

Alicja Stańco-Wawrzyńska

Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń
& War Studies University in Warsaw (Poland)

Terrorism and Media – an Interactive Modelling of a Message: the Research Framework¹

Abstract: The report presents theoretical framework of relationships between terrorist organisations and media, and it describes them as an interactive modelling of a message. It introduces the concept of mediatisation of terrorism, and it offers a definition of this process. Moreover, the report develops it with six theoretical hypotheses related to: influence of media on selection of terrorists' targets, adaptation of an act of terror to the 'logic of media communication', personalisation of terrorism and celebritisation of terrorists, creation of biased and oversimplified stereotypes, transformation of terrorist objectives into catch-phrases, as well as a role of political violence in agenda-setting of main news broadcasts. The presented concept will be verified in the ongoing comprehensive, quantitative-and-qualitative study on mediatisation of terrorism in American television, that will investigate the process between September 11, 2001 and the Boston Marathon Bombing in 2013.

Keywords: *terrorism; media; modelling of message; mediatisation; celebritisation; stereotyping; agenda-setting*

¹ The report is a result of the research project *Terrorism and media: Interactive Modelling of a Message as a Factor of Terrorism's Mediatization in the American Television*, supported by the National Science Centre, Poland (UMO-2015/19/N/HS5/02540).

The Research Project *Terrorism and media: Interactive Modelling of a Message as a Factor of Terrorism's Mediatization in the American Television* offers a new theoretical perspective, that integrates three areas of academic interest – political science, security studies, and media studies. The transdisciplinary character of research is based on an employment of media studies' tools to a subject of political investigations. It makes possible to explain the phenomenon of links between terrorism and media from a new and innovative perspective, as well as to develop a present state of arts in the discipline.

The main research problem is the question, if in the main news broadcasts (evening news) of the television channels in the United States we can observe an adaptation of terrorist organisations' message to the rules of participation in the mass-communication. It has been asked with reference to a general definition of the mediatization of terrorism, which was operationalised on the basis of a critical analysis of various interpretations of the mediatization itself. The definition states, "mediatization of terrorism is a process, in which terrorism yields its autonomy, becomes dependent on mass media in realisation of its basic and essential (central) functions and is permanently shaped by an interaction with media" (Hjarvard, 2008; 2013; 2014; Strömbäck, 2008; 2010; Strömbäck & Esser, 2014a; 2014b; Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999; Schulz, 2004; 2006; Krotz, 2007; Hepp, 2013; Hepp, Hjarvard & Lundby, 2015).

The main research hypothesis assumes that in the contemporary politics a terrorist attack as a message (of a terrorist organisations' communication with others) is modelled and formatted by an interaction of media, including television, and an organisation itself. Thus, it develops a common observation of benefits of co-existence of mass media and political violence (Hoffman, 2006; Aleksandrowicz, 2010; Wojciechowski, 2013). In the 21st Century their relationships become even more than a 'co-existence' of two independent groups of actors – as they may be described as a 'co-influence' that leads to an interactive modelling and formation of a message (a terrorist attack). The verification of the main hypothesis requires an answer to the essential question, if quantitative and qualitative analyses of main American news broadcasts show features of an adaptation of terrorist organisations' message to rules of participation in the mass-communication. Therefore, the main question can be answered only after the verification of following six detailed hypotheses:

1. The result of interactive influence of media on a terrorist's message in American television channels is a selection of terrorist attacks' targets (Goban-Klas, 2009; Lundby, 2009). Contemporary media, especially the television, prefer selection of shocking news, which enable them to emotionally involve the recipients².

² What is related to its role in influence on social and political attitudes or preferences, see Frederickson & Losada, 2009; Boyatzis et al., 2013; Wawrzyński et al., 2015.

As a result, terrorists prefer to select public places as a scene of their attacks, especially these spots which are relevant and/or symbolically significant for a society and a government. Their preferences include, e.g. public transportation system, governmental and self-governmental facilities, industrial and business facilities, shopping malls, symbols of the nations and gatherings with political, social and economic leaders or successful entrepreneurs. The classification of preferred targets substantiates a prediction of media's influence on terrorist in their process of communicating with others.

2. The form and the scenario of a terrorist attack is adapted to features of media. Thus, in American news broadcast the 'spectacularisation' of terrorist attacks is present and noticeable (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999, p. 35). Terrorists wish to gain media attention, and they aim at presenting their message to as wide as possible range of recipients – they not only consider a place and a schedule of the event, but they also choose a suitable form of it. These actions enable them to get more media attention to acts of terror. The television, alike the Internet, takes advantage of power of images and their impact on the recipient, thus, terrorist attacks are not just described in word, but concurrently they are presented and shared through movies or images. The vision and sound influence both recipient's perception and recipient's emotional response to a stimuli (Berger, 2014), what – as a result – increases her/his interest in a presented story. The television's need to present an 'attractive' and 'interesting' information leads to the recreation of a terrorist attack as a spectacle – its form has to be dramatic, and it has to inspire people's emotions. The act of terror becomes a performed spectacle that competes with other media spectacles for a viewer's attention (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999, p. 35; Goban-Klas, 2009, pp. 91–94), and this process should be considered as an element of the interactive formatting of terrorist message by media.
3. The personalisation of major terrorists in media leads to celebrityisation of them (Rojek, 2001; Driessens et al., 2010; Leslie, 2011). The personalisation of a leading terrorist results with popularisation of an association of one individual, her/his name or her/his nickname with the whole terrorist organisation, as in 'Bin Laden's Al-Qaeda' (Snow & Altheide, 1979; Goban-Klas, 2009, pp. 91–94). Therefore, leading terrorists become 'a face' of their organisation and its label. Media use the character of terrorist organisation's leadership and the emphasise her/his role in violent actions. Presentation of active groups is often focused on its leader's actions, personal life, motivations, psyche, personality, experiences and other details which may be recognised by the recipient as 'attractive' or 'interesting', but not informative. As a result,

the leader becomes commonly recognised as the individual, not as a member of the organisation, and becomes a brand – her/his name or photo is used to popularise oversimplifications or cognitive biases, including these related to the organisation in general, its objectives and past actions. Leading terrorists are personifications of the terrorism and their organisations, and they become popular – thus, currently terrorists are subjects of celebritisation (Herwitz, 2008; Milner, 2010; Rojek, 2001; Leslie, 2011). It was clearly seen in the case of Osama bin Laden, who was commonly recognised as the World's 'terrorist number one', the face of Islamic terrorism and the major public enemy, but at the same time, he was not only considered as the leader and the commander of Al-Qaeda, but also as its symbol and brand (Stańco, 2013). Moreover, he has become the symbol of terrorism in general, and he is present in popular culture even after his death. The establishment of 'a face' of the organisation by terrorists themselves, observable celebritisation of leaders and employment of their images in media is the next aspect of interactive modelling of a message between terrorists and media.

4. American news broadcasts cause popularisation of a stereotype, and a highly simplified image, of the terrorist as Muslim (Freedman & Thussu, 2012; Hess & Kalb, 2003; Hoskins & O'Loughlin, 2010). Media communication, especially the television, forces journalists and data researchers to present information in a quite specific way. Descriptions of the reality often offer biased and oversimplified images of social and political processes. Then, on the basis of these simplifications and social-shared cultural contents, it creates stories (narratives) that are promoted in news broadcasts and political talk-shows. This process stimulates popularisation of stereotypes and other cognitive biases (Bodenhausen et al., 2009, p. 112; Sanderson, 2010, p. 340; Sinderman et al., 1999, pp. 255–258; Wawrzyński, 2013, pp. 1–3). In general, American television offers a common stereotype of the terrorist which characterises him as a male Muslim with Middle Eastern origins, in turban, who with a bomb wishes to destroy the Western World and its values in his suicidal mission. The study investigates following features of the stereotype: (a) colour of skin, including racial prejudice, (b) terrorist's artefacts, (c) ethnic origins, (d) religion and confession, (e) anti-Western attitudes, including antidemocratic and anticapitalistic preferences, and (f) suicidal intentions. The theoretical framework presented in this report is based on the assumption that stereotyping is an essential element of mediatised modelling of a message, and it is a way, how television co-constructs a message send by terrorists to the mass audience.

5. In news broadcasts terrorist's motivations and objectives are oversimplified and highly generalised, thus they become a simple and general catch-phrase (Hoskins & O'Loughlin, 2010; Cottle, 2006). Terrorist's motivations and goals are also simplified and generalised with reference to the logic of media communication. Journalists present just and only one general motivation which is recreated into a slogan, and which becomes a label of the organisation. Media construct their message through a combination of simple phrases (that describe major motivation of terrorists), but they prefer these interpretations which are easy to memorise and catch (Snow & Altheide, 1979). As a result, in terms of the rules of mass communication, a media event becomes 'a pseudo-event', because presentation of a terrorist attack as a pseudo-event seems to be more attractive in the television broadcast (Schulz, 2004, pp. 87–101; Wojtkowski, 2012, pp. 44–67; Boorstin, 1982). Therefore, oversimplified and generalised motivations of terrorists presented in media should be considered as the fifth element of an interactive modelling of a message.
6. Finally, news about a terrorist attack are placed as the first, the second or the third in the agenda-setting of major American news broadcasts (Hjarvard, 2014; Lundby, 2014; Schulz, 2006). The recreation of terrorist attacks as pseudo-events, stereotyping terrorists and celebritisation of their leaders lead to increasing attractiveness of terrorist actions in mass media (Schulz, 2004, p. 93). Thus, the study investigates a construction of agenda-setting as an element of interactive modelling of a message between terrorists and media. The position of news on terrorism is measured, and it enabled us to investigate presentation of a terrorist attack as a political event in major American news broadcasts, as well as to investigate a presumed attractiveness of these actions in terms of media communication. Thus, media determine social opinions on the significance of political violence and the terrorism (Hepp & Krotz, 2014).

The general objective of the study is a measurement of the modelling and formatting of a message through interactions between terrorist organisations and media as an element of the mediatisation of terrorism. It also investigates increasing interdependence between terrorists and media as a way to verify and explain theoretical aspects of the process of terrorist attacks' co-construction in an interaction between these two groups of actors, and it asks a question if these relationships may be observed in the new-type terrorism, and have they become stronger in the era of Al-Qaeda or are they modified in the times of the Islamic State, focused on the Internet as a principal medium for communication with audience.

Presented theoretical framework is based on following theoretical assumptions:
 (a) the process of mediatisation is observable in the American media in the highest

degree, which surpasses degrees observable in other countries (Hindman & Wiegand, 2008), (b) the process of mediatisation is observable in television in the highest degree, which surpasses degrees observable in other media (Schulz, 2006), (c) media, with compliance to their logic of communication, interpret and assess terrorist actions, organisations' leadership, bombers, their motivations, acts of terror, responses to political violence and reactions to it, and political leaders' actions to prevent and counter terrorism – media organise inputs and outputs of the system (Schulz, 2006), (d) media are the major source of information about the terrorism and terrorist organisations, and a society shares knowledge popularised by media – moreover, media are a basic channel of communication between terrorists and others (Strömbäck, 2010) and, finally, (e) contents of a message and its 'carrier' are dependent on 'the logic of media communication' and 'the logic of terrorism' (Strömbäck, 2010; Snow & Altheide, 1979).

Media studies are still a new and developing discipline that has been defining its frameworks. It is the reason publications on relationships between terrorism and media are rather general, and they introduce cultural perspective to political violence as a new perspective (Stańco-Wawrzyńska, 2016; Karatzogianni, 2012). Most often, the literature discusses mutual benefits (Freedman & Thussu, 2012; Aleksandrowicz, 2010; Norris et al, 2003; Hess & Kalb, 2003) or it describes experiences of journalists who worked on acts of terror and terrorist organisations (Maniszewska, 2010, Barnett & Reynolds, 2008; Hess & Kalb, 2003). Therefore, the possibility to introduce and develop a new research approach on the 'borderlands' of political science, media studies and security studies is a major motivation for presentation of the theoretical framework of the mediatisation of terrorism in this report.

References:

- Aleksandrowicz, T. (2010). "Medialność jako konstruktywne znanie aktu terrorystycznego". In K. Liedel & S. Mocek (Eds.), *Terroryzm w medialnym obrazie świata* (pp. 13–32). Warszawa: Collegium Civitas–Wydawnictwo TRIO–Instytut Studiów Politycznych Polskiej Akademii Nauk.
- Barnett, B., & Reynolds, A. (2008). *Terrorism and the Press: An Uneasy Relationship (Mediating American History)*. Frankfurt am Main–New York: Peter Lang Publishing.
- Berger, A. (2014). *Media Analysis Techniques*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.
- Bodenhausen, G.V., Todd, A.R., & Richeson, J.A. (2009). "Controlling Prejudice and Stereotyping. Antecedents, Mechanisms, and Context". In T.D. Nelson (Ed.), *Handbook of Prejudice, Stereotyping, and Discrimination* (pp. 111–135). New York: Psychology Press.
- Boorstin, D. (1982). *The Image: a Guide to Pseudo-Events in America*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Boyatzis, R.E., Smith, M.L., & Beveridge, A.J. (2013). "Coaching with Compassion: Inspiring

- Health, Well-Being, and Development in Organizations". *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 49(2), pp. 153–178.
- Cottle, S. (2006). *Mediatized Conflict: Understanding Media and Conflicts in the Contemporary World*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Driessens, O., Raeymaeckers, K., Verstraetena, H., & Vandenbussche S. (2010). "Personalization according to politicians: A practice theoretical analysis of mediatization". *Communications: European Journal of Communication Research*, 35(3). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1515/comm.2010.017>
- Fredrickson, B.L., & Losada, M.F. (2005). "Positive Affect and the Complex Dynamics of Human Flourishing". *American Psychologist*, 60(7), pp. 678–686.
- Freedman, D., & Thusuu, D.K. (2012). *Media and Terrorism: Global Perspectives*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.
- Goban-Klas, T. (2009). *Media i terroryści. Czy zastraszą nas na śmierć?* Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego.
- Hepp, A. (2013). *Cultures of Mediatization*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Hepp, A., Hajrward, S., & Lundby, K. (2015). "Mediatization: Theorizing the Interplay between Media, Culture and Society". *Media, Culture & Society*, 37(2), pp. 1–11
- Hepp, A., & Krotz, F. (2014). *Mediatized Worlds: Culture and Society in a Media Age*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Herwitz, D. (2008). *The Star as Icon: Celebrity in the Age of Mass Consumption*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Hess, S., & Kalb, M. (2003). *The Media and the War on Terrorism*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.
- Hindman, D.B., & Wiegand, K. (2008). "The big three's prime-time decline: a technological and social context". *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 52(1), pp. 119–135. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08838150701820924>.
- Hjarvard, S. (2008). "The Mediatization of Society. A Theory of the Media as Agents of Social and Cultural Change". *Nordicom Review*, 29(2), pp. 105–134.
- Hjarvard, S. (2013). *The Mediatization of Culture and Society*. London: Routledge.
- Hjarvard, S. (2014). "Mediatization and cultural and social change: an institutional perspective". In K. Lundby (Ed.), *Mediatization of Communication* (pp. 199–226). Berlin–Boston: De Gruyter.
- Hoffman, B. (2006). *Inside Terrorism*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Hofman, I. (2016). "The New Journalism: an Attempt at the Model Reconstruction". *Polish Political Science Yearbook*, 45, pp. 391–398.
- Hoskins, A., & O'Loughlin, B. (2010). *War and Media*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Karatzogianni, A. (2012). *Violence and War in Culture and the Media: Five Disciplinary Lenses*. New York: Routledge.
- Krotz, F. (2007). "The meta-process of 'mediatization' as a conceptual frame". *Global Media and Communication*, 3, pp. 256–260.
- Leslie, L.Z. (2011). *Celebrity in the 21st Century: a Reference Handbook*. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO.
- Lundby, K. (2009). *Mediatization: Concept, Changes, Consequences*. Frankfurt am Main–New York: Peter Lang Publishing.
- Lundby, K. (2014). *Mediatization of Communication*. Berlin–Boston: De Gruyter.
- Maniszewska, K. (2010). "Primum non nocere. Medialny obraz terroryzmu w świetle dziennikar-

- skich kodeksów etycznych”. In K. Liedel & S. Mocek (Eds.), *Terroryzm w medialnym obrazie świata* (pp. 201–216). Warszawa: Collegium Civitas–Wydawnictwo TRIO–Instytut Studiów Politycznych Polskiej Akademii Nauk.
- Mazzoleni, G., & Schulz, W. (1999). “>Mediatization< of Politics: A Challenge for Democracy?”. *Political Communication*, 16(3), pp. 247–261. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/105846099198613>.
- Milner, M. (2010). “Is Celebrity a New Kind of Status System?”. *Society*, 47(5), pp. 379–387. DOI: 10.1007/s12115–010–9347-x.
- Norris, P., Kern, M., & Just, M. (2003). *Framing Terrorism: The New Media, the Government and the Public*. London: Routledge.
- Rojek, C. (2001). *Celebrity*. London: Reaktions Books.
- Sanderson, C.A. (2010). *Social Psychology*. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons.
- Schulz, W. (2004). “Reconstructing Mediatization as an Analytical Concept”. *European Journal of Communication*, 19(1), pp. 87–101. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323104040696>.
- Schulz, W. (2006). *Komunikacja polityczna. Koncepcje teoretyczne i wyniki badań empirycznych na temat mediów masowych w polityce*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego.
- Sinderman, P.M., Brody, R.A., & Tetlock, P.E. (1999). *Reasoning and Choice. Explorations in Political Psychology*. Cambridge–New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Snow, R., & Altheide, D. (1979). *Media Logic*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.
- Stańco, A. (2013). *Terrorystyci jako celebryci* (Unpublished dissertation). Toruń: Uniwersytet Mikołaja Kopernika.
- Stańco-Wawrzyńska, A. (2016). “Athina Karatzogianni (Ed.). Violence and War in Culture and the Media: Five Disciplinary Lenses. New York: Routledge, 2012. 280 pp., \$39.95 paperback. ISBN: 978–0–415–72134–9”. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 28(1), pp. 180–182. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2015.1112195>.
- Strömbäck, J. (2008). “Four Phases of Mediatization: An Analysis of the Mediatization of Politics”. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 13(3) pp. 228–246. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161208319097>.
- Strömbäck, J. (2010). “Mediatization and Perceptions of the Media’s Political Influence”. *Journalism Studies*, 12(4), pp. 423–439.
- Strömbäck, J., & Esser, F. (2014a). “Introduction. Making sense of the mediatization of politics”. *Journalism Studies*, 15(3), pp. 243–255. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2014.897412>.
- Strömbäck, J., & Esser, F. (2014b). *Mediatization of Politics: Understanding the Transformation of Western Democracies*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Wawrzyński, P. (2013). “The Past, Polish Politics of Memory, and Stereotyping: an intercultural perspective”. *E-Revista de Estudos Interculturais do CEI*, 1, pp. 1–23.
- Wawrzyński, P., Muszyński, M.A., Czarnek, G., & Schattkowsky, R. (2015). “Individual Differences and Attitudes towards the Government’s Remembrance Policy”. *Polish Political Science Yearbook*, 44, pp. 125–139.
- Wojciechowski, S. (2013). “The Need for New Research on Terrorism”. *Polish Political Science Yearbook*, 42, pp. 34–46.
- Wojtkowski, Ł. (2012). *Mediatyzacja polityki: Amerykańska kampania prezydencka 2008*. Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UMK.

Author

Mrs Alicja Stańco-Wawrzyńska

Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, Department of Journalism and Social Communication & War Studies University in Warsaw, Department of Information Security. Contact details: ul. S. Batorego 39L, 87–100 Toruń, Poland; e-mail: stanco.wawrzynska@gmail.com.