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From Minutes to Months

A rapid evidence assessment of the impact of media and social media during and after terror events.

A REPORT TO THE FIVE COUNTRY MINISTERIAL COUNTERING
VIOLENT EXTREMISM WORKING GROUP.

REPORT BY

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Minutes To Months

Executive Summary

This document reports findings from a Rapid Evidence Assessment conducted on the role of mass and social media during and after terrorist events. It is designed to bring together and synthesize insights and evidence from the available published research literature to inform future policy and practice development. By promoting understanding of how different forms of mediated communication shape what happens in the aftermath of terror events, the work seeks to reflect changes in both the conduct of terrorism and the contemporary information environment. In particular, the spread of social media has had disruptive and transformative impacts upon press and broadcast journalism, and the ways that terrorist violence is performed.

THIS EXECUTIVE SUMMARY IS ORGANIZED AROUND THREE PRINCIPAL SECTIONS:

- 1. An overview of the relationships between terrorist violence and media, and how these have been influenced by changes to the media ecosystem.**
- 2. A brief outline of the key typical developments that take place in particular time periods as one moves further away from the occurrence of the original violence.**
- 3. Recommendations for police, government and others involved in public safety provision, in terms of what strategic communications postures they can adopt to limit the impacts and harms of terror attacks.**

MEDIA & TERRORISM

An increasingly complex and multi-polar media environment has to be navigated by policy-makers, practitioners and members of the public when a terror event occurs. This is significant because of the **diversity of communicative actions** performed via mainstream media and social media, some of which will support the interests of police and governments, whilst others will amplify the harms of the violence committed by the perpetrators. The increasing **volume of communication** enables different groups to develop alternative interpretations and framings of the same event. As a consequence, there are typically multiple narratives and accounts circulating in the post-event environment, which can be more or less influential upon the construction of collective understandings and public definitions of the situation.

Harm is an important orienting principle for the analysis. It captures how the tenor and tone of political reaction to an event can alter and shape its overall impact. This has direct policy relevance in so far as authorities cannot control all of the messaging following a terror incident, but rather their strategic and tactical communications can make a material difference to the overall prevalence and distribution of the harms induced.

A key finding is that the **management of post-event situations** has been relatively neglected compared with more 'upstream' interventions. Taking a pragmatic view that, despite the best efforts of police and security services, not all future plots will be prevented, developing an understanding of how any harms can be mitigated is an important undertaking. Terrorist violence is purposively designed to 'terrorise, polarise and mobilise', different public audiences, therefore understanding and managing the dynamics of public reaction to these provocations is vital.

A defining premise of research on terrorism is that generating media coverage of politically motivated violence is intrinsic to how and why it is conducted in particular ways. Consequently, there is a large and diverse literature on the interactions between terrorism and media. Of particular salience to the current study is a relatively recent shift in approach towards more detailed **'event based' analyses**. Rather than general commentaries on how media cover terrorism, these provide more 'high resolution' and intricate renderings of the ways communicative actions influence the trajectories of specific cases.

This shift reflects how the presence of social media affords new forms of data capture that can be used to study terror events in ways that were not previously possible. Studies adopting this approach are especially relevant to the focus of this research.

Positioned in this way, research on the interactions between media and terrorism are interpreted as gravitating around four key 'logics'. By 'logic' we mean the principles and 'drivers' that serve to organize and structure an understanding of the causes and consequences of mediated communication on the conduct of terrorism by different actors.

- **Terror logics** focus upon how and why individuals or groups seek to harness, utilize or exploit different forms of mediated communication in pursuing their intentions or aims.

- **Media logics** are concerned with illuminating the rationales involved in how journalists, the organisations to which they belong, or social media users, report and interpret terror events.

- **Response logics** attend to the activities of counter-terrorism, and how mainstream media and social media channels function to frame the ways acts of terror are responded to.

- **Harm logics** document the social impacts and consequences induced by how the media, of different types, portray terror events and the reactions to these.

Typically, individual research studies tend to accent one or other of these 'logics', but in reality these dimensions interact with each other to shape the overall mechanics and dynamics of reaction to a particular terror event.

To help make the findings distilled from our analysis of the literature more practically useful and insightful, we have established two vectors via which they can be disaggregated. The first of these focuses upon the communications performed by different actors connected to an event, using mainstream or social media. The second attends to issues of temporal sequencing, in terms of how communicative interventions are positioned at particular moments in time after the violent event.

SIX KEY GROUPS OF COMMUNICATIVE ACTORS ARE IDENTIFIED. THESE ARE:

Perpetrators The instigator(s) of a terror event physically at the scene, and their supporters. Typically, they are seeking to amplify the impact, and /or set out justifications or explanations for it.

Participants People physically present at the scene as the terror event occurs in real time (including victims, eye-witnesses, bystanders, journalists).

Public The audience(s) to terror reached by media and responding to media; reading, listening, viewing and reacting online and offline. Audience membership can often be segmented in terms of their interest in and alignment with the event.

Practitioners The state actors who orchestrate the operational response to the terror event in live time (includes police, security services and government officials).

Press and Publicisers The print and broadcast mass media reporting on the event. Extends to media personalities or 'talking heads' without explicit affiliation to a political party, communicating via blogs, Op-Eds or social media.

Policy and Politics This label seeks to capture the influence of policy makers and other politicians, of varying ideological persuasions, whose communicative interventions help shape reactions to the event.

KEY DEVELOPMENTS OVER TIME

The main report details how, as time passes in the wake of an event, these messengers and their messages become more or less influential on the overarching dynamics of wider social reaction. To help understand this aspect, the process is sub-divided into a number of key temporal phases as depicted in the Figure below.

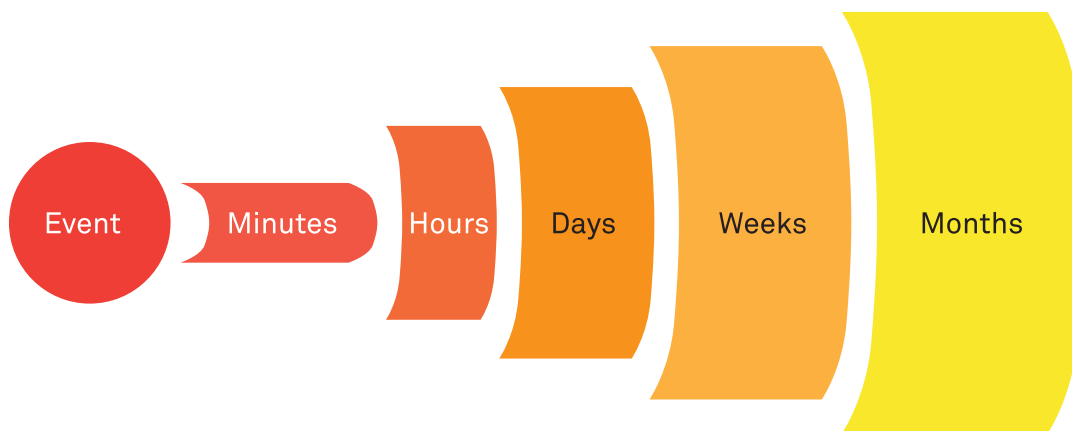


Figure 1. From Minutes to Months: Key Temporal Phases of Social Reaction

By blending communicative actors and time post-event, it is possible to derive a structured understanding of **'who is doing what and why'** in terms of media and social media communications conducted. Of course, the precise sequencing and timing will depend upon the specific circumstances of the incident itself, but as a framework this starts to identify the key generalisable patterns of communicative behavior.

MINUTES

The period immediately following the occurrence of terrorist violence is characterized by confusion and high degrees of uncertainty about what has happened. Initial public awareness is created by participants in the event tweeting messages, or using other social media platforms, to alert their followers. Such messages are picked up and rapidly relayed by other media outlets. In these circumstances, it is important for police to make an early public statement and then to update this when they can. This is preferable to delaying any comment, which will allow other voices to speculate, and spread misinformation and disinformation in the ensuing official information vacuum.

Discipline is vital because any inconsistencies and discrepancies will be exploited subsequently by the authors of conspiracy theories. Evidence suggests that uncorrected misinformation functions as a 'seed' for more deliberate disinformation propagation. Much as police investigators think in terms of a 'golden hour' of criminal investigation where their initial actions exert a structuring influence over their subsequent activities, so it is appropriate to conceive of a 'digital golden hour' principle in this context. This holds that the early communications made by police, event participants and others, do a lot of work in framing subsequent public interpretations and understandings.

HOURS

After the very early reactions have been registered, often by those directly connected to the event in some way, a more general public awareness and interest is likely to develop exponentially and very rapidly. In part, such dynamics are attributable to the engagement of a form of 'affective contagion', which

leads onlookers to emotionally connect with, and become wrapped up in, the unfolding story.

During this period, one can expect supporters of the perpetrators to 'claim' the act, and for police and government responders to officially define it as a terrorist incident. This accompanies an explosion in public awareness and communications about the event, many of which include speculative 'soft facts'. A key development to be monitoring at this stage is interventions by groups ideologically opposed to the suspected perpetrators, whose communications may start to try and amplify a sense of risk and incite anger.

Establishing a strategic communications capacity and capability during this period would perform two functions: (1) provide timely and accurate updates about what is known at that time; (2) rapid rebuttals of any information that is known to be false. Typically, responses have focused upon the first of these, but evidence suggests that from a 'harm reduction' perspective, the latter is also increasingly vital.

One recent innovation observed and worth highlighting, is senior officials making proactive statements that try and anticipate trouble, and thereby influence the behaviour of key segments of the audience. In addition to any material effects this may have on hate crime, it can perform as an important signal to communities that there is an awareness of a potential vulnerability to experiencing negative repercussions.

DAYS

As time passes, the initial sense of shock subsides and forms of public sense-making take over. Typically, this includes the development of a more detailed understanding of what has happened, who was involved and their motivations. During this period, it is common to observe inter-linked processes of solidarity and scapegoating. The former refers to public expressions of common values and how 'our way of life' is resilient to such assaults. More malign, is how certain social identities and groupings tend to be collectively blamed for the violence, by others with particular ideological affiliations. As a consequence, it is during this period that considerable policing effort may have to be directed towards managing 'secondary' instances of violence including hate crimes against people and property symbolically associated with the social identities of those committing the original violence.

An important objective for post-event strategic communications during the sense-making period

is to not allow the perpetrators of the act, or their supporters, to craft a narrative that projects an aura of malignant power. Communications issued by politicians and policy-makers should avoid unintentionally contributing to an impression that the perpetrators of the act are 'evil masterminds'. This important and legitimate objective can be achieved by ensuring that discrediting information about the past behaviours of any suspects or groups are shared.

In terms of countering narratives and perspectives authored by supporters of terrorist violence, civil society and third sector representatives can often provide an important voice in the days following an attack. There are opportunities for police and policy makers to think about how individuals in such roles might be helped to function as credible messengers. For example, police could brief such actors directly to make sure they are fully aware of the current situation.

A recently documented development is the involvement of foreign states running influence and interference campaigns, using a full spectrum of mass and social media assets, to inflame existing social tensions. At the current time, it is not clear how often such activities have been performed, but there is robust evidence of it having taken place on several occasions in the last two years. This blending of geopolitical conflicts into post attack situations establishes an additional layer of complexity to be managed by authorities, and may be an important arena for policy development in the near future.

WEEKS

After a few days, in most cases, intense public attention has passed. Reflecting this, media interest and commentary often pivots around updates about the police investigation, and its progress.

In the weeks that follow, handling potentially 'discrediting' information about the performance of the intelligence and security services may be an issue. One feature highlighted by the review of evidence about recent terror attacks is how, in the vast majority of cases, journalistic enquiries have revealed that terrorist offenders were previously 'known' to the authorities, and oftentimes had been in direct contact with them. Consequently, acknowledging and providing a reasonable explanation for what has transpired, is often a key strategic communications objective in the weeks after an attack.

MONTHS

Understanding how media and social media are used to communicate in the wake of terror attacks is important because of how past attacks are used to radicalize future potential perpetrators. This is not an activity restricted to the longer-term, and can sometimes commence quite soon after a terror event. However, we have positioned it at this point in the temporal sequencing, to reflect how an attack, and the responses to it, are frequently enrolled into a wider narrative by members of the terrorist group. It is this wider narrative that can subsequently be used to try and inspire and mobilise vulnerable others in the future.

A second facet of media interest at this point in time gravitates around the findings from any reviews or public inquiries that were launched to 'learn the lessons' from an event, especially where they highlight systemic weaknesses that are suspected to have contributed to the violence. As a general trend, as we move further away from the event in time, so a greater proportion of the media traffic can be defined as political communication. For example, whether legislative reforms are warranted is a common theme identified across terror events worldwide.

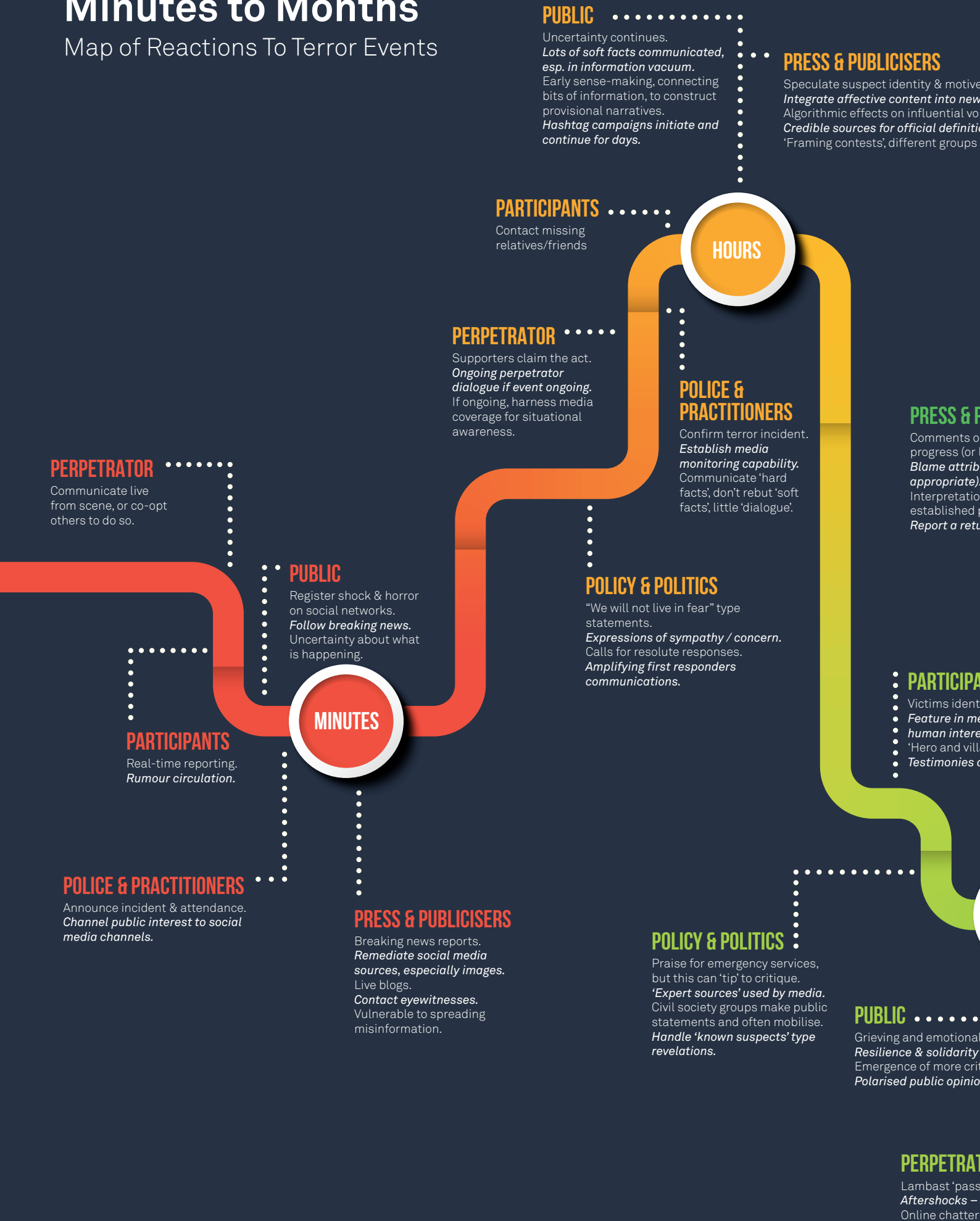
A key driver for the analysis overall, is to provide a comprehensive take on the range of interacting communications performed by different actors and stakeholders that take place during and after terror events, and how they collectively shape impacts and public understanding. The key findings and insights of the analysis can be summarized in a way that draws them together, providing a single point of view. This is depicted in the Figure below.

In due course, subject to suitable development, this framing has the potential to provide an organizing structure for a 'playbook' that can be used to steer policing and governmental strategic communications activities when responding to terror events.

Figure 1.

Minutes to Months

Map of Reactions To Terror Events



...s.
...s content.
...ices & journalists co-opt hashtags.
...ons of the situation.
...compete to set the agenda.

PERPETRATOR

Use the event to try and radicalize others.

PUBLICISERS

...n investigation
...lack of).
...tion (where
...ns more in line with
...political values.
...urn to 'normality'.

WEEKS

...ified.
...edia stories, with
...st angle.
...ain' stories.
...on chaos at scene.

DAYS

...l sharing.
...actions (eg memorials).
...tical voices.
...n.

PERPETRATOR

...ive' moderates.
...retaliatory attacks.
...amongst supporters

POLICY & POLITICS

Bi-partisan interpretations of the event.
Calls for review or enquiry.
Questions about wider counter-terrorism implications.

WEEKS

PUBLIC

General public attention subsides.
Acute fear and anxiety triggered dilutes.
Resilience actions online and offline.

POLICE & PRACTITIONERS

Updates on investigation.
Broadening role for community impact management.
Defend against reputational concerns.

PRESS & PUBLICISERS

Identify concerns about police/intelligence services.
Fill in the backstories of participants.
Broadcast public statements from a range of sources.
Report police operations.
Expose accounts.

POLICE & PRACTITIONERS

Official statements.
Identify suspects & appeal for info. to assist investigation.
Enforcement actions against wider suspect networks (can continue for weeks and months).
Handle reputationally damaging info about 'known suspects'.

PUBLIC

Public pressure to release information, or launch enquiry.
Anniversaries can reignite interest.

POLICY & POLITICS

New legislation responding to identified weaknesses.
Establish review / enquiry.

MONTHS

PERPETRATOR

Retrospective reporting (by others) interpreting their logics and actions.

PARTICIPANTS

Anniversaries and key events used to tell more detailed 'survivor stories'.

PRESS & PUBLICISERS

Report on any criminal trials and geo-political connections.
Report significant events, such as anniversaries, inquests, new laws.

POLICE & PRACTITIONERS

Criminal justice proceedings.
Learn from inquiries and/or reviews.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Informed by the findings and insights generated from this assessment of the evidence, there are a series of actions and interventions that can be identified as good practice. Individually and cumulatively they can help constrain media and social media communications seeking to amplify post-event harms associated with terrorism. These are summarised below:

1. In the minutes and hours following an attack, make an early statement about what is known and unknown at the current time and update this periodically. This is important in diminishing the space for rumours, propaganda and other 'soft facts'.
2. Establish a strategic communications capacity and capability, to include a single authoritative messenger for public communications, and steer messaging through them.
3. If the event is ongoing, be prepared to ask citizens at the scene(s) to desist from using social media in case it is affording the perpetrators enhanced situational awareness.
4. Co-ordinate messaging across partner agencies to ensure consistency and complementarity.
5. Implement a social media listening capacity and capability early on, with a particular focus upon groups inciting anger and / or social tensions.
6. Utilize social media listening for rumours, fake news and conspiracy theories. This should include foreign influence and interference operations. When these are detected, implement 'rapid rebuttals'.
7. Message 'polyphonically' and proactively, recognizing that different platforms and channels engage particular segments of the public.
8. As the immediate post-event reaction phase passes, prepare communications designed to 'puncture' the glamour of any perpetrators. This could involve satire, or 'boosting' messages by community-based opponents of the terrorist groups.
9. Set up a network of trusted journalist contacts and brief them regularly, including about known sources of disinformation. They can be helpful in exposing these to the wider public.
10. Be prepared to implement tactics that distract, disrupt, deny or delay messaging from other actors that might amplify the aggregate harm of the incident.

The overarching conclusion of the analysis is the importance of managing the post-event situation, in terms of influencing and minimising the public harm and impact resulting from a terror attack. To date, we conclude that this has been under-appreciated and somewhat neglected when compared with the amount of attention and focus that has been directed to 'upstream' preventative interventions. There are opportunities to develop comprehensive policy frameworks for post-event prevention interventions designed to mitigate and moderate the harm impacts that any incident achieves.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	17
1.1	SCOPE	
1.2	METHOD	
1.3	INTRODUCING A TIME DYNAMIC APPROACH	
1.4	THE MINUTES TO MONTHS (M2M) FRAMEWORK	
2	THE LOGICS OF MEDIA AND TERRORISM	23
2.1	TERROR	
2.2	MEDIA	
2.3	RESPONSE	
2.4	HARM	
3	MINUTES TO MONTHS	29
3.1	THE EVENT	
3.2	MINUTES AFTER	
3.3	HOURS AFTER	
3.4	DAYS AFTER	
3.5	WEEKS AFTER	
3.6	MONTHS AFTER	
4	RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE	53
4.1	M2M MAP OF REACTIONS TO TERROR EVENTS	
5	CONCLUSIONS	63
	APPENDIX	65

1.

CHAPTER 1.

Key Points

Introducing an event-based approach to reporting evidence and insights about the role of media and social media during and after terrorism events to understand:

- **How communications can amplify the social harm of terror events and influence public perceptions of terrorism and counter-terrorism.**
- **The disruptive and transformative impacts of digital and social media.**
- **Generalisable patterns of social action and reaction associated with key communicative actors as time passes during and after terrorism events.**
- **Needs and opportunities for the future management of terror risks.**

Introduction

This document reports insights and evidence about the role of the mass media and social media during and after events of terrorism. Conceptually, it takes an event-based approach, starting with a specific incident and then determining its causes and consequences over time. By comparing across a number of events, it aims to progress a generalisable understanding of how and when mediated communications from key actors can be influential in amplifying the social harm associated with terrorism. Developing such an enhanced understanding has particular value to policy and practice in terms of enabling more effective interventions to constrain the wider harms and impacts of terror events.

The organisation of the analysis gravitates around four key 'logics' or rationales that function to structure media communications about terror events. Applying these logics throughout allows our interpretation of events over time to attend to the following: i) perpetrators utilising the media to reach and engage a wide audience; ii) journalists sourcing and reporting in response to terror events; iii) the actions and reactions of policy and practice to terror events, and iv) the harm footprint left by terror, online and offline.

1.1 Scope

The work is principally informed by a structured assessment of the published research literature. This is supplemented by a small number of empirical case studies drawn from high-profile terror events to highlight key contemporary developments and trends.

The scope encompasses terror events worldwide with domestic and international motivations, enacted by a range of means and by any number of perpetrators. The nature and timing of an event itself structures, but does not determine, the reactions it generates and the trajectory of media communications about it. Not all events have 'media intent',¹ whilst others routinely slip under the media's radar². This reflects how terrorism is a generic conceptual label covering a variety of forms of violence and circumstances that belies a straightforward consensus and definition. In terms of media attention and coverage. A hostage situation over an extended period presents different challenges from events where a single actor undertakes a suicide bombing or vehicle-based attack.

The scope does not include events defined as 'cyber-terrorism'³, nor 'state-terrorism'⁴. However, the intervention and influence of online actors in the aftermath of real-world terror events are considered in terms of the propagation and spread of disinformation.⁵

1.2 Method

A Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) methodology was used to identify and interpret sources determined to be directly relevant to the scope of this work. A REA provides a structured and robust account of the quantity and quality of evidence in respect of a given topic. It is more rigorous and developed than an orthodox literature review, but less involved than a full systematic review. A more detailed account of the procedures guiding the search, retrieval and analysis of source materials for this study is provided in the Appendix.

HOWEVER, TWO PRINCIPAL FINDINGS CAN BE SUMMARIZED HERE:

■ Whilst the inter-relations between terrorism and mass media (and increasingly social media) have been extensively researched, detailed empirical studies of their role during and after specific events, as opposed to more general commentaries, are considerably less prevalent than what can be termed 'relational studies' and 'content-oriented studies'. The former is primarily concerned with the inter-relations between media organizations, terror events and groups. The latter offer detailed analyses of the contents propagated by media organizations about terror campaigns, attacks and groups, or by the terrorist organizations responsible.

■ This notwithstanding, there does seem to be a trajectory of development where 'event-based' analyses are becoming more common-place, in part reflecting the streaming qualities and data capture affordances associated with new social media sources. Such empirical and event-based approaches to studying the interactions between media and terrorism are especially important for the current study and thus afforded particular prominence in what follows.

1.3 Introducing a time dynamic approach

Exemplifying the shift to event-based analyses, and subject to multiple relatively intensive investigations, is the murder of Lee Rigby in Woolwich, London in 2013. Five significant studies of this incident have now been conducted, with each adopting a slightly different focus. These include the UK Parliament's Intelligence and Security committee report,⁶ focused in particular upon the pre-crime activities of the two suspects, and their radicalisation. Relatively quickly after the crime, the think-tank Demos published a report⁷ incorporating twitter data collected following the murder, to argue that police needed enhanced capacity and capability to monitor and analyse social media platforms. Others have used social media

1 Nacos, B. (1994) *Terrorism and the media: from the Iran hostage crisis to the World Trade Center bombing*. Columbia University Press: NY.

2 Marthoz, JP (2017) *Terrorism and the Media: a handbook for journalists*. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002470/247074E.pdf>

3 Pollitt, M. (1997) "A Cyberterrorism Fact or Fancy?", *Proceedings of the 20th National Information Systems Security Conference*: 285-289.

4 <https://www.fbi.gov/stats-services/publications/terrorism-2002-2005>

5 <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/here-s-why-you-should-worry-about-russian-propaganda>

6 [http://isc.independent.gov.uk/files/20141125_ISC_Woolwich_Report\(website\).pdf](http://isc.independent.gov.uk/files/20141125_ISC_Woolwich_Report(website).pdf)

7 Bartlett, J. and Miller, C. (2013) @metpolice uk: how twitter is changing modern policing. London. Demos.

analytics to focus upon how terrorist attacks such as this occasion forms of digital cyber-hate.⁸

The same event has been used to explore interactions between national press and social media, finding the former play an important role in steering and guiding the content of the latter in the aftermaths of atrocity events.⁹ In the context of the current report, this is especially salient as it contests the assumption that social media takes a leading, agenda-setting, function for press and broadcast outlets. The empirical evidence suggests more complex patterns of recursive and mutually adjusting influences in terms of what gets communicated to public audiences, when and how.

The most recent contribution to this literature gravitating around the Lee Rigby event is a pair of linked articles emanating from the same project. A systematic analysis collected social media data to delineate key patterns in the processes of social reaction in the wake of the attack¹⁰. Adopting a different conceptual lens, the event was interpreted using conflict dynamics theory to render a more sophisticated and complex understanding of relationships between key actors following terrorist violence.¹¹ Rather than thinking in terms of 'perpetrators of an act' versus 'the authorities' and 'general public', the developing account was one of 'multi-polar interactive conflict dynamics'. The point made is that there are multiple and shifting contests over interpretation and meaning, engaging multiple with a range of actors and perspectives. According to this analysis, it is misleading to think of 'the media' as a singular entity cast in one role, rather different elements of the media ecology will perform different functions and offer different perspectives, which together shape aggregate social reaction patterns.

From a detailed analysis of digital behavioural data, Innes et al.¹² developed a conceptual model of the social organization of public reactions labelled "the 10 "Rs" of social reaction". These are summarized as follows:

8 Williams, ML. and Burnap, P. (2015) Cyberhate on social media in the aftermath of Woolwich: a case study in computational criminology and big data. *British Journal of Criminology*, 56, 2: 211-38.

9 McEnery, T., McGlashan, M., Love, R. (2015) Press and social media reaction to ideologically inspired murder: the case of Lee Rigby. *Discourse & Communication* 2015, Vol. 9(2) 237-259

10 Innes, M., Roberts, C., Preece, A. and Rogers, D. (2016) "Ten "Rs" of social reaction: Using social media to analyse the "post-vent" impacts of the murder of Lee Rigby," *Terrorism and Political Violence*: 1-21, doi: 10.1080/09546553.2016.1180289

11 Roberts, C., Innes, M., Preece, A., Rogers, D. (2018) After Woolwich: analysing open source communications to understand the interactive and multi polar dynamics of the arc of conflict. *British Journal of Criminology*, Volume 58, Issue 2: 434-54,

12 Innes, M., Roberts, C., Preece, A. and Rogers, D. (2016) "Ten "Rs" of social reaction: Using social media to analyse the "post-vent" impacts of the murder of Lee Rigby," *Terrorism and Political Violence*: 1-21, doi: 10.1080/09546553.2016.1180289

Reporting – involves people at the scene or in the vicinity detailing aspects of what they have observed or heard directly to a wider public audience;

Requesting – as news breaks of a significant event, people seek to use their social networks to source more details about is happening or has happened;

Responding – involves the use of social media platforms as a site for recording and sharing emotional and cognitive responses to what is often shocking and traumatizing news;

Recruiting – as the process of reaction evolves and develops, extremist groups located at different points on the ideological spectrum seek to use social media platforms and their communications as vehicles to draw people towards their ideas and values;

Retaliating – Facebook, Twitter and other platforms are now routinely involved, both directly and indirectly in the organization of retaliatory actions, which can be both physical and digital, as individuals and groups seek to vent their emotions;

Risking – empirical observations across a number of terror incidents document how certain individuals seek to use media and social media to amplify a perception of risk in the wake of terror attacks, whilst others attempt to mitigate any such collective concerns and tensions;

Rumouring – as a concept is used to cover the spreading of misinformation and disinformation which appears to be an intrinsic component of the post-attack situation;

Remembering – although less fraught or divisive than some of the other Rs, remembering and the formatting of a collective memory of the incident and its key issues, is an important element of the process of reaction, especially over the longer-term;

Reheating – captures the ways in which ideologically motivated groups seek to connect the most recent attack, with other similar past incidents. The purpose being to wrap it into their broader grievance narrative;

Resiliencing – recognizes that in addition to malign and harmful social impacts, terror attacks do also occasion more pro-social responses, such as surges in social solidarity.

Stepping back from the details of the particular analyses, collectively these studies of the Rigby murder point to two key vectors that can be used to aid the organisation of how we think about the aftermath of terrorist violence. The first of these is the role of time, and how reaction patterns unfold and evolve. The second vector concerns the different roles and functions that are performed by an array of actors, that together impact upon how an event comes to be publicly defined and understood. In approaching our analysis, we perceive an opportunity to blend aspects of these two positions together to craft a structured conceptual framework that will enable a systematic treatment of how media and social media perform a range of different roles during and after terrorist attacks.

1.4 The Minutes to Months (M2M) Framework

Informed by the studies detailed in 1.3 and the Rapid Evidence Assessment, a conceptual model was developed around the idea that there are a series of key temporal phases in the aftermath of a terror event. The Minutes to Months (M2M) framework is used to structure the material presented herein. A representation of the relations between the temporal phases is provided in Figure 1 on the following page.

This Minutes to Months framework offers an innovative approach to thinking about how events, and communications about them, can be understood as they unfold over time. It posits that there are a series of five temporal phases in the aftermath of a terror incident: minutes, hours, days, weeks and months. Approaching the media-terror relationship using this perspective means starting with the proximate consequences that occur immediately following an event and then tracing out how these frame further concatenated occurrences.

As time advances from minutes to months, the more intense and concentrated initial impacts of an event tend to progressively dissipate, but the ripple effects can mean they touch greater numbers of the public and involve a wider array of communicative actors. These actors contribute to the media construction and reportage of incidents of terror over time, and ultimately to social reactions.

To some degree, the focus on particular actor roles within research studies on terrorism are structured by traditional academic disciplinary interests. For example, criminologists tend to highlight the role of police and other criminal justice agencies, whereas studies emanating from communication science tend to focus more upon journalists. The temporal framework adopted here illuminates ‘clusters’ of actors, acting and interacting at any one time point during or after an event. From our reading of the empirical evidence, we identify six actor groups with respect to their media contribution: (1) Perpetrators; (2) Participants at the scene; (3) Public audiences; (4) Police and Practitioners; (5) Press and Publicisers and (6) Policy and Practice.

In summary, combining an analysis of key actors and time periods helps bring together key communications and actions pertaining to ‘who is doing what and when’. Taking this perspective sheds new light on how media communications can influence public understandings, and reactions to, terrorism. The application of the same approach also highlights and identifies gaps in current knowledge, evidence and understanding. Needs and opportunities for policy and practice development that will enhance the future management of terrorist risks and threats are therefore identified and discussed in sections 4 and 5 of this report with an emphasis on practical interventions and further research.

Figure 2.

Minutes to Months

Map of Reactions To Terror Events



es.
ays content.
ices & journalists co-opt hashtags.
ions of the situation.
compete to set the agenda.

PERPETRATOR

Use the event to try
and radicalize others.

PUBLICISERS

on investigation
(lack of).
ution (where
,
ons more in line with
political values.
urn to 'normality'.

WEEKS

ified.
edia stories, with
est angle.
ain' stories.
on chaos at scene.

DAYS

l sharing.
y actions (eg memorials).
tical voices.
on.

PERPETRATOR

sive' moderates.
retaliatory attacks.
amongst supporters

POLICY & POLITICS

Bi-partisan interpretations of the event.
Calls for review or enquiry.
Questions about wider counter-terrorism
implications.

WEEKS

PUBLIC

General public
attention subsides.
**Acute fear and anxiety
triggered dilutes.**
Resilience actions
online and offline.

POLICE & PRACTITIONERS

Updates on investigation.
**Broadening role for community
impact management.**
Defend against reputational
concerns.

PRESS & PUBLICISERS

Identify concerns about
police/intelligence services.
**Fill in the backstories of
participants.**
Broadcast public statements
from a range of sources.
Report police operations.
Expose accounts.

POLICE & PRACTITIONERS

Official statements.
Identify suspects & appeal for info. to assist investigation.
Enforcement actions against wider suspect networks (can
continue for weeks and months).
Handle reputationally damaging info about 'known suspects'.

PUBLIC

Public pressure to
release information, or
launch enquiry.
**Anniversaries can
reignite interest.**

POLICY & POLITICS

New legislation responding
to identified weaknesses.
Establish review / enquiry.

MONTHS

PERPETRATOR

Retrospective
reporting (by others)
interpreting their
logics and actions.

PARTICIPANTS

Anniversaries and key events
used to tell more detailed
'survivor stories'.

PRESS & PUBLICISERS

Report on any criminal trials and
geo-political connections.
**Report significant events, such as
anniversaries, inquests, new laws.**

POLICE & PRACTITIONERS

Criminal justice proceedings.
Learn from inquiries and/or reviews.

2.

CHAPTER 2.

Key Points

Setting the Scene with an overview of 4 'Logics of Media and Terrorism' connecting events, communication and actors.

This section provides an overview of key themes related to the connections between media and terrorism. It is organised around four principles or 'logics', which each represent 'gravitational' positions within the research literature around which recurrent themes and interests appear to coalesce. These are identified as:

BOX 1

Logics underpinning the current literature on media and terrorism.

TERROR LOGICS:

How the perpetrators of terrorism use participants at the scene and the media as a conduit to public audiences.

MEDIA LOGICS:

How press and publicisers communicate via traditional and social media networks, and the impact they have on the unfolding definition of the situation.

RESPONSE LOGICS:

How police and practitioners and actors associated with policy and politics respond to the event in the short and longer-term and influence public opinion.

HARM LOGICS:

The near term and longer-term 'footprints' terror leaves within communities online and offline that signals harmful public impacts.

Prefacing a more detailed discussion, it is worth noting that many of the problems and challenges identified in respect of media and social media reporting of terror events replicate and reproduce issues identified across a wider range of social institutions and situations. The disruptive and transformative effects of social media upon the media ecology are not confined to terrorism phenomena but are more structural and deep-rooted. Recognition of this is relevant to thinking about possible policy and practice innovations insofar as effective responses may require forms of social engineering beyond the purview of even the most determined counter-terrorism agency.

It is relevant to this analysis that, at the time of writing, the roles and responsibilities of social media companies appear to be undergoing a degree of re-negotiation. For a considerable period their avowed position has been that they are not ‘publishers’ of the material that appears on their platforms and should not be viewed as responsible for the content of what their users post online. However, following a number of public scandals and adverse publicity, it does appear that a number of the main social media providers are becoming more interventionist in terms of:

- Identifying content on their platforms that should be removed, and in some cases stopping such material being uploaded in the first place;
- Doing more to amplify influential and credible information sources; and,
- Tracking event-related propaganda for extended periods following significant events.

The issues here are complex and beyond the purview of this report. There are important questions of rights to free speech that have to be considered in terms of any regulatory intervention and what people can say within the boundaries of law. Equally, such rights have to be counter-balanced by recognition that collective harm can be generated by toxic communications following significant acts of politically motivated violence. These complexities notwithstanding, it is certainly the case that actions by platform providers

can have an important role in constraining the public harms induced in the wake of terror attacks.

Relatedly, it would be misleading to assume that all the problems recently attributed to mass media and social media reporting of terror events are without precedent. Whilst social media technologies and platforms have unleashed new social and communication dynamics, there are also some deeper challenges that relate to how journalists commentate on terrorist violence in general. There have been long-standing concerns that media coverage of counter-terror interventions might offer a tactical advantage to those engaging in violence. This was an issue discussed with respect to the SAS’s iconic storming of the London Iranian Embassy in 1980¹³. Recent debates about the use of social media to engage in ‘live reporting’ from the scene of the attack can be understood as resonating with these longer-term concerns.

2.1 Terror Logics

Terrorist violence is a form of communicative action designed to ‘terrorize, polarize and mobilize’ different segments of the public audience.¹⁴ Consequently, there is a long-standing and widespread recognition of the importance of the relationship between media and terrorism. For a number of prominent commentators, capturing public attention in the wake of an event is at least as important as any destruction in understanding the logics and rationales of those engaging in political violence.¹⁵ Summarizing the literature in this vein, Paul Wilkinson identified that mass media provide four key potential affordances for terrorist organizations:¹⁶

1. Conveying propaganda of the deed and generating fear among target groups;
2. Mobilizing wider support for their cause amongst the general population;
3. Frustrating and disrupting the response of the government and security services;
Fostering enhanced and more material support from those already sympathetic to the terrorists’ cause.

13 Paul Wilkinson, “The Media and Terrorism: A Reassessment” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 9 (1997): 51–64, doi: 10.1080/09546559708427402

14 Martin Innes, *Signal Crimes: Social Reactions to Crime, Disorder and Control* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); See also L. Dillon, Joshua D. Freilich & S.M. Chermak. 2018. Media effects within the context of violent extremism in the post 9/11 era. In M. Khader, N.L. Seng, J. Tan & D. Cheong, Eds. *Learning From Violent Extremist Attacks: Insights from Behavioral Sciences Perspective*. Hackensack: World Scientific. In press.

15 Steven M. Chermak and Jeffrey Gruenewald, “The Media’s Coverage of Domestic Terrorism,” *Justice Quarterly* 23, no. 4 (2006): 428 – 461. DOI: 10.1080/07418820600985305

16 Wilkinson, “The media and terrorism”, 51-64.

An analysis of the 17-day hijacking of TWA Flight 847 suggests that extensive coverage by NBC Television and the other networks enhanced the 'value' of the 39 hostages to the Shi'ite Islamic Jihad terrorist group who had seized them. As a result, it significantly increased the pressure on American and Israeli governments to secure their release.¹⁷

A number of studies have sought to develop theoretical accounts that centre the performative aspects of terror¹⁸. This perspective interprets terrorism as being as much about capturing political and public attention, as it is about causing harm and destruction. The key ingredient is the desire of those committing the attack to generate media coverage, an intent integrated into the design and delivery of their violence. This would include instances where terrorists record their violence, either sending it to journalists for onward dissemination, or broadcasting it directly to a public audience via the internet. A variant of this logic was Anders Breivik, who in anticipation of his spree of deadly violence, made arrangements for public distribution of his 'manifesto'.

As well as these more expressive and performative functions, a number of studies document how media and social media can be deployed more instrumentally in a terror attack by perpetrators and their sympathisers¹⁹. For example, after the Mumbai terror attack in 2007, it was revealed that the marauding machine-gun operatives on the ground were being provided with situational awareness by supporters overseas, monitoring social media and using it to update their colleagues about what was happening in near real-time²⁰.

2.2 Media Logics

In his analyses of how and why media organizations report crime and crisis events in particular ways, David Altheide²¹ distilled a set of 'media logics' to account for how journalists and media proprietors reconcile commercial imperatives with key practices.

Understanding these logics helps to explain and justify the ways in which journalists and mass media organizations act, in terms of covering some events but not others, and how these get constructed as stories. Importantly, there is a general consensus that structural changes to the media ecology in terms of financial pressures are altering some of the operating principles steering traditional media organizations.

There is recurring concern about how the media report terror events in ways that can shape how it unfolds, with the effect of increasing the intensity and reach of an event's impact.²² This raises obvious and important questions. What is known about the impacts and effects of these patterns of communication? How do they influence public understandings of terrorism and counter-terrorism with regard to specific incidents and more generally?

An orienting principle of media effects research is trying to understand the specifics of how much and what kinds of influence different forms of media reportage have. Whilst media may have only limited impacts upon what people think, they are more profoundly influential in determining the issues we think about. Miller and Sack²³, for example, report: "there is no doubt the Toronto 18 case, and the way the media covered it, contributed to a heightened state of public alarm about terrorism and Muslims". In support of this contention, the authors cite a CanWest News Service poll, immediately after the arrests of the Toronto 18, that suggested a majority of Canadians (58%) believed there were many more extremist groups and cells operating in Canada.

This 'agenda-setting' function achieved by press and publicisers through filtering events, issues and problems for collective attention, whilst deselecting others, is a critical way in which media are important in social life. To some degree, this effect has been weakened by the prevalence of social media, which undoubtedly occasion opportunities for a greater diversity of interests, sources of news and perspectives²⁴. However, we should not over-state

17 A. P. Schmid, "Terrorism and the media: The ethics of publicity," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 1, no. 4 (1989): 539–65, doi: 10.1080/09546558908427042.

18 Weimann, G. (2008) *The Theater of terror. Psychology of terrorism and mass media*, 379–90. Kellner, D. (2004) 9/11, spectacle of terror and media manipulation. *Critical Discourse Studies*, 1: 1: 41–64. Chouliariaki, L and Kissas, A (2018) The communication of horrorism: a typology of online death videos. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 35, 1

19 Sullivan, R. (2014) Live-tweeting terror: a rhetorical analysis of @HSMPress_ twitter updates during the 2013 Nairobi hostage crisis. *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 7, 3: 422–33.

20 Oh, O. et al. (2011) Information control and terrorism: tracking the Mumbai terrorist attack through twitter. *Inf Syst Fron*, 13: 33–43.

21 David L. Altheide, "The Mass Media, Crime and Terrorism," *Journal of International Criminal Justice* 4, no. 5 (2006): 982–997, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jicj/mql061>

22 Dillon, L., Freihlich, D. and Chermak, SM. (forthcoming) "Media effects", in press.

23 Miller, J and Sack, C (2010) "Terrorism and anonymous sources: The Toronto 18 case," *Canadian Journal of Media Studies* 8 (2010): 1–21.

24 Fahmy, S. (2017) Media, Terrorism and society: perspectives and trends in the digital age. *Special Issue Mass Communications and Society*, 20: 35–9.

this diversification on the grounds that, when major terror attacks occur, people flock to both mainstream and social media seeking information about what has transpired.

The capacity of a terror event to capture and sustain media and public attention is in part a function of the damage and destruction it delivers. Extraordinary forms of violence, such as that executed on 9/11, or in London in 2005, are almost inevitably and inherently more newsworthy than incidents where the harm is less visible. Indeed, these kinds of media logics feed in to terror logics to explain how and why terrorists seek to change and innovate their tactics. One reason for their macabre innovations in violence, their choice of symbolic targets or dates, may be an awareness that such qualities render it more 'newsworthy' and likely to acquire attention.

There is a general pattern then that terror events attract media attention, and many are conducted in ways intended to leverage such publicity. But it would be misleading to suggest that all attacks incorporate a media logic. There are qualities that tend to lessen the intensity of media interest. For example, where the intent or motivations behind an attack are not especially clear. Whilst this can elicit media speculation and commentary, overall it tends to weaken the ability of journalists and commentators to frame a strong narrative about the violence and its causes.

2.3 Response Logics

If media logics identify the imperatives structuring and steering the behaviours of social media users, journalists and press and broadcast organizations to which they belong, response logics are their equivalent for a range of actors associated police and practitioners (e.g. other emergency responders), policy and politics.

Ultimately, communications from these sources have value in shaping the level and intensity of the harm that an event acquires in the short and longer-term. For example, in the early aftermath of a terror event, 'official' communications from these sources in the media are likely to be restricted to merely confirming an incident has taken place and perhaps reminding the public at large that there may be other actors who

are actively spreading 'soft facts' about that event, albeit deliberately (disinformation) or unwittingly (misinformation).

Learnings about timely and appropriate response continues to evolve from experience over time. For example, after the 2013 terrorist attack at the Boston marathon, researchers from the Conference Board of Canada²⁵ undertook a fact-finding mission there, aimed at drawing lessons on critical situation management. One of the key findings to emerge was the importance of social media broadcasting 'real-time' information to the community. As the report's author observed, "in a crisis, people use social networks for a variety of informational purposes, including to: gather information about the crisis, family, and friends; reach out for help; share information with authorities; inform and offer assistance to others [and] provide emotional support to each other" (ibid.: 31). In relation to events in Boston, individuals spoke of the potential for social media tools supporting three critical objectives: "disseminating and amplifying official event-related information and advice to build the public's support and guide their behaviour; monitoring social media to help build timely organizational situational awareness [and] detecting and addressing event-related (mis-)information" (ibid.: 31). City officials also recognized, post hoc, they had been hampered in their information sharing efforts by the lack of an emergency broadcast message (ibid.).

2.4 Harm Logics

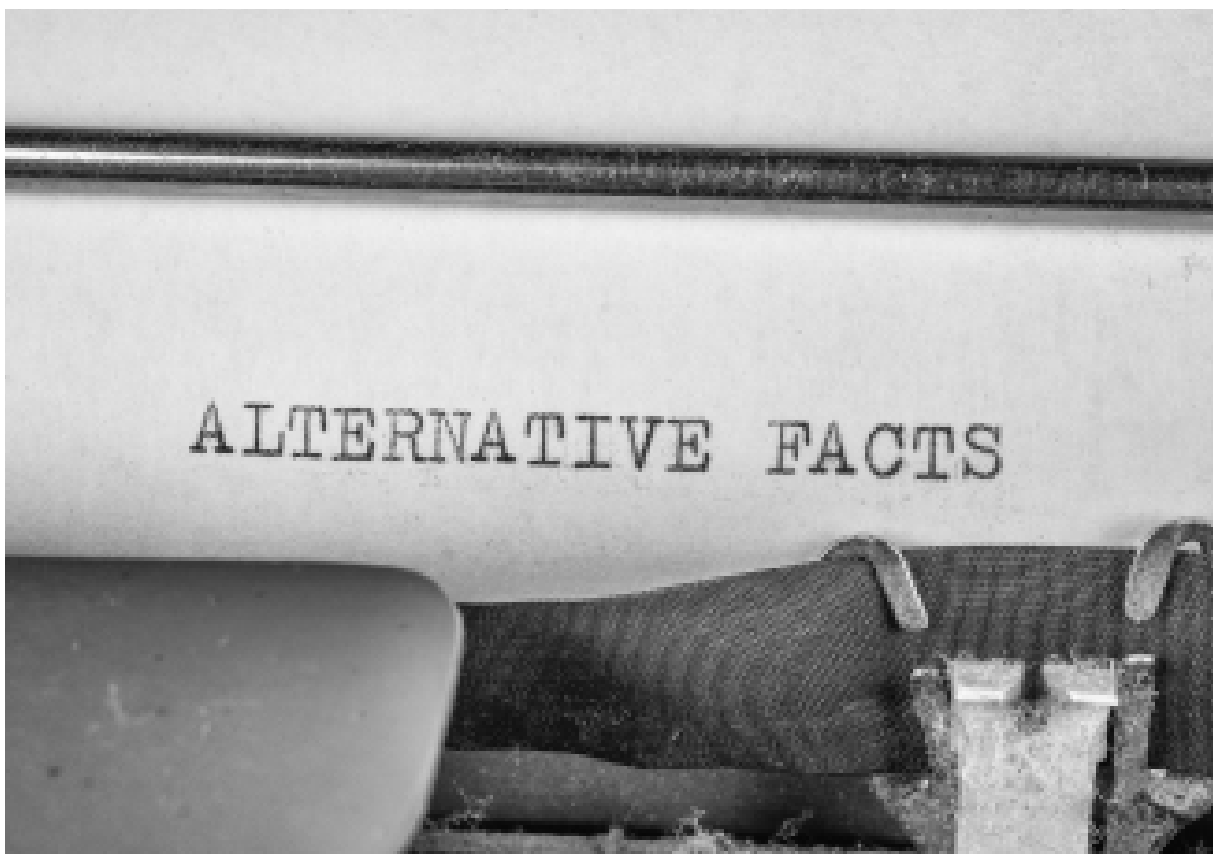
Harm logics foreground concern with more malign effects or outcomes that are associated with the media coverage of events. High profile terror attacks have the capacity to induce a range of impacts and consequences which can be variously experienced at individual, community / group and social levels. These are configured by Innes (2014) as 'private', 'parochial' and 'public' 'harm footprints'²⁶. These categories differentiate between events where the intensity, prevalence and distribution of any effects is limited and constrained, and events where harms and impacts 'travel' to 'touch' far greater numbers of people.

²⁵ Rutten, B (2015) The response that was #BostonStrong: insights from the 2013 Boston marathon bombings. Conference Board of Canada.

²⁶ Innes, M. (2014) Signal Crimes: social reaction to crime, disorder and control. Oxford University Press: pp 71-72.

Opinion surveys show that the public salience of terrorist attacks varies over time and is not a simple function of the frequency or intensity of attacks.²⁷ There is a suggestion in Spanish survey data that the public can become somewhat desensitized to terror in the midst of a long-term campaign, but also that the tenor and tone of political reactions to the violence can have a role in amplifying the social harm people experience. That this is Spanish evidence, between 1985 and 2012, is pertinent given the consensus that the Madrid attacks in 2004 played a role in shaping the outcome of the general election of that year.²⁸ Analyses of the impacts of the November 2015 terror attack in Paris found that post-event fear and 'cyberhate' travelled across nations in its aftermath, with increases detected in Spain, Finland, Norway and the United States, as well as France²⁹. Consistent with the findings of other studies, the data suggested that harmful effects of cyberhate are mitigated by social trust³⁰.

Whilst these four logics are presented separately above, it is not intended that each are viewed in isolation from each other. As will be accentuated by the range of studies reviewed in this document, logics co-exist and interact with each other in the time during and after terror events. A symbiotic relationship between terror and media is widely recognised but, also emergent when the communications associated with an event are analysed over time, are other key interactions in the contemporary communication environment. For example, the interaction between media and response logics in the early time frames of an event as it unfolds.



27 Hénar O. Criado, (2017) "What makes terrorism salient? Terrorist strategies, political competition and public opinion," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 29, no. 2: 197-214, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2015.1008628>

28 Oksanen, A., Kaakinen, M., Minkkinen, J., Räsänen, P., Enjolras, B. and Steen-Johnsen., K. (2018) "Perceived societal fear and cyberhate after the November 2015 Paris terrorist attacks," *Terrorism and Political violence* (2018):1-20, doi: 10.1080/09546553.2018.1442329.

29 Oksanen et al.(2018) Perceived societal fear and cyberhate after the November 2015 Paris terrorist attacks. *Terrorism and Political violence* (2018):1-20. doi: 10.1080/09546553.2018.1442329.

30 Williams, ML and Burnap, P (2016) "Cyberhate on social media in the aftermath of Woolwich: A case study in computational criminology and big data," *British Journal of Criminology* 56, no. 2 (2016): 1-28. doi: 10.1093/bjc/azv059

3.

CHAPTER 3.

Key Points

An evidence-based conceptual framework is introduced to model key temporal phases in the aftermath of a terror event. It traces how initial impacts progressively dissipate over time to reach a greater number of communicative actors and public audiences.

- **Events:** the circumstances of an incident, in terms of whether the attack is concluded or ongoing, shape and influence the temporal dynamics of media coverage.
- **Minutes:** actions and behaviours performed by communicative actors immediately following an event when levels of confusion and uncertainty are high.
- **Hours:** an ‘information explosion’ in public awareness of the event via media and social media. Official notification of the event co-exists with rumour and other ‘soft facts’.
- **Days:** the emergence of ‘collective sense-making’ and a public definition of the situation. A surge in solidarity may be off-set to some degree by rising social tension.
- **Weeks:** more reflective and critical reactions to the event are reported, along with developments or outcomes in the police investigation.
- **Months:** The agenda-setting role of the media leads to the specifics of the event being absorbed into a wider narrative on terrorism and extremism. This can include political dimensions of response, public inquiries and new legislation, but also radicalising influences that may feed in to subsequent terror plots.

THE EVENT

The situated details associated with a defined critical event, structure and guide, but do not determine, the type and strength of reaction it generates. The capacity of a terror event to capture media and public attention is, in part, a function of the damage and destruction it delivers. Extraordinary forms of violence committed against symbolic targets, such as that executed on 9/11 or in London in 2005, are almost inevitably and inherently more newsworthy than incidents where the harm is less visible, or its impacts judged less resonant to audiences in more powerful countries. Some events are orchestrated to ‘explode’ into newsfeeds, whilst others progressively unfold in a nail biting drama. The latter building in intensity and in terms of their ability to capture public attention over a period of hours or days. An event over an extended period is thus very different in terms of the communication challenges it raises from other types of event, which begin and end instantaneously.

It is not unusual for a breaking news event to be labelled as ‘terrorism’ prior to any official definition of the situation being issued. In such circumstances, these early proclamations can have a framing influence upon initial reporting as more details about it enter the public domain. This is pertinent to the subsequent discussion of key time periods, in that, where a terror event is spread over days (such as in a

hostage-taking or siege), then this can mean some of the key communication-based reactions are delayed in terms of when they happen, compared with their occurrence following more temporally condensed forms of violence. As such, in what follows, we have assigned key communicative actions to particular temporal phases. This is on the basis that these are the points of time when these things are most likely to happen. However, this does not imply that these are the only moments when they can occur during or after a terror attack, as this can reflect the nature of the incident itself. After all, what we are seeking to elucidate through this analysis are reaction patterns, rather than documenting every possibility or eventuality.

Considerable space could be directed herein to discussing the details of different modalities of terrorist violence and their respective abilities to leverage varying volumes of media and social media coverage. However, for our purposes, it is sufficient to acknowledge that whilst there are some common patterns and tendencies in terms of the social organization of reactions to terror events through different media, there are differences also: the nature of the terror event itself is one factor, but not the only one.

MINUTES

The period immediately following the instigation of an event is always marked by a high degree of uncertainty about what has occurred. There will typically be multiple, conflicting accounts and interpretations of what has happened and why. People who witness, record and react at the scene, are often the first to 'break the news' to a public audience, acting as 'citizen journalists' potentially capturing real-time imagery and commentary of the event in progress. Individual or group perpetrators of an event may well upload material or communicate online or try to do so through mainstream media. Typically, these early communications are either of the violence they are performing, or provide a justification for, or explanation of, their motives. Press and publicisers will, in the minutes following an attack, start to cover it, often in a fairly descriptive register, with speculations about possible causes and/or motives being progressively introduced. As awareness that a significant event has taken place starts to spread, a public audience starts to assemble, frequently turning to their social networks as they 'forage' for information about it. Coherent with this, rumours will frequently start to circulate, some of which will be substantiated, and others disproved. This is a

symptom of the speed at which key communicative actors engage with a breaking story and this is a time when a number of significant actions occur. From a policy and practice perspective, these very early stages are notoriously difficult in communication terms as it is unclear what exactly has happened. Consequently, at this stage, official mediated communications tend to be restricted to notifying / confirming that a major event has occurred or is occurring.

Terror Logics

Attending first to the logics of terror, perpetrators can seek to amplify the impact of their actions by attracting media coverage, or live and direct messaging through social media platforms. Multiple instances of 'live streaming' by individual perpetrators of terror to broadcast and justify their actions have been documented³¹. For example, the 2013 Westgate mall siege in Kenya involved the assailants live-tweeting from its onset.³² Following the murder of Lee Rigby, the perpetrators remained at the scene to actively co-opt eyewitnesses to video their message and pass on a handwritten note justifying their actions.³³ In the Sydney Siege (also known as the Martin Place Siege or the Lindt Café

31 Maura Conway and Joseph Dillon, "Case Study: Future Trends – Live-streaming Terrorist Attack?" *Vox-Pol* (2016): 1-8.

32 David Mair, "#Westgate: A Case Study: How al-Shabaab used Twitter during an Ongoing Attack," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 40, no. 1 (2017): 24-43, doi: 10.1080/1057610X.2016.1157404

33 "Woolwich attack: the terrorist's rant," *The Telegraph*, May 32, 2013, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/terrorism-in-the-uk/10075488/Woolwich-attack-the-terrorists-rant.html> Jamie Grierson, "Lee Rigby murder: Killer Michael Adebolajo handed witness a note attempting to justify actions," *The Independent*, December 19, 2013, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/lee-rigby-murder-killer-michael-adebolajo-handed-witness-a-note-attempting-to-justify-actions-9015775.html>

Siege), the assailant, Man Haron Monis, monitored traditional media, compelling his hostages to reach out to media outlets and make social media posts and videos on his behalf.³⁴ The two-day incident received rolling news coverage across Australia, with the beginning of the incident captured on 'live to air' morning television programming, with the siege site located directly opposite the television studios of the Channel 7 network.

Perpetrator communications typically have multiple target audiences, including their perceived adversaries and the general public. Intriguingly though, there is evidence that they also routinely seek to speak to groups with ideological affinities to their position, as they seek to recruit sympathisers to their brand of extremism. These intra-group competitive behaviours have been documented amongst far-right groups³⁵ and Islamist jihadi groups.³⁶

Given the predilection of terrorist actors and organizations to want to control and edit their narrative, a number pre-prepare material (such as videos and manifestos) broadcasting their intention, justifying their actions or worldview before, during or shortly after they act. Perpetrators can also seek to stage events in front of a large, pre-existing media presence in order to guarantee immediate live coverage. Examples include the 1972 Munich Olympics,³⁷ the second plane hitting the World Trade Centre (one of the most watched live TV events in history) and the Boston marathon bombing. In the Boston example, the news broke via the Boston Globe newspaper's twitter only 8 minutes after the bomb detonated at the finish line where journalists were already present. Live TV coverage was established within half an hour, preceding the first official statement by police by some twenty minutes.³⁸

Media Logics

With the proliferation of 24/7 media channels and digital participatory platforms, Press and Publicisers

are increasingly quick to frame a 'media event' after its occurrence and reach a worldwide audience. This initial framing often takes place ahead of any official definition of the situation as involving terrorism. As a consequence, reporting during the first minutes tends to be quite confused. There may well be multiple competing accounts of what has happened, who is involved and why. Unsurprisingly therefore, different media platforms and channels can offer markedly different accounts during this period, and there can be substantive revisions to these as events and official accounts unfold. As part of this general uncertainty and confusion, a lot of rumours and 'soft facts'³⁹ (unvalidated and unverified information) will be circulating in mass media and social media. Post the 2016 US elections, social media platforms and analysts have increasingly picked up on the malign activities of 'troll farms'⁴⁰ sowing seeds of political discord on the internet and of 'bots' – automated accounts posing as real people – distorting debate. Whilst many such accounts are ineffective, a few are prolific and in an unfolding crisis situation they can work together to amplify particular stories so that they trend on users' social media newsfeeds⁴¹.

A number of studies suggest, that in the post 9/11 era, the media have been too quick in framing and blaming Muslim perpetrators, often in advance of a clear understanding of events. The significance of media framing in these initial stages has been characterised as: 'the public respond not so much to events, but to reported events.'⁴² A second, related quality, concerns how the increasingly rapid, detailed and unfiltered communication of an event increases its emotional impact on public audiences. Digital participatory platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram facilitate a greater communicative role and influence for citizens at the scene and networked citizens engaging with breaking news online⁴³.

During the 2013 Oslo attack, some victims used social media to contact family and friends⁴⁴, others to try and increase their situational awareness of

34 Michael Barnes, *Inquest into the deaths arising from the Lindt Café siege: Findings and Recommendations* (Sidney, New South Wales: State Coroner of New South Wales, 2017).

35 Joshua D. Freilich, Steven M. Chermak, and David Caspi, "Critical Events in the Life Trajectories of Domestic Extremist White Supremacist Groups: A case study analysis of four violent organizations," *Criminology & Public Policy* (2009): 497-530.

36 Edna Erez, Gabriel Weimann, and Aaron Weisburd, "Jihad, Crime, and the Internet: Content Analysis of Jihadist Forum Discussions," Report submitted to The National Institute of Justice (2011), <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/2368867.pdf>

37 Find Bennett 2016 ref

38 Mary Kate Brogan, "How Twitter is Changing Narrative Storytelling: A Case Study of the Boston Marathon Bombings," *The Elon Journal of Undergraduate Research in Communications* 6, n. 1 (2015): 28-47.

39 <http://upsi.org.uk/news/2018/4/23/briefing-paper-digital-influence-engineering>

40 <https://medium.com/dfrlab/trolltracker-russian-trolls-on-reddit-251075642811>

41 <https://disinfoportal.org/botspot-twelve-ways-to-spot-a-bot/>

42 Benjamin I. Page and Robert Y. Shapiro, *The Rational Public: Fifty Years of Trends in Americans' Policy Preferences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

43 Gilardi, F. (2016). Digital Democracy. How Digital Democracy is Changing Democracy and its Study. 1-5.

44 Mareile Kaufmann, "Resilience 2.0: social media use and (self-)care during the 2011 Norway attacks," *Media, Culture & Society* 37, no. 7 (2015):972-987, doi: 10.1177/0163443715584101

what was happening whilst they were isolated during the island shooting. However, survivors interviewed later felt that the high volume of information posted online at that time, including misinformation, was a difficulty, as were attempts made by journalists to contact them whilst they were still in hiding.⁴⁵

The consequence is that mass media are no longer the primary gatekeepers in control of unfolding event narratives and visual images that circulate widely from the minutes after an event.⁴⁶ Platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube are often the source of breaking news, with the former described as switching from 'ambient' or background mode to central 'foreground' mode in immediate response, as reflected in trending topics.⁴⁷ In this sense, social media have assumed an important agenda-setting role for mainstream media.⁴⁸ This is supported by empirical analyses of crisis events (of which terror is one form), confirming that during, and immediately after, the consumption of news on social media by the public increases. It is argued that, when highly uncertain events are in their infancy, the public

may assign a higher level of credibility to social media coverage than to traditional media sources,⁴⁹ although the latter maintain a visible and influential online presence.⁵⁰

Reflecting the dynamics between mass and social media, mainstream media organizations increasingly 'remediate' reports and visual material originating from people at the scene in their early reportage.⁵¹ In no small part, this is an inflection of mobile technologies affording increasingly high-quality image and video capture, enabling witnesses to film and upload events. During the Woolwich murder of Lee Rigby in 2013, public participants at the scene were both filming and live-tweeting the incident.⁵² Within forty minutes these individuals were being direct messaged by journalists from national outlets, who were offering to purchase the rights to their images. Similarly, as British MP Jo Cox lay dying in the street having been attacked by a right-wing extremist, a member of the public filmed the scene.⁵³ Cassidy observes that, when terrorists succeed in carrying out their attacks, they do not need to film

BOX 2

The impact of rumours circulating in the confusion window minutes after an event.

In a confused and uncertain early 'confusion window', multiple rumours typically start to circulate via both social media and mainstream media channels and can continue for a number of hours. It is important to stress that these are not just peripheral but can be vitally important and consequential. In the immediate wake of the Manchester Arena bombing in 2017, a rumour started on Facebook that gunmen were active at the local Oldham hospital. The timing of these posts altered the response to the situation for police officers on the ground, because it suggested that there were additional terrorists to the known suicide bomber. As a direct result, and in accordance with standard operating protocols, ambulance crews and fire service personnel were held at the outer cordon, delaying their move to the bomb scene to administer medical aid to the victims. Whilst this decision has been subject to much retrospective criticism, more generally, evidence does suggest that rumours of additional attacks and attackers are commonplace in the minutes to hours after an event. However, the need to check and validate a social media rumour served to dilute first responses by police and partners in the Manchester case.

45 Elisabeth Frey, "Do You Tweet When Your Friends Are Getting Shot? Victims' Experience With, and Perspectives on, the Use of Social Media During a Terror Attack," *Social Media + Society* (January 3, 2018): 1-11, doi: 10.1177/2056305117750715

46 Charlie Beckett, "Fanning the Flames: Reporting on Terror in a Networked World," *Columbia Journalism Review* (2016), https://www.cjr.org/tow_center_reports/coverage_terrorism_social_media.php

47 Jean Burgess and Axel Bruns, "Twitter archives and the challenges of 'Big Social Data' for media and communication research," *M/C Journal* 15, no. 5 (2012): 1-7.

48 Tony McEnery, Mark McGlashan, and Robbie Love, "Press and social media reaction to ideologically inspired murder: The case of Lee Rigby," *Discourse & Communication* 9, no. 2 (2015): 237-259.

49 Yan Jin, Brooke Fisher Liu, and Lucinda L. Austin, "Examining the role of Social media in Effective Crisis Management: The Effects of Crisis Origin, Information Form, and Source on Publics," *Crisis Response, Communication Research* 41, no. 1 (2014): 74 - 94.

50 Jean-Paul Marthoz, *Terrorism and the Media: A Handbook for Journalists* (Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 2017).

51 Anna Reading, "The London Bombing: Mobile Witnessing, Mortal Bodies and Global Time," *Memory Studies* 4, no. 3 (2011): 298-311, <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1750698011402672> Stuart Allan, "Witnessing in Crisis: Photo-reportage of terror attacks in Boston and London," *Media, War & Conflict* 7, no. 2 (2014): 133-151 Maria Konow-Lund and Eva-Karin Olsson, "Social Media's Challenge to Journalistic Norms and Values during a Terror Attack," *Digital Journalism* 5, no. 9 (2017): 1192-1204

52 Allan, "Witnessing in Crisis," 133-151.

53 Wallen, N (2018) *Police Professional*.

the actions themselves – they can rely on the public to film and popularise their atrocities in almost real time.⁵⁴ What has been termed ‘connective witnessing’ represents a new way for networked public audiences to consume audio-visual material.⁵⁵

‘User-generated content’ (UGC) posted on the internet and social media is especially likely to be sourced by Press and Publicisers immediately after unexpected, unanticipated terror events⁵⁶ when the media are in ‘emergency mode.’⁵⁷ There is intense competition and pressure to be quick to a story, and in this context, the use and remediation of UGC has challenged the integrity of journalistic sourcing and verification processes.

In a number of countries, online versions of mainstream media have adopted the practice of ‘live blogging’ in the minutes after an event breaks, publishing a continuous stream of information in real time. This “fuzzy journalism” routinely incorporates reactions and commentary from a range of actors and functions to fill an ‘information vacuum’ in the early stages, arguably exacerbated by a general reluctance amongst policy and practice actors to say much at this time given their limited knowledge about what has actually occurred⁵⁸. For example, at-the-scene images circulating on Twitter within minutes of the Brussels bombing at Zaventem airport in 2016 were wrongly attributed to a journalist participant.⁵⁹ In the UK, UGC influenced the early reporting of the 2017 Manchester Arena bombing as a ‘balloon popping’ by the BBC on twitter. Likewise, in the minutes after the London Westminster attack of the same year, several sources broadcast that ‘explosions’ had been heard, even though it was a knife and vehicle-based event.⁶⁰

Early mis-reporting of this kind can prove influential in the propagation of conspiracy theories over the mid- to longer-term. It acquires traction in the immediate aftermath because there is a ‘need for news’ amongst the general public. In sum, the contemporary media ecology constantly challenges journalists and editors to find the right balance between their ‘duty

to inform’ and journalistic integrity, in view of high volumes of unverified material that ultimately might glorify the perpetrators of terror and spread panic among the public.

Response Logics

A key information and communication dynamic pertaining to the minutes after an attack is therefore members of the public participating in it in some way, being able to use media to report what they are experiencing to others, in ‘near real-time’. These reports are then picked up by mainstream media sources to inform their breaking news packages. An especially infamous instance of this occurred during the Bataclun Theatre siege in Paris in 2015. Very early on, the following tweet was widely reported:

“I’m injured in the first floor of Bataclun. Police must intervene now, they are shooting people one by one inside.”

On the surface, situated in a very high pressure setting, this message made a compelling and urgent plea for police interventions. However, from the response point of view, there was a concern that it might possibly have been sent by one of the terrorists trying to lure police into the venue to occasion a violent confrontation. The difficulties in establishing the provenance and accuracy of information in the early stages of responding to a terror attack, is a recurring motif of this analysis.

Police and emergency service practitioners are increasingly aware of public audiences’ need for information in the minutes following an event, and how publics gravitate towards social media in the immediate aftermath of a crisis event.⁶¹ In a position similar to journalists, police and emergency services personnel have begun to harness their own established and influential online presence at times of crisis for quick-time communication and reassurance during the “confusion window” of initial public reaction.

54 John Cassidy, “Terrorism in the Age of Twitter,” *The New Yorker*, November 23, 2015, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/john-cassidy/terrorism-in-the-age-of-twitter>

55 Mette Mortensen, “Conflictual Media Events, Eyewitness Images, and the Boston Marathon Bombing (2013),” *Journalism Practice* 9, no. 4 (2015): 536-551, doi: 10.1080/17512786.2015.1030140

56 Clair Wardle, Sam Dubberly, Peter D. Brown, *Amateur footage: A global study of user-generated content in TV and online news output* (New York, NY: Tow Center for Digital Journalism, Columbia University, 2014).

57 Marthoz, JP (2017) *Terrorism and the Media: a handbook for journalists*. UNESCO.

58 Bennett (2016)

59 Rauchfleisch et al. (2017) “How journalists verify user-generated content during terrorist crises. Analyzing Twitter communication during the Brussels attacks.” *Social Media and Society* (2017): 1–13.

60 CSRI CREST final report (forthcoming)

61 Rob Procter, Jeremy Crump, Susanne Karstedt, Alex Voss and Marta Cantijoch, “Reading the riots: what were the police doing on Twitter?” *Policing and Society* 23, no. 4 (2013): 413–436, doi: 10.1080/10439463.2013.780223.

However, there is some suggestion that police organizations assume very different stances in their strategic communications postures, and their preparedness for responding to a major event. Within an hour of the Boston marathon bombing in 2013, the Commissioner of the Boston Police Department had instructed the media relations office to prepare to use all social media to 'push accurate and reliable information to the public'.⁶² In the UK, police forces proactively prepared and disseminated online messages in the minutes following a suspected terror attack, urging networked publics to follow them on Twitter or Facebook for further updates of official information. The communications team at the UK Metropolitan Police are known to pre-prepare messages that can be adapted to specific situations to enable a swifter response and their twitter followers can opt to receive 'twitter alert' notifications during a critical, ongoing incident⁶³. In the aftermath of the London Westminster attack in 2017, the first communication from the force was on twitter just seven minutes later, telling the public that the police were aware and dealing with the situation.⁶⁴ A swift online response from Greater Manchester police was also observed following the arena bombing the same year, with the following tweet within twenty minutes of the blast: 'police responded to reports of an incident at Manchester Arena. Please stay away from the area. More details to follow'.⁶⁵

Harm Logics

News in the minutes after an event not only imparts information that an event has happened, but concurrently elicits (implicitly or explicitly) an emotional response with the potential for 'affective contagion'.⁶⁶ The potential for contagion is enhanced via online sources because users can take the lead in aggregating bits of information and

receive almost immediate feedback on how others in their social networks are experiencing it.

A controlled study of public reactions to televised news coverage of terror found it triggered both an emotional and cognitive response in public audience members minutes after exposure, with high anger and anxiety along with more negative attitudes akin to stereotyping and enemy perception.⁶⁷

Whilst research suggests some public audiences appreciate the 'authenticity' of instant eyewitness media, the traumatic effect of viewing the devastation of terror in 'live time' can be immediate and significant in shaping short-term harm and public distress. Graphic, distressing images of victims, chaos and destruction that traditionally have been subject to a degree of control and editing via institutional ethical procedures⁶⁸ is now made accessible by 'citizen journalists'⁶⁹ or 'citizen photographers'⁷⁰ uploading 'instant news' onto participatory social media platforms.⁷¹ Following the Erawan shrine bombing in Bangkok in 2015, for example, a witness at the scene live-streamed unfiltered footage of victims, triggering some distress among the audience.⁷²

An exception comes from a natural experiment and analysis based on the online responses of Japanese citizens to the kidnapping of two Japanese journalists by the Islamic State. The study documents real-time responses to the capture and executions of Kenji Goto and Haruna Yukawa in 2015⁷³. Here, Japanese social media users began an online campaign against the Islamic State (IS). Recognizing that terrorists use the spectacle of mediated violence to instil fear in observers, these citizens refused to be fearful and instead adopted a mocking stance, turning Islamic State perpetrators

62 Edward F. Davies III, Alejandro A. Alves and David Alan Sklansky, "Social Media and Police Leadership: Lessons From Boston," *New Perspectives in Policing Bulletin* (March 2014), <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/244760.pdf>

63 <http://www.itv.com/news/2016-03-22/met-police-to-use-twitter-alerts-during-major-incidents-in-london/>

64 Ian Griggs, "Inside the Met Police comms response to the Westminster attacks," *PR Week*, May 03, 2017, <https://www.prweek.com/article/1432250/inside-met-police-comms-response-westminster-attacks>

65 <https://twitter.com/gmpolice/status/866774284018102274>

66 Zizi Papacharissi, "Toward New Journalism(s). Affective News, Hybridity, and liminal Spaces," *Journalism Studies*, (2014): 27-40. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2014.890328>

67 Anat Shoshani and Michelle Slone, "The Drama of Media Coverage of Terrorism: Emotional and Attitudinal Impact on the Audience," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 31, no. 7 (2008): 627-640, doi: 10.1080/10576100802144064.

68 Donald Matheson and Stuart Allen, *Digital War Reporting* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009).

69 Shayne Bowman and Chris Willis, "We Media: How audiences are shaping the future of news and information," *The Media Centre at the American Press Institute* (2003), http://www.hypergene.net/wemedia/download/we_media.pdf

70 Patrick, C., & Allan, S. (2013). *The camera as witness: The changing nature of photojournalism*. In K. Fowler-Watt & S. Allan (Eds.), *Journalism: New challenges* (1st ed., pp. 162-182). London, England: Routledge

71 Mortensen, "Conflictual Media Events," 536-551

72 Pete Brown, "OMG I can't unsee that': Lessons from Periscoping the Bangkok bomb blast," *First Draft*, August 25, 2015, <https://firstdraftnews.org/omg-i-cant-ever-unsee-that/>

73 Laura Huey, "This is Not Your Mother's Terrorism: Social Media, Online Radicalization and the Practice of Political Jamming," *Journal of Terrorism Research* 6, no. 2 (2015), doi: <http://doi.org/10.15664/jtr.1159>

into objects of fun and satire and, at the same time, turning the IS into a parody. This removed some of the 'cool factor' associated with IS in real-time online. A later study⁷⁴ of three types of online anti-terrorism strategies – countering content, parody and satire, and hacking - found satirizing targets to be a “promising” tactic, adding that

satirical approaches typically draw more reactions (retweets and likes) than educational content. However, these scholars also warn that “none of the measures work if they are not addressed to the right audience” (ibid. 191).⁷⁵



74 Christian Reuter, Katja Pättsch, Elena Runft, “IT for Peace? Fighting Against Terrorism in Social Media – An Explorative Twitter Study,” *i-com: Journal of Interactive Media* 16, n. 2 (2017): 181-195, doi:10.1515/icom-2017-0013
75 Ibid, 191

HOURS

As time advances and the process of reaction moves from minutes to hours, initial shock subsides and there is a shift towards trying to make sense of what has happened/is happening, how and why. Within the first couple of hours, there is routinely a rapid growth in public awareness and breaking news may achieve global travel across all mainstream media and social media channels. These communications are characteristically high in emotional energy as groups and individuals register their responses. Press and other publicisers, together with members of the public start to communicate attributions of blame and responsibility, including speculating possible motivations. The affordances of digital platforms enable public audiences to actively engage in shaping and mobilising reactions, or collating sense-making information. This can perform an important agenda-setting function for wider media coverage at this early stage. Typically several hours after the start of any incident, police will confirm whether the situation is being treated as terrorism. Depending upon the nature of the violence, perpetrators and / or their supporters may seek to claim responsibility for the act. Where an event is ongoing, people at the scene will continue to engage in live reporting, albeit more informative control is usually being asserted at this stage by

the authorities. Within the space of hours, the first official statements will often be made about the event. Interestingly, whilst these can be reassuring for some, they can often function as ‘lightning rods’ for criticism and even elicit reactance-motivated responses from some segments of the public who resent a perceived loss of a freedom and so adopt an attitude or behaviour that is contrary to what they’re told.⁷⁶

In circumstances where perpetrators remain actively engaged, or at large, some hours after the instigation of an event, then new communication challenges come in to play. Perpetrators can actively use social media platforms to broadcast their actions, threats and ideology, or else challenge the emergent narratives from other actors, including the media, politicians and practitioners. The terrorist group Al Shabaab, for example, used a twitter account (either affiliated or sympathetic to the group) to share their perspective, frame a different storyline and challenge the narrative from journalists and the authorities during a hostage event over several days following their attack on a shopping mall in Nairobi.⁷⁷ They did not, however, engage in any dialogue with other users, who included a host of practitioners and policy actors using twitter at this time, thereby retaining control of their narrative.

⁷⁶ Brehm, S. S., & Brehm, J. W. (1981). *Psychological Reactance: A Theory of Freedom and Control*. Academic Press.

⁷⁷ Rachel Sullivan, “Live-tweeting the terror: a rhetorical analysis of @HSMPress_ Twitter updates during the 2013 Nairobi hostage crisis,” *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 7, no. 3 (2014): 422-433.

Media Logics

As minutes become hours, the reactionary content and tone of public posts on media platforms begins to change from breaking news and initial information-seeking towards sentiments associated with grief, sympathy and coping.⁷⁸ A study of the audio-visual content of tweets posted in the hours after the Paris Bataclan and Brussels attacks distinguished online 'news content' (screenshots, first-hand footage) from 'affective content' expressing sympathy with victims. Within the first three hours, mass media outlets had sourced user-generated audio-visual content, posting it online to provide 'on-site' perspectives of the confusion. Visual images are especially valued by them during this period. Seven hours later, they were 'remediating' affective content as newsworthy in its own right.⁷⁹ Public audiences purposively sought online sources of information from press and publicisers such as @BBCbreakingnews and @CNN in the hours after, and online mainstream media accounts were highly influential in elevating and prolonging the 'dissemination careers' of event content. In the hours after Brussels, they accounted for almost half of audio-visual material being shared on Twitter. Ordinary users (including people at the scene) faded in online prominence as the hours post-event increased, supplanted by 'expert' interpretive commentary from mainstream media sources which may continue to cite them as evidence.

As a corollary, the rapidly increasing volume of online posts, photos and videos received and shared feeds public sense-making, allowing different public audiences to develop and articulate alternative frames and interpretations of the same event. It is in the hours following events that popular hashtags campaigns are initiated by digital communities. These circulate widely and function to focus audience attention on a few hashtags which signal the topic. Twitter reaction to terror in Paris in 2015 saw the emergence of the hashtags #CharlieHebdo and #JeSuisCharlie to represent freedom of expression and freedom of the press in the hours following the targeted attack on the French satirical newspaper.⁸⁰ Whilst these hashtags travelled fast and wide, they were shortly followed by counter-messaging hashtags, e.g. '#JeSuisAhmed'.

Another important sense-making communication activity during the early hours where uncertainty and confusion prevail, involves social networks being proactively mobilised by publics to collate and share information not yet released by official sources. Following the school shooting at Virginia Tech in 2007, for example, a Facebook page was created by members of the public to compile peer-generated victim lists at a time when only the number of fatalities had been released by official sources.⁸¹

Relatedly, Twitter has been used to organise and disseminate crisis information, engage in 'fact-finding' and generate missing person appeals in

BOX 3

The 'media reflex' to name the perpetrator in the hours after an event.

In the UK, Channel 4 News (a mainstream and respected TV broadcaster) falsely identified the perpetrator of the London Westminster attack 4 hours later as Abu Izzadeen during its evening news broadcast, substantiating rumours and images that had been circulating on twitter an hour earlier. Izzadeen is a well-known hate preacher, but one who was quickly proven to be serving a jail sentence at the time of the event.

78 Kaufmann, "Resilience 2.0", 972-987.

79 Axel Bruns and Folker Hanusch, "Conflict imagery in a connective environment: audiovisual content on Twitter following the 2015/2016 terror attacks in Paris and Brussels," *Media, Culture & Society* 39, no. 8 (2017):1122-1141, doi: 10.1177/0163443717725574

80 Jisun An, Haewoon Kwak, Yelena Mejova, Alonso Saenz De Oger, S., Braulio Gomez Fortes, "Are you Charlie or Ahmed? Cultural pluralism in Charlie Hebdo response on Twitter," Proceedings of the 10th International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media (ICWSM) (Cologne, Germany, 2016).

81 Leysia Palen, Sarah Vieweg, Sophia B. Liu, Amanda Lee Hughes, "Crisis in a Networked World: Features of computer Mediated Communication in the April 16, 2007, Virginia Tech Event," *Social Science Computer Review* 27, no. 4 (2009). Sara Vieweg, Leysia Palen, Sophia B. Liu, Amanda Lee Hughes, and Jeannette Sutton, "Collective intelligence in disasters: Examination of the phenomenon in the aftermath of the 2007 Virginia Tech shooting," Proceedings from the 5th International ISCRAM Conference (May 5-7, 2008).

the hours after an event, prior to official statements being released.⁸² The latter was a strong feature of the online public response to the Manchester Arena bombing in May 2017 where children and young people were quickly named and pictured as 'missing' by worried friends and relatives appealing for information on their whereabouts. Individual user appeals quickly utilised shared hashtags and so were able to reach the large online audience who were tracking the breaking news. Within hours, mass media in the UK and US had collated and published online articles on missing children using the pool of images circulating on social media at that time. Their influential online news feeds set-in-motion online processes of sharing, verifying and collating information on individuals involved in the tragedy. Users actively updated the statuses of individual victims with passage of time, marking their photos with ticks and crosses. A number of users claimed that this was a collective 'public good' enabled by twitter in a time of shock, crisis and uncertainty. As time went on, however, this online checking activity was also aimed at the truth status of missing person appeals. It emerged that a number were fake (including those circulated by mass media), using photos sourced elsewhere online. A retrospective analysis documented a total of 28 fake appeals in circulation after this event⁸³.

Posts that are highly endorsed and shared on social media networks in the hours after an event can set or change the direction of collective sense-making processes, whether these originate from press, public or influential – at times controversial – publicisers or politicians. It is in this time frame that potential 'thought leaders' or influencers start to become prominent communicative voices in relation to an event. Their establishment is supported by the algorithmic effects underpinning social media platforms. Geared towards providing users with personalised content consistent with their existing interests, the operations of algorithms can

unintentionally create an 'echo chamber' of content that coheres with users' existing views, rather than a broad spectrum of opinions.⁸⁴ After a terror event, this takes on a greater significance as echo chambers serve to amplify division and contribute to more polarised debate, particularly around issues of religion, ideology and race that can set in motion longer term harm.⁸⁵

The emergence of 'soft fact' rumours and conspiracy theories during this time period is an important development. Approximately one hour after the 2017 London Westminster bridge attack by Islamist extremists, twitter was flooded with conspiracy theories that the entire event had been 'spoofed', was a 'false flag', a hoax or staged incident. These conspiracy theories typically made highly elaborated use of audio-visual material, personal accounts from participants and inconsistencies identified in materials from press and publicisers to both make their point and discredit official accounts. From this tweeted content, subsequent analyses identified online groups who actively construct false flag narratives around high profile events including, but not limited to, worldwide terrorism.⁸⁶

The propagation of rumours and conspiracies are not confined to social media, rather social media can set the agenda that press and broadcast media pursue,⁸⁷ at times with deleterious consequences. This feeds what has been termed a general 'media reflex' to try and name the perpetrator as quickly as possible.⁸⁸ This has resulted in mainstream media propagating and popularising theories, motives and names that are subsequently falsified or discredited. For example: CNN mistook the Sandy Hook school shooter for his brother in the hours after the incident, whilst online forum Reddit identified innocent participants as suspects in the Boston marathon bombing⁸⁹ The "tweet first, verify later" approach to news reporting online⁹⁰ can have serious reputational consequences for news organizations should they get it wrong.

82 Thomas Haverin and Lisl Zach, "Twitter for city police department information sharing," Proceedings of the 73rd ASIS&T Annual Meeting on Navigating Streams in an Information Ecosystem 47, no. 41 (2010). Procter et al., "Reading the riots", 413–436.

83 Crime and Security Research Institute (2018) 'Soft Facts and Digital Behavioural Influencing: Project Findings Report to the Centre for Research Evidence on Security Threats'. Cardiff University.

84 Beckett, "Fanning the Flames", 60.

85 Ibid, 60. Oksanen et al., "Perceived societal fear and cyberhate", 1–20.

86 Crime and Security Research Institute (2018) 'Soft Facts and Digital Behavioural Influencing: Project Findings Report to the Centre for Research Evidence on Security Threats'. Cardiff University.

87 George Haddow and Kim Haddow, 2nd ed., *Disaster Communications in a Changing Media World* (Amsterdam: Elsevier B.V., 2014), 65.

88 Marthoz, *Terrorism and the Media*, 47.

89 Ken Bensinger and Andrea Chang, "Boston bombings: Social media spirals out of control," *The Los Angeles Times*, April 20, 2013, <http://articles.latimes.com/2013/apr/20/business/la-fi-boston-bombings-media-20130420>

90 Nicola Bruno, *Tweet First, Verify Later? How Real-time Information Is Changing the Coverage of Worldwide Crisis Events* (Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, University of Oxford, 2011).

Response Logics

When perpetrators, press and participants all engage with social media around an ongoing event, observing, reporting and sharing every new development as it unfolds, this presents threats and challenges to response logics seeking to contain a precarious situation and bring it to a close. In some countries, mass media are subject to governance in the form of news embargoes or live broadcasting bans to facilitate police operations and protect participants.⁹¹ If not, media restrictions can be imposed on the media retrospectively following ill-advised coverage filmed hours in to an ongoing event. Examples of where this has happened include live media coverage of the Westgate mall siege in Kenya and French media reportage of the whereabouts of a victim's hiding place during the Charlie Hebdo attack.

There are, however, only weak governance arrangements pertaining to social media networks and little to stop citizen journalists live-reporting accounts or images from the scene. During the 2014 Sydney siege, for example, live-reporting risked shifting tactical and operational advantage away from police and intelligence agencies, towards the perpetrator.⁹² In respect of the co-ordinated series of attacks lasting four days in Mumbai in 2008, a post facto analysis concluded that perpetrators could have monitored and utilised 'situational awareness' made available to them via live media and twitter to mount further attacks against civilian targets.⁹³ To try and mitigate risks associated with participants and networked publics communicating situational awareness, there are instances where policy and practice actors have intervened directly. During a hostage stand-off with a radical Islamist gunman at the Paris Hyper Casher grocery store in 2015, police issued a social media appeal to the public to cease tweeting owing to the risk of situational information aiding the perpetrator before armed officers stormed the premises some hours later.⁹⁴

Even when the perpetrator is immediately apprehended or killed at the scene, the demand for

information from media participants on-the-ground can still risk disrupting ongoing operational activity. A retrospective account from a Senior Investigating Officer at the scene of the street stabbing of MP Jo Cox stated that a key learning point was to manage the constant demand for updates from journalists by delegating it to senior figureheads within the force, saying: 'if I had tried to front the media... I would not have been able to get any work done.'⁹⁵

In such circumstances, policy and practice actors can also use social media to tackle rumours and misinformation. Following major social disorder as it unfolded during the London riots, UK police and emergency services used twitter largely as a broadcast 'megaphone' to provide situational reports, retweet these reports for other forces and to issue appeals to the public not to circulate rumours.⁹⁶ Other police practitioners have used social media more as a two-way engagement tool to participate in dialogue with those involved during their ongoing active engagement in social protest.

Harm Logics

An intriguing communications dynamic concerns the travel patterns of reactions to an incident in the hours that follow. Utilising geo-coded meta-data from tweets following the murder of Lee Rigby,⁹⁷ showed an intense local reaction, that then 'leapt' very quickly to other urban centres. The impacts did not therefore travel in 'waves' rippling out progressively over greater distances but were 'everywhere all at once'. The contents of these messages escalated the intensity of the rhetoric, including multiple instances of 'kill speech'. There is evidence from other studies that social media travel patterns can register internationally within this time frame. For example, the beach attack in Tunisia involving a large number of British tourists, and the attacks across Paris, Belgium and Germany all increased tensions within the UK, albeit less intensively than where the violence was actually located.

91 Marthoz, JP (2017) *Terrorism and the Media*

92 Benjamin Archie, "Tweeting situational awareness during the Sydney siege," *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism* 11, no. 1 (2016): 14–29.

93 Onook Oh, Manish Agrawal, H. Raghav Rao, "Information Control and terrorism: tracking the Mumbai terrorist attack through Twitter," *Information Systems Front* 13 (2011): 33–43.

94 Griff Witte, "In a kosher grocery store in Paris, terror takes a deadly toll," *The Washington Post*, January 9, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/paris-kosher-market-seized-in-second-hostage-drama-in-nervous-france/2015/01/09/f171b97e-97ff-11e4-8005-1924ede3e54a_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.e91b3ff16118 Archie, "Tweeting situational awareness", 14-29.

95 Wallen, N (2018) *Right designations*. *Police Professional*, 604, May 3rd: p.17

96 Christian Ehnis and Deborah Bunker, "Social media in disaster response: Queensland police service – public engagement during the 2011 floods," in *Australian Conference on Information Systems*, ed. 23rd J. Lamp (Geelong, Geelong: ACIS, 2012). Procter et al. 2013

97 Roberts et al., "After Woolwich", 434–454.

Polarisation of opinion and potentially inflammatory communications are not unique to social media, having also been documented in mainstream media analysis following a major terror attack on a nation state. Live blanket coverage after 9/11 and an emotive commentary from TV anchors and a host of political and policy experts, cued and primed the audience on how to interpret what they saw and its wider social and political significance. Within hours, journalists and expert sources were actively adopting a frame of 'decisive retaliation',⁹⁸ 'us' versus 'them'

nation blaming, and a warfare rhetoric. The impact of the latter, combined with key features of the event itself (its international significance, targeted nation attack and its highly symbolic targets) triggered what Nacos et al.⁹⁹ term a 'patriotic reflex' among the viewing public. This reflex gave unequivocal support for the President and for national unity. But arguably in doing so, also set the stage for war, and longer-lasting fear and divisions within society that can be reheated by the media with each new reported incident of radical Islamist terrorism.



⁹⁸ Marthoz, *Terrorism and the Media*, 34.

⁹⁹ Brigitte L. Nacos, Yaeli Block-Elkon, and Robert Y. Shapiro, *Selling fear: Counterterrorism, the media and public opinion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

DAYS

In the days after a terror event, the perpetrator(s) and their cause are often officially named and broadcast in the media. At this time, Press and Publicisers play an important role in rehearsing and negotiating the narrative and meanings of the traumatic event, beginning to adopt a more questioning stance often amid ongoing or directly related operational activities. A key part of the media process at this time involves the construction and reporting of a 'backstory' for both perpetrators and victims associated with the event. A range of actors make public statements via the media and often mobilise (online or offline) to engage in spontaneous memorials or vigils for the victims. The networked public, empowered by the affordances of social media platforms, can continue to assume a more active role. Scrutinising incoming information, engaging in 'investigations' and reporting misbehaviour can generate 'collective intelligence'. Such activities are perceived as positive, constructive and aligned to 'civil society' by digital communities, the so-called 'good' of social media, bringing out the best motivations in people. Online activities can also at times serve to cloud interpretations of an event with misinformation and rumour or provide a ready forum for hate speech.

¹⁰⁰ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-29722094>

¹⁰¹ Alexander, A. (2017) Digital Decay: tracing changes over time among English Islamic state sympathisers on twitter. https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zax-dzs2191ff/DigitalDecayFinal_0.pdf

Terror Logics

Given the state of high alert, uncertainty and emotional arousal that follows a terror event, the days afterward can be characterised by a higher than normal policy and practice responsiveness to perceived threats from terrorist groups and their supporters. In this way, their terror logic is sustained through what can be a series of false-positive warnings and reactive operational responses to restrict and monitor. The day following the Quebec attack in 2014, for example, the national terror threat level was raised in Canada owing to an observed increase in online chatter from radical groups¹⁰⁰. Other research has shown that pro-ISIS social media activity peaks 24 hours after an event before returning to baseline.¹⁰¹

Media Logics

The level of public attention and scrutiny facilitated by mass media and social media coverage can remain high and its audience reach can remain global.

Empirical evidence suggests that, after about two to three days, general public interest starts to subside from its peak, although it can remain relatively elevated for an extended period. In terms of press and other publicisers, their initial activities will be concerned with providing more detailed accounts

about the key event participants. This will likely include the backgrounds and motivations of the perpetrators and possibly some victims.

Over a slightly more extended period of days, media focus tends to become responsive, featuring official updates from police and political leaders in respect of the progress of any criminal investigation, as well as unofficial sightings and speculation on enforcement activity. Propagation of fear and uncertainty by the media is also fed by high profile coverage of an ongoing, often highly visible, operational response from police and armed services, such as those observed post Paris¹⁰² and Manchester¹⁰³. In the days after a major incident, it is not uncommon to read and hear about raids of properties in various parts of the country, amid reports of a highly dangerous 'cell' of perpetrators about to be discovered. There may be questioning, arrests, releases without charge, all of which are captured by traditional media and reported online by witnesses at the scene, neighbours living nearby, co-workers and other acquaintances of those implicated.

In the preceding passages, impacts upon victims and their families were referenced. Traditional tactics engaged in by journalists, such as 'door-stepping', can be disturbing for those connected to, or claimed to have ties to, an incident. This extends to relatives, friends and acquaintances of any alleged perpetrators, some of whom have complained of media harassment¹⁰⁴. In the contemporary information environment, they may have to also contend with vitriolic 'trolling' and seeing images of their loved ones being taken from social media accounts and repurposed by journalists and other social media users. Post-Manchester, what was an innocuous piece of video footage of a man putting out the rubbish filmed by his neighbour, took on a new meaning and significance when the individual was identified as the perpetrator and it became widely streamed online by the press¹⁰⁵.

However, accenting victims rather than the perpetrators¹⁰⁶, is one way that the press can 'bring humanity and dignity back into what was a narrative of destruction and fear'¹⁰⁷. Humanizing victims and

broadcasting the symbols and processes of grief and grieving can be the best counter-terrorism measure the mass media can provide. These processes are not limited to traditional media and indeed may often start on social networks in the minutes and hours after an event. Concerned friends and family can actively use these platforms to appeal about missing individuals, who are later confirmed online as injured or deceased.

In circumstances where a significant volume of disinformation is circulating, journalists can potentially play an important role in exposing messengers and messages propagating deliberately false narratives and accounts about an attack. Framed by the imperatives of media logic, this can provide journalists with a new angle on the story to write about, once the key details about who did what to whom and why have been settled. 'De-bunking' disinformation is an important element of ensuring the public and politicians have an accurate understanding of what has transpired. In the UK, this has sometimes been enabled by the authorities establishing a network of 'trusted' journalists, and communicating directly with them to highlight misinformation and disinformation stories, related to the event, that might be circulating on social media. Of course, there need to be clear boundaries around this kind of activities, so that it does not impede expression of legitimate differences of opinion. However, exposing deliberate attempts to amplify social tensions and divisions post-event, does seem an important feature of managing the public harms of terrorism in the digital age.

Response Logics

An emerging element of the overarching story in this period are more critical allegations of 'failure' on the part of police and intelligence services. These are routinely lodged by mainstream media stories and can build over a number of days, from initial suspicions through to more forceful suggestions of blameworthiness. It was striking, for example, to note how much of the coverage of the Manchester bombing in the days afterward, was concerned

102 Angelique Chrisafis, "Thousands of troops on Paris streets but are they France's new Maginot line?" The Guardian, April 15, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/apr/15/paris-attacks-operation-sentinelle-soldiers-patrolling-streets-france-safer>

103 Robert Booth, Vikram Dodd, Sandra Laville and Ewen MacAskill, "Soldiers on UK streets as threat raised to critical after Manchester bombing," The Guardian, May 23, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/may/23/salman-abedi-police-race-to-establish-if-manchester-suicide-bomber-acted-alone>

104 <http://pressgazette.co.uk/sunday-times-defends-ipsa-doorstepping-complaint-with-recording-of-encounter/>

105 <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4542070/Salman-Abedi-filmed-putting-bins-out.html>

106 Beckett, "Fanning the Flames", 46.

107 Ibid, 46.

with criticizing the police, security services and government, once it transpired that the perpetrator, Salman Abedi, was 'known' to them¹⁰⁸.

Harm Logics

Secondary instances of violence and other criminal acts of visible retaliation aimed at target members of a community occur in this timeframe, seeded offline and online. Real-world incidents of hate crime, such as the defacement of mosques in the wake of Islamist terror, can provide highly symbolic images that circulate in the media. Such incidents and reportage can prompt local community support and offline efforts to rectify the physical damage¹⁰⁹, yet for a different audience can galvanise the online propagation of hate speech¹¹⁰.

The murder of Lee Rigby illustrates an intriguing innovative intervention that functioned to reduce secondary instances of violence in the days following

his death.¹¹¹ This involved the group Anonymous, the so-called 'hacktivist collective', publishing membership lists for the English Defence League (EDL). This was significant because the EDL leadership had been organizing significant public protests across the country following this event that were enabling and encouraging hate crimes. At some point, Anonymous decided to intervene by hacking into the EDL's computer system and publishing online their membership list and then, subsequently, some detrimental personal details relating to some of these members. This proved to have a 'chilling effect' on EDL mobilisation and activity. Whilst one would not countenance the specific details of how this was achieved, the general principle is potentially more interesting: mediating a 'distraction' in order to inhibit the potential for harmful activity may have some merit. Consuming the attention, time and energy of potentially troublesome groups engaging in secondary violence has potential harm reduction potential.



108 <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/politics/home-secretary-amber-rudd-admits-10487238>

109 <https://www.wsj.com/articles/canada-police-hold-2-look-motive-in-terror-attack-at-mosque-1485791738>

110 <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/06/19/former-edl-leader-tommy-robinson-condemned-finsbury-park-mosque/>

111 Roberts et al., "After Woolwich", 434–454.

WEEKS

Moving in to what is typically a post-event situation, as days become weeks, the intensity of general media and public interest in the event subsides along with acute levels of public fear. This can, however, be rapidly reignited at any moment by ancillary incidents, such as significant hate crimes, 'copycat' offences, and/or key developments in the police investigation being made (or not). Media and social media reportage of re-normalising activities and public resilience may be off-set to some degree by the malign behaviours of online and offline actors with the intent of amplifying social division, anger and distrust.

Media Logics

The 'ripple effects' an event has on the public psyche has been detected over a period of weeks and internationally. Longer-term modelling of the social sharing of emotions¹¹² following a crisis event shows an initial 'emergency phase' (event to 2 weeks post-event) that is characterised by intense sharing, rumination, arousal and solidarity. This phase shifts after 2-6 weeks into a second 'inhibition phase', where sharing plateaus and then progressively declines. In its place, a third 'adaption phase' begins to dominate where there are progressive decreases in emotional

sharing with others, based on both the frequency and mode of communications, including on social networks. Following the 2004 Madrid attacks, a shift from high event-related emotional arousal, towards what could be regarded as more 'functional' sharing in terms of searching for meaning and shared beliefs was reported.¹¹³ Eight weeks post-event, survey participants reported 'hearing' more than 'talking' about the traumatic event.

This coheres with Smelser's analysis¹¹⁴ of the kinds of emotional reactions terror attacks tend to induce over time. **He contends that whilst there are some unique properties of emotional reaction to terror attacks, there are also some common affective trajectories when compared to other kinds of natural disasters and accidents, including:**

- Psychic numbing, involving a combination of disbelief, denial and suppression of affect.
- Followed by intense emotions of fear, anxiety, terror, rage and guilt.
- A surge in both solidarity and 'scapegoating' Outpourings of sympathy.

¹¹² Pennebaker, JW & Harber, K (1993) A Social Stage Model of Collective Coping: The Loma Prieta Earthquake and The Persian Gulf War. *Journal of Social Issues*, 49, 4: 125-45.

¹¹³ Rimé, Bernard & Páez, Darío & Basabe, Nekane & Martínez-Sánchez, Francisco. (2010). Social sharing of emotion, post-traumatic growth, and emotional climate: Follow up of Spanish citizen's response to the collective trauma of March 11th terrorist attacks in Madrid. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 40, 1029 - 1045. 10.1002/ejsp.700.

¹¹⁴ Neil Smelser, *The Faces of Terrorism: Social and Psychological Dimensions* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

He concludes that most attacks deliver an intense, but relatively brief, impact upon levels of public fear and concern, before public attitudes and perceptions tend to return to something approaching their normal 'baseline' levels. Public polls in the weeks after the Oklahoma City bombing (an act of domestic terror) found no longer-term indicator that the public's sense of personal vulnerability to terror was elevated, with respondents citing the low probability of event occurrence and their lack of agency in being able to prevent it in their reasoning.¹¹⁵

Of significance here in mitigating against a longer-term fear response are collective processes of adjustment and 're-normalisation' facilitated by rituals of memorialization reported in media and social media. One week after an event is typically a symbolic time for public vigils, silences, fundraising efforts and church services that play a role in locating the recent event in the collective memory. The performance of these 'set-piece' events often attracts press and broadcast coverage. Gravitating around such events, the role of political and policy actors ascends, perhaps eclipsing that of practitioners. This can often be a critical period in terms of foreshadowing what the possible wider political implications of the attack might end up being. For example, a notable trend across several recent attacks in Europe has been for senior politicians to use it as an opportunity to publicly channel blame towards the large social media platforms who have allowed the perpetrators and their supporters to exploit the technologies they provide.

In keeping with the guiding analytic framework for this study, we should not over-state the degree of social solidarity that is generated. In liberal societies, there is typically 'push-back' against government narratives, and especially any attempts at 'blame-shifting'. An element of this more critical standpoint from media sources has to be accepted, but equally, it can tip over into an unhealthier state. For instance, within weeks, collective rituals that promote social solidarity can co-exist with the emergence of conspiracy theories. As a species of soft fact, conspiracy theories pivot around highly selective interpretations of the 'known' facts at that point in time and highlight perceived discrepancies between different accounts that are circulating. A recent report on the ethics of responsible journalistic

reporting of terror attacks, expressed concern that these kinds of contribution can end up 'polluting information flows'¹¹⁶ as they are endlessly repeated and widely shared on social networks.

Response Logics

TWO KEY INSIGHTS CAN BE DRAWN OUT THAT PERTAIN TO THE ORCHESTRATED RESPONSE LOGICS ASSOCIATED WITH TERROR EVENTS OVER THE LONGER-TERM:

- There is a general pattern that terror attacks will cause secondary incidents of violence, but this is not inevitable and does not occur in every case;
- The policing response to terror weeks later broadens out from investigating the original event to a wider community-impact management role associated with coordinating the response to other related crimes.

Focusing upon the conduct of the police investigation, as was intimated in the previous section, it has become routine for police, security service officials and government representatives to have to manage potentially 'discreditable' information about their performance. Looking across the aftermaths of recent attacks in the UK, France and the US, it has often been revealed by media sources that the perpetrators were previously 'known' to the authorities in some capacity, and warning signals were missed.

In terms of our temporal modelling, rumours of such contacts typically emerge in the days following the atrocity, but tend to be officially confirmed, elaborated and reported in the weeks after. In this time frame, information may enter the public domain that perpetrators were subject to a no-fly ban, were on a European watchlist or were acting in 'plain sight' posting inflammatory posts on social media encouraging violent acts. Such information requires attempts at reputation management, and a series of explanations and justifications are offered by senior intelligence and police representatives as to how and why it was not possible to prevent the tragedy that has unfolded. This is significant because if the media and other social media publicizers get behind narratives of disquiet, then the pressure for

¹¹⁵ Lewis, CW (2000) The terror that failed: public opinion in the aftermath of the bombing in Oklahoma city. *Public Administration Review*, 60, 3: 201-10.
¹¹⁶ p. 68 In Marthoz, Jean-Paul, *Terrorism and the Media: A Handbook for Journalists*. Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 2017.

some kind of inquiry or review to be commissioned becomes more assertive. These kinds of pressures become even more acute where suspects remain at large and are not secured by police.

Harm Logics

Evidence of how the social tensions triggered by a terrorist event can induce more malign harms over a period of weeks, can be garnered by examining the aftermaths of four of the attacks that happened in the UK in 2017. Figure 1 below displays police recorded crime data for England and Wales for a three-week period following the Westminster, Manchester Arena, London Bridge and Finsbury Park attacks. The data is a percentage comparison with the same period for the previous year (which was following the Brexit vote where hate crime levels increased compared to 2015).

These data show that, in three out of the four attacks, there was a net percentage increase in the number of hate crimes reported to and recorded by police. The outlier is the Finsbury Park incident, which unlike the other three, was committed by a perpetrator with a far-right political motivation. Perhaps unsurprisingly,

given the especially heinous nature of the violence committed, the Manchester Arena bombing triggered the largest increase in 'retaliatory' hate crimes recorded by police in the first week, which persisted into weeks two and three.

A recent development connected to the empirical data presented in Figure 1 above, finds evidence of Kremlin backed 'spoof' social media accounts deliberately seeking to amplify social divisions and tensions following these four UK events. Adding to open source confirmations from recent publications issued by the US Senate¹¹⁷, NBC News¹¹⁸ and RBK of faked Russian accounts and propaganda narratives, the key insights are summarized in Box 4 below.

Given how recent this phenomenon is, it is difficult to know whether foreign government influence and interference operations of this kind have been present in other terror events, and the extent to which such attempts at harm amplification might be anticipated in the future. In policy and practice terms, this development is potentially quite profound: it suggests that local contests over interpretation and meaning can be inflected by geo-political conflicts.

BOX 4

Evidencing disinformation following UK acts of terror in 2017.

47 different confirmed Russian accounts were operating on Twitter and disseminated messages about all four UK terror events in 2017. Eight of these 47 accounts were especially active in the weeks that followed.

- These generated in excess of 153,000 shares.
- A cluster of these accounts had been set up towards the end of 2014, several years previously.
- These accounts adopted 'spoof' identities, mimicking digital social identities across the ideological spectrum. The majority presented as right-wing personas, but others were presented as more civil libertarian in orientation.
- The strategy was clearly to 'infiltrate and incite' established thought communities online. They were seeking to exploit existing concerns already circulating amongst particular groups.
- These accounts also made use of materials generated by Russian mainstream media sources such as Russia Today.
- The accounts shared and retweeted some of the most controversial narratives associated with the four attacks.

117 <https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/FinalRR.pdf>

118 <https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/social-media/now-available-more-200-000-deleted-russian-troll-tweets-n844731>

MONTHS

Longer-term impacts and consequences stretching over months and years derive from some (not all) terror events and how they are represented in the media. In this time-frame, a specific event (or series of events) may be remediated in traditional media and social media for a variety of purposes. Any impacts may be reignited by the launch of formal inquiries and reviews to document and ‘learn the lessons’ of the incident. Specific events are referenced to interpret and justify the tenor of new laws and legislative instruments. Established narratives of grievance about extremist action, particularly in the wake of future threats and activity, are ‘refreshed’ and ‘reheated’ by evoking that event particularly at significant time markers for memorialising activity, (e.g. at one-year anniversaries). Mediated content months and even years after an event therefore can continue to encapsulate elements of media, harm and response logics. More pragmatically, it is important because of how it can facilitate malign attempts to radicalize new recruits to a terrorist cause long after the intensity of the media focus has shifted away from the proximate, visceral reactions of shock, horror and emotional tragedy.

Terror Logics

Three years after the Sydney siege, the New South Wales State Coroner held an inquest into the deaths

which was also tasked with examining the actions of police and authorities before and during that event¹¹⁹. The role of the media and social media whilst the event was ongoing was a particular focus and so the inquest is significant in retrospectively documenting the terror logics underlying this particular event.

Key extracts from the inquest are:

- Media monitoring from the siege site.
- The perpetrator, Monis, enlisted the hostages in monitoring the media – traditional and online – for reports on the siege.
- The perpetrator directed hostages to call media outlets.
- At various times, Monis directed hostages to call TV and radio stations to deliver announcements and demands or attempt to influence coverage. None of the media outlets broadcast these calls.
- Social media posts and videos from the hostages were broadcast.
- Hostages posted the perpetrators’ demands on social media, including Facebook. Some mass media reported on these social media posts.
- Hostages videos of Monis’ demands were sent to media outlets in an effort to have them broadcast.

¹¹⁹ Magistrate Michael Barnes, Inquest into the deaths arising from the Lindt Café siege: Findings and Recommendations (Sydney, New South Wales: State Coroner of New South Wales, 2017), 4.

The media complied with police requests not to broadcast the videos and so, as a result, the hostages uploaded them onto YouTube. These videos were removed by police at a later time.

- Expert evidence on messaging through media and social media.

- Negotiation experts provided advice that police press conferences and other media messages should have been **more strategic, crafted in such a way as to try and influence the perpetrators behaviour.**

- Experts also suggested police should have worked

with Monis' family or solicitor to craft messages for social media to communicate with him and try to engage him with police negotiators.

- Management and impact of the media during the incident.

- Various media outlets broadcast live video of the café during the Siege.

Box 5, below, cites the main recommendation from the inquest, significant because it explicitly addresses the interface of media and response logics during an ongoing terror event.

BOX 5

Recommendation from the Inquest into the deaths arising from the Lindt Café siege.

Recommendation 23: ... 'that the Commission of Police consider seeking an agreement with news media outlets whereby the NSWPF will establish a way for such outlets to rapidly and confidentially determine whether publishing specific material could compromise the response to an ongoing high-risk situation and the media in turn will agree not to publish such material without first alerting a nominated senior police officer of their intention to do so.'

Media Logics

It is not only policy and politics at play in the longer term, an example from Canada illustrates how media logics shape how and when relevant information pertaining to an event can enter the public domain in 'slow-time' to respond to, and shape, public opinion, politics and policy responses.

See Box 6 on the following page.

Response Logics

Response Logics are engaged with a shift more towards how the procedural and legislative landscape is responding to the event. These policy and practice adaptations can be set in motion by issues and weaknesses in response frameworks that have been

highlighted by preceding media and social media coverage. An example discussed in some detail here is based on the 2014 Sydney siege, that engaged the political and policy sphere in triggering the conduct of an official review and inquest, to shape the future trajectory of public policy and legislation concerning the role of communications and media.

The official Federal government review and inquest that followed the siege attended to the role of communications and the media, considering state and federal official compliance with appropriate communications protocols during the two-day siege. Focusing solely on official communications activities, the review found that communications with the public were timely, effective and aligned with relevant protocols.¹²⁰ Activities undertaken by the New South Wales Police Force established operations on the

¹²⁰ Commonwealth of Australia, Martin Place siege: Joint Commonwealth - New South Wales review (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, January 2015), 65.

BOX 6

Responding to Terror Attacks in Canada

Events: Oct 20th Oct 22nd, 2014 'lone-wolf' attacks on Canadian soldiers in Quebec and Ottawa. These closely timed (but unconnected) attacks on soldiers in Canada represented the first fatal terrorism attacks on Canadian home soil attributed to ISIS or Al-Qaeda.

Perpetrators: ISIS affiliates.

The Ottawa perpetrator, Zehaf-Bibeau, had videoed himself recording his motives earlier on the day of the attack but had not broadcast the video. Four months later this material was put in to the public domain for discussion after mounting pressure to do so. A citizen's photo of Zehaf-Bibeau taken just prior to his attack was confiscated at the scene by a police officer who then re-photographed the image. The photo surfaced seven hours after the shooting on Twitter, with the source linked to an ISIL account. Twitter responded within an hour to suspend that account, but later police investigations suggested that the photo may have been purposely leaked by police outside of Canada. Other footage later broadcast from the scene was from CCTV and television cameras that captured the sound of the final gunfight. Months after the two attacks, the government had acted on perceived 'points of failure' identified from these events and moved to revamp national security laws in anticipation of future attacks. A new Anti-Terrorism Act was introduced in 2015. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police also established 'Project Savvy' with the aim of proactively searching for threats on open source media. In 2018, Facebook posts were used as evidence in a deportation trial of a man suspected of inciting terrorist violence.

understanding that the incident was terror-related, although this was not communicated publicly at the time¹²¹. This included activating the New South Wales Crisis Policy Committee, who coordinated and approved public messaging during the incident, with New South Wales Police taking the lead in providing operational updates to the public. Consideration was also given to the risk of further violence or retaliatory attacks off the back of the incident¹²² and recommendations made regarding future cooperation with the media (Box 7 opposite).

In the aftermaths of recent terrorist attacks, public remonstrations from senior figures within the security agencies have also exerted pressure on governments to enhance their legal powers to tackle a 'morphing' and adapting threat. This siren call is potent for politicians who perceive they need to be seen to be 'doing something', and almost automatically reach for the formulation and introduction of new laws as their principal response¹²³.

¹²¹ Ibid, 66

¹²² Ibid, 70

¹²³ Innes, M., Roberts, C. Lowe, T (2017) A disruptive influence? "Prevent"-ing problems and countering violent extremism policy in practice. *Law and Society Review*, 51, 2: 252-81.

Since 9/11 in the UK, this 'legislative reflex' has been manifested in seven separate pieces of legislation, not all of which judicial scrutiny.

- the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001, which allowed for detention without trial (later overturned by the courts);
- the Prevention of Terrorism Act 2005, introducing the 'control order' (also overturned);
- the Terrorism Act 2006, that extended the detention of suspects without charge from 14 to 28 days;
- the Terrorism Order 2006, enabling the Treasury to freeze the assets of suspects;
- the Counter-Terrorism Act 2008, under which police were permitted to continue questioning suspects after charge;
- the Terrorist Asset-Freezing Act 2010;
- the 2015 Counter-Terrorism and Security Bill.

New legislation has become an almost ritualized part of the societal response logic to major terrorist attacks. These new legal instruments have had an important framing influence upon the progressive development of, and adjustments to, the UK's cross-government CONTEST strategy, introduced to provide a comprehensive response to the changing international terrorist threat post-2005.

Harm Logics

Groups with extreme views, both broadly supportive of or antithetical to those of the perpetrator, begin early on to interpret the specific details associated with an event in a way coherent with their ideas and values. However, there can be longer lasting influences associated with these broadcasts too, because such messages seek to connect the recent event with a broader narrative of grievance. This feeds harm logics, whereby such messages seek to amplify and sustain social divisions online and offline. For example, on the night of the Manchester Arena Bombing in 2017, Tommy Robinson, the former leader of the English Defence League made a date connection with the Lee Rigby murder 4 years earlier. He tweeted the following message that was widely shared and endorsed: "On the anniversary of Lee Rigby's horrific murder it looks like we have been attacked again #Manchester".

Over the longer term, such connections can be significant in how events are interpreted and have ongoing, malign narratives constructed around them. They are also implicated for their role in radicalising individuals and moving them into a mindset where they are willing to engage in violence. Evidence for this can be found in cases such as Darren Osborne the perpetrator of the 2017 Finsbury Park vehicle attack upon worshippers who had just left the local mosque. At his trial, it was reported that prior to deciding upon his course of action, he had 'binge watched' material on the online site 'InfoWars' about previous Islamist inspired events in the period prior to his crimes¹²⁴. Similarly, Safaa Boular, an 18-year-old woman from London who was convicted of plotting a terror attack on the British Museum in June 2018, was alleged to have been radicalized online¹²⁵ in the wake of the 2015 Paris terror attacks.

BOX 7

Recommendations from the Federal government review about communications during the Martin Place siege.

1. 'Media representatives should be offered access to government-led training exercises to further improve cooperation in the event of future terrorism incidents.'
2. 'The National Security Public Information Guidelines should be updated to ensure relevant agencies in all States and Territories have clear guidance on accessing information and communicating with the public.'

¹²⁴ <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2018/jan/24/darren-osborne-uk-mosque-attack-suspect-read-infow/>
¹²⁵ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-44359958>

4.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

Many of the problems with how media and social media communicate information during and after terror events are symptomatic of wider and deeper challenges associated with the contemporary information environment. There is, after all, considerable general public and political disquiet at the current time about the malign influence of misinformation and disinformation as it is impacting across a range of social institutions and situations. Given the current climate, it is important to differentiate between those more general, societal level mitigations and solutions, and other initiatives more specifically targeted to managing the consequences of terror events.

KEY IMPLICATIONS OF THE ANALYSIS PRESENTED ARE THAT:

- **Counter-terrorism policy design should attend more closely to the post-event situation.** For understandable reasons, policy development and research attention has focused 'upstream', upon how processes of violent radicalisation can be interdicted to prevent the onset of violence in the first place.
- **Terrorist violence is intended as a provocation to elicit intense and vivid reactions, the relative neglect of how to manage post-event situations, what we label 'post-event prevent', is a current weak point in many governmental counter-terrorism frameworks.** If it is accepted that it will not be possible to prevent all future terror plots, then a reasonable and pragmatic aim is that the harm induced by those that do occur be reduced and mitigated. The label 'post event prevent' reflects its primary concern with constraining the consequences triggered in the wake of an attack.

4.1 Minutes to Months (M2M)

Matrix

Subject to some further development, the evidence and insights set out above could be distilled to inform a strategic communication 'playbook' to support this post-event prevent strategy. This playbook would provide a structured, holistic approach to manage the relative and aggregated influence of media and social media communications during and after terror events. The concepts developed herein afford a potentially useful framework for such an approach.

The M2M framework could be adapted by strategic communications professionals as a tool for gauging the influence of media communications upon any social harm footprint induced by an event, enabling them to target attention and effort on those aspects that matter most for a particular incident. Illustrating this possibility, Table 1 draws together

what the evidence suggests are key communicative actions, organised by temporal phase and according to key responsible actors into a matrix. The matrix conveys the complexity of communications activities performed during and after terror events, whilst simultaneously drawing the interacting components and elements together to provide a single picture.

In terms of its practical application, the matrix is useful because it can be adapted to reflect how the specific qualities of the terror event, the motivations of the perpetrators, together with the situation and setting of occurrence, are all consequential in shaping the communications dynamics and harm management challenges generated.

The M2M matrix captures how communications issued by authorities can amplify, as well as constrain, the harms and consequences induced by the original violence. The following sections expand the matrix contents.



	MINUTES	HOURS	DAYS	WEEKS	MONTHS
Perpetrators	Communicate live from scene, or co-opt others to do so.	Supporters claim the act. Ongoing perpetrator dialogue if event ongoing. If ongoing, harness media coverage for situational awareness.	Lambast 'passive' moderates. Aftershocks – retaliatory attacks. Online chatter amongst supporters.	Use the event to try and radicalize others.	Retrospective reporting (by others) interpreting their logics and actions.
Participants	Real-time reporting. Rumour circulation.	Contact missing relatives/friends.	Victims identified. Feature in media stories, with human interest angle. 'Hero and villain' stories. Testimonies on chaos at scene.		Anniversaries and key events used to tell more detailed 'survivor stories'.
Public	Register shock & horror on social networks. Follow breaking news. Uncertainty about what is happening.	Uncertainty continues. Lots of soft facts communicated, esp. in information vacuum. Early sense-making, connecting bits of information, to construct provisional narratives. Hashtag campaigns initiate and continue for days.	Grieving and emotional sharing. Resilience & solidarity actions (eg memorials). Emergence of more critical voices. Polarised public opinion.	General public attention subsides. Acute fear and anxiety triggered dilutes. Resilience actions online and offline.	Public pressure to release information, or launch enquiry. Anniversaries can reignite interest.
Police & Practitioners	Announce incident & attendance. Channel public interest to social media channels.	Confirm terror incident. Establish media monitoring capability. Communicate 'hard facts', don't rebut 'soft facts', little 'dialogue'.	Official statements. Identify suspects & appeal for info to assist investigation. Enforcement actions against wider suspect networks (can continue for weeks and months). Handle reputationally damaging info about 'known suspects'.	Updates on investigation. Broadening role for community impact management. Defend against reputational concerns.	Criminal justice proceedings. Learn from inquiries and/or reviews.
Press & Publicisers	Breaking news reports. Remediate social media sources, especially images. Live blogs. Contact eyewitnesses. Vulnerable to spreading misinformation.	Speculate suspect identity & motives. Integrate affective content into news content. Algorithmic effects on influential voices & journalists co-opt hashtags. Credible sources for official definitions of the situation. 'Framing contests', different groups compete to set the agenda.	Identify concerns about police/ intelligence services. Fill in the backstories of participants. Broadcast public statements from a range of sources. Report police operations. Expose accounts.	Comments on investigation progress (or lack of). Blame attribution (where appropriate). Interpretations more in line with established political values. Report a return to 'normality'.	Report on any criminal trials and geo-political connections. Report significant events, such as anniversaries, inquests, new laws.
Policy & Politics		"We will not live in fear" type statements. Expressions of sympathy / concern. Calls for resolute responses. Amplifying first responders communications.	Praise for emergency services, but this can 'tip' to critique. 'Expert sources' used by media. Civil society groups make public statements and often mobilise. Handle 'known suspects' type revelations.	Bi-partisan interpretations of the event. Calls for review or enquiry. Questions about wider counter-terrorism implications.	New legislation responding to identified weaknesses. Establish review / enquiry.

Table 1. Minutes to Months Matrix

MINUTES

The period immediately following the occurrence of terrorist violence is marked by confusion and high degrees of uncertainty about what has happened.

Initial public awareness is created by participants in the event tweeting messages, or using other social media platforms, to alert their followers. Such messages are picked up and rapidly relayed by other media outlets.

In these circumstances it is important for police to make an early public statement and then to update this when they can. This is preferable to delaying any comment, which will create space for other voices to speculate, and spread misinformation and disinformation.

This position presumes police have available a standing capacity to systematically monitor social media across multiple platforms. Such a capability potentially affords direct policing benefits in terms of being able to rapidly collate visual images and text shared by event participants that may have intelligence or evidential value to any police investigation. This is important in light of evidence from the 2017 UK attacks that suggests members of the public were far more willing to share their images with journalists than submit them via the police's official collection portal.

A defining quality of social media in particular is the velocity with which breaking news can be shared. It means that reaction to major terror events potentially have an 'everywhere all at once' quality in terms of how public awareness and impacts 'travel'.

Social media travel is important because it means that community impacts from a terror event can be experienced over a wide geographic area. Whilst there is some research evidence relating to this phenomenon, it probably warrants future

investigation to determine more coherently how, when and why such travel patterns do (and do not) occur. Recent incidents suggest improved practice is starting to be implemented in digital first responses. This is not to under-estimate the challenges involved. Knowing what to say when the situation is chaotic and uncertain is difficult.

Some core principles are: establish an authoritative and credible messenger; be clear about the message that can be delivered at that moment; foster public awareness without causing alarm; and, be willing to directly counter-message against any incipient rumours before they can establish traction.

Local agencies should agree who is going to take strategic communications lead in the event of any terror attack, rather than improvising any such arrangements in the chaos and confusion following one. It is important that messaging is pre-prepared, coordinated and consistent between agency partners. Other partners should amplify these messages to their networks, rather than messaging independently. This level of discipline is vital because any inconsistencies and discrepancies will be exploited subsequently by the authors of conspiracy theories. Evidence suggests that uncorrected misinformation functions as a 'seed' for more deliberate disinformation propagation.

There is a 'digital golden hour' principle, just as police investigators think in terms of a 'golden hour' of criminal investigation where their initial actions exert a structuring influence over their subsequent activities. This holds that the early communications made by police, event participants and others, do a lot of work in framing subsequent public interpretations and understandings.

HOURS

A key development to be anticipating and monitoring at this time is interventions by groups ideologically opposed to the suspected perpetrators, since their communications may start to try and amplify a sense of risk and incite anger.

Communications activities in the first hours following an attack, will in part, reflect the scale of the violence that has been performed and whether the perpetrators are still active, or have been neutralized. During this period, one can expect supporters of the perpetrators to 'claim' the act, and for police and government responders to officially define it as a terrorist incident. This accompanies an explosion in public awareness and communications about the event, many of which include speculative 'soft facts'.

The presence of multiple, over-lapping narratives of 'who did what to whom and why' is the 'new normal'. This becomes especially apparent in the hours after an attack. A defining quality of the contemporary media environment is how it comprises multiple organizations and actors whose communications sometimes complement, and other times contest one another. However, they are all collectively contributing to the definition of the situation and public narrative produced. Press and broadcast journalists are operating under considerable commercial pressure to achieve scoops and break news, and there are times when this compromises their ability to filter credible material sourced from 'citizen journalists' at the scene. In this context, the ability of police or government to be able to control the unfolding public narrative is limited.

A strategic communications capacity and capability needs to be established during this period to perform two functions: (1) provide timely and accurate updates about what is known at that time; (2) issue rapid rebuttals of any information

that is known to be false. Typically, responses have focused upon the first of these, but evidence suggests that from a 'harm reduction' perspective, the latter is also increasingly vital. **Authorities should be prepared to message 'polyphonically', targeting specific audience segments.** Linked to the above point, it is important that all messaging is carefully and precisely targeted. It is misleading to assume that the same message can be delivered to those sympathetic to the terrorists' ideas as to the general public.

One recent innovation observed and worth highlighting, is senior officials making proactive statements that try and anticipate trouble and influence the behaviour of key segments of the audience. In addition to any material effects this may have on hate crime, it can function as an important signal to communities who might be feeling vulnerable following the attack. This is important because, in the hours following an incident, 'retaliatory' messaging from those who self-define as ideological opponents of the suspected perpetrators and their supporters is likely to be seen.

As well as implications for police and other governmental agencies, there are also clear responsibilities for journalists and other professional communicators. Much has been made of the dilution of their influence over the media-sphere as it has been rendered more complex. **From the cases reviewed, media actors appear to retain an important agenda-setting role in the wake of terror events as credible sources of information.** Equally however, when mainstream media sources mis-report aspects of an event, even if it is quickly corrected, it provides an accelerant for online conspiratorial thought communities.

DAYS

From a communications perspective, as the process of reaction moves from hours into days, the initial sense of shock subsides, and forms of public sense-making take over. Typically, this includes a more detailed understanding of what has happened, who was involved and their motivations.

During this period, considerable policing effort may have to be directed towards managing 'secondary' instances of violence, including hate crimes against people and property symbolically associated with the social identities of those committing the original violence. This typically includes offensive behavior and language communicated through digital channels, as well as responding to media reporting of retaliatory attacks. One method to inform this aspect would be for police communications professionals (and similar partner agency representatives) to conduct joint exercises with a network of trusted key press and broadcast journalists. Just as exercises are used to understand weaknesses in physical responses to major events, a similar logic could be applied to understanding strategic and tactical public communications.

This could be extended by ensuring that, in the days after an incident, regular briefings are provided to this network of trusted contacts spanning different media outlets. They can play an important role in exposing disinformation messengers and messages. As a note of caution, this should not tip over into propaganda, as it needs to be recognized that reporters may surface negative information. But the 'bigger picture' need is to find a way to counteract the multiple misinformation and disinformation rumours and conspiracies that are circulated on social media platforms.

An important objective for post-event strategic communications during the sense-making period is to prohibit perpetrators of the act, or their supporters, crafting a narrative that projects an aura of malign power. Following an atrocity, where death and/or destruction has been caused, there is clearly a temptation for those commenting upon it to construct the author of the act as a de facto 'folk devil'. Indeed, this is something that communications by those sympathetic to the perpetrator will often seek to amplify. Therefore, it is important to ensure that no messages are sent by the authorities that unintentionally enhance the perceived power and sophistication of the perpetrators. Indeed, there is indicative evidence to suggest that where 'discrediting' information about the perpetrators is uncovered, carefully publicizing this can have a role in lessening the aggregate harm, because it punctures the notion that the event was committed by a macabre 'mastermind'.

A very recent development, and we do not yet fully understand how widespread it is, involves foreign states running influence and interference measures using a full spectrum of mass media and social media-based sources. The intent appears to be to amplify and exacerbate domestic social tensions, and to seed confusion so that people don't know what information or institutions they can trust anymore. The consequence is that local conflicts gravitating around an event are inflected by geopolitical conflicts. At present, there is very little evidence that can be drawn upon to guide what is effective in managing the impacts of these newly emergent disinformation campaigns.

WEEKS

There may be a balance to be struck by authorities between short-term and longer-term consequences of decisions about how and when to intervene. For instance, the occurrence of hate crimes in the wake of a terror event involves clear harms. However, the revulsion such acts trigger amongst many members of the public can transition into enhanced community cohesion and resilience over the longer term. In the weeks after a major attack, there are typically surges in both solidarity and 'scapegoating'. Thus, a conundrum for policy and practice development is that, in seeking to do something about the latter, interventions do not interfere with the organic social processes that induce the former.

Similar challenges surround the issue of what to do about orchestrated 'bot' and 'troll' online activity, whose communications deliberately seek to amplify social divisions and tension. Currently we lack good evidence about what these achieve. Ongoing work suggests that most such accounts achieve

very little, but there are a few that potentially exert a considerable influence. Governments could introduce regulatory instruments requiring social media companies to establish effective measures to suspend the 'power few' accounts that create problems within one hour of them being detected.

Configuring and understanding the contours of this problem accurately is important. To date, we perceive that public and political attention has rather been captured by a concern with anti-social bots, because they are relatively visible - an intriguing, but not especially consequential, feature of the new media ecosystem. Policy innovations should not be unduly concerned with, or swayed by, metrics from social media providers showing large numbers of bots being suppressed or deleted. Rather, effort needs to be focused upon the 'power few', the 'hidden persuaders', that potentially have more profound influence effects and are more difficult to detect.

MONTHS

Past attacks are used to radicalize future potential perpetrators, therefore establishing a suite of effective interventions designed to interact with how media and social media are used to communicate in the wake of terror attacks is important. Individuals such as Darren Osborne, who committed a vehicle-based attack on worshippers outside Finsbury Park Mosque in London in 2017, were clearly fuelled by their interpretation of past-Islamist inspired atrocities.

More broadly, communications activities in the months following an attack will be associated with significant developments in the police investigation, and any inquests or trial proceedings.

An important consideration for this time-period is handling potentially 'discrediting' information about the performance of the intelligence and security services. As was highlighted by the review of evidence, in the clear majority of cases it has transpired that terrorist offenders were previously known to the authorities, who oftentimes had been in contact with them. Although this pattern creates reputational risk for the agencies concerned in terms of overall public trust and confidence, we have not uncovered any evidence to suggest that this has caused long-term negative impacts upon public opinion. However, there is probably merit in organizations collaborating with their international peers to establish future good practices in this regard.

As a general trend, as we move further away from the event, so a greater proportion of the media traffic can be defined as political communication. For example, whether legislative reforms are needed is a common theme some months after a high-profile event.

Bringing these insights together, in terms of managing the immediate reaction phase over the first hours and days, a potential area of investment is in a '4D' strategy. This is a strategy that both reactively and proactively intervenes in respect of known key communication nodes that might be seeking to amplify the impacts of an attack:

Distract – run interventions that consume the attention, time and energy of the key agitators, so that they cannot co-ordinate their more harmful activities.

Disrupt – for example surging 'take-downs' of social media accounts sympathetic to perpetrators or those supporting violence.

Deny – issue rapid rebuttals of any potentially consequential rumours, fake news or conspiracy theories across multiple channels.

Delay – the intent behind these coordinated tactics is to try and ensure that any inflammatory communications are 'pushed' outside of the reaction phases where they can do most harm. Once a public definition of the situation becomes less ambiguous, then misinformation and disinformation are likely to be less consequential.

SUMMARY

The implementation of the 4D strategy to disrupt and de-stabilize harmful communications should be understood as informed by, and predicated upon, the key insights and evidence that have been set out in the preceding sections. In particular, there are a number of initiatives and investments that police, government and civil society partners can do in order to expose and constrain the negative impacts that mass media and social media communications can have. These can be briefly summarized as follows:

- 1. In the minutes and hours following an attack make an early statement about what is known and unknown at the current time and update this periodically. This is important in diminishing the space for rumours and propaganda.**
- 2. Establish a strategic communications capacity and capability, to include a single authoritative messenger for public communications and steer messaging through them.**
- 3. If the attack is ongoing, be prepared to ask citizens at the scene(s) to desist from using social media in case it is affording the perpetrators enhanced situational awareness.**
- 4. Co-ordinate messaging across partner agencies to ensure consistency and complementarity.**
- 5. Implement a social media listening capacity and capability early on with a particular focus upon groups inciting anger and / or social tensions.**
- 6. Utilize social media listening for rumours, fake news and conspiracy theories, this should include foreign influence and interference operations. When detected implement rapid rebuttals'**
- 7. Message 'polyphonically' and proactively recognizing that different platforms and channels engage particular segments of the public.**
- 8. As the immediate post-event reaction phase passes, prepare communications designed to 'puncture' the glamour of any perpetrators. This could involve satire, or 'boosting' messages by community-based opponents of the terrorist groups.**
- 9. Set up a network of trusted journalist contacts and brief them regularly, including about known sources of disinformation. They can be helpful in exposing these to the wider public.**
- 10. Be prepared to implement tactics that distract, disrupt, deny or delay messaging from other actors that might amplify the aggregate harm of the incident.**

5.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusions

The intent underpinning this report is that by synthesizing the available knowledge and evidence about the role of media and social media, evidence-based insights should be derived to provide a platform for developing a ‘playbook’ to inform future strategies and tactics. This would help to establish counter-measures to constrain the harms induced following terror attacks, whilst concurrently avoiding any interventions that might aggravate the situation.

Over the past five years or so, both the mechanics and dynamics of terrorism, and how it is reported via media sources, have altered dramatically. There has been a diversification in terms of ideological motivations, and a shift to a full-spectrum of attack methodologies, ranging from bombings to knife and vehicle-based attacks. Over the same period, the logics of media and the information environment have been fundamentally transformed.

In the aftermath of terror attacks, the multiple competing narratives circulating are not all controlled, or controllable, by the authorities. They are occasioned by the immediate ability of the public to participate in shaping the story. This means that journalists are not as dependent upon official sources for information as they were in the past, yet they operate in an increasingly competitive media market to be the first to ‘break’ stories.

Additional complexity is added to this agenda by the implicit suggestion in the available literature that the dynamics of social reaction may not be the same across different country contexts. The Canadian approach, for instance, tends towards a slower release of substantive information about the crime or any suspects than is typical in the UK or USA. That this assertion remains implicit, however, reflects a distinct lack of systematic comparative research in this field.

One further area of reflection concerns the current state-of-the-art in terms of understanding the social impacts of new technology trends. For example, in the preceding passages it has been noted that large numbers of bots are now used to break news about important global events online. However, it is far from clear what impacts these actually have.

Current attempts to gauge the influence achieved by communications on social media are overly dependent upon quantified 'reach' and 'impression' metrics. However, these only count numbers of social media users 'touched' by the information, rather than whether any actual changes in the recipients' thoughts, feelings or actions were induced.

Broader understanding about what happens in the aftermath of terror attacks, and the role of media and social media in shaping these processes, is impeded by the lack of systematic comparative case analyses looking across multiple incidents to diagnose common patterns and differences in respect of different modes of terrorist violence. Seeking to redress this balance should be a priority in the future commissioning of research in this area. Preparing the ground for such development work, this analysis has been shaped by two underlying premises. First, we need to incorporate a more sophisticated appreciation of the complexities of the contemporary

media ecology and the roles performed by different actors in terms of the communications they make. Second, by attending to the temporal dimension, there are certain patterns present in terms of what communications happen when, in the aftermaths of terrorist attacks. Illuminating generalisable patterns is important insofar as they afford the possibility of prediction and anticipation; precursors for preparing meaningful policy and practice interventions.

Overall, both policy and research attention has neglected the post-event situation. Pragmatically, if it is accepted that despite best efforts, it will not be possible to prevent all future threats and plots, then there are counter-measures that can be implemented to constrain the harms that occur. In engaging with this challenge, the framework developed herein is designed to provide a structured approach to understanding the complex and multi-faceted ways in which media and social media communications influence such processes.



Research Design and Methodology

KNOWLEDGE MAPPING

Quantitative mapping of the literature was based upon systematic searching of 9 online databases to retrieve and investigate all relevant materials that matched defined criterion (N=5,490). The databases were chosen to cover a range of disciplinary bases: Taylor & Francis, JSTORE, Science Direct, Sociological Abstracts, PsycINFO, National Institute of Justice (NIJ), LexisNexis, Campbell Collaboration. Two other sources not in a relational database format were also searched for key terms: The International Bibliography SS (ProQuest) and Perspectives on Terrorism Bibliography. Potential sources for inclusion in the latter were identified manually (N=436) and then refined (N=76; 17%).

Due to the number of databases searched, and the extensive and diverse literature within these, additional individual and targeted searches were developed for each database, so as to strengthen the quality and relevancy of the returns. Retrievals were based upon a blend of single item and Boolean searches¹²⁶, organized as follows:

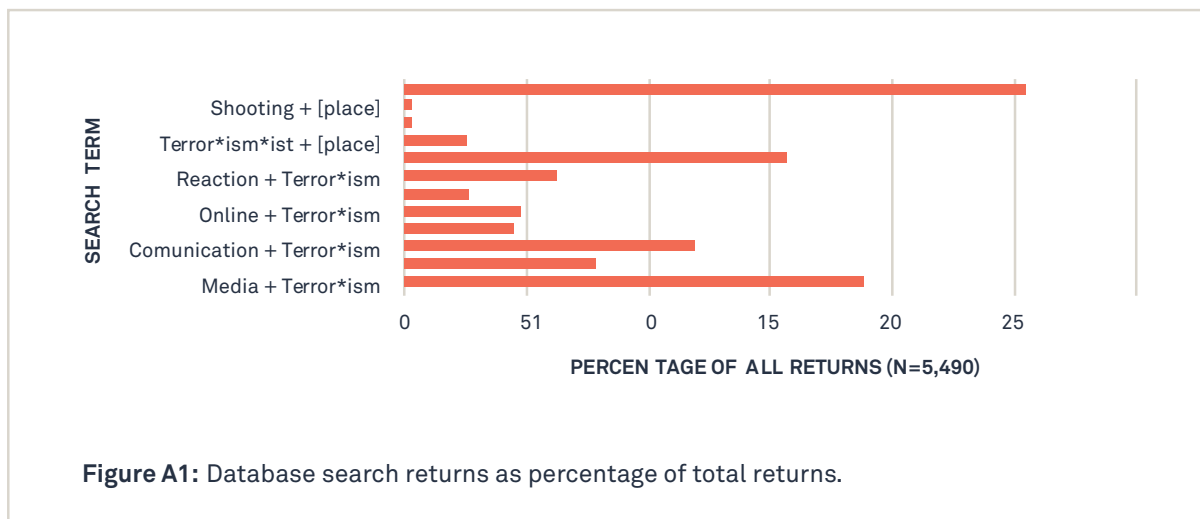
- Focus upon media and social media related issues that arise during and after terrorist incidents [search terms: media AND terror*ism; social media AND terror*ism]
- The public reaction to terrorist events online or offline [search terms: reaction AND terror*ism; public AND terror*ism]
- The formulation of a narrative and definition of the situation by governments, the media, and social media, and key influencers within these mediums [narrative AND framing; communication AND terrorism; etc.]

■ Case study searches based around specific locations where known high-profile events took place. For example - Boston marathon bombings, Mumbai, Paris attacks, Tunisia, etc. [search terms: terror*ism AND location (e.g. Boston); bombing AND location; etc.].

Testing different combinations of search-terms, the more successful returns and matches were rapidly established. 'Successful' matches were defined in terms of the number and relevancy of the materials which each brought back. Around 40 different Boolean search terms, with different levels of specificity (or extent), were trialed before arriving at the best 10 term combinations. Figure A1 opposite shows each search term as a percentage of all returns, from which it can be seen that counter-terrorism is a dominant theme in the existing literature, accounting for just over 25% of all returns. Figure A1 displays all 12 key search term combinations and the number of returns for the different individual databases investigated.

An initial scan and assessment of the identified materials was conducted to identify the most relevant sources. There was, for example, a considerable amount of non-empirical research, concerned with mass media and terrorism in general, rather than public reactions and impacts, that was not included in the more detailed analysis. Two researchers independently assessed the returns by reading all the abstracts to confirm inclusion or exclusion according to the degree of relevancy. Additional references were identified and included within the assessment process by reading the primary sources and tracking down the citations.

¹²⁶ Boolean searching is a system of showing relationships between sets by using the words AND, OR, and NOT which can assist in database searching by combining or limiting terms.



The quantification data set out in Figure 1 and Table 1 should be understood as an ‘indicator’ rather than ‘measure’ of the relative distribution of the research literature. This is because a number of relevant sources of material were identified through routes other than the database searches.

KEY TERM COMBINATION	NAME OF SEARCHABLE DATABASE									TOTAL RETURNS
	TAYLOR AND FRANCIS ONLINE	JSTORE	SCIENCE DIRECT	NCJRS . GOV	SOC ABSTRACTS	PSYINFO.	NJU	LEXIS NEXIS	CAMPB. COLLAB.	
*NUMBER OF RETURNS	127	128	129		130	131	132	133	134	
Media + Terror*ism	92	38	103	438	83	9	2	261	2	1028
Social Media + Terror*ism	15	8	63	158	8	0	1	174	0	427
Communication + Terror*ism	27	7	200	111	18	0	2	285	0	650
Narrative + Terror*ism	13	10	46	63	11	2	0	94	1	240
Online + Terror*ism	8	1	71	0	0	1	0	177	0	258
Online +										
Attack	8	8	0	0	1	2	0	124	0	143
Reaction + Terror*ism	8	13	0							
	135	1	3	0	178	0	338			
Public + Terror*ism	81	120	0	0	0	22	0	631	0	854
Terror*ism*ist + [Place]	107	22	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	133
Bomb*ing + [Place]	7	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	11
Shooting + [Place]	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	12
Counter-Terror*ism	9	153	187	1000	43	0	4	0	0	1396
Total	387	380	670	1905	165	39	17	1924	3	5490

Table 2. Searchable database key terms and returns, number.

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