Reasoning about terror in the mass media

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Abstract

Using UCLA's NewsScape Archive of International Television News, we tracked American and international news stories and discussions as they developed on 22 July and in the following days and months. Our primary focus is the media's role in reasoning about the attacks. How does the news explain an event, when very little information is actually available? How does it decide who is accountable in a situation, and what parts of society need fixing? Often revered as the fourth branch of government, the media is looked upon to gather, filter, reason through, and make sense of information. We argue that this process of reasoning is central to the news media's watchdog function. Through our research we built a five-stage model to illustrate how causal reasoning is performed in television news. By comparing American and Norwegian responses to 22 July, we see how social norms and values can affect the way we make cause-and-effect connections, which in turn affects the changes we believe are possible and necessary in society.

Introduction

Perceiving opportunities for social learning in the face of a terrorist attack has been one of the focal points of the NECORE project, which this article forms a part of. What are the lessons that Norwegian society can draw from the events of 22 July, and what can the observing societies learn from the novel elements of the Norwegian response? How do we negotiate the tension between the desire to be better prepared and the fear of future panic-induced negative shifts? Can we formulate a normative lesson from the media's attempt to negotiate the challenge of an inadequate police response in the midst of trauma?

The events of 22 July 2011 included a car bomb in the center of Oslo, followed by a sustained shooting rampage at a youth camp on Utøya. Throughout the afternoon and evening, victims and survivors communicated constantly with their friends and family through mobile phones and social media. The local information flow was rapid and relatively efficient; nevertheless, there was an initial period of profound and debilitating confusion about what was really happening. Mass media served as the biggest conduit of information; the entire world followed the event from the very beginning via social media, international news, and local news channels. Even within the epicenters of the city, most people received updates, both accurate and inaccurate, through mass media.

Television provided the most timely, detailed, and sustained source of information during the attacks and reactions in the days and months following. In this chapter, we examine the role of television in initiating, mediating, and moderating the public debate around the significance of 22 July. Using UCLA's NewsScape Archive of International Television News, we focus primarily on U.S. coverage of the attacks, and compare its response to that of Norway. The aim is to illuminate the role of news media in reasoning about the attacks – from reporting the facts on the ground to explaining them, from assigning responsibility to formulating strategies for the future. We introduce a five-stage model for causal reasoning in the news that evaluates how well the media make cause-and-effect connections, and how these connections affect public discussion and ultimately, social learning and change.

Terrible news

The canonical function of news media is to report the facts as they happen. The gold standard of a free press is the free flow of information to optimally inform citizens and position them to make rational decisions. This power, however, is easily abused. In the late nineteenth century, Wardman coined the term "yellow journalism" to characterize the proliferation of scandalous stories, scary headlines, faked interviews, overdramatic images, and desperate attempts to entertain rather than inform. The media have been criticized as "gatekeepers of information" (White, 1950), with an "agenda-setting power" (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), unfairly deciding what audiences have and don't have access to. Iyengar (1994) introduced "media framing" to demonstrate media influence on policy and public opinion, while Herman & Chomsky (1988) criticized elites for monopolizing media, and using their ownership to serve their financial interests.

Today, enthusiasm for the positive social potential of the news is at a historic low. According to a recent poll by the Pew Research Center (2018), 39 % of American respondents do not believe that the news does a good job in reporting the most important current events, and 43 % do not believe that news is reported accurately. Despite these dismal ratings, however, respondents endorse Thomas Jefferson's (1804) assessment that the free press is the most effectual avenue to the truth—a majority of them defending the news' watchdog role in society (Pew Research Center, 2017).

A useful starting point is to grant that no single perspective captures the entire landscape, and that rival media theories are to some significant degree orthogonal, illuminating independent aspects of the event, and thus complementary. We need rich and diverse descriptions of what news media do along multiple dimensions in order to capture an immensely complex process. We propose that what characterizes news media at a more fundamental level is causal reasoning—how the news analyzes an event in terms of its causes, and how it identifies points of intervention to predict social consequences and correctly attribute responsibility. This claim has both social and cognitive dimensions, which present a series of interesting challenges for media studies.

Why causal reasoning matters

Causal reasoning is a cognitive skill that develops at a young age, and later plays a part in planning, overall mental health, and perceptions of rewards and punishment (Platt and Hayden, 2011). By age 5, children begin to elaborate multiple causes and possible positive and negative consequences of an event (Grist and Field, 2011). A failure in causal reasoning, a seemingly simple cognitive task, can lead to major issues such as worry habits or mental disorder. Inference Based Treatment (IBT) is one way to mitigate this. Aardema and O'Connor (2012) first designed IBT to treat Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) patients. IBT exercises helped patients tame their imaginations, make reasonable cause-and-effect connections, and balance the differences between facts, possibilities, and probabilities. Subjects who participated in IBT exercises experienced significant reductions in negative mood states, inferential confusion, and obsession. (Aardema et al., 2012).

David Hume ([1738] 1896) was among the first to assert and argue philosophically that observation and experience are necessary to causality—a contrast to the superstitious views of causation that were so prevalent at the time. But when Judea Pearl (1996) applied Hume's principles to computer science, he found a mathematical "nightmare!". Pearl found that events do not follow linear or transitive properties of logic, as Hume had implied. Instead, causation is largely communicative; it relies on vocabulary, common sense, and intricate logic that do not easily fit into a programmer's equation. Hart and Honore (1985) ran into similar complexities when applying causation to the legal domain. Judges and lawyers consider not just the chain of events of a crime, but also political factors such as judicial precedent, public policy, and legal loopholes, and social factors such as cultural ethics and norms (for example, employers are liable for their workers' performances, and parents are liable for their children's actions). Courts require a systematic exploration of alternative and counterfactual scenarios: what were the circumstances of this case, who else is involved, what choices did the defendant make, what choices did the plaintiff face? The answers to these questions lead to very different extremes—from a two-year sentence to life in jail, from total acquittal to possible execution.

Causal reasoning has been shown to play a key role in mental health, scientific experimentation, and legal action. However, causality has not been examined on a mass communicative scale, or applied to an institution where all the elements of cause-and-effect come into play: television news. Television is a type of display space that commands our attention and also reflects the human mind. Broadcast networks have the resources and manpower to gather facts immediately after a story breaks. They then package these messages into multi-modal, mass communicative news stories that—complete with sound, visuals, footage, commentary and nationwide reach—move the masses and spur them to action. Important social, political or economic issues may be suppressed if media never brings them to public consciousness. We call special attention to media because it not only reports the facts, but also arranges them into a chain of cause and consequence. From the social perspective, causal reasoning allows the news to fulfill its foundational functions: to help citizens understand the world around them so they can make informed decisions in their personal, political, economic, and social lives.

A five-stage model

In looking at coverage of July 22, the task of developing an accurate understanding of the causes and consequences of an event turned out to be quite complex. The media often pride themselves on providing "eye-witness news" and reporting "just the facts", but they actually include so much more. Sure, facts tell us *what happened*, but we need to know much more to achieve social learning: *why did it happen*, *why didn't it happen*, *how could it have been different,* and *what can we do so it does (or does not) happen again?* We present a five-stage model illustrating how cause-and-effect connections in the news ultimately help to achieve social learning.

Stage 1: Evidence

The first mention of the Oslo attacks in the NewsScape database is a breaking news story on CNN's Newshour at 07:04 PDT, 16:04 CET in

Oslo. News anchor Don Lemon speaks to a CNN reporter in London, who repeats an NTB report: there has been one or two major explosions in a government building in Oslo that houses the Prime Minister; he is safe, but eyewitnesses report there are people bleeding on the streets. As they speak, the screen displays a picture of the blasted building, shattered windows and smoke. They speculate possible causes of the explosion – perhaps an accidental gas leak or a calculated terrorist attack – but emphasize they are working hard to confirm the facts. Lemon comments that Oslo is "a relatively safe place" and that an attack like this is unusual. At 07:40 PDT he telephones an eyewitness, and grills him about the details of his experience and the emotions he and the people around him are feeling. Five minutes later they bring in NRK reporter Linda Reinholdtsen, who reports that the bomb appears to have exploded on the Prime Minister's helicopter landing pad on the fourth floor. Some of this information is correct, some is not. In the initial hours after the attack, the journalists are scrambling to establish the "what happened".

What facts do the news present, and consequently what factually follows? The news gathers evidence at greater volumes and faster speeds than any other medium. The twenty-first century has seen a surge in the capacity to collect and transmit information. Smart phones and social media channels such as Twitter allow for the rapid distribution of pictures, videos and comments, shared with millions of viewers just minutes after being captured across the world.

By recording and narrating what is happening, the media provide the raw material for understanding and learning about significant events. Was it one explosion or two? Is the Prime Minister dead or alive? Answers to these questions don't just hand themselves off; they require witnesses, visuals, and the pursuit of eyewitnesses and subject experts. Information is first gathered, then written carefully by journalists, manipulated by editors and graphic designers, and arranged into a digestible and sensationalized story for the public. Most facts are not actually newsworthy, and the facts that are newsworthy are carefully selected, then nicely packaged with lengthy montages, emotional images, and dramatic expressions.

Take for example something as simple as the precise location of an event, recreated on CNN by a slow zoom of the globe to Norway, to Oslo, and finally to the 3D images of the government district. These visuals create the conceptual frame within which a narrative could be situated. Technologies like Google Maps bring the situation into perspective, and help viewers picture the entire scene, down to the very street and building. MSNBC enhanced *facts* like "1 Bomb At Least 7 Dead" and "Lone Gunman Opened Fire" with darker shades, large font, dramatic lighting, gloomy vignettes, and moving images in the background (figure 10.1 and 10.2). Their Los Angeles affiliate KNBC used similar editorial tactics, showing a vigil in Oslo with another bold headline: "93 Dead" (though the final death total from the Oslo and Utøya attacks was 77; figure 10.3).

"Facts" in the news are actually *selected* and *sensationalized* with non-factual features—graphics, music, audio clips and emphatic headlines. The manipulation brings about a "telelusion effect", in which viewers at home see themselves in the scene. This in turn creates "emotion potential", a tension that spurs audience action or, at the very least, heightens interest in the story and empathy for those involved. News

Figure 10.1: Bystanders and medical professionals help the wounded after a bomb explodes in Oslo. (NBC *Headlines Nightly News*, 2011-07-22,1830 US. This image is not covered by the terms of the book's CC license and cannot be reused without rightsholder permission.)

Figure 10.2: The island of Utøya, where a gunman opened fire during the Norwegian Labour Party's AUF youth camp. (NBC *Headlines Nightly News,* 2011-07-22,1830 US. This image is not covered by the terms of the book's CC license and cannot be reused without rightsholder permission.)

Figure 10. 3: Hundreds gather in Oslo to remember the victims of the 2011 Norway attacks. (KNBC *Nightly News Sunday*, 2011-07-24, 17:30 US. This image is not covered by the terms of the book's CC license and cannot be reused without rightsholder permission.)

media help audiences to construct a simulation of a causally connected series of events—this happened, this is happening.

However, the facts that emerge, even if performed accurately and in a timely manner, do no more than scratch the surface of the function of the media. We do not have the kind of knowledge we want until we are

able to reconstruct a far more detailed simulation of what happened, a simulation with multiple components and complex consequences. Even as Reinholdtsen works to nail down the facts of the explosion, she exclaims,

> We have no idea what happened, it's all kind of chaotic. We've never had an explosion like this in Norway since the Second World War. All we know is that there has been a very, very powerful explosion. We don't know if it's a bomb, if it's a gas explosion, what it could be. I'm working in the national broadcasting company right now, and we're all desperately trying to figure out what's happened. I can tell you it's really, really scary. Everyone is really upset and nobody knows what's happened.

The stark facts on their own are meaningless. The explosion, the shattered glass, the injured on the street serve only to alarm; paradoxically, they do not count as constituting knowledge of what happened. In response to the interviewer's question about whether anyone is claiming responsibility for the attack, Reinholdtsen transitions to the second stage of the causal reasoning model.

Stage 2: Explanation

Once the details of the scene in Oslo were reported, the media's focus shifted to the material cause: was it a gas explosion or a bomb? A gas explosion wasn't likely, as Norway does not distribute gas to households or offices. Reinholdtsen grasps at straws – she struggles to fit the event into a frequency-based understanding of what types of events are likely to happen, from a Bayesian reasoning perspective: "We've never had an explosion like this in Norway since the Second World War." The emotion of upset is generated in part as a delta against this prior and cherished frame of expectations: we thought we were safe, we counted on being able to think we were safe. Instinctively, we realize that what has happened now changes the course of what may happen next, prima facie, without knowing where it came from. In declaring that the situation is "really, really scary," Reinholdtsen highlights the unstated fear that this is an intentional attack.

The notion that this was indeed a bomb is later confirmed by the Norwegian police. At 17:00 CET, 08:00 PDT Fox News' "Happening Now" starts with breaking news of the attack and at least one fatality. At the bottom of the hour, correspondent Greg Burke, with an imposing backdrop of Jerusalem behind him, implies that the Oslo attack is an instance of Islamic terror. He asks, "So what could have happened? Nobody taking responsibility as of just yet, but you have to keep in mind that Norway is taking part in Libya, they're taking part in Afghanistan, they also – like their Scandinavian neighbor Denmark – did have an uproar over the cartoons." The conceptual network suddenly widens: the car bomb in Oslo is now proposed to be causally related to NATO's wars in Libya and Afghanistan, or the controversy around the cartoons of the prophet Muhammed. At 19:18 CET, 10:18 PDT, Fox News brings in John Bolton, former US Ambassador to the UN for an expert opinion. Bolton confidently asserts this is "a very un-Norwegian act, so the odds of it coming from someone other than a native Norwegian, I think, are extremely high." "It's a classic terrorist effort," Bolton concludes, "and it's going to have a dramatic impact on Norway." Wrong, wrong, right.

These first few hours of U.S. mass media coverage provided a reasonably accurate physical representation of what had happened, persistently wrapped in the wrong explanation. On KCBS Evening News Bob Orr reports, "Believe it or not Norway has been on Al-Qaeda's hit list for about eight years now," since leader Ayman al-Zawahiri threatened Norway for its participation in the war in Afghanistan. On CNN's Situation Room, contributor Brian Todd presents several connections between Norway and radical Islam. The leader of Ansar al Islam resides in Norway, but was recently charged with incitement to violence. Norway was also involved in the "*Jyllands-Posten* Muhammad cartoons controversy", when Danish newspapers published a controversial cartoon of Prophet Mohammed (figure 10.4). Striking images fill the screen during Todd's segment, showing Muslims burning the Danish flag in response to the *Jyllands-Posten* publication (figure 10.5).

By the time Anders Behring Breivik was arrested – a 32 year old Norwegian man, Islamophobe, self-styled Christian, Fundamentalist, and political extremist – major news networks had already aired video reels

Figure 10.4: Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten was criticized for publishing a series of controversial cartoons of Prophet Muhammed in 2005. (CNN, *Situation Room*, 2011-07-22, 21:00. This image is not covered by the terms of the book's CC license and cannot be reused without rightsholder permission.)

Figure 10. 5: The Muslim community protests in response to the Jyllands-Posten Muhammad cartoons controversy. (CNN, *Situation Room*, 2011-07-22, 21:00. This image is not covered by the terms of the book's CC license and cannot be reused without rightsholder permission.)

of radical Islamists in Europe, and images of al-Qaeda members possibly linked to the attack. Explanations in the news often involve the "terrible news paradigm" – the fact that terrible events often get terrible coverage. This is especially true for live coverage, which has little time for journalistic routines like credible sourcing or editorial scrutiny (Reynolds & Barnett,

2003). The news anchors who happen to be on duty at the time are left scrambling to determine the facts and assemble a coherent narrative, whether or not they have the expert knowledge to do so. Information is often reported, then retracted. One small detail can lead to an entire segment that has little or nothing to do with the event. From a causal reasoning standpoint, the news creates what Pearl calls the "adjustment problem" (1996): factors included in a causal analysis can alter or even reverse cause-and-effect connections. Unlike Pearl's computer science work, causal reasoning in the real world cannot be controlled or manipulated. Journalists are not able to run experiments or test hypotheses before going live. They are forced to identify variables and controlled variables within the situation at hand, assess potentially different outcomes, and at the same time, consider their audience's ideologies and their network's agenda.

These first explanations typically fit an event into a well-established explanatory frame and a dense network of pre-existing assumptions. There is an immediate payoff with this: it confirms what we have already been thinking, creates a sense of excitement over the power of our own reasoning, strengthens existing commitments, and relieves us of having to think any further about the matter. Viewers may find this payoff attractive, and networks may find the practice of invoking a narrow suite of explanations an effective strategy to keep their viewers engaged and enthusiastic. There are internal limits to the amount of energy and attention an audience is going to be willing to allocate to a news story: if the narrative is too unfocused, the story too long-winded, or the conceptual networks invoked in the explanation too unfamiliar, audiences will stop watching. This latent communicative potential is not defined absolutely; strategies of communication may succeed in imparting new knowledge even in adverse circumstances, for instance by the skillful deployment of creative conceptual blends. However, it cannot be ignored: the act of creating the news must take into account the cognitive resources their audiences are ready to commit. It is unfair to criticize the media for simplifying: if the causal framework of an event can be effectively and accurately simplified, viewers will be legitimately grateful for journalism that calls a spade a spade. On the other hand, the cost of oversimplification is just as obvious: your account may end up paradoxically missing the mark.

We urge viewers to stay cautious about the assumptions and narratives the news creates. What explanations make the editorial cut? Whose voices are heard? Hilton's studies on conversation and causality argue that "good explanations" are truthful and relevant to the *why* question (1990). Hilton warns that explanations can be constrained by interpersonal goals and attributional biases, which we can now see reflected in mass communication as well. A news story doesn't end after reporting *what happened*, but goes on to find and answer more questions linked to causal reasoning: *what did not happen, what could we have done, what could have and should have been in an ideal situation and under a perfect institution*?
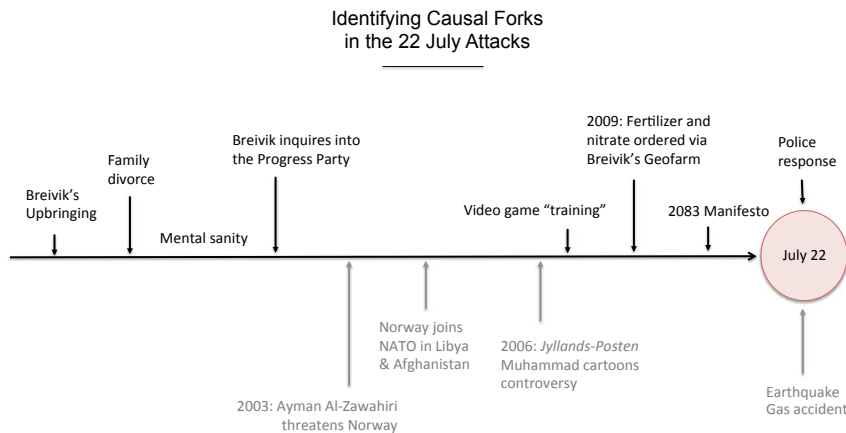
Stage 3: Causal Surgery

Figure 10.6: Identifying causal forks in the 22 July attacks. (Ilustration made by the authors.)

The third stage is no longer a simulation or reconstruction of reality (stages I and II), but a reconstruction of an idealized counter factuality—a process we call "causal surgery", and a term we borrow from Judea Pearl's work on causation in mathematics. Causal surgery is the act of reconstructing events down to a level of detail where you begin to see the possibility spaces available to the agents at the time, in the heat of action. This causal model is required in order to identify a counterfactual: what *could have* happened. This counterfactual is critical to learning: what we

are interested in learning about is not primarily the material facts, or even the material and mental processes that caused them. The true object of learning is to understand where it could have been possible to intervene, so as to change the course of events. This learning requires causal surgery.

The mass media may or may not be willing to devote the resources required to achieve this goal. To the extent the media are unwilling to engage in the hard work of reconstructing not only what happened, but also what could have happened, the ability of the public sphere to learn from the event is hampered. In the days following 22 July, the news media circulated several stories from several perspectives: stories about Breivik (his parents' divorce, his political radicalism, the steps he took to prepare for the attack), stories surrounding the victims (the grief of parents, the experience of students and survivors), and stories from Norwegian officials (interviews with Prime Minister Stoltenberg and police members). The news started to pay particular attention to the parents of the victims, who were enraged by the fact that the police had taken over 90 minutes to stop Breivik's shooting spree on Utøya. These narratives heightened the emotion potential of the issue and forced the public to look more critically at police failures on July 22.

Within these narratives, the news explore windows of possible intervention: points in time and space where a better outcome *could have been* achieved, had the right procedures been followed or the right decisions made. For example, Randall Larsen, Director at the Institute for Homeland Security, reported on KCBS, "someone who worked with him or knew him or in his family" could have easily prevented the attacks if they had only warned authorities about his peculiar behavior (KCBS Early Show). In this "counter-reconstruction", social learning is determined by an alternate reality, one where the desired outcome (an earlier arrest, fewer casualties) could have been realized. The causal surgery stage shows that there are several points of intervention: many things could and should have happened so that *x* would never have happened.

When done correctly, the examination of alternative realities is not simply a construction of counterfactuals, but an attempt at determining what was in fact possible at various points in the chain of past events. Ultimately, it is only by comparing different possible courses of events

that we can meaningfully identify causality: the cause is the action at the point where the world forks. In this way, causal surgery applies prospection (Seligman et al., 2013) to the past. Our inferences from past prospection are often uncertain: if Grubbegata (the street next to the bombed government building) had been secured, would Breivik have moved the attack elsewhere? Past prospection must deal with probabilities that cannot be tested; each historical event is unique. Nevertheless, it is an activity that the news are expected to engage in, and must engage in in order to learn from the event, determine where things could and should have been done differently, and by whom.

Stage 4: Responsibility

Our case study is an example of a highly publicized event that leads to major social shifts and government reform. The cries for justice—amplified by news reports and social media—led the Norwegian parliament to bypass the law and bring together a commission to examine the facts of July 22. The result was the Gjørv Report, an extensive investigation of Norway's leadership, security measures, police operations, and emergency preparedness that aimed to establish "social learning" and hold members of society accountable. Several officials resigned as a result, including Police Director Øystein Mæland (Sørlie et al., 2012). Even Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg was urged to step down on the front page of VG, one of Norway's leading newspapers. Although Stoltenberg did not resign, the example illustrates the media's ability to assign recursive, or second order responsibility. Where the law might stop with Breivik, the media continues to hold even third parties accountable.

But how do we decide that something or someone could have positively changed the course of an event? We suggest three components to determining responsibility: what is possible in a situation, what is likely given the circumstances, and what is actually valuable (ideologically, economically, politically, dramatically); figure 10.7. Newsworthy stories that lead to realistic policies are found at the intersection of all three. From the get go, news teams approach a story already informed by a particular set of values, and a particular theory of what is possible. They mold this state
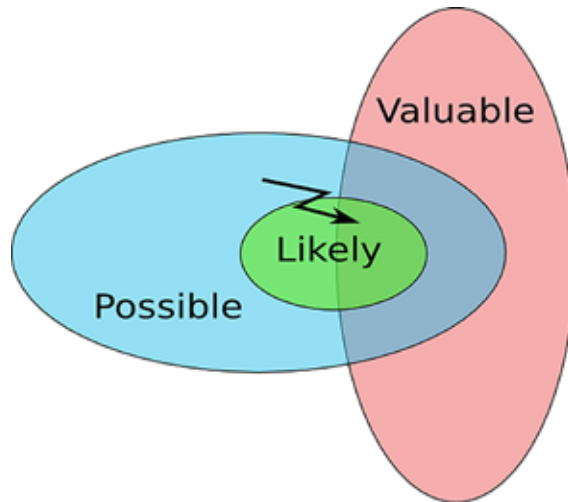
Figure 10.7: Three components to determine responsibility.

space according to their own perceptions; and report stories within the limits of these spaces.

We found two versions of the possibility-value topology when comparing American and Norwegian news coverage of the July 22 attacks. On one hand is an "inclusive" state, where the value space is quite large. "Inclusive" societies prioritize social membership and social responsibility, which in turn opens up the possibility for political policies and community efforts that support negotiation, and protection against inequality or bullying. On the other hand is an "exclusive" state, where the value space is much narrower. Here, individualism is valued most of all, which makes possible policies such as the protection of privacy, but makes impossible policies such as universal healthcare. Both Norwegian and American cultures have "inclusive" and "exclusive" theories about human nature; but by investigating their respective news channels, we found that each culture exhibits a more dominant topology.

We found an exclusive value space in U.S. news coverage, in which an individual's actions is scrutinized more closely than the social level. Take for example the highly controversial issue of gun ownership in the United States. After the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in December 2012, gun laws in America gained more attention in the news. Soon after, President Obama and Vice President Biden proposed new legislation

requiring background checks and stronger gun regulations. Ultimately, however, their bipartisan proposals were shut down by the U.S. Senate, again reinforcing the truly American values of individual freedom, deregulation, and the right to bear arms. Now over five years later, these values are again being challenged after a string of recent terror attacks such as the 2017 concert shooting in Las Vegas, Nevada, and the 2018 school shooting in Parkland, Florida. Anti-gun protests and student marches have been organized nationwide. Corporations such as Walmart and Dick's Sporting Goods have bypassed state and federal law, raising the minimum age for gun buyers in their stores, and cutting ties with the National Rifle Association. In America's state space, taking guns off the streets is a stronger, more fruitful possibility than taking people off the streets.

In contrast, gun measures in Norway were never mentioned in Norwegian media after the July 22 attacks. In Norway's state space, guns do not make crime possible; society makes crime possible. The discussion focused instead on democracy and multiculturalism. First consider the role of the Norwegian police. During the Utøya shooting, victims reported seeing blue lights arriving on the opposite shore (17:52), and then having to wait for what seemed like an eternity (33 minutes) before help reached the island (18:25). In fact, the gunman had famously called the police to surrender (18:00), but continued killing in the absence of a decisive response. In the weeks following the attacks, the police were widely perceived as having fallen short of what was expected of them at Utøya. Still, criticism in domestic media remained muted. In interviews, civilians expressed bafflement over the slow response of both police and ambulances, while police responded that they did everything they could have done. Spare us speculations about whether choices made on that day would have saved lives, pleaded North Buskerud Police Chief Sissel Hammer.

The appeal is straightforward: the police did what they actually did, and nobody was suggesting malicious intent. The police appointed an internal commission, which duly concluded the police had followed their operational guidelines and acted with full professionalism; the idea that they "could have" done something different was dismissed. What could be the purpose of creating counterfactual scenarios at variance with what

actually happened? As it turns out, this is what you have to do to learn from your mistakes. The resource that you have to improve your performance is to examine exactly what was possible in the past.

These questions – what you could have done, but did not – are largely dictated by your state space. In an inclusive state space, values like social responsibility allow for a specific set of questions: what political and economic opportunities can we make available for our citizens, and how can our police better serve our communities? The exclusive state space allows for a contrasting set of questions grounded on individualism: how do we prevent a dangerous individual from purchasing firearms, what is unique about a terrorist's personal experiences or family background to lead him to such violence? By comparing Norwegian and American news media, we saw how cultural norms could actually influence perceptions of *what is possible.*

Secondly, consider the role of the media. NECORE colleagues Tine Ustad Figenschou and Kjersti Thorbjørnsrud (2016) interviewed newspaper editors about the climate after the attacks. How did they decide what to cover, and why? Specifically, how did they deal with criticism of the police? The editors explained that they exercised great constraint in publicizing any criticism, in part to avoid painful accusations, and in part out of deference to the Gjørv Commission, which had superior access to the details of what really happened. On the 2nd of September 2011, Aslak Bonde writes in *Morgenbladet* that we need an accountability debate now and cannot afford to wait until next summer, but his pleas fell on deaf ears. Some weeks later, on the 28th of September 2011, one of the victim's parents is cited in *Aftenposten* complaining, "Nobody dares to say anything at all, nobody dares to criticize."

Foreign media showed much less restraint in their criticisms. On the 26th of July 2011, KNBC's correspondent Martin Fletcher presented "The Police Question" by reporting the details of "Friday's dismal performance." The next day, amateur footage of the police in a sinking rubber dinghy made triumphant rounds on YouTube. A distraught Anderson Cooper shook his head on CNN, expressing the concern that the Norwegian police responded inadequately at Utøya. The international perception was that the Norwegian police were glaringly and shockingly

unprepared, and their refusal to admit it nothing less than a public embarrassment.

Who got it right? Figenschou and Thorbjørnsrud note that the initial coverage of the attack was massive but very narrow in its admission of perspectives; as the amount of coverage abated, the width of perspectives was slowly allowed to increase. Are we well served by this type of time-dependent self-censorship by the media? Are we simply allowing wounds to heal, or are we passing up an opportunity for vital learning?

The U.S. is still in the process of learning from its domestic attacks. Debate has focused primarily on mental health, gun control, immigration, and police protection. In sharp contrast, Norway has ultimately prioritized democracy over defense. Learning has focused on multiculturalism, free speech, inclusiveness, and the idea that granting citizens *more* opportunities—to vote, to engage themselves, and to voice their opinions—could be enough to prevent another terror attack. The difference between the two cultures proves that causal reasoning in the real world is not as certain or as logical as Hume would have liked us to believe. Causality is largely dictated by the society it serves, and therefore the possibility-value topology within that society. Our possibility spaces are constantly evolving to reconcile our personal values and social ideals, with what we believe to be possible and probable within the limits of our communities, governments and physical environments. These spaces vary by individual, by culture, by nation, and as we argue here, by medium.

Stage 5: Planning

After a proper reconstruction of events and attribution of responsibility, news media finally open the floor for policy debates, political discussions, and proposals to help move society forward. The attacks on 22 July brought several issues to the forefront, all of which were explored in the media: democracy, multiculturalism, Norway's justice system, international and homegrown terrorism. Martin Fletcher (KNBC Nightly News) spoke with Muslims in Oslo, reporting that the population was rapidly growing and relatively happy. Aleksandr Selivanov on Russia Today discussed the struggles of marginalized and lower-class Norwegians who,

much like Breivik, felt they did not have a voice in Norway's democracy. Randall Larsen, Director at the Institute for Homeland Security, stressed the importance of "a more informed and engaged citizenry" that should recognize Breivik-type individuals in society (KCBS The Early Show). CNN praised Norway for its resilience, and called for new crisis management plans, and measures to protect freedom.

Yet the clarity of 20–20 hindsight should not be confused with a realistic plan for anticipating "known unknowns and unknown unknowns". Actual learning from terrorism is extremely challenging, precisely because the terrorist identifies and strategically exploits gaps in the anticipation. Learning is not simply a matter of a society, a police force, or a criminal acknowledging his mistakes, though this is a vital first step. To learn, you actually have to delve into what is and what was possible in your own actions. It requires creativity and humility relative to current skills and established procedures. Learning is disruptive.

Consider the opportunities for social change on the cusp of a destabilizing event. Rahm Emanuel, Obama's one-time White House Chief of Staff, famously pronounced, "You never want a serious crisis to go to waste." A crisis awakens fear, and with it comes a willingness to consider radical social change—an argument elaborated by Naomi Klein's *The Shock Doctrine* (2007). A crisis, Rahm explained, "is an opportunity to do things you think you could not do before" (see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1yeA_kHHLow). The 9/11 attacks in the U.S. are now understood to have been used as a pivot for instituting social change, from the Patriot Act and the Global War on Terror, to a massive expansion of electronic surveillance, to the Iraq war. Could something similar happen in Norway?

The 9/11 attacks were blamed on foreign perpetrators, and a credible argument was advanced that the U.S. faced a distributed international enemy. The 22nd of July attacks in Norway, in contrast, were attributed to a single, lone wolf. It is not beyond the bounds of possibility that the attacks could have been recast as a larger conspiracy; in fact, Behring Breivik himself attempted to present it as such. There were enough clues to argue for a broader right-wing rebellion, rooted in subcultures with international connections, and thus justifying sweeping reforms. Yet, even a lone wolf event could be argued to warrant vastly expanded

surveillance as a defensive response. Indeed, the massive and spontane-ous rose marches testify precisely to this possibility: a strong sentiment arose in people that this event should not be allowed to take Norway down the path of a police surveillance state. In the middle of the cri-sis, there was an acute awareness that previously unacceptable changes could now become implemented. Whereas the U.S. embraced sweeping changes to its surveillance laws, arguably to its own detriment, Norway rejected this potential change, ultimately calling for increased social con-sciousness rather than national security.

Conclusion

To fulfill its function as "the fourth branch of government", and assume Jefferson's role as "the most effectual" of "all avenues to truth", the press must empower viewers to make decisions in their daily lives. So far, stud-ies on media have centered on its elite interests and gatekeeping power. We argue that the news—before even setting a public agenda—must *rea-son* for us. We encourage viewers to start paying attention to how the news makes cause-and-effect connections (is the explanation of the facts proven, or is it a result of stereotypes or too early assumptions?), how it assigns responsibility (where is the debate centered, who gets a voice, who is given the most air time or the biggest platform?), and how it helps society learn from the past and plan for the future (what social shifts or policy changes result from a news story or discussion?).

Our ability to act effectively as a society depends on our ability to identify the moments where intervention is possible, given our lim-ited means, and to formulate the kind of intervention that will lead to a desired long-term effect. The news presents a public manifestation of this task of reasoning. News media cannot simply report the fact, nor pro-vide self-evident explanations; to do their work properly, they must—and routinely do—engage in complex acts of past prospection, reconstruct forks in the causal chain that identify possible actions that were never taken. Values are used to pare down the size and shape of the vast space of possible actions contemplated, giving the investigation direction. The news must necessarily generate hypotheses about the likelihood of such

hypothetical actions having certain desirable outcomes, and because history does not repeat itself, these hypotheses must remain irreducibly unverifiable. Far from merely reporting the news, the news media mine the past for possible actions, thereby generating lessons and prospective plans that create the future.

The 22nd of July continues to act as a complex source of learning for Norwegian society, along lines that in an international comparison are surprising. Instead of viewing the attacks primarily as a lesson in how to disarm people, or introduce novel forms of protection, the dominant response was to reaffirm Norwegian values of inclusiveness, and the prevention of violence through a sustained care for the individual. This response acknowledges that we lack certainty in our predictions; only time will tell if it is successful.

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