

The First 119 Minutes of 9/11: Sourcing and Speculation on CNN

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The first 119 minutes of 9/11: Sources and speculation on CNN



Xigen Li, Laura Lindsay, Kirsten Mogensen and Jay Perkins

Manship School of Mass Communication, LSU

- Ongoing September 11 Project:
- Interviews with 37 news directors, producers, reporters, anchors e.g. at CNN, Fox, ABC, CBS and NBC
- Quantitative content analyses of five networks – tapes from Vanderbilt University
- Qualitative analyses of text, audio, visuals
- 12 faculty members

Sources and Speculation on CNN

- Content analysis of 119 minutes
- Interviews with 10 staff members
- Questions:
- Who served as sources and how?
- What kind of analysis or speculation was used?

Content analysis

CNN first 119 minutes:

- 82 pct. of time: facts
- 18 pct. of time: analysis



Sources

- 24 pct. of the stories quoted witnesses
- Among them 86 pct. described what happened – or what they thought had happened.



Sources

- 14 pct. of the witnesses described the severity of the disaster.



Government officials

- 10 pct. of stories quoted government officials
- Topics:
 - Rescue efforts
 - terrorism in general



Government officials



Talked about U.S. government and its reactions

President Bush



Help victims, investigation, terrorism act

Seeking truth, present a fair and comprehensive account of events

- Two source rule replaced by disclaimer
- Attribution of information to AP or other trustworthy sources
- Constant update
- Cautious in choosing sources

Speculation

- Logical analysis based on what the correspondents could personally see – did lead to mistakes :
- Plane crash turned out to be terrorism act.
- First witness questioned if the crash was an accident, but CNN reporters did not talk about terrorism acts before 9.30 - 40 minutes later.
- CNN started talking about terrorism, when the president did.

Some missteps

- Second plane described as a small propeller plane
- Fire on the Mall in Washington
- Car bomb in State Department
- Fire at the State Department
- Second plane towards Washington

McAlister, National Managing Editor, CNN:

- "There were a number of things that came through the intelligence community, which would have been acceptable by the normal rules of sourcing and all that, but if we'd gone on TV with it, it would have led to panic."

What the viewers said

- CNN topped the list as the preferred station for crisis coverage
- CNN viewers particularly praised the network's commitment to continuous coverage.

WestGroup Research,
Pew research Center



Thank You!



- Kirsten Mogensen, visiting associate professor at theanship School of Mass Communication, Louisiana State University
- From:
- Roskilde Universitetscenter, Denmark.