

Terrorism making headlines: Danish journalists and the ethical dilemmas of covering terrorism

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Abstract

This study explores the ethical considerations that are encountered by Danish journalists when covering stories about terrorism and whether there is a perceived need for more editorial guidelines. An online questionnaire with multiple-choice, Likert scale and open text box questions was distributed to a sample group of Danish journalists using the snowball method in March 2021. The survey gathered quantitative and qualitative data from a total of 74 Danish journalists who all remain anonymous. Their suggested ethical considerations were analysed and compared to dilemmas raised in the academic literature on the relationship between terrorism and the media. The study shows that the dilemmas described in the literature are similar to those experienced by the journalists surveyed. Their ethical considerations were mainly related to the publication of graphic details, the use of propaganda material, names and photos of the terrorists, as well as whether the coverage could inspire copycats. The media coverage's effect on victims, viewers and readers as well as on national security was also of concern. The journalists surveyed appeared to prioritise importance to the public over sensationalism in their terrorism coverage. A bit less than half of the participants, particularly those younger than the sample group's average age, expressed a need for

more editorial guidelines to be used during terrorism coverage. In addition, female journalists, to a larger extent than their male colleagues, perceived more editorial guidelines as a current need, and they in general found keeping the ethical balance in terrorism coverage more difficult than male journalists said they did. In the future, courses on ethics in terrorism coverage, particularly for younger journalists, or more clarification in media outlets with regard to editorial guidelines for terrorism coverage may be useful.

Introduction

In my former career as a journalist, I always felt ethically challenged when covering terrorism. I discussed this feeling with co-workers and yet continued to feel uncertain about what to publish and what to leave out. Studying terrorism, I have become even more aware of how terrorism may benefit from media attention. Several terrorism scholars have highlighted for instance the risk of terrorists exploiting the established media to spread propaganda or inspire copycats. These dilemmas combined with my own experiences motivated me for this study focusing on the attitudes, beliefs and values of Danish journalists in relation to ethics when covering terrorism. Furthermore, the study should help to assess whether there is a perceived need among Danish journalists for more guidance or editorial guidelines. I specifically aimed to explore the following question:

“What are some of the ethical considerations encountered by Danish journalists when covering stories about terrorism?”

In this study, I have attempted to answer this question by surveying a number of Danish journalists on this subject and comparing their responses to dilemmas raised in relevant academic literature. Danish journalists' ethical considerations when covering terrorism have never been studied similarly before. As journalism is different everywhere, depending on for instance press freedom levels (Marthoz 2017, 9), Danish media outlets are a unique case. They are usually not linked to political parties (Hjarvard 2007, 44) and Denmark ranks highly in the World Press Freedom Index (RSF 2020), which may affect editorial choices.

This study does not focus on dilemmas attached to specific terrorist attacks but focuses more broadly on Danish journalists' ethical considerations when covering terrorism. The study provided room for participants to freely suggest ethical considerations, but it also explores specific dilemmas discussed in the academic literature, such as the media's coverage of terrorist events and propaganda. Furthermore, it is assessed whether more guidance would be appreciated as helpful in terrorism coverage, and subsequently, I may possibly use this project as a pilot for a dissertation focusing on editorial guidelines for Danish media outlets. The literature and my own experiences led me to expect that Danish journalists do face ethical dilemmas when covering terrorism and that a need for more guidelines may exist.

Literature

Many terrorism scholars have described the relationship between the media and terrorism. This project includes academic literature on this subject as well as literature on journalistic principles and ethics. I will highlight the ethical

dilemmas of terrorism coverage as suggested by these scholars before comparing these to my collected data.

The media and terrorism

Many scholars agree that terrorism needs attention to function and possibly even to exist (Juergensmeyer 2003, 141). Jenkins labels terrorism as “theatre” (1975, 4), while Hoffman suggests that it is “a perverted form of showbusiness” (2017, 185) and that terrorists know exactly how to stage events to attract a lot of media attention (2017, 202), hence spreading the terror even further. Historically, terrorists have used the “popular press as a vehicle for armed propaganda” (Schmid 1989, 544), and, Wilkinson believes, media attention may help the terrorists recruit, gain moral and financial support for their cause and disrupt authorities’ attempts to stop terrorism (2011, 154). The coverage may inspire copycats (Elshimi 2018, 1) and function as a facilitator for terrorism (Crenshaw 1981, 381). Media coverage of terrorism may also distort the public perception of terrorism (Huff and Kerzner 2018, 65) and cause exacerbation and polarisation (Marthoz 2017, 14). Furthermore, the definition of terrorism may lack as much clarity to the media as it does globally (Schmid 2014, 588). In recent years, the so-called Islamic State (ISIS) has refined terrorist media propaganda to a high-quality level (Friis 2017, 261), which has been spread widely through for instance social media, partly due to fascination (Sindberg 2019). Footage of these staged events or quotes from the terrorists’ own proclaimed news agency, A’maq News Agency, have occasionally been picked up by the established media, which might be ethically concerning (Bystrykh 2017). This study’s survey

questions (Appendix 2) are based on the plethora of dilemmas mentioned in this literature, such as the risk of spreading propaganda, citing terrorists or their supporters, inspiring copycats and potential recruits and the risk of damaging national security and distorting the public's perception of terrorism.

Journalism ethics

Journalists have various principles guiding them with regard to ethics and newsworthiness, which may depend on national context. Ward defines ethics in journalism as "a set of principles and norms that, at least to some degree, guided journalistic practice" (2005, 100). Danish media ethics are partly regulated by the law on "good media practices" (Mejlby 2001, 74-75) in order to protect journalists, the public and sources. For instance, victims of crimes or accidents, or people close to them, should be treated, visually and verbally, with respect and etiquette (Mejlby 2001, 74-75). These considerations become even more acute in a world of commercial news, clickbaits and sensationalism (Frampton/BBC 2015). As Ward suggests, "journalists should maintain allegiance to a public interest that is greater than their own personal interests" (Ward 2005, 12). Danish journalists also work with certain criteria to estimate news value. These are importance, topicality, conflict, sensation and identification (Schultz 2006, 57) and terrorism may fit these well. Denmark's high level of press freedom (RSF 2020) is also important to consider, because, as Marthoz suggests, "Terrorism also tests the freedom and independence of the media – it could be said that, to a certain extent, it takes these values hostage" (2017, 14). Some organisations have attempted to affect the media to consider specific ethical dilemmas, such as the American

ALERT (2020) campaign against naming perpetrators in the media and The Global Coalition against Daesh which published a “counter-Daesh” dictionary specifically for journalists (2020). All of these relevant themes are combined in this research project.

Other studies

Some studies have been conducted on media ethics in terrorism coverage. Murell and Rupar (2019, 34) studied decisions made by news editors in the UK, US, Australia, Russia, France and Belgium during coverage of terrorist attacks. They included editors only and focused strongly on the collaboration between journalists and the authorities, accuracy of information and defining terrorism (Murell & Rupar 2019, 35-36). A Danish scholar, Mogensen (2011), studied ethical decisions made by American journalists during the first 24 hours of covering the terrorist attacks on September 11th, 2001. My study focuses on a broader range of ethical considerations instead of specific terrorist events.

Methodology

This study used a questionnaire (Appendix 2) based on dilemmas discussed in the literature to explore the ethical considerations encountered by Danish journalists when covering terrorism. Their responses were collected through a web-based Qualtrics survey asking 24 standardised questions, including multiple-choice and Likert scale questions for collecting quantitative data and open text boxes for qualitative answers. The questions’ design, structure and wording were inspired by Robson and McCartan (2011, 260-267). In order to

gather data on participants' "attitudes, values, beliefs and motives" (Robson and McCartan 2011, 248), the questions focused on the journalists' possible ethical considerations when covering terrorism. In the survey, terrorism is understood as the participants' labelling of terrorism in their coverage. A few initial factual questions gathered data on gender, age, nationality and years of journalistic experience for analytical purposes and to ensure that the participants were indeed Danish journalists. There could be a risk of a "social desirability response bias" (Robson and McCartan 2011, 248), as the respondents might wish to appear in a positive light when responding. To counter this and create valuable, nuanced answers, the survey was anonymous, and the questions varied in design. For clarity, the questions were asked in Danish. After the data collection, the quantitative data was analysed in Excel to create graphs and in Minitab for Fisher's Exact Test. The qualitative data was analysed using grounded theory to identify themes in the responses (Robson and McCartan 2011, 163). The survey results were partially translated from Danish into English for this paper.

The sample

The survey was open for ten days in March 2021 and the participants were reached using the non-probability method of "snowball sampling" (Neuman 2014, 169). I contacted 40 journalists and asked them to encourage other journalists to participate. All responses were anonymous, and I have no knowledge of any of the respondents' identities. I received 74 responses in total. The sample consists of Danish journalists between 23 and 69 years old with an average age of 40.7. 47.3 percent were male, and their average age

is 41.82, while 53.7 percent were female with an average age of 39.7. On average, the participants had 14.2 years of journalistic experience, with the number being 13.46 for women and 14.94 for men, so no significant difference is seen between the genders. Seven participants had never covered terrorism with five of them being below the age of 30. In total, eight participants were below the age of 30. The results should be reproducible among another group of Danish journalists. However, new discussions or events can affect the dependability, and the fact that several terrorist suspects were arrested in Denmark (Olsen/Independent 2021) shortly before opening this survey may have reminded the respondents of their thoughts on ethics.

Ethics

The participants remain anonymous with individual codes in the analysis (Scheuren 2004, 13). Their identities are unknown, as the snowball method was used, and they were asked to refrain from confirming their participation. Furthermore, they were asked to confirm that they were older than 18 years old to avoid surveying minors. Participants had to agree to a consent statement explaining about the purpose of the data collection, that their data cannot be withdrawn due to anonymity and that all questions, except for nationality and years of journalistic experience, could be skipped in case of uneasiness. They also received a link to a downloadable Participant Information Sheet and were informed that all data will be deleted on 30th April 2026, as it may be used later in a dissertation or for academic or media publications. The data is stored in the university's OneDrive only accessed by the researcher and the supervisor. The participants were given the

researcher's contact information for questions, feedback etc. The International Relations Ethical Committee at the University of St. Andrews approved this study (Appendix 1). My own journalism background could influence me, but I left journalism five years ago and do not currently work with any of the participants. However, my knowledge about Danish journalism may be advantageous. I remained openminded to all possible findings throughout the research.

Challenges and limitations

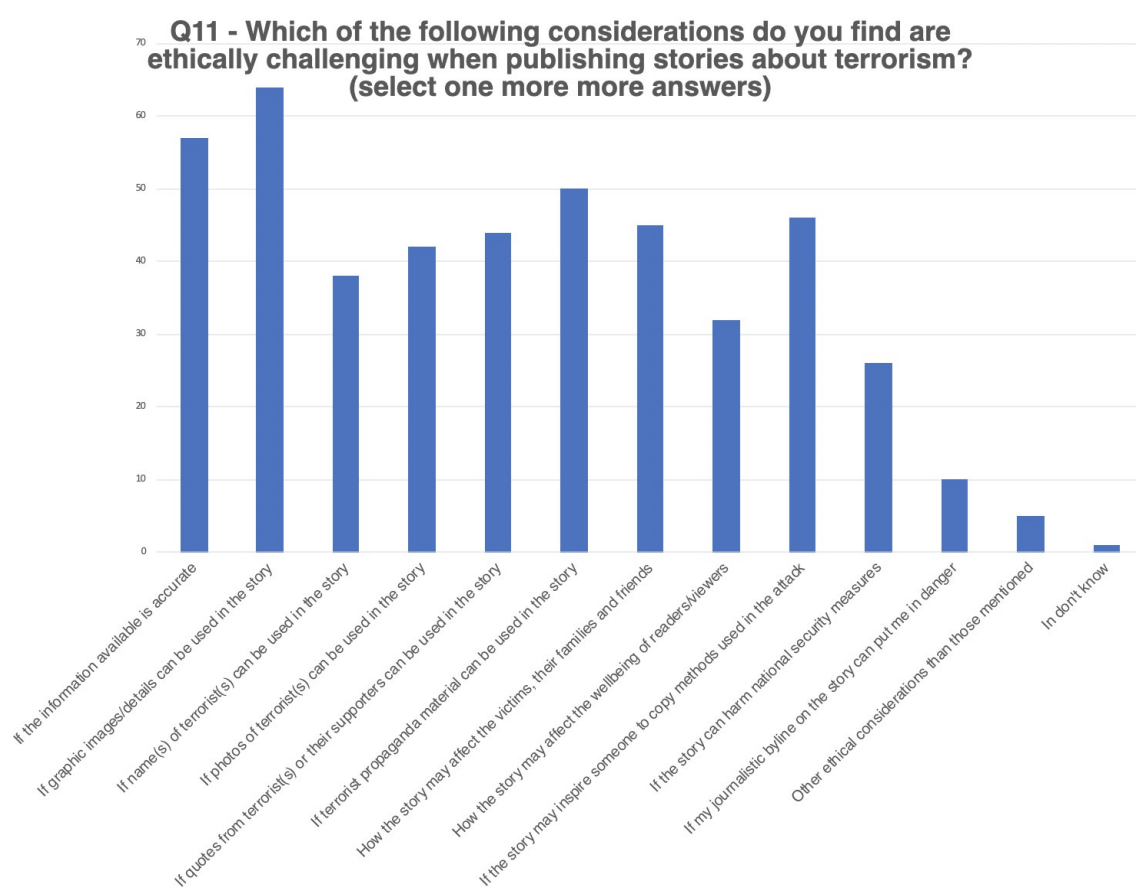
This is a paper of a limited scale and consequently, it was not possible to analyse all of the collected data in depth. Instead, data was thematically selected for specific analysis. With a more extensive project, I could have looked further into individual ethical dilemmas or various decisions made during specific terrorism events. I also considered asking participants to describe specific past experiences, but this could compromise participants' anonymity and additionally, memories may be flawed, incorrect or biased (Scheuren, 18). Furthermore, with a longer time frame, qualitative interviews could have added valuable information. However, the survey's text boxes did generate some useful qualitative answers.

Analysis

I will now proceed to analyse and discuss the data. First, I will answer the research question by presenting some tendencies in the ethical considerations encountered by the Danish journalists surveyed and comparing these to the literature. Some themes overlap but are attempted

structured after the responses. Secondly, I will assess the selection of news value criteria in relation to ethics. Finally, I will evaluate the possible need for more editorial guidelines and what could potentially help journalists navigate ethics.

Figure 1: Ethically challenging considerations encountered by Danish journalists



Details

89.19 percent of the journalists surveyed found that the ethical balance when covering terrorism was in general very or to some extent difficult (Appendix 3, Q17). Female journalists in particular found it difficult to a very high or high extent ($p = 0.0392$), but further research would be necessary to clarify why this is. With regard to specific ethical considerations, participants were

challenged the most by the use of graphic images and details, with 64 out of 74 (Figure 1) encountering this dilemma. This may not be that surprising as this concern is specified in the Danish law in media practices (Mejlby 2001, 74-75) as well as the guidelines of the Danish broadcaster TV2 (2020, 5). The challenge of which details to publish was also a theme appearing in the Q12 text box. One respondent mentioned that it is a dilemma that the terrorists will want as many details out as possible: "It is annoying to know how this works. But we cannot refrain from covering a lot of the details". This response emphasises the journalist's worries that their work can actually help to facilitate terrorism, as is also suggested by Crenshaw (1981, 381). Similarly, a participant claimed in the Q18 text box to feel torn between ethics, public demands and media competition: "We have to get as many facts as possible out. It is a shame, but people need those. And if I as a journalist refrain from publishing it, then other questionable types will". Half of the participants (Figure 1) found it ethically challenging to decide whether names or photos of the terrorists should be published; this was also highlighted as an issue by the ALERRT campaign (ALERRT). The Danish Broadcasting Corporation has also proclaimed that they will refrain from using terrorists' photos or names (Barlag/Journalisten 2016). The Q12 text box shows different opinions on this. Three respondents mentioned that they would never publish these particular details, partly because the 'glorification' might inspire others, showing again that some journalists seem to be aware that their coverage may help to strengthen support for the terrorists' cause (Wilkinson 2011, 154), while one suggested that they would always use photos and quotes from a financial criminal, "so why not do the same with a terrorist?". Half of the

participants were also concerned about the effect of the coverage on the affected victims, as well as readers and viewers. This concern is, again, not that surprising as this is also mentioned directly in the Danish law on media practices (Mejlby 2001, 74-75). As a whole, there appeared to be awareness of how details published in the media can aid the terrorists and it creates a dilemma as one may still need to publish it to acknowledge a public service duty.

Accuracy

The second largest concern in Figure 1 is the accuracy of information, with 57 out of 74 respondents having this concern. 16 participants elaborated on this as a theme in the Q12 text box, suggesting that the time pressure makes it difficult to always check facts, that the authorities sometimes sit on important information, which can both lead to speculation and make the story more intriguing, and that the terrorists have their own agenda with regard to details and framing. One emphasises that it is important to wait and openly say which information is still lacking “instead of suggesting too early that it is terrorism just to paint everything in ‘breaking’ yellow”. Time pressure was, to some or a great or very great extent, a concern for 76.72 percent, who worried that it can get in the way of ethics when covering terrorism (Appendix 3, Q14).

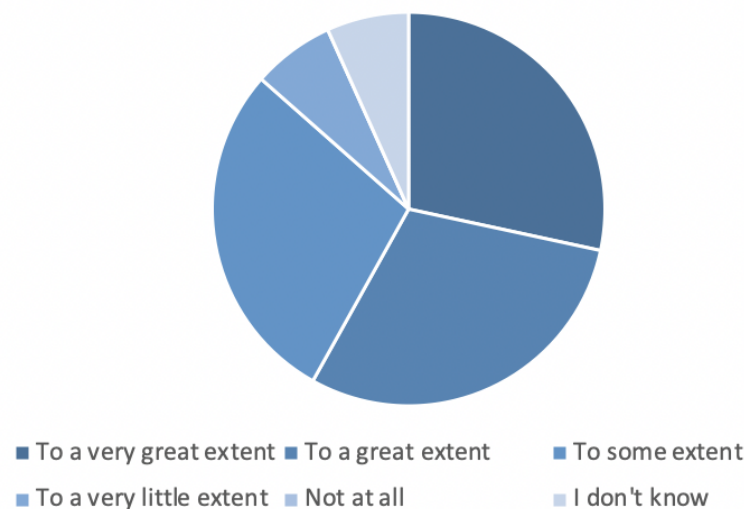
Propaganda

Two thirds of the respondents found the media’s possible spreading of propaganda or risk of inspiring copycats to be ethically challenging (Figure 1), which is an issue also pointed out by for instance Schmid (1989, 544). Most of

the respondents were well aware that terrorists may attempt to use the established media to spread propaganda (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Propaganda and established media

Q16 - Do you believe that terrorists use the established media to spread their propaganda messages?



In the Q12 text box, three respondents suggested that propaganda material should never be used in media coverage. One recalled editorial discussions about an attack in Christchurch in which the perpetrator had published a manifesto online: "On one hand we did not want to be a voice for the terrorists, but on the other hand, publishing the manifesto can help paint a clear picture of the perpetrator and his motives". Another participant stated that readers, listeners and viewers have the right to know about the terrorists' own messages, but then "we are helping the terrorists by publishing it". One also explained that when ISIS had their so-called 'caliphate', their own propaganda material was often the only window into it, but "at the same time we were spreading the footage that they wanted to be spread". One

suggested that “propaganda material can have news value but should be declared”. Marthoz has described this difficult role of the media in similar terms, stating that the media: “has an obligation to provide verifiable information in the public interest, and audiences have a fundamental right to access accurate and balanced information, especially when it may affect their own safety or freedom” (Marthoz 2017, 1). It appears to be contested whether propaganda is indeed important information for the public, yet it is agreed that it supports the terrorists’ framing. It might be helpful for media outlets to clarify this internally. Half of the respondents (Appendix 3, Q15) also found that the ethical decisions revolving around propaganda material have become more difficult in recent years due to the refinement of propaganda and social media’s role, as also mentioned by Friis (2017, 261). One respondent in Q12 suggested that constant social media updates put extra pressure on the media, while another respondent was unsure about whether to “spare the readers/viewers” from certain details when everything can be found on social media. Clearly, social media is challenging established media outlets. On a separate question (Appendix 3, Q13) asking whether choosing the most suitable definitions in terrorism coverage is difficult, two thirds felt that this was somewhat challenging. Hence, the Global Coalition against Daesh’s dictionary for journalists may be helpful to some degree (2020) if the definitions suggested by the Coalition appear suitable to the journalists.

Security

Among others, Wilkinson (1989, 154) expressed concerns about the media disrupting the authorities’ work and potentially damaging national security.

This concern was shared by every third respondent (Figure 1). Interestingly, 10 of the 74 respondents were also worried whether having their byline on stories about terrorism could pose a danger to themselves. This may reflect the fact that Danish journalists have several times in the past been targeted in foiled attacks planned by terrorists (PET 2020). How this fear may influence the media's work would be an interesting study in itself.

Defining terrorism

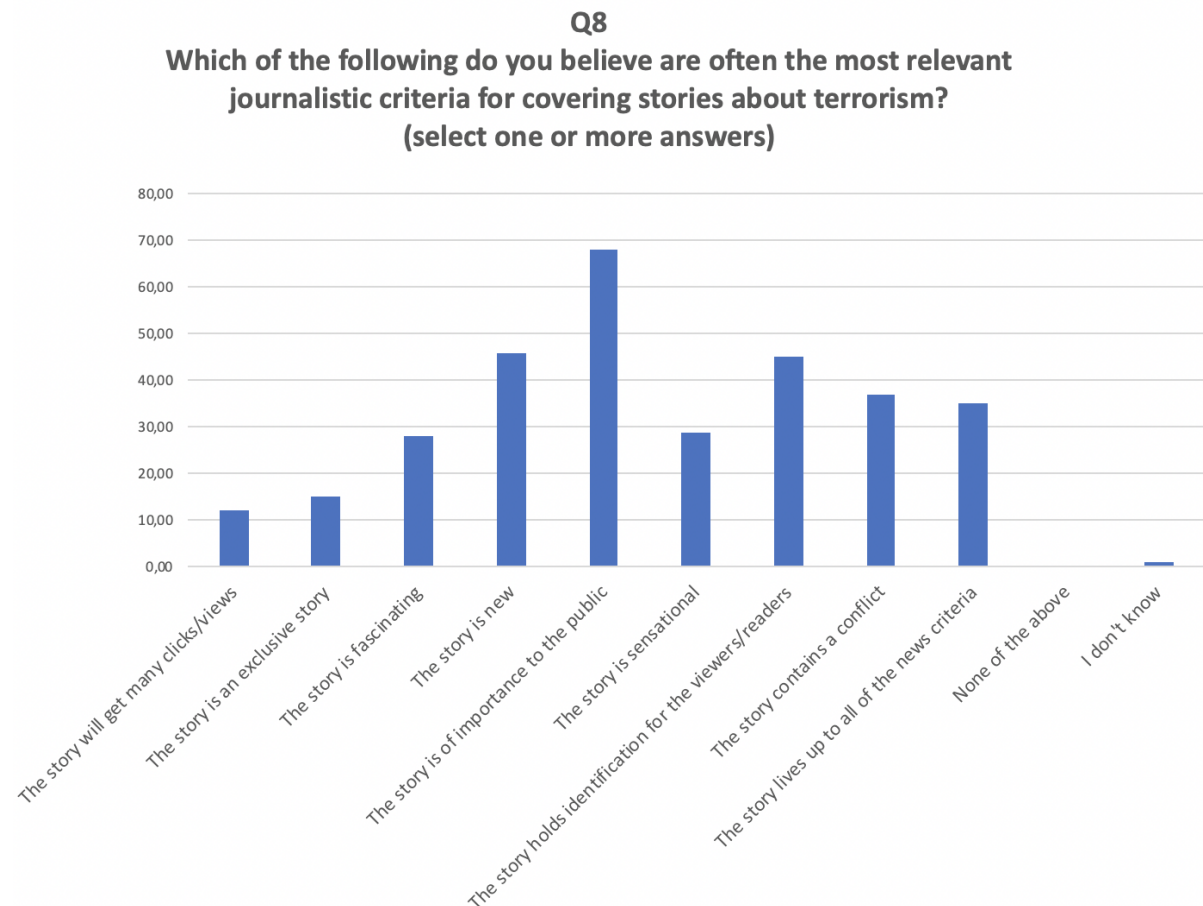
As an important source of information, the way that the media covers and defines 'terrorism' can affect the public's view and perception of the phenomenon (Huff and Kerzner 2018, 65). In Q10, which asked how the journalists defined terrorism when at work, 45 of the respondents agreed that they would wait for authorities to confirm whether it was terrorism. However, 24 other respondents relied on other judgments. Some relied on "trustworthy sources" or "experts"; others relied on their management's decisions, while another group decided whether it was terrorism based on the estimated motive. Several of these respondents said they would label the act as terrorism if they believed that the motive was religious or political, and if civilians were attacked in order to influence politics. Others called it terrorism if someone targeted another person for political reasons or if an attack appeared designed to spread fear among a group of people. Others looked at whether it was a coordinated attack against innocent victims. It is well known among terrorism scholars that a globally applicable definition of terrorism has yet to be agreed on (Schmid 2014, 588), so one cannot be surprised if journalists do not agree either. However, it might be beneficial for the media to

lean on the assessment of the authorities, as most of the respondents claimed to do.

Newsworthiness

Almost two thirds of the respondents usually considered stories about terrorism to be more newsworthy than other stories (Appendix 3, Q9). This perspective of great news value may possibly interfere with the ethics of the coverage. While most Danish journalists are trained to work with a specific set of news value criteria, which are importance, topicality, conflict, sensation and identification (Schultz 2006, 57), other criteria, such as exclusivity, have over the years come to exist alongside the classic ones (Schultz 2006, 157). The participants were asked to pick from a range of known news criteria which ones were often relevant when covering terrorism (Figure 3). I will briefly focus on these findings below.

Figure 3: Journalistic criteria in relation to terrorism coverage



Importance to the public is, possibly unsurprisingly, the criterion that was chosen by the most respondents. This criterion was also mentioned 18 times in the Q7 text box as relevant in terrorism coverage. One respondent emphasised that, “however, it is only of high importance to the public if it is aiming at changing a part of our society’s foundation”, while another argued that “Media coverage of terrorist attacks is often of high relevance to the public, because the attacks impact political decisions and shape the world that we live in. For instance, our participation in Afghanistan”. This makes sense, yet one might wonder if the impact on politics and our daily lives would be smaller if the media covered it less, hence lessening the terrorism’s effect.

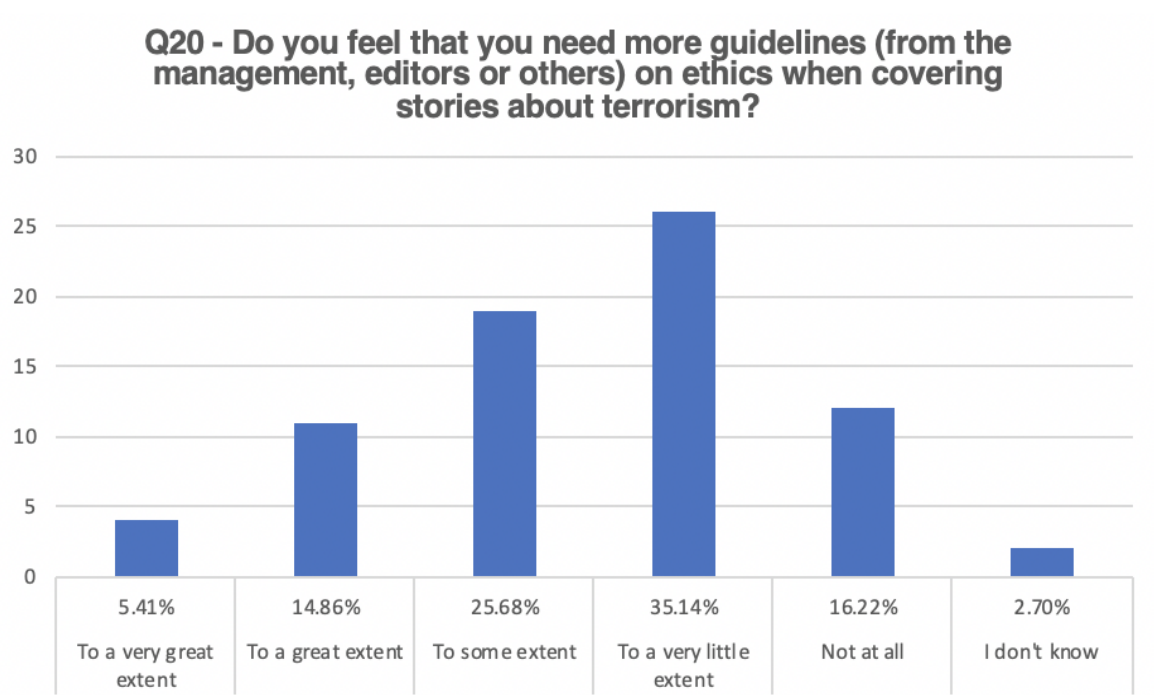
However, as suggested in the first comment, it is arguable that the media should always cover events which threaten society's foundation. Identification is another criterion that was considered relevant by more than half of the respondents. A theme suggested by several participants in Q7 was that the closer to Denmark or the Western world an event is, the more relevant it becomes. This could be an ethical issue, because victims of terrorism in faraway countries can, ethically speaking, be equally important. However, these attacks may not threaten our own surrounding society to the same degree, and it makes sense that viewers or readers are more concerned about threats closer to themselves. Unfortunately, however, identification and the feeling that oneself might be next is also what makes terrorism powerful (Schmid 1989, 543). Only every sixth participant found sensationalism and the story getting many clicks/views to be relevant, which could be surprising with the media outlets' tough competition for audiences' attention (Frampton/BBC News, 2015), yet it seems ethically appropriate not to put a great deal of weight on these criteria. Two thirds of the journalists who found the potential number of clicks/views to be relevant were below the sample group's average age and might have selected this criterion because they grew up with the internet. Finally, the only differences between the genders' choice of criteria were that double as many male journalists as female ones found fascination and conflict to be of relevance. It is unclear why this was the case.

Guidelines

The motivation leading to this project was partly an interest in knowing whether Danish journalists experience clear editorial guidelines when covering terrorism or if they see a need for more guidance. When asked

whether the guidelines have been clear during terrorism coverage in the past, around half of the journalists felt certain about them, while a little less than half only felt certain to some extent or a very small extent (Appendix 3, Q21). Just under half of the participants currently, to a great or to some extent, felt the need for more guidelines today, while somewhat more than half of them did not (Figure 4).

Figure 4: The perceived need for more editorial guidelines on terrorism coverage



Of those expressing a high or very high need for more guidelines, 13 out of 15 were under the sample's average age of 40.7 ($p = 0.0181$). While of those stating that they to some extent needed more guidelines, 12 out of 19 were above the average age ($p = 0.0311$). This may mean that more guidance is needed the younger one is, and as one matures as a journalist, one may still need more guidance but to a lesser extent. This fits with a theme seen in the Q18 text box in which 14 respondents stated that they rely on their experience

for guidance when working on terrorism stories. Experience may bring more certainty on ethics. However, gender may also play a role. 12 of the 15 respondents expressing a need for more guidelines to a very high or high extent were female ($p = 0.0219$), while 8 of the 12 who did not experience this need at all were male. As the sampled genders' average age and years of experience were quite similar, experience alone does not appear to give more certainty around ethics. It is unclear why male journalists felt more confident regarding guidelines.

Approximately every fifth participant had at some point in the past experienced that poor ethical decisions were made at their workplace during terrorism coverage and every fifth had been personally involved in covering terrorism in a way that they would have done differently today (Appendix 3, Q22 and Q23). However, it is interesting that the participants with these past experiences did not necessarily today feel a need for more guidelines to a higher extent than the ones without these experiences. This may signify that ethical boundaries in Danish media outlets have developed over the past few years. Combined with the fact that most respondents found terrorism coverage to be particularly ethically challenging (Appendix 3, Q17), the results may altogether suggest that it would be a good idea to prioritise letting experienced journalists work on terrorism coverage and that younger employees can benefit from having more ethical guidance. This matches some of the suggestions in Q24, which asked what could help journalists make good ethical decisions in the future. More than 30 mentioned clear editorial rules and guidelines as a way forward, and a few suggested that these should be discussed across various media outlets to avoid very different

standards emerging. A few raised the issue that guidelines would have to be updated often as terrorism and media types develop quickly. Lastly, a group of respondents suggested that it might be helpful to provide educational courses, particularly for new employees, on journalism ethics and the way that terrorism works with regard to attention. These are all interesting suggestions which have, to my knowledge, not yet been raised in published research.

Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the ethical considerations encountered by Danish journalists when covering stories about terrorism and whether more editorial guidelines on this matter would be helpful. A total of 74 Danish journalists responded to a questionnaire containing 24 multiple-choice, Likert scale and open text box questions focused on ethical considerations, the news value of terrorism and whether more guidelines would be beneficial. The journalists surveyed found terrorism coverage to be particularly ethically challenging, and especially female journalists perceived the ethical balance as very difficult. In general, terrorism coverage caused the journalists a variety of ethical concerns. The greatest dilemma was whether to use graphic details or photos with 64 out of 74 sharing this concern. Two thirds were challenged by the potential use of terrorist propaganda, while more than half found it difficult to decide whether to use terrorists' names or photos. Several suggested that details, propaganda and the recognition of perpetrators may lead to the terrorism getting too much attention and inspiring copycats, hence strengthening the terrorists' cause. Another major concern was the accuracy of information, partly because terrorists have their own agenda in spreading information and partly because social media constantly updates, while

authorities may not want to say much. Other concerns were the effect of the media coverage on victims, viewers and readers as well as the risk of harming national security. Conclusively, the considerations experienced by the journalists surveyed were very similar to the dilemmas in the relationship between media and terrorism pointed out by terrorism scholars. With regard to news criteria, the participants mainly prioritised the terrorism stories' importance to the public over for instance sensationalism and many clicks. Lastly, around every fifth participant had in the past experienced issues with poor ethical decisions being made during terrorism coverage, either in their workplace or while personally working on a story. Somewhat less than half of the participants expressed a great or slight need for more editorial guidelines. Interestingly, there was no significant overlap between the journalists who have experienced poor ethical decisions in the past and the ones needing more guidelines. This may signify that, after all, more certainty around ethics in terrorism coverage has been established in the media outlets over the years. Male journalists expressed a need for more guidelines to a lesser extent than female journalists did, yet it is unclear why this was the case. Journalists younger than the sample group's average age also appeared to be more inclined to need more guidelines than the more experienced journalists, and many participants also pointed to their experience as the most important factor in their ethical decisions. This may suggest that it would be beneficial to prioritise letting experienced journalists cover terrorism when possible and potentially clarifying the media outlets' ethical guidelines early on for new employees or setting up educational courses on ethics and terrorism.

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Appendices

Appendix 1.1 Survey Questions in English

You are invited to take part in the research study “Terrorism making headlines: Danish journalists and the ethical dilemmas of covering terrorism” which is conducted by researcher Rikke Østergård Kornerup.

This study assesses journalists’ considerations around ethics when covering terrorism stories.

The survey contains approximately 20 questions and should take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

Your participation is voluntary. The survey is anonymous, but you will be asked questions about nationality, age, gender and current/former job position i.e. You must be at least 18 years old to participate in this survey.

If you are less than 18 years old, please close this window and refrain from continuing.

Should you feel uncomfortable about any of the questions or the information requested, you can choose to skip the question or the survey without disbenefit. Your help is very much appreciated either way.

Your data will be treated with full confidentiality and will remain anonymous if published. Graphs, direct quotes etc. may be used.

Your data will be kept in an encrypted and safely stored hard disk which only the researcher can access. Your data will be deleted by April 30th, 2026, as it may also, if you accept to participate in this survey, be used for a dissertation and academic or media publications with same confidentiality regulations applied. Due to your anonymity, the data cannot be withdrawn once your responses have been submitted.

Should you have questions or feedback, you can contact me: roh1@st-andrews.ac.uk.

You can find and download a Participant Information Sheet here (link inserted to Google drive).

If you accept this arrangement and understand who has access to your data and the content of the Participant Information Sheet, I will appreciate your participation.

1. Do you accept to participate in this study?
 - Yes
 - No
2. Are you a Danish citizen?
 - Yes
 - No
3. What is your gender?

- Male
 - Female
 - Other
 - SKIP QUESTION
4. What is your age?
- TEXT BOX
 - SKIP QUESTION
5. For how many years have you worked as a journalist at an established newspaper, tv or radio channel (or the online platform connected to such outlets)?
- TEXT BOX
6. Have you ever covered stories about terrorism?
- Yes
 - No
 - I don't know
 - SKIP QUESTION
7. As you see it, what are often the main journalistic criteria for covering stories about terrorism?
- TEXT BOX
 - I don't know
 - SKIP QUESTION
8. Which of the following do you believe are often the most relevant journalistic criteria for covering stories about terrorism? (select one more answers)
- The story will get many clicks/views
 - The story is an exclusive story
 - The story is fascinating
 - The story is new
 - The story is of importance to the public
 - The story is sensational
 - The story holds identification for the viewers/readers
 - The story contains a conflict
 - The story lives up to all of the news criteria
 - None of the above
 - I don't know
 - SKIP QUESTION
9. Stories about terrorism are often more newsworthy than other news stories?
- Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Neutral
 - Disagree
 - Strongly disagree
 - I don't know

- SKIP QUESTION

10. How do you decide whether an attack was an act of “terrorism” when editing your story? (select one more more answers)

- TEXT BOX

- SKIP THIS QUESTION

11. Which of the following considerations do you find are ethically challenging when publishing stories about terrorism? (select one more more answers)

- If the information available is accurate or potentially fake
- If graphic images or details can be used in the story
- If the name(s) of the terrorist(s) can be used in the story
- If photos of the terrorist(s) can be used in the story
- If quotes from terrorist(s) or supporters of terrorism can be used in the story
- If terrorist propaganda material can be used in the story
- How the story may affect the wellbeing of victims, their families and friends
- How the story may affect the wellbeing of readers/viewers
- If the story may inspire someone to copy the methods used in the attack
- If details in the story can harm national security measures
- If your own journalistic byline on the story can put you in danger
- Other ethical considerations than the ones mentioned
- I don't know
- SKIP QUESTION

12. Which ethical considerations do you find challenging when covering terrorism, if any?

- TEXT BOX

- SKIP QUESTION

13. How difficult is it to choose the most suitable definitions (Islamic State vs. Daesh, foreign fighter vs terrorist, soldier vs fighter, lone wolf vs lone actor)?

- To a very great extent
- To a great extent
- To some extent
- To a very little extent
- Not at all
- I don't know
- SKIP QUESTION

14. Do you believe that time pressure can sometimes get in the way of ethics when covering terrorism?

- To a very great extent
- To a great extent
- To some extent
- To a very little extent

- Not at all
- I don't know
- SKIP QUESTION

15. Do you believe that the online access (through social media or websites) to high-quality visual propaganda and direct quotes from terrorist groups has made the ethical decisions when covering terrorism more difficult?

- To a very great extent
- To a great extent
- To some extent
- To a very little extent
- Not at all
- I don't know
- SKIP QUESTION

16. Do you believe that terrorists use the established media to spread their propaganda messages?

- To a very great extent
- To a great extent
- To some extent
- To a very little extent
- Not at all
- I don't know
- SKIP QUESTION

17. How challenging is the ethical balance in general when covering stories about terrorism?

- To a very great extent
- To a great extent
- To some extent
- To a very little extent
- Not at all
- I don't know
- SKIP QUESTION

18. What helps you make ethical decisions when covering terrorism stories?

- TEXT BOX
- SKIP THIS QUESTION

19. Do you in general feel a need to discuss with other journalists before deciding on the use of photos, footage and other details for terrorism related stories?

- To a very great extent
- To a great extent
- To some extent
- To a very little extent
- Not at all

- I don't know
- SKIP QUESTION

20. Do you feel that you need more guidelines (from the management, editors or others) on ethics when covering stories about terrorism?

- To a very great extent
- To a great extent
- To some extent
- To a very little extent
- Not at all
- I don't know
- SKIP QUESTION

21. Do you feel that the editorial line on ethics has been very clear when covering stories about terrorism?

- To a very great extent
- To a great extent
- To some extent
- To a very little extent
- Not at all
- I don't know
- SKIP QUESTION

22. Looking back, do you believe that there have been times (in your workplace) when poor ethical decisions have been made when covering terrorism?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- I don't know
- SKIP QUESTION

23. Do you find that you in the past covered stories about terrorism in ways that you would have done differently today?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- I don't know
- SKIP QUESTION

24. What do you think could help journalists make good ethical decisions in the future when covering terrorism?

- TEXT BOX
- SKIP THIS QUESTION

Debrief

Thank you for taking this survey. Your contribution is very much valuable and appreciated.

Nature of study

This project had its' focus on the ethical challenges experienced by Danish journalists when covering stories about terrorism. It should hopefully help to assess if further guidance is needed in order help journalists navigate in terrorism coverage in the future.

Data

As outlined in the Participant Information Sheet marked 'PIS_[08022021]_[01]_[Terrorism making headlines]' (insert Google drive link to pdf) ;

- The information (data) you have provided will be stored in an anonymised form.
- Your data will only be shared or published in an anonymised form.
- The data will be kept in an encrypted and safely stored hard disk only accessed by the researcher.
- Your data may be used for associated publications, academic or in the media, in the future without further consultation.
- Because your information (data) is anonymous at the point of collection or subsequently anonymised, we will not be able to withdraw it after that point because we will no longer know which information (data) is yours.

Sources of support

If you have been affected by participating in this study and you wish to seek support, you can contact the researcher for assistance.

Contact

If you have concerns or if you would like to view a summary of the results of my research, please email the researcher or the supervisor detailed below.

Researcher Rikke Østergård Supervisor Maria Dalton

Kornerup

Roh1@st-

andrews.ac.uk

[mhd2@st-](mailto:mhd2@st-andrews.ac.uk)

[andrews.ac.uk](mailto:mhd2@st-andrews.ac.uk)

Appendix 1.2 - Survey Questions in Danish

Du inviteres hermed til at deltage i studiet "Terrorism making headlines: Danish journalists and the ethical dilemmas of covering terrorism". Studiet udføres af Rikke Østergård Hansen.

Det omhandler journalisters etiske overvejelser, når de dækker historier om terrorisme, og denne survey har samme fokus.

Den indeholder cirka 20 spørgsmål og vil tage cirka ti minutter af din tid.

Din deltagelse er frivillig og anonym, men der indgår spørgsmål om nationalitet, alder, køn og antal år som journalist. Du skal være ældre end 18 år for at deltage. Hvis du er yngre, så luk venligst vinduet og undlad at fortsætte.

Alle spørgsmål (undtagen nationalitet) kan springes over. Jeg er uanset hvad meget taknemmelig for din hjælp.

Den indsamlede data vil blive behandlet fortroligt og vil forblive anonymt i alle tilfælde. Data vil blive opbevaret i en sikker harddisk, som kun er tilgængelig for researcheren. Det vil muligvis blive anvendt i en specialeafhandling og akademiske eller journalistiske publikationer og vil derfor blive slettet senest d. 30. april 2026. Der kan bruges grafer, citater mv. fra denne survey. Fortrolighed og anonymitet bliver i alle tilfælde opretholdt. Du accepterer dette ved at fortsætte denne survey.

Har du spørgsmål eller feedback, kan du kontakte mig på roh1@st-andrews.ac.uk.

Du kan finde og downloade et Personal Information Sheet dokument her (indsæt link til Google drive).

Hvis du er ok med disse vilkår og behandlingen af din data, vil jeg virkelig værdsætte din hjælp og din tid.

1. Accepterer du at fortsætte med denne survey?
 - Ja
 - Nej
2. Er du dansk statsborger?
 - Ja
 - Nej
3. Hvad er dit køn?
 - Mand
 - Kvinde
 - Andet
4. Hvad er din alder:
 - TEKSTBOKS
 - SPRING OVER

5. I hvor mange år har du arbejdet som journalist på et etableret medie (avis, magasin, tv, radio eller digital platform tilknyttet disse)?
- TEKSTBOKS
6. Har du været med til at dække historier om terrorisme?
- Ja
 - Nej
 - Ved ikke
 - SPRING OVER
7. Hvilke hovedkriterier spiller ind i forhold til at gøre terrorisme til en interessant historie?
- TEKSTBOKS
 - Ved ikke
 - SPRING OVER
8. Hvilke af følgende kriterier er relevante i forhold til at dække historier om terrorisme? (flere svarmuligheder)
- Historien vil få mange clicks/seere/læsere
 - Historien er en solohistorie
 - Historien er fascinerende
 - Historien er helt ny
 - Historien er væsentlig
 - Historien er sensationel
 - Historien indeholder identifikation for læsere/seere
 - Historien indeholder en konflikt
 - Historien lever op til alle nyhedskriterier
 - Ingen af de ovenstående
 - Ved ikke
 - SPRING OVER
9. Historier om terrorisme har ofte mere nyhedsværdi end andre historier?
- Meget enig
 - Enig
 - Neutral
 - Uenig
 - Meget uenig
 - Ved ikke
 - SPRING OVER
10. Hvordan vurderer du, om et angreb var et terrorangreb?
- TEKSTBOKS
 - SPRING OVER
11. Hvilke af de følgende overvejelser, synes du, er etisk udfordrende i dækningen af historier om terrorisme? (flere svarmuligheder)
- Om den tilgængelige information er korrekt
 - Om vi bør bruge voldsomme billeder eller detaljer i historien
 - Om vi bør bruge terroristers navne i historien
 - Om vi bør bruge billeder af terroristerne i historien

- Om vi bør citere terrorister eller deres støtter i historien
- Om vi bør bruge propagandamateriale fra terrorister i historien
- Hvordan historien kan påvirke de ramte og deres pårørende
- Hvordan historien kan påvirke seere/læsere
- Om historien kan inspirere til lignende angreb
- Om historien kan skade national sikkerhed
- Om min egen byline på historien kan udsætte mig som journalist for fare
- Andre etiske beslutninger end ovenstående
- Ved ikke
- SPRING OVER

12. Hvilke af ovenstående etiske udfordringer (hvis nogen), synes du, er sværest i forhold til terrordækning og hvorfor?

- TEKSTBOKS
- SPRING OVER

13. Er det en udfordring at vælge de mest passende definitioner (fx Islamisk Stat eller Daesh, fremmedkriger eller terrorist, soldat eller kriger, ensom ulv eller soloangreb etc.)?

- I meget høj grad
- I høj grad
- I nogen grad
- I meget lille grad
- Slet ikke
- Ved ikke
- SPRING OVER

14. Tænker du, at tidspres nogle gange kan hindre grundige etiske overvejelser i dækningen af terrorisme?

- I meget høj grad
- I høj grad
- I nogen grad
- I meget lille grad
- Slet ikke
- Ved ikke
- SPRING OVER

15. Tænker du, at nutidens online adgang (via sociale medier eller hjemmesider) til terror-propaganda af høj visuel kvalitet har gjort det sværere at træffe etiske beslutninger i dækningen af terrorisme?

- I meget høj grad
- I høj grad
- I nogen grad
- I meget lille grad
- Slet ikke
- Ved ikke
- SPRING OVER

16. Tænker du, at terrorister bruger de etablerede medier til at sprede deres propaganda og budskaber?
- I meget høj grad
 - I høj grad
 - I nogen grad
 - I meget lille grad
 - Slet ikke
 - Ved ikke
 - SPRING OVER
17. Hvor svær er den etiske balance i dækningen af netop historier om terrorisme?
- I meget høj grad svær
 - I høj grad svær
 - I nogen grad svær
 - I meget lille grad svær
 - Slet ikke svær
 - Ved ikke
 - SPRING OVER
18. Hvad hjælper dig til at træffe etiske beslutninger, når du dækker historier om terrorisme?
- TEKSTBOKS
 - SPRING OVER
19. Har du ofte et behov for at drøfte det med andre journalister, når du skal beslutte brugen af billeder, video og andre detaljer i historier om terrorisme?
- I meget høj grad
 - I høj grad
 - I nogen grad
 - I meget lille grad
 - Slet ikke
 - Ved ikke
 - SPRING OVER
20. Føler du et behov for flere eller klarere etiske guidelines (fra ledelsen, chefredaktionen, redaktører eller andre) til brug i dækningen af terrorisme?
- I meget høj grad
 - I høj grad
 - I nogen grad
 - I meget lille grad
 - Slet ikke
 - Ved ikke
 - SPRING OVER
21. Føler du, at den redaktionelle linje har været tydelig, når du har skullet dække historier om terrorisme?
- I meget høj grad

- I høj grad
- I nogen grad
- I meget lille grad
- Slet ikke
- Ved ikke
- SPRING OVER

22. Du har oplevet på én af dine journalistiske arbejdspladser, at der på et tidspunkt er blevet truffet problematiske etiske beslutninger i dækningen af historier om terrorisme?

- Meget enig
- Enig
- Neutral
- Uenig
- Meget uenig
- Ved ikke
- SPRING OVER

23. Du har i fortiden oplevet at være med til at dække historier om terrorisme på en måde, som du rent etisk ville have gjort anderledes i dag?

- Meget enig
- Enig
- Neutral
- Uenig
- Meget uenig
- Ved ikke
- SPRING OVER

24. Hvad ville i fremtiden kunne hjælpe journalister at træffe gode etiske valg i dækningen af historier om terrorisme?

- TEKSTBOKS
- SPRING OVER

Debrief

Tak for din tid og din hjælp med denne survey. Det er meget værdsat.

Om projektet

Dette projekt havde fokus på danske journalisters etiske overvejelser, når de dækker terrorisme. Undersøgelsen skal bidrage til at estimere, om flere guidelines kan være brugbare i fremtiden.

Data

Som det fremgår af Participant Information Sheet marked

'PIS_[08022021]_[01]_[Terrorism making headlines]' (indsæt Google drive link til pdf)

;

- All information (data) vil blive opbevaret i anonym form.

- All information (data) will be stored on an encrypted hard disk in a secure place, only accessible to the researcher.
- All information (data) will only be shared or published in an anonymized form.
- Your data can be used for related projects in the future without further consultation.
- Because your information (data) is anonymous, we cannot trace it back later, as we are not aware of your identity.

Support

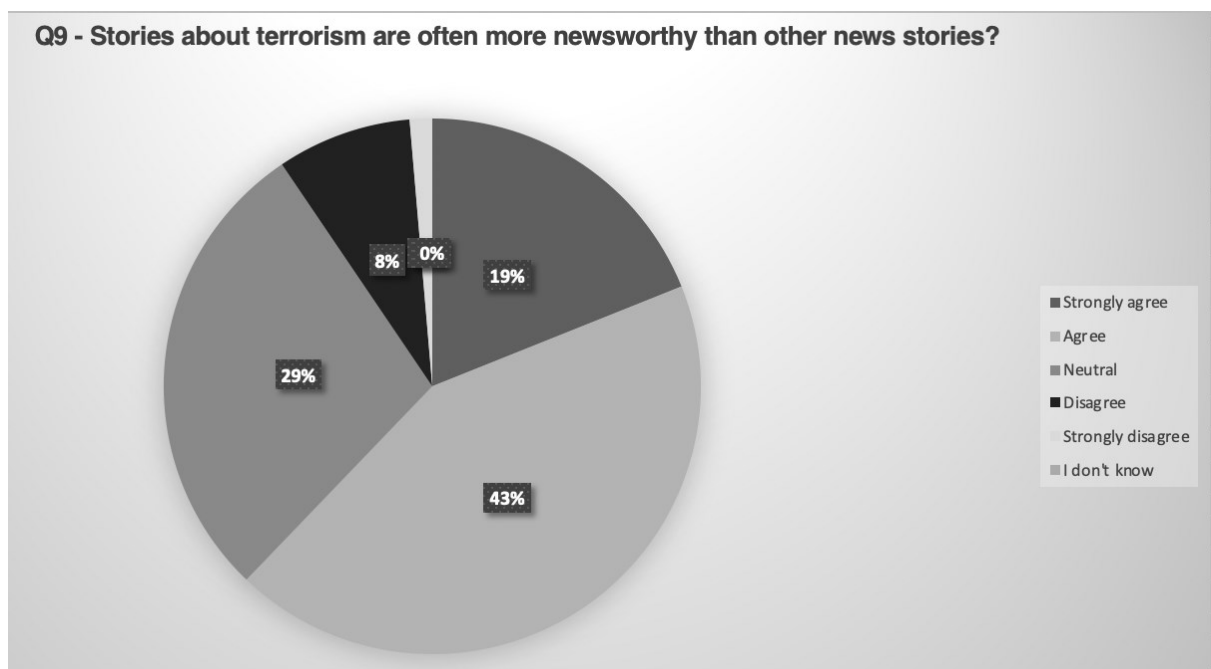
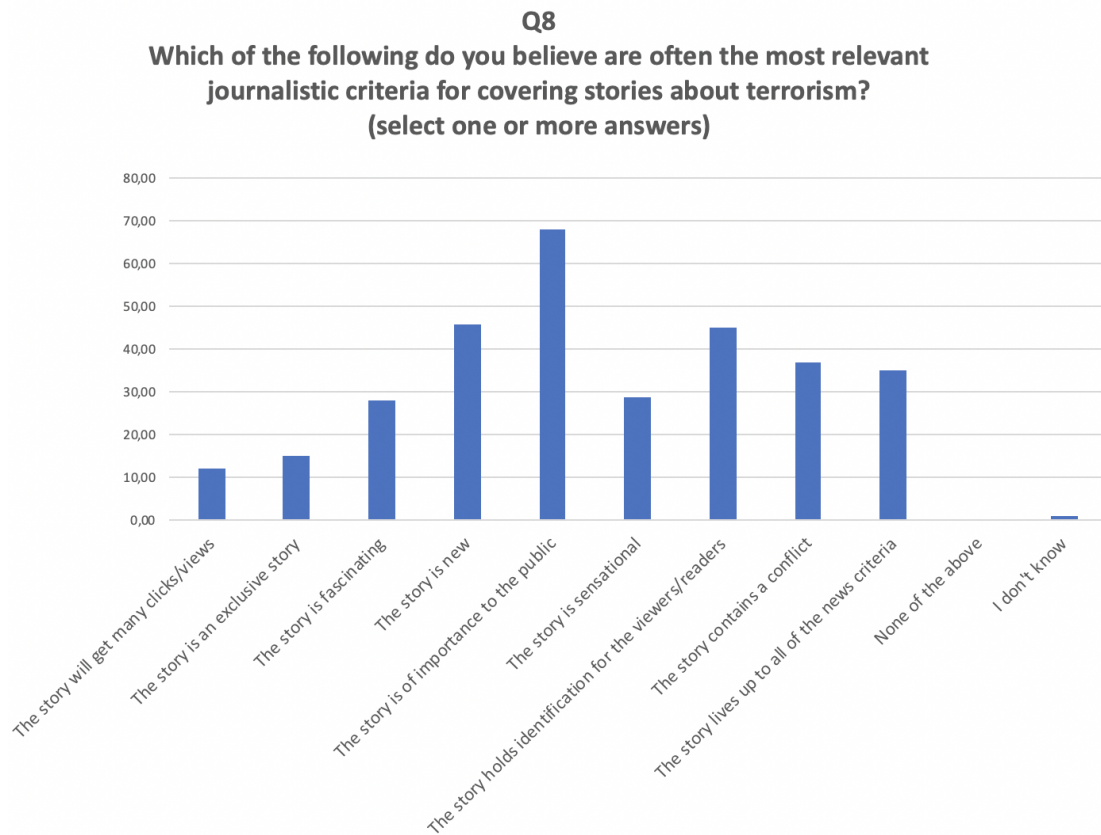
If you have been affected by your participation in this project, and you want help, you can contact the researcher for further assistance.

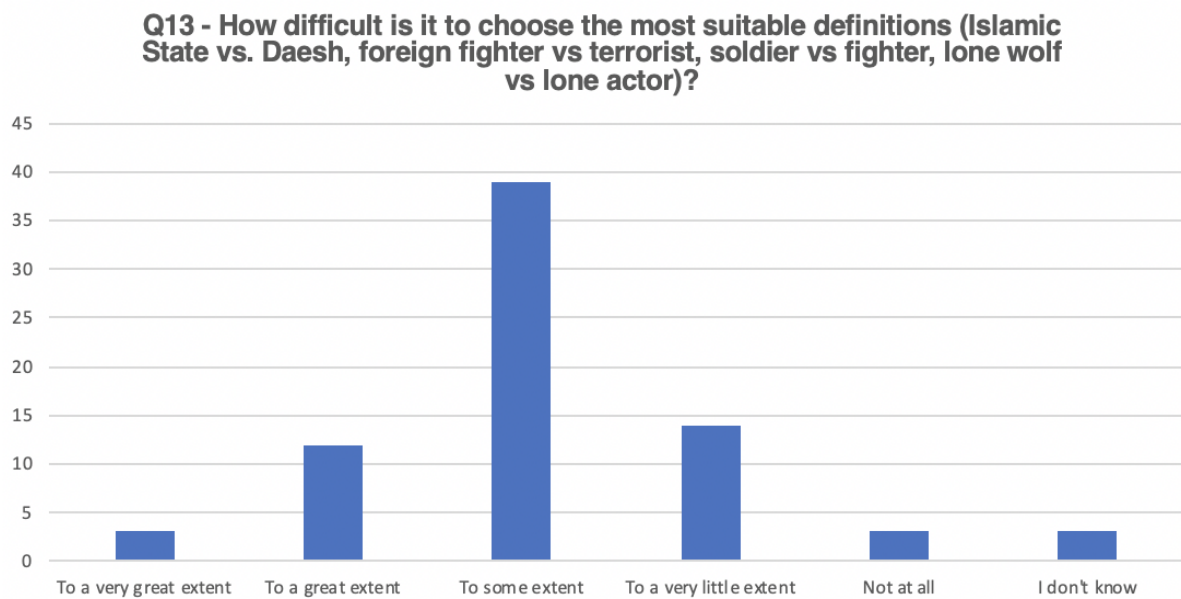
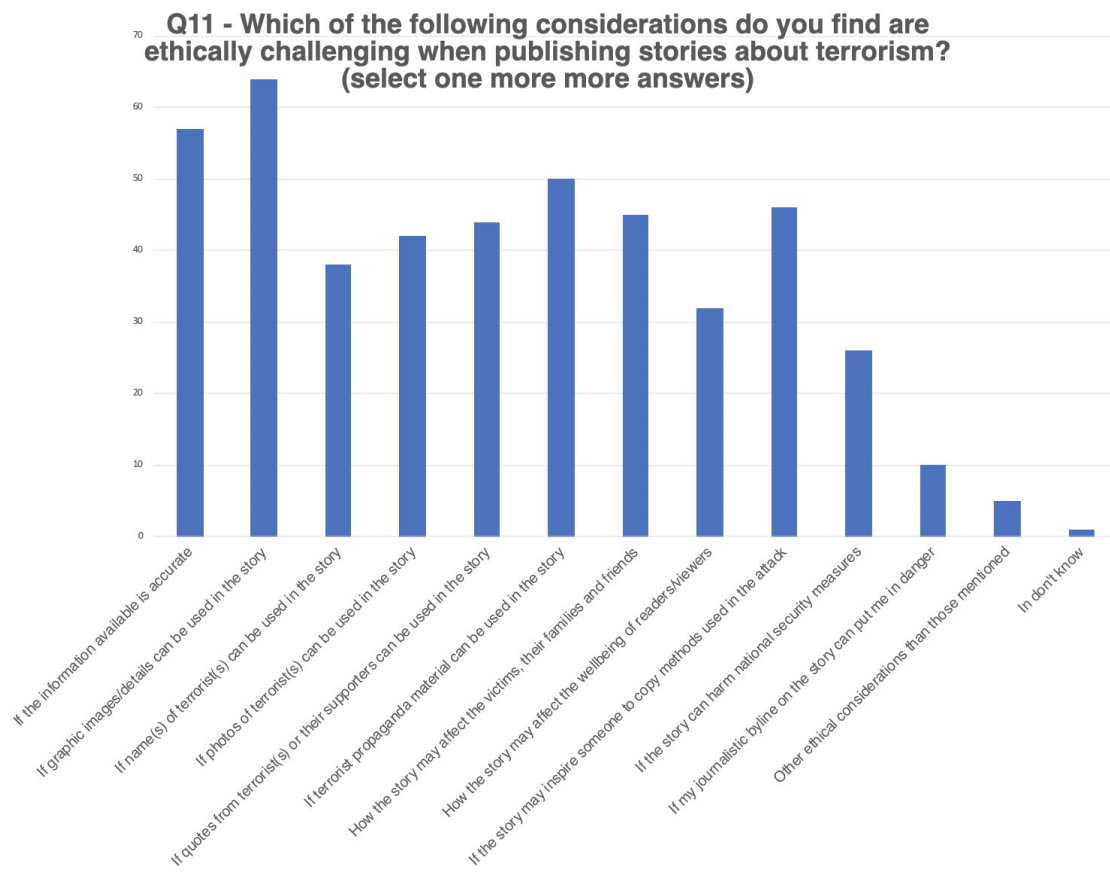
Kontakt

Har du bekymringer, feedback eller spørgsmål, kan du kontakte researcheren eller dennes supervisor:

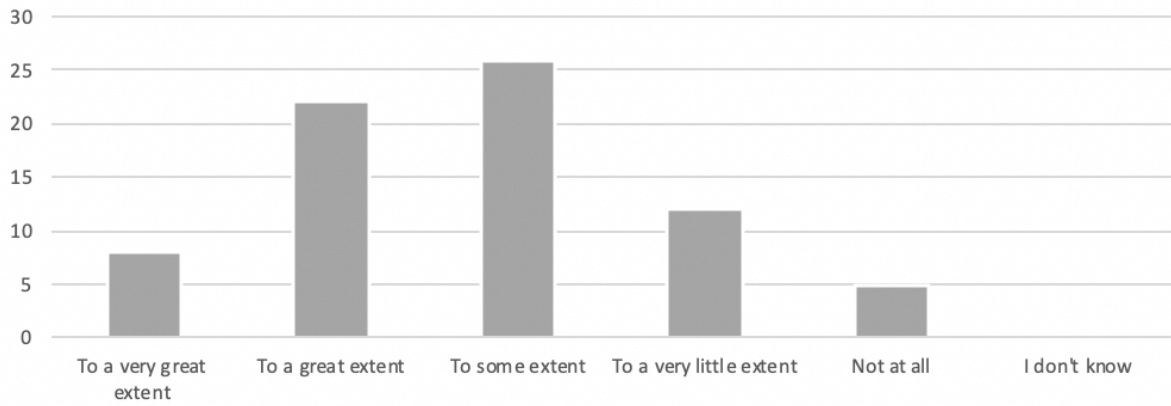
Researcher	Rikke Østergård Kornerup Roh1@st-andrews.ac.uk	Supervisor	Maria Dalton mhd2@st-andrews.ac.uk
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Appendix 2 – Selected graphs of survey results in English

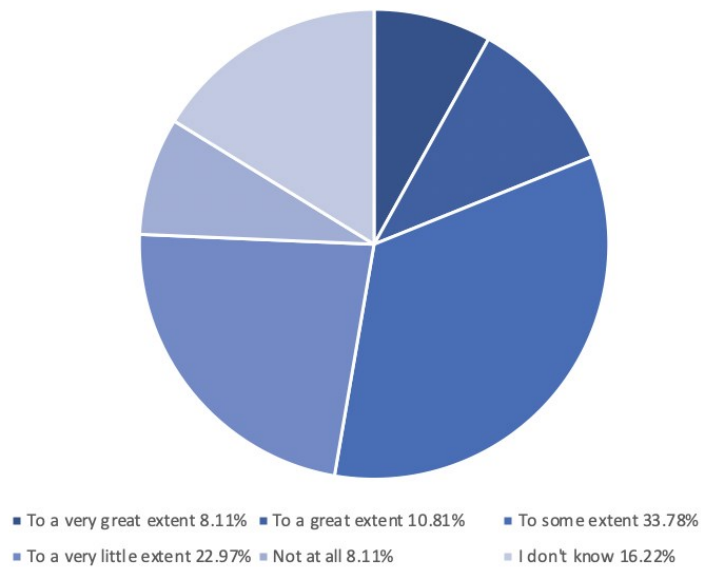




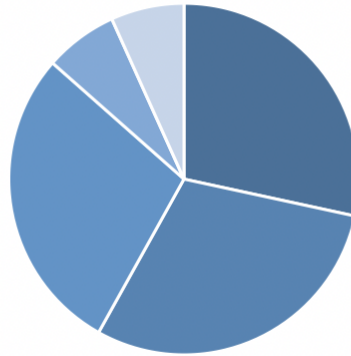
Q14 - Do you believe that time pressure can sometimes get in the way of ethics when covering terrorism?



Q15 - Do you believe that the online access (through social media or websites) to high-quality visual propaganda and direct quotes from terrorist groups has made the ethical decisions when covering terrorism more difficult?

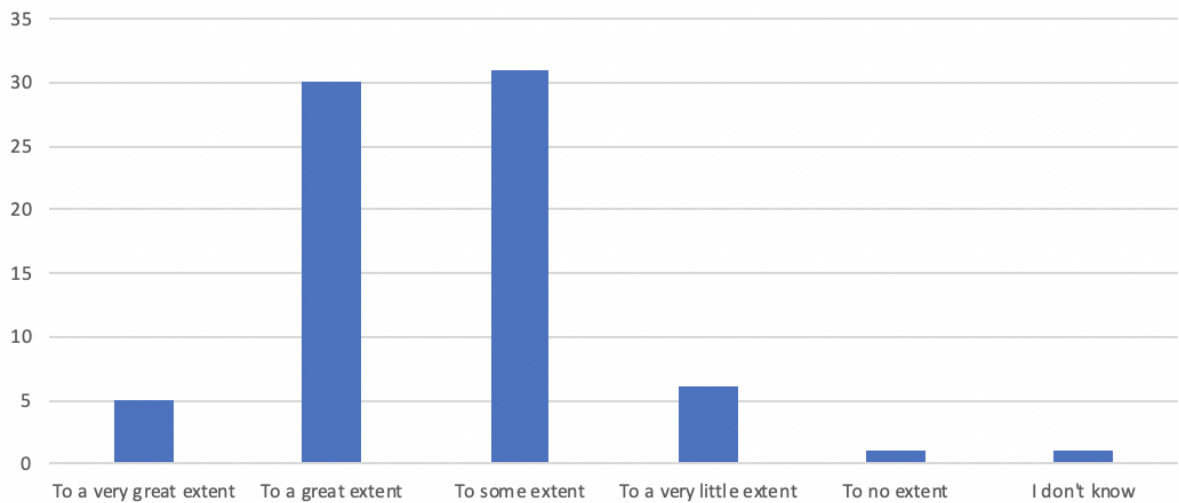


Q16 - Do you believe that terrorists use the established media to spread their propaganda messages?

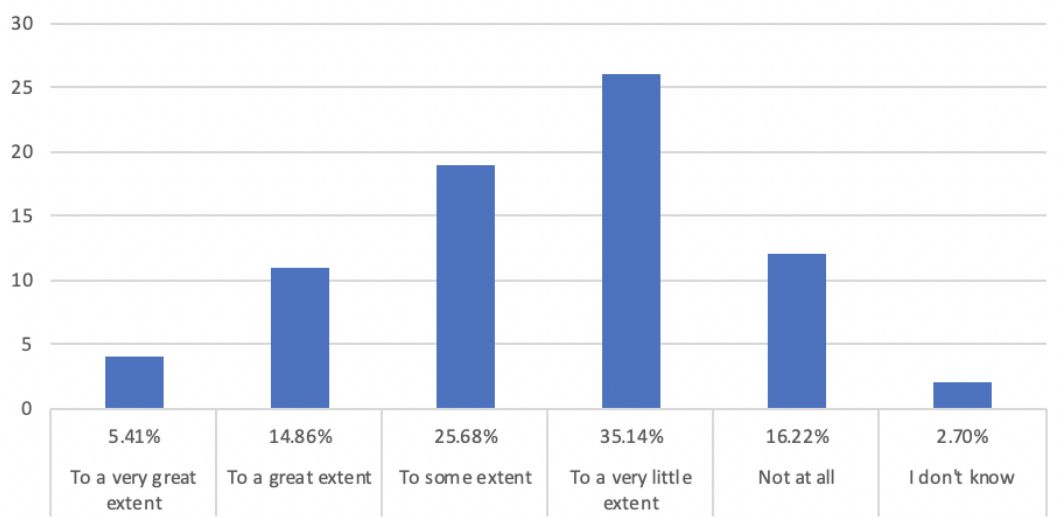


■ To a very great extent
 ■ To a great extent
 ■ To some extent
■ To a very little extent
 ■ Not at all
 ■ I don't know

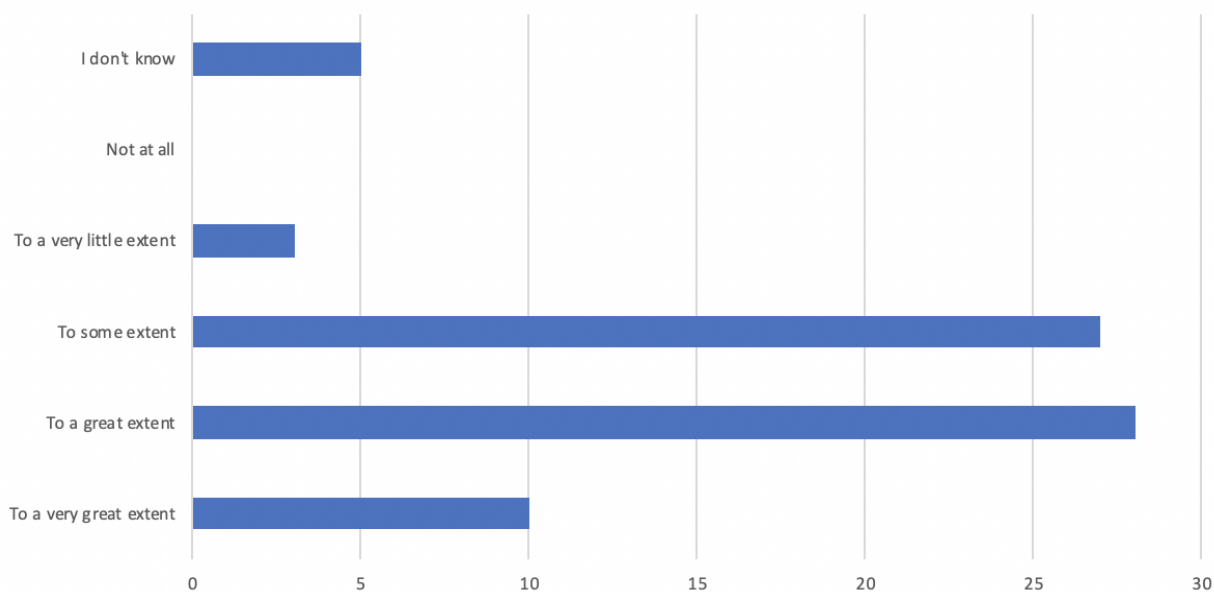
Q17- How challenging is the ethical balance in general when covering stories about terrorism?



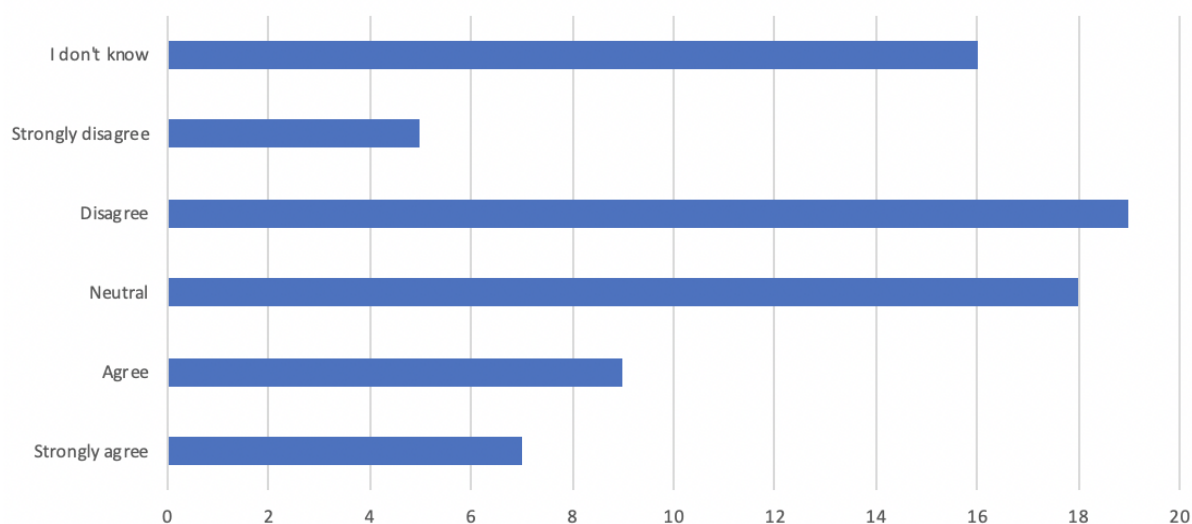
Q20 - Do you feel that you need more guidelines (from the management, editors or others) on ethics when covering stories about terrorism?



Q21 - Do you feel that the editorial line on ethics has been very clear when covering stories about terrorism?



Q22 - Looking back, do you believe that there have been times (in your workplace) when poor ethical decisions have been made when covering terrorism?



Q23 - Do you find that you in the past covered stories about terrorism in ways that you would have done differently today?

