Journalism Signature Assignment

Reagan M. Connell

Utah Valley University
The attacks of November 13, 2015 in Paris were brutal and shocking, and the news coverage of the events was chaotic. Every news outlet scrambled to get information to the public, in some cases even inaccurate information, as quickly as possible. Some media sources chose to wait until the following day to put out any information, while others gave live updates throughout the night. The different ways in which this news was broadcast says important things about the source and about the audience. It is also important to look at what images were included and why. In this case, the coverage Paris attacks stayed thematically similar throughout nearly all news mediums, with sympathy at the forefront of the message. Some sources opted to utilize more fear-directed language, but overall the sympathetic message remained central. In the event of an international tragedy, it is important news coverage is accurate and sensitive to the issue. Descriptions, rhetoric, and imagery have to be carefully reviewed in these situations, and some sources were more careful than others.

The New York Times article by Liz Alderman and Jim Yardley (headline "Paris Terror Attacks Leave Awful Realization: Another Massacre") was released the morning following the attacks, and told the story of the events much like just that: a story. The language of the piece is descriptive and colorful, almost as if it was written for a novel. A quote from the article that represents the tone of the entire piece is "Ambulances screamed down the boulevards, as a stunned and confused French capital was again left to wonder: Why us? Once again?". This kind of storytelling delivers the information with the guarantee of emotional reaction, and the images
chosen for the article strike right through the heart as well. Pictures of wailing mothers, candlelit vigils in the streets, and injured hostages being rescued from buildings are all images a reader would look at and think "how awful, how sad". The authors clearly intended the piece to be emotional as well as informative.

By contrast, The Salt Lake Tribune article by Greg Keller and Jamey Keaten (headline "Eiffel Tower goes dark as France mourns 129 dead") also published the morning following the attacks seemed more straightforward and slightly less theatrical. It was as informative and emotional as the Times, without the story-like tone. The images were essentially the same, candlelit vigils and so on, but this article was a little more to-the-point and easy to grasp. Simplicity is important because tone can easily misstep and become offensive when covering international tragedies. BBC News featured a stream of live updates on the events, with each post being a short blurb of information. Updated death counts, eyewitness and survivor quotes, updates from police and military, and other posts flooded the feed every couple minutes during the attacks and aftermath. Over the course of the tragedy, the feed kept readers engaged in the situation. Instant updates meant readers didn't have to wait for the news anchor on the television to talk around to the next event between recaps and interviews. It also meant readers could get the basics of the situation without having to scroll through paragraphs to get that information. This presentation was even simpler than the Tribune's, but it also lacked some of the sympathetic tone the Tribune was able to express.

Television coverage by Fox News was true to the classic image of a television news broadcast, with an engaged anchor and several reporters and interviews with police and politicians. The coverage was dramatic and fast-paced, constantly flashing to scenes of police rescues and explosions in the streets of Paris. The information presented was also dramatically
framed and, at times, inaccurate. At one point, the death count flashing across the screen read 158, when in fact the total the next morning ended up being 129. This broadcast was entirely insensitive to the tragedy with how theatrical and political it was. Finally, The Telegraph web article by Eleanor Steafel, Rory Mulholland, Rozina Sabur, Edward Malnick, Andrew Trotman and Nicola Harley titled "Paris terror attack: Everything we know on Saturday afternoon" gives short bits of information between several videos and images. Explosions can be heard in the videos, and the images depict scenes of the crowded football stadium, chaos in the streets, and mourning families. Many of the same images used in the other articles are used in The Telegraph's, though this piece featured many more videos than the others. The videos are useful to see and hear exactly what the scene sounds like, but can also be disturbing and graphic. Like the other articles, a shocked and sympathetic message is central to this piece, but there is also a subtle element of political agenda by the way it referred to the attackers as "Islamists" in most sentences.

News of international tragedy is difficult to cover respectfully and with sensitivity when page hits and subscriptions are necessary to the survival of media. However, The Salt Lake Tribune mostly achieved this sensitivity better than the other examples mentioned. What is most important in an instance like this is to convey the information without bias, political agenda, insensitivity, or theatrics, and the Tribune succeeded in that capacity. Reporting tragedies is often made into a sport when the weight of the situation deserves more care.
References

rref=collection/newseven
tcollection/attacks-in-paris


