THE IMAGE OF TERRORISM IN EUROPEAN MEDIA A CASE STUDY OF FOUR TERRORIST ATTACKS

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Abstract: Terrorist attacks are currently the greatest threat to global security. All national and international institutions with management, training or military attributions show great importance to this almost uncontrollable phenomenon. All these events were widely presented in the media, and with every terrorist attack the media institutions presented the breaking news and gave up local programs to give details about terrorist conflicts. Often, journalists gave up professional ethics by publishing images with strong emotional impact just to broadly show the danger threatening the whole world. Whether located in France, Belgium, Egypt and Syria, they were all widely broadcasted, greatly influencing the public opinion. The present paper proposes an analysis of the way in which four of the terrorist attacks of the past two years were presented in the European media, namely two in Paris, one in Turkey and one in Brussels. Thus, the emphasis will lay on how the attacks have been covered, the impact on the public, as a a real state of panic was created in many of the cases and how the topics have been approached with regard to the professional ethics. Furthermore, the dimension media offered these events had a boomerang effect - it gave satisfaction to those behind these terrorist attacks, as they have reached their goal, managing to establish global panic.

Keywords: media, terrorism, ethics, attcks, public opinion

1. Introductory considerations

In the last two years, The European Union has faced the worst terrorist attacks since its establishment. Only from the beginning of 2015, 200 people have been killed, 500 have been wounded by jihadists and dozens of European citizens have been kidnapped in conflict areas across Syria, Iran or Iraq. Even though the European leaders have had dozens of meetings on the topic of combating terrorism and have adopted every time strategies for combating this phenomenon, jihadi fighters appear to be unstoppable. As the attacks multiplied, things were much more serious and dangerous. As a response to this increasing multi level phenomenon, media comes in to play a very important role. There was no terrorist attack for the media to ignore. All of them have been highly depicted in newspapers, on the radio, on television or on the internet. Breaking news on televisions kept on for days, in most of the cases, every detail was broadcasted and audiences doubled or even tripled to ordinary days. In order to get a better cover of all events, the journalists broadcasted live on spot all information, as well as the reactions of authorities and the posts of the terrorists claiming responsibility for the attacks. All of this have ensured better information for the citizens, but also had another effect, by giving satisfaction to the leaders of Islamic groups. They gained free excessive media coverage, managing to establish panic across the continent.

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For example, in the article Terrorism and the media: the impact of terrorist attacks on society, published on the Romanian Intelligence Service blog, Mihai Păduraru considered that "Mass-media involuntarily supports the terrorists through their publicity – through the news press and seeking the sensationalism - indispensable for them (M. Păduraru, 2015). Moreover, the experience of recent years has shown that the terrorists seek to show how unstoppable they are and how a relatively broad group can dominate dozens of countries with armies, intelligence services or police services. And this layout can be basically done with the support of media institutions in the benefit of their credibility. If, for some reason, an attack had not been broadcasted, the social impact would have been less obvious. Excessive coverage of each event has taken the level of the jihadist conception on a new dimension to the point of creating events with the greatest possible media impact. Not a few times, media institutions were targeted, such as the famous French magazine Charlie Hebdo or the more frequently cases of abducted and executed journalists. The connection, therefore, between terrorist groups and media is strongly connected, at first glance, not just terrorism depending on the media, but also vice versa. If terrorism needs the media to bring about panic, terror, the media uses (even if not directly) the terrorist attacks to increase audiences, to increase the online traffic or the circulation for printed editions. But the idea that terrorism finds its triumph in the media is not new (Edgerton, 1996). Former British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, said that "we must try to deprive terrorists of the oxygen of publicity, which they depend on." However, apart from the indirect effect, the main function of the media is to inform, therefore, such an event cannot be overlooked by the media, as it gathers all the criteria of a crucial information. Many analysts who have been studying and are studying terrorism observe a symbiosis between terrorism and media and claim that media "feeds off terrorism" (Jurcan, 2015). It is impossible to bring into question such a theme because the media must not lack its freedom of speech, must inform the public, must fulfill its mission - a guarantee of freedom of speech.

2. The Charlie Hebdo terrorist attack and its reflection in the media

The terrorist attack on Charlie Hebdo is one of the most dramatic one in the recent history of France. In January 2015, two armed masked men stormed into the headquarters of the Charlie Hebdo magazine, killed twelve people and injured another eleven. Ten journalists and two policemen were the victims of terrorists who fired automatic weapons. The reaction of the journalists from around the world was extremely fast. They all quickly submitted images and information or expressed their solidarity with their press colleagues. And the press reaction led to a chain reaction of a nearly globally mobilized civil society. Both politicians and ordinary people occupied the streets, solidarity messages were posted on social networks to show support for France and for the magazine. Hence the symbolic message "Je suis Charlie". But beyond solidarity and analytic approach of the subject, media institutions have partially waived their professional conduct, violated some laws or came across the limit of law, just to broadcast shocking images. If the bloody images are not normally transmitted unabridged by the press, many journalists decided this time to present them uncut, because the attack on Charlie Hebdo was regarded as an attack on freedom of speech. For example, The Guardian in Britain headlined on the front page Assault on democracy and published two representative photos. The first one showed a murdered policeman and the other perfectly illustrated the people solidarity as a response to the bloody attack - people gripped by sadness and fear, gathered in Paris with banners containing the world wide viral message Je suis Charlie. The Guardian blurred the faces of the people, but not the time of the attack. For example, in the case of the murdered policeman the online version presented the attack using step-by-step images, underlining the strong emotional

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impact. But the biggest controversy The Guardian raised was whether the newspaper should make public the cartoons that sparked the hatred of the jihadists or not. Although many readers and journalists agreed that this is the role of press, The Guardian editors were quite reserved and published only those images lacking the offensive character against the Muslims. (The Guardian, 2015). Similar headlines targeting the attack on the freedom of press were also presented in The Independent, The Times and The Sun. The latter published a very shocking picture on the front page – the very moment before the shooting of the policeman. The photo clearly depicts the agent's face while he was begging for mercy, lying down under the pointing weapons of the terrorists.The most important French publications such as Le Liberation, Le Parisien or Paris Normandie avoided shocking images on the front page. Instead, there were used suggestive images, such as photos of the victims, pictures expressing solidarity or after-the-attack images. For example, Le Figaro adopted an intermediate version, displaying only some of the images of terrorism. Their front page presented the photo of the two terrorists who were wandering the street with weapons in their hands.

So after the terrorist attack on Charlie Hebdo, violent images showing people in degrading situations were published and broadcasted. Under the shelter of the public interest, invoked by many, those pictures and movies breached the European media codes of conduct. But the attacks on Charlie Hebdo meant so much more – while regarded as attacks against the freedom of press, many publications, radios and tv stations became afterwards prudent while diffusing information.

3. Images of terrorism following the Paris attack

The terrorist attacks from Paris took place in November, 2015. Three explosions and six armed attacks occurred in several Paris districts revealing a tragic unprecedented account: 140 casualties and hundreds wounded. Such an event is expected to be overpublicized and the journalists sought the fastest way to cover all the aspects of the phenomenon. But just like Charlie Hebdo attack, the images of the terrorists' violence have reached an unexpected level. At least in the case of Bataclan attack, as the images of violence are difficult to express. A journalist from Le Monde had a close by footage of the attack but also of people fighting their way out of the building. As shocking as they were, the images have been broadcasted around the world. The panic of the people leaving the building, wounded, bloody and scared is uncensored. There are people filmed while they are agonizing at the entrance of the building without getting any help or making their way out while trying to drag their friends and acquaintances away. There are strong emotional images, that may affect any normal person, but nevertheless they have been more or less broadcasted. The televisions, along their regulated European level legislation, used the blurred faces of the victims but nevertheless, they still generate an inner stress to any viewer. (European Council, 2015)

In fact, almost all the images captured during Paris attacks in November 2015 inspire panic. There was panic at the stadium, in bars and on the streets, and that is why media extended this panic feeling throughout Paris, France and then all over the continent. Starting with The Telegraph, The Sun, The Time, Daily Mail, Le Monde, Le Liberation, Deutche Welle, BBC – all these major media institutions decided to publish images of violence. Their only doubt was whether these images should circle around the world or not. That is why the effects they could have on viewers have become new topics for the media. (CBS, 2015) For example, CBS News made an extensive material about the psychological trauma a common viewer may suffer watching the attacks in Paris, by simply watching television.

Getting over the feeling of panic after the attacks in Paris, the media, through social media specifically, exceeded the function of information and became so much more. Facebook enabled

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the Safe Button option, to quickly determine whether their relatives and friends in Paris area are safe. Enabling this option, Paris residents or French capital visitors could access the Safe Button so that everyone knew they were safe and sound/unharmed/unhurt

4. The terrorist attack in Brussels and the fake images

The attacks took place in Brussels in March 2016, as three simultaneous explosions took place in the capital of Europe. Two of them occurred at Zaventem airport in the northeast of the capital and another in Maelbeek underground station. As with the terrorist attacks in Paris, the media reacted within minutes after the explosions, to quickly transmit the information. This time as well, the post attack images were shocking, but nonetheless, few were the journalists who refused to publicize them. The reason is simple: the incident took place in a densely populated neighborhood and the images of the attacks were numerous and posted shortly after on social networks by eye witnesses. Overcoming the emotional impact and the inconvenient state of the victims filmed in embarrassing state, wounded, bloody, with torn clothes, the attacks in Brussels highlighted an issue that the media should be extremely careful, both for ethical and strictly professional reasons. Given that we live in the century of speed, in which the phones are equipped with cameras, and practically, every person holding such a device can become a photo-reporter the Internet abounds with images posted shortly after the events, such as the one from Brussels. The question is whether professional journalists can turn to these images, especially if these images are actually real.

During the attacks in Brussels, when all the journalists sent to cover a better image of the event struggled, several sets of false images appeared on social networks. For example, Courrier Picard was fooled by the social networks and published a video from the 2011 attacks in Moscow, presenting them as being from the Brussels Airport. The images were also assumed by TV stations in Romania, such as Realitatea TV. Another video, which was given a fake source as coming from CCTV, was broadcasted on social networks, as being from Brussels. It was actually from the capital of Belarus. The journalists of major media institutions did not walked into this trap and had the information thoroughly checked before posting the pictures on the internet. Moreover Liberation, The Guardian and many other publications from the EU Member States have conducted extensive material about the possibility of misinformation through social networks.

5. The attack in Turkey

The attack took place in Ankara in March 2016, where a explosion followed a suicide attack. 37 people died and over 100 were injured. This time as well, the images of terrorism were tough. Surveillance cameras images from the area were broadcasted, capturing the time of the explosion in detail, as well as the images of people blown away by the explosion. The European media interest was not as high as in the three previous bombings, but the subject was publicized enough. We take into account the proximity criterion as a justification of how to approach the Ankara attack. Even if it was not given an importance as large as the attacks occurred in the EU, the images of terrorism this time were also not masked. We have seen the online publications of major media institutions, photographs or images of wounded, bloody, dirty and terrified people or finding themselves in embarrassing situations. The question is whether these images can be published without the consent of these people, if the public interest outweighs the interest of the person in these moments.

Conclusions

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The attacks occurred in the past two years have brought changes in the manner journalists from major media institutions in the European Union approach new issues. The changes are specifically related to the development of technologies that automatically led to an incredible speed in sending images. The witnesses of such events can post images in record time on social networks or they can give them directly to the media. Facing these major challenges and in the desire to cover the topic as well as possible, the media representatives violate professional ethics, but also some normative acts. The images are too violent, with strong emotional impact, and at times there have appeared even misinformation. Furthermore, the size of these events given by the media also had a boomerang effect - those behind these terrorist attacks were satisfied, they have reached their goal, managing to establish a global panic. Moreover, the experience of recent years has shown that the terrorists seek to show that they are unstoppable and a how relatively broad group can dominate dozens of countries with armies, intelligence services or police services. And this can be done basically with the support of media institutions that enjoy credibility. Excessive coverage of each event has taken on a new dimension also at the level of the jihadist conception. The attackers have come to create events with the greatest possible media impact, and not infrequently even the media was the target of attacks, such as attacks from the famous French magazine Charlie Hebdo or many cases of journalists abducted and executed.

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