

# Terrorism and the media essay sample

[Media](#)



What is the meaning of terrorism and the mass media? According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary online, the meaning of terrorism is the systematic use of terror as means of coercion. Terrorism has spawned heated debate. Instead of agreeing on the definition of terrorism, social scientists, policy makers, lawyers, and security specialists often argue about the meaning of the term (White 4). We can agree what that terrorism is a problem, but we cannot agree on what terrorism is (White 4). According to Alex Schmid (1992), terrorism is not a physical entity that has dimensions to be measured, weighted and analyzed. It is a social construct; that is, terrorism is defined by different people within vacillating social and political realities (White 4). The definition of any social construct changes with the social reality can be nebulous, or it can be threatening when one group imposes its version of reality on another (White 4). One of the primary reasons terrorism is difficult to define is that the meaning changes within social and historical contexts (White 6). Changes in the meaning occur because terrorism is not a solid entity (White 6-7).

News media refers to television, radio, and print journalism. It also refers to newer sources on the internet, including news, reporting services, the blogosphere, website pages, and propaganda broadcasts (White 104). Terrorism requires interdisciplinary research techniques because it involves so many aspects of the human experience, and its relationship with media have not been fully explored (White 104). Jeff Ian Ross, according to our text book, first off, believes meanings are socially created and Ross demonstrates that reporting is a part of the social construction of terrorism. Second, terrorists are aware of the power of the media and seek to manipulate their

message through it. Third, while the media enhances the power of terrorism, it does not cause it. Finally, terrorists will increasingly use the internet to communicate as the relationship between the media and terrorism grows stronger in the future. (White 104)

Everybody in the public eye wants to use the media to his or her advantage; and, interest groups, including governments and terrorists, compete for favorable labels and images (White 105). Daya Thussu (2006) states that the United States' perspective of terrorism has dominated the international media since 9/11. This is due to the media's ability to create and sustain the social image of terrorism. Thusu refers to this power as mythmaking, and the myths circulated by television news shape the worldview of those who watch. Such myths and misconceptions are presented far beyond the West, and they have defined social reality after 9/11 in many parts of the world. If social constructs created by collective definitions, the power of the media helps to define the boundaries of those constructs. (White 105)

According to Shana Gadarian, author of a journal article, "The Politics of Threat: How Terrorism News Shapes Foreign Policy Attitudes," terrorism shattered America's sense of invulnerability and unparalleled might on a sunny September morning. Almost overnight, the American landscape went from one of prosperity, safety, and power to one of the threat, fear, and uncertainty. Threat and fear are not simply psychological phenomena; they are politically consequential for how elites and the mass media communicate with the public and, ultimately, for opinion formation. In times of crisis, citizens turn to political leaders and the media to make sense of new and frightening events. The contours of the information environment in turn

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influence how people prefer the government to react to threat. (Gadarian 469)

There is tension between security forces and the media. According to White, although some scholars believe the media favors the governments, police, and security forces frequently find themselves at odds with this media power. On the one hand, they compete for favorable media coverage. On the other hand, governments exhibit a strong disdain for the press because media social constructions often run counter to governmental objectives and policies (White 106). Paul Wilkinson (1997) argues that governments seek to harness the power of the media for social control. For example, in hostage situations, security forces are responsible for the fate of victims. Reporters often do not focus on the security mission of such incidents because they are under tremendous pressure to be first with the story. As a result, Wilkinson concludes, law enforcement and military goals often conflict with the goals of the reporters. (White 106)

According to Barrie Gunter in his journal article, "The Public and Media Coverage of the War on Iraq," the War on Iraq dominated news coverage in all the major news media both in the lead up to the war itself during the war campaign (Gunter 42). Regular television news bulletins were extended, special reports disrupted the normal television schedules, and round-the-clock coverage was provided on 24-hour broadcast news services. The newly labeled concept of the 'embedded' reporter meant that viewers at home enjoyed privileged access to action from the front line on an unprecedented scale (Gunter 42). The visual quality of this coverage surpassed any that had gone before drawing the domestic audience in as voyeurs of a virtual war. In <https://assignbuster.com/terrorism-and-the-media-essay-sample/>

addition, the major daily and Sunday newspapers supplied hundreds of pages of coverage each week along with vivid photographic images from the war front (Gunter 42).

News coverage of war almost inevitably raises a number of ethical questions about the role played by journalists, the need to be fair to all sides in a dispute, and concerns about the impact of coverage on media audiences. Usually impartiality considerations can become hotly debated when the journalist's own country is one of the warring parties (Gunter 42). Jingoistic news headlines may be welcomed by government as support for the justness of war, but may depart from the usual standards of journalistic impartiality and objectivity. Such conflicts of interest can be more acute than normal during times of war (Gunter 42). In the case of the War on Iraq, the rise of the embedded journalist understandably gave rise to even more poignant questions about journalistic independence and objectivity (Gunter 42). Gunter also states that historically the major news media have been observed to take a predominantly deferential stance during times of war, rarely questioning the justice or morality of going to war if to do so would place them critically opposed to government policy (Gunter 43). This typical pattern of reporting has been observed in the United Kingdom and United States alike (Gunter 43).

In the UK, the media did not challenge the integrity of the principles of government policy or action during the Falklands conflict (Glasgow University Media Group, 1985). Even during the 1991 Gulf War, when the volume of coverage in the press and television was unprecedented, the British news media rarely challenged the actions of the allied forces (Morrison, 1992).

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(Gunter 43) According to White, infotainment telesector is a term coined by Benjamin Barber and it means ' a sarcastic term to describe cable news networks. It refers to news organization producing stories to entertain their audiences under the guise of presenting objective information (White 111). The infotainment telesector is not geared for depth; it is designed to create revenue. " News" becomes banter between a news anchor and guest, and debates evolve into shouting matches between controversial representatives (White 111). Issues are rarely discussed (White 111). Hosts perpetually interrupt their guests or provide answers to their own questions.

Coverage of many shows is driven by a pleasing personality who either lacks intellectual depth or does an excellent job holding it (White 111). Morning news shows are full of interviewers who discover issues obvious to the rest of the world and who shake their heads in wonderment when common knowledge is revealed (White 111). During the early days of the 2003 war on Iraq, important questions were asked about the amount of attention given to the war by news organizations and more especially about the nature of that coverage (Gunter 43). Were the major television stations, for instance, guilty of treating the war like a form of entertainment? There was much live coverage from the front line courtesy of ' embeds.' There were concerns that live eyewitness coverage might be too graphic and therefore potentially disturbing or upsetting to more sensitive viewers, especially children (Gunter 43). There were added worries that the television cameras might unwittingly witness the death of British soldiers, with significant implications for their relatives watching back home who would be denied the privilege of private grief (Gunter 43).

All these questions ultimately address ethical issues with which news organizations must wrestle in trying to attain a balance between keeping the population informed about matters of great public interest, while at the same time treating war with the seriousness it deserves (Gunter 43). In addition, there must be recognition of the responsibilities that go with the privilege of close-up and protected access to the theatre of war. The need to achieve exclusives ahead of competitor news suppliers is understandable in an increasingly competitive news environment (Gunter 43). Exclusives cannot be achieved, however, at the price of causing deep upset to large numbers of people witnessing these mediated events back home nor at the expense of giving away military secrets (Gunter 43). Terrorism and the mass media have its positive and negative mechanisms. It's informal for citizens to know what is going on in the world and keep them updated. But it is also a tool for terrorists to get their message across to the world. The media tries to show the world what's going on but not for just our safety and knowledge but money is tied in as well. Money is the root of all evil and some will do anything for the money.

#### Work Cited

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