Roskilde University

Television Journalism During Terror Attacks

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Television Journalism

During Terror Attacks

Public Service

- How can journalists help society through a terror related acute national crisis that may threaten the basic structure and core values of the social system?
- The case of September 11, 2001.
- ABC, NBC, CBS, CNN, Fox News.

Professional Norms

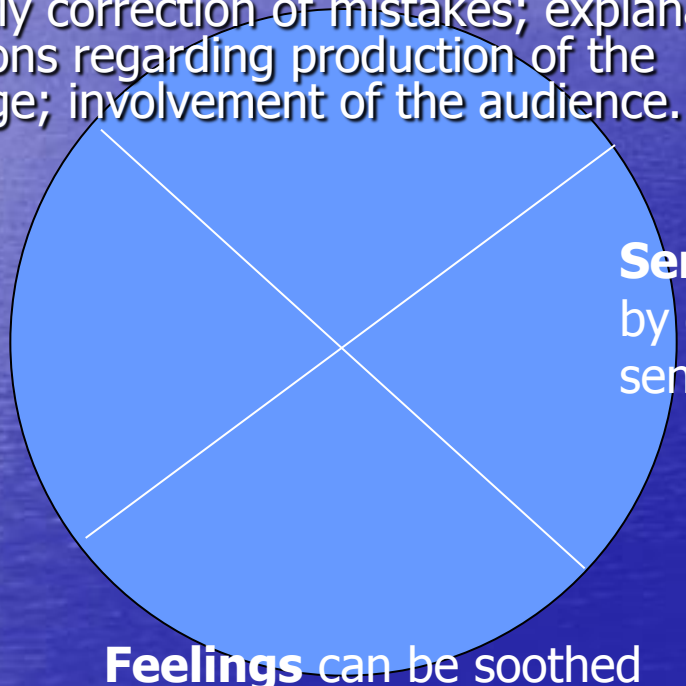
- Professional ethics discusses moral solutions to professional problems. Janik (1994):
- Professionals' problems by their very nature are problems specific to professional practice, i.e., ethical problems that arise in the course of carrying out the tasks for which one has been professionally trained...

Methods

- Personal interviews with 37 journalists that covered the events for ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN, FOX News and MSNBC.
- Content analysis of the coverage the first 24 hours.

First aid to audience members

- **Rational thinking** is supported by timely, accurate information; admission of and promptly correction of mistakes; explanation of conditions regarding production of the coverage; involvement of the audience.



Senses can be relieved by downplaying of sensation.

Security is improved by national security considerations.

Feelings can be soothed with the help of comfort and positive news stories.

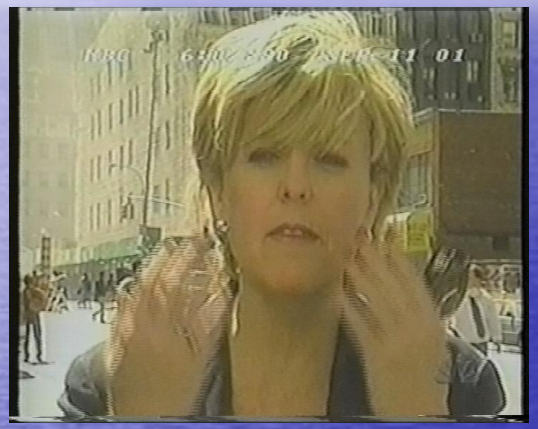
The figure is inspired by C.G. Jung (Jacobi 1987).

Information as soon as possible

Honesty is the best policy

We're all in this together

We cannot show emotion

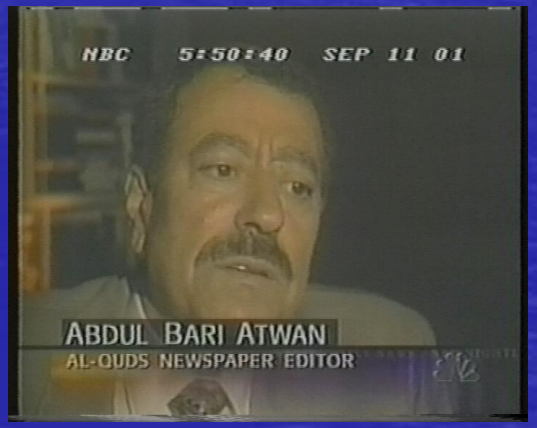


Reassurance is a by-product of journalism

Sensationalism the normal; downplay the sensational

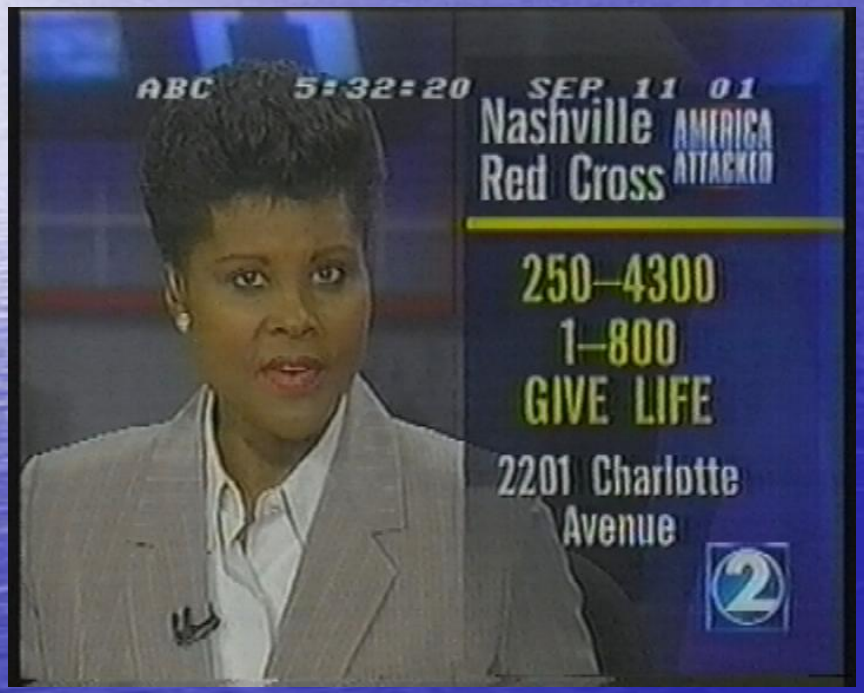
Avoid stereotypes

Avoid *national* sources with extremist views

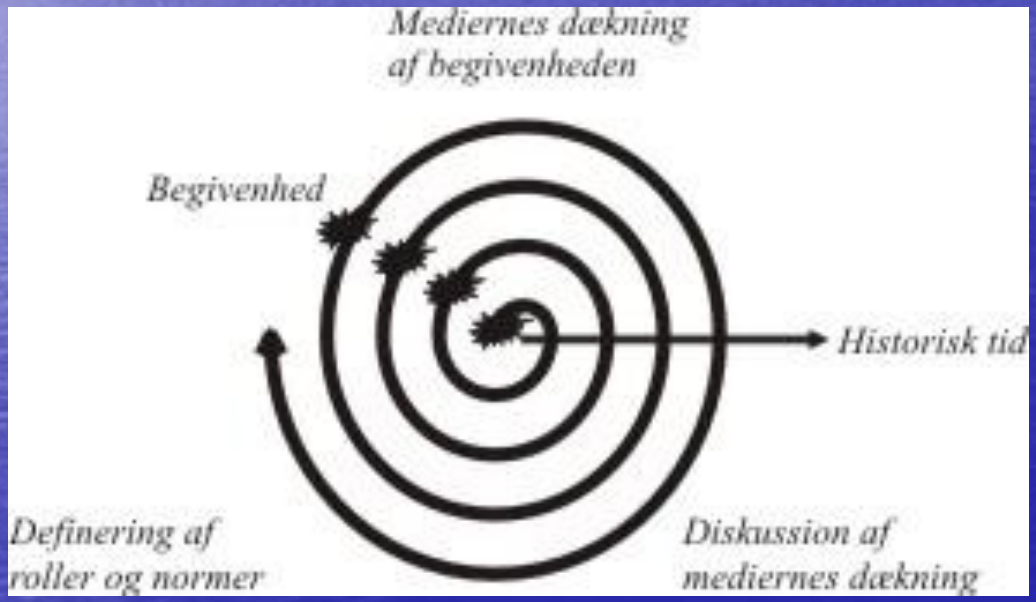


Find the good among the bad

Journalism is a public service



Development of professional norms



Viewers' satisfaction?

- 9 out of 10 watched the coverage on television.
- Most were satisfied with the coverage.
- Praise: Accuracy, immediacy, commitment to continuous coverage, professionalism of anchors, video footage.
- Complaints: Repetition of information and pictures, too sensational.
- (WestGroup Research 2001).

Watchdog for democracy

Moral reasoning

Government officials as sources

- National leadership
- Rescue workers

Respect for national security