project examining the links between terrorism, political rhetoric and media coverage with particular reference to the impact on American Muslims. We are releasing three white papers looking at how recent events inform the current political cycle, linking terrorism, political rhetoric, and media coverage with particular reference to the impact on American Muslims. The motivation is to improve the understanding of these relationships, and to engage journalists and social media companies in developing improved reporting of terrorism in a live, digital environment for the benefit of everyone in society.

Writer and lawyer Rafia Zakaria focuses on research of search and social media to show how the rhetoric and discussion of Muslims in relation to terrorism not only creates a skewed public discourse but also puts US Muslims in a special category of those tracked, surveilled, and discriminated against by law. Journalist Burhan Wazir examines case studies from the past twenty years to show how the links between terrorism, political messaging, and reporting have evolved. Charlie Beckett, director of the London School of Economics media policy think tank POLIS, examines what the standards and guidelines for reporting and editing during terrorist attacks might be developed and modified for a digital world.

Their initial reporting highlights both the lack of standardized best practices and the nature of the challenges a distributed news environment presents. The papers emphasize the need for robust protection of First Amendment rights in the US, and call upon the social platforms to enter into regular conversation with publishers on editorial decisions and content guidelines.

We are grateful to those who helped shape and deliver the project. The support of Democracy Fund Voice for commissioning the project, the editors Paul Harris and Nausicaa Renner for helping shape and deliver the papers against a tight deadline, Kathy Zhang at the Tow Center for orchestrating the ongoing activity and events in this area, and the staff at Columbia Journalism School, the Columbia Journalism Review, and the Tow Center for their tireless contributions.

We look forward to feedback and responses and continuing our work in this area over the coming weeks and months.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Terrorism is a brutal and violent practice, but it is also a media phenomenon. Terror is vital news: a dramatic, important story that the public needs to know about and understand. But terrorism also relies on such publicity to disrupt society, provoke fear, and demonstrate power. This problematic relationship predates digital technology. In 1999, American historian Walter Laqueur wrote:

> It has been said that journalists are terrorists' best friends, because they are willing to give terrorist operations maximum exposure. This is not to say that journalists as a group are sympathetic to terrorists, although it may appear so. It simply means that violence is news, whereas peace and harmony are not. The terrorists need the media, and the media find in terrorism all the ingredients of an exciting story.[1]

So what is the responsibility of journalists, who supply the oxygen of publicity? Journalism that reports, analyzes, and comments upon terror faces a challenge in creating narratives that are accurate, intelligible, and socially responsible. Many of the issues journalists face also relate to wider journalism practices, especially around breaking news and conflict journalism.[2]

In the last few years, this problem has become more acute and more complicated technically, practically, and ethically with the acceleration of the news cycle and the advent of social media. News events are amplified by social media, which often host the "first draft" of terror coverage. These platforms are specifically targeted by terrorists and referenced by journalists. Yet these companies often have only a short history of dealing with the political and commercial pressures many newsrooms have lived with for decades. The fear is that reporting of terror is becoming too sensationalist and simplistic in the digitally driven rush and that the role of professional journalism has been constrained and diminished. In February 2016, when the White House sought help to counterterror groups, it invited executives from Facebook, Google, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, Tumblr, and Microsoft to come up with ideas to halt the use of the internet by extremists.[3]

This paper seeks to describe this developing situation in the context of changes in the very nature of journalism and news. It identifies trends, problems, and best practices for more constructive journalism about

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terror. In the first section, the paper will look at the problems facing journalism around terrorism: the increasing speed of the news cycle; new technologies and the limits on resources; the challenge of verification, definition, proportionality; and dealing with spin and propaganda.

The second section explores ways towards better reporting of terror: which systems should be in place; what language journalists should use; how journalists should judge perspective and give context in a fast-moving incident; the responsibilities of the journalist to show empathy, to demonstrate discretion, and to avoid sensationalism; and the possibility of creating narratives that show the relevance of what is happening to different communities and influence policy.

The third section will look at the role of the major platforms, especially Google, Facebook, and Twitter. What impact do they have on audiences? How do they relate to the creation of journalism about terror, especially in disseminating news? Social platforms have become part of the way the public understands and responds to terror events, but their ethical, social, and editorial responsibilities are yet to be determined. The role of the platforms is evolving significantly as they become part of the news flow. How transparent should they be about their algorithms or policies that shape the flow of content? New developments, such as live video, are creating fresh dilemmas.

Journalism has a responsibility to help society cope with the threat, reality, and consequences of terrorism. The role of independent, critical, and trustworthy journalism has never been more important. Yet, the news

1 Walter Laqueur. "The New Terrorism: Fanaticism and the Arms of Mass Destruction," Oxford University Press, 1999, p.44.
2 James Rodgers, "Reporting Conflict," 2012, available at: https://he.palgrave.com/page/detail/reporting-conflict-james-rodgers/?sf1=barcode&st1=9780230274464
3 "US asks tech and entertainment industries in fighting terrorism," New York Times, 2016, available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/25/technology/tech-and-media-firms-called-to-white-house-for-terrorism-meeting.html?_r=0

Improving the work of journalists is central to the news media's survival as a vital part of a modern, democratic society.

media has never been under such pressure economically and politically. This paper seeks to add to that pressure with a plea for better reporting. This is not just a moral or academic appeal. Unless journalism responds to the challenges that issues like terror poses, it will become less and less valued. Improving the work of journalists is central to the news media's survival as a vital part of a modern, democratic society.

This is neither a handbook for journalism about terrorism nor a comprehensive research study. The aim of this paper is to provoke reflection and improve the diversity and quality of journalism. This paper also has a self-conscious bias towards American and European media, partly because of the importance of this issue in the current American and European electoral cycles.

KEY FINDINGS

- There is widespread concern that the news media is reporting terror events in a way that can spread fear and confusion. Journalists struggle with the accelerating pace of the news cycle and the complicated and diverse nature of terrorism itself. Especially in the context of breaking news, they have to adapt to the speed and complexity of information flows that are increasingly influenced by the authorities, the digital platforms, and even the terrorists themselves.

- There is a danger that news coverage can provide the publicity the terrorist seeks, as well as add to disinformation through poor verification and lack of context. Such publicity can even be seen to be helping terrorists increase their impact and make their recruitment more effective. The way journalists frame news around terror events can also reinforce prejudices and stereotypes.

- Social media amplifies the communicative scale and impact of terrorism, and it adds to the misinformation and emotional responses to terror events. Journalists using social media as a platform or a source do not always maintain the best editorial standards. Social media has changed the very nature of news around terror, for example, by providing imagery, eyewitness accounts, and live video. But it can also deceive, distort, and distract. Journalists are adapting to this new context, but there are still practical and policy problems in terms of verification and news judgment.

- Digital platforms are now where many people consume news about terrorism. They are influential in filtering information and shaping the flow of news, but they do not have the same ethos or practical capacity and experience as news organizations. They also have not yet come to fully understand their role or accepted their responsibilities in the mediation of terrorism, and are still negotiating their relationship with news media.

- Digital platforms have a special dilemma as open environments that also seek to protect their users from offense. While they provide an immense opportunity for journalists and the public to be better informed and to interact around these events, their algorithms and editing policies are still problematic.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- News media organizations need to have detailed guidelines on all aspects of terrorism coverage. They need to deal with language, significance, and context, as well as accuracy and balance. Coverage needs to be backed up by a self-conscious iterative process that allows journalists to reflect, discuss problems and best practices, and improve. Especially for those organizations that are larger or are multiplatform, these guidelines need to be communicated widely. Coordinated internal systems, including systems such as Slack, should be put in place to make sure best practices are maintained even in breaking news or developing story situations.

- Journalists need to be as transparent as possible with the audience about their sources and the limits of their knowledge. Transparency is key to trust. Social media can be a valid and important source, but it must be verified and put into context.

- News media and digital platforms need to develop better technical and editorial systems for verification and accuracy. This might include using "honest brokers" or other agencies and experts. Fact-checking needs to be central. The principle of "better right rather than first" has to be enforced across all publications or broadcasts on all platforms. Editorial management has to make sure the pressure to be fast does not threaten the audience's right to be able to trust what is published.

- Journalists need to think harder about the way they are framing stories. The news media logic that determines how important a story is and what scale of treatment it gets is too often driven by herd mentality or repeated formulae. Journalists need to reflect on whether they treat similar stories in different places proportionally, and whether they include diverse voices and informed comments.

- News media should invest in the great opportunities for deeper reporting presented by new technologies. Not just to report faster and to more people, but to create better context and clarity. Data visualization offers the opportunity for more fact-based reporting, for example. New platforms offer creative ways to engage with different demographics. But ultimately, better journalism is about digging deeper and looking further. More constructive narratives that include empathy, resilience, and positive responses to terror should be created as part of the news coverage itself. The social impact of news coverage should be considered, not just audience numbers and the drama of the event.

- The digital platforms need to work more closely with news organizations to improve the production and distribution of trustworthy information and informed debate around terror events. They need to bring in more journalistic expertise to improve their own verification and filtering systems. They should use more "honest broker" organizations and be more transparent about their own systems. Above all, they need to accept their responsibilities as de facto editors of news about terror.

Section 1
The Problem With Covering Terrorism

By its very nature, terrorism challenges normal narrative frames and processes. The basic facts themselves are often difficult to establish after a terrorist incident, much less analyze: What happened? Who did it? Why? What is the reaction of the authorities and the public? What policy or political change might it provoke? How can we report it without making it more likely to happen again?

This chapter looks at the challenges of covering terror events. Some of these are new problems, created by technological innovation or economic and political factors. Some are longstanding issues that have become much more complex in the digital environment, making good editorial practices more difficult to carry out.

HISTORICAL COVERAGE OF TERRORISM

Terrorism is always a relative term, and its application has changed over time. Former UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher once labeled Nelson Mandela's anti-apartheid African National Congress party as a "terrorist" organization[4] before later going on to urge his release. The American extreme left-wing group the Weathermen, founded in 1969, began as an anti-imperialist group that bombed government buildings and ended up as a counter-cultural cult. The nationalist Irish Republican Army (IRA) was highly organized along military lines which Thatcher also described as terrorist, but with whom she initiated negotiations.[5] Hamas has won elections and has a strong social service network but has also carried out attacks, including suicide bombings on civilians. The American government describes Hamas as terrorist, while others such as Turkey are prepared to treat it as a political actor in the Middle East and give it support.

Because of the term's subjective nature, some people argue terrorism should not be used at all by journalists.[6] But semantics are only part of the problem. For journalists, part of the challenge has always been how to reflect the perspectives of the authorities and public in their own countries. This is only made more complex with international terrorism and transnational media. For example, this year Turkey was subject to a series of attacks by different groups killing civilians. The way those narratives are framed by Western news media has not been consistent, according to Azzam Tamimi, editor in chief of the London-based Arabic channel Al Hiwar:

> Whereas the Islamic State [Daesh] is considered a menace, the PKK and its affiliates are seen as legitimate actors or even freedom fighters. Few Western journalists can resist the temptation to take sides on ideological or cultural basis. The inherited fear or hate of Islam and Muslims usually manifests itself.[7]

Terrorism has always had a symbiotic relationship with news media, one that predates the internet. Journalist and terrorism expert Jason Burke points out that those involved in violent struggle soon realized the opportunity provided by the arrival of mass media:

In 1956, the Algerian political activist and revolutionary Ramdane Abane wondered aloud if it was better to kill 10 enemies in a remote gully "when no one will talk of it" or "a single man in Algiers, which will be noted the next day" by audiences in distant countries who could influence policymakers.[8]

4 "Margaret Thatcher branded ANC 'terrorist' while urging Nelson Mandela's release," The Independent, 2013, available at: http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/margaret-thatcher-branded-anc-terrorist-while-urging-nelson-mandela-s-release-8994191.html
5 "Thatcher gave approval to talks with IRA," The Guardian, 1999, available at: https://www.theguardian.com/uk/1999/oct/16/northernireland.thatcher
6 "Internal emails show Al Jazeera English banning use of terms "terrorist," "Islamist" and "militant." National Review, 2015, available at: http://www.nationalreview.com/corner/397320/internal-emails-show-al-jazeera-english-banning-use-terms-terrorist-militant-islamist
7 "Drawing the line in coverage of terrorist attacks," Anadolou Agency, 2016, available at: http://aa.com.tr/en/turkey/drawing-the-line-in-coverage-of-terrorist-attacks/537853
8 "How the changing media is changing terrorism," The Guardian, 2016, available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/25/how-changing-media-changing-terrorism

As Burke writes, the same technological advances such as communications satellites which created a globalized media also gave opportunities for expanded publicity for terrorism:

> In 1972, members of the Palestinian Black September group attacked Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics, the first games to be broadcast live and the first to be the target of a terrorist attack. The cameras inevitably switched their focus from the sports to the ongoing hostage crisis.[9]

The September 11 attacks were, of course, a watershed moment. Observing the attacks unfold in real time was a communal event, shared by tens of millions of people around the world. A report by Annenberg on journalism and terror published two years later recognized the internet had become a significant factor.[10] It points out that the internet allowed the public to "aggregate bits of information" independently and extended "reach" for smaller media organizations. It also notes that "problematic information is now available on non-journalistic sites."

Al-Qaeda also exemplified the way that terror organizations have become media producers as well as media subjects. Most famously, Osama bin Laden made a series of videos that allowed him to speak through the world's media. But as Burke has chronicled, from 2005 onwards with the expansion of the internet, the Al-Qaeda network with its widespread, diffuse organization of cells and affiliates prioritized the recording of its activities and the dissemination of its propaganda online.[11] Some of this ended up in mainstream news media, such as the video of the beheading in 2004 of the American contractor Nick Berg in Iraq.[12]

A few years later, the transformative effect of Web 2.0 and the meteoric rise of Facebook, Twitter, and other social networks would utterly reshape that digital context. Although the core editorial concerns of the report would remain, the media landscape in which terror attacks now unfold is on a very different scale.

Terrorism in the age of instant news and social media is a "different beast," said former BBC Global News Director Richard Sambrook in an interview. He has worked through the last three decades and insists the subject is now more complex:

> Twenty years ago... reporting terror was simpler. You knew who had done it. A car bomb goes off outside Harrods, and the IRA communicate directly with code words. The police would know. The issues were more straightforward, and you knew who you were dealing with. Now it's much more complicated. Terrorism is a different beast, and the fact that it is networked or that it is more likely to be indigenous raises a raft of issues.[13]

Terror organizations have become media producers, as well as media subjects.

ISIS again raises the problem of how journalists define terror events. Acts committed in the name of ISIS don't always have clear links with the core organization, and claims of responsibility are more tenuous. This amorphous form of terrorism raises the question of what other violent, ideologically motivated attacks on innocent civilians—designed to gain publicity for a cause and to create fear and reaction—fall under the label of terror. The 2016 attack on the gay nightclub in Orlando, the 2015 shootings in San Bernardino, and the 2016 Munich shopping center shooting were all very different kinds of events described as "terrorism" at some point. If we give a name to one incident, why not another?

9 "How the changing media is changing terrorism," The Guardian, 2016, available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/25/how-changing-media-changing-terrorism
10 Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania, "Reporting on Terrorism: Newsroom Discussion Guide" available at: http://www.annenbergpublicpolicycenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2003_03_reporting-on-terrorism_rpt21.pdf
11 "How the changing media is changing terrorism," The Guardian, 2016, available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/25/how-changing-media-changing-terrorism
12 "American beheaded in revenge for torture," The Guardian, available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/may/12/iraq.alqaida
13 Interview with the author, September 2016

There has been a fundamental shift, from news media having control over the flow of information to a more distributed set of sources and platforms. The journalist is no longer the primary gatekeeper.

THE CHALLENGING NEW CONTEXT FOR THE JOURNALIST AND AUDIENCE

Social platforms are increasingly the place where terrorism is reported first. From ISIS beheadings to video from inside the Bataclan Paris nightclub, these sites are a key news player, sometimes shaping coverage.

There has been a fundamental shift, from news media having control over the flow of information to a more distributed set of sources and platforms. The journalist is no longer the primary gatekeeper. Today's audiences have vastly more immediate and direct access to a greater volume of material and variety of sources online. The public can get information directly from other citizens, the authorities, or even terrorists themselves. The relative ease with which the news media are able to report events quickly and graphically—thanks to digital technology—means that audiences often report they feel overwhelmed and even repulsed by the onslaught of "bad news" events.[14]

Around terror events, live broadcasting, and particularly television, remains the dominant news information source for a majority of the media-consuming public. However, over the last decade, those reports are becoming more reliant on social media. Coverage of the London bombings in 2005 featured grainy mobile phone video of survivors walking away from the wrecked train carriages down underground tunnels.[15] In the wake of that, the BBC set up a user-generated content

(UGC) hub specifically to gather and verify content created by citizens for use in its news.[16] By the attacks in Mumbai in 2008, journalists were able to find imagery and information from citizen photography sites such as Flickr and the 900 tweets published every minute.[17] Traditional news distribution agencies such as Reuters became clearing houses for UGC. AP appointed its first social media editor in 2012.[18]

In 2016, the first phase of broadcast coverage of the attacks in urban centers such as Paris, Brussels, Munich, and Ankara was dominated by both video and stills harvested from social media. ABC News's International Managing Editor Jon Williams, who has been making broadcast news for more than 30 years, points out that this is an historical change in the visibility of news events:

> Clearly in the 1970s and 80s very often incidents would happen without pictures. In 1996 the only imagery of the IRA Manchester bombing came from CCTV some time after the event. Today there would be any number of people recording that on cellphones and inundating social media with it in real time.[19]

14 "Beyoncé, cute kittens or relentless tragedy?," The Guardian, 2015, available at: https://www.theguardian.com/media/2015/feb/01/beyone-cute-kitten-tragedy-news
15 "Smartphone journalism: photographs," BBC, available at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/academy/journalism/skills/filming-and-recording/article/art20130702112133388
16 Valerie Blair-Gagnon, "Social Media at BBC News," 2015, available at: https://www.routledge.com/Social-Media-at-BBC-News-The-Re-Making-of-Crisis-Reporting/Belair-Gagnon/p/book/9781138823488
17 "Mumbai attacks: Twitter and Flickr used to break news," The Daily Telegraph, 2009, available at: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/india/3530640/Mumbai-attacks-Twitter-and-Flickr-used-to-break-news-Bombay-India.html
18 "AP names first international social media and UGC editor," The AP, 2012, available at: http://www.ap.org/Content/Press-Release/2012/AP-names-first-international-social-media-and-UGC-editor
19 Interview with the author, September 2016

New technologies also provide opportunities for other kinds of enhanced visual input such as the live Google Map created by one journalist during the Mumbai attacks.[20] The arrival of live video on social networks means that the citizen (as well as the journalist and terrorist) can become a social network broadcaster. As discussed in the second and third sections, this immediate streamed access creates editorial issues for news organizations and ethical problems for the platforms themselves. At the moment, their use around terror incidents is sporadic but becoming more common.

Social media networks also mean terror news intrudes directly into our intimate media sphere. The same profiles we use for personal content or the consumption of entertainment, routine information, and social exchange are now a space filled with dramatic and shocking images and messages. News is increasingly consumed on mobile devices and smartphones, making the news part our personal, socially connected lives. In their interaction with media, it is not surprising that people react more personally, emotionally, and instantly than ever before.[21]

FRAMING THE NARRATIVE: DEFINITIONS OF "TERRORISM"

There is enormous pressure with a major breaking story to come up with a fresh line amidst the surge of information. Audience expectations of instant reportage combined with the increasing market competition add to that need for journalists to work quickly and at the limits of their abilities and resources. This rush to certainty can lead to false leads from mainstream as well as social media. Journalists and audiences inevitably seek to fit terrorist incidents into a pattern. This is exacerbated by group think among journalists, especially on social media. In the race to publish and in the midst of a dangerous situation it is difficult to maintain a critical attitude to those dispensing authoritative information.

One manifestation of this is the expert commentator, who is often chosen as much for their closeness to a TV studio as for their relevant insights.[22] Live broadcasters are developing a language that relativizes its statements: "this is what is being reported," "this is what we are being told," and "reports on social media suggest." The danger is the audience does not understand the precise nature of the qualifications involved. Adding qualifiers such as "appears to be" or "potential" to "terrorism"

Social media networks also mean terror news intrudes directly into our intimate media sphere.

is highly risky in a breaking news story. "Terrorism" has traditionally been seen as an external threat, such as 9/11, but as the London Bombings of 2005 and many of the incidents of 2016 show, there are "home-grown" terrorists who draw upon international networks as well as "domestic" terrorists with a local or national agenda. Individuals who carry out terror attacks are not necessarily a "lone wolf." Someone with mental health issues might also be a terrorist. The descriptions are rarely clear. Section two makes the case for greater reflection on terminology and sets out some principles.

One option is to never use the word. Al Jazeera English made it clear that its journalists should not use the term, along with others such as "jihadist."[23] BBC guidelines do not ban the use of the term, but admit it is problematic:

> The word "terrorist" itself can be a barrier rather than an aid to understanding. We should convey to our audience the full consequences of the act by describing what happened. We should use words which specifically describe the perpetrator such as "bomber," "attacker," "gunman," "kidnapper," "insurgent," and "militant." We should not adopt other people's language as our own; our responsibility is to remain objective and report in ways that enable our audiences to make their own assessments about who is doing what to whom.[24]

20 Map of Mumbai attacks, available at: https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?ll=18.922445%2C72.832242&spn=0.007054%2C0.007864&hl=en&msa=0&z=17&ie=UTF8&mid=1l6SuyXR-ZLDapOIK8ViEQ3j608Tw
21 Charlie Beckett and Mark Deuze, "On the Role of Emotion in the Future of Journalism," 2016, available at: http://sms.sagepub.com/content/2/3/2056305116662395.long
22 "After the Paris attacks: live news should challenge narratives, not desperately try to create them," Common Dreams, 2015, available at: http://www.commondreams.org/views/2015/11/14/after-paris-attacks-live-news-should-challenge-narratives-not-desperately-try
23 "Internal emails show Al Jazeera English banning use of terms 'terrorist,' 'Islamist' and 'militant.'" National Review, 2015, available at: http://www.nationalreview.com/corner/397320/internal-emails-show-al-jazeera-english-banning-use-terms-terrorist-militant-islamist
24 "Terrorism: Language When Reporting Terrorism," BBC, available at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/editorialguidelines/guidance/terrorism-language/guidance-full

This approach has not changed significantly in principle in response to recent developments in terrorism or media technology.

ABC News in America has a similar approach. International Managing Editor Jon Williams says their journalists should not use the word "terrorism" except when quoting other people:

> Words matter. We would not have described [the 2016 London Russell Square stabbing] as a "potential terror incident." We would just describe it as a stabbing and have put it in the context of other incidents. Our modus operandi is to do what it says on the tin. We would wait to see how someone [in authority] characterized it. With the San Bernardino incident our assumption was that with the prevalence of mass shootings in America we should assume it's just a shooting. It began as a workplace shooting but came into the context of people who had been radicalized but it still requires someone to characterize it as "domestic" terror or "inspired by ISIS."[25]

As Sambrook points out, deciding whether to use the word "terror" is only part of the problem:

> I think it's a bit of a cop out to simply say you won't use the word "terror" or "terrorism." There are some actions to which that term will apply. I think there is a neat way through this. Simply describe what has happened and report what people have said. Recent incidents have shown how many factors are potentially involved. Is the killer suffering from mental illness, or if he shouts "Alluha Akbar" does that make it a Jihadist? In the end, report what has happened and what people say and let the viewer draw their own conclusions.[26]

Above all, the growth of terrorists ascribing a religious motivation to their actions has raised fresh dangers of associating neutral words such as Islamic or Muslim with terrorism. While the terrorist may make religious claims, there is no reason for journalists to treat that uncritically.

AVOIDING HARM: THE NEWS MEDIA'S RELATIONSHIP TO TERRORISM

Terrorists are now media producers themselves. Anders Breivik was acutely conscious of the role the media would have in promoting his beliefs. He sent a 1,500-word manifesto to more than a thousand people just before his first bomb went off.[27] ISIS has an extensive media production capacity, creating videos and articles that are distributed through highly-developed social media activities.[28] They use the kidnapped British journalist John Cantlie as a subject of their videos and then as a presenter.[29] Much of the material is English-language targeted at potential sympathizers or recruits online internationally.[30] To tell the story of what the terrorist is thinking, saying, and doing it is often useful to use this material. But the danger is that even in a critical context this effectively relays and amplifies the terrorist's message. As Erica Chenoweth explains:

> What's important is that the imitative effects of mass shootings and terror attacks may not be unrelated to one another. The blurry distinction between what constitutes mass shootings versus acts of terror means that, functionally, those motivated to obtain notoriety or political power through graphic violence may not really care whether their competitors are "terrorists," "shooters" or something else.[31]

25 Interview with the author, August 2016
26 Interview with the author, September 2016
27 "Inside the warped mind of Anders Brevik," The Daily Telegraph, 2016, available at: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/07/22/anders-breivik-inside-the-warped-mind-of-a-mass-killer/
28 "Inside the surreal world of the Islamic State's propaganda machine," The Washington Post, 2015, available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/inside-the-islamic-states-propaganda-machine/2015/11/20/051e997a-8ce6-11e5-acff-673ae92ddd2b_story.html
29 "British hostage John Cantlie narrates new ISIS video," Heavy, 2016, available at: http://heavy.com/news/2016/03/new-isis-islamic-state-news-pictures-videos-john-cantlie-talks-about-the-american-airstrikes-on-media-kiosks-in-mosul-city-john-cantlie-britain-united-kingdom-hostage-president-obama-full-uncensored/
30 "ISIS is using social media to reach YOU, its new audience," The Daily Beast, 2014, available at: http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/08/31/isis-s-use-of-social-media-to-reach-you-its-new-audience.html
31 "Yes, mass shootings tend to produce copy cats. So do terror attacks," The Washington Post, 2015, available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2015/12/04/yes-mass-shootings-tend-to-produce-copycats-so-do-terror-attacks/

There is always a danger of media giving terrorists details about security operations that help them improve their work. This is particularly relevant in the midst of a terrorist operation. Live video or pictures of a scene may endanger security forces or hamper their work. It is essential that, when the public is at risk, the news media works closely with security officials.

There is also a wider problem that those authorities, especially politicians, frame their commentary on terror events to suit their own interests. Journalists have an obligation to report what powerful people say—but they do not have an obligation to replicate their perspective. As British journalist and former *London Times* editor Simon Jenkins argues, politicians have their own agendas:

> To the media, terrorism is meat and drink. To politicians, it is an opportunity to flex muscles, brandish guns, boast revenge. Talk of war adds ten points to an approval rating. It saved George Bush as it is now saving France's François Hollande. Counter-terror theory may advise caution and an emphasis on normality. Political necessity counsels the opposite; the trumpets and drums of battle. It requires the terrorist's deeds to be amplified, headlined, exaggerated to justify a warlike response.

The sheer volume of terror news may make further attacks more likely. Michael Jetter, a professor at the School of Economics and Finance at Universidad EAFIT in Medellín, Colombia, argues that increased coverage of terror attacks correlates to an increase in their frequency.[32] He also argues that terror tactics that have greater media impact, such as suicide bombings, could lead to their increased popularity. Olivier Roy, French political philosopher and expert on the causes of terror, argues that media coverage helps extremist organizations in recruiting and mobilizing terrorists.[33] He says that the framing of terror events by politicians and the media "valorizes the up rootedness of uprooted people" and provides them with a sense of belonging and meaning.

Language is critical because the public make judgments about risk based on the terminology involved. Just because something creates "terror" does not make it a "terrorist" event. The Daily Mail Online headline on the next page uses the word "terror"—but the sub-head makes it clear that it was not "terror-related":

At least four dead and dozens injured as Thailand is hit by multiple explosions: Mobile phone bombs hidden in plant pots leave Western tourists fleeing resorts in terror

WARNING GRAPHIC CONTENT

- **At least four people have been killed and dozens injured in a wave of bomb attacks in Thailand**
- **First two explosions hit busy street in tourist resort of Hua Hin overnight, killing at least one person**
- **The town, which is close to Bangkok, was reportedly struck again by multiple blasts on Friday morning**
- **Two blasts ripped through Patong on the island of Phuket, a destination popular with foreign tourists**
- **Twin explosions in southern city of Surat Thani have killed one person and injured at least three more**
- **At least 10 foreign tourists have been injured in the strikes, which are not thought to be terror related**
- **It is believed the explosives were hidden in plant pots and flower beds and detonated by mobile phones**

32 Michael Jetter, "Terrorism and the Media," 2014, available at: http://ftp.iza.org/dp8497.pdf
33 "Terrorism in the age of Twitter," The New Yorker, 2015, available at: http://www.newyorker.com/news/john-cassidy/terrorism-in-the-age-of-twitter

At what point does a "hate crime" such as the Charleston church shooting become categorized as "terrorism"? Breivik had active links with extreme right-wing groups and used his actions to promote his anti-Islamic, anti-liberal ideology. His convictions included "terrorism." However, in the media, he was most often referred to as a mass murderer or mass killer, not a terrorist. Likewise, Ali Sonboly, the 2016 Munich shooter was described by police as "inspired" by Breivik, but they said the incident was not "terror-related." Sonboly had been receiving psychiatric treatment, raising the definitional problem around terror and mental health. In considering the mix of motives, it does seem that mainstream media has a propensity to describe events as "terror" if they have some element of jihadist or Islamist ideological ingredient.

Even if a recognized terrorist organization does claim responsibility, journalists may need to fine-tune the language. There was evidence that the 2016 Wurzburg train attacker was "inspired" by ISIS propaganda rather than controlled by them, yet ISIS still claimed it as part of their campaign in Europe. The Ansbach bomber Mohammed Daleel had stronger links to ISIS including a propaganda video he made pledging allegiance to the ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. His preparation for the bombing was more sophisticated and planned. Does that make him more of a terrorist? What significance should journalists have given to the fact that several of this summer's German attackers were asylum seekers or refugees? As soon as perpetrators are identified with a minority group, the danger is that community will be impugned in a way that does not happen when perpetrators are seen to be from the majority population. In a political environment where in many regions there are tensions over ethnic identity, immigration, and cultural values, it is even more important that the news media does not make unqualified connections between race, religion, and terror acts.

VERIFICATION AND TRANSPARENCY

There are some obvious problems created by this new engagement from the audience on terror events. There is a great deal of misleading or false audience-created content, much of it highly reactive and subjective, and there is an increasing number of fake news sites that deliberately spread this content to attract traffic.[34] Social networks are somewhat self-correcting and are moderated, but this can be delayed—by which time falsehoods or false impressions have spread, uncorrected. A missing student Sunil Tripathi was named on Reddit in the wake of the

Boston Marathon bombing in 2013, leading to a manhunt before police were able to rule him out. But in that four-hour period many journalists disseminated the rumor on their own social media accounts.[35] They appeared to accept a lower standard of verification then they would have done for publication on their regular news channels or sites.

The primary function of journalism is still to get facts right. The volume of social media content and the fact that some of it is inaccurate or misleading should not make professional journalists complacent. News media content is now blended into the audience's news feeds and audiences often do not discriminate between "amateur" and "official" or journalistic content online. Research shows that on social media people trust their peers as much as the news media (although that includes their peers sharing news media content).[36]

In this context, it is even more important that the news media distinguish itself by providing reliable information. Statistics show mainstream journalists are still trusted to varying degrees, depending to the medium, the user's age, and the perceived partisanship of the news brand. One of the key variables is their perception of the accuracy and impartiality of the journalism.[37] Verification of facts and the correct expression of "what we know to be true" is under enormous pressure as breaking news accelerates.

As discussed in the next section, editorial guidelines at most major news organizations have since been revised to make it clear that the same standards must apply to gathering material from or posting material on social media.

34 "5 ways fake news websites are evolving," First Draft News, 2016, available at: https://firstdraftnews.com/5-ways-fake-news-websites-are-evolving-hoax/
35 "Mistaken identity manhunt: the case of Sunil Tripathi," Storify, 2015, available at: https://storify.com/srich2/getting-started
36 "Digital News Report 2016," available at: http://www.digitalnewsreport.org/survey/2016/trust-in-the-news-2016/
37 "Digital News Report 2016," available at: http://www.digitalnewsreport.org/survey/2016/trust-in-the-news-2016/

Section 2
Better Terror Reporting

This chapter will identify how news organizations are best able to address the challenges set out in reporting on terrorism.

RESHAPING THE NEWSROOM

New skills are needed to understand user-generated imagery from social networks, terrorist propaganda on specialist websites (often not English language), government or security communications, expert and academic analysis/research blogs and websites, local, specialist, international, and foreign language news media organizations, aggregators, bots and campaign groups.

Yet a guiding philosophy through this complex network of information should be simple: Only report as facts what you know to be true. We can put aside philosophical debates over truth and focus on the journalistic process of identifying some kind of evidence-related process that gives us the best, most reliable account of who, what, where, when, and why.

The newsroom will always be core to this process: its resources, task management, technologies, skills, and infrastructure. Increasingly the larger broadcasters such as CNN and the BBC are the ones that have extensive online operations with the capacity to cope with the full range of sources and platforms. Legacy newspaper operations such as *The Guardian* and *The New York Times* have developed processes such as live blogs where they too are able to exploit and showcase a greater number of sources. At the same time, local news organizations have the advantage of intimately knowing their area, and are often able to keep ahead of their larger rivals as news breaks. Other specialist media, such as the nonprofit Conflict News Twitter account, act as aggregators, filtering information online.[38]

Some news organizations such as *The Wall Street Journal* and the UK's ITN have outsourced some of their newsgathering to agencies such as Storyful, which have highly developed expertise in verifying imagery, video, messages, and other data from social networks.[39] "Real-time information discovery company" Dataminr specializes in scouring Twitter and its analytics for breaking stories including the first news alert on the death of Osama bin Laden.[40] Banjo has developed software that allows it to monitor geo-located social media activity globally and provide news alerts to its media partners, including American Sinclair Broadcast Group.[41] These companies often have commercial as well as news media clients and they do not claim to be journalism agencies. But they are engines for online discovery that can spot stories before newsrooms.

A guiding philosophy through this complex network of information should be simple: Only report as facts what you know to be true.

First Draft News is another coalition of organizations that provides verification insights, training, information, techniques, and research.[42] There are also individual small-scale operations that focus on particular areas or issues, such as Bellingcat which its founder Elliot Higgins describes as "by and for citizen investigative journalists." It has developed sophisticated forensic data-analysis tools and techniques to provide deeper information in the wake of events. The European Journalism Centre (EJC) has produced a Verification Handbook that gives detailed guidance on how this can work in emergency situations such as terror attacks.[43]

38 "Conflict News," available at: http://www.conflict-news.com/
39 "News Corp buys Storyful," The Guardian, 2013, available at: https://www.theguardian.com/media/2013/dec/20/news-corp-buys-storyful-social-news
40 "Bin Laden death-detecting analytics service signs partnership with Twitter," Ars Technica, 2016, available at: http://arstechnica.com/business/2012/04/bin-laden-death-detecting-analytics-service-signs-partnership-with-twitter/
41 "The most important social media company you have never heard of," Inc., 2015, available at: http://www.inc.com/magazine/201504/will-bourne/banjo-the-gods-eye-view.html
42 First Draft News, available at: https://firstdraftnews.com
43 European Journalism Centre, Verification Handbook available at: http://verificationhandbook.com/

“Publish and be damned” is not applicable in the terror context.

Organizations such as First Draft and the EJC demonstrate the processes that journalists can adopt if they have the time and will to do so. The key is to have a set of guidelines related to breaking news and terror that can form the basis for newsroom culture, standards, and practice. Different news brands will make their own calculations about how to implement best practices universally across an organization. CNN and BuzzFeed use the internal messaging system Slack, for example, to ensure that all staff on all platforms are getting the same guidance as news breaks.

GETTING TO THE TRUTH

CNN took a serious reputational hit for its mistake in coverage of the Boston Marathon. Like almost all major news organizations, it has adopted a more effective way of reconciling the competing demands from audiences for instant news and verified information.[44] It now has a more coordinated editorial management structure with digital platforms integrated with broadcast.

The business as well as the ethical case for journalism in a media environment so full of false, partial, or provisional information must be based on trust. Citizens now have social media feeds full of messages, often from peers not professionals, that alert them to breaking terror news. When they click onto the mainstream news media material, they expect something more reliable. Journalists cannot police the internet for truth, but as well as getting their own facts right, journalists can also have a role helping to identify fake or mistaken information on social media. This kind of “myth-busting” helps arrests the spread of false information and can educate the audience in online verification.[45]

“Publish and be damned” is not applicable in the terror context. Samantha Barry, CNN’s Head of Social Media, said in an interview that they are aware of changing expectations of the audience, but they sometimes have to pause before publication to retain trust:

> It is really important for CNN to be right not necessarily first. Audiences are more forgiving than other media people when it's a developing story. There was one example from the Dallas police shooting when police released a video of a suspect. We didn't put it out on digital and social because we saw questions about whether it was a suspect. The police then rowed back. We get pressure for example, from people tweeting at us when they see something on social media. This happened around the recent evacuation of JFK airport. But we only put out the story when we had something we were comfortable with what we knew for ourselves.[46]

Newsgathering from social media should abide by the same principles used for any other source. However, the BBC gives additional advice in its guidelines on gathering user-generated content around issues such as copyright, crediting producers, and treating the public with respect and sensitivity.[47] Organizations such as First Draft News also have more detailed advice on verification and the treatment of contributors.[48]

TRANSPARENCY IN BREAKING NEWS

News organizations will make individual mistakes of fact, taste, or framing, but it is how you handle the development of breaking news overall that matters.[49] News organizations are desperate for audience attention. Online analytics now provide instant, live statistics on page views, engagement, and traffic, as well as the usual broadcast audience levels and share. Competition is a vital motive for journalism, and especially during breaking news, it drives newsrooms to provide a rapid response as well as more considered context. So increasingly news organizations must develop a credible grammar for provisional narratives. Donald Rumsfeld's famous aphorism is relevant here:

44 "The pressure to be a news leader tarnishes a big brand," The New York Times, 2013, available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/22/business/media/in-boston-cnn-stumbles-in-rush-to-break-news.html?_r=0
45 "Debunked: what social media got wrong about Paris Attacks," CNN, 2015, available at: http://edition.cnn.com/2015/11/18/europe/paris-terror-attack-myths/
46 Phone interview with the author, August 2016
47 BBC News Group, "Social Media Guidance for Staff," 2015, available at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/26_03_15_bbc_news_group_social_media_guidance.pdf
48 "Are you a journalist? Download this free guide for verifying photos and videos," First Draft News, available at: https://firstdraftnews.com/are-you-a-journalist-download-this-free-guide-for-verifying-photos-and-videos/
49 Interview with the author, August 2016

> There are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns—the ones we don't know we don't know.[50]

Mainly through social media, but sometimes through other news media sources, the audience is now often conscious of the basic facts and "known unknowns" as news breaks, whether via social or traditional media. As Sambrook points out, social media tells people instantly that something has happened, but it cannot always explain what it is:

> You get a situation like in Bangkok [2015] where we first know that something has happened because people start tweeting and then a bystander starts broadcasting pictures of the aftermath on live on Periscope [Twitter's live stream tool]. The guy doing it literally didn't know what he was showing and when he realized he was filming body parts he regretted it.[51]

As that amateur broadcast went out, viewers were able to comment and the man filming also responded, but while his actions gave the world images of this event, it could not give much insight.[52]

This is now how news is made. There has been some kind of explosion. But we do not know what kind of explosion. One possibility at the front of people's minds, regardless of statistical probability, is terrorism. But journalism's key task is to find out what we don't know.

Journalists covering breaking terror news are adapting their language and being humbler in publicly sharing their ignorance as well as their knowledge—something once unimaginable to newsroom culture. To say that something has not been confirmed is not adequate as a final narrative, but in the early stages of an incident it is as important to identify uncertain information. Authority is enhanced, not diminished, by making sources as clear and precise as possible. A general statement such as "reports on social media" is at the worse vague end of the spectrum, but if the platform and social media account is identified then that helps build a more nuanced picture. This is part of building much-needed media literacy in the audience. Detailed, continual transparency helps promote public understanding of the process of news as well as building trust in its outputs.

News organizations need to be aware that simply by reporting an emerging situation they are signaling that it is of potential significance. "We are getting reports" is not a phrase that should allow editors to suspend their usual judgment. That judgment, though, can now be more openly made.

News media institutions have intellectual and professional capital. It is good to share the caveats and conditions that are applied in the newsroom on screen. With breaking news—especially on a topic so fraught with competing and complex definitions and perspectives as terror—authority is gained not by automatic certainty but by sharing the journey towards understanding.

USING THE RIGHT LANGUAGE

Journalists have to use shortcuts to compress complex realities into formats people can consume quickly. The formula of headlines, edited video, graphics and so on are part of the necessary process of simplification and communication under limited time and space. But with a complex subject like terror, precise language is vital, as Mary Hockaday, the BBC's controller of World Service English wrote to me in an email:

> The recent rapid sequence of events does challenge us about language. Terrorist, the lone wolf, the mentally ill, the loner, ISIS directed, ISIS sympathizer, ISIS inspired.... News events rush past and headlines simplify... but it's really important we go on striving to be precise, recognize the complexity – of the people and indeed what the policy response needs to be. And use accurate, concrete language when we can rather than generalities.[53]

50 "OMG I can't unsee that! What happened when the aftermath of the Bangkok bombing was streamed live on Periscope," Medium, 2015, available at: https://medium.com/1st-draft/omg-i-can-t-ever-unsee-that-what-happened-when-the-aftermath-of-the-bangkok-bomb-blast-was-7a3f39ee2b0#.taux6r5t3
51 Interview with the author, September 2016
52 Eyewitness Media Hub, "'OMG I can't ever unsee that': What happened when the aftermath of the Bangkok bomb blast was streamed live on Periscope," 2015, available at: https://medium.com/1st-draft/omg-i-can-t-ever-unsee-that-what-happened-when-the-aftermath-of-the-bangkok-bomb-blast-was-7a3f39ee2b0#.p98vyuvjg
53 Email to the author, August 2016

Language should be concrete and consistent. In Western media, critics say that with the post-9/11 rise in extreme violence that proclaims itself to have an Islamist motivation, there has been a tendency to reserve the term "terrorism" for only that category:

> We used to use terrorist to describe all kinds of people, from Irish Catholic republicans to American Jewish radicals. But since 9/11, we've been using it much more swiftly in reference to Islamists.[54]

Dylann Roof, the alleged perpetrator of the 2015 Charleston shooting of nine African American churchgoers was accused of a hate crime, not terrorism. Yet he had an ideological agenda and drew upon the ideas of white supremacist groups. Micah Johnson, who shot police officers in Dallas, appeared to have a strong political motive for his actions based on his anger at police shootings of black civilians.[55] The BBC's Director of Editorial Policy David Jordan warns against applying the term terrorist too widely:

> The problem is with the word "terrorist" rather than "terrorism." When you apply it to an individual you must do it with care and caution. In the case of the Charleston shooter he appeared to have mental health issues and political motives but was not associated with a political group that had the declared aim of using extreme violence against innocent people to achieve a specified goal. As an international news organization we increasingly find governments around the world who want to apply the label "terrorist" to anyone who opposes them and so it is important not to use it without thinking.[56]

As terrorism becomes more diffuse and the association of a specific act with an organization becomes harder to ascertain it becomes even more important that news organizations compare and contrast the way they use words—not just terrorism itself but also the accompanying adjectives and the assumptions they carry.

Language matters especially when it turns to metaphor. Most famously, the use of the "war on terror" metaphor should act as a warning. Its widespread deployment following the cue from the George W. Bush administration declined as mainstream media understood that actual wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and against ISIS were not working militarily.

Labels such as “lone wolf” or “evil” resonate but have little factual meaning.

As one of the UK’s most senior judicial officials, the then Director of Public Prosecutions, Sir Ken Macdonald made clear just two years after the London Bombings, the military metaphor also boosts the terrorist’s sense of power and ignores other policy options in countering their campaigns:

> London is not a battlefield. Those innocents who were murdered on July 7, 2005, were not victims of war. And the men who killed them were not, as in their vanity they claimed on their ludicrous videos, “soldiers.” [...] We need to be very clear about this. On the streets of London, there is no such thing as a “war on terror,” just as there can be no such things as “war on drugs.” [...] The fight against terrorism on the streets of Britain is not a war. It is the prevention of crime, the enforcement of our laws and the winning of justice for those damaged by their infringement.[57]

Labels such as “lone wolf” or “evil” resonate but have little factual meaning.[58] Apart from sensationalizing the perpetrator, they give the sense that the individual was operating in isolation. In fact, it is difficult to find any examples of terrorists not influenced to some degree by the messaging of terror groups even if their actions were not explicitly controlled or directed.[59]

54 Adam Ragusea, Slate, available at: http://www.slate.com/authors.adam_ragusea.html
55 Dallas Police shootings, Wikipedia, available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2016_shooting_of_Dallas_police_officers
56 Interview with the author, September 2016
57 “There is no war on terror,” The Daily Telegraph, 2011, available at: www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1540399/There-is-no-war-on-terror-says-DPP.html
58 “The Myth of Lone Wolf Terrorism,” Foreign Affairs, 2016, and “The Restoration of the Caliphate,” LinkedIn, 2016, available at: https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/western-europe/2016-07-26/myth-lone-wolf-terrorism and https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/isis-network-warriors-making-jihad-web-erika-lisa-panuccio
59 Interview with the author, September 2016

Likewise, the distinction between mental health and terror is rarely clearcut. On the one hand, the application of the label "mental illness" is a useful indicator if supported by some authoritative assessment that helps guide the audience. The London 2016 Russell Square stabber had been receiving treatment in a psychiatric hospital, for example. But it is arguable that anyone who believes in killing innocent people for an ideological cause has a dysfunctional psychology. Mainstream news style guides do not refer to this dilemma specifically. Jordan says this is an area where guidance is still evolving:

> The mental health issue regarding terror is a comparatively new problem and we are talking with other standards people to try to create guidelines. But by its nature it is complex. For example, just because someone once had treatment for a mental health problem does not mean that they are still "mentally ill. So as usual, we should avoid vague terms and only report facts.[60]

Language matters because it conditions the public acceptance, for example, of negotiations with extremist groups as political or military actors.

In the heat of reporting a breaking news incident such as the London Russell Square knife attack, we can see how the news media struggles to cope with these competing demands for categorization, as "facts" are emerging. The attacker, Zakaria Bulhan, was arrested immediately after the incident occurred at around 10:30 p.m. on Wednesday August 3, 2016. The story broke quickly,[61] partly through eyewitness accounts on social media.[62] The news media initially reporting it prominently as a "possible" terrorist attack, based on police statements. By 11 a.m. the following day, the police were effectively ruling out terror. A random stabbing with one fatality by a person with a mental health problem would have been a story in its own right, but not necessarily the lead on the BBC's flagship morning radio program Today without the terror connotation. The initial prominence of the story—and its later drop down the running order—is not necessarily a failure of journalism; it reflects the development of the story through time. At 5 a.m. as the Today program prepared to air, Assistant Commissioner Mark Rowley, from the Metropolitan Police, said:

> This was a tragic incident resulting in the death of one woman and five others being injured. Early indications suggest that mental health was a factor in this horrific attack. However, we are keeping an open mind regarding the motive and terrorism remains one line of inquiry being explored.[63]

Jamie Angus, editor of the BBC's morning Today program, explains how they assessed a series of factors:

> With the benefit of hindsight, we would not have given the story such prominence, but at the time it was right to treat it so seriously even though we did not have absolute confirmation that it was terrorism. When the story broke we got in extra people to prepare our morning report because the 1 a.m. statement by the police mentioned terror as a factor and they repeated that later. The genre of the attack was not clear, but it often isn't a clear distinction between someone who is mentally ill or a Jihadist. Of course, radicalized people are often psychologically vulnerable anyway. The police had also mentioned that he was Norwegian with Somali heritage, which suggested they were considering a terror motive, too. We took our cue from the fact that such a senior officer was still mentioning the possibility of terrorism.[64]

Much of the pressure to publish live is driven by news breaking on social media first from "non-journalistic" sources. As one producer on a news channel says, the fear of missing out on a story surfacing on social media can lead to the temptation to cover it before significant details are confirmed:

> I resisted "breaking" news of a shooting in a Spanish supermarket until we knew more. As it turned out, it was a domestic dispute. We didn't report it at all. But my boss on the day wanted to break it because people were mentioning it on social media and he felt it "might" be something else.[65]

60 Interview with the author, September 2016
61 "Pictured: the moment police bundled crazed Norwegian-Somali knife attacker to the ground," The Daily Mail, 2016, available at: http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3722796/Woman-killed-five-people-injured-terrorist-knife-attack-central-London.html
62 Available at: https://twitter.com/hyperlinkhelen/status/760984211633373184
63 "Update: Incident in Russell Square: Metropolitan Police, 2016, available at: http://news.met.police.uk/news/update-incident-in-russell-square-177433
64 Interview with the author, September 2016
65 Anonymized interview with author August 2016

But the news media is not a tracking system for online activity. Platforms such as Facebook are increasingly a source for news for the public[66] and can provide a great source of facts and opinion but it is highly selective. All the newsrooms spoken to for this report insist that they apply the same editorial standards to social media as to any other source. As the CNN guidelines state:

> Citizen-generated reports are subject to the same strict review process that CNN applies to traditional reporting before they are included in CNN stories.[67]

WORKING WITH SOCIAL MEDIA

The best news media encourages interaction and listens and responds. Alex Thomson, Chief Correspondent for the UK's Channel 4 News uses his Twitter feed to show and discuss his journalism as he gathers news. He posts smartphone footage and replies to comments. Other "traditional" international correspondents such as CNN's Christiane Amanpour have used Facebook Live video to provide a more interactive user experience. Journalists say that while much of the feedback can be bland or unhelpful, it can help give a sense of what the public misunderstands and so encourage journalists to address those gaps.

Correspondents such as the BBC's Matthew Price say even interacting with people who complain or are confused can be a useful way of understanding what people do not know. By correcting or responding to them you can help that individual but, of course, the message also goes out to the journalist's wider network:

> Covering the refugee crisis live from the field in its early phase, I got many comments saying that these were not real refugees because they were almost all men. So they were "just" economic migrants. I reflected on that and asked the refugees where the women and children were. They pointed out that often the men go ahead to prepare the way for their families. So although the images were of men, many were in effect, travelling ahead of their families. I then made sure to make that point on social media but also in my reporting.[68]

For Price, even a "mistaken" audience comment on social media can lead to better journalism.

Sometimes the public knows more than the journalist about an aspect of a story. They might have eyewitness accounts, local knowledge, or specialist insights. Social media can provide perspectives and information not available through the usual channels or sources and it can provide them quickly. Tapping into the social media of groups traditionally marginalized by mainstream media helps the journalist and the public understand the context of the extremist individuals who might draw upon those cultures. This could be the online discourse of US "alt right" activists[69] or the social media messaging of youths in Molenbeek, the Brussels district with a high Muslim population where ISIS had text messaged locals.[70] There is increasing evidence that those marginalized communities feel misrepresented by mainstream media. Paying attention to their online voice—albeit not always representative—can add to overall understanding for the journalist and audience.

Editors, too, should take the context of social media into account when making judgments around framing narratives. Just because posts on social media are often confused, misleading, or ill-informed does not mean they should be dismissed. This is especially true now that news coverage itself is subject to constant online critique. *The Guardian*'s social media editor, Martin Belam, said:

> And all the time you've got people @-messaging you that you are doing it wrong, or serving an agenda, or displaying bias. With one tweet about the Iranian background of one of the recent attackers, the replies criticized The Guardian for being racist to even mention it, and other people criticized The Guardian for trying to suppress information that he was an ISIS fighter.[71]

66 "News use across social media platforms," Pew Research Center, 2016, available at: http://www.journalism.org/2016/05/26/news-use-across-social-media-platforms-2016/
67 "Journalistic Integrity," Time Warner, available at: http://www.timewarner.com/company/corporate-responsibility/telling-the-worlds-stories/journalistic-integrity
68 Email to the author, August 2016
69 "An establishment conservative's guide to the Alt-Right," Breitbart, 2016, available at: http://www.breitbart.com/tech/2016/03/29/an-establishment-conservatives-guide-to-the-alt-right/
70 "Brussels Attacks: fight the Westerners texts sent to Molenbeek," The Guardian, 2016, available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/28/brussels-attacks-fight-westerners-text-sent-youths-molenbeek-isis
71 "How should the media cover terror attacks?" The Guardian, 2016, available at: https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/live/2016/jul/28/how-should-the-media-cover-terror-attacks-live-debate?utm_source=esp&utm_medium=Email&utm_campaign=Media+Briefing+new+v2&utm_term=183715&subid=631473&CMP=ema_546

But these also raise valid points that can contribute to reflection in the newsroom about the framing of terror narratives.

AVOIDING HARM AND RELATIONS WITH AUTHORITIES

Reporting on terror events must also be sensitive to security considerations. Journalists have a duty to report as fully as possible but in a terror-related scenario the news media has a responsibility to avoid causing harm. Journalists can legitimately not report facts if doing so would increase risks or hamper a security operation. This means responding to requests from the authorities to not report particular facts or not to show certain images. There should always be a due process within the news organization of making that decision. Ideally, the fact of any decision to restrict reporting should be reported.

During the 2004 school siege in Beslan, Chechnya, the BBC decided to go on a time delay for its live feed because of the danger of showing graphic imagery of hostages including children. During the security operation following the 2015 attacks on the Charlie Hebdo offices in Paris and the siege of a supermarket where hostages had been taken, the French broadcast regulator issued a notice to domestic newsrooms asking them to show "discretion." Paris police on the scene told TV crews not to broadcast their officers in action. At the same time broadcasters were regulating themselves. Paris-based BFM TV chose not to broadcast the police rescue operation live. It also did not air an audio interview it recorded with the hostage-takers themselves until after the incident was over. BFM TV journalist Ruth Elkrief said it was a series of decisions they had to make for themselves in the newsroom:

> It's very difficult. We have to move fast. But are we undermining the investigation? Are we being manipulated? We're asking ourselves these questions constantly. We had several emergency meetings during the day to debate what to do. We're always checking ourselves.[72]

Transparency about making those judgments helps build the understanding and confidence of the audience. Clearly, journalists cannot give a running commentary on all their editorial decisions, but a similar approach could be adopted to that when embedded with the military during conflicts, as suggested in BBC guidelines:

> We should normally say if our reports are censored or monitored or if we withhold information, and explain, wherever possible, the rules under which we are operating.[73]

Journalists have a civic duty to cooperate in the interests of public safety, but this does not mean automatically complying with police or security requests. The seizing of the laptop of BBC journalist Secunder Kermani—who had made contacts with extremists—appeared to challenge in principle the idea that journalists can ever talk to terrorists or their associates.[74]

These judgments are hard at a practical level with breaking news. Journalists now have access to real-time live video and images of alleged participants instantly uploaded on social media. The news media should not wait for guidance before assessing whether using material might cause harm. Showing the outside of a building where an incident is taking place might, for example, give the terrorist information about deployment of security forces. Clear lines of communication with the police are vital. As one senior broadcast journalist said, there can be a moment when the natural desire to cover a breaking story clashes with security imperatives:

> During recent shootings in Munich, the local police tweeted several requests that everyone refrain from speculation, and also that people stopped showing live pictures of police positions. We were doing exactly that at the time, taking live agency feeds of heavily armed cops, and staying on air by saying things like "we shouldn't speculate but…[75]

72 "Social media complicates police efforts amid attack," Wall Street Journal, 2015, available at: http://www.wsj.com/articles/gag-order-during-french-raids-highlights-technology-dilemma-1420923128
73 "War, Terror and Emergencies," Editorial Guidelines, BBC, available at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/editorialguidelines/guidelines/war-terror-emergencies/accuracy-and-impartiality
74 "Terror police ask journalists to think twice about contacting jihadis," The Independent, 2015, available at: http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/terror-police-ask-journalists-to-think-twice-about-contacting-jihadis-a6714146.html
75 Anonymized interview with the author, August 2016

For local media especially, the relationship with police can be mutually beneficial. During the Lindt Cafe siege, Channel Seven had remarkable access to police operations because they agreed to give them oversight of their picture feeds. The police were able to use the material to assess what was happening. The broadcasters in turn had to agree not to show sensitive images live, to have a time delay on their broadcast feed, and to keep some material back until the siege was over.[76]

NOT HELPING THE TERRORIST

There is also a long-term issue about how detailed media coverage might help terrorists improve their operational effectiveness. As Javier Delgado Rivera has written, thanks to news media reports, terrorists now know how the FBI tracked the network of the San Bernardino shooters with information from their damaged cell phones. They know that French police linked one of the Paris attackers to the Brussels attacks through parking tickets. Perhaps future terrorists will be more careful:

> Detailed media reporting on police investigations can inadvertently help attackers avoid past miscalculations and refine their modus operandi. Journalists would argue that their job is to protect society's right to know. Yet in such exceptional circumstances, editors should ensure that the latest information they feed to their audience is useless to fundamentalists seeking to do harm.[77]

This is especially important as terrorists become increasingly self-radicalized and train themselves partly through the study of previous incidents.[78] Overall, it would be impossible for the news media not to report any circumstantial detail that could help a future terrorist, but as with the reporting of suicide, where journalists refrain from describing methods of self-killing, discretion around the depth of information on methods and countermeasures is possible.[79]

This is part of the bigger issue about proportionality around reporting on terror, according to University of Western Australia professor Michael Jetter:

> The purpose of not reporting suicides fully is to not encourage copycats. What German newspapers are doing is they're blowing it up so much that everybody who is seeking attention is really given

> the signal that, "I will be famous." That is very likely a reason why you see so many more of those things. It's a scary development and I do think they need to think about how they cover things.[80]

As we have seen there are many reasons that journalists might decide to withhold facts or material. This can vary due to the news brand's ethos and their audience culture.[81] British broadcasters now rarely show ISIS propaganda videos, although there is no blanket ban. But when ISIS made a video of a four-year-old British child apparently blowing up a car with captives inside, *The Sun* newspaper ran the image as its front page: "Junior Jihadi"[82] and the *New York Post* even ran the story with a slide show of "terrorist photos that made us gag."[83] The coverage was clearly hostile, but it was the kind of publicity ISIS sought. A few months later ISIS released videos showing children executing prisoners.[84] The BBC's Jordan said they chose not to show the images partly because of the issue of consent with a minor, but also because they did not want to help ISIS:

76 "Sydney siege: a chilling account," News.com.au, 2014, http://www.news.com.au/entertainment/tv/sydney-siege-a-chilling-account-by-chris-reason-of-the-barbaric-night/news-story/423c4ce37c20914e8db92b927d1795b6
77 "Does the media say too much when reporting on terrorism?," Open Democracy, 2016, available at: https://www.opendemocracy.net/arab-awakening/javier-delgado-rivera/does-media-say-too-much-when-reporting-on-terrorism
78 "Does the media say too much when reporting on terrorism?," Open Democracy, 2016, available at: https://www.opendemocracy.net/arab-awakening/javier-delgado-rivera/does-media-say-too-much-when-reporting-on-terrorism
79 "Media guidelines for the reporting of suicide," The Samaritans, available at: http://www.samaritans.org/media-centre/media-guidelines-reporting-suicide
80 "Expert calls for terror attacks to be treated same way as suicide when it comes to media coverage," News.com.au, 2016, available at: http://www.news.com.au/world/europe/expert-calls-for-terror-attacks-to-be-treated-same-way-as-suicide-when-it-comes-to-media-coverage/news-story/04d99ebfd2092d9be952928a92995360
81 "French media to stop publishing photos and names of terrorists," The Guardian, 2016, available at: https://www.theguardian.com/media/2016/jul/27/french-media-to-stop-publishing-photos-and-names-of-terrorists
82 Tomorrow's Papers Today, blog, available at: http://suttonnick.tumblr.com/post/136561141471/mondays-sun-front-page-jihadi-junior
83 ISIS makes 4-year-old execute prisoners," New York Post, 2016, available at: http://nypost.com/2016/02/11/4-year-old-junior-jihadi-used-in-isis-video/
84 "ISIS video appears to show children, including Briton, killing captives," The Guardian, 2016, available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/aug/27/isis-video-appears-to-show-children-including-briton-killing-captives

Language is critical because the public makes judgments about risk based on the terminology involved. Just because something creates "terror" does not make it a "terrorist" event.

> It was perfectly possible to tell that story without using the pictures. The danger is that by showing it there becomes a kind of diminishing return for the terrorist so the next time they have to create something even more outrageous. Arguably, if people had not published those images in the first instance then ISIS would not have made more. This is partly why we don't show propaganda videos unless there is a serious news reason to do so.[85]

The counter argument is that to understand the full horror of terrorism, it is vital to show what they do in full detail. Yet, in a world where just about everything is available online it is difficult to argue that the public is being denied information. In the end, it is a decision that should be thought through by the individual organizations in relation to specific events. By reporting on a terror event, research suggests that we make another one more likely.[86] So it is important that the scale of reporting as well as its content is considered. The drama and danger combined with the ideological threat and human impact create a compelling narrative cocktail. For *The Guardian*, the 2015 Paris attacks saw more unique visits to its website than any event in its history bar one—the extraordinary story of Britain voting to leave the European Union. The increasing proximity of terror attacks to our everyday lives adds to their fascination and immediacy. The prominence given in terms of duration and visibility of reporting on terrorism sends a strong signal to the audience. Judgment on this is not a science, but journalists need to consider external perspectives as well as the temptation of "going big" on a particular incident.

GEOGRAPHICAL BIAS

There was a lively debate in the wake of the Paris and Brussels attacks comparing the coverage of those incidents with similar incidents in places like Beirut and Ankara.[87] These events were reported in the Western media but not to the same extent. Journalists explained that many of the complaints on social media about this were inaccurate and suggested critics were trying to score political points and demonstrate their own ethical virtue.[88] Journalists point out that even when reported, the coverage attracted far less interest from the public. This is partly because overall audiences will always respond more to news that has relevance to their own lives and for a Western audience, the French and Belgian attacks were on people and a society that the majority population could identify with more readily.[89] ABC's Jon Williams explains:

> Our first responsibility is to the audience, and we have a US audience. For them a bomb in Paris is a bigger deal than Baghdad. They visit Paris, they know and care more about France. That's not to say we don't cover the Iraq incident but we will generally tell stories that connect with our audience. In the same way an earthquake in Italy is more important than the same deaths in Sumatra because these places speak to Americans in a way that others don't. It's different if you are a global broadcaster is like the BBC with a less defined idea of the audience—but our audience is in the USA.[90]

85 Interview with the author, September 2016
86 Michael Jetter, "Terrorism and the Media," 2014, available at: http://ftp.iza.org/dp8497.pdf
87 "Days before Brussels there were two devastating terrorist attacks the media ignored," US Uncut, 2016, available at: http://usuncut.com/world/brussels-media-ankara-turkey/
88 "You won't read about this in the media but...". Medium, 2016, available at: https://medium.com/@martinbelam/you-won-t-read-about-this-in-the-media-but-b275d46fd51f#.m4adv9lna
89 "There is nothing wrong with mourning Brussels, but not Beirut," The Guardian, 2016, available at: https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/mar/25/nothing-wrong-mourning-brussels-not-beirut
90 Interview with the author, August 2016

He also points out that the attacks in Europe this summer were significant because they represented a change in strategy by ISIS. They also raised fresh questions about community relations in those countries and the military/political strategy of governments in domestic and foreign policy areas.

The recent American terror events were also qualitatively different. The San Bernardino attacks were by "home-grown" extremists radicalized by online jihadist propaganda. The Orlando nightclub shooting was claimed by ISIS as inspired by them, although it seems the perpetrator was also driven by homophobia. Likewise, the Dallas police shooting challenged the usual frame of "terror" but it clearly had ideological motives, was connected to extremist groups, and sought to spread fear.

Journalists should always be reflecting on their editorial judgments and the quality of their coverage. Reporting by western media of the European and American attacks tended to focus more on the victims.[91] It used more emotive, compassionate, and outraged language. It stressed the surprise of the attacks, while the incidents in Lebanon, for example, were framed as just another tragedy in a violent region.[92] More voices and detail from non-Western incidents would help redress the tonal balance, while more foregrounding of the connections with western politics would close the interest gap, too. These are perennial concerns regarding coverage of international stories but the paradox is that it is now much easier to cover distant events in the same way as "domestic" incidents.[93] The extent of the discrepancy is a matter of editorial choice and effort.

QUALITY, CONTEXT AND CONSTRUCTIVE REPORTING

Under the pressure of limited time and resources the news media is still a powerful and efficient resource for reporting and understanding complicated and challenging incidents. As the UK Editor of BuzzFeed, Janine Gibson, points out, the large amount of information around these events can paradoxically make creating a clear narrative more difficult:

In a breaking crisis situation, we usually set up a thread for "myth-busting" that will point out fake images or correct false leads and give basic background information. People expect us to do that and they trust us to do it.

Janine Gibson
UK Editor of Buzzfeed

> Perpetrators now leave a much wider information footprint. They leave records of their lives on social media or they make videos and write messages. Friends or witnesses provide a whole load more material to sift through. We just know more about everybody. So the picture we try to build is much more complex and hard to simplify into the usual clichés.[94]

The audience now expects analysis and context almost simultaneously with reporting of the facts. Social media means that there is an instant explosion of often-erroneous information that presents the journalist with an additional task, that Gibson says BuzzFeed has taken on, along with its breaking news and background coverage:

> In a breaking crisis situation, we usually set up a thread for "myth-busting" that will point out fake images or correct false leads and give basic background information. People expect us to do that and they trust us to do it. We ask readers to send us things they find and we will check it out. It's a kind of media literacy and I think young people in particular feel pride in correcting mistakes seen on social or mainstream media.[95]

91 "Paris, Beirut and the language used to describe terrorism," The Atlantic, 2016, available at: http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/11/paris-beirut-media-coverage/416457/
92 "Lives fit for print: exposing media bias in coverage of terrorism," The Nation, 2016, available at: https://www.thenation.com/article/lives-fit-for-print-exposing-media-bias-in-coverage-of-terrorism/
93 Phil Harding, "The Great Global Switch-off," available at: http://www.lse.ac.uk/media@lse/Polis/Files/globalswitchoff.pdf
94 Interview with the author, September 2016
95 Interview with the author, September 2016

There are individual journalists such as Rukmini Callimachi of *The New York Times* who write compellingly, critically, and with a large reservoir of knowledge. Her lengthy piece based on an interview with a former ISIS member, for example, provided deep information on its organization, strategy, and training of recruits who then make up its diffuse international network.[96] Research shows that this kind of narrative, using defectors, is effective in giving credible insights into terrorist motives.[97] Understanding the history helps understand the resultant terror attacks. *The Financial Times* special feature on ISIS's dealing in the oil market was an outstanding use of interactive graphics that showed how the terror organization was funding itself and its links with international markets.[98] This kind of background reporting is an essential supplement to the reporting of terror events. As media researcher Arda Bilgen has written, this helps with the "desecuritization" of narratives. Instead of concentrating only on the incident, the victims, and the drama of the disruption of normal life, this kind of objective, fact-based, nonpartisan reporting helps differentiate the various terror types and provide much-needed clarity.[99]

Collectively, news teams now deploy new tools such as data visualization, video with text, and short-form explainers to enhance audience understanding across a wide range of platforms. These platforms, such as Snapchat, can also reach different demographics. "Digitally native" news organizations have been pioneers at finding new styles for gaining attention for these difficult topics. VICE documentaries on ISIS, for example, have gained remarkable access, and their style of less mediated, less formulaic reporting allows the audience a more direct insight into their subject.

Journalism must be independent, critical, and realistic, but there is opportunity for narratives of resistance, solidarity, and compassion. This would also help a fearful or jaded public engage with the issues and generate a more positive discussion about resilience in the face of the threat and a better quality of debate around "solutions," according to media researcher Arda Bilgen:

> Implementing certain [editorial] policies that are different than the previous failed policies can facilitate the breaking of that cycle by forcing at least one side of the equation–the media–to act in a more responsible, more conscious, and more cooperative manner. Only then starving the terrorists of the oxygen of publicity on which they depend can become possible and more robust steps can be taken to win the ideological and actual battle against terrorism.[100]

Perhaps most urgently, it would arrest a tendency towards Islamophobia. This is a problem for society, not just the news media. As Mary Hockaday, the BBC's controller of World Service English, points out, this can be a question of responding to those who are themselves trying to create more constructive narratives around terror:

> I thought it was very interesting that the Imams who attended the funeral in Rouen were quite clear they wanted to do it and needed to do it to "show" they are different. They fully understood image matters—and didn't complain about needing to attend to that. It's therefore really important that we the media report the voices who appeal to better nature, to peace, who show solidarity, and the people working hard and painstakingly at counter-radicalization. Not because I'm a softy, but because these things are also true and need to be said over and over again to counter the negative.[101]

One example of solutions-oriented journalism broadcast in the same week as the Brussels attacks was a short news film by the BBC that looked at Mechelen, another Belgian town with a high Muslim population, that seems to have avoided any significant radicalization through a policy of "zero tolerance" policing and outreach policies. It allowed the city mayor to explain his policies in detail and got high viewing figures.[102]

96 "How a secretive branch of ISIS built a global network of killers," The New York Times, 2016, available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/04/world/middleeast/isis-german-recruit-interview.html?rref=collection%2Fbyline%2Frukmini-callimachi&action=click&contentCollection=undefined&region=stream&module=stream_unit&version=latest&contentPlacement=4&pgtype=collection&_r=0
97 "Victims, perpetrators, assets: the narratives of Islamic State defectors," ICSR, 2015, available at: http://icsr.info/2015/09/icsr-report-narratives-islamic-state-defectors/
98 "Inside ISIS: the journey of a barrel of oil," The Financial Times, 2015, http://ig.ft.com/sites/2015/isis-oil/
99 Arda Bilgen, "Terrorism and the media: a dangerous symbiosis," 2012, available at: http://www.e-ir.info/2012/07/22/terrorism-and-the-media-a-dangerous-symbiosis/
100 Arda Bilgen, "Terrorism and the media: a dangerous symbiosis," 2012, available at: http://www.e-ir.info/2012/07/22/terrorism-and-the-media-a-dangerous-symbiosis/
101 Email to the author, August 2016
102 "Brussels attacks: Belgium's zero tolerance mayor," BBC, 2016, available at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-35897299

Humanizing terror's victims and their communities may be the best counter-extremist measure media can provide.

Journalism around terror events also has a role in mediating the emotional impact for the audience. There is an element of useful ritual about the creation of instant shrines at the scene of incidents, the memorial services, and the expressions of condolence. Social media and platforms now play a part in that, with special hashtags or profile flags to show solidarity. By showing this process of grieving, the news media helps communities recover from the trauma. By focusing on the victims rather than the perpetrators, journalists can bring humanity and dignity back into a narrative of destruction and fear. Samantha Barry of CNN explains:

> Our audience tells us in a number of ways that they want us to focus on the victims. One of the most powerful pieces we did which achieved unprecedented levels of engagement across all platforms was when Anderson Cooper choked up reading the names of the Orlando victims. We try to be impersonal in how we report, but we are not robots. And the audience needs good news, too. Survivor stories are important as are those stories of personal courage such as the people who went back into the Bataclan nightclub to save their friends.[103]

Emotion used to be seen as an indulgence in hard news journalism, but when it comes to terrorism it is important to treat it as more than a commodity,[104] especially with the advent of social media.[105] Part of this is acknowledging the emotional impact of terrorist events on the journalist themselves.[106] Anderson Cooper's tears over the Orlando massacre run the risk of appearing too personally involved with the story. But it is possible to include feelings as part of storytelling without diluting factual and critical perspective. BuzzFeed's Gibson says news organizations should be able to operate in different modes without compromising overall integrity:

> With these events we are operating in three dimensions at the same time. We are simultaneously doing the breaking news, the analysis, and we are also sending reporters without a specific deadline to go find out what is going on—not to talk to the police but to talk to people to get the emotion behind the story. To go to vigils to talk to people to get their testimony but also to get the reasons why people were out and about in the wake of the event–seeing it from bottom up.[107]

Perhaps most important is to ensure that this is inclusive of the wider communities involved, be they the LBGT population of Florida or the Muslims of Europe. Humanizing terror's victims and their communities may be the best counter-extremist measure media can provide.

103 Interview with the author, August 2016
104 Charlie Beckett, 2015, available at: http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2015/09/10/how-journalism-is-turning-emotional-and-whatthat-might-mean-for-news/
105 Charlie Beckett and Mark Deuze, "On the Role of Emotion in the Future of Journalism," 2016, available at: http://sms.sagepub.com/content/2/3/2056305116662395.short
106 Charlie Beckett and Mark Deuze, "On the Role of Emotion in the Future of Journalism," 2016, available at: http://sms.sagepub.com/content/2/3/2056305116662395.long
107 Interview with the author, September 2016

Section 3
Journalism, Terror, and Digital Platforms

This chapter will examine the increasingly important role of platforms such as Facebook, Google, Apple, and Twitter in providing information, connecting to journalism, and framing narratives around terror news events.

THE POWER OF THE PLATFORMS

The major platforms are now increasingly the way the Western public accesses news about terror. Twitter, Facebook, Google, and Apple provide the infrastructure for mainstream news media to disseminate their material.[108] Sixty-two percent of Americans now say they get news via social media.[109] Sixty-three percent of American Twitter and Facebook users say they get news from those platforms, with Twitter especially popular for breaking news (59 percent).[110] Facebook also owns the hugely popular social messaging apps Instagram and WhatsApp. Snapchat is increasingly used by news brands like CNN and Vice, who push content to users through Snapchat Discovery.

Platforms also aggregate news stories through Apple News, Google News, and Twitter Moments. They make deals with news organizations to feature journalism, further shaping the dissemination and consumption of news. They are also starting to provide new production tools for journalists such as livestreaming on Facebook and YouTube or through apps such as Twitter's Periscope. Journalists have lost control over the dissemination of their work. This is a crucial challenge for the news media overall, but the issue is especially acute when it comes to reporting on terror.

The platforms provide an unprecedented resource for the public to upload, access, and share information and commentary around terror events. This is a huge opportunity for journalists to connect with a wider public. But key questions are also raised: Are social media platforms

now becoming journalists and publishers by default, if not by design? How should news organizations respond to the increasing influence of platforms around terror events? Facebook is becoming dominant in the mediation of information for the public, which raises all sorts of concerns about monetization, influence, and control over how narratives around terrorist incidents are shaped.

Facebook's role in the dissemination of news is concerning because it is not an open and accountable organization.

As Guardian Editor Katharine Viner points out, we live in a world of information abundance, a world where "truth" is often harder to establish than before, partly because of social media:

> Now, we are caught in a series of confusing battles between opposing forces: between truth and falsehood, fact and rumor, kindness and cruelty; between the few and the many, the connected and the alienated; between the open platform of the web as its architects envisioned it and the gated enclosures of Facebook and other social networks; between an informed public and a misguided mob.[111]

It is in the public interest for these platforms to give people the best of news coverage at critical periods. But will that happen?

108 "Facebook is eating the world," Columbia Journalism Review, 2016, available at: http://www.cjr.org/analysis/facebook_and_media.php
109 "News use across social media platforms 2016," Pew Research Center, 2016, available at: http://www.journalism.org/2016/05/26/news-use-across-social-media-platforms-2016/
110 "State of the news media 2016," Pew Research Center, 2016, available at: http://www.journalism.org/2016/06/15/state-of-the-news-media-2016/
111 "How technology disrupted the truth," The Guardian, 2016, available at: https://www.theguardian.com/media/2016/jul/12/how-technology-disrupted-the-truth

Facebook's role in the dissemination of news is concerning because it is not an open and accountable organization.[112] Recently, a Facebook moderator removed a story by Norwegian newspaper Aftenposten that featured the famous "napalm girl" image of a girl running from an attack during the Vietnam War. It was removed because the image violated the platform's Community Standards on showing naked children.[113] When Facebook deleted the image, Aftenposten's editor accused Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg of "an abuse of power":

> I am upset, disappointed – well, in fact even afraid – of what you are about to do to a mainstay of our democratic society.[114]

However, initially, even when the historic context of the image was pointed out along with its importance to the news story, Facebook stood by its stance:

> While we recognize that this photo is iconic, it's difficult to create a distinction between allowing a photograph of a nude child in one instance and not others.[115]

Following a global outcry—including thousands of people posting the image on Facebook—they backed down and said they would review their policy and consult with publishers.

This case was more than a one-off failure of judgment by Facebook. It is a symptom of a systematic, structural problem. CEO Mark Zuckerberg insists that Facebook is "a tech company, not a media company.... we build the tools, we do not produce any content."[116] Yet Facebook aggregates news, and its algorithms and moderation teams influence what news appears in people's streams. It recently reviewed its procedures in response to fears that human editors on the trending team might have a "liberal" bias. An internal inquiry did not find evidence of bias, but it did make clear that both algorithms and human curators are making judgments in a similar way to how a news organization filters information.[117] Other platforms that curate news content, such as YouTube, face similar issues. They may not call themselves news or media companies, but they are editors of journalism.

This is a pressing policy problem, and the platforms are eager to engage in a dialogue. Tackling this is critical to them partly because it might drag them into regulatory oversight that will limit their control over their own platforms. However, there is a fundamental clash of interests between the publishers and platforms, which makes it hard to establish such policies. News is a good way of getting people to come to their platform, but it is a relatively minor part of their business (more so for Twitter than Facebook). How the platforms deal with this in regard to terrorism is an extreme case of a wider problem, but it brings the issues into sharp focus and reminds us of what is at stake.

THE PLATFORMS AND BREAKING NEWS

When two men murdered off-duty British soldier Lee Rigby in Woolwich, London, in 2013, it was a precursor of the attacks of summer 2016 in America and Europe. The attackers used the incident to promote their extremist Islamist ideologies. It provoked a limited anti-Muslim backlash, such as an attack on a mosque, two potential copycat incidents, and at least one white supremacist "revenge" attack. The British government responded by setting up an anti-extremist task force.

112 "Facebook is eating the world," Columbia Journalism Review, 2016, available at: http://www.cjr.org/analysis/facebook_and_media.php
113 "Community Standards," Facebook, available at: https://www.facebook.com/communitystandards/
114 "Facebook backs down from napalm girl censorship and reinstates photo," The Guardian, 2016, available at: https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/sep/09/facebook-reinstates-napalm-girl-photo
115 "Mark Zuckerberg accused of abusing power after Facebook deletes napalm girl post," The Guardian, 2016, available at: https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/sep/08/facebook-mark-zuckerberg-napalm-girl-photo-vietnam-war
116 "Zuckerberg says Facebook will never be a media company," Quartz, 2016, available at: http://qz.com/770743/zuckerberg-says-facebook-will-never-be-a-media-company-despite-controlling-the-worlds-media/
117 "Facebook to change trending topics after investigation into bias claims," The Guardian, 2016, available at: https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/may/24/facebook-changes-trending-topics-anti-conservative-bias

As Rigby was being attacked in the street, bystanders were tweeting about it. One person recorded a video of one of the attackers—with blood still on his hands—talking about why he had carried out the killing. A research project that looked at the Woolwich incident concludes that social media is the place where this kind of news breaks with important implications for "first responders."[118] The report also says social media is now a key driver of public understanding. This has implications for the authorities, the study states, but also for the platforms, who must consider their role in mediating the public reaction to avoid negative outcomes in terms of both further incidents and community relations.

For mainstream media, this was a test case of how to handle user-generated content in a breaking terror news situation. As *The Sun* Managing Editor Richard Caseby said:

> This was very graphic and disturbing content. Would it only serve as propaganda fueling further outrages? These are difficult moral dilemmas played out against tight deadlines, intense competition, and a desire to be respectful to the dead and their loved ones.[119]

The video first appeared on YouTube in full. News channels such as Sky carried the footage of Michael Adabalajo wielding a machete and ranting at onlookers. ITN obtained exclusive rights to run it on the early evening bulletin, just hours after the incident and before 9 p.m., known in the UK as the "watershed," after which broadcasters are permitted to air adult content. Those reports, unlike the YouTube footage circulated on social media, were edited and contextualized, and warnings were given. But there were still more than 700 complaints from the public about the various broadcasts, including on radio.[120] The UK's broadcasting regulator Ofcom cleared the broadcasters and said their use of the material was justified, although it did have concerns about "health warnings" and published repeated guidelines.[121]

For the platforms, it brought up two issues. Firstly, it was through the platforms that the news broke, raising questions about their responsibility for content uploaded to their networks. Second, the incident raised a problem about the platforms' reporting of users who post inflammatory

material. This second issue emerged during the trial of the second attacker, Michael Adebowale. Adebowale had posted plans for violence on Facebook, and its automated monitoring system had closed some of his accounts. This information was not forwarded to the security services. Facebook was accused of irresponsibility, including by the then UK Prime Minister David Cameron:

> If companies know that terrorist acts are being plotted, they have a moral responsibility to act. I cannot think of any reason why they would not tell the authorities.[122]

Facebook's standard response is that it does not comment on individual accounts but that it does act to remove content that could support terrorism. Like all platforms, it argues that it cannot compromise the privacy of its users.

The three main platforms—Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube—all have broadly similar approaches to dealing with content curation during a terror event. All have codes that make it clear they do not accept content that promotes terrorism, celebrates extreme violence, or promotes hate speech.[123] Twitter's stance is typical:

> We are horrified by the atrocities perpetrated by extremist groups. We condemn the use of Twitter to promote terrorism and the Twitter Rules make it clear that this type of behavior, or any violent threat, is not permitted on our service.[124]

118 "Security, terrorism and social media," The Economic and Social Research Council, 2015, available at: http://www.esrc.ac.uk/news-events-and-publications/evidence-briefings/security-terrorism-and-social-media/
119 "Security, terrorism and social media," The Economic and Social Research Council, 2015, available at: http://www.esrc.ac.uk/news-events-and-publications/evidence-briefings/security-terrorism-and-social-media/
120 "Coverage of the Lee Rigby killing," Slideshare, 2014, available at: http://www.slideshare.net/ahobbs2/week-28-lee-rigby-killing
121 "Lee Rigby video: BBC, ITV, Sky News cleared over graphic footage," The Guardian, 2013, available at: https://www.theguardian.com/media/2013/dec/20/lee-rigby-video-bbc-itv-sky-news-michael-debolajo
122 "Broadcast bulletin," OFCOM, 2014, available at: http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/enforcement/broadcast-bulletins/245/obb245.pdf
123 "Facebook could have prevented Lee Rigby murder," The Daily Telegraph, 2014, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/terrorism-in-the-uk/11253518/Facebook-could-have-prevented-Lee-Rigby-murder.html
124 Twitter post, 2016, available at: https://blog.twitter.com/2016/combating-violent-extremism

Twitter has taken down over 125,000 accounts since 2015, mainly connected to ISIS. It has increased its moderation teams and use of automated technology such as spam-fighting bots to improve its monitoring. It collaborates with intelligence agencies and has begun a proactive program of outreach to organizations such as the Institute for Strategic Dialogue to support online counter-extremist activities. As Twitter has stated, these platforms are in a different situation to news organizations. They are open platforms dealing with a vast amount of content that can only be filtered post-publication. They are still developing the systems to manage the problem:

> There is no "magic algorithm" for identifying terrorist content on the internet, so global online platforms are forced to make challenging judgment calls based on very limited information and guidance. In spite of these challenges, we will continue to aggressively enforce our Rules in this area, and engage with authorities and other relevant organizations to find solutions to this critical issue and promote powerful counter-speech narratives.[125]

Google says the public assumes there is a technical fix, but in practice the volume and diversity of material (40 hours of video are uploaded every minute to YouTube) make it impossible to automate a perfect system of instant policing of content. Artificial intelligence and machine learning can augment systems of community alerts. But even if a piece of content is noted, a value judgment has to be made about its status and what action to take. Should the material be removed, or a warning added?

This puts the platforms in a bind. YouTube, for instance, wants to hang onto its status as a safe harbor for material that might not be published elsewhere. When video was uploaded of the results of alleged chemical weapons attacks on rebels in Syria, YouTube had to make a judgment about their graphic nature and impact.[126] Much of the material was uploaded by combatants, but YouTube had to make judgments about how authentic or propagandistic it was. YouTube says it generally makes such judgments case by case; in this instance, many mainstream news organizations were then able to use that material from YouTube in their own reporting.

LIVESTREAMING

This problem of balancing protection of the audience, security considerations, and social responsibility with privacy and free speech becomes even more acute with the arrival of new tools such as live video streaming from Facebook Live, Twitter Periscope, YouTube, and even Snapchat and Instagram.[127] This affords ordinary citizens the opportunity of broadcasting live. Many people welcome it as an example of the opening up of media. But what happens when a terrorist like Larossi Aballa uses Facebook Live to broadcast himself after murdering a French policeman and his wife, holding their 3-year-old child hostage, broadcasting threats, and promoting ISIS?[128] The Rigby killers relied on witnesses to broadcast them after the incident, but Aballa was live and in control of his own feed. That material was reused by news media but edited and contextualized.[129]

There is a case for allowing virtually unfettered access that gives citizens a direct and immediate, unfiltered voice. Diamond Reynolds filmed the shooting of her boyfriend Philando Castile by a police officer in St. Paul, Minnesota, live on Facebook. The video was watched by millions, shared across social media as well as re-broadcast on news channels and websites. It attracted attention partly because it was the latest in a series of incidents where African Americans were subject to alleged police brutality.[130] In this case, Facebook Live made a systematic injustice visible through the rapid reach of the platforms. Local police contested her version of events, but the live broadcast and the rapid spread of the video meant her narrative had a powerful impact on public perception. It was contextualized to varying degrees when re-used by news organizations, but the narrative was driven to a large extent by Reynolds and her supporters.

125 Twitter post, 2016, available at: https://blog.twitter.com/2016/combating-violent-extremism
126 YouTube video, 2015, available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eimj5QG0o0M
127 "Death on smartphones: in a world of livestreamed tragedy, what do we gain?" The Conversation, 2016, available at: https://theconversation.com/death-on-smartphones-in-a-world-of-live-streamed-tragedy-what-do-we-gain-62769
128 "French terrorist attack aftermath broadcast on Facebook Live," Digital Trends, 2016, available at: http://www.digitaltrends.com/social-media/facebook-live-terror-attack/
129 "French terror attacker threatened Euro 2016 in Facebook post, source says," CNN, 2016, available at: http://edition.cnn.com/2016/06/14/europe/french-policeman-terror-attack/
130 Florida police shoot black man lying down with arms in air," The Guardian, 2016, available at: https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/jul/21/florida-police-shoot-black-man-lying-down-with-arms-in-air

These platforms insist they are not publishers, let alone journalistic organizations.

News organizations need to consider how to report these broadcasts and what to do with the material. Research shows varying approaches to dealing with this kind of graphic footage, even when not related to terrorism.[131] Should news organizations include direct access to live video as part of their coverage, as they might from an affiliate or a video news agency? In principle, they all resist becoming an unedited, unfiltered platform for live video broadcasts by anyone, with no editorial control.[132] As Emily Bell, director of the Tow Center for Digital Journalism at Columbia's Journalism School, points out that this reflects a difference between news organizations and the digital platforms:

> When asking news journalists and executives "if you could develop something which let anyone live stream video onto your platform or website, would you?" the answer after some thought was nearly always "no." For many publishers the risk of even leaving unmoderated comments on a website was great enough, the idea of the world self-reporting under your brand remains anathema. And the platform companies are beginning to understand why.[133]

Media organizations are having to negotiate with the platforms about how to inhabit the same space when these dilemmas arise. Sometimes, they have to act unilaterally. For example, CNN has turned off auto play for video on its own Facebook pages around some terror events and routinely puts up warning slates for potentially disturbing content.

HOW THE PLATFORMS HANDLE RISK AND RESPONSIBILITY

The platforms are acting to protect users from harmful content, as well as to comply with security considerations. Facebook, for example, deactivated the account of Korryn Gaines (who was later shot and killed) during a standoff with police.[134] A mainstream media organization might well have complied with a similar request. However, it raised questions as to why that particular action was taken, but not others. The perceived inconsistency of the platforms' policies comes from a lack of clarity and transparency. Twitter has removed ISIS-related material, but it does not always do the same for homophobic or racist tweets. In the wake of the Dallas shooting of police officers, there was a spate of extremist messaging that Twitter struggled to moderate.[135] The company accepts it has a problem:

> We know many people believe we have not done enough to curb this type of behavior on Twitter. We agree. We are continuing to invest heavily in improving our tools and enforcement systems to better allow us to identify and take faster action on abuse as it's happening and prevent repeat offenders. We have been in the process of reviewing our hateful conduct policy to prohibit additional types of abusive behavior and allow more types of reporting.[136]

131 "How did news organizations handle the Philando Castile Facebook Live video?" First Draft News, 2016, available at: https://firstdraftnews.com/real-time-decisions-how-news-organisations-handled-the-philando-castile-facebook-live-video/
132 "Live Output," Editorial Guidelines, BBC, available at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/editorialguidelines/guidance/live-output/guidance-full
133 "The unpredictable course of livestream has caught us unprepared," The Guardian, 2016, available at: https://www.theguardian.com/media/2016/jul/17/live-streaming-violent-events-crisis-facebook
134 "Facebook shuts down livestream of shooting at police request," Fortune, 2016, available at: http://fortune.com/2016/08/05/facebook-video-police/
135 "Minutes after Dallas shooting #BLM radicals for death of cops on Twitter," HypeLine, 2016, available at:http://hypeline.org/minutes-after-dallas-shooting-blm-radicals-call-for-death-of-cops-of-twitter/
136 "Milos Yiannopoulos permanently banned from Twitter," The Mary Sue, 2016, available at: http://www.themarysue.com/milo-yiannopoulos-permanently-banned-from-twitter-after-racist-harassment-inflicted-on-leslie-jones/

These platforms insist they are not publishers, let alone journalistic organizations. Their business is built upon providing an easy-access, open channel for the public to communicate. The terms and conditions of use, however, allow them to remove content, including shutting off live video. This is now done according to a set of criteria that are enforced through a combination of automated systems that identify key words, flagging of offensive content by users, and decisions by platform employees to remove or block the content or to put up a warning. This sort of post-publication filtering is not the same process as a journalist selecting material pre-publication.

However, it is editing. It involves making calculations of harm and judgments about taste. Monika Bickert, Facebook's head of policy, has said the platform does not leave this decision to algorithms. Instead, decisions are made on the basis of what is uploaded and how it is shared. Someone condemning a video of hate speech might not, for example, have his or her account suspended, but someone sharing the same video in a way that incites further hatred might:

> Was it somebody who was explicitly condemning violence or raising awareness? Or was it somebody who was celebrating violence or not making clear their intention or mocking a victim of violence?[137]

The obvious, critical difference with a news organization is that platforms do not have control over the content creators as they create and publish material.

Because of their much wider structural role, platforms have agreed to co-operate more extensively with the authorities on counterterrorism than news organizations and journalists often do. In the UK, there is the formal D Notice process that allows authorities to make one-off arrangements with news organizations to delay publication of security-sensitive material. When *The Guardian* was preparing publication of the

It is important for journalists to understand how platforms shape the framing of issues and the public's response.

Snowden revelations, its Editor Alan Rusbridger had conversations with British intelligence.[138] However, the relationship between the authorities and the news media is always ad hoc and built on the idea of journalistic independence, even hostility. *The Guardian* ended up with British intelligence officers coming into its newsrooms to destroy hard-drives that carried the classified information.[139] Technology companies have also resisted attempts to allow the authorities more access to their data and to preserve the privacy of their users.[140] But the Snowden revelations suggest that intelligence agencies have been successfully targeting online communications covertly.[141]

137 "In wake of shootings, Facebook struggles to define hate speech," NPR, 2016, available at: http://www.npr.org/sections/alltechconsidered/2016/07/14/486036166/in-wake-of-shootings-facebook-struggles-to-define-hate-speech
138 "The Snowden leaks and the public," The New York Review of Books, 2013, available at: http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2013/11/21/snowden-leaks-and-public/
139 Ibid.
140 "US tech firms criticize UK spying legislation," The Wall Street Journal, 2016, available at: http://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-tech-firms-criticize-u-k-spying-legislation-1452190202
141 "NSA Prism program taps into use data of Apple, Google and others," The Guardian, 2013, available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jun/06/us-tech-giants-nsa-data

SHAPING THE NARRATIVE: FILTER BUBBLES AND POLARIZATION

It is important for journalists to understand how platforms shape the framing of issues and the public's response. Posting on social media has a performative element; people say things because they are feeling emotional or signaling a point of view. Especially during the coverage of terror events, the reaction of the online public will be instinctive, and not necessarily representative. That does not mean it should not be noted and taken into account. But the danger of narratives built on social media content or that use social media as a proxy for what people are saying is that it privileges a highly selective sample.

Currently, the platforms' algorithms are tuned to bring personalized content that heightens engagement. The danger of this approach is that it clearly shapes the distribution of content to what people like, and users may be more likely to see political content they agree with rather than a broad spectrum of opinions. This is particularly relevant to terror events because evidence shows the greatest polarization of opinion online happens with divisive issues around ideology and race.[142] Research on online echo chambers has mixed results. But it does suggest that the polarization of politics is partially reinforced by social media, particularly by certain platforms such as Twitter.[142]

Sometimes this has a positive motivation. After the Paris attacks, Facebook encouraged people to add the French flag to their profiles to demonstrate solidarity with the people of France. That immediately raised the question of whether it would do the same for every country that suffered a terrorist incident.[144] Facebook would prefer this to be done by algorithms that are more powerful, faster, and cheaper than humans. Indeed, it has reportedly shifted further away from human curation on its trending online news streams, partly because of allegations of a liberal human bias.[145] Algorithms are ultimately programmed by humans, but the main work of selection and personalized dissemination of content will be done automatically. This is of particular concern when the subject is political. During the UK's European Union referendum campaign, the social media activist Tom Steinberg, who founded MySociety, said that he found it almost impossible to find a different view on the issue from his personal opinion on his Facebook feed even when he actively sought a more diverse diet:[146]

Tom Steinberg
June 24 ·

I am actively searching through Facebook for people celebrating the Brexit leave victory, but the filter bubble is SO strong, and extends SO far into things like Facebook's custom search that I can't find anyone who is happy *despite the fact that over half the country is clearly jubilant today* and despite the fact that I'm *actively* looking to hear what they are saying.

This echo-chamber problem is now SO severe and SO chronic that I can only only beg any friends I have who actually work for Facebook and other major social media and technology to urgently tell their leaders that to not act on this problem now is tantamount to actively supporting and funding the tearing apart of the fabric of our societies. Just because they aren't like anarchists or terrorists - they're not doing the tearing apart on purpose - is no excuse - the effect is the same, we're getting countries where one half just doesn't know anything at all about the other.

It's in the power of people like Mark Zuckerberg to do something about this, if they're strong enough and wise enough to swap a little shareholder value for the welfare of whole nations, and the world as a whole.

The polarization of opinion around terror is also potentially worrisome.

142 "Israel, Gaza, War and Data," Medium, 2014, available at: https://medium.com/i-data/israel-gaza-war-data-a54969aeb23e#.v9kp3mmt3
143 "Political polarization on social media: do birds of a feather flock together on Twitter?," The Policy and Internet Blog, 2015, available at: http://blogs.oii.ox.ac.uk/policy/political-polarization-on-social-media-do-birds-of-a-feather-flock-together-on-twitter/
144 All flags profile photo convertor, available at: https://killscreen.com/articles/facebook-filter-adds-flags-countries-attacked-isis-picture/
145 "Facebook is trying to get rid of bias in trending news by getting rid of humans," Quartz, 2016, available at:http://qz.com/768122/facebook-fires-human-editors-moves-to-algorithm-for-trending-topics/
146 "Defined by the filter bubble," Civic Hall, 2016, available at: http://civichall.org/civicist/defined-by-the-filter-bubble/

News organizations have had to change to adapt to social networks, and platforms too must continue to develop the way they behave in the face of breaking news.

One of the great advantages of the internet was the possibility of connecting to a greater range of sources and perspectives, but the algorithms of search and social counter this. This raises serious questions about the public formation of opinion around terror events, whether minority views will be excluded and a diverse debate on terrorism homogenized. Part of the role of a healthy news media is to provide that wider and deeper perspective and to include challenging as well as reassuring views. The platform algorithms seem to militate against that.

SHOULD PLATFORMS BECOME MORE LIKE MEDIA ORGANIZATIONS?

The platforms are in a difficult place in terms of the competing pressures of corporate self-interest, the demands of their consumers for open access, the public interest involved in supporting good journalism, and fostering secure and cohesive societies. They are relatively young organizations that have grown quickly, and are still accreting institutional knowledge on these issues.

The platforms have accepted they have a public policy role in combatting terrorism. Facebook now has a head of policy for counter-terrorism. They have gone further than most Western news media in allowing themselves to be co-opted into counter-terrorism initiatives. Yet any intervention

raises questions. For example, Facebook offered free advertising for accounts that post anti-extremist content.[147] But which ones and how far should it go? The platforms all say this is a developing area, and they are still consulting to see what is most effective and most consistent with the goal of being politically neutral. Platforms like Google argue they are only part of an existing conversation with governments and international bodies. They point out it is not for them to push a counter-narrative as it probably would not be credible or authentic. Instead they see their job as enabling the capacity of others.

The platforms do provide an opportunity for building social solidarity in the wake of these incidents far beyond the ability of news media. In the wake of the Lee Rigby killing, there was widespread reaction on social media expressing shock and disgust at the attacks including from many Muslims. There were also positive social media initiatives that sought to pay respect to the victim.[148] But some reaction was incendiary and anti-Islamic. Some people faced charges for inciting racial hatred on social media.[149] At the height of the European attacks in July 2016, one study recorded 7,000 Islamophobic tweets daily in English, compared to 2,500 in April.[150] More could be done to police these conversations, but as we have seen, there is a limit at the moment to its efficacy. As Martin Innes, the author of a report on social media and terror warns, this is still a nascent science:

> Traditional "big data" science statistical methods can be misleading in terms of how and why events are unfolding after major terrorist incidents, due to the complex conflict and information dynamics. Theory-driven methods of data analysis need to be urgently developed to realize the potential of social media analytics.[151]

147 "Facebook gives free advertising to users who counter terror propaganda," The Verge, 2016, available at: http://www.theverge.com/2016/2/12/10957776/facebook-terrorism-counter-speech
148 RIP Drummer Lee Rigby, Facebook post, available at: https://www.facebook.com/RIPdrummerLeeRigby/
149 "Woolwich attack: online posts over Lee Rigby killing spark charges," BBC, 2013, available at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-22665443
150 "Islamophobic tweets peaked in July," BBC, 2016, available at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-37098643
151 "Security, terrorism and social media: evidence briefing," Economic and Social Research Council, 2015, available at: http://www.esrc.ac.uk/files/news-events-and-publications/evidence-briefings/security-terrorism-and-social-media/

British MPs recently criticized the platforms for not doing enough to counter ISIS. The then-Chairman of the Commons Home Affairs Select Committee, Keith Vaz said:

> They must accept that the hundreds of millions in revenues generated from billions of people using their products needs to be accompanied by a greater sense of responsibility and ownership for the impact that extremist material on their sites is having.[152]

However, the platforms say they are already doing much to remove incendiary content. As the radicalization expert, Peter Neumann from London's Kings College, has pointed out, media is only a part of the extremist strategy:

> The vast majority of ISIS recruits that have gone to Syria from Britain and other European countries have been recruited via peer-to-peer interaction, not through the internet alone. Blaming Facebook, Google, or Twitter for this phenomenon is quite simplistic, and I'd even say misleading.[153]

The platforms (and the news media) cannot police these networks alone. There is also a responsibility for the authorities to monitor and engage with social media and to actively counter bad information and to provide reliable, real-time streams of information. Ultimately, the price of open access and exchange on these platforms might be an element of negative and harmful material.

However, just because these issues are complex does not mean platforms cannot adapt their policies and practices. It might be a virtual switch put in place to delay live feeds that contain violence. More "honest-broker" agencies such as Storyful or First Draft might emerge to act as specialist filters around terror events. One suggestion has been platforms like Facebook should hire teams of fact-checkers.[154] Another is they should hire senior journalists to act as editors.[155]

Of course, those last suggestions would make those self-declared tech companies more like news media. But we now inhabit what Andrew Chadwick[156] calls a "hybrid media" environment where distinctions are blurred. News organizations have had to change to adapt to social networks, and platforms too must continue to develop the way they behave in the face of breaking news. Companies such as Facebook and Google are already reaching out to journalists and publishers to find ways of working that combine their strengths. Twitter and Facebook, for example, have created a coalition organized by verification agency First Draft with 20 news media organizations to find new ways to filter out fake news.[157] Platforms and the news media both have much to gain in terms of trust by taking the initiative instead of waiting for angry governments to impose solutions that hurt creativity and freedom in the name of security. One only has to glance at more repressive regimes around the world to see the price paid for democracy when reactionary governments restrict any form of media in the name of public safety.

152 "Social media giants failing on extremism – MPs," BBC, 2016, available at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-37180159
153 Ibid.
154 "Facebook should hire fact checkers: here is what they would do," Poynter, 2016, available at: http://www.poynter.org/2016/facebook-should-hire-fact-checkers-heres-what-they-would-do/428118/
155 "Facebook needs an editor," Medium 2016, https://medium.com/whither-news/facebook-needs-an-editor-b388f789a9c3#.idyqs3g3t
156 Andrew Chadwick, "Hybrid media systems: politics and power," 2013, available at: https://www.amazon.co.uk/Hybrid-Media-System-Politics-Studies/dp/0199759480
157 "Facebook and Twitter join coalition to improve social media news gathering," The Guardian, 2016, available at: https://www.theguardian.com/media/2016/sep/13/facebook-twitter-social-media-newsgathering

CONCLUSION

This paper has set out a range of problems in reporting on terrorism that are practical, political, ethical, and structural. This is an evolving issue as both the nature of terrorism and media environment continue to change. This paper has also highlighted good practice and innovation that suggests progress is not just possible, but is already happening. Yet we need a process of self-critical debate both within newsrooms and between the news media and other people involved in these narratives.

The practical problem is of improving accuracy and providing better-informed context. It is particularly difficult with limited resources and rapidly multiplying sources and platforms. The same technologies that give journalists the power to report quicker and more extensively also speed up the news cycle and fill the public sphere with confusing, false, and complex information. Yet verification can be improved by adopting better techniques and insisting on standards across all platforms and under all circumstances. Greater transparency is a key attitudinal change that will help improve the search for truth and build trust.

The political problems are harder to solve. Journalists must understand the way they frame these stories has an impact on individuals, communities, and public policy. The fact news media gives publicity to the terrorist is a problem that cannot be completely resolved. But journalism can be created in ways that reduce the propaganda effect for either the terrorist or the panicked politician. By showing more empathy for the people involved and including more constructive narratives of resilience and understanding, the news media can at least counter the sense of fear and hopelessness terror news can induce.

The technology companies that provide platforms for the public and journalists to discuss and debate terrorism must do much more to improve how they filter and distribute information. There must be a more productive dialogue between the platforms and the news media about how their relationship can work better for the public good. Promoting more "good" journalism would be a start. In the same way the news media has to accept a wider responsibility for effects of reporting on terror, the digital giants must also recognize they are not just data or tech companies. They are part of the creation of narratives and formation of public opinion.

It is important we get this right. Trust in American media has plummeted to new lows. At a time when journalism is facing an economic crisis, we must rebuild the public's confidence. Consumers have so many alternatives to mainstream news media and so many distractions from journalism overall, we need to prove our worth. Terrorism is a key testing ground. Improving coverage of terrorism is important because violent extremism is a significant issue and symptomatic of wider problems around the world. The case for more intelligent, informed, and socially responsible reporting of terror is not just a moral plea. It is a chance to show journalism remains a vital part of modern society.

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