MEDIA, TERRORISTS AND OXYGEN OF PUBLICITY

Lizhe Xu
National Speed Skating Oval, CHINA

Abstract

Since the attacks of September 11, 2001, terrorism becomes increasingly intense, and the security of international society and people are under the growing threat. In the meantime, the media rapidly develop, especially in the field of new media. A mutually utilize relationship between media and terrorism formed gradually. On the one hand, terrorism needs the media to propagate their ideas; on the other hand, the media desire to help in competition for ratings, revenue and prestige by reports of vast source of sensational, visually compelling news stories. The relationship between terrorism, insurgency and the media has long applied politicians, commentators and academics, some of them argued that the media may encourage terrorist activities, however this view was fought against by other people who stand in opposite position (Cottle, 2006, p.157). This article will explore the relationship between terrorism and media, in particular as the speedy growth of new media, the interrelation between terrorism and media has become more and more inseparable.
Keywords: *media, terrorists, publicity, oxygen, terrorism*

As a manifestation of human conflict, terrorism has a long history. 'Terrorism' first appeared in the 18th century, and it was originally used to describe the actions of the Jacobin Club during the 'Reign of Terror' during the French Revolution (Furstenberg, 2007). The most genuine of international terrorism formed in the Second World War until the late 1960s during this period completed (Chaliand, 2007, p. 227). After the 1990s, the global terrorist activities began to significantly increase. Major events after the September 11 attacks in 2001 include the 2005 London bombings and the 2011 Norway attacks.

There is always a wide debate on the definition of terrorism, because various countries and government use different definitions of terrorism in their national legislation. In addition, that the term "terrorism" is charged politically and emotionally lead to the international community has not been formulated a universally definition. In November 2004, a United Nations Secretary General report described terrorism as any act 'intended to cause death or serious bodily harm to civilians or non-combatants with the purpose of intimidating a population or compelling a government or an international organization to do or abstain from doing any act' (United Nations, 2005).

The media develop speedily while the development of terrorism. Arguably, the media played an unconscious role in promoting the development process of the terrorist activities. In other words, the media unwittingly become the links

and tools in spread process of terrorism, and even play the role of advocator of terrorism.

From the point of view of terrorism, the ultimate aim to bombings and hostage-taking through the modern media is that to threat, influence and persuasion audience who concerned about development and outcome of terrorist activities. Exploring the relationship between terrorism and the mass media, the most useful method is to try to recognise the terrorist view of communications (Wilkinson, 1997). Terrorism is a kind of political propaganda, and is a strong expression as well, because the terrorists and their political opinion defenders constantly use sophisticated skills to deceive the media gatekeeper, and attract attention to themselves with a number of terrorist actions and seditious words. For instance, members of the Italian Red Brigades always arrange their criminal actions on Wednesday or Saturday, due to these two days known as the preferred dissemination Day, so that Thursday or Sunday newspaper will be thicker result from their murderous behaviour. Moreover, Wilkinson (1997) claimed that the propaganda channels involve newspapers and magazines would become an important part of terrorist activities when terrorist leaders establish support infrastructures for terrorism overseas.

From media's perspective, in order to attract the audience's attention and boost ratings or the rate of circulation, the media are also enthusiastic about reporting the incidents masterminded by terrorist. They are not often content with the length of time or the media coverage of terrorist activities, but make every attempt to grab the headline news and exclusive coverage. Especially after the event of 9/11, terrorism incidents become the object which the news media chase around, and every terrorist incident will become headline coverage. In addition to the pursuit of profit, terrorist activities also provide more special news sources for the media. Due to the special influence of terrorist incidents, as well as particular concern of people on terrorist incidents, terrorist activities involuntarily turn to be the materials of news coverage, and furthermore, in which the media accentuate position and role.

Regarding the news media play a negative role in combating terrorism, many people have criticized it. For example, during the troubles in Northern Ireland, when the car-bombings and assassinations spilled over to mainland Britain, Former British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher blamed the media give the terrorists with the 'oxygen of publicity'. Paul Wilkinson, a well-known scholar in the field, point out the free media in open society are particularly vulnerable manipulated by terrorist organizations, and it is clear that the terrorism and the media often have a mutual tendency to provide nutrients (Venkatraman, 2004). With the development of society, the relationship between terrorism and the media emerge new features. That is terrorists have a presence online, in other words, the interrelation between terrorism and the Internet are closer than

past, because communication is the core of terrorism (Schmid and de Graaf). There are two dissimilar potential threats online: cyberterrorism and the use of the Internet as a communication medium (Seib& Janbek, 2011).

Seib (2011) defined that 'Cyberterrorism is the use of the Internet harmfully and directly to bring about harm to persons or property, including attacks on Web sites. Cyberterrorism can do this by introducing a virus, altering information online, crashing a Web site, and by inserting a political message in a site belonging to another, among other methods.'

Another more important online terrorism that is the Internet is used as a communication medium by terrorism. According to Seib and Janbek (2011), 'the number of terrorist websites was estimated at a dozen in 1997, 4,350 by early 2005, 94,800 by 2006, and over 6,000 by 2008.' Currently, most terrorist groups are believed to use Internet. Terrorism has established a virtual world early 1990s and they stay here, and this virtual world is increasingly maturing and safe (Seib and Janbek, 2011). Seib and Janbek (2011) indicated that Al Qaeda has accepted the Internet as the best medium for communicating each other to scattered audiences. The websites related the AI-Qaeda have made a great contribution for Laden and his Al-Qaeda, because many Muslims in as many places as possible are instigated to jihad (Scheuer, 2004). With the wide application of new media within terrorist organization, Al-Qaeda's Internet operations steadily became more sophisticated and secure. Terrorists initially convey information by e-mail. According to a 2004 report by the U.S. Justice and the Treasury Departments, the traditional espionage communication technique of the terrorists was altered for online use. Meanwhile, as a similarly useful tool, the discussion board can link to different websites and post announcements. It is scarcely imaginable that Al Qaeda has set up an online library of training materials, which can teach its readers how to make ricin poison, how to make a bomb from commercial chemicals, and other useful advice. The Saudi-based online magazine Muaskar al-Battar told potential recruits, 'Oh, Mujahid brother, in order to join the great training camps you don't have to travel to other lands. Alone in your home or with a group of your brothers you too can begin to execute the training program.' These determinations of training can not only reach various people quickly, but can also avoid the dangers of soldiers congregate at a mosque or other dangerous places. In addition E-mail service and online library, online video also play an important role in the virtual world of terroristic organization. Such as the Al Qaeda-affiliated Global Islamic Media Front, this is one of the online video providers. There are many high quality online video about how to plan a roadside assassination, how to fire a rocket-propelled grenade and how to use a surface-to-air missile, and provide other tactics. Moreover, Conway (2012) demonstrates that Mobile Internet access is swiftly becoming simple, especially amongst young people, who like surfer Internet using mobile devices. For

these young people, the Internet is often their first port of seeking information on topics with which they have no acquaintance with.

Terrorists are aware of this trend and attempt to publicise terrorism by the use not just of dedicated websites, but also through pushing out their content across the social network such as Facebook and Twitter, video sharing sites such as YouTube. Arquilla(2008) has stated that Al Qaeda is grateful for that 'both time and space have in many ways been conquered by the Internet,' and Bruce Hoffman(2008) also commented that the Internet provides Al Qaeda a 'virtual sanctuary', because it is 'the ideal medium for terrorism today: anonymous but pervasive.'

To better understand the interrelation between terrorism and new media, this stage will analyse selected questions. First, who is the disseminator of terrorist information? No matter what form of media as medium, terrorism information is from the terroristic organization, however, a few researchers claim that some terrorism information is used by government to change social discourse, because the changing social discourse is central to the process by which social problems are constructed (Best, 1999, cited in Altheide, 2006). Second, what is the message? Terroristic Organizations share their history and origin by media with their audiences. Due to Islamic organizations are usually a hybrid of religion and politics, they normally illustrate interpretation of Islam through media. Third, who are the audiences? Seib& Janbek (2011) argue that the language of communication is an indicator of the intended message target. Terrorist Web sites are available in different languages; therefore, it is clear that terroristic organizations are targeting audiences beyond their host nation's language. Last, how and through what channels is the information communicated and with what effect? The purpose of terrorist activities is to have an impact. In fact, their behaviour is only a lever, the motive and purposes are what they want to convey to the world. They depend on the media exposure to translate terrorist activities into political capital in order to express their specific political or ideological appeal. Furthermore, media is not only provide a channel with which terrorist groups learn from each other, but also become a barometer of terrorists adjust strategy. The most dangerous characteristic of contemporary terrorism is that it can be easily emulated. As the media coverage terrorist activities around the world, different parts of the terrorists learn from other terrorists' advanced experience, and then formulate their own scheme of terrorist actions based on a careful analysis of other terrorist actions. For example, after event of 9/11, the U.S. launched comprehensive anti-terror operations, but terrorists quickly adjust their strategies of struggle, and various members of the Afghan are transferred to the Middle East. In general, terrorism disseminates information regarding their mission and beliefs through variform media, and attempt to Shape international public opinion by influencing judgement of journalists.

To sum up, although the media is not the main reason for expansion of terrorism, the media unconsciously promote terrorist activities, especially in recent years, new media has grown into a fuel to promote terrorism. On the other hand, terrorist activities utilise the media to expand their publicity, thereby forming an asymmetric interaction between terrorism and media. Terrorism have proliferate result in anti-terrorist actions are more intense, and the media is thereby more indispensable. The inescapable fact is that the dissemination of anti-terrorist means that the concern about terrorism. Specifically, from anti-terrorist's perspective, they expect to defend of the legitimacy and legality of their actions through the media, and from the point of view of terrorism, they likewise expect through the media to publicise their purpose to the audience. That is to say, both terrorism and anti-terrorism utilise the media for their respective interests. It is arguable that the terrorism and the media have formed the relationship of mutual utilisation of the relationship for their respective purposes, particularly in the era of mass media. However, the purpose of researching terrorism and media mutual influence is to alert the media should select and process skilfully while report terrorist incidents. It is emphasised that the media is innocent, because the media is unconscious to help terrorism. More important is that media should not be required to stop concentrating on terrorism due to the media helps the terrorism unconsciously. Not only is media relied on by terrorism, but also anti-terrorism is dependent on the media.

Bibliography

Chaliand, G. (2007). The History of Terrorism: From Antiquity to al Qaeda. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Conway, M. (2012). From al-Zarqawi to al-Awlaki: The Emergence of the Internet as a New Form of Violent Radical Milieu. (posted to ISODARCO website). Available: http://www.isodarco.it/courses/andalo12/doc [2012, Jan. 10].

Furstenberg, F. (2007, Oct 28,). "Bush's Dangerous Liaisons". The New York Times. Retrieved May 4, 2010.

Scheuer, M. (2004). Imperial Hubris: Why the West is losing the War on Terror. Washington DC: Brasseys.

Seib, P. (2008). The Al Jazeera Effect: How the New Global Media Are Reshaping World Politics. Dulles, VA: Potomac Books

Seib, P. & Janbek,D.M. (2011). Global Terrorism and New Media: the post Al Qaeda generation. London: Routledge.

Venkatraman, S. (2004). Media in a terrorized world: reflections in the wake of 911. Singapore: Eastern Universities Press.

Wilkinson, P. (2007). The Media and Terrorism: A Reassessment. Terrorism and Political Violence, 9(2), 51-64.