Impact of mediatisation and the effect on the boston bombings

Using an example of your own choosing, demonstrate how the process of mediatisation has shaped the development of a major event such as a revolution, humanitarian movement or global trend.

The proliferation of camera phones over the past decade has created an unprecedented landslide of visual information in the online public sphere, transforming the form and amount of communication in relation to crisis events (conflictual media events, eye witness images, and the Boston Marathon bombing, 2013). In an increasingly mediatised world, it is now easier than ever to document attacks and major events through the use of social media. The term mediatisation encompasses multiple meanings; the definition this essay will employ is the process by which society to an increasing degree is submitted to, or becomes dependent on the media and its logic. This is pertinent in relation to the Boston bombings, since the general public were dependent on social media and immediately turned to its platforms to keep up to date with what was happening. There were three major facets to the Boston bombings, and with each of these the mediatisation of social media played a major role in influencing the aftermath of the attacks. This essay will argue that the process of mediatisation, in particular social media, has played a very important role in the development and aftermath of the Boston bombings. This essay is going to explore the specific different uses of social media, as well as the way in which the Boston bombings highlights some of the negative outcomes of this type of mediatisation. This essay will then explore and argue how these potential negative outcomes can also be viewed as having their own positive effects.

April 15th 2013, a changed day for most, marked the 117thrunning

of the Boston Marathon, the world's oldest annual marathon. The initial idea

of the marathon was to commemorate the 1775 battles of Lexington and

Concord that sparked the revolutionary war. The marathon embarked from

the town of Hopkinton, west of Boston, consisting of 23, 000

participants. At approximately 2: 49pm there were more than 5, 600 runners

still completing the marathon when two pressure-cooker bombs were hidden

amongst crowd goers and exploded within seconds of each other, nearing

the finish line along Boylston Street. The bombs left three spectators dead

and more than 260 other people wounded. The role of the

media, and particularly social media, was extremely important during the

attack. The first reports of the bombings were spread through Twitter and

Facebook, and minutes later the Boston Police confirmed the explosion in a

tweet. The media informed people all over the world of what was going on,

harnessing the power of globalised media to form an interconnectedness

between the local public and the rest of the world. While television

networks may have been the most widely used source regarding the attack

and its aftermath, it was social media that shaped the story

and individual responses to the bombings. The Boston bombings marked a

watershed and dividing difference to the role of social media in the present

day from when it was first popularised, marking a forever change for social

media and the fully participatory public in news events and coverage for the

networks, ' it is America's first fully interactive national tragedy of the social

media age' (Kakutani, 2013). Eye witness images were provided immediately

after the attack and delivered the public with the initial visual documentation

of it all in the mainstream media. Eye witness images are considered as a

symptom of a larger transformation, whereby connective culture (van Dick, 2013) changed conflictual events. The impact of eye witness images lies in their immediacy, they are uploaded instantly to the media and circulate in the online ecosystem. This tendency does not only increase the quantity of information that is available for the public eye, but it also raises questions relating to the protection of privacy. It calls into question the value of images as proof, given that they can often be subjective, decontextualized, and fragmented in character (Mortensen 2015). As the relationship between a tragic event and the media starts to change, the individual's interpretation and understanding can also be seen to develop, thus shaping the whole landscape of the event.

The media are considered to be the independent variable that affects the dependent variable: the individual (Hjarvard, 2015). In Hjarvard's work he investigates the effects of this independent variable, stating that ' the influences of the media are not only found within the communication sequence of senders, messages, and receivers, but also the changing relationship between the media and other cultural and social spheres', and social media is a prime example of this type of mediatisation. Hjarvard mentions and highlights the constant changing technologies, and therefore the powerful relationship that the media holds with people. Hjarvard sees the media's growing independence from political sources as yet another sign of mediatisation, arguing that the media thereby gains even more control over its content. This independence of media and the role of social media in the Boston bombings has faced criticism, highlighting the potential damages of public involvement. Terrorism is aimed at the people watching, not at the

actual victims (Jenkins, 2015), connoting that the increased and changed use of social media therefore brings with it a negative framework.

Although news outlets increasingly welcome and facilitate eyewitness images, they tend to be ambivalent in regards to the true legitimacy and validity of the images being given. As aforementioned, the terrorists want people to take photos and upload them onto social

media, they crave the media attention. Although Jenkins has

modified his argument to ' many of today's terrorists want a lot of people watching and a lot of people dead', this still leaves the question that if social media did not exist or was less depended upon, would there

be fewer terrorist attacks? The intense media coverage of a trauma like the Boston bombings can also trigger psychological distress in individuals outside of the immediate community. Holman et al.

examine whether continual media exposure to the bombings is associated with acute stress. They compare the impact of direct exposure with the impact of media exposure and the results show that repeated bombing-related media exposure was associated with higher acute

stress than even direct exposure. The mediatisation of events such as this tragedy seems to be so encompassing that individuals have experienced significant negative impacts, shaping reactions to an extreme degree and negatively influencing perspectives.

From individual reactions to larger scale community spirit, the dependence on the media, in particular on social media, during the Boston bombings has shaped the whole of the dialogue that surrounds the event. In 1961, sociologist Charles E. Fritz observed the ability of disasters to bring people

together: ' people become more friendly, sympathetic, and helpful than in normal times'. The day of the bombings, thousands of people were posting across media platforms, offering prayers, resources and places to stay. A makeshift Google Document, entitled ' I have a place to offer- Boston Marathon Explosion' had over 4, 000 people adding their names and phone numbers to help those who had been affected. Connecting with others around a shared circumstance of the event, moments and experiences that bring communities together retains context and fosters deeper bonds with others. Therefore they stop collecting friends and ' liking' vacation photos results in engaging each other again as a community (Adler, 2013).

Social media seemed shaped by every aspect of the response. As soon as the bombs went off everyone immediately turned to social media to give and receive updates. Authorities were using Twitter to give instant updates, while the Boston Globe temporarily converted its homepage to a live blog that pulled in tweets from Boston authorities, news outlets and citizens. Using social media to spread the word about a terrorist attack is a lot more effective as the blasts are sent out instantly. Social media gives the ability to spread the information far beyond the affected area, having the capability to inform loved ones and the general public all over the world. It was not only individuals who benefited from the use of social media but also services, such as the account of an ER doctor who saw a tweet from a friend at the finish line, a minute after the bombs. This therefore prompted the ER to hold off on surgeries that were about to begin, saving precious time and space for the incoming victims from the attack. Social media served as a support for the law enforcement agencies when searching for the subjects.

They were able to analyse thousands of images and videos on Twitter and Facebook to come up with suspects. They were then able to use the suspects' online personas to identify their social media accounts and therefore dissect their lives to get a better idea of who to investigate. These advantages were not without their nuanced troubles, as there was a lot of misinformation being put out by the media. Edward Davis stated that it was very difficult to feed the media beast and to complete the investigation at the same time. He was forced to advise other agencies to have strong social media personnel in place to handle the various accounts. The police department's Twitter account's following count went from 53, 000 to 304, 000, facilitating the correction of misinformation. While this process of mediatisation and dependence on social media can have negative outcomes, it also has been its positive outcomes, creating a unity amongst communities and more globally.

The interdependence of individuals and the media is ever-strengthening, with the Boston bombings marking a development in the future relationship between social media and the aftermath of a major event. Social media has shaped the outcome of the Boston bombings terror attack and will continue to influence and characterise grand scale events to come. In major events people instantly turn to and rely on social media to find updates and to provide information to others. Social media thus reaches a broader audience almost instantly, and tragedies such as these depend on this new way of sharing information. In the present day traditional broadcasting methods have been put aside; even authorities such as the police are using social media platforms like Twitter to provide live updates.

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