

# **Moral Panic of Islamist Extremism: Elite-Engineered fear harming the Hierarchy of Credibility**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of Liverpool John  
Moore's University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

March 2024

## **Declaration**

This thesis is entirely my own work and has not been submitted in full or in part for the award of a higher degree at any other educational institute.

No sections of this thesis have been published.

# Acknowledgments

Little did I know in 2016 when I started on this idea that it would take this long. I scoffed at the mere idea that I would be submitting in 2022, boldly (foolishly) declaring in 2016 that I would be *'wrapping this thing up in three, maybe four years'* (French, 2016). I feel that I have become considerably wiser since then, never again underestimating the enormity and complexity of such an undertaking.

I have also learnt that a successful PhD is not just down to the efforts of one person. During this almost eight-year journey I have had a lot of help and support, without which I may never have managed such a feat of endurance. Firstly, I would like to extend my sincerest and warmest thanks to *Dr Carlo Panara* and *Dr Lol Burke* of *John Moores University*. Your guidance and expertise have been invaluable, and your patience shown with the 'scattergun' approach I take to my work hasn't gone unnoticed. Thank you both for the years of immeasurably important dedication.

To my family; my father (*John*), my mother (*Martina*), and my brother (*Barry*). Since leaving Ireland in 2008, I have been on a quest to do you all proud. I hope that this contributes some way towards that goal. Simply being the people that you are has been a motivator at times when enthusiasm was low. And those very same sentiments can be extended to my wife, *Sarah*. Imaging our life together post-PhD research is now a reality for us to finally enjoy. In my days of doubt, that dream for us kept me going. To my daughter *Aoife*, whose mere existence was the initial motivation; the catalyst; for this doctoral enterprise. Completion of this is the fulfilment of a promise I made to you before you were even born. I will be forever grateful for the unending sense of purpose that you provide.

Finally, remembering the late, great *Luna* the Labrador. In the early years of this project you were a sleepy and comforting shadow by my desk chair.

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# Abstract

Moral panics can lead to substantial changes in a society, but their framework should be re-evaluated in light of the effects of modern communication technology. This study focused on the moral panic surrounding Islamist extremism, including its impact on the Hierarchy of Credibility, the dominance of Western elites in shaping public opinion, and the role of new communication technologies such as the Internet and social media. The study also examined the influence of disinformation on social trustworthiness and the function of elite figures in framing social issues, contributing to mass fear and negative portrayals. The research aimed to enhance academic understanding of moral panic theory by examining the impact of technological advancements on moral panic framework and the roles of social actors, with the goal of modernizing the field. It is crucial for researchers to consider the influence of new communication technologies and address the lack of extensive research on moral panic in the context of terrorism and conspiracy theories. The study used a non-experimental, interpretative case study design, collecting news headlines from Lexis Library, Google search engine, and Facebook, and analysing approximately 2,477 of them thematically. Additionally, approximately 2,500 Facebook comments from 13 selected news articles published in 2016 were collected to examine discourse and frames presented by elite social figures. The research uncovered multiple themes, both quantitative and qualitative, with quantitative data showing that news coverage of terrorism surpassed that of other potentially more hazardous events. This coverage reached its peak in 2017, following a series of Islamist-inspired terrorist attacks in the UK. The study's results indicate that Western elites must be mindful of how sensitive issues are distorted and how this impacts their reputational legitimacy and the trustworthiness of the information they disseminate. Furthermore, the study emphasizes the significance of considering conspiracy theories and the role disinformation plays in shaping public opinion. The analysis of Facebook comments revealed a broad range of concerns, including widespread fear, a deep mistrust of government and news media, and support for extreme solutions. The implications of this study emphasize the relevance of moral panic theory in contemporary society. The research findings illustrate the applicability of moral panic to Islamist terrorism and how elite-driven panics can affect the public's beliefs, resulting in the proliferation of conspiracy theories and the erosion of traditional power structures.

## List of Abbreviations & Key Words

ANF	al-Nusra Front
APA	<i>American Psychological Association</i>
ATCSA (2001)	Anti-Terrorism, Crime & Security Act (2001)
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BBR	<i>British Bill of Rights</i>
BLM	Black Lives Matter
CAPPS	<i>Assisted Passenger Pre-Screening System</i>
CCCS	Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (Birmingham)
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CNN	Cable News Network
CPA	Coalition Provisional Authority
CPS	<i>Crown Prosecution Services</i>
CTA (2008)	<i>Counter-Terrorism Act (2008)</i>
CTA (2008)	Counter-Terrorism Act (2008)
ECHR	European Convention on Human Rights
ECtHR	European Court of Human Rights
EU	European Union
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FISA (1978)	<i>Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (1978)</i> <i>Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Amendments Act</i> (2008)
FISSA (2008)	
GCHQ	Government Communications Headquarters
GFA	Good Friday Agreement
GTI	<i>Global Terrorism Index</i>
HJS	Henry Jackson Society
HRL	Human Rights Law
HUAC	House of Un-American Committee
ICC	International Criminal Court
IPSO	Independent Press Standards Organisation
IRA	Irish Republican Army
IS/ISIS/ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
ISI	<i>Islamic State of Iraq</i>
LBC	<i>Leading Britain's Conversation</i>
MAC	<i>Muslims Against Crusades</i>
MBS	<i>Mortgage-Backed Securities</i>
MENA	Middle East & North African
NSA	<i>National Security Agency</i>
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
ONS	<i>Office of National Statistics</i>



PACE	<i>Police &amp; Criminal Evidence Act</i>
PIRA	Provisional Irish Republican Army
POW	<i>Prisoner of War</i>
PTA (2005)	Prevention of Terrorism Act (2005)
RAAD	<i>Radical Action Against Drugs</i>
RIPA	<i>Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA)</i> (2000)
RIRA	Real Irish Republican Army
TACT (2000)	Terrorism Act (2000)
TACT (2006)	Terrorism Act (2006)
TNCs	<i>Technical Capability Notices</i>
TPIMS	Terrorism Prevention & Investigatory Measures Act (2011)
TV	Television
UDHR	<i>Universal Declaration of Human Rights</i>
UK	United Kingdom
UKIP	United Kingdom Independence Party
UN	United Nations
US/USA	United States/United States of America
WMD's	Weapons of Mass Destruction
WoT	War on Terror
WTO	World Trade Organization
WWII	World War 2

### **Key Words**

Moral panic, Islamist extremism, terrorism, internet, social media, conspiracy, conspiracy theory, disinformation, Facebook, Lexis Library, Google

# Table of Statutes

Anti-Terrorism, Crime & Security Act (2001)  
BBC Charter and Agreement (2006)  
Civil Authorities (Special Powers) Act (Northern Ireland) (1922)  
Communications Act (2003)  
Contempt of Court Act (1981)  
CONTEST Strategy (2003)  
Convention for the Prevention & Punishment of Terrorism (1937)  
Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Seizure of Aircraft (1970)  
Coroners & Justice Act (2009)  
Counter-Terrorism Act (2008)  
Counter-Terrorism Act (2008)  
Counterterrorism & Border Security Bill (2019)  
Counterterrorism & Security Act (2015)  
Counter-Terrorism and Sentencing Act (2021)  
Criminal Justice Act (2003)  
Data Protection Bill (Draft) (2013)  
Data Retention & Investigatory Powers Act (2014)  
English Bill of Rights  
Espionage Act (1917)  
Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (1978)  
Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Amendments Act (2008)  
Framework Decision on Combating Terrorism (2008)  
General Assembly Resolution 49/60 (2000)  
Human Rights Act (1998)  
Immigration and Asylum Act (1999)  
International Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear  
Terrorism (2005)  
International Convention for the Suppression of Financing of  
Terrorism (1999)  
International Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Bombings  
(1997)

Justice & Security Act (2013)  
Magna Carta (1215)  
Malicious Communications Acts (1988)  
McCarran Act (1950)  
Murder (Abolition of the Death Penalty) Act (1965)  
National Security Act (1984)  
Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act (1973)  
Official Secrets Act (1989)  
Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act (1968)  
Patriot Act (2001)  
Police & Criminal Evidence Act (1984)  
Prevention of Terrorism Act (2005)  
Protect America Act (2007)  
Protection of Freedoms Act (2012)  
Public Order Act (2022)  
Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (2000)  
Security Council Resolution 1566 (2004)  
Sedition Act (1918)  
Sexual Offenses Amendment Act (1976)  
Terrorism Act (2000)  
Terrorism Act (2006)  
Terrorism Prevention & Investigatory Measures Act (2011)  
Terrorist Asset-Freezing Act (2010)  
The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen  
United Nations Charter  
United States Code (USC)  
Universal Declaration of Human Rights  
Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties (1969)

## Table of Cases

*A and others v Secretary of State for the Home Department* [2004]

UKHL 56

*A and others v Secretary of State for the Home Department* [2004]

UKHL 56

*A and Others v United Kingdom* [2009] ECtHR 3455/05

*Fox, Campbell and Hartley v United Kingdom* (1990) 13 EHRR 157

*Gillan and Quinton v UK* [2010] ECtHR 28 4158/05

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*"The only thing we have to fear is fear itself—nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance."*

- Franklin D. Roosevelt, Inaugural Address, March 4, 1933.



# Thesis Introduction

*'Societies appear to be subject, every now and then, to periods of moral panic'.<sup>1</sup>*

Moral panics are a display of exaggerated social fear that is rooted in distorted perceptions of threatening individuals, groups, or situations. These distortions lead to disproportionate and excessive responses that exceed the severity of the problem at hand. Such reactions, which stem from a misrepresentation of reality, can result in discriminatory harm towards socially constructed *suspect* groups. A fundamental hypothesis of this research posits that the moral panic framework established by early key theorists, such as Stanley Cohen and Erich Goode & Nachman Ben-Yehuda, remains relevant in contemporary times. However, these frameworks require academic adjustments to enable effective assessments of modern issues that elicit intense, hostile group emotions. There are various prominent environmental provocations at play during the manifestation and perpetuation of mass panic. This thesis maintains that any reevaluation of classic moral panic frameworks must give due consideration to the role of modern technologies, such as mobile phones, social media platforms, and 24/7 news, in facilitating communication. The impact of these technological innovations on the behaviour of key social actors must be considered to provide a comprehensive understanding of moral panic phenomena. McRobbie & Thornton (1995) articulate that a *'multi-mediated social world'* has allowed information about public issues to become diversified, with claims-making capabilities having grown owing to various information sources.<sup>2</sup> This thesis speculates that the widespread use of the Internet and social media in daily life has engendered social transformations, communal disunity, and exacerbated contentious divisions. Social networking tools allowing written, photo, and video production and information sharing to be much easier, and have fundamentally redefined what we previously understood about public knowledge attainment, sense-making processes, and the relationships between those at the top of the *Hierarchy of Credibility* and those at grassroots level. This thesis seeks to advance the

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<sup>1</sup> Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* [Routledge 2002] 1

<sup>2</sup> Angela McRobbie & Sarah L. Thornton, 'Rethinking "moral panic" for multi-mediated social worlds' [1995] *British Journal of Sociology* 46 559

understanding of the significance of exploring concerns surrounding panics, which has been recognized as a crucial aspect by many academics.

By examining these issues under a contemporary lens, this research aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse. Unfettered fear and ignorance exhibited during periods of volatile hostility are often channelled towards minority *Outsiders* isolated from mainstream society. As Walsh (2020) writes:

*'whether generating anxiety about social change, sharpening social distance, or offering new opportunities for vilifying outsiders, distorting communications, manipulating public opinion, and mobilising embittered individuals, digital platforms and communications constitute significant targets, facilitators, and instruments of panic production.'*<sup>3</sup>

Few issues have roused public anxiety like the recurrent threat of terrorism since 2001. According to Weston & Innes (2010), the 9/11 attacks were instrumental in transforming terrorism studies from being a relatively minor academic consideration into a multidisciplinary and rapidly evolving area of research.<sup>4</sup> The MSc dissertation of this researcher focused on the post-9/11 counterterrorism measures implemented by the US and British governments and their impact on human rights safeguards. During this research, a general apathy from the public towards intrusive state interventions in the name of counterterrorism and national security was observed. In fact, many individuals appeared to welcome such infringements, particularly on their right to privacy, by espousing the self-defeating and weary mantra, *"If you have nothing to hide, then you have nothing to fear."* Considering these observations, a number of fundamental questions arise. What are the reasons behind people's support for such intrusive measures? Are they advocating for these actions to be temporary or permanent in nature? Would they themselves condone such invasiveness if it were being imposed upon them, or do they only see it fit for those who pose a threat to us? This PhD thesis will serve as a continuation of the research conducted during the MSc program, with a focus on post-9/11 terrorism, specifically Islamist extremism, through the application of the moral panic theory framework. As

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<sup>3</sup> James P. Walsh, 'Social Media and Moral Panic: Assessing the Effects of Technological Change on Societal Reaction' [2020] *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 1-20

<sup>4</sup> Nicola Weston, & Martin Innes, 'Terrorism' in Fiona Brookman. et al. (eds). *Handbook on Crime* [Willan Publishing 2010] 846-864

will be highlighted in forthcoming chapters, the application of moral panic framework to the issue of terrorism has evaded a similar level of scholarly research as other social issues which have roused mass concern, such as youth deviancy, drug crazes, and the impact of violent media entertainment. The incorporation of the panic framework into academic literature during the 1970s implies that it must be modified to address the challenges posed by contemporary issues, social transformations, and environmental changes. This researcher theorised early in this doctoral research that mass fear was the product of mass ignorance, leading to broad questions, such as: *How was fear and ignorance generated? By whom? For what purpose?* This research aims to demonstrate not only the continued relevance of the moral panic framework as a means of examining distorted social responses to modern phenomena, but also to illuminate the enduring impact of such collective distortions on community solidarity, legislative legacy, and democratic well-being.

The primary objectives of this study are:

1. To critically evaluate and analyse the shortcomings in the literature and frameworks pertaining to moral panic.
2. To critically assess the function of contemporary communication technology within the moral panic framework and the part played by social actors.
3. To analyse the interpretations of Islamist extremism during the early to mid-2010s through the lens of the moral panic framework.
4. To examine the interpretations of Islamist extremism during the 2017 Islamist terrorist attacks through the lens of moral panic framework.
5. To critically evaluate the importance of phenomena such as fake news, conspiracy theories, and mis/disinformation.

## **Chapter Synopsis**

This thesis examines existing moral panic framework and its scholarly contributors in Chapter 1, and then delves into the effects of contemporary technological advancements on social communication, interaction, and relationships in Chapter 2. The study illustrates several evolutions to the moral panic framework and examines how terrorism panics have intensified under political elite and media rhetoric following the events of September 11th, 2001. In Chapter 3, the thesis outlines the

qualitative and quantitative data collection and analytical methodologies used, with the presentation of data in Chapters 4-6. Chapter 4 begins by considering the effects of the post-911 terrorism panics, frames, and divisions in cultivating terrorism panic during the 2010s. Chapter 4 will examine trends in media reporting from 2010-2016, analyse periods of panic volatility in 2017 corresponding to Islamist extremist attacks, and investigate the rhetoric of other key social actors in panic cultivation. It will also consider Facebook comments as a measurement of public sentiment. Chapters 5 will focus on the examination of media production and political rhetoric in 2017, including Facebook comments, and how they responded to the Islamist terrorist attack in the UK. Chapter 6 focuses on a similar timeline of Chapters 4-5, however, considers moral panic of Islamist terrorism through a grassroots lens, with a focus on conspiracy theory. Chapter 7 will explore the limitations and possibilities of moral panic framework in understanding contemporary social phenomena, including the role of social media, and the researcher will argue that moral panic framework is still valuable as a theoretical instrument despite its limitations.

# Chapter. 1

## Enter Moral Panic

### **Introduction**

Moral panic research intends to recognise and explain episodes of mass hysterical reactions and inflated hyperbolic fears of issues perceived as threatening to established social orders and conservative communal values. This thesis contends that core deliberations from classical academic works on moral panic theory - contributions from Cohen's seminal *Folk Devils & Moral Panics* and the characteristics of moral panic provided by Goode & Ben-Yehuda in *Moral Panics: The Social Construction of Deviance* - continue to hold relevancy for academic research and application for understanding contemporary issues. Nevertheless, as society evolves, so too must academic theory used for our understanding and detailing social changeability, incorporating methods of communication, behaviours, and mass reaction. As a starting point for this thesis, this chapter explores and details existing scholarly contributions to moral panic theory while highlighting literature gaps and proposes that moral panic theory and the roles of its actors should be subject to revision owing to sociological environmental developments since the introduction of the earliest moral panic framework. While generating an understanding of moral panic theories, consideration is paid to classic theoretical frameworks used to identify and explain moral panic occurrences: the first wave of moral panic scholarship.<sup>5</sup> There is a focus on clarifying a working definition, considering classical and contemporary frameworks, and where developments in the concept of moral panic might be found. Finally, this chapter explains why moral panic theory was selected and applied to a case study of Islamist extremism/terrorism.

### **The Emergence of Moral Panic Theory**

British academics in the 1960s and 1970s saw themselves as advocates of innovative sociological perspectives, as British applications of some American criminological theories returned mixed results owing to differences in class structures, cultural differences, and the geographical growth of cities. It was not until the 1970s that efforts to reconsider British subcultures were made, and questions

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<sup>5</sup> Charles Krinsky, *The Ashgate Research Companion to Moral Panics* [Ashgate Publishing Limited 2013] 2

were raised regarding the source and nature of mainstream social reactions.<sup>6</sup> Work stemming from Birmingham's *Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies* (CCCS) was pivotal in this development. For example, Phil Cohen (1972) considered how subcultures expressed themselves in both characteristic symbols and their feelings towards the social mainstream, with the cultural and political position of diverse youth groups observed by theorists through an examination of music, dress style, and behaviour.<sup>7</sup> This change in focus by British criminologists questioned community responses to deviancy, including the effects that negative labels bestowed by society's mainstream upon outsider individuals and groups had on community cohesion. This developed notions such as Lemert's 1930s *Primary* and *Secondary* deviance, which stated that:

*'This corresponded to the rule of symmetry: that, in order to explain behaviour, it was necessary to explain actions and reactions and then, of course, subsequently, the impact of reaction upon action.'*<sup>8</sup>

Through Stanley Cohen's sociological work, moral panic theory emerged in this era of British criminological development. Cohen's initial framework for moral panic theory established a foundation for academic scholarship on the formation, intensification, and management of social problems<sup>9</sup> and episodes (or Impact events) the emerge suddenly causing great fear, before receding into memory.<sup>10</sup> Academic underpinnings to what would become Cohen's detailed elaboration of moral panic theory is attributed to Mackay (1841) and Le Bon (1895)<sup>11</sup> through their respective examinations of individual participation in mass social dynamics, such as crowd gatherings and panic creation. Both authors have an obvious influence on Cohen's hypotheses.

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<sup>6</sup> Nathaniel Weiner, 'Resistance through realism: Youth subculture films in 1970s (and 1980s) Britain' [European Journal of Cultural Studies, 2018] 21 (2) 165-188

<sup>7</sup> Phil Cohen, *Sub-Cultural Conflict and Working Class Community* [Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972] 2

<sup>8</sup> Krinsky (n5) 17

<sup>9</sup> James P. Walsh, 'Moral Panic by Design: The Case of Terrorism' [2017] *Current Sociology* 65 (5) 643

<sup>10</sup> Krinsky (n5) 4

<sup>11</sup> Brian V. Klocke & Glenn W. Muschert, 'A Hybrid Model of Moral Panics: Synthesising the Theory and Practise of Moral Panic Research' [2010] *Sociology Compass* 4 (5) 296

Although Moore (2014) claims that the first outright use of the 'moral panic' term is found in McLuhan's 1964 work,<sup>12</sup> Rothe & Muzzatti (2004) argue that it was initially termed by Jock Young in *The Drugtakers* (1971).<sup>13</sup> Becker's (1963) contribution enlightened thinkers to the role and influence of moral entrepreneurs within social panic development. Regardless of when the term may have first been used, it was not until Cohen's 1974 publication that the theory received comprehensive scholarly realisation. Since, the concept of moral panic has seen elaborations, corrections, and revisions, and has been applied to various social matters across several academic disciplines.<sup>14</sup>

### **Understanding Moral Panic: Key Definitions**

Given its inauguration by Cohen in the field of sociology, the concept of moral panic has migrated beyond scholarly text and has been implemented by various sectors of mainstream society, though blurring its definition along the way. Miller (2013) notes that the term is frequently used by the press in several countries such as the UK, Australia, and the US, becoming imprecise through its broad application.<sup>15</sup> Goode & Ben-Yehuda would explain that moral panics are retrospectively '*seen as far back as the existence of organised society with hostility and fear directed towards 'agents of evil'*'.<sup>16</sup> However, Cohen's *Mods and Rockers* youth subculture research of 1960s Britain has been denoted by panic theorists such as Goode & Ben-Yehuda,<sup>17</sup> Jones,<sup>18</sup> and Critcher,<sup>19</sup> as foundational, holding implications beyond the immediate subject matter of youth delinquency.<sup>20</sup> There have been many social issues to which

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<sup>12</sup> Sarah. E.H. Moore, *Crime and the Media* [Palgrave MacMillan 2014] 104

<sup>13</sup> Dawn Rothe & Stephen L. Muzzatti, 'Enemies Everywhere: Terrorism, Moral Panic, and US Civil Society' [2004] *Critical Criminology* 327

<sup>14</sup> Chas Critcher, 'Moral Panics' [Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of Criminology 2017] <<https://oxfordre.com/criminology/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264079.001.0001/acrefore-9780190264079-e-155>> accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2020.

<sup>15</sup> Toby Miller, 'Tracking Moral Panic as a Concept' in Charles Krinsky, *The Ashgate Research Companion to Moral Panics* [Ashgate Publishing Limited 2013] 37-38

<sup>16</sup> Erich Goode & Nachman Ben-Yehuda, *Moral Panics: The Social Construction of Deviance* [2<sup>nd</sup> ed, Wiley-Blackwell Publishing 2009] 89

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid* 21.

<sup>18</sup> Stephen Jones, *Criminology* [6<sup>th</sup> Ed, OUP 2017] 64-66

<sup>19</sup> Chas Critcher, *Moral Panics, and the Media* [OUP 2003] 10

<sup>20</sup> Ian Marsh & Gaynor Melville, *Crime, Justice, and the Media* [Routledge 2009] 48

the theory has been applied, including witch hunts,<sup>21</sup> aids,<sup>22</sup> drug scares,<sup>23</sup> street crime,<sup>24</sup> youth violence,<sup>25</sup> child abuse and paedophilia,<sup>26</sup> satanism and religious cults,<sup>27</sup> and school shootings.<sup>28</sup> The use and application of the concept of moral panic in news media discourse has increased considerably since 1985, with more than 200 references found in articles published by The Guardian and The New York Times between 2000 and 2007.<sup>29</sup> Still, its application to understanding communal reactions to terrorism is underexplored.

Moral panics and exhibitions of mass fear outline and stretch the ethical and moral boundaries of a society.<sup>30</sup> Such overreaction to an exaggerated issue is a phenomenon that affects many people, with short and long-term ramifications. Cohen's definition of this concept has been widely acknowledged and cited in various studies on moral panics, highlighting its lasting impact:

*Societies appear to be subject, every now and then, to periods of moral panic. (1) A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; (2) its nature is presented in a stylised and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; (3) the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; (4) socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnosis and solutions; (5) ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to; (6) the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates and becomes more visible. Sometimes the object of the panic is quite novel, and at other times it is something which has been in existence long enough but suddenly appears in the limelight. Sometimes the panic passes over and is forgotten, except in folklore and collective memory; at other times, it has more serious and long-*

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<sup>21</sup> Nachman Ben-Yehuda, 'The European Witch Craze of the 14<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries: A Sociologist's Perspective' [1983] *American Journal of Sociology* 86 (1) 1270

<sup>22</sup> Simon Watney, 'AIDS: The Intellectual Agenda' in Peter Aggleton, & Hilary Homans, (eds) *Social Aspects of AIDS* [London Falmer Press 1988] 52-64

<sup>23</sup> Edward Armstrong, 'Moral Panic over Meth' [2007] *Contemporary Justice Review* 10 (4) 427-442

<sup>24</sup> Peter AJ Waddington, 'Mugging as a Moral Panic: A Question of Proportion' [1986] *British Journal of Sociology* 37 (2) 245

<sup>25</sup> Michael Welch, Eric Price, & Nana Yankey, 'Youth Violence and Race in the Media: The Emergence of Wilding as an Invention in the Press' [2004] *Race, Gender & Class* 11 (2) 36

<sup>26</sup> Phillip Jenkins, *Moral Panic: Changing Conceptions of the Child Molester in Modern America* [Yale University Press 1998]

<sup>27</sup> Phillip Jenkins, & Daniel Maier-Katkin, 'Satanism: Myth and Reality in a Contemporary Moral Panic' [1992] *Crime, Law and Social Change* 17 (1) 53-75

<sup>28</sup> Ronald Burns, & Charles Crawford, 'School Shootings, the Media, and Public Fear: Ingredients for a Moral Panic' [1999] *Crime, Law, and Social Change* 32 (2) 147

<sup>29</sup> David Altheide, 'Moral Panic: From Sociological Concept to Public Discourse' [2009] *Crime, Media, Culture* 5 (1) 79

<sup>30</sup> Critcher (n19) 5



*lasting repercussions and might produce such changes as those in legal and social policy or even in the way the society conceives itself.*<sup>31</sup>

While the above definition is Cohen's, Critcher's (2003) evaluative addition included as the bracketed numbers (1-6).<sup>32</sup> For the benefit of the next section of this chapter, these bracketed numbers are included to further illustrate the progressive stages of moral panic. A supplementary helpful definition of moral panics - 'second only to Cohens'<sup>33</sup> - is provided by Stuart Hall et al. (2013), asserting that:

*'When the official reaction to a person, groups of persons or series of events is out of all proportion to the actual threat offered, when "experts," in the form of police chiefs, the judiciary, politicians and editors perceive the threat in all but identical terms, and appear to talk "with one voice" of rates, diagnoses, prognoses and solutions, when the media representations universally stress "sudden and dramatic" increases (in numbers involved or events) and "novelty," above and beyond that which a sober, realistic appraisal could sustain, then we believe it is appropriate to speak of the beginnings of a moral panic.'*<sup>34</sup>

Like Cohen and Hall et al., Marsh & Melville (2009) also contend that a moral panic is an exaggerated reaction conjured by prominent mainstream social actors towards the activities or conducts of sub-cultural groups labelled as 'problematic'. Accompanied by exaggerated reactions to 'trivial' behaviours, such behaviours become attributed to 'problematic' groups in amongst the law-abiding populace - the *Folk Devil*<sup>35</sup> or a *Familiar Stranger*<sup>36</sup> - amplifying mainstream concern and forcing a crackdown on undesirable behaviours and associated groups,<sup>37</sup> a form of *Deviancy Amplification*. Moral panics are an overstated response by dominant social 'in groups' to behaviours seen as a threat from society's *Outsiders*; those who go against acceptable mainstream norms are regarded as detrimental or harmful. In short, moral panic occurs because of a collective failure to appraise a situation rationally. Instead, panics become symptomatic of ill-defined fears, presenting a

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<sup>31</sup> Cohen (n1) 1

<sup>32</sup> Critcher (n19) 9-10

<sup>33</sup> Krinsky (n5) 5

<sup>34</sup> Stuart Hall, Chas Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke & Brian Roberts, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the state and law & order* [Palgrave and Macmillan 2013] 16

<sup>35</sup> "...visible reminders of what should not be." in Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* [Routledge 2002] 2-3

<sup>36</sup> James Morrison, *Scroungers: Moral Panics and Media Myths* [Zed Books 2019] 9

<sup>37</sup> Marsh & Melville (n20) 47

melodramatic, overly simplistic account of an incident while utilising stereotypes to create a visible and emotional blameworthy symbol for contentious civic debate.<sup>38</sup>

An accurate measure of moral panic is seen in the overreaction, which is '*out of all proportion to any level of actual threat*'.<sup>39</sup> As moral panics are an exhibition of disproportionate communal anxieties of overstated problems, the reactions and remedies greatly exceed the objective threat. As panics view problematic and 'evil' behaviours as wounding the very fabric of a whole culture, serious protection controls measures must be adopted to punish culprits and repair damage. For Goode & Ben-Yehuda:

*'The threat this evil presumably poses is felt to represent a crisis for that society: something must be done about it, and that something must be done now; if steps are not taken immediately, or soon, we will suffer even greater consequences.'*<sup>40</sup>

To elaborate, Goode & Ben-Yehuda compare observable panic characteristics, such as hostility and volatility, to a fever which presents intensified emotions of fear, dread, anxiety, hostility, and robust feelings of righteousness.<sup>41</sup>

### **Criticism of the Moral Panic Concept**

Throughout academic efforts to define moral panic, there have been criticisms of the general terminology used. Considered independently, the term *Moral* concerns principles of what is considered *right* and *wrong* behaviour,<sup>42</sup> whereas a *Panic* is defined as the sudden onset of uncontrollable fear and anxiety.<sup>43</sup> Best criticises that the term 'moral panic' was introduced without clear and precise definitional understanding. Despite the concept having spread globally, it has been understood vaguely and applied arbitrarily.<sup>44</sup> In Britain, the research emphasis among scholars has been on the *moral* aspects of panic. Best saw the concept as a tool of moral

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<sup>38</sup> Phillip Jenkins, *Pedophiles and Priests: Anatomy of Contemporary Crisis* [OUP 1996] 170

<sup>39</sup> Hall et al., (n34) 29

<sup>40</sup> Goode & Ben-Yehuda (n16) 35

<sup>41</sup> Ibid 35.

<sup>42</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary* [OUP 2012] 468

<sup>43</sup> Ibid 518.

<sup>44</sup> Joel Best, 'The Problems with Moral Panic: The Concepts Limitations' in Charles Krinsky, *The Ashgate Research Companion to Moral Panics* [Ashgate Publishing Limited 2013] 69-70

critique yielded by conservative upper-class authorities on youths from the lower-middle classes, as the upper strata cogitated behaviours, cultural expressions, and disorder as having deeper moral connotations harmful to upper-class positions of authority. Jewkes (2011) also holds reservations around moral panic terminology, with 'morality' consisting of subjective contradictions for what a particular society will qualify as being 'moral' and 'amoral' behaviours.<sup>45</sup> Establishing criteria or limitations to 'moral' considerations is argued as preventing associations to seemingly similar issues. Considering morality further, Goode & Ben-Yehuda highlight different reactions between confrontations to norms and values of a community, in a way that is not seen with, for example, health concerns. Through such a comparison, a physical threat may be remedied through basic and 'common sensical' methods, whereas threats to the fabric of society may be perceived as deep-rooted and complex.<sup>46</sup>

In contrast to the British emphasis on moral dimensions, American social constructionist researchers pressed on the emotional and irrational reactions to troubling events akin to mass hysteria and collective delusions recorded during witch-hunts.<sup>47</sup> Critcher's emphasises questions the use of the 'panic' term as it implies an irrationality in the concerned group, and a 'self-defeating' view of people who may well be sensibly and logically apprehensive.<sup>48</sup> Further, progressive understanding moral panic is subject to periodic and contextual evaluation of the *foci* of each panic, which changes alongside the consciousness and moral boundaries of a society. When Best talks of conflicting moral panic interpretations, this can be understood as panics which have different origins, impact different groups, and are reacted to by different social organisations. For example, foundations of panic concerning graphic horror films (Video Nasties) arouse different concerns than historical panics regarding AIDS transmissions. Thompson (1998) clarified that intensifying fear of harm of certain phenomena indicates that such problems are viewed as an assault to the mainstream order. However, for reactions to certain phenomena to qualify as moral panic, concerns must be overstated and

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<sup>45</sup> Yvonne Jewkes, *Media & Crime* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed, Sage Publishing 2015] 95-102

<sup>46</sup> Goode & Ben-Yehuda (n16) 21

<sup>47</sup> Best (n44) 69

<sup>48</sup> James M. Jasper, *Moral Panics* [2001] International Encyclopaedia of the Social and Behavioural Sciences (2<sup>nd</sup> ed) 15 10029-10033

nonconsequential.<sup>49</sup> Yet, what does and does not qualify as moral panic is difficult to determine. Jewkes (2011) again holds reservations regarding the qualifying criteria of 'deviance' in moral panic deliberations. Specifically, Jewkes critiques the *Deviancy Amplification Model* when highlighting that not all folk devils can be seen clearly as vulnerable groups unfairly slandered as the source of the threatening phenomena. Some groups or phenomena may pose a level of legitimate concern. Walsh (2017) contributes to the argument of blurred distinctions, making a deduction on Islamist extremists and the social groups they claim to represent; ISIL claiming to represent a 'true' expression of Islam, for example.<sup>50</sup>

In countering criticisms, Cohen, supported by Goode & Ben-Yehuda, concedes that terminology in this area is not altogether entirely adequate. Nevertheless, such terms are better suited than most alternatives.<sup>51</sup> Cohen further acknowledged that the 'panic' term conveys a connotation of irrationality and unmanageableness, though he insisted it makes sense as a protracted metaphor.<sup>52</sup> The term *panic* may overstress cynical audiences but remains suitable to illustrate how communal sentiment overcomes individual reasons during panic volatility. Nevertheless, criticisms surrounding terminologies continue, with Waiton coining the term '*Amoral Panic*' to accommodate public concerns grounded within a wide range of ideological worldviews, so much so that we have progressed from sporadic and occasional panic towards a state of permanent fear.<sup>53</sup> As Newburn (2009) describes of Waiton's claims; alongside panics being a permanent state, panics have also changed in character and are '*best conceived as amoral*'.<sup>54</sup>

### **Established Frameworks for Moral Panic: Folk Devils & Moral Panics**

Britain has seen many waves of youth panic erupting in the post-war era, with concerns raised regarding the Teddy Boys, Hells Angels, Skinheads, Hoodies, and Chavs.<sup>55</sup> During the Easter Bank Holiday weekend (1964) in the British coastal town

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<sup>49</sup> Kenneth Thompson, *Moral Panics* [Routledge 1998] 8

<sup>50</sup> Walsh (n9) 643-662

<sup>51</sup> Critcher (n14)

<sup>52</sup> Cohen (n1) xxvii

<sup>53</sup> Alex Sutherland & Stuart Waiton, *The Politics of Antisocial Behaviour: Amoral Panics* [Routledge 2008] 14

<sup>54</sup> Tim Newburn, 'Reviewed Work: The Politics of Antisocial Behaviour: Amoral Panics by Stuart Waiton' [2009] *British Journal of Criminology* 49 (1) 129

<sup>55</sup> Marsh & Melville (n20) 48

of Clacton-on-Sea, minor acts of violence and property damage occurred between two groups of primarily adolescent males belonging to one of two groups subsequently labelled as Mods (Modernists) and Rockers. By the Monday morning, the Mods and Rockers incidents dominated national newspapers with exaggerated and distorted article content. For example, reports claimed that beaches were 'deserted' because of 'violent youths', although Cohen clarifies that beaches were avoided due to poor weather. Headlines contained sensationalised wording ('riot', 'orgy of destruction', 'battle', 'attack', 'siege', 'beat up the town', and 'screaming mob') and imagery. Reports also predicted further, inevitably violent, clashes ("we need to avoid such violence 'next time").<sup>56</sup> By collecting newspaper articles, hosting discussion groups, and conducting interviews with young people, journalists, and local people of influence - all alongside spending time at other seaside resorts during other holiday periods such as Margate and Brighton - Cohen focused on the influence and responses of news media and the provocation of society during panic construction. An aspect of deliberation was the *labelling* of 'deviant' behaviours and symbols fashioned and assigned to British youth who aligned to either the Mods or Rockers' groups. Cohen utilised sociological labelling and interactionist perspectives of social deviance, considered how society labelled rule-breakers, and what actions society takes to address Folk Devils.<sup>57</sup> Referencing the work of Becker<sup>58</sup> and the *Deviancy Amplification model*,<sup>59</sup> Cohen illustrated the manufacturing of deviancy attributed to *Outsider* groups who have become symbolically associated as the source of social harm. Researchers such as Critcher (2017) and Krinsky (2013)<sup>60</sup> present Cohen's moral panic framework as follows:

1. Behaviour by folk devils is defined as a threat to societal values and interests.

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<sup>56</sup> Cohen (n1) 26-41

<sup>57</sup> Marsh & Melville (n20) 49

<sup>58</sup> Howard Becker, *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance* [The Free Press 1963]

<sup>59</sup> Deviance or Deviancy Amplification, first introduced by Leslie Wilkins in his book *Social Deviance* (1967), suggests that a slight initial deviation may spiral into ever-increasing significance through labelling processes and over-reacting. Initially linked to cybernetics and feedback loops, it was used extensively within the labelling theory of deviance. However, the most systematic defence and application of the theory is found in Jason Ditton's *Controlology* (1979), a critique of 'half-hearted' labelling theories which attempts "to extend Wilkins's model to the point at which control may be seen to be operating *independently* of crime (rather than within a mutually causal framework) on the basis that such liberation will constitute an adequate prepositional basis for a fully-fledged labelling theory. – Taken from the Oxford Dictionary of Sociology [3<sup>rd</sup> Ed, OUP 2009]

<sup>60</sup> Krinsky (n5) 4

2. The threat is depicted in a recognisable and dramatic form by the media.
3. Thus, a rapid increase in public concern has emerged.
4. Authorities, politicians, and moral entrepreneurs call for a solid solution.
5. The panic recedes and results in social and institutional changes.<sup>61</sup>

This fluid sequence is evident in Cohen's definition of moral panic leading Critcher to typify Cohen's model as *Processual*, though progression through these stages can be 'thwarted or diverted'.<sup>62</sup> Cohen's examination of Mods & Rockers commences with an account of the immediate consequences, referred to as the *Inventory*, which delves into the repercussions of the Impact event (Clacton's anti-social conduct) caused by the prominent Folk Devils (Mods & Rockers). He subsequently delves into an investigation of social reactions (*Reactions*) and finally, revisits the *Warning* and *Impact* phases of the moral panic.<sup>63</sup> During the Inventory phase of moral panic, there is an unorganized assessment of the Impact event (or Episode). People who were affected or exposed to adversity start to develop a preliminary understanding of what occurred and their situation in the aftermath.<sup>64</sup> The mass media are particularly influential as they frame the situation and those deemed responsible (Folk Devils). Cohen also focuses on the audience and how they interpreted Impact events. Cohen's emphasis on the printed press was because other prominent panic actors became visible to the populace through media coverage. During this abrupt episodic interpretation, mass media has a principal framing and problem-defining influence when providing audiences with processed, second-hand (edited) information.<sup>65</sup> This process is pivotal for formulating a social understanding of the impact of events and reactions during moral panic. Cohen's *Reaction* phase encompassed three elements: *Rescue* (*help for those victims and those impacted*), *Remedy* (*deliberate and formal relief for those affected*) and *Recovery* (*the community either recovers its former equilibrium or achieves a stable adaptation*).<sup>66</sup> During the Reaction phase, actions successfully addressed the threat with a more methodical, calculated, and

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<sup>61</sup> Critcher (n14)

<sup>62</sup> Critcher (n14)

<sup>63</sup> Cohen (n1) 18-19

<sup>64</sup> Ibid 17.

<sup>65</sup> Willem Schinkel, 'Governing through Moral Panic: The Governmental Use of Fear' in Charles Krinsky, *The Ashgate Research Companion to Moral Panics* [Ashgate Publishing 2013] 293

<sup>66</sup> Cohen (n1) 17

lasting approach than that seen during the previous Inventory phase.<sup>67</sup> The repercussions of these actions could potentially produce changes to legal and social policy, or even in the way the society conceives itself; a reaffirmation of social and moral boundaries,<sup>68</sup> where *'a community either recovers its former equilibrium or achieves a stable adaption to changes the disaster brought about.'*<sup>69</sup> As Cohen described:

*'The warning must be coded to be understood and impressive enough to overcome resistance to the belief that current tranquillity can be upset... exposed to communication from others, or to signs from the approaching disaster itself indicating specific imminent danger.'*<sup>70</sup>

The Warning phase of Mods & Rockers was characterized by sensitisation to perceived threats. However, the initial episode in Clacton-on-Sea had little warning, which prompted Cohen's research to begin with the Inventory phase. Throughout the subsequent bank holidays, repetitive themes in the Warning phase emerged, as moral panic has the capacity to fluctuate and resurface periodically. One such theme was the increasing complexity of the warning phase leading up to subsequent impact events, which commenced earlier in anticipation of episodes between Mods & Rockers. As deviant frames for Mods and Rockers had already been established, the reigniting of panic was built on previously circulated distorted information. Another observable theme was the heightened sensitization to threat, evidenced by the increased volume of false alarms generated and believed, as well as the disproportionate and unnecessary security precautions recommended and often implemented, which heightened expectations of harm.<sup>71</sup> When threats were presented as a certainty (*when, not if*), the warning phase sensitised the public to deviant symbols linked to subcultures, constructing the identification of 'threats' through labels and symbols which were to be easily recognised and commonly encountered by the public on a daily basis, thus creating a misapprehension of danger close in time, proximity, and frequency. As panics would eventually calm and

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid 16-17.

<sup>68</sup> Critcher (n14)

<sup>69</sup> Cohen (n1) 17

<sup>70</sup> Ibid 16.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid 164.

recede in volatility, warnings would become less publicised as the constructed deviance had become such a regular occurrence that it became normalised.<sup>72</sup>

Rothe & Muzzatti (2004), in efforts to advance panic framework inspired by both Cohen and Goode & Ben-Yehuda propose the following panic process:

1. Someone or something becomes defined as a threat to values or interests.
2. The threat is depicted in a recognisable form by the media.
3. A rapid build-up of public concern generated hostility.
4. Response from authorities, politicians, and moral entrepreneurs.
5. Panic results in social change.<sup>73</sup>

Critcher's work in 2003 expanded upon Cohen's model of moral panic by providing additional details. Critcher contended that Cohen's depiction of panic development was inadequate, and instead posited that panic progression and social actors' behaviours follow a linear progression rather than a circular sequence. Critcher emphasized that Cohen was less concerned with the distinct stages of moral panic and more focused on how social reactions unfold and evolve over time.<sup>74</sup> Critcher offered a panic framework derived from Cohen's earlier definition of moral panic, acknowledging that charting Cohen's framework in such a way risks reducing its complexity to a mechanical model of progression, thereby reducing the interdependent relationship between social actors. Within *Moral Panics and the Media*, Critcher applied Cohen's processual model to numerous case studies, including; video nasties, raves/ecstasy, AIDS, paedophilia, and child abuse; concluding that Cohen's framework held consistency, although required refinement. The following numbered progression, proposed by Critcher, is aligned with those applied to Cohen's definition of moral panic, as illustrated earlier in this chapter:

1. Emergence: A form of behaviour is perceived as threatening, creating anxiety that something is wrong, with a narrowed focus on imminent dangers.

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid 164-167.

<sup>73</sup> Rothe & Muzzatti (n13) 327-350

<sup>74</sup> Critcher (n19) 13



2. Media Inventory: Preliminary explanations of the threat are mainly articulated via news media. The exaggeration, distortion, prediction, and symbolisation of a threat are created as actors become sensitised to danger.
3. Moral Entrepreneurs: Groups or organisations speculate about the nature of the problem and recommend remedies to solve the issue. They offer directions and explanations for why behaviours are taking place.
4. Experts: Like moral entrepreneurs, experts carry a particular weight which affects how the media define issues. The media also uses expert views to reinforce narratives that are in line with the news distributor's ideological value.
5. Coping and Resolution: The reactions of leading actors contain ideas about the required measures (remedies). Current policing powers are exploited and, if deemed insufficient, the demand for extraordinary power increases.
6. Fade Away: The panic ends, as *'the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates and becomes more visible.'*
7. Legacy: Potential short-lasting effects becoming a footnote in history or producing lasting changes in social policy, the law, or society's view of itself.<sup>75</sup>

### **Policing the Crisis: Diverting Attention**

Scholars of moral panic often make demonstrable efforts to illustrate that rates of inappropriate behaviour (the source of the panic) are not increasing and that actors stimulating panic have a vested interest in doing so.<sup>76</sup> By the 1970s, the concept of moral panic had been applied to various social issues to explain how certain phenomena could become 'overconstructed', inciting exaggerated fear.<sup>77</sup> In doing so, Hall et al. detail the materialisation of an innovative panic seen in the UK and USA, where an organised movement instigated by state officials against a vague folk devil diverted attention away from a crisis of capitalism:

*'There is indeed in the later stages (of the crisis of capitalism) a 'mapping together' of moral panics into a general panic about social order, and such a*

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid 16-19.

<sup>76</sup> Jasper (n48) 10029-10033

<sup>77</sup> Massimo Introvigne, 'Moral Panics and Anti-Cult Terrorism in Western Europe' [2007] *Terrorism and Political Violence* 12 (1) 47

*spiral has tended, not only in Britain, to culminate in what we call a 'law-and-order' campaign... This coalescence into a concerted campaign marks a significant shift in the panic process, for the tendency to panic is now lodged at the heart of the state's political complex. From that vantage point, all dissensual breaks in the society can be more effectively designated as a general threat to law and order, thus subverting the general interest.<sup>78</sup>*

During a period spanning eighteen months from 1972 to 1973, it was reported that approximately sixty incidents of street robbery had been labelled as "muggings" in the news, marking the first instance of this behaviour being characterized in such a manner in British discourse. Violent street robberies, such as those reported on Arthur Hills (15<sup>th</sup> August 1972) and Robert Keenan (5<sup>th</sup> November 1972), 'confirmed' that the crime of 'mugging' was 'authentic', 'rising', and a 'cause for concern'. Conservative politicians provoked a rhetorical association between black youth and violent street delinquencies as mugging was introduced as a *new* category of crime. Elite actors (politicians, judges, and police) emphasised that this 'new' behaviour threatened the fabric of British society, with UK streets soon to resemble New York and Chicago if this was not adequately dealt with. These claims stimulated populist support for abandoning social welfare programs in favour of paying for the enforcement of 'social discipline and public order'.<sup>79</sup> The mugging term was adopted from US discourse with a comprehensive symbolic package – street crime, symbolic black youth threat, poverty, violence, a breakdown of law and order.<sup>80</sup> All added to a general social crisis of rising crime which fitted well with a growing conservative mood and movement against 'permissiveness'.<sup>81</sup> Contextually, the Home Secretary declared a disturbing 129% increase in mugging crimes in London over the previous four years. However, research by Hall et al. argued that there was no legally defined crime such as 'mugging' in British criminal law, so no crime of 'mugging' could have occurred. Consequently, there could also have been no measurable statistics upon which the Home Secretary could have made such a statement.<sup>82</sup> By analysing available criminal statistics, Hall et al. found little evidence suggesting that violent crime was rising.

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<sup>78</sup> Hall et al., (n34) 219

<sup>79</sup> Krinsky (n5) 286

<sup>80</sup> Stuart et al., (n34) 23

<sup>81</sup> Austin Turk, 'Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order. Stuart Hall, Chas Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke, Brian Roberts' [1980] *American Journal of Sociology* 86 (1) 213

<sup>82</sup> Hall et al., (n34)

Regarding mugging as a moral panic, Hall et al. subsequently examined, revised, and expanded Cohen's framework considering political developments in Britain at the time.<sup>83</sup> The authors first considered how capitalism could contribute to a rise in crime before appraising the media, police, and governmental responses to criminalising black youths. As Krinsky (2013) describes, Cohen's framework was aligned with a Marxist critique of false consciousness which diverted attention away from real issues.<sup>84</sup> Similarly, Hall et al. stated that an economic recession during the early 1970s increased unemployment and other economic difficulties, widening inequalities which exacerbated comprehensive social discontent. With capitalism facing a crisis, the government required a scapegoat to divert attention from capitalist failings. With divisive government strategies compounding growing economic poverty and crime, elite frames reduced multifaceted social problems to personal, localised threats directly attributable to suitable and regularly encountered folk devils, such as black youth, welfare 'scroungers', and single mothers.<sup>85</sup> The recession exacerbated the social and economic marginalisation of black youths, increased street robberies, and became a newsworthy topic for British news media. As the government response was to divert police attention towards 'mugging', higher arrests were made for this crime in areas of already high or rising crime rates, legitimising hard-line, punitive government approaches. The press documented these unfolding proceedings to their consuming audiences. Consequently, public attention was diverted to a 'mugging' scare rather than capitalist deficiencies, a truer catalyst of social conflict.

Hall et al.'s core argument was that moral panics must be understood not merely as occasioned from episodes of public concern and fear but as diversionary manifestations intended to maintain the status quo.<sup>86</sup> For example, the Home Secretary's claim of a 192% rise in mugging; using the nearest legal category to mugging – *assault with intent to rob* – statistics highlighted an annual rise averaging at 33% between 1955 and 1965, but only an annual 14% average rise between 1965

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<sup>83</sup> Krinsky (n5) 5

<sup>84</sup> Ibid 5.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid 286.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid 6.

and 1972. This type of crime grew slower at the time of panic than in previous years. Hall et al. accepted the Marxist view that capitalist economies went through periods of crisis when it became difficult for businesses to sell goods or services at a profit. They also believed that the crisis in British society went beyond economic problems, developing their analysis to examine the crisis of hegemony among the British political elites. Since the early 1970s, Britain has faced both economic and hegemonic crises. From 1945 to 1965, higher levels of employment, rising living standards, and expansion of the welfare state meant an *inter-class truce*, as the lower working classes became content with the rule of political elites. However, as economic struggles increased, so too did unemployment alongside stagnation in improvements to living standards, resulting in challenges to hegemony. Hall et al. provide examples of such challenges, such as the Northern Irish Troubles, the growth of student protests, the growth of black equality movements, and organised strikes and demonstrations by trade unions.<sup>87</sup>

Merton's 1938 *Anomie & Strain* theory claims that a failure for members of society to meet the accepted goals of the mainstream via legitimate means could see individuals seek alternative, deviant modes to attain materialistic and capitalist achievement. Owing to inequalities created within the British capitalist system, crimes such as robbery and theft might have been expected to rise if Anomie & Strain theory were considered. Within the context of these capitalistic struggles and subsequent challenges to the acceptance of the British ruling class, mugging was portrayed as a fresh challenge to law and order, diverting attention away from the struggles of neoliberalism. Nevertheless, in some sections of British society, there was a decline in legitimacy and authority for political elites as limited and unsatisfactory answers were offered.<sup>88</sup> For other sections of society, they had been persuaded that their problems were caused by the young black mugger, raising tensions among the working classes; classes in which the failings of neoliberalism often impact hardest, and the social class many young black youths also belonged to; and the *Familiar Stranger* close in proximity. Hall et al. dedicated a chapter of *Policing the Crisis* to analyse the bases of English class cultures and the prevailing

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<sup>87</sup> Hall et al., (n34)

<sup>88</sup> Ibid 317-320.

explanatory ideologies of crime, stating that the mugger was the perfect folk devil reflective of:

*'...fears and anxieties of those who first imagined and then actually discovered him: young, black...threatening the traditional peace of the streets...embodying in his very actions and person, feelings and values that were the opposite of those decencies and restraints which make England who she is.'*<sup>89</sup>

As Hall et al. contend, Britain had no viable economic solutions for an unstoppable capitalist decline and no political base for alternative socialist strategies. What emerged was the 'Iron Times' of increasingly punitive measures implemented against the mugging crisis.<sup>90</sup> Liberal attempts to counter or soften this increased punitiveness were ineffectual, as liberal evaluation unavoidably failed to provide a sufficient explanation understood by the populace to challenge the 'common sense' conventionalisms (or mythologies) of the English middle and working classes.<sup>91</sup> As the authors write:

*'Instead of a concrete analysis offering a true explanation, 'public images' was invoked that merely suggested fragmented and descriptive connections among various social problems, thus accomplishing only 'rhetorical closure'.*<sup>92</sup>

A crucial theoretical component of the study by Hall et al. considers that many news stories are based on statements from politicians, policing officials, and criminal justice practitioners (primary definers of information), while the media merely present and explain stories to their audiences in their role as secondary definers of information, categorisations which will be considered further in Chapter. 2 alongside the social actors of moral panic. Following the publication of *Policing the Crisis*, other researchers, such as Beckett (1998), have assessed developments within systems of governance, finding that during the 1980s, politicians from both major parties attempted to turn public concerns about crime to their political advantage.<sup>93</sup> In a critical observation, Beckett states that drug use, for example, was defined as:

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid 161-162.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid 303-304.

<sup>91</sup> Turk (n81) 213-214

<sup>92</sup> Hall et al., (n34) 118

<sup>93</sup> Katherine Beckett, *Making Crime Pay: Law & Order in Contemporary American Politics: Studies in Crime and Public Policy* [OUP 1998] 44-45

*'...in political discourse as a social control issue rather than public health or socioeconomic problem. As the decade passed, the public became more likely to support enhanced law enforcement, harsher sentences, and the contradiction of civil rights as appropriate solutions to the drug problem. This shift was part of a more general trend towards toughness that began in the 1960s. This time it wasn't just conservatism playing a leading role in getting tough: many democrats attempted to wrest control of crime and drug issues from Republicans by advocating stricter anticrime and antidrug laws.'*<sup>94</sup>

Further, considerations should be given to the effectiveness of punitive measures adopted by enforcement agents in what Garland (2002) described as a *Responsibilisation Strategy*. While Beckett further proposed that US President Regan revived a pre-existing panic over street crime and drug use and again incited public fears and that President Bush prolonged them;<sup>95</sup> Garland suggested that a strategy was adopted in which policy would be adopted to address *the fear of crime*, even if that same policy had little positive effect upon the actual crime itself:

*'When a series of police research studies suggested that some measures might fail to reduce actual crime rates but succeed in reducing the reported levels of fear and insecurity, the way was opened for a new policy aim.'*<sup>96</sup>

Garland discussed the introduction of programs that enlisted more public and community elements as informal agents of crime control, extending the system of governance beyond the state itself and enabling individuals to be responsible for not only eschewing criminal behaviours but also overseeing the behaviour of others. In this sense, a new policy was aimed at fear of crime by providing a level of civic reassurance, as criminologists and policymakers increasingly viewed fear of crime as independent of the crime itself. As part of this, a *Responsibilization Strategy* attempted to extend state crime control agencies by further incorporating private and community groups. Instead of addressing crime by direct and traditional methods such as policing, courts, and prisons, this approach promoted indirect actions and improved networks of informal crime control methods, complementing official state

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid 44-45.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid 44-45.

<sup>96</sup> David Garland, *The Culture of Control: Crime and Social Order in Contemporary Society* [University Chicago Press 2002] 122

control.<sup>97</sup> An issue with this approach to governmentality is that fear can present itself as a helpful tool for officials to capitalise upon for these gains without considering the lasting ramifications of inciting moral panic over specific issues. For example, Simon (2007) found that some US politicians during the '60s and '70s '*found crime a convenient line of retreat from explicit support for legal racial segregation in education and other public accommodations.*' By exploiting the public fear of crime, various politicians adopted strong anticrime stances out of self-interest, camouflaging their true intentions and turning to crime so that they could determine public policy without encountering unyielding opposition or controversy.<sup>98</sup> It should, however, be made clear that while some panics are driven cynically by those attempting to manipulate public opinion, other panics and their actors genuinely perceive the threat(s) as authentic.<sup>99</sup>

### **Social Constructions of Deviance: Characterising Moral Panic**

Erich Goode and Nachman Ben-Yehuda identified *characteristics* of moral panic, set forward in *Moral Panics: The Social Construction of Deviance* as being *Concern, Consensus, Volatility, Hostility, and Disproportionality*.<sup>100</sup> These characteristics help to distinguish moral panic from *legitimate* social concerns,<sup>101</sup> and have been applied to issues such as satanic rituals and pornography when assessing if such 'problems' are legitimate threats or distorted fears.<sup>102</sup> This approach, termed *social constructionism*, challenges the basic assumptions that sociology could define, measure, and explain social issues.<sup>103</sup> Critcher (2003) considered Cohen's model to be a processual one, but he also typifies Goode & Ben-Yehuda's five characteristics as being an *Attributional* model.<sup>104</sup> All five criteria must be demonstratable, measurable, and gratified before a phenomenon can be deemed moral panic.

*'While their consideration of structural characteristics of moral panic represents a distinct shift in perspective from Cohen's attention to their progression over time, that Goode & Ben-Yehuda contextualise their work by*

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid 124.

<sup>98</sup> Jonathan Simon, *Governing Through Crime: How the War on Crime Transformed American Democracy and Created a Culture of Fear* [OUP 2007] 24-25

<sup>99</sup> Jasper (n48) 10029-10033

<sup>100</sup> Goode & Ben-Yehuda (n16) 37-43

<sup>101</sup> Walsh (n9) 643-662

<sup>102</sup> Rothe & Muzzatti (n13) 327 - 350

<sup>103</sup> Critcher (n14)

<sup>104</sup> Critcher (n19) 25

*cogently analysing Cohen's ideas throughout their book suggests that they intended to supplement rather than displace his processual model.*<sup>105</sup>

The *Concern* characteristic outlines that moral panic involves a '*heightened level of concern over the behaviour of a certain group or category*'.<sup>106</sup> There should be evident concern over the consequences of unhealthy behaviours. Public apprehension can be measured using various methods including opinion polls, surveys, news reports, and other qualitative methods. Through these measurement methods, we can account for the second characteristic: *Consensus*. When proclaiming that moral panic has occurred, there must be consensus that concerns hold credulity. This consensus does not need to 'grip the nation'; rather, it can be with a 'significant' proportion of a community stimulating them into non-routine responses.<sup>107</sup> Disproportionality is arguably the most contested criterion in this regard. However, the ability to academically demonstrate moral panic rests upon evidence of this characteristic. Goode & Ben-Yehuda proposed that disproportion is apparent when public concerns and proposed remedies are above what can be deemed rational or suitable when the reality of the concerns is considered.<sup>108</sup> Supporting panic researchers in identifying extreme elements of moral panic, Goode & Ben-Yehuda provide *the following Criteria of Disproportion*:

- *Exaggerated figures*: Where figures used to measure the problem are 'grossly exaggerated' to its reality, this criterion of disproportionality is met.
- *Figures Fabricated*: If the threat that is feared is, by all available evidence, non-existent, this criterion of disproportionality is met.
- *Rumours of harm invented and believed*: When stories of false harm or threats are told and believed, this criterion of disproportionality is met.
- *Other harmful conditions*: If the attention paid to a specific condition is vastly more significant than that paid to another, and the concrete threat or damage caused by the former is no greater or less than that of the latter, this criterion of disproportionality is met.

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<sup>105</sup> Krinsky (n5) 7

<sup>106</sup> Goode & Ben-Yehuda (n16) 37

<sup>107</sup> Klocke & Muschert (n11) 300

<sup>108</sup> Goode & Ben-Yehuda (n16) 40-41



- Changes over time: If the attention given to a condition at one point is infinitely more significant than that paid during a previous or later period without any corresponding growth in objective seriousness, the criterion of disproportionality is met.<sup>109</sup>

In short, Goode & Ben-Yehuda argue that if exaggeration and fabrication of the issue can be demonstrated, rumours are created and believed, and attention not afforded to other more serious threats and characteristics of disproportion have been met.<sup>110</sup>

Criticism has been levied on this criterion of disproportionality. Waddington (1986) contends that measuring and reasonably demonstrating the criterion of disproportionality is difficult. Establishing comparisons between the scale of the problem and the scale of the response has led to more concentration placed upon the scale of response than on the scale of the problem itself, with Waddington citing Cohen, Young and Hall et al. as examples of this.<sup>111</sup> This further implies that panic scholars should be in a position to understand what a proportionate response would (or should) be and intimately understand all dimensions of the problem:

*‘Conceptually, the notion of a moral panic lacks any criteria of proportionality without which it is impossible to determine whether concern about any...problem is justified or not.’<sup>112</sup>*

For researchers of American moral panic, disproportionality is central to moral panic.<sup>113</sup> In agreement with Ungar (1992)<sup>114</sup> and conceding that some problematic social issues cannot measure an objective threat, Goode & Ben-Yehuda dispute this claim and perhaps harshly claim that much of the field has ignored Waddington’s attack on the moral panic concept.<sup>115</sup> Critcher addresses critiques that data used to demonstrate disproportionality can be unreliable, asking ‘who is to say what a proportionate response is?’<sup>116</sup> Nevertheless, Goode & Ben-Yehuda reason that

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid 44-46.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid 75-77.

<sup>111</sup> Waddington. (n24) 246

<sup>112</sup> Ibid 246.

<sup>113</sup> Best (n44) 70

<sup>114</sup> Sheldon Ungar, ‘The Rise and (Relative) Decline of Global Warming as a Social Problem’ [1992] *The Sociological Quarterly* 33 (4) 483-501

<sup>115</sup> Goode & Ben-Yehuda (n16) 75

<sup>116</sup> Critcher (n14)

'future-orientated' threats, such as global warming and nuclear war, can be impossible for a researcher to calculate, and that threats which are imminent or now occurring are indeed calculable using their criteria of disproportion. Episodes of moral panic are often short lived, erupting, and quickly subsiding. *Volatility* is expected to heighten levels of *Hostility* during panics, displaying the most unified period of consensus with hostility evident towards the prescribed folk devil. When measuring hostility, we can identify whom society views as blameworthy for supposed harm. Fitting the definition of moral panic theory, hostility is unjust because of the disproportionate reactions to distortions. It is also essential to ask why particular Folk Devils emerge as the undesirable symbols of the problem.

As this thesis progresses, Goode & Ben-Yehuda's moral panic characteristics shall be applied when assessing contemporary threats from Islamist extremism/terrorism. Further, in this thesis's next chapter, Goode & Ben-Yehuda's *Locus of Moral Panics* is deliberated. The locus (loci) of moral panic states that fear and concerns are articulated through particular actions, held beliefs, and sentiments felt by collectives or communities. This thesis further evaluates moral panic loci in the next chapter. We would be naïve, Goode & Ben-Yehuda explain, to assume that panics grip society to the extent that all its members are affected in the same way at the same time, as there may be intense debate and disagreement about whether a given condition represents a valid cause for concern: *to who is the panic, a panic?* In this light, we must also ask, who is 'panicked?'<sup>117</sup> To this end, they propose three theories on how moral panic may occur. When deliberating the current role of social actors in the next chapter, it is suggested that the loci of moral panics are also impacted by changes in social actors.

### **Contemporary Moral Panic Framework: Revisions**

Efforts have been made to revise moral panic frameworks to enable broader application to a range of contemporary issues, with McRobbie & Thornton (1995) advocating such revisions to account for modern social and cultural developments.<sup>118</sup> Klocke & Muschert (2010) assert that few articles explain how to

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<sup>117</sup> Goode & Ben-Yehuda (n16) 43

<sup>118</sup> McRobbie & Thornton (n2) 559-574

adequately analyse the scope, intensity, and reception of moral panic. With an 'underrated effort' capitalising on the strengths of the original theories,<sup>119</sup> Klocke & Muschert combine Cohen's processual and Goode & Ben-Yehuda's attributional models to form a hybrid of the two (see Appendix. 1). This hybrid offers practical suggestions for analysing and researching the conditions, processes, and effects of moral panic (see Appendix. 2).<sup>120</sup> In critiquing processual and attributional models, Klocke & Muschert argue that there have been significant changes in how social actors of moral panics interrelate within society, particularly emphasising the current standings of news media considering communicative technological developments such as text messaging, blogs, and social media. A moral panic framework needs not only to explain *what* occurs, but also *how a panic framework* should allow for counter-narratives from folk devils and other fragmentations of modern media beyond the volatile mainstream media and social interest lifespan.<sup>121</sup>

The hybrid yields a framework with three distinct stages: *Cultivation, Operation, & Dissipation*. *Cultivation* refers to the emergence of conditions, actors, and discourses, evidencing the growth of moral panic. For panic to develop, there needs to be a conflict between two or more competing 'moral universes' pronounced by moral entrepreneurs who have constructed an issue for a wider society. De Young (2007) describes a moral entrepreneur as:

*'...an individual, group, or formal organisation that takes on the responsibility of persuading society to develop or to enforce rules that are consistent with its own ardently held moral beliefs. Moral entrepreneurs may act as rule creators by crusading for the passage of rules, laws, and policies against behaviours they find abhorrent or as rule enforcers by administering and implementing them... the effect of moral entrepreneurship... the formation of a new class of outsiders whose behaviour now violates these newly minted regulations and therefore is subject to the opprobrious label of 'deviant.'*<sup>122</sup>

Moral crusades often occur during times of rapid social change, which creates the potential for value conflicts between diverse communities sharing the same social

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<sup>119</sup> Critcher (n14)

<sup>120</sup> Klocke & Muschert (n11) 295-309

<sup>121</sup> Ibid 300.

<sup>122</sup> Mary De Young, 'Moral Entrepreneur' [2007] Wiley Online Library <<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/9781405165518.wbeosm122>> accessed 19<sup>th</sup> October 2019.

space. These crusades develop into moral enterprises as each group defends its traditions. Economic (recessions) and political crises (war, say) provide fertile conditions for moral panic, with past panics potentially providing foundations for familiar narratives, frames, and discourses. The cultivation stage consists of (pre-existing) value conflicts, problem frames, existing or emerging folk devils, key interest groups, and identifiable social problems in a social-historical context, with significant media attention paid to emerging problems.<sup>123</sup>

The *Operation* stage details the processes which function during moral panic, examined under three subdivisions: *Episode*, *Magnification*, and *Regulation*. The instigation of panic (Episode) stems from an often-identifiable triggering incident which holds a 'strong element of inherent drama'. The episode phase can have immediate media coverage that includes *distortive*, *predictive*, and *symbolic* elements which illuminates the social problem and projects certainty of future issues. Folk devils are specified in dramatic narratives, images, and depictions.<sup>124</sup> Critical responders and their actions should be evaluated along with identifying social commentators and their summary of events, dramatic images, and symbols. The *Magnification* sub-stage considers folk devil 'participation', scrutinising their purported threatening differences and behaviours. News reporting will evolve from providing 'facts' to 'sense-making' journalism, where public officials and moral entrepreneurs present their opinions. There will also be increased participation from other officials and experts through news media, as the media uses official sources as primary definers to frame the issue. Government officials, social institutions, and action groups conjure rhetorical scenarios which often repackage tales of historical atrocity to emphasise the threat and typify the behaviour of the folk devil. The folk devil may speak out in their defence; however, this may elicit more concern. The media often generates subject-based taglines or headlines to reinforce their frames and incorporate opinion polls, letters to editors, protests, web content, and blogs to illustrate public concern.<sup>125</sup> Magnification should describe the characterisations of broader episode meanings in value-laden terms, identifying connections to current problems, proposed causes, and solutions to the problem. This can be done by

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<sup>123</sup> Klocke & Muschert (n11) 301

<sup>124</sup> Ibid 302.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid 303.

analysing official statements and media discourse scaling the scope of the problem, identifying discursive patterns when typifying folk devil behaviours, and analysing the media's coverage of the problem and comparing this to past coverage to detect recurring themes or frames. Inevitable *regulation* calls for robust social control measures to manage, discourage, and remove threats. This includes pre-emptive actions and increased surveillance. Powers inflate for agents of social control, and there is encouragement for the public to show heightened vigilance toward threats and report their suspicions. Agents of social control and action groups mobilise financial and human resources to take collective legislative, civic, and law enforcement measures against the threat. This mobilisation of regulatory forces may become an institutionalised fixture accompanied by the passage of new laws or harsher penalties. Scrutinising regulatory elements identifies the social groups targeted for surveillance and the methods and means of regulation. It identifies sources of mobilisation and justifications for civic, legislative, and enforcement actions, and analyses the process and outcomes of critical responses undertaken to mitigate the issue. However, control responses may also spark countermovement's, as social control is often discriminately applied to individuals, groups, and organisations perceived to be the folk devil of the panic at play.<sup>126</sup>

Finally, the *Dissipation* of moral panic involves the receding of volatile and heightened social anxiety. As a critical source of secondary information, the media are again a vital actor, described as a '*cauldron through which claims makers and counter-claims makers evaluate and contest social meanings*'.<sup>127</sup> Klocke & Muschert separated this stage into different subdivisions, stating that several outcomes may be formed during dissipation. For example, with *Normalisation*, a new hegemony is established, and there may also be elements of *Transformation*, as panic results in social, ideological, or institutional change either in support of moral regulation or in opposition to it. There might also be a *Dissolution*, as the panic is challenged or debunked, the offending behaviour drops off, or another pressing issue takes its place. A *Re-Circulation* of the elements of panic is repeated in discourse, creating dynamics for a new or revived panic. Dissipation analyses factors and conditions that

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid 304.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid 304.

advance the decline of panic, identifies institutional legacies of the panic, and identifies symbolic legacies (new or continuing problem frames, symbols, and images) that may cultivate or deter future moral panics.

While Critcher describes this hybrid as an underrated effort which capitalises on the strengths of the original theories and encompasses the best of both rather than an either-or scenario,<sup>128</sup> Best (2013) critiques that the hybrid model glosses over the definition of moral panic and circumvents most moral panic criticism. Two of Best's chief points include that the hybrid fails to question what constitutes a 'panic' and fails to tackle questions of panic proportionality.<sup>129</sup> To these criticisms, it could be assumed that by merging Cohen's and Goode & Ben-Yehuda's models, Klocke & Muschert inherently agree with the definitions of moral panic formed by previous researchers, which have also been accepted in this thesis. Further, by merging Cohen's and Goode & Ben-Yehuda's models, it could also be assumed that Klocke & Muschert disagree with at least some of the criticisms aimed at the classic frameworks or feel that by merging the processual and attributional frameworks, they address weaknesses in each of the classic frameworks by merging their more robust components. Lastly, it is disagreeable that either the hybrid or the classic frameworks fail to stipulate what constitutes a panic, as Goode & Ben-Yehuda's moral panic characteristics - if reasonably met - should satisfy this concern.

Many other recent academic contributions have been made to the study of moral panic. Luce (2013) analysed distorted discourses by examining a case study of press reporting on suicide and critiquing journalistic standards during the creation of moral panic.<sup>130</sup> Hayle (2013) questions if there is a possibility of having folk devils without the mass hysteria of a moral panic, attempting to separate and present 'folk devils' and 'moral panics' as separate, distinct phenomena. Using data from news articles, it was found that folk devils have been created outside of, and without, the volatility period inherently expected of moral panic.<sup>131</sup> Fazzino et al. (2014) consider

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<sup>128</sup> Critcher (n14)

<sup>129</sup> Best (n44) 75

<sup>130</sup> Ann Luce, 'Moral Panics: Reconsidering Journalism's Responsibilities' in Karen Fowler-Watt & Stuart Allan Eds. *Journalism: new challenges* [2013] Centre for Journalism and Communication Research 393-409

<sup>131</sup> Steven J. Hayle, 'Folk Devils without Moral Panics: Discovering Concepts in the Sociology of Evil' [2013] *International Journal of Criminology and Sociological Theory* 6 (2) 1125

the evolved role of moral entrepreneurs in technological communicative advancements (social media),<sup>132</sup> while Brisman & South (2015) have applied Cohen's framework to the issues in green criminology (climate change), influenced by Cohen's latter career seminal work on state *denial*.<sup>133</sup> Morrison (2019) investigates constructed panics of *Scroungers*, those labelled as feckless and workshy and who take advantage of the welfare system whilst the rest of 'Us' work hard and pay taxes. Morrison utilises a methodological approach similar to this thesis: news article content analysis alongside social media comments.<sup>134</sup> More recently, Cooper and Navarro-Genie (2021) examined global responses to the COVID-19 pandemic again considering Cohen's panic framework.<sup>135</sup>

### **Moral Panic & Terrorism**

Moral panic is an important instigator of social change, are neither marginal nor trivial and help in understanding social life. As Goode & Ben-Yehuda state:

*'A close examination of the impact of panics forces us to take a more long-range view of things, to see panics as a long-term social process rather than separate, discrete, time-bound episodes.'*<sup>136</sup>

Research directly applying moral panic to terrorism is lacking. Jasper (2001) writes that scholars have scrutinised panics from the perspective of behaviours which are considered, in reality, to be harmless to broader society, arguing that this makes it easy to demonstrate that panic is undeserved and unnecessary within a specific and transparent value system. However, Jasper states that other panic researchers have applied framework to issues which are - in fact - evidently harmful, making subsequent reactions challenging to demonstrate disproportionality and exaggeration of concerns. Nonetheless, the ineffectiveness of disproportionate

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<sup>132</sup> Lori L. Fazzino, Michael Ian Borer, & Mohammed Abdel Haq, 'The New Moral Entrepreneurs' in *The Death and Resurrection of Deviance: Critical Criminological Perspectives* [Palgrave Macmillan 2014] 168-191

<sup>133</sup> Avi Brisman & Nigel South, 'New 'Folk Devils,' Denials and Climate Change: Applying the Work of Stanley Cohen to Green Criminology and Environmental Harm' [2015] *Crit Crim* 23 449

<sup>134</sup> Morrison (n36)

<sup>135</sup> Barry Cooper & Marco Navarro-Genie, *COVID-19: The Politics of a Pandemic Moral Panic* [Frontier Centre for Public Policy 2021]

<sup>136</sup> Goode & Ben-Yehuda (n16) 149-171

remedies has commonly been explored in research as an alternative measurement.<sup>137</sup> Indeed, this research falls very much into Jaspers' later realisation.

Moral panic inherently approaches social problems by viewing them as grossly distorted and harmful, accompanied by unnecessary and ineffective reactions and remedies. Often, academics argue that harm is minimal or non-existent. However, this is not the case for terrorism. Terrorist threats from Islamist extremism display ranging *modus operandi* and elicit political, social, and legislative responses as terrorist discourses are historically recounted.<sup>138</sup> Knowing that terrorism poses a significant threat and potential harm, this thesis does not seek to argue the contrary. Research aims of this project are to consider responses to terrorism - specifically Islamist extremism - and the changing roles of social actors. As Jasper alludes to, moral panic can still occur even with real and significant threats, materialising through social reactions exceeding proportionality and necessity and sacrificing normal standards through aggressive legislation that impedes human rights. Even with real and significant threats, moral panic can still occur if there is evidence of false or distorted information generation and dissemination, especially for nefarious political gain and ideas which will be explored in later chapters. In recent years, researchers have attempted to apply panic concepts and frameworks in terrorism research. For example, by examining media frames, Pece (2018) illustrates differing typologies and representations that European news media offers audiences within the framing narrations of incidents linked to terrorism and how such depictions can influence panic creation. Pece finds that media representations of terrorism are reliant upon two concepts: *Hypermediation* and *Immediacy*, both of which are able to trigger panic, given that media's online presence provides audiences with a greater closeness and experience of terrorism episodes, including the audience's ability to interact via comments. Ultimately, the uncertainty and instability caused by terrorism create a state of constant fear, leading to support for hard-line measures such as the *Patriot Act*.<sup>139</sup> Dingley & Herman (2017) collected data relating to how media reported on radicalisation and Islamist extremist attacks in Europe during 2015-2016.

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<sup>137</sup> Jasper (n48) 10029-10033

<sup>138</sup> Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language* [2<sup>nd</sup> ed, Pearson Education Limited 2010]

<sup>139</sup> Emanuel Pece, *The Representation of Terror and Moral Panic: The Media Frames of the European Press* [2018] *Journal of Mediterranean Knowledge* 3 (1) 87



They found that most articles analysed assumed a relationship between religion, Islam, and radicalisation/terrorism whilst assuming that 'our' Western, Christian values and norms were an acceptable 'default' position for citizens to adopt and measure others by.<sup>140</sup> Rothe & Muzzatti argued that mainstream news accepted and propelled the Bush administration's one-dimensional, hostile, and divisive framing, arguing that the news media had been compelled to frame Afghanistan's *Taliban*. They gave refugees to Osama Bin Laden as inherently evil.<sup>141</sup> Rothe & Muzzatti (2004) examined hegemonic *War on Terror* rhetoric pushed by the Bush administration after 9/11, using a critical moral panic assessment. By conducting an empirical study of mainstream news media coverage, US legislative reactions, and predictions of further, extreme Islamist terrorist danger, Rothe & Muzzatti proposed that the Bush administration created a dichotomy in which other nations could be defined as 'good' or 'evil' (allies or enemies of the US).<sup>142</sup>

Walsh (2017) assessed the relationship between terrorism and moral panic, paying particular attention to the role of folk devils in terrorism panic. Walsh argues that exaggerated threats and disproportionate responses are not solely driven by moral entrepreneurs or social control agents but are informed by the strategic practices and rationalities of the folk devils themselves.<sup>143</sup> Walsh explored how terroristic methods – the deployment of shocking and exceptional violence to incite fear and stimulate political change – challenged our understanding of the moral panic framework.<sup>144</sup> Recent technological developments have unleashed and intensified shared feelings of collective harm, magnified social change, offered new opportunities to vilify outsiders, distorted communications, manipulated public opinion, and mobilised embittered individuals. Digital platforms and communications create significant targets and facilitate the development of instruments for panic production. In a later publication, Walsh (2020) focused on the role of social media, considering the relationship between moral panics and emergent media systems.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> James Dingley & Sean Herman, 'Terrorism, Radicalisation & Moral Panics: Media and Academic Analysis and Reporting of 2016 and 2017 'Terrorism' [2017] *Small War and Insurgencies* 28 (6) 996-1013

<sup>141</sup> Rothe & Muzzatti (n13) 327-350

<sup>142</sup> Scott A. Bonn, 'How an Elite-Engineered Moral Panic led to the US War on Iraq' [2010] *Critical Criminology* 19 227

<sup>143</sup> Walsh (n9) 643-662

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid* 643-662.

<sup>145</sup> Walsh (n3) 1-20

We may also look to other academic theory to further our understanding of terror effects of society. A further contribution to the role of the folk devil is the merging of the *Civilising Process* with the moral panic concept. During the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries, systematic efforts were made to encourage those from the lower class to conform to the expectations and standards of the middle and upper classes, especially those lifestyle aspects considered to belong to moral character, drinking, cruelty toward animals, neglect of children, pornography, and visual/video imagery. Jasper writes that, for more than 100 years, moral panic stemmed from apprehensions from the socially advantaged about the less privileged.<sup>146</sup> Rohloff & Wright (2010) contemplate that Norbert Elias' Civilising Process can escalate the 'explanatory power' of moral panic frameworks, moving them beyond their informative, yet limited, agendas for social analysis. The civilising process illustrates the development of European civil societies away from the lawless and anarchic Middle (Dark)-ages and into the early modern era,<sup>147</sup> and how Europeans came to think of themselves as more 'civilised' than their neighbouring countries.<sup>148</sup> Elias' analysis of manners and behavioural transitions between the 13<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries observed changing perceptions of shame and embarrassment of, among others, bodily propriety, and violence. Indeed, public displays of violence in the form of legitimate state violence carried out on criminals in the form of corporal and capital punishment eventually moved out of sight to the inside of institutions such as prisons before many justice systems forfeited the practices entirely and nations became more civilised in their offenders' management. By utilising Elias' civilising concepts, Rohloff & Wright suggest that the civilising process can detail the associations between stand-alone occurrences of moral panic and ongoing social concerns. They explain that panic erupts owing to unacceptable behaviours by members within a civilisation seen as contributing to the decivilization of society. Technological developments enhancing the diffusion of knowledge has progressively empowered the exaggeration and distortion of events '*as well as the de-amplification of events.*' Rohloff & Wright state that:

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<sup>146</sup> Jasper (n48) 10029-10033

<sup>147</sup> Norbert Elias, *The Civilising Process* [Revised Ed, Blackwell Publishing 2000]

<sup>148</sup> Andrew Linklater & Stephen Mennell, 'Norbert Elias, The Civilising Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations – An Overview and Assessment' [2010] *History and Theory* 49 (3) 384

*'...to attend to the problem of temporality with specific empirical examples, we can then explore how the specific panic (or panics) are affected by more comprehensive social processes specific to the given example under investigation....The following questions could be asked about the relationship between short-term panics and long-term processes: how do particular social problems come to be defined as such and develop into moral panics; how do groups of people come to be the foci of processes of 'disidentification''<sup>149</sup>*

Rohloff & Wright assert that Elias's concepts can illuminate the function of moral panic within a process of civilised co-habitation, which includes managing and controlling conflicts appearing when *'decivilising counter currents accompany civilising trends, when for example, technology, specialisation, and democratisation bring social disruptions such as those related to a greater division of labour.'*<sup>150</sup>

Additionally, applying Elias' process to analysing moral panic can help academics address questions such as why some social issues lead to episodes of volatile panic and why others issues do not, and how groups qualify (or fail to qualify) as Folk Devils.<sup>151</sup> However, notions that the civilising process could contribute to moral panic research were considered by Hier (2016) who found that while the civilising process might help to explain a potential historical-structural shift towards the so-called 'age of moral panic', the civilising process has failed to substantially supplement defining elements of moral regulation or help to develop alternative frameworks for moral panic which improve upon what has already been developed.<sup>152</sup>

### **Justifying the selection of moral panic theory for this research**

This PhD has opted to concentrate on the narrative of Islamist terrorism in the United Kingdom. By employing moral panic framework, the study aims to uncover societal frames and reactions surrounding terrorist threats, the individuals and groups deemed responsible for such threats, and the public discourse that illustrates grassroots interpretations.<sup>153</sup> Jewkes (2015), however, argues that it is challenging to explain why criminology and other academic disciplines, *'...continue to place the*

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<sup>149</sup> Amanda Rohloff & Sarah Wright, 'Moral Panic & Social Theory' [2010] *Current Sociology* 58 (3) 403

<sup>150</sup> Krinsky (n5) 367-368

<sup>151</sup> Ibid 367-368.

<sup>152</sup> Sean Hier, 'Moral Panic, Moral Regulation, and the Civilising Process' [2016] *The British Journal of Sociology* 67 (3) 414

<sup>153</sup> Jasper (n48) 10029-10033

*moral panic thesis at the heart of studies of deviance and disorder when both sociology and media studies have more or less ignored it for decades*'. This is a salient point when justifying the decision to apply the panic framework in this study.<sup>154</sup> Although researchers such as Jewkes, Best, Ungar, and others question the legitimacy of moral panic research, Thompson (1998) defends academic interest when affirming that moral panic research '*deserves to be recognised for what it truly is: a key sociological concept*.'<sup>155</sup> Critcher (2017) reinforces this, claiming that '*such reservations have not prevented the notion from spreading beyond academe into debates about social problems in society at large*'.<sup>156</sup> There is an assumption in some criminological theories of crime that many deviants are economically marginalised, turning to deviancy as a means of addressing social barriers and problems. This latter notion is also somewhat attributable to the construction of the Folk Devil if one considers the *Deviancy Amplification Spiral*. Nevertheless, an impetus is placed on understanding how fear is generated, its repercussions, and the groups that qualify as blameworthy. There is a recognised necessity to explore and understand exaggerated reactions on the part of the 'moral majority', which have been progressed by feelings of uncertainty stemming from the quickness of transformations to their immediate social environment (social disorganisation).

The application of moral panic framework for his research holds advantages which other frameworks -such as *Moral Regulation*, *Risk Society* and *Fear of Crime or Terrorism* models - do not provide. Critcher (2013) stipulated that moral panic analysis needed to reconnect to mainstream sociological theory, recommending a potential path via *Moral Regulation*. Moral regulation holds that societies create and maintain continuous dialogue regarding the boundaries of what are morally acceptable behaviours and how they should be regulated, allowing for the once forbidden to become acceptable.<sup>157</sup> This forms part of recent efforts to identify the cultural processes of ethical maintenance, in which moral panic is an intense occurrence.<sup>158</sup> Moral panic and moral regulation share similarities in that each theory

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<sup>154</sup> Jewkes (n45)

<sup>155</sup> Thompson (n49)

<sup>156</sup> Critcher (n14)

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Chas Critcher, 'Model Answers: Moral Panic and Media History' in Sian Nicholas & Tom O'Malley, *Moral Panics, Social Fears, and the Media: Historical Perspectives* [Taylor & Francis 2013] 13

holds that a social group (folk devil) endeavours to act against the will of the mainstream, broadcasting their opposing moral position. However, Critcher also identified flaws related to the scope of moral regulation and its boundaries within the structure of moral panic contemplation.<sup>159</sup> Unlike moral regulation, moral panics do not require reform of the moral character of the 'deviant'. Instead, moral panics only require 'direct and coercive intervention.' Moral panics also identify victims from perpetrators more clearly than moral regulation, appealing to the *moral economy of harm*—the idea that people are negatively affected by disproportionate actions and the assigned stigma of others.<sup>160</sup>

*Risk Society*, developed by Ulrich Beck<sup>161</sup> and furthered by authors such as Anthony Giddens,<sup>162</sup> seems unsatisfactory when appraising periods of mass and volatile crisis fear. A risk society seems to lack the capacity to adequately consider the volatile fear or hostility present in moral panic frameworks. Although Beck later proposed that the 9/11 attacks brought substantial global changes,<sup>163</sup> risk society would seem to be a better application for social issues which convey concern with a reduced or more gradual likelihood of transpiring. The fear derived from the topics generally encompassed by risk society, environmental, and financial harms, for example, can emphatically result in cataclysmic global consequences (hence the risk). Nevertheless, they are unlikely to happen or are spoken about as befalling future generations (it will be *their* problem). In Becks' application of risk society framework to terrorism, he discusses a global response. He highlights the positive developments that have emerged since 2001, namely enhanced intercontinental collaboration.<sup>164</sup> Again, however, risk society fails to accommodate for volatile periods of heightened, unregulated, and widespread communal fear, which moral panic framework accommodates. As this PhD progresses, it is reasoned that the measurable *Volatility* panic characteristic forwarded by Goode & Ben-Yehuda<sup>165</sup> is essential for differentiating between expected or customary display fear and the brief

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<sup>159</sup> Chas Critcher, 'Widening the Focus: Moral Panics as Moral Regulation' [2009] *British Journal of Criminology* 49 17

<sup>160</sup> Critcher (n14)

<sup>161</sup> Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* [Sage Publications 1986]

<sup>162</sup> Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* [Stanford University Press 1990]

<sup>163</sup> Ulrich Beck, 'The Terrorist Threat: World Risk Society Revisited' [2002] *Theory, Culture & Society* 19 (4) 39

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid* 39-55.

<sup>165</sup> Goode & Ben-Yehuda (n16) 41-43

yet extraordinary panics. As illustrated in later chapters, threats and warnings of terrorism were ever-present in political and media discourse, during which time risk society could potentially assess social response and management. Indeed, if we suppose for a moment that moral panic and risk society are merged, risk society may combine commendably with the *Warning* and *Remedy* stages of Stan Cohen's moral panic framework. These phases are prejudiced by a society concentrating on, and recovering from, weakness and threats. During these two phases, populations become sensitised to menacing issues as they look for, and are triggered by, the constructed signs of an inflated threat. During such times, prominent social actors forward their proposals, which are sometimes implemented to diminish the risk of jeopardy. Again, it is ideal for evaluation through the lens of risk society. Nevertheless, in the absence of this period of volatility, a moral panic framework was favoured.

A final alternative theoretical framework which might have been applied to terrorism/Islamist extremism is *Fear of Crime or Terrorism* models, particularly those put forward by Garofalo. While the fear of crime model considers nominal information (age, sex, race, income, etc.), furthering our understanding of crime, risk assessment, and individual responses to fear of crime, it does so only in the sense of a person fearing or anticipating *physical harm* from crime.<sup>166</sup> In this sense, such theoretical frameworks would constrain and limit the scope of this thesis if applied.

### **Chapter Conclusion**

This thesis aims to join the ranks of later revisionists by employing moral panic framework to analyse Islamist extremism. Cohen's comprehensive moral panic framework, since introduced to academic literature, has been used retrospectively to analyse historical sources of widespread panic, demonstrating the strength and flexibility of panic models. The moral panic framework has been utilised by various academic disciplines to explain worrying or problematic social phenomena.

This chapter has sought to identify enduring moral panic definitions and frameworks, highlighting their criticisms. While many scholars have rightfully and predictably

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<sup>166</sup> James Garofalo, 'The Fear of Crime: Causes and Consequences' [1981] *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 72 (2) 839

pointed to moral panic shortcomings, it is essential to note that few theories are immune to criticism of their limitations. It is important for researchers who apply moral panic theory to make sense of and explain social issues to understand its limitations surrounding definitions, terms, and measurement abilities (e.g., disproportionality). However, academic arguments that the theory is outdated fail to consider its extensive multidisciplinary application. Disciplines such as sociology, social psychology, economics, and criminology can benefit from a judicious utilization of the panic framework. Critical scholars also overlook the enduring potential of moral panic theory, its applicability to a variety of case studies, and its ability to evolve along with societal changes. Moral panic researchers, including those in this study, acknowledge this possibility by addressing known shortcomings. Efforts have been made for this theory to be revised and adapted for modern relevance and applicability. Following Cohen's seminal work, there have been several persuasive contributions from Hall et al., Goode & Ben-Yehuda, Critcher, and Klocke & Muschert (the latter of which is often overlooked). The hybrid model proposed by Klocke & Muschert provides useful guidance for examining and studying moral panic conditions, processes, and effects, recognising that there have been considerable behavioural changes in social actors of moral panic due to technological advancements such as text messaging, blogs, social media, and news media.<sup>167</sup> The work of Klocke and Muschert is both comprehensive and practical, and their model serves as a strong foundation for this research. However, there are limitations to the hybrid model, as it is difficult to implement the model and its guidelines directly. Attempting to strictly follow the hybrid's linear progression proved to be cumbersome. Therefore, although this study was inspired by the hybrid model, it was not implemented directly. Other works by Rohloff and Wright, Walsh, Morrison, and Pece have provided different perspectives on the components of moral panic, particularly the role of certain social actors. Walsh (2020) argues that moral panic frameworks like Cohen's should be updated rather than abandoned to account for how digital communications trigger reactions and cause distress. This does not mean disregarding existing perspectives on moral panic, but rather reinvigorating them to consider modern implications.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Klocke & Muschert (n11) 300

<sup>168</sup> Walsh (n3) 1-20

Although some studies have explored the use of the moral panic framework to address modern terrorism issues, further research is necessary in this area. A comprehensive, multidisciplinary academic examination of terrorism panics would provide valuable insights. Those who have attempted to analyse terrorism through the lens of moral panic have made noteworthy conclusions, which remain relevant in subsequent chapters. Investigating the moral panic surrounding terrorism reveals a lack of appreciation for the significant impacts of social media and how online platforms have transformed the behaviours and modes of communication among the traditional key actors of panic. This thesis delves deeper into the moral panic of terrorism, focusing on niche media, conspiracy theories, and the spread of false information. The following chapter examines the consequences of globalization and technological progress, as well as the impact of a decline in public confidence in well-known elite organizations, such as traditional media and political organizations, on the source of moral panic.



## Chapter. 2

# Moral Panic theory, new technologies & 9/11: Enter Social Media

### Introduction

The prior chapter scrutinised the merits, drawbacks, adjustments, and critiques of traditional and modern perspectives on moral panic. While the idea was rooted in the British cultural and political framework of the 1960s and 70s, advances in communication technology and the emergence of social media have altered the distribution of informational control, enabling diverse perspectives to be incorporated into the discourse and transforming the process by which the public acquires knowledge.<sup>169</sup> The impact of active social actors on moral panic, including its origins and characteristics, can be significant. These actors can influence the way moral panics are engineered and expressed. For instance, the media plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion by creating sensationalised and simplified portrayals of issues. This puts pressure on policymakers to respond quickly and severely, sometimes disproportionately. Other prominent social actors are likely to have a similar influence on moral panics.<sup>170</sup> The lack of prompting actors can avert panic. Additionally, if actors exhibit altered behaviour, it is reasonable to assume that panic dynamics and our understanding of its intensification will also be affected.

Throughout history, Western democratic leaders have faced numerous instances of reputational damage, including the Pentagon Papers and Watergate scandals of the 1970s, the Iran-Contra affair of the 1980s, and the UK's Arms-to-Iraq scandal in the 1990s. Moreover, harmful economic policies, such as the West's promotion of neo-liberalism in developing countries, have also contributed to reputational damage.<sup>171</sup> Further, consideration should be paid to the intertwined relationship between political entities, the media, and the social media impact.

The following chapter delves into the effects of social media on the behaviours, communication, and sense-making abilities of individuals involved in moral panics. It

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid 1-20.

<sup>170</sup> Walsh (n9) 643-662

<sup>171</sup> Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* [Penguin 2008]

argues that in light of the evolving nature of society, it is important to reassess the framework of moral panics. The chapter focuses on Goode & Ben-Yehuda's Locus of Moral Panic and Elite-Engineered Theory, with a particular emphasis on the role of news media and politicians. The chapter evaluates the construction and framing of elite panic discourse in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, which led to an aggressive military and surveillance approach and the War on Terror (WoT). This evaluation is crucial because the sense-making of elites in the aftermath of 9/11 contributed to the development of lasting and recurring frames that were recycled during future terrorism panics, emphasizing public safety, state security, and threats to Western values. These frames enabled the US and UK coalition to justify domestic and internal measures to address the WoT and subsequent invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq.<sup>172</sup>

### **Enter Social Media**

While infused with the traditional rudiments of communities, we live in a *digital society*<sup>173</sup> modernised by civic interconnectedness and civility in shared social spaces. Bell (1976) explains that post-industrial society—an *Informational Society*—is an innovative blend of capitalism and community solidarity, replacing industrialised culture and occurring because of a coalition between telecommunications and computer technologies.<sup>174</sup> This coalition gave rise to *digital labour* accompanied by digital revenue streams, alongside an increasing dependence on digital technologies by government institutions and mass media. This notion of an informational society eventually created a global computer network with more fluid information-sharing and communication-sharing capabilities. As Bartlett (2018) details, “*technology tends to increase human competencies, manufacture fresh opportunities, and increase efficiency*”.<sup>175</sup> At the heart of the digital society is *social media*, defined as websites and applications encompassing interactive participation and that ‘*enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking*’.<sup>176</sup> As Walsh (2020)

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<sup>172</sup> Stephen D. Reese & Seth C. Lewis, ‘Framing the War on Terror: The internalization of policy in the US press’ [2009] *Journalism* 10 (6) 777

<sup>173</sup> Simon Lindgren, *Digital Media & Society* [Sage Publications 2021] 5

<sup>174</sup> Daniel Bell, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society* [Basic Books 1976]

<sup>175</sup> James Bartlett, *The People vs Tech: How the Internet is killing democracy (and how we can save it)* [Ebury Press 2018] 2

<sup>176</sup> *Oxford Living Dictionaries*

<<https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110810105901867>> accessed 18<sup>th</sup> Feb 2024.

writes, 'to retain moral panic's conceptual utility, scholars must interrogate how social media are upending traditional...flows of information and power.'<sup>177</sup> Social media interconnects people and ideas, builds bonds, allows people to seek and give advice and support, mobilises social causes, and has become a standard feature since the first resemblance of a social media site, *Six Degrees*, was created in 1997.<sup>178</sup> Online environments provide free-flowing information creation and dissemination capabilities, fundamentally impacting panic actors' behaviour and subsequently altering panic frameworks. Internet availability is widespread on now commonly owned everyday devices such as laptops, smartphones, and iPad/tablets. By early 2020, 96% of British households had Internet access, up from 57% in 2006,<sup>179</sup> with 60% of respondents to a 2020 Statista poll indicating that smartphones were essential devices for accessing the Internet.<sup>180</sup>

Social media has become a hub for information sharing, with approximately 4.2 billion people being active social media users globally by 2021.<sup>181</sup> Since its creation in 2004, *Facebook* has become the world's most popular social media platform, with approximately 2.8 billion monthly account holders (as of 2021). Facebook also owns three of the top five social media platforms (*WhatsApp*, *Instagram*, and *Facebook Messenger*), with each platform having more than one billion active users. The second is *YouTube*, which has over two billion. *Twitter* accounts for approximately 397 million users worldwide.<sup>182</sup> Noyes (2019) reported that Facebook, on average, has 1.5 billion people as active daily users, with an average of 510,000 comments posted every 60 seconds.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Walsh (n9) 1-20

<sup>178</sup> 'The Evolution of Social Media: How did it begin, and where could it go next?' [Maryville University 2021] <<https://online.maryville.edu/blog/evolution-social-media/>> accessed 10<sup>th</sup> Oct 2021.

<sup>179</sup> Cecil Prescott, 'Internet access – households and individuals, Great Britain: 2020' [Office for National Statistics 2020]

<<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/householdcharacteristics/homeinternetandsocialmediausage/bulletins/internetaccesshouseholdsandindividuals/2020>> accessed 12<sup>th</sup> Jan 2022.

<sup>180</sup> Petroc Taylor, 'Which is the most important device you use to connect to the Internet, at home or elsewhere?' [Statista 2020] <<https://www.statista.com/statistics/387447/consumer-electronic-devices-by-internet-access-in-the-uk/>> accessed 12<sup>th</sup> Jan 2021.

<sup>181</sup> Stacy J Dixon, 'Social Media – Statistics & Facts' [Statista 2021]

<<https://www.statista.com/topics/1164/social-networks/>> accessed 10<sup>th</sup> Oct 2021.

<sup>182</sup> Stacy J Dixon, 'Most popular social networks worldwide as of July 2021, ranked by number of active users (in millions)' [Statista 2021] at <<https://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/>> accessed 10<sup>th</sup> Oct 2021.

<sup>183</sup> Dan Noyes, 'The Top 20 Valuable Facebook Statistics – Updated July 2019' [Zephoria Digital Marketing 2019] <<https://zephoria.com/top-15-valuable-facebook-statistics/>> accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> Jul 2019.

Since the inception of social media platforms, there have been several ethical deliberations regarding their use and impressions of society worldwide, with some academic literature focusing on individuals' judgement of their reality. Instagram allows users to present their lives contrary to how they live, thereby affecting the mindset of other impressionable users.<sup>184</sup> Cyberbullying via social media platforms has also been linked to deaths involving children, with suicide rates for ten to fourteen years old children having grown by more than 50% in the US.<sup>185</sup> In October 2021, former Facebook employee, Frances Haugen, declared before the US Senate that the company's platform '*harms children, stokes divisions, and weakens our democracy.*'<sup>186</sup> Facebook, in particular, has come under increased pressure to address misinformation and disinformation distribution blamed for having prejudiced Western democratic processes. Most notably, the outcomes of the 2016 US presidential election of Donald Trump and the Brexit referendum discontinuing the UK's membership in the European Union. By 2017, Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg was forced to apologise for how Facebook had been used as a tool in 'dividing society' after sustained pressure.<sup>187</sup><sup>188</sup> Furthermore, social media have been accused of enabling terrorist groups to communicate with and recruit members, with Kapardis (2010) arguing that the Internet has transformed media operations, potential for terrorist attacks, recruitment, financing, and government difficulties for maintaining national security.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> Frances Dalomba, 'Pros and Cons of Social Media' [Lifespan 2020] <<https://www.lifespan.org/lifespan-living/social-media-good-bad-and-ugly>> accessed 10<sup>th</sup> October 2020.

<sup>185</sup> 'Facts about Bullying' [StopBullying.gov 2021]

<<https://www.stopbullying.gov/resources/facts#stats>> accessed 10<sup>th</sup> October 2021.

<sup>186</sup> Filippo Menczer, 'Facebook whistleblower Frances Haugen testified that the company's algorithms are dangerous – here's how they can manipulate you' [The Conversation 2021] <<https://theconversation.com/facebook-whistleblower-frances-haugen-testified-that-the-companys-algorithms-are-dangerous-heres-how-they-can-manipulate-you-169420>> accessed 10<sup>th</sup> October 2021.

<sup>187</sup> Rob Crilly, 'Mark Zuckerberg apologises for the way Facebook has been used to divide people' [The Telegraph 2017] <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/10/01/mark-zuckerberg-apologises-way-facebook-has-used-divide-people/>> accessed 10<sup>th</sup> October 2021.

<sup>188</sup> Sam Levin, 'Mark Zuckerberg: I regret ridiculing fears over Facebook's effect on election' [The Guardian 2017] <<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/sep/27/mark-zuckerberg-facebook-2016-election-fake-news>> accessed 10<sup>th</sup> October 2021.

<sup>189</sup> Andreas Kapardis, *Psychology & Law: A Critical Introduction* [4<sup>th</sup> Ed, CUP 2010] 372

### **Changes to Panic Actors, Locus, & Social Ordering: Social Media Impact**

Critcher argues that Cohen's explanation of moral panic thinly clarifies the significance of social actors and their role in panic development.<sup>190</sup> However, this researcher would counter that critique, proposing that Cohen's *Folk Devils & Moral Panics* research inadeptly explores social actors more than Critcher gives credit, although with an emphasis on the press more than on other actors.

Writers such as McRobbie & Thornton (1995) argue that the moral panic concept should be revised to account for social, cultural, and technological developments which have engendered a 'multi-mediated' world.<sup>191</sup> Indeed, researchers such as Walsh (2020),<sup>192</sup> Luce (2013),<sup>193</sup> Hayle (2013),<sup>194</sup> Pece (2018),<sup>195</sup> Dingley & Herman (2017),<sup>196</sup> Brisman & South (2015),<sup>197</sup> Morrison (2019),<sup>198</sup> and Cooper & Navarro-Genie (2021)<sup>199</sup> have attempted to appraise panic frameworks by appraising the key social actors.<sup>200</sup> However, Hier (2018) claims that digital communications have been overlooked by panic scholars who continue to fixate on mainstream broadcasting media,<sup>201</sup> highlighting that an academic emphasis with an '*univocal press, hierarchical information flows, monolithic audiences are untenable in the context of multi-mediated social worlds*'.<sup>202</sup> Since Cohen's seminal contributions to this area, all panic researchers have repetitively highlighted five social groups significantly contributing to interactionist, labelling, and framing dynamics within panic framework:

1. Mass Media.
2. The Public.
3. Agents of Social Control (such as police).

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<sup>190</sup> Critcher (n19) 9-10

<sup>191</sup> Krinsky (n5) 8

<sup>192</sup> Walsh (n3) 1-20

<sup>193</sup> Luce (n130) 393-409

<sup>194</sup> Hayle (n131) 1125-1137

<sup>195</sup> Pece (n139) 87-99

<sup>196</sup> Dingley & Herman (n140) 996-1013

<sup>197</sup> Brisman & South (n133) 449-460

<sup>198</sup> Morrison (n36)

<sup>199</sup> Barry Cooper & Marco Navarro-Genie, *COVID-19: The Politics of a Pandemic Moral Panic* [Frontier Centre for Public Policy 2021]

<sup>200</sup> McRobbie & Thornton (n2) 559-574

<sup>201</sup> Sean Hier, 'Moral panics and digital-media logic: Notes on a changing research agenda' [2018] *Crime, Media, Culture: An International Journal* 15 (2) 379

<sup>202</sup> McRobbie & Thornton (n2) 559-574

4. Lawmakers/Politicians.
5. Moral Entrepreneurs.<sup>203</sup>

Societal concerns are pronounced through the actions taken, beliefs held, and expressed sentiments by such actors.<sup>204</sup> Moral panic results from 'a *multifaceted interplay and manifestation of behaviours, philosophies, and reactions*' implicating these actors.<sup>205</sup> Despite the enormity of online platforms, social media platforms would struggle to qualify as actors in similar regard to others, with these platforms creating little *original* content. Instead, they provide an environment (a platform; stage) for other panic actors to express themselves.<sup>206</sup> As a result, social media does not qualify as a panic actor in this research in its own right, but, is nevertheless a fundamental facilitator for change of the other actors.

Poster (2013) divided the development of modern news channels into two periods: the *Broadcast Age* and the *Interactive (social web) Age*. During the broadcast age, media were almost exclusively centralised, meaning that media such as radio, television, and newspapers disseminated indirect information as part of a one-way relationship with the audience. Classic panic theorists developed their work during the broadcast age with information output being *one-directional*. In this social web era, news production, consumption, and civic communication capabilities evolved demonstrably. Social media has significantly influenced world culture, economies, and our understanding of world issues through how we receive information, either by our own conscious pursuit of content from certain sources or through targeted algorithms that send items without invitation or necessity.<sup>207</sup> Social media platforms, such as *Facebook* and *Twitter*, assemble traditional panic actors in one place, creating a socially interactive and inclusive central platform. As such, online platforms have altered how actors communicate, simultaneously addressing communicative limitations.<sup>208</sup> For example, a public member may not have enjoyed

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<sup>203</sup> Cohen (n1)

<sup>204</sup> Goode & Ben-Yehuda (n16) 23-28

<sup>205</sup> Rothe & Muzzatti (n13) 327-350

<sup>206</sup> Jacob Amedia, 'The Impact of Social Media on Society' [2015] *Advanced Writing: Pop Culture Intersections* 3

<sup>207</sup> Mark Poster, *The Second Media Age* [Polity Press 2013]

<sup>208</sup> Paul Hodkinson, *Media, Culture & Society: An Introduction* [Sage Publishing 2017] 26-27

the reach, influence, and exposure that a post on their social media page might now enjoy.

Furthermore, the production and distribution of mainstream news has also become more equal, as traditional newspaper outlets may now include video and audio content - a limitation of their conventional print-only medium. All forms of news can now provide written, visual, and audio outputs.<sup>209</sup> Other panic actors expanded their communication capabilities as political figures, and agents of social control frequently provided updates and announcements on platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Moral entrepreneurs can ignite, mobilise, and sustain movements for social change through an online presence, as evidenced by racial equality movements such as *Black Lives Matter* (BLM) and feminist movements such as *#TimesUp* and *#MeToo*. Folk devils may also stand up for themselves, challenge hegemony, and sound oppositional rhetoric in defence of accusations levied at them. With the advent of digital technologies, civic interactions with elite social entities have become common.<sup>210</sup> In short, the voices of those at the bottom of the social hierarchy have a higher chance of being heard by those at the top. The audience, who once had restricted means to voice concerns and ideas, could now express discourse freely and interact with others. Ordinary citizens have the proficiencies to be well informed of current events and instantaneously updated, often viewing ongoing incidents (e.g. terrorist attacks) as they transpire. Lower costs and accessibility to smart devices with Internet capabilities have inflated options for media consumption, and people are now creating and exchanging content with others.<sup>211</sup>

In this regard, social media acts as a 'conducting platform' for 'spreadable media.'<sup>212</sup> Owing to the combination of smartphones and social media's inclusivity mechanisms, public members contribute much more than mere verbalised eyewitness testimonies of events and hysterical reactions. For example, during the *Manchester Arena* bombings in 2017, civilian video phone footage was recorded and

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<sup>209</sup> Edson C. Tandon Jr., Zheng Wei Lim, & Richard Ling, 'Defining Fake News: A Typology of Scholarly Definitions' [2018] *Digital Journalism* 6 (2) 137

<sup>210</sup> Poster (n207)

<sup>211</sup> Kerric Harvey, 'Social Media, Definition & Classes' [Sage Publications 2014] *Encyclopedia of Social Media and Politics* 1158-1161

<sup>212</sup> Christian Fuchs, *Social Media: A Critical Introduction* [Sage Publishing 2014] 53

shared from inside the arena as the bombing occurred.<sup>213</sup> Social media have empowered content producers with equality in how they might present information to audiences and how audiences can select the information they would like to digest. Also, the influence of modern folk devils should be considered more prominent because of the *social web era* and online arenas, enabling them to provide alternative discourse on elite narratives during instances of mass panic.<sup>214</sup>

### **Hierarchy of Credibility & Locus of Moral Panic**

Social media has had an additional effect of questioning the conventional hierarchy of society. As prominent social media figures continue to emerge, it is crucial to re-evaluate the source of moral panic, a topic that Good and Ben-Yehuda have extensively researched. This is especially important when considering the idea of social order, as outlined by Becker. The *Hierarchy of Credibility* is a theoretical framework that determines *who* defines reality.<sup>215</sup> *Truth* is grounded in the principle that those belonging to the highest-ranking social groups have *credibility* in defining events.<sup>216</sup> This extends itself to other theoretical notions regarding *sense-making* narratives projected by social elites, diversely explored by writers such as Proctor (2008),<sup>217</sup> Herf (2008),<sup>218</sup> Tuana (1988),<sup>219</sup> Chomsky & Herman (1988),<sup>220</sup> Barton,

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<sup>213</sup> Keeley Lockhart, 'Manchester Terror Attack – captured on camera by those who were there' [The Telegraph 2017] <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/05/23/manchester-terror-attack-captured-camera/>> accessed 7<sup>th</sup> Feb 2017.

<sup>214</sup> Anastasia Powell, Gregory Stratton, & Robin Cameron, *Digital Criminology: Crime and Justice in Digital Society* [Routledge 2018]

<sup>215</sup> '...the likelihood that those in powerful or high-status positions in society who offer opinions about controversial topics will have their definitions accepted because such spokesmen are understood to have access to more accurate and more specialised information on particular topics than the majority of the population.' Howard Becker's definition of the Hierarchy of Credibility as described by Stuart Hall, Chas Critcher, Tom Jefferson, John Clarke & Brian Roberts, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law & Order* [Palgrave and Macmillan 2013] 61

<sup>216</sup> Jennifer Schulenberg, & Allison Chenier, 'International Protest Events, and the Hierarchy of Credibility: Media Frames Defining the Police and Protestors as Social Problems' [2014] *Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice* 56 (3) 261

<sup>217</sup> Robert Proctor, 'Agnotology: A Missing Term' in Robert Proctor, & Londa Schiebinger, (eds) *Agnotology: The Making and Unmaking of Ignorance* [Stanford University Press 2008]

<sup>218</sup> Jeffrey Herf, *The Jewish Enemy: Nazi Propaganda during World War II and the Holocaust* [Harvard University Press 2008]

<sup>219</sup> Nancy Tuana, 'Coming to Understand: Orgasm and the Epistemology of Ignorance' in Robert Proctor, & Londa Schiebinger, (eds) *Agnotology: The Making and the Unmaking of Ignorance* [Harvard University Press 1988]

<sup>220</sup> Noam Chomsky & Edward S. Herman, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* [Vintage 1995] 1-33



Davies, & White (2018),<sup>221</sup> and Cohen (2001).<sup>222</sup> Goode & Ben-Yehuda's Elite-Engineered concept is applied in some detail during this thesis. In doing so, it is practical to concurrently consider Becker's *Hierarchy of Credibility* in ranking the authority of panic actors. In evaluating the influence of social media on the hierarchy, the ability of elites to generate and maintain moral panic is assessed. This is because social media platforms offer a wide range of information and discussions from various sources, which diminishes the impact of elite individuals and groups. As Schulenberg & Chenier (2014) wrote, researchers apply a hierarchy of credibility to determine:

*'...how the news media fragment the social reality of crime and misrepresent police actions...Journalists designate politicians and law enforcement as primary and official definers of crime, as evidenced by media reliance on police sources.'*<sup>223</sup>

Although credibility is a construct "as old as Greek philosophy and new as social media",<sup>224</sup> Gaziano & McGrath (1986) highlight issues with measuring credibility.<sup>225</sup> Nevertheless, Hall et al. (2013) ascertain distinctions between *Primary* and *Secondary* definers (or framers) of social events, adding further theoretical and hierarchical understanding to the intertwining relationships between elite social actors. According to Hall et al., the primary definitions of information are officials and authoritative sources such as politicians, police, court officials, and religious figures.<sup>226</sup> Becker (1967) surmises that those at the top end of the Hierarchy of Credibility are at the top of a recognised social order in which:

*'...knowledge of truth and right to be heard are not equally distributed. Everyone knows that responsible professionals know more about things than laymen, that police are more respectable, and their words ought to be taken*

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<sup>221</sup> Alana Barton, Howard Davis, & Holly White, 'Agnotology and the Criminological Imagination' in Alana Barton & Howard Davis, *Ignorance, Power and Harm: Agnotology and the Criminological Imagination* [Palgrave 2018]

<sup>222</sup> Cohen (n1)

<sup>223</sup> Schulenberg & Chenier (n216) 261-294

<sup>224</sup> Charles C. Self & Chris Roberts, 'Credibility' in Don. W. Stacks, Michael B. Salwen & Kristen C. Eichhorn *An Integrated Approach to Communication Theory & Research* [Routledge Publishing 2019]

<sup>225</sup> Cecile Gaziano & Kristin McGrath, 'Measuring the Concept of Credibility' [1986] *Journalism Quarterly* 63 (3) 451

<sup>226</sup> Hall et al., (n34)

*more seriously than those of the deviants and criminals with whom they deal.*<sup>227</sup>

As Becker states, in any structure of hierarchical groups, members of the lower rungs assume that those higher in societal ordering are well positioned to *define the way things are*.<sup>228</sup> In a hierarchical structure, regardless of what other groups further down the hierarchy declare, the structural chart dictates that members of the lower social strata will have incomplete knowledge compared to those at the top, making their views of reality comparatively partial and distorted. Consequently, any account professed by those at the top of the hierarchy innately qualifies as the most credible account available to society. Becker explains that to be considered members of a society *in-group*, we are morally bound to recognise the definitions of reality proposed by the superior group. They should be held preferentially over explanations forwarded by those at the foot of the hierarchal social structure,<sup>229</sup> or as this thesis considers, fringe groups that have adopted *alternative* hierarchies. Moral panic research since Cohen's 1970s seminal contribution demonstrates that mass news media and politicians are the principal social definers at the top of a credibility hierarchy. Therefore, much scrutiny has been dedicated to these social actors in this thesis. It should also be highlighted that each of the four nations within the UK can consist of different definers. For example, Northern Ireland consists of different mainstream political parties forming their power-sharing *Assembly* and have access to Republic of Irish news broadcasters; with variances seen in other regions and local news sources. Nevertheless, all UK nations share a commonality in that Westminster is the base of British democracy, and the newspapers sampled for this research have national (now international) reach.

The Hierarchy of Credibility aligns with the evaluations of the moral panic locus. We should not suppose that panic grips society to such a magnitude that *all* its members are disturbed similarly, at the same time, or in the same way. There are subjective disputes about whether a given situation represents a legitimate cause of serious concern.<sup>230</sup> To this end, Goode & Ben-Yehuda proposed three theories about how

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<sup>227</sup> Howard Becker, 'Whose Side Are We On?' [1967] *Social Problem* 14 (3) 239

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid* 239-47.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid* 239-47.

<sup>230</sup> Goode & Ben-Yehuda (n16) 43

moral panic ignites and who ignites it: the *Elite-Engineered Theory*, the *Grassroots Theory*, and the *Interest-Group Theory*. Elite individuals, groups, and institutions in society yield influential power over news media to pass laws, direct social control agents, and frame social issues. The *Elite-Engineered theory* of moral panic rests on the idea that, as primary information sources at the top of the hierarchy, society believes these institutions provide correct, reliable information and frames regarding important issues. The elite-engineered theory states that ruling elites cause and engineer moral panic, consciously or subconsciously generating concerns and fears often intended to divert attention or flak away from *real* problems whose solutions appear to threaten or undermine the interests of elite groups.<sup>231</sup> The revelation of causation and solutions to these real problems would typically threaten or undermine the interests of elite groups.<sup>232</sup>

In contrast to the *Grassroots* notion, elite-engineered theorists claim that moral panic cannot occur solely based on pre-existing public fear. Instead, they argued that panic was a product of elite manipulation to protect their interests. An illustrative example of research adopting a critical elite-engineered perspective is Hall et al.'s (1978) *Policing the Crisis*. Therein, focus was given to the 'new' crime *mugging* panic in Britain during the 1970s, which saw British capitalism under strain and a Conservative government adopting a punitive approach to the 'rise' in street muggings attributed to young, black males. Hall et al. argued that there was, in fact, no such rise and that the reactions from politicians, the media, and agents of law control were out of proportion to the actual threat.<sup>233</sup> Under this theory, moral panics are about matters other than the apparent focus constructed by the elites, which draws public attention away from the real problem to other, often less impactful, social, and economic troubles.<sup>234</sup> Grassroots theory states that moral panic is derived from the public at the bottom of the hierarchy. Finally, interest-group theory stems from the middle rungs of power and status in the middle of the hierarchy. Professional associations, police, media, religious groups, and educational organisations have independent purposes for bringing issues into public

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<sup>231</sup> Ibid 62.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid 62.

<sup>233</sup> Hall et al., (n34) 29

<sup>234</sup> Klocke & Muschert (n11) 297

consciousness, with the interests of such moralistic enterprises often contradictory or irrelevant to elite interests.<sup>235</sup>

### **The News & Moral Panic**

During the 1960s to 1980s, a significant amount of theoretical exploration was conducted by radical academics such as Young, Cohen, Hall, Critcher, and Chomsky, who examined the power of mass media in constructing fear of deviancy through its framing and symbolisation. The majority of people typically acquire information about societal issues from the media, which is often presented in a second-hand and modified form.<sup>236</sup> Mainstream news occupies a preeminent position within the hierarchy of credibility, on a par with political figures, in the same elite-engineered locations of moral panic. Therefore, journalists, publishers, and broadcasters wield privileged and instrumental status within democratic societies, amplifying and diffusing information on crucial and worrying matters. Mass media can shape society by reinforcing social norms, values, and structures or bolstering existing rules.

News can be defined as an account of topical, engaging, and substantial events that significantly affect people,<sup>237</sup> to amuse, entertain, inform, and inculcate individuals with the values, beliefs, and codes of behaviour that will integrate members of the populace into the acceptable institutional structures of mainstream society. A constitutive and constituent part of defining and framing social problems, manufacturing deviant symbols, and creating policy;<sup>238</sup> news media serve as a system for communicating messages and symbols to the general population.<sup>239</sup> Contemporary panics are 'unthinkable' without the media<sup>240</sup> as they "*provide the most effective spark for the creation of Moral Panics, as well as the engine for their conveyance*".<sup>241</sup> During disturbing periods, people turn to mass media and political figures for information and consolation, despite digital platforms having dislocated

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<sup>235</sup> Goode & Ben-Yehuda (n16) 67-68

<sup>236</sup> Marsh & Melville (n20) 51

<sup>237</sup> Edson et al., (n209) 137-153

<sup>238</sup> Phillip Schlesinger, & Howard Tumber, *Reporting Crime: The Politics of Criminal Justice* [OUP 1994] 272

<sup>239</sup> Chomsky & Herman (n220) 1-33

<sup>240</sup> Critcher (n19) 131

<sup>241</sup> Goode & Ben-Yehuda (n16) 89

the mainstream media's monopoly as *the* chief information source.<sup>242</sup> Moreover, they provide feedback on public reactions to primary definers. In a functional democracy, journalists are vital for delivering information and keeping the populace informed. An informed electorate with access to accurate and unbiased information is an essential prerequisite for operative democracy.<sup>243</sup>

Mainstream news should hold social elites to account. However, what is published as a news story is the conclusion of a multilateral process that categorises and selects the captivating elements of a story.<sup>244</sup> Because the news dedicates a large amount of space and time to deviant stories, it is inevitable that social panic researchers such as Cohen and others examine the role of media on social consciousness.<sup>245</sup> Young (1974) reasoned that news media has three modes of impact on public opinion. First, *Mass Manipulation* highlighted public susceptibility to manipulation owing to gullibility. The second is related to a *commercial 'laissez-faire'*, which states that individual attitudes have already been developed, leading people to choose sources of information which reinforces this. The third influence on public opinion, outlined by Young, is a *Consensual Paradigm* which claims that public opinion on topics is created by one-sided reporting of stories which lack competing arguments.<sup>246</sup> Cohen studied the weight of media input to disproportionate portrayals of Mods & Rockers episodes in *the Inventory* (initial aftermath) assessment of Mods and Rockers. First, stories and information were *Exaggerated and Distorted*, with the seriousness of episodes being overstated, creating an inaccurate account of the proceedings. This included factors ranging from ambiguities and embellishment in reporting, to the linguistic and arrangement of newspaper stories, including sensationalised headlines, melodramatic vocabulary, replication (or double reporting)<sup>247</sup> of "obviously false stories" and the amplifying of otherwise trivial features made stories 'news'.<sup>248</sup> Cohens proposed measures for disproportionate media portrayals in *Prediction*, consisting of declarations that something harmful is

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<sup>242</sup> Walsh (n3) 1-20

<sup>243</sup> Andrew Mullen, 'Twenty-years on: The second-order prediction of the Herman-Chomsky propaganda model' [2010] *Media, Culture & Society* 32 (4) 673

<sup>244</sup> Hall et al., (n34) 56

<sup>245</sup> Marsh & Melville (n20) 49

<sup>246</sup> Jock Young, *Mass Media, Drugs, and Deviance* [Routledge, 1974]

<sup>247</sup> Moore (n12) 105

<sup>248</sup> Cohen (n1) 26-27

sure to happen or that harms that have already happened are destined to happen again. During Mods & Rockers episodes, Cohen documented media accounts from sea-side town residents, including political figures and law enforcement agencies, who discussed what they should do '*next time*'. The media often reported 'non-stories' characterising large groups of peaceful youths simply attending public events or stories following police operations to address youth deviancy despite no reported law-breaking,<sup>249</sup> creating a *Self-Fulfilling Prophecy*.<sup>250</sup> Additionally, *Symbolisation* refers to the emblematic stimulus of words and imageries, with even non-aligned words becoming attached to representational social features. For example, the term *Mod* becomes a symbolic schema of a certain deviant social subcultural status (demonology).<sup>251</sup> Associated objects and defining traits (hairstyle, clothes, and motor vehicles) also portray deviant symbolic importance, inciting negative emotions and reactions from a broader society. Consequently, both 'Mods' and 'Rockers' terms transformed from contextually neutral to unambiguously unfavourable symbols attaining new meanings.<sup>252</sup>

UK media organisations and journalists are *expected* to deliver truthful and accurate information about world events in adherence to journalist standards,<sup>253</sup> with codified measures to maintain legitimacy and credibility and establish journalistic standards. The BBC, for example, has set out their standards and editorial values in the *Royal Charter*, which established that the BBC adopted impartiality in reporting news and political matters, is now cited in the *BBC Charter and Agreement* (2006).<sup>254</sup> The written press, however, does not have legal obligations to impartiality and is free to publish stories as long as such content does not offend libel law and others, such as the *Contempt of Court Act* (1981), the *Official Secrets Act* (1989), and the *Sexual Offences Amendment Act* (1976). In 1990, the *Newspaper Publishers Association*

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<sup>249</sup> Ibid 35-36.

<sup>250</sup> A Self-Fulfilling prophecy can be defined as when a person unknowingly causes a prediction to come true because he or she expects it to come true. In other words, an expectation about a subject can affect our behaviour toward that subject, which causes the expectation to be realised.

<sup>251</sup> Moore (n12) 106

<sup>252</sup> Ralph H. Turner & Samuel J. Surace, 'Zoot Suiters and the Mexicans: Symbols of Crowd Behaviours' [1956] *American Journal of Sociology* 62 14

<sup>253</sup> 'Code of Conduct' [National Union of Journalists 2022] <<https://www.nuj.org.uk/about-us/rules-and-guidance/code-of-conduct.html>> accessed December 3<sup>rd</sup> 2022.

<sup>254</sup> 'BBC Editorial Guidelines' [BBC] <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/editorialguidelines/guidelines/>> accessed 26<sup>th</sup> February 2019.

and *Newspaper Society* published their *Code of Practice*, establishing a press complaints commission, which was replaced by the *Independent Press Standards Organization* (IPSO) after the *News of the World* phone-hacking scandal in 2014.<sup>255</sup> Social media may be subject to legislation such as the *Malicious Communications Act* (1988) and *Communications Act* (2003), making it an offence to send grossly offensive, indecent, obscene, or false communications.<sup>256</sup>

Nevertheless, mainstream media has been guilty of wrongful reporting and illegal practices. Suppose we believe that established news institutions make these errors unintentionally through human error as they try to adhere to ethical standards. In that case, we may at least understand that errors occur in the commission of a righteous pursuit to fulfil the purported service of 'a free and fair media.' However, this image of a reporter acting in the public's best interests has been heavily damaged by revelations such as the phone hacking scandal involving *the News of World* journalists, with the subsequent *Leveson Enquiry* into the culture, practices, and ethics of the British press. Further, accusations such as the BBC's denial of responsibility in the sexual abuse crimes of Jimmy Savile,<sup>257</sup> and controversy surrounding a BBC interview with Princess Diana in 1995.<sup>258</sup> Though, news reporting remains divisive, and a key factor in cultivating and igniting panic.

### **Terrorism & the Illusion of Novelty**

To thoroughly examine the moral panic surrounding Islamist terrorism during the 2010s, it is essential to consider pre-existing media and political frames. One of the initial perceptions of 9/11 news coverage was that Islamist extremism (or terrorism more broadly) represented an entirely new threat to Western state security. Although the 9/11 attacks were undoubtedly significant and defining, characterized by a large-scale destruction and spectacle, terrorism and its threats were not unprecedented. Though, some researchers argue for a distinction between the "Old" and "New" eras

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<sup>255</sup> 'History of British Newspapers' [News Media Association 2024] <<https://newsmediauk.org/history-of-british-newspapers/>> accessed 25<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

<sup>256</sup> 'Communications Offences' [CPS 2024] <<https://www.cps.gov.uk/legal-guidance/communications-offences>> accessed 25<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

<sup>257</sup> Chris Greer & Eugene McLaughlin, 'The Sir Jimmy Savile scandal: Child sexual abuse and institutional denial at the BBC' [2013] *Crime, Media, Culture* 9 (3) 243

<sup>258</sup> 'Princess Diana interview: What did Martin Bashir and the BBC do?' [BBC News 2021] <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/explainers-57163815>> accessed 12<sup>th</sup> December 2021.

of terrorism, with the contemporary era widely believed to have begun with the 9/11 attacks.

The presence of a "novelty" factor is critical in the cultivation and eruption of moral panic, which partly explains why panics gain widespread consensus and spread rapidly. New phenomena evokes uncertainty and fear of the unknown, making the general population more sensitive to a "new" threat. When an issue is framed as novel or unfamiliar, it is perceived as an unknown, thereby stoking fear as society struggles to apply appropriate evaluations to such "unfamiliar" threats. The novelty factor also benefits political elites, allowing them to advance their agenda, and news outlets to amplify this agenda while attracting revenue-generating audience attention. However, as stated, terrorism is not 'new'. Despite Warbrick's (2004) claim that violent threats to Western states from politically motivated non-state actors have been relatively rare since WWII,<sup>259</sup> Walsh & Jorgensen (2020) argue that terrorism is now more common, emphasising that of the 74 terrorist groups listed by the US Department of State in 2003, only three (the IRA, the ETA, and Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood) existed prior to 1960.<sup>260</sup> Prior to more recent jihadi terrorism, the Northern Irish '*Troubles*' posed substantial challenges to civic wellbeing in Britain from the late 1960s until the end of the 1990s as conflict waged over the region's political status.<sup>261</sup> Between 1922-1990s the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland suffered political, social, and economic discrimination,<sup>262</sup> generating support for the Provisional IRA (PIRA). As such, approaching domestic counterterrorism was a learning procedure in domestic conflict security, leading to an eventual resolution that encompassed the British and Irish governments. The accomplishment of the *Good Friday Agreement* (GFA, 1998) was effective in bringing relative peace. However, it should be noted that splinter groups such as the *Real IRA*, *Radical Action Against Drugs* (RAAD), and other comparatively minor Irish paramilitary groups have emerged as opponents of the agreement. While the GFA was a landmark moment for the UK and the Republic of Ireland on the issue of domestic

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<sup>259</sup> Colin Warbrick, 'The European Response to terrorism in an Age of Human Rights' [2004] *The European Journal of International Law* 15 (5) 989

<sup>260</sup> Anthony Walsh & Cody Jorgensen, *Criminology: The Essentials* [4<sup>th</sup> ed, Sage Publishing 2020] 255

<sup>261</sup> Sam Mullins, '*Home Grown*' *Jihad: Understanding Islamist Terrorism in the U.S. and U.K.* [Imperial College Press 2016] 95

<sup>262</sup> Paul Wilkinson, *Terrorism versus Democracy: The Liberal State Response* [Routledge 2011] 28



terrorism, the 9/11 attacks were significant not just to the US, but for many of the international community, as the nature of terrorism *appeared* to have appropriated new dimensions.<sup>263</sup> Scholars, such as Carrabine et al. (2014)<sup>264</sup>, Neumann (2009)<sup>265</sup> and Kapardis (2010),<sup>266</sup> highlight the differences between classic and contemporary terrorist organisations. Carrabine et al. contended that the features of older terrorist groups include the following:

1. Tighter local organisation
2. Local political objectives
3. Relatively low levels of violence
4. Relative restraint regarding tactics
5. Threats to specific authorities.<sup>267</sup>

Furthermore, the older groups had discreet and interlinked cells with hierarchical command structures, having a clearly defined ideology and objectives, being numerically small in their member base when compared to their adversary, often making discriminant attempts to strike purposefully selected, symbolic targets chosen for their apparent iconic value,<sup>268</sup> as evidenced by the PIRA attacks on London's Royal Parks in July 1982, the attempted assassination of Margaret Thatcher in 1984, and an explosion at a British army recruitment centre in 1990. This target calibration demonstrated a focused effort towards achievable end goals rather than merely producing excessive casualty rates, with attacks generally proportionate when measured against their political objectives.<sup>269</sup> This is not to say that classic terror groups did not collaterally or purposefully kill civilians, (for example, the notorious 1998 Omagh bombing by the Real IRA). Still, older groups typically went to 'extraordinary' lengths to justify and legitimise their attacks.<sup>270</sup> The PIRA was known

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<sup>263</sup> David Lowe, *Terrorism: Law & Policy* [Routledge Publishing 2018] xxi

<sup>264</sup> Eamonn Carrabine, Pamela Cox, Pete Fussey, Dick Hobbs, Nigel South, Darren Thiel & Jackie Turton, *Criminology: A Sociological Introduction* [3<sup>rd</sup> Ed, Routledge 2014]

<sup>265</sup> Peter R. Neumann, *Old & New Terrorism* [Polity Press 2009]

<sup>266</sup> Kapardis (n189) 373

<sup>267</sup> Carrabine et al., (n264) 441

<sup>268</sup> Neumann (n265) 25-46

<sup>269</sup> Alexander Spencer, 'The 'new terrorism' of al-Qaeda is not so new' in Stuart Gottlieb (ed), *Debating Terrorism and Counterterrorism: Conflicting Perspectives on Causes, Contexts, and Responses* [Sage Publishing 2014] 6

<sup>270</sup> Neumann (n265) 27

to provide security services with advanced warnings by contacting third parties (a local newspaper agency, for example) with details of explosives to actively minimise civilian casualties. Observable attempts to minimise casualties helped preserve eligibility for a place at the bargaining table with whom they had a grievance (often governments). Civilian casualties and disproportionate violence - from the view of terror groups with 'rational and negotiable' demands - would only alienate them from supporters and financial backers, thereby lessening the likelihood of local support, funding, and recruits. It might also have reduced the legitimacy of their respective *causes*, harming future negotiations towards attaining their end-goal ambitions.<sup>271</sup>

Whilst primarily confined to Northern Ireland, violence spilt into the Republic of Ireland and mainland Britain, with notable attacks being the Birmingham pub bombings (21 killed) and the killing of Lord Mountbatten (1974); bomb attacks on London's Royal Parks (killing 11) in 1982; attempted assassination of Margaret Thatcher in the Brighton hotel bombing (killing 5) in 1984; the bombing of the Royal Marines Music school (killing 11) in 1989; Dockland's bombings in London (killing two and causing more than £150m in damages) and the Manchester bombing (killing 0, injuring 212), both in 1996. From 1970 to 2010, Irish paramilitaries were responsible for almost half of the 606 attacks on the British mainland, while the rest could be attributed to approximately 50 other groups and individual non-state actors.<sup>272</sup> In short, terrorism has been a Western problem for some time.

### **Islamist Extremism & the Illusion of Novelty**

The terrorist does not produce violence for violence's sake alone. Their objective is to cause cultural upheaval; create hostility among the populace; and provoke subjugation, discrimination, and disharmony.<sup>273</sup> It should be noted that neither Islam nor any other religion, in their modern interpretation, condones the extreme violence. While some may argue otherwise (based on qualitative data from Facebook comments in later chapters), it is crucial to recognise that individuals who commit violent acts often do so under the guise of religious affiliation. It is important to

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<sup>271</sup> Spencer (n269) 6

<sup>272</sup> Mullins (n261) 95

<sup>273</sup> Jean-Paul Marthoz, *Terrorism and the Media: A Handbook for Journalists* [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation 2017]  
<<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000247074>> accessed 24<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

emphasize that the vast majority of people practice their faith with the intention of improving themselves and others.

Additionally, it should be highlighted that Islamist extremism, like terrorism in general, is not a new phenomenon. The contemporary form of Islamist insurgency gained momentum in the 1980s, with groups emerging in South Lebanon (Hezbollah), Gaza, and the West Bank (Hamas), and also in Egypt (al-Gama'al al-Islamiyya).<sup>274</sup> In 1996, Osama Bin Laden, then leader of al-Qaeda, declared war on America following U.S. military involvement in the Gulf War.<sup>275</sup> There was also a bombing of the World Trade Centre in 1993 and the Oklahoma City Federal Building bombing in 1995.<sup>276</sup> Religiously motivated terrorism has been perpetrated throughout history, again dispelling the myth of 'Old' and 'New' terrorism eras. Christian identity cults and sects in the United States, preaching white supremacy and hate propaganda, anti-Semitism, and armed opposition to the federal government have been linked to groups such as those believed to have been involved in incidents such as the 1995 Oklahoma bombing.<sup>277</sup> The 9/11 attacks saw four commercial planes hijacked by 17 members of al-Qaeda, two crashing into the World Trade Centers, one into the Pentagon, and one crashing down in a field, resulting in almost 3000 deaths.<sup>278</sup> Consequently, al-Qaeda became almost synonymous with terrorism. This was to such an extent that casual observers of the terrorist subject should be forgiven for thinking that terrorism was exclusive to Islamist fundamentalism.<sup>279</sup> Europe has faced Islamist threats since at least the mid-1990s, following bombings by al-Qaeda-affiliated GIA in France.<sup>280</sup> With direct state-on-state conflicts becoming more infrequent and replaced with clandestine conflicts, the tactics espoused by non-state actors as they endeavour toward a global influence changed. The post-9/11 years saw further attacks within Western countries from Islamist-inspired covert

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<sup>274</sup> Wilkinson (n262) 31

<sup>275</sup> Lowe (n263) 5

<sup>276</sup> Ibid.

<sup>277</sup> Wilkinson (n262) 31-33

<sup>278</sup> 'The 9/11 Terror Attacks: 11 September 2001' [BBC News]

<[http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/events/the\\_september\\_11th\\_terrorist\\_attacks](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/events/the_september_11th_terrorist_attacks)> accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2019.

<sup>279</sup> Law (279) 321

<sup>280</sup> Peter Nesser, 'Military Interventions, Jihadi Networks, and Terrorist Entrepreneurs: How the Islamic State Wave Rose So High in Europe' [2019] CTC Sentinel 12 (3) 15  
<<https://ctc.usma.edu/military-interventions-jihadi-networks-terrorist-entrepreneurs-islamic-state-terror-wave-rose-high-europe/>> accessed 11<sup>th</sup> March 2020.

cells or lone wolves, bombings in Madrid (2004), London (2005), and Moscow (2010), to illustrate but a few. This emerged and coincided with open war conflicts in Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003), political upheaval in the Middle East stemming from the *Arab Spring* (2011), and the ongoing civil war in Syria. The Islamist al-Nusra Front (ANF) and ISIL arguably benefited most from this turmoil with regard to commandeering sizable landmasses, the influx of foreign fighters to these Middle Eastern conflict zones,<sup>281</sup> and their influence on supporters internationally. Having launched as one of several hundred armed groups in Syria, ISIL became notably better organised from 2013 onwards as they took control of sizable, inhabited areas in Syria and Iraq. Having originated from al-Qaeda in Iraq, ISIL became affiliated (and sometimes merged) with other jihadist groups before rebranding itself as the Islamic State group, opportunistic of civil instability.<sup>282</sup> Research has shown distinguishing traits for 'new' terror groups such as al-Qaeda and ISIL as having:

1. Loose cell-based global networks with minimal lines of command and control.
2. Locations in failed or failing states.
3. High levels of violence.
4. Less restraint on tactics.
5. Increased threats to the strategic interests of Western nations and the notion of a 'cosmopolitan society'.
6. Use of high-tech communication to coordinate actions and promote causes.<sup>283</sup>

The U.N. explains that Islamist extremism aims to instill fear in its target to uncover a 'falseness' in democracy; fear of terrorism is described as:

*'...one of the strongest, visceral emotions there is and can lead otherwise open and tolerant people down the road of prejudice and discrimination. This fear can be so powerful as to determine the outcome of elections and manifest itself in draconian policies targeted at some of the most vulnerable communities in society.'*<sup>284</sup>

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<sup>281</sup> Edwin Bakker, Christoph Paulussen & Eva Entenmann, *Returning Jihadist Foreign Fighters: Challenges Pertaining to Threat Assessment and Counterterrorism Security and Human Rights* [Leiden University 2014] 12

<sup>282</sup> United Nations Security Council Resolution 2170 [August 2014] S/RES/2170

<sup>283</sup> Carrabine et al., (n264) 441

<sup>284</sup> Marthoz (n273) 37-39

However, Islamist extremists have been accused of political vagueness in their ambitions which stem primarily from religious or 'mystical' motivations.<sup>285</sup> Adding clarity, Spencer (2014) states that these groups strive for:

- The spread of Islamist extremism.
- Withdrawal of foreign influence from the holy lands.
- The overthrow of governments opposed to their ideologies.
- The creation of a Caliphate.
- Israel's Elimination <sup>286</sup>

With aims to liberate and unite the Ummah (global Muslim community) whose rights they believe have been hurt or denied by a combination of Christians, Jews, and apostate Muslim rulers;<sup>287</sup> this 'new' terrorism has also been described as *retributivist* terrorism that is not a means to an end but an end in itself, aiming to inflict little more than maximum destruction.<sup>288</sup> Islamist extremist groups desire weapons capable of causing high-intensity damage and indiscriminate mass destruction. Spencer, supported by Neumann (2009),<sup>289</sup> cited identifiable tactics, including the use of technology, weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), suicide tactics, and excessive violence.<sup>290</sup> However, these tactics are not novel. In the past, the United Nations has taken steps to address specific terrorist activities by implementing legal instruments. These include the Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Seizure of Aircraft (1970), the Convention against the Taking of Hostages (1979), and the Suppression of Terrorist Bombings Convention (1997), among others, as previously mentioned. Owing to the scale of deaths and iconic infrastructural targets damaged and destroyed, scholars who argue for a new terrorism point to the 9/11 attacks introducing differences concerning the *modus operandi* of Islamist fundamentalist groups in the preparedness of tactics forthcoming. Elements of contemporary Islamist terrorism, such as *modus operandi* and civilian target selections, have

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<sup>285</sup> Gus Martin, *Understanding Terrorism: Challenges, Perspectives and Issues* [4<sup>th</sup> Ed, Sage Publishing 2013] 37

<sup>286</sup> Spencer (n269) 10

<sup>287</sup> Neumann (n265) 42

<sup>288</sup> Kapardis (n189) 373

<sup>289</sup> Neumann (n265) 25-46

<sup>290</sup> Spencer (n269) 10-14

seemingly continued to develop since the commencement of the 2010s, maintaining a violent and indiscriminate approach. Scholars arguing for recognition of a 'new' terrorism stress aspects such as the *modus operandi* as being 'more lethal, violent and heavily motivated by fundamentalist religion'<sup>291</sup> to such an extent, Zimbardo & Breckenridge (2006) claim that modern terrorism can impose more intense and disproportionate fear, together with the ability to construct an enduring and pervasive apprehension of danger.<sup>292</sup>

Although al-Qaeda continue to develop plots against the West, most jihadist terrorism is carried out by *ISIL-inspired* homegrown individuals or groups, with ISIL acting as a base of the central leadership in the Middle East;<sup>293</sup> a 'franchising' of terrorism. This centralisation sees the command group (ISIL) with a fixed geographical base or location in the Middle East or North African regions while providing the brand or franchise (ideology) to other stations worldwide. They act as 'godfathers of terror', inspiring from afar as the individual lone actor or group within Western states organise their attacks, funding, and recruitment.<sup>294</sup> According to Law (2016), the operational structure of the organization experienced a rapid acceleration after the death of Osama bin Laden in 2011, under the leadership of Ayman al-Zawahiri.<sup>295</sup> Developments in post-Cold War globalisation and technological innovations, such as the ease of international travel, accessibility to weapons, dual-use technologies, specialist trainers, a shift from international to internal disputes, and the free flow of ideas and information through new communication platforms such as the Internet have created opportunities for terrorist groups to exploit.<sup>296</sup> Research on the Syrian conflict indicates valuable terroristic opportunities made possible by social media platforms. These facilitate a global reach, increasing the probability of propaganda coverage and member conscription, and enabling would-

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<sup>291</sup> Andrew Silke, 'Holy Warriors: Exploring the psychological processes of Jihadi radicalisation' [2008] *European Journal of Criminology* 5 (1) 99

<sup>292</sup> James N. Breckenridge & Phillip G. Zimbardo, 'The Strategy of Terrorism and the Psychology of Mass-Mediated Fear' in Bruce Bongar, Lisa M. Brown, Larry E. Beutler, James N. Breckenridge & Phillip G. Zimbardo *Psychology of Terrorism* [OUP 2006] 116

<sup>293</sup> Law (279) 330

<sup>294</sup> Ibid 330-333.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid 333.

<sup>296</sup> Rohan Gunaratna, 'Al-Qaeda is an example of 'new terrorism' in Stuart Gottlieb (ed), *Debating Terrorism and Counterterrorism: Conflicting Perspectives on Causes, Contexts, and Responses* [Sage Publishing 2014] 16-17

be lone actors or covert cells to carry out assaults against their native homelands.<sup>297</sup> Matusitz (2013) goes as far as to include mobile phones, laptops, and the Internet as identifiable weapons for terrorists and confirms that in the 1990s, there were just twelve terrorist websites. By November 2007, this figure was over 5,800.<sup>298</sup> With the aid of globalisation and technological advances, Islamist extremist groups have been able to 'franchise' terrorism beyond the *central* stress zones located primarily in Iraq and Syria, where al-Qaeda and ISIL '*provide the name but the individual or group largely acts independently to their plan*'.<sup>299</sup> Burke (2004) described this dimension of contemporary terrorism – with its global reach and 'franchises' – as a 'network of networks'.<sup>300</sup> Gunaratna (2014) claims that 'al-Qaeda central' has been surpassed by the overall Jihadi movement, with coalition forces weakening the group since 9/11. However, they still have strength in the 30-40 operationally associated network groups in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East.<sup>301</sup> Groups such as Boko Haram formed part of the *second layer* of terrorist franchising when making alliances with these central groups. Although groups like al-Qaeda and ISIL continue to develop terror plots, most attacks on Western states have been carried out by homegrown groups inspired, but not directed or funded, by central leadership.<sup>302</sup> Extremist Islamist ideologies have been adopted by covert cells, lone wolves, and foreign fighters who are located within or have returned to Europe and the UK. These cells, which are situated in Western societies like Europe, North America, and Australia, constitute the third layer of terrorist franchising. The true power of Islamist terrorists lies in their ideologically affiliated cells and individuals, who are dispersed worldwide. This networking and cell influence is a defining feature of contemporary Islamist terrorism, according to Gunaratna. Initially, al-Qaeda emerged as a centralized group with a clear hierarchical command structure before evolving into networks and cells that spread its influence.<sup>303</sup> The proliferation of extremist doctrines has been facilitated by recent technological advancements, including mobile telephony, round-the-clock

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<sup>297</sup> Sandra Laville 'Social Media used to recruit a new wave of British jihadis in Syria' [The Guardian 2014] <<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/apr/15/social-media-recruit-british-jihadis-syria-twitter-facebook>> accessed 7<sup>th</sup> March 2015.

<sup>298</sup> Jonathan Matusitz, *Terrorism and Communication: A Critical Introduction* [Sage Publications 2013] 341

<sup>299</sup> Law (279) 330

<sup>300</sup> Jason Burke, *Al-Qaeda: The True Story of Radical Islam* [Penguin Publishing 2004]

<sup>301</sup> Gunaratna (n296) 21-22

<sup>302</sup> Law (279) 330

<sup>303</sup> Gunaratna (n296) 21

news broadcasting, and the Internet. It is worth noting that one of the most salient differences between Islamist extremist organizations and other terrorist groups lies in the extensive network of ideologically driven cells and individuals (often referred to as "lone wolves") that are scattered across the globe, who are prepared to execute attacks that are challenging for security agencies to uncover. In short, whilst terror cells are not novel, element of the spread of the ideology and influence are.

### **Online forums changing the News**

Criticisms have been aimed at the news for not always taking seriously the measure of their responsibility as information providers. In this '*great propaganda game*', media enter a '*macabre dance of terror*' as they dramatise information which hands terrorists a '*wand of murderous choreography*'.<sup>304</sup> Prior to the early 2000s, traditional news production primarily consisted of radio, newspapers, and television. However, with the advent of the Internet and social media platforms, the public now has the ability to receive instant news updates directly on their mobile devices. In 2000, the year preceding the 9/11 attacks, 52% of US adults utilized the Internet. By 2015, this number had risen to 84%.<sup>305</sup> According to CNN, the proportion of individuals accessing election news online during the 2000 US presidential election was 33%, which is higher than the 22% recorded in 1996.<sup>306</sup> This indicates a notable increase in the number of individuals relying on online platforms for their news consumption during election periods. Statista reported that from 2010, US adult Internet news readers increased from 59% to 64% between 2000 and 2010 for those who accessed the Internet several times per week, and from 66% to 76% for those accessing the Internet daily.<sup>307</sup> By 2017, at least 67% of 4,971 surveyed American adult participants received at least 'some' of their news from social media; this increased from 2016. It was also identified that more than half (55%) of those aged 55 and over also used social media as a news source, 10% more than in the

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<sup>304</sup> Marthoz (n273) 12

<sup>305</sup> Andrew Perrin & Maeve Duggan, 'Americans' Internet Access: 2000-2015' [PEW Research Centre 2015] <<https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2015/06/26/americans-internet-access-2000-2015/>> accessed 31<sup>st</sup> May 2023.

<sup>306</sup> 'Survey: Internet established as major news source in 2000 elections' [CNN, 2000] <<https://edition.cnn.com/2000/ALLPOLITICS/stories/12/04/pew.survey/index.html>> accessed 31<sup>st</sup> May 2023.

<sup>307</sup> 'U.S. adult internet users who get news online from 2000 to 2010, by frequency of internet use' [Statista 2011] <<https://www.statista.com/statistics/184573/us-adult-internet-users-who-get-news-online-since-2000-by-frequency/>> accessed 31<sup>st</sup> May 2023.



previous year.<sup>308</sup> According to a report issued by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) in the United Kingdom, it was revealed that the utilisation of all online activities surveyed in 2007 and again in 2015 had experienced a rise, encompassing the consumption of online news, newspapers, or magazines.<sup>309</sup> A report published by Ofcom in 2017 examined the news consumption habits of individuals in the United Kingdom across television, radio, newspapers, and the internet. The study included a sample of 2,894 participants, and the findings revealed that although social media has witnessed a continuous increase in usage for news consumption since 2010, television remains the most prevalent source of news in the UK, accounting for 69% of consumption. However, both television and newspapers have experienced a decline in usage since 2013. Interestingly, demographic data showed that among individuals aged 16 to 24, 63% are more inclined to use social media as a source of news, compared to only 18% of those aged 65 or above. Conversely, older individuals are more likely to read newspapers and listen to the radio, with radio usage consistently remaining between 33 and 36%.<sup>310</sup> Inflated media coverage since the introduction of the 24/7 news channels has resulted in progressively frequent and diverse moral panic.<sup>311</sup>

Social media has facilitated not only continuous access to information and news, but also the aggregation of diverse sources within a single platform. As evidenced by *Table 2.1*, the UK-based news outlets under consideration in this thesis collectively boast a significant following of approximately 95.5 million Facebook users in 2021.<sup>312</sup> These figures partly illustrate the dissemination capabilities of major UK news outlets. *BBC News* is the most popular news outlet in the UK, with over 53 million Facebook followers at the time of writing. The second is *Daily Mail*, but with a significantly lower Facebook fellowship of 16 million, whereas *The Guardian* and *Sky News* are almost even with over 8 million likes. Others (*Daily Telegraph*, *The Sun*, *The Mirror*, *The Express*, and *The Times*) had over 13 million Facebook likes. For

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<sup>308</sup> Elisa Shearer & Jeffery Gottfried, 'News Use across Social Media Platforms 2017' [PEW Research Centre 2017] <<https://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/2017/09/07/news-use-across-social-media-platforms-2017/>> accessed 31<sup>st</sup> May 2023.

<sup>309</sup> Prescott (n179)

<sup>310</sup> 'News Consumption in the UK: 2016' [Ofcom 2017] <[https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0017/103625/news-consumption-uk-2016.pdf](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0017/103625/news-consumption-uk-2016.pdf)> accessed 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2017.

<sup>311</sup> Jasper (n48) 10029-10033

<sup>312</sup> These figures are accurate from the time of collection: 9<sup>th</sup> October 2021

adult Statista respondents in the USA and the UK in 2021, 41% and 42% respectively stated that they used social media as a news source.<sup>313</sup>

News Provider	Facebook Page Likes (2019)
BBC News	53 million
Daily Mail	16 million
Sky News	8.7 million
The Guardian	8.4 million
The Telegraph	4.4 million
The Sun	3.3 million
The Mirror	3.2 million
The Express	1.5 million
The Times	0.8 million

Table 2.1: Figures recorded from Facebook (2021)

In recent times, the growth in information sources has led to a plethora of choices for audiences, which is in stark contrast to the more restricted news outlets that were available in the past. However, the utilisation of algorithms by online platforms has had an impact on individual autonomy and information choice. Algorithms group social media posts based on their preference to users, prioritising content with a higher likelihood of engagement. Additionally, they deliver personalized, unsolicited content to users' social media accounts, filtering and delivering the most interesting information based on user data and interactions. Algorithms rank and filter information, creating sequences that match information to user preferences based on profile activity, and prioritise posts for which the algorithm predicts higher user interaction. Consequently, less relevant or low-interest posts are disregarded. Collaborative filtering aligns users with similar interests, and algorithms can consider personal data, such as geographic location. Furthermore, machine learning enables computers to learn from the real world, thereby improving task performance, such as recommendations.<sup>314</sup> Although an algorithm is a coder-created process which establishes a set of rules based on *machine learning* (algorithms “learn” how to operate with *some* human oversight) which considers and follows calculations and other problem-solving processes that are followed by computers, social media

<sup>313</sup> Amy Watson, 'Share of adults who use social media as a source of news in selected countries worldwide as of February 2021' [Statista 2021] <<https://www.statista.com/statistics/718019/social-media-news-source/>> accessed 10<sup>th</sup> October 2021.

<sup>314</sup> Maria Alessandro Golino, 'Algorithms in Social Media' [Institute for Internet & the Just Society 2021] <<https://www.internetjustsociety.org/algorithms-in-social-media-platforms>> accessed 29<sup>th</sup> October 2021.

platforms will actively denote which content should be promoted on their platforms.<sup>315</sup> As business entities, marketing generates revenue for social media platforms, such as Facebook. This includes marketing brands or content that public pages want to promote, paying a fee to the social media platform, and algorithms that promote their businesses over others.<sup>316</sup>

### **Modern News Ideology & Conflicts of Interests on Public Sense-Making**

What social media and algorithms do is provide users with targeted information they are more likely to want to engage with. According to Downs (1957), individuals would face significant costs for obtaining information, and as a result, they delegate this financial and laborious burden to news organizations. However, this outsourcing raises important questions about whether the media, as intermediaries between elites and grassroots, create conflicts of interest or impede the public's ability to make sense of complex issues.<sup>317</sup> The Internet has reduced the total expenditure for new and emerging competitors in the news industry, with many rejecting journalistic standards and destabilising business models, through which conventional news corporations have experienced high levels of public trust and credibility.<sup>318</sup> In the competitive market for media outlets and their parent companies, Chomsky & Herman (1988) explained that the introduction of advertising revenue made newspapers economically viable, reducing the cost of newspapers below their running costs and generating profits. This put newspapers without advertising revenue at a disadvantage as they were more expensive to produce and purchase. Advertisers gained more influence over news selection and story framing through the threat of funding withdrawal for noncompliance. This impacted "radical" papers that critiqued the government, as their audiences had modest means and were more likely to buy the cheaper, advert-funded paper. This process meant that advertisers were purchasing space to access a market of customers, ensuring that modern news disrupters and advertisers shared a mutual relationship based on profitability. An advertiser's choice of who to pay for advertising space can be influenced by the

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<sup>315</sup> Ibid.

<sup>316</sup> Ibid.

<sup>317</sup> Anthony Downs, *An economic theory of democracy* [Harper & Row 1957]

<sup>318</sup> David M. J. Lazer, Matthew A. Baum, Yochai Benkler, Adam J. Berinsky, Kelly M. Greenhill, Filippo Menczer, Miriam J. Metzger, Brendan Nyhan, Gordon Pennycook, David Rothschild, Michael Schudson, Steven A. Sloman, Cass R. Sunstein, Emily A. Thorson, Duncan J. Watts, and Jonathan L. Zittrain, 'The Science of Fake News' [2018] *Science*, 359 (6380) 1094-1096

reputation and popularity of the news distributor, the stories they cover, and the calibre of the audience they attract. The autonomy of news agencies has been eroded by bankers, investors, and large individual investors.<sup>319</sup>

From a news perspective, the objective is to produce stories that engage the audience and boost revenue. To achieve this, news outlets shape content in specific ways to cater to particular demographics, fostering a sense of familiarity among the audience. News sources have also embraced ideological stances, which influences their reporting of significant events. Such ideological inclinations also affect their connections with like-minded individuals in positions of authority and with their audience at the grassroots level. For example, a 2017 YouGov poll asked UK citizens to rate the political leanings of newspapers. Respondents generally perceived The Guardian as *somewhat or very left-wing*, The Daily Mail as *moderately or very right-wing*, and The Independent as a more centrist newspaper.<sup>320</sup> This perception creates an audience expectation of what slants they expect in the coverage of stories from their respective providers.

Such an environment has encouraged aggressive tactics to catch audience attention. The approach of eye-catching, but sometimes misleading, headlines, and the use of images is often given the modern label of *clickbait*.<sup>321</sup> This media tactics, alongside stories of genuine interest, helps create website traffic and increase advertising revenue. With news being socially and often ideologically constructed, editors exercise subjective judgments regarding which bits of information are included or excluded from stories.<sup>322</sup> The complex process of selecting newsworthy stories contributes to the construction of distortions and disproportionalities.

Greer & Reiner (2012) claimed that the first academic exploration of newsworthiness was conducted by Galtung & Ruge (1965), who found 12 'news values' that

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<sup>319</sup> Chomsky & Herman (n220) 1-33

<sup>320</sup> Mathew Smith, 'How left or right-wing are the UK's newspapers?' [YouGov 2017] <<https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2017/03/07/how-left-or-right-wing-are-uks-newspapers>> accessed 26<sup>th</sup> January 2022.

<sup>321</sup> *Articles, photographs, etc. on the internet that are intended to attract attention and encourage people to click on links to particular websites* [Cambridge Dictionary 2022]

<<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/clickbait>> accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2022.

<sup>322</sup> Edson et al., (n209) 137-153

determined news story selection.<sup>323</sup> Chibnall furthers when listing eight qualities to construct a news story. These included:

1. *Immediacy*: Instantly relatable, with little consideration of long-term patterns or historical contexts.
2. *Dramatisation*: Emphasis is placed on the most dramatic elements of the story. Banner headlines, distinct terminology, nicknames
3. *Personalisation*: Individuals receive more attention than the issue (victim(s) and Folk Devil).
4. *Simplification*: Issues are overly simple, ignoring any complexities consumers cannot absorb upon first reading.
5. *Titillation*: Thought given to arousing or interesting presentation of information
6. *Conventionalism*: Events, no matter how novel they are, must be placed in a conventional context so that consumers can feel familiar with the story.
7. *Structured Access*: Stories are reinforced by experts and other upstanding members of society, such as politicians and policing officials.
8. *Novelty*: Unusual or unique events or elements likely to attract public interest.<sup>324</sup>

Jewkes outlined 12 *news values* which shape crime reporting, detailing how the news selects and portrays important events.<sup>325</sup> In subsequent chapters, parallels are drawn between the original research and Jewkes' news values. For instance, the *Threshold* value posits that events must attain a certain level of significance or spectacle to be considered newsworthy. In the context of terrorism, it is evident that attacks or terrorism-related stories easily fulfil this criterion. Additionally, the concept of *Predictability* in media coverage of terrorism warrants examination. While unpredictable events create news, predictable stories enable news outlets to plan and organize their coverage in advance, allocating resources such as reporters and camera crews. Another aspect of predictability is that media agendas are structured

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<sup>323</sup> Chris Greer & Robert Reiner, 'Mediated Mayhem: Media, Crime, Criminal Justice' in Mike Maguire, Rod Morgan & Robert Reiner, *The Oxford Handbook of Criminology* [5<sup>th</sup> Ed, OUP 2012] 263

<sup>324</sup> Steve Chibnall, *Law and Order News: An Analysis of Crime Reporting in the British Press* [Routledge 2001]

<sup>325</sup> 'The professional, yet informal, codes used in the selection, construction and presentation of news stories.' See Yvonne Jewkes, *Media and Crime* [3<sup>rd</sup> Ed, Sage Publishing 2015] 301

and propagate a moral framework for debate, which they are unlikely to alter. Consequently, journalists or editors report aspects of a story that align with their pre-established approach. This can be observed in the tabloid press, where right- or left-leaning papers frame the same events differently to cater to their target audience. In doing so, the tabloid press *simplifies* complex events, reducing them to their basic components. This simplification, as explained by Jewkes, provides a straightforward point of reference for news stories that are lengthy and unfold gradually. Jewkes argues that this oversimplification by news outlets discourages critical interpretation among audiences and leads to unanimous agreement, typically manifested as moral outrage and condemnation directed at those who violate the legal or moral codes of mainstream society.<sup>326</sup> It can be stated that *individualism* connects the values of simplification and *risk* with personal definitions and rationalizations of crime, which are selected or preferred over more intricate cultural and political accounts. Individualization simplifies stories and make them more personal, thus impacting social, political, and economic issues, which are often only reported as conflicts of interest between individuals or subcultural groups. Furthermore, risk is made evident as issues are reduced in complexity and attributed to personal connotations that resonate with the public.

Mass media tends to devote little time to crime avoidance unless it can be incorporated into the ongoing narrative of danger. Most crimes, such as murder and rape, are committed by offenders known to the victim; however, the media regularly presents these types of serious crimes as random, meaningless, unpredictable, and potentially occurring at any time.<sup>327</sup> This is also the case with contemporary reporting of terrorism, which has seen a rise in the indiscriminate nature of attacks on both public and targeted areas. Nevertheless, the idea that we are all potential victims is a relatively new concept, cultivating continual fear. Crime stories have become increasingly victim-centric, emphasizing a constructed or specific vulnerability above the rate or likelihood of victimization. The fear of crime can be more accurately perceived as the fear of personal safety and the exploitation of public concerns by exaggerating potential risks to people's fears and anxieties. Furthermore, the over-

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<sup>326</sup> Ibid.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid.

reporting of crimes has instilled exaggerated fears regarding their likelihood of victimization. The Proximity value holds significance for micro-oriented news values, including Individualism, Risk, and Sex. Proximity encompasses both spatial and cultural aspects, with spatial referring to geographical closeness and cultural pertaining to the relevance of an event to an audience. These two aspects are often interconnected, resulting in news stories being perceived to align with the audience's pre-existing values, beliefs, and interests, and presented as taking place in geographical proximity to the audience that are most likely to be reported.<sup>328</sup>

The most selected news stories involve violence or conflict, as they fulfil the aim of the news media to disseminate dramatic stories containing the most graphic, captivating information. Media institutions constantly push the boundaries of acceptable reporting when depicting acts of violence. According to Jewkes, many violent crimes are reported without any follow-up or analysis, leading to a lack of context or conclusion. Interestingly, even when violent crime rates decrease, media reports of violent incidents tend to increase. Some argue that this is because the more sensational the violence, the greater its ability to produce a visual spectacle or graphic imagery. Terrorist attacks, for example, often fulfil this criterion. Television news is typically considered more credible by the public than newspapers, as it offers higher-quality images that are believed to demonstrate the 'truth' of a story or to verify a particular angle taken by the news team. In the second decade of the 21st century, stories were more likely to create news if they were accompanied by imagery and words. Jewkes suggests that all these news values share a common reliance on a right-wing consensus that is justified in encapsulating the 'British way of life.'<sup>329</sup> One further encapsulation was derived from the *Children* news value. While Hall et al. stated that a crime can gain media attention if violence is attached,<sup>330</sup> Jewkes pointed out that crimes involving children tend to garner media attention, regardless of their severity. However, she noted that the level of deviance required to attract media attention is significantly lower for those with a "personality" than for ordinary citizens. This is because the mere presence of a well-known individual elevates the crime's meaningfulness, making it newsworthy even if it's a

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<sup>328</sup> Ibid.

<sup>329</sup> Ibid 49-70.

<sup>330</sup> Hall et al., (n34)

routine or mundane offense. This holds true whether the individual is a victim or a perpetrator.<sup>331</sup>

In short, the need to provide captivating content in order to attain revenue also requires news organisations to maintain working relationships with primary information sources to craft stories that capture the audience's attention, thereby attracting more lucrative advertising investment. This can make it difficult to understand how "*educating the public while holding the government accountable*" can be considered a top priority for most major news businesses. While the media claims to be an independent voice free from outside influence or constraint, Cohen's definition of moral panic portrays a cooperative effort between various social actors. News is seen as a platform that connects social actors, consciously or subconsciously framing reality and developing moral panic.<sup>332</sup> A more sympathetic view of the media is that it simply reports stories to attract viewers<sup>333</sup> and inform citizens of government actions.<sup>334</sup> In this regard, news also serves the function of holding government accountable,<sup>335</sup> although there is a long-standing perception that political elites and the press work together for mutual benefit. Many academics have convincingly argued that there is a nefarious relationship between political elites, corporations, and the mainstream media. As detailed by Hall et al., *Secondary Definers* of information (news media) depend on *Primary Definers* for the information they disseminate. The media translate this information from primary sources to their audiences, over-empathising the threat of violence, increasing intense, *volatile concern* and *hostility*<sup>336</sup> and intensifying, rather than suppressing, deviance.<sup>337</sup> Within the elite-engineered loci, news media provides excessive coverage and framing of trivial and marginal issues as being more malicious and widespread than reality suggests, in the hope of diverting attention away from issues which concern society's elites. In the process, they underlined only views and behaviours acceptable to the higher rungs and reinforced what was unacceptable.<sup>338</sup>

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<sup>331</sup> Jewkes (n45)

<sup>332</sup> Schinkel (n65) 293

<sup>333</sup> Jasper (n48) 10029-10033

<sup>334</sup> Matthew A. Baum & Yuri M. Zhukov, 'Media Ownership & News Coverage of International Conflict' [2019] *Political Communication* 36 (1) 36

<sup>335</sup> Mullen (n243) 673-690

<sup>336</sup> Hall et al., (n34)60

<sup>337</sup> Krinsky (n5) 5

<sup>338</sup> Jasper (n48) 10029-10033



Several notable works illustrate such suspect relationships between the state and media. Herf (2008) details Nazi state-run media and the effective use of targeted propaganda and socially harmful narratives in creating a blameworthy *International Jewry* following WWI and manufacturing consent from the German public for the discriminatory state practices that came from the Third Reich.<sup>339</sup> Browning (1992) alludes to how powerful such propaganda was when evaluating how *Ordinary Men* took part in German state atrocities against minority groups during WWII as enlisted members of a reserve police battalion.<sup>340</sup> Comprehensively, Chomsky & Herman (1988) view media as a conductor for communicating messages, frames, and symbols to the general populace approved by the dominant elites. Chomsky & Herman proposed fluid components presented in a top-down propaganda model utilised to *Manufacture Consent* from the populace for elite behaviours. In proposing this theory, Chomsky & Herman attempt to explain media behaviour and profiteering interests through 'filters' proposed critically analyse the interdependencies between news media and elites. To illustrate the mutually beneficial relationship between both actors, they state 'filters', including:

- (1) The size, concentrated *ownership*, owner wealth, and profit orientation of the dominant mass-media firms,
- (2) *Advertising* as the primary income source of the mass media,
- (3) The reliance of the media on *sourcing* information provided by the government, business, and 'experts' funded and approved by these primary sources and agents of power,
- (4) *Flak* as a means of disciplining the media or enforcing this relationship between media and its primary sources of information
- (5) Ideology, 'Anticommunism' and fear. This purports for the creation of an enemy, a folk devil as a national religion, and a control mechanism.<sup>341</sup>

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<sup>339</sup> Herf (n218)

<sup>340</sup> Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserved Police Battalion 11 and the Final Solution in Poland* [Penguin 1992]

<sup>341</sup> Chomsky & Herman (n220) 1-33

In short, Chomsky & Herman's propaganda model examines the influence of wealth and power inequalities on news media interests and rationales for story selection and framing. This model demonstrates how financial and political factors shape the news stories that are deemed suitable for publication, suppress opposition, and enable government and private elite interests to amplify their messages to the consuming audience. The information that forms the basis of news reporting undergoes a series of filters, in line with Cohen's observation of second-hand information. This process results in the 'cleaned residue,' which is the edited and filtered news that the audience sees or reads. It is important to note that news media businesses aim to generate profits, and this perspective alters the original premises of discourse and its interpretation, ultimately redefining what is considered newsworthy.<sup>342</sup> Deviating too far from these filters can impede media information sourcing. This comprises the data gathered by media outlets from their main information sources (politicians), which may be restricted or withdrawn if the media does not comply with their primary information providers. Known as "Flak," this disrupts information sourcing and can hinder news reporting, ultimately harming sales and advertising revenue. This was demonstrated during the Covid-19 pandemic when the British Conservative Party boycotted Good Morning Britain due to their rigorous questioning of government ministers' handling of the pandemic.<sup>343</sup>

Relating to Chomsky & Herman's ownership and concentration of media entities, a report from the *Media Reform Coalition* (2021) questions what a 'free and fair' media means when social media, TV channels, newspapers, radio stations, and streaming services are owned by a concentrated number of organisations. The report found that just three companies in the UK owned 90% of the national newspaper market. These three companies account for 80% of the online market. To supplement, *Table 2.2* the few corporations involved in the ownership of UK media. Traditional news organisations also account for 48% of Facebook users' news sources, increasing the market reach for a few major news syndicates. Ethical questions are raised about the power of a few people to influence the reality of many.

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<sup>342</sup> Ibid 1-33.

<sup>343</sup> PA Media, 'Downing Street lifts boycott of ITV's Good Morning Britain' [The Guardian 2020] <<https://www.theguardian.com/media/2020/nov/15/downing-street-lifts-boycott-of-itvs-good-morning-britain>> accessed 12<sup>th</sup> October 2021.

Company	News Outlets Owned
News UK (part of News Corporation)	The Sun; The Times; The Sunday Times
Daily Mail Group	Daily Mail; The Mail on Sunday; Mail Online; Metro; i; New Scientist
Reach PLC	Daily Express; The Mirror; Daily Star; Echo; Manchester Evening News; Daily Record
Guardian Media Group (The Scott Trust)	The Guardian
Telegraph Media Group (Pressholdings)	The Telegraph; The Sunday Telegraph
BBC Group	BBC News
Comcast	Sky News

Table 2.2: UK media ownership per corporation as of October 2021

Concerns about ownership and a monopoly on information are exasperated when we consider that Facebook (now Meta) owns three of the top five social media applications or platforms used to access news online in the UK (Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram).<sup>344</sup> Table 2.3 lists major social media platforms and respective number of active users as of October 2021.

Social Media Platform	Number of Active Users
Facebook	2.89 billion
YouTube	2.8 billion
WhatsApp	2 billion
Instagram	1.39 billion
Facebook Messenger	1.3 billion
Tik-Tok	1 billion
Snapchat	538 million
Telegram	550 million
Twitter	436 million
Reddit	430 million

Table 2.3: Most popular social networks worldwide as of October 2021, ranked by number of active users, Statista (2022)

Baum & Zhukov (2019) argue that this centralisation of national media ownership sways news coverage of conflicts and atrocities. For example, studies of the 2003 Iraq War revealed that the media outlets of large corporations featured a narrower scope of opinions and inputs.<sup>345</sup>

### **Elite-Engineered Panic & Sense-Making of 9/11: Agnotology**

Despite reservations emerging from academic arguments for a new form of terrorism, ordinary citizens may perceive sensationalised events as a new problem

<sup>344</sup> Tom Chivers, *Report: Who Owns the UK Media?* [Media Reform Coalition 2021]

<sup>345</sup> Baum & Zhukov (n334) 36-63

that has emerged rapidly, due in part to their limited critical knowledge and gaps filled by elites. This perception is influenced by the sense-making process, which is constructed and disseminated by social elites. Chomsky & Herman's 1988 work mapping institutional relationships can, in part, highlight the elite-driven effort to make sense of the 9/11 attacks, which involved collaboration between political and media institutions.

The mainstream narrative after 9/11 intensified the public's sensitivity to terrorist threats, predictions of further harm, and existing symbols of harm within Western society. During times of widespread upheaval, such as a major terrorist attack, people naturally turn to their political leaders, the media, and social control agents for reassurance and information about what has happened. As per Hall et al, elite-engineered panics can be used to divert public attention away from issues that the state would prefer to avoid, or to create a broad consensus on concerns and appropriate actions. This process involves classifying the enemy and symbolizing their harm potential, gaining public support for discriminatory practices, promoting social polarization, persecution, and dehumanization through systematic targeting.<sup>346</sup> An important tool in such unscrupulous schemes is the use of propaganda delivered through mass media. Herf (2008), when describing Nazi state-run media and the effective use of targeted propaganda and socially harmful narratives, created a blameworthy *International Jewry* following WWI and manufactured consent from the German public for the discriminatory state practices and acts of state persecution that came from the Third Reich. As Herf details, Nazi regime propaganda repetitively proclaimed that a social actor they termed as 'the Jewry' or the 'International Jewry' was '*...intent on exterminating Germany and the Germans.*'<sup>347</sup> This is an extreme example that illustrates the power of elite sense-making.

Distorted, manipulative elite sense-making and hegemony creates *ignorance* among the population from which the government needs support. Initially advanced by Proctor & Schiebinger (2008), *Agnology* concerns the deliberate spread of (dis)information to confuse, deceive, and distort worldviews to favour the creation

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<sup>346</sup> Hall et al., (n34)

<sup>347</sup> Herf (n218) 1

and dissemination of such information. Agnotology is the creation of mass ignorance. As Barton, Davis & White (2018) describe:

*"Contemporary physics postulates invisible 'dark matter' and 'dark energy' to explain what is observable in the natural universe. Analogously, analysis of the generation and sustenance of ignorance—the absence of imperfect or false understanding—can illuminate the understanding of humanity's worst crimes and catastrophes. It offers the exposure and dissection of myriad combinations of false beliefs, unfounded assumptions, and wrongheaded reasoning that quietly or not so quietly usher humanity towards peril, suffering and loss."*<sup>348</sup>

The production of ignorance is not unstructured or unintentional. Tuana (2008) posits that ignorance creation is *'far from being a simple, innocent lack of knowledge and that it is a complex phenomenon, which like knowledge, is interrelated with power.'*<sup>349</sup> Elites use established institutions and corporations to perpetuate harm and manipulation,<sup>350</sup> while negative accounts of them are neutralised within the prevailing regime's presentation of truth. In this sense, the creation of ignorance among the public is a useful skill for a state government seeking to evade scrutiny of their actions or deficiencies. The agnotological approach is relevant to the elite-engineered theory for moral panic, as presenting specific issues of disproportionality by elites, ignorance, and distortion may help elite political and media frames persevere in their quest to create panic and alarm in matters undeserving of such disproportionate attention and steer concentration away from others. Ignorance is therefore sustained by hierarchies of credibility and influence, though a professional and organised effort to focus on stories that diminish critiques or unflattering projections of elites. Elites can also be excluded from media headlines, with a de-emphasis on their behaviours. Within hegemonic mainstream ideologies, aspects of social and cultural organisation structurally restrict and mould public understanding, constraining intellectual and empathic discourse, interpretations, and understanding of the social environment and our place within it. Barton, Davis & White identify four interrelated *"States of Ignorance"* in systematically approaching such engineered social understanding:

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<sup>348</sup> Barton, Davis, & White (n221) 14

<sup>349</sup> Tuana (n219)

<sup>350</sup> Paddy Hillyard, & Steve Tombs, 'From 'crime' to social harm?' [2007] *Crime, Law & Social Change* 48 (1) 9

1. *An Absence of knowledge*: where facts are not known,
2. *A false knowledge*: where 'facts' are 'known' with certainty but are false,
3. *An absence of understanding*: where there are deficits in knowledge and a false understanding, and,
4. There are *failures in sense-making* regarding such facts, uncertainties, and falsehoods.<sup>351</sup>

Forwarding these notion through the elite-engineered lens, at the time of the 9/11 attacks, T.V. reporters and onlookers struggled to detail anything beyond what they were able to see immediately in front of them, leaving a '*void of meaning*'; a void which was subsequently filled by event interpretations by leading US politicians, such as US President George W. Bush and his administration, news media, and online niche media.<sup>352</sup> Chermak & Gruenewalk (2006) posited that the media tends to focus on the sensational, violent, and fear-inducing aspects of terrorism, while neglecting historical, cultural, and social explanations. An analysis of New York Times news articles on terrorism published between 1980 and 2001 revealed that most terrorist incidents received minimal coverage, while a few cases were sensationalised. The 9/11 attacks, for instance, garnered extensive media coverage due to several reasons, including the public's increased access to new informational and communicative media, the attacks' alignment with newsworthiness criteria, and the widespread fear and attention they generated. Chermak & Gruenewalk argued that the media and political frames surrounding the 9/11 attacks contributed to its mass appeal. Abdolian & Takooshian (2003) found that during the last week of September 2001, approximately 95% of Americans followed the news for updates on the 9/11 attacks.<sup>353</sup> While researching how Americans responded to 9/11 attacks, Traugott et al. (2002) found that the press was an integral part of sense-making and opinion-forming development, forming an essential source of information. The authors argue that individuals with the highest levels of news exposure are most

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<sup>351</sup> Barton, Davis, & White (n221) 13-35

<sup>352</sup> Richard Jackson, *Writing the War on Terrorism: Language, Politics and Counter-Terrorism* [Manchester University Press 2005] 29-31

<sup>353</sup> Lisa Finnegan Abdolian & Harold Takooshian, 'The USA Patriot Act: Civil Liberties, the Media, and Public Opinion' [2003] *Fordham Urban Law Journal* 30 (4) 1429

likely to be psychologically affected by major episodes and are less likely to recover fully.<sup>354</sup>

When the US and the world were taking stock (making sense; Cohen's Inventory) of what had happened, a 2001 article by *The News York Times* entitled '*The War Against America; An Unfathomable Attack*' framed the significance of the attacks. The article described the episode as "*one of those moments in which history splits, and we define the world and 'before' and 'after'*", immediately telling its readers to '*remember the ordinary, if you can*'.<sup>355</sup> America "*would never be the same*", and terrorism was a social problem which required a response.<sup>356</sup> By this point in 2001, there was little clarity as to the rarity of such attacks, and few explorations or inclusions involving counter-narratives related to the potential role of Western nations' foreign policy in providing terrorist groups with motivations to attack. There was also only a modest examination of Islamist extremists' goals.<sup>357</sup> Jackson emphasised the importance of addressing certain crucial questions in the absence of knowledge and comprehension, such as: What motivated them to carry out such an act?; What kind of individuals would commit such a heinous act?; Were there any further attacks to come?; and What was the most appropriate course of action? According to Jackson, the Bush administration promoted a political, military, and cultural interpretation of the events. This narrative aimed to legitimize and normalize a military response in the 'War on Terror' (Operation Enduring Freedom), depicting the attacks as an exceptional tragedy and a grave injustice, and portraying them as an act of war rather than a criminal act of murder carried out by non-state actors.<sup>358</sup>

In the days that followed, facts and figures of 9/11 were outnumbered by opinions, anonymous sources cited, reporters saturating their commentaries with patriotism,

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<sup>354</sup> Michael Traugott, Ted Brader, Deborah Coral, Richard Curtin, David Featherman, Robert Groves, Martha Hill, James Jackson, Thomas Juster, Robert Kahn, Courtney Kennedy, Donald Kinder, Beth Ellen Pennell, Mathew Shapiro, Mark Tessler, David Weir, & Robert Willis, 'How Americans Responded: A Study of Public Reactions to 9/11/01' [2002] *Political Science and Politics* 35 (3) 511

<sup>355</sup> 'The War Against America; An Unfathomable Attack' [The New York Times 2001]  
<<https://www.nytimes.com/2001/09/12/opinion/the-war-against-america-an-unfathomable-attack.html>>  
access 14<sup>th</sup> December 2001.

<sup>356</sup> Steven Chermak & Jeffery Gruenewald, 'The Media's Coverage of Domestic Terrorism' (2006) *Justice Quarterly* 23 (4) 428

<sup>357</sup> *Ibid* 428-461.

<sup>358</sup> Jackson (n352)

and very few reports meaningfully addressed Jackson's questions, as mentioned above.<sup>359</sup> Altheide (2006) affirmed that government and military officials were ever-present figures in news reports in the aftermath of 9/11, with new providers slanting towards administrative sources with a specific focus and language.<sup>360</sup> By relying heavily on the government's narrative, the media amplified the Bush administration's framing of the war on terror, crafting an ideological bond between journalists and policymakers. A similar trend occurred during the Cold War and Red Scare eras towards anti-communism, similar to that detailed in Chomsky's propaganda model. As President Bush declared during a speech at a prayer service on September 14<sup>th</sup>, 2001, "*War has been waged against us by stealth and deceit*",<sup>361</sup> despite Osama Bin Laden having openly declared 'war' against America in the mid-1990s.<sup>362</sup> With the notion of a 'War' on terrorism holding broad appeal and support (consensus),<sup>363</sup> media coverage of the attacks was prophetic that a retaliatory war was inevitable and righteous. The headlines were prowar and contained distinct nationalist graphics with American flags broadcast on their television screens, appealing to populist sentiment. They were heavily present in the background or foreground as people were interviewed about attacks or war prospects. As the Bush administration pushed heavily for an invasion of Afghanistan, the media helped create a sense that the war was a necessary and proper response, failing to be neutral in their coverage and being pro-war alongside the administration,<sup>364</sup> with pro-war voices in leading news coverage outstripping anti-war counter-narratives.<sup>365</sup> This has also been referred to as the '*CNN Effect*', in which news coverage influences government strategies and policies.<sup>366</sup> This presentation of a problem and the delivery of interpretations also creates a sense of unity: *the Us*.

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<sup>359</sup> Finnegan Abdolian & Takooshian (n353) 1429-1453

<sup>360</sup> David Altheide, 'Terrorism and the Politics of Fear' [2006] *Cultural Studies Critical Methodologies* 6 (4) 415

<sup>361</sup> 'Text: Bush Remarks at Prayer Service' [The Washington Post 2001] <[https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/nation/specials/attacked/transcripts/bushtext\\_091401.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/nation/specials/attacked/transcripts/bushtext_091401.html)> accessed 14<sup>th</sup> December 2021.

<sup>362</sup> Dominic Tierney, 'The Twenty Years War' [The Atlantic 2016] <<https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/08/twenty-years-war/496736/>> accessed 14<sup>th</sup> December 2021.

<sup>363</sup> *Law* (279) 325

<sup>364</sup> Altheide (n360) 415-439

<sup>365</sup> Andrew Lindners, 'Among the Troops: Seeing the Iraq War through three journalistic vantage points' (2009) *Social Problems* 56 (1) 21-48

<sup>366</sup> Piers Robinson, 'The CNN Effect: Can the news media drive foreign policy?' [1999] *Review of International Studies* 25 (2) 301-309



When researching how Americans responded to the 9/11 attacks, Traugott et al. (2002) found that a significant number of US citizens suffered a sense of losing personal safety and security.<sup>367</sup> There was a sense of weakness and fragility in the nation's security owing to the revelations of gaps in security in the lead up to the attacks. For example, Kapardis (2010) writes that, at the time of the attack, the *Assisted Passenger Pre-Screening System (CAPPS)*, which uses basic information provided by passengers when they reserve and buy tickets, flagged two of the four hijackers on American Flight 77 which was later directed into the Pentagon. Even though their bags were scanned, neither men were questioned nor searched. The magnitude of the 9/11 attacks coupled with elite amplification and diffusion made it certain in the minds of the American population that changes were required for US national security to protect *Us* from *Them*. As former US vice president, Dick Cheney reasoned in 2003:

*'9/11 changed everything for us...9/11 forced us to think of new ways about threats to the United States, about our vulnerabilities, about who our enemies were, about what kind of military strategy we needed in order to defend ourselves.'*<sup>368</sup>

Chermak & Gruenewald (2006) found that terrorism incidences were often covered like familiar crime stories which empathised with the characteristics of victims, suspects, crime, and the response from the justice system. News reporters would refer to information from their 'crime sources' and police officials, who are usually presented as representatives of a criminal agency or criminal justice practitioner. Other incidents:

*'...are inserted into stories about a range of important policy issues-some incidents might be used as opportunities to generate support for specific legislation, make a request for additional resources, justify restructuring organisational priorities, or serve as a reminder that terrorism is a great threat that needs to remain of concern.'*<sup>369</sup>

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<sup>367</sup> Traugott et al., (n354) 511–516

<sup>368</sup> Patricia Dunmire, '9/11 Changed Everything': On Intertextual Analysis of the Bush Doctrine' [2009] *Discourse & Society* 20 (2) 195-222

<sup>369</sup> Chermak & Gruenewald (n356) 428-461

Media stories about terrorism are often ideological in their frames, as they aim to justify a particular course of exhibited reactions, such as armed conflict or increased domestic social and security control. However, this notion of sustaining national victimisation induced fear, anger, and a desire for revenge which translated into support for violent, disproportionate state approaches,<sup>370</sup> both domestic and foreign.

### **Us vs Them: The Presence of Evil & Labels of the Uncivilized Other**

When aligning with Hall et al.'s findings, ignorance production and deformations in public sense-making are easier to conduct when there is a scapegoat (the black mugger, for example). Given that moral panic is a struggle between the boundaries of order, truth, and normality,<sup>371</sup> research tends to capture and explain episodes involving overly hysterical reactions and hyperbolic fears towards folk devils perceived as threatening social order and civilised, communal values.<sup>372</sup>

The notion of *Evil* can be primarily associated with biblical and philosophical scriptures. Thus, this categorisation of a Good vs. Evil (Us vs Them) has enjoyed omnipresence in behavioural moralisation and civilising standards for centuries. Neiman (2002) reasoned that these early explanations of evil depicted cruel and unpleasant behaviours rooted in civilisation,<sup>373</sup> although such explanations overlook disparities between rationally moralistic and naturally occurring evils, with theorists conceding the challenge of delivering a universal definition. The complexity of defining evil includes the associations between evil and individuals exposed to social shaming. As such, the term evil has a variance of definitions with broader meanings, proposing that evil encompasses all wrongdoing in an absolutist logic, while narrower definitions restrict evil to behaviours beyond misdemeanours.<sup>374</sup> For example, while McCloskey (1960) explains that moral evil is a violation of divine instruction stemming from the rationale choices of people;<sup>375</sup> when discussing cases

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<sup>370</sup> Jackson (n352) 33-35

<sup>371</sup> Nicky Falkof, 'On moral panic: Some directions for further development' [2018] *Critical Sociology* 46 (2) 225

<sup>372</sup> Walsh (n9) 643-662

<sup>373</sup> Susan Neiman, 'Undeniable Evil' [2002] *New England Review* 23 (4) 5

<sup>374</sup> Andrew Flescher, *Moral Evil* [Georgetown University Press 2013]

<sup>375</sup> H.J. McCloskey, 'God and Evil' [1960] *The Philosophy Quarterly* 10 (39) 97

of child sexual abuse, Rittossa (2010) forwards that concepts of evil are attached to criminal offenders who have committed depraved acts of criminality.<sup>376</sup>

Political movements can take advantage of social divisions and instigate support for their agendas. As terrorist violence against civilians creates suspicion of others and fosters fear among civic populations, terrorism is often represented by elites as one of the grave threats to national security. However, not all violent actions garner the same level of political media devotion to notoriety, either at the time they are committed or retrospectively. For example, the terrorist behaviour of Guy Fawkes and his co-conspirators. They were once considered criminals and are now celebrated annually in Britain, signifying the need to reconsider the notion of evil beyond its moral and natural variations.<sup>377</sup> A key difference here is that November 5<sup>th</sup> was declared a national holiday through *The Observance of 5 November Act* (1605) which enshrined an annual day for British thanksgiving.<sup>378</sup> Nevertheless, following 9/11, the 'evil' frame was utilised to justify armed conflicts with Afghanistan and Iraq (alongside North Korea). George Bush declared these two nations had come to comprise two-thirds of an *Axis of Evil* during his State of the Union speech in 2002, declaring that:

*'States like these, and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the world's peace. These regimes pose a grave and growing danger by seeking weapons of mass destruction. They could provide these arms to terrorists, giving them the means to match their hatred. They could attack our allies or attempt to blackmail the United States. In any of these cases, the price of indifference would be catastrophic.'*<sup>379</sup>

The concept of evil is often ascribed to terrorists and their accomplices, who scheme to undermine the state and its citizens. According to Altheide (2006), powerful individuals propagated a narrative that provided a coherent explanation for 9/11 and other terrorist incidents, shaped public perspectives, and conveniently classified terrorist acts. One of the crucial myths fabricated by elites during the post-9/11 era

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<sup>376</sup> Dalida Rittossa, 'Criminal Legal Confrontation with Evil in Cases of Sexually Abused Children' [2010] BRILL 39

<sup>377</sup> Susan Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy* [Princeton University Press 2015]

<sup>378</sup> Lynne Garner, 'All About Bonfire Night' [2010] Child Care 7 (11) 20

<sup>379</sup> 'Full text: State of the Union address' [BBC News 2002]

<<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/1790537.stm>> accessed 8<sup>th</sup> Feb 2002.

was the notion that a conflict between good and evil was necessary to protect the United States from further harm, with our side being portrayed as virtuous and the opposing group as evil and depraved.<sup>380</sup>

It is important to recognise that governments too can engage in actions that are considered "evil" or fall within the realm of social harm, as defined by academic standards.<sup>381</sup> Nevertheless, Western governments are rarely held responsible for their wrongdoings, which are often hegemonically justified by elites as necessary to prevent a greater evil, with harmful state actions presented as the lesser of the two<sup>382</sup> (also see Cohen's seminal work on *State Denial*).

The 9/11 attacks were depicted in a manner that linked them to several pre-existing and widely popular "meta-narratives," such as pre-constructed narratives or frames associated with sentiments and widely held depictions, such as World War II and the Cold War. These are classic examples of international conflicts with clear right and wrong standing. The War on Terror and the Coalition's justification for using pre-emptive self-defence against Iraq and the terrorist entities operating there were often suggested to be part of this "necessary evil," while also demonstrating that the actions and rhetoric of governments can distort what is considered "evil behaviour."<sup>383</sup> Moreover, the peremptory self-defence argument carries additional investigative burdens in determining whether the hypothetical 'evil' (the terrorists will attack us if we do not attack them) would have been less or more damaging than the peremptory state evil.<sup>384</sup> Rothe & Muzzatti (2004) argued that mainstream news accepted and propelled the Bush administration's one-dimensional, hostile, and divisive framing, arguing that news media had been compelled to frame Afghanistan's *Taliban*, who gave refuge to Osama Bin Laden, as inherently evil.<sup>385</sup> Rothe & Muzzatti examined the WoT propelled by the Bush administration after 9/11 using a critical moral panic assessment and conducted an empirical study of mainstream news media coverage and US legislative reactions. They found that

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<sup>380</sup> Altheide (n360) 415-439

<sup>381</sup> Hillyard & Tombs (n350) 27-41

<sup>382</sup> Lars Svendsen, *A Philosophy of Evil* [Dalkey Archive 2010]

<sup>383</sup> Stuart Croft, *Culture, Crisis and America's War on Terror* [CUP 2006]

<sup>384</sup> Cees Jan Hamelink, *Media and Conflict: Escalating Evil* [Routledge 2015]

<sup>385</sup> Rothe & Muzzatti (n13) 327-350

predictions of further Islamist terrorist danger unveiled a dichotomy created by the Bush administration in which other nations had been defined as either 'good' (allies of the US) or 'evil' (enemies of the US);<sup>386</sup> *"You are either with us, or with the terrorists."*<sup>387</sup>

Fear was an immediate response from the American public, a fear which would subsequently support 'assaults upon civic security'.<sup>388</sup> The prompt reaction demonstrated a significant rise in demonstrations of national pride and passionate displays of sorrow and solidarity. There were evident apprehensions that echoed throughout American society following the 9/11 tragedy, with victims, survivors, and their loved ones appearing in images conveying the severity of the event, thereby lending credence to the government's account of the appropriate course of action.<sup>389</sup> The most apparent initial concern was the danger of further large-scale attacks killing and injuring people and causing severe property damage. However, this soon incorporated other dimensions. The contemporary terrorism phenomena encompasses not only the tactical and strategic dimensions, but also ideological, principled, and moral elements. Cohen's Mods & Rockers research unveiled pervasive patterns of constructionism and reaction that transcended the limited scope of the Mods and Rockers factions.<sup>390</sup> Islamist extremism crystallised a near unquestioned '*Us vs Them*' distinction during the War on Terror, with Islamist extremism as an undisputed enemy to Western civilisation. This would come to extend itself to *British values* (democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs).<sup>391</sup> What the 9/11 attacks provided was the instantaneously palpable *Folk Devil* amplified through the presence of Muslims and Islamic communities inside Western nations. Moral panics are rarely deprived of objective bias, with religious minorities often perceived as a threatening

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<sup>386</sup> Bonn (n142) 227-249

<sup>387</sup> 'Text: President Bush Addresses the Nation' [The Washington Post 2001]

<[https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/nation/specials/attacked/transcripts/bushaddress\\_092001.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/nation/specials/attacked/transcripts/bushaddress_092001.html)> accessed 12<sup>th</sup> Dec 2021.

<sup>388</sup> Law (279) 325

<sup>389</sup> Ibid 325.

<sup>390</sup> Critcher (n14)

<sup>391</sup> *Prevent Strategy* [2011] 107

<[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/97976/prevent-strategy-review.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/97976/prevent-strategy-review.pdf)> accessed 27<sup>th</sup> July 2020.

social problem rather than part of the accepted mainstream or social resource.<sup>392</sup>

Jackson writes that in constructing and framing the fearful 'terrorist' immediately following 9/11, George Bush explained that the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks were 'traitors to their *religion*' and a '*fringe movement that perverts the peaceful teachings of Islam...terrorists are traitors to their faith.*'<sup>393</sup> These aspects are an intermingling of risks to wellbeing while doubling up as an affront to traditional 'Western' values; '*The attack took place on American soil, but it was an attack on the heart and soul of the civilised world.*'<sup>394</sup>

Adding a further critical dimension, Rohloff & Wright (2010) consider Elias' *Civilising Process* when enhancing moral panic theory and folk devil creation, providing insight into the management and control of conflicts which appear when:

*'decivilising counter currents accompany civilising trends, when for example, technology, specialisation, and democratisation bring social disruptions such as those related to a greater division of labour.'*<sup>395</sup>

The civilising process is useful deliberation in the Us vs Them narrative, powerfully conjuring the terrorist as evil, barbaric, and *uncivilised*. This has the consequence of tarnishing associated, lawful, and often victimised social groups in the same way (labelling all Muslims as terrorists, for example). Such strong, emotional labels generating volatile, hostile social emotions of a threat close in proximity are a constant reminder and sensitisation to threat. Since the French revolution, a state can increase its self-professed legitimacy and rightfulness to power when its enemies have negative labels such as 'terrorist' attributed to them.<sup>396</sup> When considering negative, deviant impressions, labelling theories are essential owing to socially ascribed titles and their levels of prejudiced connotations or meanings,<sup>397</sup> with 'evil' actions identifiable based on *attributes* of perpetrators construed as such.<sup>398</sup> Society construes labels to classify individuals and behaviours. Unwarranted labels bestowed upon people or groups based on prejudiced determinations thrive in

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<sup>392</sup> Introvigne (n77) 47-59

<sup>393</sup> Jackson (n352) 64

<sup>394</sup> The Washington Post (n387)

<sup>395</sup> Rohloff & Wright (n149) 403-419

<sup>396</sup> Rothe & Muzzatti (n13) 327-350

<sup>397</sup> Luke Russell, 'Evil and Incomprehensibility' [2012] *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 36 62

<sup>398</sup> Eve Garrad, 'The Nature of Evil' [1998] *Philosophical Explorations* 1 (1) 43

ignorance of proceedings and over-generalisation of the evil term in discourse, enticing the criminal justice system (CJS) to overuse the term when prescribing sentences in severe cases.<sup>399</sup>

Brudholm & Lang (2018) argue that members of the public associate evil with anxiety-inducing scenarios and feelings of vulnerability with such adverse associations resulting in individuals or sub-groups being marginalised and stigmatised from the accepted mainstream of society;<sup>400</sup> becoming the folk devil. Every moral panic carries a clearly defined and distinguishable folk devil;<sup>401</sup> a source of evil, harm, and wrongfulness. Referring again to Cohen's moral panic definition, the Folk Devil element of panics is referenced as a '*...condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests...*'<sup>402</sup> Folk Devils become the symbol of what is wrong, portrayed as a 'suitable enemy' or the face of the 'evil' that has befallen society.<sup>403</sup> Exemplified in *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, Cohen identified youths belonging to either the Mods or Rockers group as folk devils. In contrast, Jock Young identified a bohemian or hippy subculture in *The Drugtakers*.<sup>404</sup> Folk Devils test conventional mainstream standards, norms, principles, and rules of a given society, increasing social tension and damaging cohesion. It is often observed in previous presentations of moral panic theory that Folk Devils are the unfortunate receivers of undue alarms and hostility and are generally depicted by panic scholars as unwanting of their damaging representation. Early criminological positivist theorists such as Lombroso denoted the 'born' criminal intrinsic of a predetermined *evil*. Almost uncompromisingly, early biological and psychological positivist theories held that specific individuals would never fit the law-abiding and civilised standards of *the rest of society*. Evil cannot be cured, and an administrative and utilitarian approach should be adopted once we establish who is evil. 9/11 prompted a reconsideration of moral boundaries, understanding of good and evil, and institutional power structures, with protagonists

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<sup>399</sup> Russell (n397)

<sup>400</sup> Thomas Brudholm, & Johannes Lang, *Emotions and Mass Atrocity: Philosophical and Theoretical Explorations* [CUP 2018]

<sup>401</sup> Jasper (n48) 10029-10033

<sup>402</sup> Goode & Ben-Yehuda (n16) 27

<sup>403</sup> Ibid 27.

<sup>404</sup> Jock Young, *The Drugtakers: The Social Meaning of Drug Use* [Harper Collins Distribution Services 1971]

or heroes projected as firefighters, agents of social control, and flight passengers on each plane. In contrast, antagonists or villains such as Osama bin Laden, al Qaeda, and the Taliban instantly became apparent *symbols* of evil associated with the Islamic religion. By extension, the Muslim and Islamic faith also fell into the villain category. Rothe & Muzzatti (2004) argued that clichéd portrayals of Arab Muslims as terrorists featured in theatrical movies and television programs after 9/11 reinforce the mainstream 'evildoer' frame of an Arab-terrorist nexus,<sup>405</sup> with media giving more attention to their folk devil embodying a new and extraordinary threat.<sup>406</sup>

An immediate concern for those assigned folk devil status is the hostile reaction they receive, such as hate crimes against Muslim groups following Islamist terrorist attacks. For example, By 17<sup>th</sup> Sept 2001, *The Evening Standard* had already reported on 'revenge' attacks against Muslim individuals and mosques in the UK.<sup>407</sup> Ivandic, Kirchmaier, & Machin (2019) evidence a '*sizable effect of jihadi terrorist attacks on Islamophobic hate crime*', illustrating spikes in hate crimes commissioned immediately following an attack, a stark contrast to figures of hate crimes prior to attacks. This contrast is further indicative of the volatility and *hostility* of terrorism panics. The authors also found that Islamophobia is not only an immediate response to an attack, but is also provoked by information on terrorism offenders and their victims offered by the media.<sup>408</sup> However, labelling theories also illustrate how social marginalisation may further increase the likelihood that labelled individuals conform to the same labels, a *Self-Fulfilling Prophecy*. Through labelling theories, we can better understand stigmatisation and bias presented in news media, which exploit labels to sway public opinion,<sup>409</sup> exaggerate levels of deviancy and threat, and inflate public fear to attain and grow their audience.<sup>410</sup> Although Walsh (2017) distinguished that terrorists actively seek the status of notoriety, manufacturing this label for

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<sup>405</sup> Rothe & Muzzatti (n13) 327-350

<sup>406</sup> Krinsky (n5) 5

<sup>407</sup> 'Revenge' attacks on Muslims: Terror War: Violence Terrorism USA' [The Evening Standard 2001] (London) retrieved via Lexis Library

<sup>408</sup> Ria Ivandic, Tom Kirchmaier & Stephen Machin, 'Amplifying Islamophobic hate crime: UK media in the wake of terror attacks' [LSE 2019] <<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/the-media-in-the-wake-of-terror-attacks/>> accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> Sept 2022.

<sup>409</sup> Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* [Simon and Schuster 2009]

<sup>410</sup> Jeff Hemsley, Jenna Jacobsen, Anatoliy Gruzd, & Phillip Mai, 'Social Media for Social Good or Evil: An Introduction' [2018] *Social Media & Society* 4 (3) 1



themselves with a deliberate focus.<sup>411</sup> Islamist extremists' proactive pursuit of folk devil status by plotting and carrying out terrorist attacks caused those of the same faith to attain this label. For this reason, terrorism panics incite a dual meaning in the folk devil term. As Walsh explains regarding the folk devil of terrorism panics, terrorists are provocateurs achieving social reactions out of proportion to their numerical or military powers. In this sense, they are considered chief instigators in creating sensitive concerns and disproportionate reactions, as opposed to moral entrepreneurs and social control agents in mass media.<sup>412</sup> As Islamist extremists seek to challenge Western societies' stability, tolerance, and peace of mind in the name of the Islamic religion, extremists intentionally encourage social alienation and fear of Muslim citizens in Western nations. This can be evidenced by, for example, England and Wales hate crime statistics for 2018/19, revealing that 47% (3,530) of religious hate crime offences were targeted against Muslims. This makes terrorists different from folk devils in classic moral panic analysis, such as Mods & Rockers, for example, as they did not actively (initially at least) seek their deviant label.<sup>413</sup>

Earlier in this chapter, Islamist terrorism was argued as not being a 'new' phenomenon, though, terrorist attacks hold an element of 'novelty factor'. The gravity and symbolic nature of the 9/11 attacks were, from an academic, historical, and media perspective, a spectacle unlike no other attacks, as figures 2.1-3 illustrate. The power and success of constructing 11 September 2001 as a day of the American national tragedy are best evidenced in how the date itself (9/11) has become linguistically iconic, dissociated from the time and geographical locations where the attacks took place. As Jackson exemplifies, plenty of political and media discourse referenced 9/11 as a 'tragedy', 'calamity', 'loss' and 'horror'. Instead, '9/11' is a rhetorical shorthand for America's tragedy, with Americans themselves fixed as principally wronged (*American exceptionalism*). These terms are often paired with dramatic and symbolic pictures in media reports (see Fig. 2.1).

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<sup>411</sup> Walsh (n9) 643-662

<sup>412</sup> Ibid 643-662.

<sup>413</sup> 'Hate Crime, England and Wales, 2018/19' [Gov.UK 2019] <[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/839172/hate-crime-1819-hosb2419.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/839172/hate-crime-1819-hosb2419.pdf)> accessed on 30<sup>th</sup> Jul 2020.

*Figure 2.1: Photo of the second plane making impact with the World Trade Centre buildings (Image removed for repository publication – view via citation).*

The time which followed the attacks, new photos, and video footage emerged in the news media and online, edited, framed, and disseminated worldwide. There were many different photographic images of the New York attacks, as Fig. 2.1 illustrates a moment just before the second passenger carrier struck the second of the World Trade Centres. *The Falling Man* (see Fig. 2.2) became iconic from a victimology perspective, an ordinary, everyday, hardworking American forced into the choice of burning or falling to his death.<sup>414</sup>

*Figure 2.2: The Falling Man (Image removed for repository publication – view via citation).*

The frames, symbols, and emotive imagery circulated, such as that illustrated in Fig. 2.3, an American flag planted at the base of the World Trade Centre (Ground Zero), created a 'moral responsibility'; an obligation for counter-violence, where there was

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<sup>414</sup> Time Photo, 'The Story Behind the Haunting 9/11 Photo of a Man Falling From the Twin Towers' [Time 2016] <<https://time.com/4453467/911-september-11-falling-man-photo/>> accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> Sept 2022.

an explicit effort made to use the tragedy of 9/11 as a moral abdication for collateral civilian deaths in Afghanistan and Iraq (*the terrorists started it*).<sup>415</sup> The elite-constructed narrative prevented any or little *alternative* mainstream comprehension of the 9/11 attacks, particularly those which implicated or incriminated America's foreign policy.<sup>416</sup> Despite this near-one-way narrative in the formative years of WoT, as news media has since fragmented and differing viewpoints the have grown in number and diversity, folk devils have a greater capacity to air their options<sup>417</sup> because social media provides a platform to engage in discourse and create media content to counter claims made against them, meaning that folk devils are no longer powerless victims.<sup>418</sup> As a result of dominating political and media-supported discourse following 9/11, state justifications for the invasion of Afghanistan were a mere formality, with the invasion itself garnering international support for US military intervention. For example, on 12<sup>th</sup> Sept 2001, the French newspaper Le Monde ran with a headline, "*Nous sommes tous américains — We Are All Americans*."<sup>419</sup>

Figure 2.3: An American flag planted at the base of the World Trade Centre (*Image removed for repository publication – view via citation*).

### **Chapter Conclusion**

This chapter considered the influence of social media on moral panic, arguing that the behaviour of actors in a moral panic is affected by social media, which has also altered the balance of power in information dissemination. Social media has changed the way people communicate and interact, which has resulted in a shift in the focus of moral panic. Researchers must now consider the impact of social transformations and modify their frameworks accordingly. While social media has provided online

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<sup>415</sup> Jackson (n352)

<sup>416</sup> Ibid 31.

<sup>417</sup> Krinsky (n5) 8

<sup>418</sup> Walsh (n3) 1-20

<sup>419</sup> Nash Jenkins, 'How Paris Stood With the US After 9/11' [Time 2015]

<<https://time.com/4112746/paris-attacks-us-september-911-terrorism/>> accessed 8<sup>th</sup> Feb 2022.

platforms for communication and information sharing, it has also created new challenges in terms of the spread of false information. Despite the framework for analysing moral panic being developed in the 1960s by Cohen, it is necessary to address these changes to fully understand the impact of social media on moral panic.

The chapter delved into the influence that social media has had on the manner in which political leaders and the media construct moral panics, and its effects on public discourse and policy. It is unsurprising, given the depictions of terror attacks during the early 2000s and the subsequent reactions from those in positions of authority, that efforts were made to assert hegemonic control and maintain order in response to these events. While it is understandable that leaders may endeavour to reassure the public in the face of such threats, it is crucial to avoid exacerbating fear and hostility in the process. The portrayal of terrorism as a new phenomenon, exclusive to Islamist extremism, is misleading and distorts the true nature of the threat. Similarly, characterising terrorism as a constant and existential threat is also misleading and contributes to the perpetuation of moral panic surrounding Muslim communities and the Islamic faith. Despite the efforts of established terror groups to link the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks and subsequent attacks on Western states to their own cause, the focus on religious, cultural, and physical differences has resulted in the marginalisation and stigmatisation of Western Muslim communities and the Islamic faith. The presence of Muslims in Western societies and the increased media and political attention directed towards them have contributed to the perception of an omnipresent terror threat emanating from this source. This has sensitised the public and garnered support for invasive counterterrorism measures and military interventions in foreign countries. As will be explored in forthcoming chapters, such frames and sensitivities have lived long into the 2010s.

# Chapter. 3

## Methodology

### **Introduction**

This chapter offers an extensive examination of the methodologies utilised in this PhD study, including the techniques for data collection and the analytical approaches used in investigating the moral panic surrounding Islamist extremism during the 2010s. The data collection process involved both qualitative and quantitative data, sourced from Google search engine, Lexis Library, and Facebook. The majority of the data collected was in the form of news headlines and Facebook comments, which provided a solid foundation for analysing moral panic dynamics. As previously discussed in earlier chapters, moral panic is characterised by heightened societal fear and disproportionate reactions to perceived threats or deviant behaviour. The rise of Islamist extremism during the 2000s and into the 2010s sparked sporadic episodes of widespread concern globally, resulting in a recurrent manifestation of moral panic. To gain insights into this phenomenon, the study conducted both qualitative and quantitative analyses on the data retrieved from news publications and Facebook comment data. Google and Lexis Library offered access to a vast array of news articles, enabling the examination of media representations and political discourse, while a thorough analysis of Facebook comments was conducted to discern public attitudes and patterns of engagement. This study utilises a mixed-methods approach with the aim of contributing to the current understanding of the moral panic dynamics surrounding Islamist extremism. The following chapter provides a detailed account of the data collection procedures, analytical methods, ethical principles, and methodological constraints that underpinned this research project.

### **Aims & Objectives**

Conducting doctoral research assessing moral panic of Islamist terrorism poses several far-reaching questions, such as:

- What is the source of the terrorism panic?
- What are the *concerns* about terrorism?
- What social values or interests are perceived as harmed by terrorism?

- How can *consensus* of concerns be measured and illustrated?
- What is the role of *panic actors* in the construction and perpetuation of terrorist panic?
- What social changes occur when terrorist threats are perceived?
- Would extreme and invasive remedies be implemented to counter this threat?
- Would these actions be performed on a temporary or permanent basis?
- Would there be support for the self-infliction of these remedies, or would public support only be in favour of the human rights violations of *Others*?
- How can *hostility* and *volatility* be measured and illustrated?
- How can *disproportionality* be measured and illustrated?

The objective of this research was to investigate the Islamist terrorism panic phenomenon by employing online communications technology for data gathering and analysis. This was accomplished by applying an existing moral panic framework to the issue of Islamist terrorism and analysing the roles of panic actors in the present day. Additionally, this study emphasised the impact of civic exposure to misinformation and how it contributes to the development of moral panic.

Specifically, the following questions were addressed in this thesis:

1. What are the gaps in the moral panic literature?
2. How have communicative technological advancements (Internet and social media) influenced moral panic framework and social actor behaviours?
3. What discourse frames and interpretations of Islamist extremist threats have emerged? How have they been cultivated and utilised?
4. How do Impact events evolve online?
5. How does online disinformation affect moral panic framework?

The first two chapters of this thesis aim to address questions 1 and 2, respectively, by examining moral panic literature gaps and then analysing the post-9/11 moral panic of terrorism incited by social media via the internet. Later chapters continue to explore these themes, delving into the development of panic during the 2010s, social trends, and social actor behaviour through online data analysis. The bulk of this PhD focuses on terrorism panic from the perspective of Goode & Ben-Yehuda's proposed

*elite-engineered* moral panic of Islamist extremism. Later chapters critically examine the legitimacy of Becker's mainstream Hierarchy of Credibility, and apply Goode & Ben-Yehuda's Grassroots and Interest-groups rationales for panic emergence.

The objectives of this investigation are guided by the aforementioned questions.

1. To critically evaluate and analyse the shortcomings in the literature and frameworks pertaining to moral panic.
2. To critically assess the function of contemporary communication technology (social media) within the moral panic framework and the part played by social actors.
3. To analyse the interpretations of Islamist extremism during the early to mid-2010s through the lens of the moral panic framework.
4. To examine the interpretations of Islamist extremism during the 2017 Islamist terrorist attacks through the lens of moral panic framework.
5. To critically evaluate the importance of phenomena such as fake news, conspiracy theories, and mis/disinformation.

To address these aims adequately, research objectives were outlined as follows:

- 1.1 To conduct a systematic review of the existing moral panic literature to identify gaps in current knowledge and frameworks.
- 1.2 To critically analyse and compare different moral panic frameworks to identify their strengths and weaknesses.
  
- 2.1 To consider the impact of modern communication technologies, such as social media and online platforms, on the formation and spread of moral panic.
- 2.2 To evaluate the role of different social actors, including the media, government, and the public, in shaping and responding to moral panic in online environments.
  
- 3.1 To apply the moral panic framework to analyse the interpretations of Islamist extremism during the early-to the mid-2010s, focusing on media and political representations, and public discourse.

- 3.2 To identify key themes, narratives, and discourses surrounding Islamist extremism during the specified period, within the context of moral panic theory.
- 4.1 To apply the moral panic framework to analyse the interpretations of Islamist extremism during the 2017 Islamist terrorist attacks, with a specific focus on media and political representations and public discourse.
- 4.2 To examine moral panic dynamics in the context of the 2017 Islamist terrorist attacks.
- 5.1 To assess the importance of disinformation in the context of moral panic by considering its role in shaping public perceptions, media coverage, and policy responses.
- 5.2 To critically evaluate the impact of disinformation on the dynamics of moral panic, including its potential to exacerbate fear, amplify social divisions, and influence public opinion and decision-making processes.

As chapters 1 and 2 are literature review chapters, and prior to this current, the remainder of this chapter predominantly relates to Chapters 4-6.

### **Research Philosophy & Design**

The research philosophy for this study adopts an interpretivist–constructivist position. For researchers such as Bryman (2015),<sup>420</sup> David & Sutton (2011),<sup>421</sup> and Neuman (2014),<sup>422</sup> it is recognised that the social sciences necessitate diverse and varying research methods. *Interpretivism* diverges from the application of scientific models to the social realm, instead drawing distinctions between individuals and the objects of natural science. It accentuates the subjective meanings inherent in social interactions and aims to cultivate a profound, empathetic comprehension of human relationships. To address the research objectives, a non-experimental, interpretative case study design was adopted, incorporating multiple qualitative and quantitative analytical techniques to credibly triangulate deductive outcomes, generating intuitive

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<sup>420</sup> Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods* [5th ed, Oxford University Press 2015]

<sup>421</sup> Matthew David, & Carole Sutton, *Social Research Methods: An Introduction* [2<sup>nd</sup> ed, Sage 2011]

<sup>422</sup> W. Lawrence Neuman, *Social Research Methods: Qualitative & Quantitative Approaches* [7<sup>th</sup> ed, Pearson Education 2014]



knowledge about contexts and moral-value positions within Islamist terrorism panic. Given the paramount importance of interpretivism in emphasising the significance of interpreting and understanding human behaviour and social phenomena, it is imperative to employ this epistemological approach when implementing the moral panic dynamics framework. Interpretivists assert that social reality is constructed through human interactions and it is crucial to apprehend the meanings that individuals attribute to their experiences to fully comprehend the social world.<sup>423</sup> From a standpoint informed by social construction, the nature of reality is contingent upon the collective agreements and interpretations of social and personal experiences, rendering obsolete the notion of objective, unvarying truths. Instead, emphasis is placed on the subjective aspects of comprehension and the instrumental role of context in shaping individual perspectives and interpretations of their environment.<sup>424</sup> This epistemological position is commonly applied in qualitative research methodologies which prioritise the exploration of individual experiences and perceptions to gain a deep understanding of social phenomena.<sup>425</sup> Undertaking a case study approach to investigate Islamist terrorism provided an in-depth analysis of the broader narrative, encompassing the delineation, examination, and elucidation of critical concepts and occurrences, with respect to theoretical validity and practical relevance. Moreover, this methodology recognised the multifaceted character of terrorism concerns and traced its development while incorporating a range of viewpoints and perspectives, culminating in a comprehensive and holistic explanation of the phenomenon.<sup>426</sup> This research project was designed as an explanatory endeavour, with the aim of elucidating the political and social discourse that emerged in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks and persisted throughout the War on Terror (WoT) in the 2000s, as well as the subsequent ascendancy of ISIL in the early to later 2010s.

The present case study adopted a time series-longitudinal approach, investigating primary and secondary information spanning an extended period pertaining to

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<sup>423</sup> Lihui Wang, 'A Study of Symbolic Interactionism and Communication from the Perspective of American Social Psychology' (European Review 2023) 31 213

<sup>424</sup> Uwe Flick, *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research Design, vol 2* (SAGE Publications 2022) 143

<sup>425</sup> Ibid 143.

<sup>426</sup> Neuman (n422) 166-167

various events related to Islamist terrorism. Although the contextual secondary literature research for this inquiry commenced with the 9/11 attacks in the preceding chapter, the original data collected from Lexis Library, Google, and Facebook covers a temporal scope extending from primarily 2014 to 2019, encompassing the peak of ISIL's terror campaign.

The researcher utilised qualitative research techniques that centred on individuals' perceptions of events, motivations, and reasoning, while descriptive quantitative data was employed to uncover patterns in media reporting and to provide a rationale for identifying panic phases within a classic framework (e.g., a period of volatility). The researcher's epistemological position guided the design of the study towards understanding the subjective meanings and interpretations of Islamist terrorism in public discourse through the analysis of Facebook comments and elite framing through media reporting.

The interpretivism-constructivism approach allowed the researcher to explore the experiences and perspectives of relevant panic actors in depth. In this research, enhancing social interpretation of Islamist terrorism involved analysing qualitative (soft data; headlines, captions, photos, comments), although descriptive quantitative aspects were also collected from Lexis Library and Facebook in a mixed methodological approach.<sup>427</sup> Mixed-methods research is often employed to gain a comprehensive understanding of a particular topic, utilising both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a well-rounded and detailed analysis. This triangulation of methods allows for the validation of findings and the opportunity to explore various perspectives.<sup>428</sup> Triangulation, which involves approaching a topic from multiple perspectives, is often discussed in relation to the analysis of mixed method data as it seeks to achieve "convergence, corroboration, and correspondence" of findings from different data collection methods.<sup>429</sup> Qualitative data analysis can be a 'mystery',<sup>430</sup> however, the wide variety of methods in qualitative research "*is matched by the many approaches to data analysis*".<sup>431</sup> The

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<sup>427</sup> Ibid 166-168.

<sup>428</sup> David & Sutton (n421)

<sup>429</sup> Ibid 296.

<sup>430</sup> David Silverman, *Interpreting Qualitative Data* (4th ed) [Sage 2013]

<sup>431</sup> Neuman (n422) 479

primary objective of qualitative data analysis is to classify the data into "conceptual categories" and identify themes, as Silverman (2013) recommends that we "*thoroughly and fairly analyse our data without seeking outstanding examples*".<sup>432</sup> Bryman (2007) reasons that by bringing quantitative and qualitative findings together, this increased the possibility of providing insights that would not otherwise be seen.<sup>433</sup> Undertaking a mixed methods approach enabled the research to augment the validity of its findings, while simultaneously mitigating the potential influence of method-specific biases. By incorporating multiple research strategies, this thesis was able to circumvent the limitations inherent in relying solely on a single approach, thereby strengthening the overall rigor of the study.<sup>434</sup> The researcher aimed to investigate the intricate nature of human sensemaking regarding Islamist terrorism within the context of moral panic.

### **Tools used for Data Collection & Analysis**

The following instruments were primarily used throughout data collection and analysis:

- **Microsoft Office:** Word, Excel & OneNote files which are encryption and password protected.<sup>435</sup>
- **Lexis Nexis:** Lexis library retrieved data related to British-based, traditional print news outlets.
- **Google (advanced search engine features):** Google's features and tools were utilized through its advanced search options to retrieve data related to news content published by BBC and Sky News (neither retrievable via Lexis library).
- **NVivo 12:** NVivo software was the primary tool for qualitative analysis, grouping data through codes, and identifying themes.
- **Facebook:** Data such as news article headlines, captions, likes, shares, and (comments from the selected articles) were recorded.

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<sup>432</sup> Silverman (n430)

<sup>433</sup> Bryman (n420) 9

<sup>434</sup> Fiona Devine, & Sue Heath, *Sociological Research Methods in Context*. [Palgrave 1999]

<sup>435</sup> 'University Research Ethics Committee' [ljmu 2023] < <https://www.ljmu.ac.uk/ris/research-ethics-and-governance/research-ethics/university-research-ethics-committee-urec> > accessed 1<sup>st</sup> August 2023.

### **Stage. 1 Procedure: Data Collection from Lexis Library & Google**

Throughout the entirety of the research process, the collected data was generated organically and was not subjected to any discernible external influence, as identified by the researcher.<sup>436</sup> The initial stage of this study involved an extensive examination of British news reporting on terrorism from 2014 to 2019. This entailed monitoring various websites and social media posts of UK-based news providers to gain an understanding of how terrorism was covered in the media. Through this process, recurring keywords and terminologies were identified and documented. A preliminary list of 19 key terms commonly used in mainstream British news reporting on terrorism was compiled as a result of this inquiry (*see Appendix 3 for the complete list*). The application of the search terms outlined in *Appendix 3* proved to be a successful means of orienting the news publication data gathered from Lexis Library and Google in Stage 2. It was deemed an appropriate starting point to commence data collection by scrutinising frequently used keywords. Consequently, news publication data was obtained from Google and Lexis Nexis for the following British news agencies: BBC News, Sky News, The Guardian, The Telegraph, Daily Mail, The Sun, and Daily Mirror (*refer to Appendix 3*). The researcher holds that a more focused approach, rather than an examination of all UK mainstream news providers (e.g. national and regional), would be more advantageous for the analysis. To this end, the researcher concentrated on specific news outlets instead of expanding the scope. The relevant keywords were searched using both Google and Lexis Nexis, and the results were recorded in an Excel workbook (*refer to the data sample in Appendix 4*). Lexis Library provides information solely for print media, thus, data for BBC and Sky News was obtained from Google search engines using advanced search settings. The data for all other news outlets was obtained from Lexis Library. *Table 3.1* illustrates the procedures followed for searching through both Google and Lexis Library, respectively. It is important to note that Lexis Library has since been updated to Lexis+, and its features have been modified since the initial collection for this thesis. These modifications were documented in 2022, in preparation for the original submission of this PhD. Detailed in *Table 3.1*, the processes depicted therein are associated with the 2018 editions of Lexis Library and Google, respectively.

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<sup>436</sup> Jane Lewis, & Carole McNaughton Nicholls, 'Design Issues' in Jane Ritchie, Jane Lewis, Carole McNaughton Nicholls, & Rachel Ormston, (eds) *Qualitative Research Practice* [Sage 2014]

<p>Google Search Procedure for BBC News &amp; Sky News</p>	<p><u>For selecting the <i>source (provider)</i>...</u>          At the Google homepage, select <i>Settings</i>; <i>Advanced Search</i>; insert key term to <i>All these Words</i>; insert the homepage IP of either the BBC or Sky News to <i>Site or Domain</i>; select <i>Advanced Search</i>  <u>For selecting the <i>time range of results per term</i>...</u>          select <i>Tools</i>; select <i>Anytime</i>; select <i>Custom Range</i>; select desired <i>Time Range</i>; select <i>Go</i></p>
<p>Lexis Library (now Lexis+) Procedure for The Guardian; The Telegraph; Daily Mail; The Sun; &amp; Daily Mirror</p>	<p>Select <i>Content</i>; select <i>Newspapers</i>; select <i>Advanced Search</i>; insert search term to search field; select <i>Date</i>; <i>Date is Between</i> and insert desired date range; select <i>Search</i>          Once the search has been ran...          Select <i>Sources</i> (The Guardian; The Telegraph; Daily Mail; The Sun; &amp; Daily Mirror); finally, select <i>Remove Duplicate results</i>.</p>

Table 3.1: Procedure for searching key terms via Google & Lexis Library

The time parameters for collecting data from Lexis Library and Google for this case study were established between the years 2014-2019, which marked the peak of ISIL's operational influence and the concurrent rise in attacks on Western nations by Islamist extremists. This time frame provides a range of 2-3 years either side of the 2017 UK attacks, allowing for extensive coverage of the unfolding mass panic of Islamist terrorism. The primary objective of the initial 66-month search on Lexis Library and Google was to acquire a well-defined starting point for the subsequent data collection from Facebook. Given the vast nature of these archives for media data, the purpose was to determine which of the 19 key terms and from which news providers were predominant and merited further refinement during Stages 2-3 of the data collection and analysis process.

**Stage.1 Analysis: Lexis Library & Google data**

In the initial stage of analysis, a descriptive, quantitative approach was adopted to identify trends and pinpoint key terms for further investigation in subsequent research phases. The main objective of this phase was to determine the most frequently used terms in media discourse and use this evidence-based rationale to refine the research parameters for subsequent stages. Consequently, several of the initial 19 search terms were not pursued further. However, it is important to

recognise that excluded data may provide valuable research avenues beyond the scope of this PhD.

	<b>Key Terms</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percentage of overall total</b>
<b>1</b>	Terror	92,874	12.26%
<b>2</b>	Terrorist	91,883	12.13%
<b>3</b>	Immigration	76,068	10.04%
<b>4</b>	Human Rights	71,635	9.45%
<b>5</b>	Refugee	66,590	8.79%
<b>6</b>	Terrorism	63,980	8.44%
<b>7</b>	Radical	50,033	6.60%
<b>8</b>	Islamic State	45,958	6.07%
<b>9</b>	Extremist	36,429	4.81%
<b>10</b>	ISIS	29,774	3.93%
<b>11</b>	Right-Wing	29,328	3.87%
<b>12</b>	Extremism	22,732	3.00%
<b>13</b>	Islamist	20,470	2.70%
<b>14</b>	IRA	17,680	2.33%
<b>15</b>	Counterterrorism	15,752	2.08%
<b>16</b>	al-Qaeda	10,229	1.35%
<b>17</b>	Radicalisation	7,219	0.95%
<b>18</b>	ISIL	6,496	0.86%
<b>19</b>	Counter-Terror	2,574	0.34%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>757,704</b>	

*Table 3.2: Key terms total usage 2014 -June 2019*

*Table 3.2* displays the 19 most frequently used key terms by selected UK news outlets from January 2014 to June 2019 in descending order of usage, amounting to a total of n=757,704 instances. The data reveals the prominent utilisation of the key term "Terror," which was reported in n=92,874 instances (12.26%) by news outlets. Conversely, the term "Counter-Terror" was recorded only n=2,574 instances (0.34%) of the total returns. In order to refine and narrow the scope of the research, a 'Top Six' was identified, and *Appendix 5* provides a year-by-year breakdown of the frequency of these terms. The Top Six (see *Table 3.3*) (Terror, Terrorist, Immigration, Human Rights, Refugee, & Terrorism) accounted for 61.11% (n=463,030) of the term usage. On the other hand, the remaining 13 key terms totalled n=294,674 (38.89%) collective mentions in news reporting, a difference of n=168,356.

Future chapters will examine quantitative data, applying moral panic frameworks, and identifying panic phases, with a particular focus on the attributional aspect of volatility. Goode & Ben-Yehuda argued that moral panic involves heightened

antipathy toward a perceived threat, as evidenced by the level of attention directed at the issue. The measurement of this phenomenon is feasible, and the recognition of volatility is essential in considering Cohen's processual framework. In particular, if volatility is regarded as the apex of mass fear, it may be considered the midpoint of a moral panic's processual lifespan. By applying the processual framework, a Warning phase (Cohen) (or Cultivation; Klocke & Muschert) precedes any period of volatility. Correspondingly, the exhibition of volatile fear would be followed by identifiable periods of Inventory and then Remedy (Cohen) (or periods of Regulation and then Dissipation; Klocke & Muschert). The utilisation of volatility as a means of identifying midway points within a panic crisis serves as a valuable mapping tool, offering a chance to contemplate the circumstances that led to and followed the period of instability. *Table 3.3* serves as a crucial starting point for this research as it provides data on the popularity of key terms. Although the terms "Terror," "Terrorist," and "Terrorism" were searched for separately, they were grouped together as they were likely to return articles reporting on very similar topics. The terms "Immigration," "Refugee," and "Human Rights" were found to have the potential to encompass diverse content and elicit varying Facebook comments.

<b>Key Terms</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>Total</b>
Terror/Terrorism/Terrorist	31,470	45,200	47,201	48,365	48,295	28,206	<b>248,737</b>
Immigration	9,926	11,426	18,087	11,623	17,087	15,608	<b>83,757</b>
Refugee	6,365	13,325	16,556	10,481	12,945	13,193	<b>72,865</b>
Human Rights	9,599	12,266	13,778	10,153	16,570	9,269	<b>71,635</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>57,360</b>	<b>82,217</b>	<b>95,622</b>	<b>80,622</b>	<b>94,897</b>	<b>66,276</b>	<b>476,994</b>

*Table 3.3: Yearly Lexis Library & Google search returns for 'Top Six' key terms; 2014 -June 2019*

The data depicted in *Table 3.4* demonstrates the frequency with which various news outlets employed key terms during a period spanning January 2014 to June 2019. BBC News emerged as the news outlet that utilised these terms most frequently, with a total output of 193,768. The Guardian followed closely behind with a total output of 175,629, while The Times ranked third with 130,144 total outputs. This collection of news sources encompasses a range of mediums, including newspapers and television, as well as diverse ideological inclinations, including left, right, and centre. While BBC News is a renowned international television news broadcaster, The Times and The Guardian are established, high-quality broadsheet newspapers. Other news outlets included in the analysis comprise television, tabloids, and

broadsheet outlets. Throughout the study period, BBC News, The Times, and The Guardian consistently ranked among the top three news providers in terms of key-term usage. However, their respective outputs varied. Between 2014 and 2016, The Guardian led in key-term usage, followed by BBC News and The Times. Conversely, from 2017 to 2019, BBC News had the highest output, followed by The Times and The Guardian. Regarding other news outlets, The Telegraph and The Sun maintained a consistent presence in the fourth and fifth positions, respectively. Meanwhile, Daily Mail, The Express, and Sky News fluctuated between the sixth and ninth positions.

<b>News Provider</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>Total</b>
The Times	16,027	21,337	26,133	24,646	28,484	13,487	<b>130,114</b>
The Guardian	23,618	48,793	53,423	18,267	20,125	11,403	<b>175,629</b>
The Daily Telegraph	11,764	14,655	13,349	12,331	9,941	4,990	<b>67,030</b>
The Daily Mail & the Mail on Sunday	6,370	8,224	8,804	7,615	5,190	2,404	<b>38,607</b>
The Express	3,214	4,088	4,214	3,587	3,965	1,712	<b>20,780</b>
The Daily Mirror	8,385	9,645	8,032	8,397	7,767	4,650	<b>46,876</b>
The Sun	10,196	12,855	11,293	11,753	9,757	4,625	<b>60,479</b>
BBC News	20,897	24,746	27,081	36,059	51,391	33,594	<b>193,768</b>
Sky News	1,044	1,369	2,446	6,050	8,172	5,340	<b>24,421</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>101,515</b>	<b>145,712</b>	<b>154,775</b>	<b>128,705</b>	<b>144,792</b>	<b>82,205</b>	<b>757,704</b>

Table 3.4: Media outlet totals per year (all Key Terms combined)

### **Stage. 2 Procedure: Data Collection of Facebook News articles**

As outlined in Chapter 2, social media has emerged as a primary conduit of global communication, significantly impacting the way in which we acquire, discuss, and formulate knowledge and opinions.<sup>437</sup> Such technologies did not exist when Cohen and other classic panic theorists introduced their respective concepts, and contemporary panic theorists should not overlook framework transformations induced by social media. Facebook was selected as the data collection source for a variety of reasons. The rapid proliferation of social media platforms has created new opportunities for researchers to access vast amounts of data. In the case of Facebook, the platform provides a wealth of user-generated content, including news article headlines and comments, which can be utilised to study societal trends,

<sup>437</sup> Petter Tornberg, *Echo Chambers and Viral Misinformation: Modelling fake news as complex contagion* [2018] PLoS ONE 13 (9) 1



sentiment analysis, and public opinion. In 2016-2017, the number of active Facebook accounts in the United Kingdom stood at 36-38 million. In 2018, the platform commanded a 65% share of the UK social media market, and by 2019, this figure had risen to over 40 million. It was anticipated that the number of active Facebook accounts in the UK would reach 42 million by 2022.<sup>438</sup> Comparatively, in the same year, Twitter accounted for only a 13% share of the UK social media market.<sup>439</sup> When assessing which mainstream UK news providers should be selected for focused examination (such contemplations made during 2018), Facebook's active following was deliberated as a measurement of audience reach and, as such, public engagement and influence. *Table 3.5* demonstrates that the selected news outlets collectively possess approximately 95,551,812 Facebook Likes. While these figures indicate the extent of each provider's reach and potential influence, they have certain limitations. For instance, they do not reveal Facebook users who follow multiple news outlets or their geographical location (whether in the UK or elsewhere). Nonetheless, approximately 95.5 million remains a figure that signifies widespread online reach, a crucial factor for fostering panic. *Table 3.5* also indicates that BBC News is the most popular UK news outlet on Facebook, with roughly 49.5 million followers. The Daily Mail comes in second with 16.3 million Facebook likes, followed closely by The Guardian and Sky News, each with approximately 8.2 million and 8.3 million followers, respectively. This means that The Daily Mail has almost half the followers of BBC News and approximately six times fewer followers than BBC News. The remaining news outlets, including Daily Telegraph, The Sun, The Mirror, The Express, and The Times, collectively have around 13 million Facebook likes.

This diversity of news sources, ranging from traditional TV broadcasters to tabloids and broadsheet providers, also underscores the variable quality of news sources that people receive. On social media platforms, these providers have a global audience well beyond their traditional forms (e.g. newspapers printed only in the UK). This assortment of news outlets showcases a diverse spectrum of reporting viewpoints,

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<sup>438</sup> Stacy Jo Dixon, 'Forecast of Facebook user numbers in the United Kingdom (UK) from 2015 to 2022 (in million users)' [The Statistics Portal 2019] <<https://www.statista.com/statistics/553538/predicted-number-of-facebook-users-in-the-united-kingdom-uk/>> accessed 20<sup>th</sup> February 2019.

<sup>439</sup> Stacy Jo Dixon, 'Market share held by the leading social networks in the United Kingdom (UK) as of November 2018' [The Statistics Portal 2019] <<https://www.statista.com/statistics/280295/market-share-held-by-the-leading-social-networks-in-the-united-kingdom-uk/>> accessed 20<sup>th</sup> February 2019.

encompassing various political orientations. It is widely acknowledged that various news sources hold differing political biases. For instance, the BBC and Sky News are known for their impartiality, while The Guardian and The Mirror exhibit a left-leaning inclination. Conversely, the Daily Mail, Daily Express, Daily Telegraph, The Sun, and The Times are perceived as having a more right-leaning bias. BBC News and The Guardian, with a combined total of 60.5% of the 95.5 million combined Facebook likes of all news outlets analysed in this thesis, hold a commanding presence on the platform. These two outlets also significantly contributed to the retrieved key term data. BBC News is considered a "neutral" news provider in terms of political leaning, while The Guardian is the highest-rated left-leaning paper and the highest-rated broadsheet. The Times, with only 820,925 (0.86%) Facebook likes, falls short in terms of social media following, however contributed significantly to key-term usage. This study aims to examine the public's attitudes during the moral panic surrounding terrorism, and the utilisation of Facebook likes serves as a means of accessing a broader online audience and encouraging more comments on posted content.

<b>News Provider</b>	<b>Facebook page likes</b>	<b>Percentage of total</b>
BBC News	49,568,516	51.88%
The Daily Mail and the Mail on Sunday	16,348,424	17.11%
Sky News	8,343,861	8.73%
The Guardian (London)	8,246,316	8.63%
The Daily Telegraph	4,446,140	4.65%
The Sun (England)	3,297,721	3.45%
The Mirror (The Daily Mirror and The Sunday Mirror)	3,140,326	3.29%
Daily Express	1,339,583	1.40%
The Times (London)	820,925	0.86%
<b>Total</b>	<b>95,551,812</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Table 3.5: Facebook page Likes per news provider (2018)*

The findings of Stage 1's data collection and analysis enabled the research to narrow the project's focus by pinpointing Terrorism (in its collective form), Immigration, Refugee, and Human Rights as key areas warranting further investigation, through the implementation of Facebook's search engine capabilities. The purpose of this stage was to investigate the frequency of the above noted terms by selected UK news outlets and the way these terms had been used and presented to Facebook audiences. The methodology employed in this stage to gather data from

Facebook was consistent with the approach utilised in Stage 1. The objective was to determine the frequency of each key term used by each news provider on an annual basis (2014-2019) to assess their prevalence on the platform. Undertaking extensive research on the Facebook platform, the investigation involved inputting each essential term into the search field, selecting the 'search' option, and applying optional refinements to the results. These refinements included specifying 'Posts' to showcase content exclusively posted by news outlets containing each respective term, as well as employing the 'Date Posted' search option to narrow down the desired date range. Additionally, the 'Posts From' search option field was set to the news source, and this process was repeated until data was obtained for all terms and providers. Each term-news provider search yielded numerous news articles, and the date published, news provider, article title and caption, number of likes, shares, and comments, and number of video views for articles that featured viewable footage were meticulously recorded. This data was then meticulously documented in an Excel spreadsheet, resulting in the collection of approximately n=2,477 Facebook headlines.

### **Stage. 2 Analysis: Facebook News Reporting Data**

This interpretive phase of Stage. 2 aimed to understand and interpret quantitative and qualitative news data collected from Facebook, observing not only media reporting trends and topic presentation, but also observing discourse from other relevant social actors (politicians, for example) who were contributing to the sense-making of Islamist extremism. In addition to examining the volume and frequency of media reporting on terrorism, this study also sought to consider the relationship between news coverage, political discourse, communal anxiety, and how these elements have evolved in the decades since Cohen's seminal work on Folk Devils and Moral Panic. It is challenging to evaluate the nature of this relationship due to the multitude of interconnected and dynamic social factors that must be taken into account by the researcher.<sup>440</sup> Consequentially, the '*how and why*' of moral panic is regularly not fully considered.<sup>441</sup> However, technological innovations of recent years have motivated researchers across disciplines to reconsider the dynamics social

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<sup>440</sup> Sian Nicholas & Tom O'Malley, *Moral Panics, Social Fears and the Media* [Routledge 2013] 1

<sup>441</sup> Scott A Bonn, "Why Do Many in Society Drink the Kool-Aid Served in a Moral Panic?" in *Mass Deception: Moral Panic and the US War on Iraq* [Rutgers University Press 2010] 22

actor influence on society,<sup>442</sup> along with processes and mechanisms influencing perceptions, opinions, and attitudes.<sup>443</sup> The significance of the news is immediately highlighted in Cohen's panic definition, stating that for moral panic, '*... its nature is presented in a stylised and stereotypical fashion by the mass media ...*' Cohen attributed the power of media framing to social reactions which were disproportionate to the reality of the threat. News terminology draws illustration of associated academic concepts regularly contemplated by researchers when exploring moral panic, such as labelling theory, interactionism, media framing, priming, distorted framing, stereotyping and labelling of folk devils, and sensitisation to danger.<sup>444</sup> In short, much can be gained by forensically scrutinising media reporting, as mainstream media '*is the single most influential actor in the orchestration and promulgation of a moral panic*', with this actor presenting deviancy in distorted and exaggerated ways through particular journalistic and linguistic strategies.<sup>445</sup>

Furthermore, many social actors (e.g. politicians) frequently exert their influence via news dissemination. By examining the news, we not only gain insight into news reporting practices, but also the conduct of other dominant social actors. Cohen alludes to the impression of other social actors when stating that '*...the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnosis and solutions...*'.<sup>446</sup> Cohen's (1972) seminal analysis of prominent social actors in collective sense-making through news outlets continues to hold significance in contemporary times. The media often relies on statements from social actors to construct a narrative or to reinforce framed narratives. The advent of comments sections in social media has enabled the public to share their perspectives and engage in public discourse. This thesis adopts a methodological approach that acknowledges the increased influence of the public in shaping public discourse.

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<sup>442</sup> Melvin L. DeFleur, 'Where have all the Milestones Gone? The Decline of Significant Research on the Process and Effects of Mass Communication' [1998] *Mass Communication and Society* 1 (1-2) 85

<sup>443</sup> Bonn (n441) 22

<sup>444</sup> Cohen (n1) 1

<sup>445</sup> Rothe & Muzzatti (n13) 327-350

<sup>446</sup> Cohen (n1) 1

Having first recorded collected Facebook data to Excel, qualitative news headlines were transferred and analysed using NVivo 12 software, with quantitative elements of data treated on Excel. For data to be analysed on NVivo, recorded news headlines and Facebook post captions were transferred from Excel to Microsoft Word documents before their uploading to NVivo software (see *Appendix. 6*). Guidance for the practical use of NVivo software followed *the Five-Level QDA Methods* outlined by Woolfe & Silver (2018).<sup>447</sup> *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* by Saldana (2016)<sup>448</sup> and *Analysing Qualitative Data* by Gibbs (2013)<sup>449</sup> also provided particularly useful guides for qualitative data management and analysis. *Thematic Analysis* served as the overarching analytical framework for data interpretation. Braun & Clarke (2006) define thematic analysis as an iterative process of searching across data sets, be they a collection of interviews or focus groups, or a range of texts, to uncover recurring patterns of meaning.<sup>450</sup> Thematic analysis provides a systematic, yet flexible approach to qualitative data analysis, with Braun & Clarke (2006) recommending that epistemology be applied for guiding what is derived from the data and how this can influence how meanings are conceptualised and theorised. Epistemology also impacts on the role of theory and existing literature, with Braun & Clarke (2006) stating that:

*“Analysis involves a constant moving back and forward between the entire data set, the coded extracts of data that you are analysing, and the analysis of the data that you are producing. Writing is an integral part of analysis, not something that takes place at the end.”*<sup>451</sup>

In approaching thematic analysis practically, Braun & Clarke (2006) recommend a process of:

1. The researcher familiarizing themselves with their data,
2. Generating initial codes,
3. Searching for themes,

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<sup>447</sup> Nicholas H. Woolf & Christina Silver, *Qualitative Analysis using NVIVO: The Five-Level QDA Method* [Routledge Publishing 2018]

<sup>448</sup> Johnny Saldana, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* [Sage Publishing 2016]

<sup>449</sup> Graham Gibbs, *Analysing Qualitative Data* [Sage Publishing 2013]

<sup>450</sup> Virginia Braun, & Victoria Clarke, 'Using thematic analysis in psychology' [20016] *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3 (2) 77

<sup>451</sup> *Ibid* 77-101.

4. Reviewing those themes,
5. Defining and naming themes, and lastly
6. Producing a report or presenting findings.<sup>452</sup>

Further input for operationalising thematic analysis was sourced from Neuman (2014), who presents a three-stage coding method comprising Open, Axial, and Selective coding. Given the propensity of Facebook comments to be lengthy, a three-stage coding process was deemed appropriate for this research. In Morrison's (2019) publication, a research approach similar to this project was employed to examine a 2013 moral panic surrounding Scroungers (the unemployed). The research utilised news articles and Twitter data (Tweets), rather than Facebook comments, and involved the collection of 3,534 media articles from Lexis Library using predetermined search terms. The research coding employed a two-stage approach, as outlined by the author.<sup>453</sup> Morrison found that tweets provided a more concise form of expression compared to Facebook, which allowed for quicker analysis. While Facebook posts can be quite lengthy, with a maximum character limit of 63,206, they still offer a valuable platform for communication,<sup>454</sup> sometimes necessitating a third coding layer. When implementing the three-pronged approach of Open, Axial, and Selective coding, the influence on coding and theme formation was derived from the classical moral panic framework and relevant literature.

Inspirations from the hybrid framework developed by Klocke & Muschert (2010) provided a measure of interpretation for the data, as previously described. It should be noted that Klocke & Muschert's framework combines the strengths of Cohen's (processual) and Goode & Ben-Yehuda's (attributional) panic models. When applying panic framework as a tool for data analysis, it was determined that an appropriate starting point would be to focus on Impact periods suspected of containing panic *volatility*. To do this, relevant Impact events directly affecting the United Kingdom were identified, such as the 2017 Islamist terrorist attacks, which elicited volatile social reactions. Als tohis research identifies other processual panic

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<sup>452</sup> Ibid 77-101.

<sup>453</sup> Morrison (n36) 269-270

<sup>454</sup> Rita Chaires, 'Social Media Cheat Sheet: Character Limits & Posting Parameters' [American Academy of Estate Planning Attorneys, 2021] <<https://www.aaepa.com/2021/03/social-media-cheat-sheet-character-limits-posting-parameters/>> accessed 15<sup>th</sup> December 2023.

stages that commence prior to Impact volatility and following it. Each processual stage exhibits attributional panic characteristics. The research defines Impact volatility as the midpoint of a panic (2017 Islamist attacks), with data collected between 2014 and 2016 illustrating themes related to the Cultivation of a panic, including identifiable Concerns and a growing Consensus, which are attributional characteristics of a panic. Other academic features might be noted, such as sensitisation to, symbolisation of, and predictions of harm. *Table 3.6* presents a processual line of contemplation regarding the utilisation of the panic framework, along with the attributional considerations involved. This table showcases a classification of data that has been inspired by Cohen's (processual), Goode & Ben-Yehuda's (attributional), and Klocke & Muschert's (hybrid) frameworks.

<u>Warning/Cultivation</u> (2010-16)	<u>Impact/Episode</u> (2017 attacks)	<u>Inventory/Magnification</u> (immediately after 2017)	<u>Reaction/Regulation/Dissipation</u> (sometime after 2017)
Concern	Volatility	Consensus	Surveillance
Consensus	Hostility	Hostility	Mobilisation
Sensitisation	Intense coverage	Moralisation	Institutionalisation
Symbolisation	Initial analysis	Officiation	Normalisation
Prediction	Officiation	Amplification	Transformation
Normalisations		Mobilisation	Dissolution
Re-circulation			Re-circulation
Moralisation			
<b>Disproportionality see across all stages</b>			

*Table 3.6: An example of a processual moral panic and related characteristics applicable for this project*

### Open Coding of Facebook News Headlines

For Braun & Clarke (2013), a code is “a word or brief phrase that captures the essence of why you think that particular bit of data will be useful”.<sup>455</sup> Open-level coding is the first, initial read-through and immersion in datasets, further described by Mayring (2000) as *inductive category development*,<sup>456</sup> or a form of first cycle coding by Saldana (2016).<sup>457</sup> Open coding allows for a comprehensive exploration of the data and the generation of new insights and concepts. It is an iterative and flexible process that requires the researcher's active and often intimate engagement with the data. By using open coding, researchers can uncover patterns and themes that may not have been initially anticipated, leading to a deeper understanding of the

<sup>455</sup> Braun & Clarke (n450) 207

<sup>456</sup> Phillipp Mayring, 'Qualitative content analysis' [2000] Forum: Qualitative Social Research 1 (2) 3

<sup>457</sup> Saldana (n448) 67

data. Open coding was performed as the first stage of thematic analysis of Facebook news data, where the researcher examined the qualitative data by reading through the data to create familiarity and context of the content before generating initial codes to identify patterns and meanings. Using NVivo, coding began by highlighting data and assigning descriptive labels or codes to items of text (headlines/captions). Such codes highlighted key ideas and concepts, with similar data forming to create themes identifiable in the data. The practice of logging a *codebook* was adopted, which facilitated the recording of rationales and qualifying criteria of emerging themes. This method ensured the maintenance of consistency and transparency throughout the analysis process. Additionally, the use of NVivo allowed for the creation of *memos* as a procedural aid during theme development. These memos served as a means to document thoughts and recordings during the analysis, and were subsequently reviewed and considered at subsequent stages. *Table 3.7* illustrates the first order codes for Facebook news headlines.

<b>Themes</b>	<b>References made</b>
EU/Anti-EU References	108
Human Rights	201
Immigration	689
Predictive Warnings	104
Terrorism	527
Plots Foiled	87
Fake News	6
Other	15
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,737</b>

*Table 3.7: Facebook News Article Themes (2014-16)*

The primary objective of the current phase of analysis was to create initial codes and to organise data into established first-order themes, which represent broad, emergent concepts (see *Table 3.7* for a listing of open-coded themes). As the analysis progressed, it was crucial to refine and define the themes, giving each a clear and descriptive name that accurately reflects its content. Before proceeding to the next phase of coding, it was necessary to review the themes and their relationship to the coded data, making any necessary adjustments, merging, or splitting themes to ensure accurate representation of the data.

### *Axial Coding of Facebook News Headlines*



*Axial, or second-level coding*,<sup>458</sup> applies a deeper organisational level to themes and codes identified during the previous open-level coding process, further considering the context of each theme, and links between themes. Like the previous stage, axial coding is an interpretive process that involves continuous refinement and revision of the codes and themes, allowing the researcher to move beyond the initial coding stage and explore the relationships between the codes in greater depth. Axial coding is particularly useful for identifying the underlying structure and organization of the data and for developing a theoretical framework that explains the phenomenon of interest.<sup>459</sup> Following the refinement of open-coded themes and the completion of a full first examination of Facebook headlines, the themes listed in *Table 3.7* were subjected to a comment-by-comment second examination in order to establish contextual understanding and develop refined developing sub-themes. *Table 3.8* serves as an illustration of such sub-themes for the Terrorism theme.

<b>Sub-Themes</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>
Referencing attacks (to Western states)	2	20	28
Counter-Narratives	10	19	13
CT Approaches	47	21	18
Fake News	2	1	2
Foreign Fighters	15	6	3
Folk Devil	3	24	25
Hostages/Beheadings	6	1	0
Links to Immigration/Refugees	3	8	30
Plots/Foiled Plots	22	7	29
Public Opinion	2	0	0
Rationales for Terrorism	3	6	4
Terrorism in other Countries (Non-Western)	12	8	2
Warnings	27	17	60
Brexit	0	0	7
Far Right	0	0	1
Values	0	0	6

*Table 3.8: Terrorism thematic subthemes: Facebook news articles (2014-16)*

### *Selective Coding of Facebook News Headlines*

In some cases, third-order coding was needed within large Axial second-order themes and lengthy Facebook comments. *Selective coding* also scrutinises previous themes to 'identify and select data that will support conceptual coding categories that were developed'.<sup>460</sup> Selective coding is a widely utilised method in thematic analysis.

<sup>458</sup> Ibid 233-268.

<sup>459</sup> Ibid 233-268.

<sup>460</sup> Neuman (n422) 480-485

This method involves identifying a central theme or key category that serves as the focal point of the analysis, and relating all other themes and categories to this central theme. Strauss & Corbin (1990) provide a comprehensive approach for analysing and interpreting data, which can result in the development of theory. This approach encompasses various aspects of qualitative research, including grounded theory procedures and techniques such as open and other coding practices.<sup>461</sup> Glaser & Strauss (2017) stress the significance of deriving theory from coded data, presenting a strategy for generating theory through comparative analysis and underscoring the adaptable use of data in this process.<sup>462</sup> The objective of this selective coding stage is to explain the comprehensive and coherent narrative, shedding light on the case study, and applying or developing a theoretical framework that explicates the phenomenon of interest. By utilising selective coding, the researcher can construct a streamlined point of focus for the study, connecting many or all assigned codes and identified themes in their analysis. Based on the themes identified during the Open coding phase of Stage 2, two prominent themes emerged: Terrorism and Immigration. These themes were identified by analysing the frequency of articles produced for each theme. Sub-themes that emerged during Axial-level analysis provided more specific discussion points for upcoming chapters and also provided links to other themes.

### **Stage. 3 Procedure: Data Collection of Facebook Comments**

Upon completion of Stage. 2 analysis of news articles, a total of approximately 2,500 Facebook comments were collected from 13 news articles published in 2016. The examination of public sentiment involved the analysis of Facebook comments posted on news articles, and the individuals participating in this research were Facebook users who had posted public comments on the selected articles. To be eligible for participation, individuals were required to comment on an article included in the analysis. Like the news article data, the Facebook comments were recorded and stored in Microsoft Word and Excel documents before being analysed using NVivo 12 software. As detailed in the subsequent section regarding the ethical

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<sup>461</sup> Anselm Strauss & Juliet Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques* (Sage 1990)

<sup>462</sup> Barney Glaser & Anselm Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* [Aldine de Gruyter 2017]

considerations for this study, the comments were edited to remove personal information, such as profile pictures and names, in accordance with ethical requirements. The names and profile pictures were not necessary for the analysis and were not utilized. The names were replaced with either "Male" or "Female," and the comments remained verbatim for analysis purposes only. Any comments used for public dissemination were rearticulated.

### **Stage. 3 Analysis: Facebook Comments Data**

The methodology employed the examination of Facebook comments, and was consistent with the utilized applied to the analysis of news articles. Like previous analytical stages, analyses at Stage. 3 with Facebook comments also employed Open, Axial, and Selective coding to identify prevailing themes in the commentary, while maintaining a formal tone.

#### **Open Coding of Facebook Comments**

Comments posted to selected Facebook articles published during 2016 from 8 different UK-based news providers produced 10 initial distinct themes (*see Table. 3.9*). As clarified, open-level coding is the first, initial read-through and immersion in datasets; *inductive*,<sup>463</sup> first cycle coding<sup>464</sup> allowing for a comprehensive exploration of data and the development of concepts. To perform a thematic analysis of Facebook comments, the researcher employed open coding practices with NVivo. This entailed carefully examining the qualitative data to determine the context and create preliminary codes that would help identify patterns and meaning. The researcher used NVivo memos and descriptive labels or codes to recognize key ideas and concepts and documented these in a codebook to ensure transparency and rigor. The process involved highlighting data and generating initial codes to establish the context and identify patterns and meaning in the qualitative data.

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<sup>463</sup> Mayring (n456) 3

<sup>464</sup> Saldana (n448) 67-76

Themes	References made
British Values	357
Remedies	180
Media Coverage	134
Elite Distrust	129
Predictions	60
Concerns	60
Conspiracy/Misinformation	41
Immigration/Refugees	31
Police/Security	101
Brexit	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,102</b>

Table 3.9: Themes from Facebook Comments (2016)

### Axial & Selective Coding of Facebook Comments

Undertaking additional analysis through the utilisation of axial coding, the researchers scrutinized the Facebook comments data at a second organizational level. This involved employing a refined comprehension of the context and establishing connections between themes. Through iterative revisions, the codes and themes were refined, which ultimately led to a more comprehensive understanding of the case study presented in *Table 3.10*.

Sub-Themes	References made
General Criticism of Media Reporting	43
Terrorism Reporting Fuels Terror(ism)	34
Fearmongering	27
Fake News/Accusation of Lies	12
Media Agenda/Propaganda	6
Media-Terrorism Link	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>131</b>

Table 3.10: Media Coverage sub-themes (Facebook Comments; 2016)

The process of identifying third-order themes within large axial second-order themes was deemed necessary in order to create a cohesive and comprehensive narrative. During this stage, selective coding was utilised to select data that supported the conceptual coding categories that were developed earlier. By identifying nucleus themes, the researcher was able to contribute to the analytical narrative and connect many or all of the assigned codes and identified themes in their analysis. The Terrorism and Immigration themes, which were prominent in the open-coding phase of Stage 2, were given principal analytical explanation through the utilization of the frequency of the articles produced per each theme. Additionally, sub-themes that

emerged during axial-level analysis provided more precise discussion points for upcoming chapters and links to other themes.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Previous segments regarding data collection and analysis techniques have elicited ethical considerations that necessitate a comprehensive examination to ensure that quality practices have been acknowledged, adhered to, and maintained. Specifically, the protection of the "*dignity, rights, safety, and well-being of participants*" must be a paramount concern in any research endeavour.<sup>465</sup> This segment discusses several considerations that are applicable to a variety of methodological approaches, some of which are specific to those that utilise data obtained from online sources. Regardless of the type of investigation being conducted, researchers must exercise caution and be aware of the ethical implications and limitations of their chosen methodology.

The use of online data is a relatively new phenomenon in academic research, and its potential is continually being recognised and refined. In this study, the researcher had to carefully navigate the ethical landscape and comply with Facebook's terms of service to avoid any violations of the company's code of conduct and data policies.<sup>466</sup> Over the past few years, social media platforms have implemented specific rules and guidelines regarding the collection and usage of data from their platforms. To ensure the validity of this research, it was essential for the researcher to have a thorough understanding of the limitations on data access and usage imposed by Facebook at the time of data collection. As a researcher, it was essential to be aware of the terms and conditions of the research platform to prevent any potential violations or breaches. The importance of adhering to ethical standards and guidelines, as well as respecting legal and ethical boundaries, was crucial to ensure that the research process followed these principles. Noncompliance with the platform's terms of service could result in ethical breaches that may jeopardize the validity of a study. Recognizing the need to stay informed about changes in Facebook's policies, given the constant evolution of technology and social media

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<sup>465</sup> University Research Ethics Committee (n435)

<sup>466</sup> David Lauer, *Facebook's ethical failures are not accidental; they are part of the business model* [AI Ethics, 2021] 1 395–403

platforms, the researcher adapted their data collection and analytical strategies accordingly. This approach ensured that the research process remained compliant with platform policies while adhering to ethical standards.<sup>467</sup>

An application for ethical approval (18/LAW/002) was granted by the Research Ethics Committee (UREC) of Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU) on March 14th, 2018, thereby permitting the commencement of this research. The approval was granted for a period of five years, expiring on March 14th, 2023. The application for ethical approval from UREC took into consideration several critical factors concerning online data collection. These included the potential risks associated with research on Facebook users, such as psychological, physical, social, economic, and legal threats that could compromise a person's well-being and sense of self-worth. Additionally, the study may involve vulnerable groups, including minors and individuals with learning disabilities or mental illness. Furthermore, the data collection process may not always involve providing a participant information sheet and obtaining a signed consent form from participants. Considering these factors, the researcher presented the objective, limits, and security measures for the data to the UREC for an appropriate ethical evaluation by the Board of Governors at LJMU.<sup>468</sup> Adherence to the predefined purpose of data collection is of utmost importance once ethical approval has been obtained.

The use of Facebook and other online platforms for academic research purposes is a matter of growing concern due to issues of researcher transparency related to the collection and use of data, with transparency a critical element to maintaining the integrity of research.<sup>469</sup> For Friedel, Hintergard & Lede (2020), researchers should be clear about their data collection methods, research objectives, and the intended use of the data, with adequate documentation enabling peer review and validation of research findings.<sup>470</sup> Researchers must ensure that data is used only for its intended research objectives and that the project's purpose and limitations are clearly

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<sup>467</sup> 'Guidelines for the Use of Social Media Data in Research' [University of York 2023] <<https://www.york.ac.uk/staff/research/governance/research-policies/social-media-data-use-research/>> accessed 1<sup>st</sup> August 2023.

<sup>468</sup> *University Research Ethics Committee* (n435)

<sup>469</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>470</sup> Lara Friedel, Bella Hintergard & Javier Lede, 'An Analysis Facebook's Data Ethics' [Data Ethics, 2020] <<https://dataethics.eu/an-analyse-facebooks-data-ethics>> accessed 29<sup>th</sup> November 2023.

documented to prevent unauthorized access or disclosure of data. In addition, robust data security procedures must be implemented to prevent data breaches, unauthorised access, or data manipulation, thereby safeguarding the integrity of the collected information. It is important for ethical research to follow appropriate data handling techniques and storage mechanisms. Generally, researchers must protect data from unauthorised access and ensure that it is securely stored. This includes using encryption and other security measures to safeguard data. In this project, additional steps were taken to protect the privacy of Facebook users in accordance with the approved URES guidelines. These measures included storing data securely and not sharing it with unauthorized parties. The raw data was recorded to password-protected online files and stored on protected university computer systems.<sup>471</sup>

A major ethical issue in the UREC application for this PhD is the acquisition of informed consent from users whose data (Facebook comments) is being collected. As with other research methodologies, the principle of informed consent is crucial when collecting data, as participants typically expect privacy. Researchers must obtain informed consent from participants before utilizing their data for research purposes and provide them with information about the research's purpose, nature, and data usage rights. However, when analysing publicly available and passively collected data, researchers may not always require consent from users. It is crucial to consider the views of users and social media platform owners regarding the classification of digital data on social media platforms as private or public information. While Lathan et al. (2023) argue that researchers should obtain informed consent from Facebook users before collecting their data, the present study does not consider consent for comment analysis applicable, as indicated by *Appendix 8*, which states that Facebook designates information posted on its platform as "public information."<sup>472</sup> The procurement of consent was an integral component of the UREC application for this thesis. It was imperative to recognise the

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<sup>471</sup> 'Ethics application form and templates' [ljmu 2023] <<https://www.ljmu.ac.uk/ris/research-ethics-and-governance/research-ethics/university-research-ethics-committee-urec/ethics-application-form-and-templates>> accessed 1<sup>st</sup> August 2023.

<sup>472</sup> 'What is public information?' [Facebook Help Centre 2018] <[https://www.facebook.com/help/203805466323736?helpref=uf\\_permalink](https://www.facebook.com/help/203805466323736?helpref=uf_permalink)> accessed 12<sup>th</sup> March 2018.

importance of respecting the rights of users and refraining from utilising data in a manner that encroaches upon their rights, particularly in relation to Facebook and data ownership. The comments collected were not employed verbatim in the dissemination process, and any comments that were utilised as examples were presented anonymously and rephrased to preclude the possibility of tracing them back to the original posters.<sup>473</sup>

In the unlikely event that a comment would be deemed important enough to be included as a direct verbatim quote, for obtaining consent *Appendix 11-12* provides an information sheet and consent form<sup>474</sup> as approved by UREC. Note, that the comments obtained for this study were done so with the understanding that they may be used as such. If a participant requests that their comment not be used verbatim or to have it removed, it will not be published. If it was not possible to contact a person for permission to use their post verbatim, the comment will not be published but will be paraphrased to maintain their anonymity. However, this was not necessary at any stage of the research. Hypothetically, obtaining informed consent from all individuals for every comment collected would be a challenging task due to the high volume of comments and the difficulty in contacting each individual.<sup>475</sup>

With the added complexity of individual Facebook privacy settings for user accounts, it is important to note that this research did not intentionally delve into the profiles of those who posted comments. Nonetheless, this observation serves as a valuable consideration for any future research in this area. The disclosure of individual user information is regulated by the privacy settings of each account, resulting in a varying degree of information exposure. This entails that some profiles may reveal complete information, while others may only disclose limited data. Additionally, it is noted that Facebook's privacy policies grant users a considerable degree of control over their personal data, encompassing the ability to download and delete their information. However, despite lacking a necessity for obtaining participant consent,

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<sup>473</sup> University Research Ethics Committee (n435)

<sup>474</sup> 'Ethics application form and templates' [ljmu.ac.uk 2023] <<https://www.ljmu.ac.uk/ris/research-ethics-and-governance/research-ethics/university-research-ethics-committee-urec/ethics-application-form-and-templates>> accessed 1<sup>st</sup> August 2023.

<sup>475</sup> Hannah Stuart Lathan, Amy Kwan, Courtney Takats, Joshua P. Tanner, Rachel Wormer, Diana Romero, Heidi E. Jones, *Ethical considerations and methodological uses of Facebook data in public health research: A systematic review* [Social Science & Medicine, 2023] 322



there was nevertheless a moral duty to protect the privacy of individuals whose data is being collected, an important consideration and responsibility for this project. Therefore, it is imperative that researchers exercise caution in the handling and utilisation of collected data to prevent any unintended harm to participants that may result from unauthorised disclosure or misuse of such information.<sup>476</sup> or expose them to risk.<sup>477</sup>

Researchers should be aware of potential defamation issues when collecting data from social media platforms, ensuring that they do not publish false or misleading information that could harm an individual's reputation. It has been recommended by LJMUS ethics committee that, whenever possible, researchers should consider collecting data anonymously to minimise the risk of re-identification and protect the privacy of individuals.<sup>478</sup> This furthers the notions that by anonymising data to protect users' identities and personal information is an essential step for not only for maintaining privacy and confidentiality, but also for protecting researchers and the validity of their projects. As per the UREC guidelines, the practice of anonymization is mandatory when disseminating research findings. This involves the removal of any identifiable information from the data and the use of pseudonyms or codes to refer to participants. To ensure a higher level of privacy protection, it was proposed and meticulously documented in the UREC application that collected Facebook comments, wherein identifiable information such as name and profile pictures of individuals was systematically eliminated prior to comment analysis.<sup>479</sup> Please refer to Appendix. 7 for a sample of edited comments that adhere to the aforementioned protocol.

As a matter of ethical consideration, the principles of informed consent and user privacy dictate that individuals must be made aware of the conditions under which their comments may be viewed on a platform such as Facebook, with terms and conditions serving as a clear illustration of how account holders may post comments

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<sup>476</sup> Karen Kaiser, 'Protecting respondent confidentiality in qualitative research' [Qual Health Res 2009] 19 (11) 1632

<sup>477</sup> Kyle McKibbin, Bradley Malin, Ellen Wright Clayton, 'Protecting research data of publicly revealing participants' [J Law Biosci 2021] 8 (2)

<sup>478</sup> University Research Ethics Committee (n435)

<sup>479</sup> 'Data Protection and Ethics' [Foster 2024] <<https://www.fosteropenscience.eu/learning/data-protection-and-ethics/#/id/5ace27ca8ee5d6920ab94c13>> accessed 1<sup>st</sup> January 2024.

and who may access them.<sup>480</sup> Despite Facebook's data policies having been criticised for not providing users with enough control over their data,<sup>481</sup> Facebook enables individual account holders to adjust their privacy filters to limit who views posts<sup>482</sup> (*Audience Selector*) (see *Appendix. 8 & 10*), with Facebook stating how public information may be used by institutions such as TV shows.<sup>483</sup> *Appendix 9* clarifies Facebook's terms and conditions providing a clear illustration on how to post a comment and who may view it. As posts are visible to anyone and users have the ability to hide or filter their audience, it can be *reasonably inferred* that individuals who post content during data collection intend for it to be viewed by themselves. This assumption is supported by the UREC application's approval. However, there are still cautionary warnings to consider, such as the British Psychological Guidelines for Internet Mediated Research (IMR) which states that "*valid consent should be obtained where it cannot be reasonably argued that online data can be considered 'in the public domain', or that undisclosed usage is justified on scientific value grounds.*"<sup>484</sup>

Final ethical considerations were given to Facebook accounts belonging to detectably vulnerable participants, such as those under 18 years of age or displaying vulnerabilities, and any such accounts were removed from the data sets. When conducting research involving minors, additional ethical considerations must be considered, including the unique issue of gatekeeping, which concerns the digital data collection process. Researchers must carefully consider the consent process, data handling, and the rights of minors regarding their data when collecting and analysing data from minors. Researchers may encounter conduct on social media platforms that could potentially pose a risk to individuals, and it is crucial to consider

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<sup>480</sup> 'How do I post on a page, and who can see it?' [Facebook Help Centre 2018] <[https://www.facebook.com/help/424946150928896?helpref=faq\\_content](https://www.facebook.com/help/424946150928896?helpref=faq_content)> accessed 12<sup>th</sup> March 2018.

<sup>481</sup> Friedel, Hintergard & Lede (n470)

<sup>482</sup> 'How can I adjust my privacy settings?' [Facebook Help Centre 2018] <[https://www.facebook.com/help/193677450678703?helpref=faq\\_content](https://www.facebook.com/help/193677450678703?helpref=faq_content)> accessed 12<sup>th</sup> March 2018.

<sup>483</sup> 'When I post something, how do I choose who can see it?' [Facebook Help Centre 2018] <[https://www.facebook.com/help/120939471321735?helpref=faq\\_content](https://www.facebook.com/help/120939471321735?helpref=faq_content)> accessed 12<sup>th</sup> March 2018.

<sup>484</sup> 'British Psychological Guidelines for Internet Mediated Research' [British Psychological Society 2017] <<https://www.bps.org.uk/sites/beta.bps.org.uk/files/Policy%20-%20Files/Ethics%20Guidelines%20for%20Internet-mediated%20Research%20%282017%29.pdf>> accessed 12<sup>th</sup> March 2018.

the ethical ramifications of monitoring and reporting such behaviour, particularly when it concerns minors.<sup>485</sup> Upon conclusion of the research, no such instances were encountered. Due to the challenges in verifying the age and vulnerability of individuals through social media accounts (owing to privacy settings or unclear profile pictures), data (comments) were excluded from the analysis in cases of uncertainty.

### **Limitations & Reflective Considerations of Methodology**

In the course of carrying out this research design, both advantages and challenges emerged in relation to the application of the specified process and social media data. A number of substantial obstacles were encountered alongside several notable benefits, which should be taken into account in any future replication of this approach.

Notably, the sheer volume of data available, collected, and subsequently analysed proved to be a significant factor that impacted various other aspects of data collection and analysis. Although methods such as interviews can generate large numbers of participants, they often require considerable effort on the part of researchers to obtain higher rates of participant engagement. On the other hand, news articles and social media comments can easily number in the hundreds, even thousands, on topics of high public interest, presenting an effortless opportunity for researchers to collect data. Given the importance of variables such as researcher time constraints, it is essential that appropriate measures be implemented to regulate the collection and analysis of data. Failure to do so may result in the excessive accumulation of data, leading to inefficiencies and unethical practices.

Although the previous section discussed ethical considerations involved in online data extraction, it is crucial to note that the process of selecting and obtaining qualitative and quantitative data is generally straightforward. In accordance with the guidelines set forth by Facebook's terms and conditions and the UREC application approval process, obtaining consent for Facebook comments is not as necessary as

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<sup>485</sup> Danica Facca, Maxwell Smith, Jacob Shelley, Daniel Lizotte, Lorie Donelle, 'Exploring the ethical issues in research using digital data collection strategies with minors: A scoping review' [PLoS One 2020] 15 (8)

it is with other data collection methods, such as interviews. However, the ease with which data can be collected through online sources also poses a risk to the privacy of individuals. Therefore, it is essential to exercise caution when dealing with large volumes of data. The vast amount of data available from online sources can be a valuable asset, but it is important to consider the potential risks associated with the collection and analysis of large amounts of data. Due to the lack of established precedent for this methodology in the academic field at the time of this research, the initial datasets were composed of a vast number of news articles and Facebook comments, which were more extensive than those used in the final drafts. As a lone researcher, managing and navigating through the data presented several challenges, and the collection and analysis process took several months to complete, longer than initially anticipated.

One of the most time-consuming aspects of data collection was manually reviewing news articles to identify commonly used key terms. Additionally, extensive individual searches were conducted using Lexis Library and Google to locate information related to each of the initial 19 key terms, which included combinations of terms, years, and news providers. Furthermore, a considerable amount of time was allocated to searching for news articles on Facebook, which necessitated executing individualised searches based on specific keywords, years, and news providers. Moreover, it was essential to extract and edit Facebook comments using Word documents for analysis on NVivo 12 software. This process also required eliminating irrelevant data, including personal information such as names and profile pictures, as well as web scripts. Additionally, notes were recorded for the purpose of code and theme development, along with reflective notes on the research process and notes pertaining to the research findings. These tasks collectively consumed a significant amount of time and resources.

The process of data collection and analysis was extensive and required a considerable amount of time to complete. The large volume of data collected had a significant impact on the efficiency of this research approach, serving as a cautionary reminder to researchers operating under strict time constraints. Nevertheless, the methodology used allowed for the acquisition of a substantial amount of data that would have been difficult to obtain through alternative means. The process of data

collection and analysis also revealed that certain elements, such as social media comments, were more efficient than other methods, such as interview transcriptions. This research was able to consider the thoughts of a large number of individuals due to the swiftness of coding individual Facebook comments. If manual coding were to be employed in future research projects, it may be feasible to impose stricter limits on data collection to leverage the potential for rapid data processing. Despite the labour-intensive nature of this methodology, the researcher deemed it fundamental to immerse oneself in the data by dedicating significant time to its collection, manual examination, trend identification, and documentation of findings. This intimate relationship with the data might not have been achieved if automated tools were relied upon. Collecting data from online sources may also potentially uncover concealed or unforeseen patterns in human behaviour or opinion that might not have been discernible through conventional research methods. However, for future projects that employ a similar methodological approach, it may be wise to consider tools that accelerate project progression, such as NCapture. In short, the widespread availability of advanced data analysis tools and techniques has made the task of managing and analysing large volumes of data more feasible. Researchers can now utilise data mining and natural language processing methods to efficiently extract valuable insights. During the course of this PhD, the collection of large datasets also presented significant limitations in terms of the ability to fully utilise all of the information gathered. This underscores the need to impose stricter limitations at the collection phase. Despite subsequent chapters exploring numerous themes encompassing thousands of collected data items (headlines/comments), a significant number of data items had to be excluded from the final draft due to the word limitations of this project. Additionally, Lexis Library data for many of the initial 19 search terms was not included in the later stages of the research using Facebook. However, it should be noted that the excluded data is intended for future publications.

A benefit of utilising systematic online research designs is that the processes employed can be more easily replicated by other scholars, thereby promoting transparency and enhancing the credibility and validity of the study. Furthermore, the notion that news articles and Facebook comments are continuously available online, unless intentionally deleted, provides a source of data that can be retrieved at a later

time for replication. As this research project spanned several years, it was noted by the researcher that the sources of data used (Lexis library and Facebook) may have changed or updated their functionalities, potentially impacting the ability to follow the exact procedure or recover identical data. For example, the inbuilt search engine used on Facebook for news article retrieval has undergone updates and reformations over time. When Stage 2 (Facebook news articles) had been completed and articles had been selected to extract comments from, search engine changes created difficulties for retrieving those same articles. Certain data can become more challenging to retrieve, particularly if the data (often comments) are deemed to have offended or violated Facebook's evolving terms and conditions for acceptable online community behaviour. Content adjudged as *extreme*, fake news, conspiratorial, misleading, or otherwise harmful is often removed by Facebook monitors, subjected to restrictions. Owing to the sensitive nature of this research case study (terrorism), future researchers may find this element to be problematic. Extreme and/or provocative content – which may be fruitful for academic research – may also be difficult to obtain.

The organic formation of online data provides researchers with a high-quality understanding of the social consensus, which was a significant factor in the decision to acquire Facebook comments. These comments were deemed to have high emotional validity on topics such as terrorism, eliciting poignant and often controversial reactions, hostility, and extreme negativity. In essence, Facebook users, given the freedom to post comments, are more likely to express their true thoughts and emotions, aided by the perception of online anonymity and the absence of consequences for disseminating hostile rhetoric.<sup>486</sup> However, an unexpectedly large number of Facebook comments were found to be usable. Comments posted from discernible fake, 'bot',<sup>487</sup> or 'troll'<sup>488</sup> accounts were

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<sup>486</sup> Erica Bailey, Sandra Matz, Wu Youyou, & Sheena Lyengar, 'Authentic self-expression on social media is associated with greater subjective well-being' [Nat Commun 2020] 11 (4889)

<sup>487</sup> "An Internet Bot, also known as web robot, WWW robot or simply bot, is a software application that runs automated tasks (scripts) over the Internet. Typically, bots perform tasks that are both simple and structurally repetitive, at a much higher rate than would be possible for a human alone." see Ken Dunham & Jim Melnick, *Malicious Bots: An Inside Look into the Cyber-Criminal Underground of the Internet* [CRC Press 2008]

<sup>488</sup> A troll is a person deliberately making offensive or provocative online posts, deliberately starting quarrels or upsets people by posting inflammatory, extraneous, or off-topic messages in an online community (such as a newsgroup, forum, chat room, or online games) with the intent of provoking

excluded.<sup>489</sup> Taking into consideration the delicate and crucial nature of this case study, it was expected that certain comments might be derogatory or unsuitable when not considered in the context of this specific case. Consequently, comments with no context, consisting only of slang, using explicit language, or including only emojis were automatically removed. In order to ensure the integrity of the analysis, comments that lacked qualitative value or appeared to be posted from fake or spam accounts were also excluded from the data. As a result, a significant number of Facebook comments were excluded from the study, contributing to the time-consuming and somewhat challenging process of analysing user-generated data.

Online research may be regarded as a more *cost-effective* alternative to conventional data gathering methods, as it can minimize expenses related to fieldwork, travel, and participant incentives. Although this method may consume considerable time, data extraction, recording, and analysis can be executed without additional funding, as the Liverpool John Moores University already holds subscriptions for Microsoft office, NVivo, and Lexis Library licenses. Online research methods may also be combined with conventional techniques such as interviews and surveys in a blended approach. Such a *mixed-methods approach* can enhance the thoroughness and validity of the research findings. For instance, future studies that seek to build upon or expand this project may benefit from employing more advanced quantitative analysis, such as inferential statistical data, to establish more robust connections between qualitative themes and to gain a deeper understanding of the data. This is a matter for future research in this field, in addition to the use of faster qualitative research methods. The utilisation of online data presents a prospect for the execution of *comparative studies* encompassing diverse regions, cultures, or languages. Such an analysis accrues benefits by revealing patterns and discrepancies that may not have been discernible through the examination of a solitary location or community.

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*readers into an emotional response or otherwise disrupting regular, on-topic discussions, often for the troll's amusement* – 'Troll' English Oxford Living Dictionary  
<<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/troll>> accessed 12<sup>th</sup> March 2018.

<sup>489</sup> Danny Rogers & John Woodhouse, 'Online Abuse: Backbench Business Debate Commons Chamber, 7th July 2016' [House of Commons Library 2016] 2  
<<https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cdp-2016-0138/>> accessed 18<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

The capability to extract *real-time data* from online sources empowers researchers to investigate current trends and events. The timeliness of this information is crucial in comprehending topics or issues that are subject to rapid alteration, and may thus lose relevance with the passage of time. The plethora of data accessible on the internet presents the opportunity to undertake *longitudinal studies*, monitoring changes and trends over an extended period. This longitudinal approach may provide more profound understanding of how opinions and attitudes evolve over time. An additional benefit that was observed during the analysis was the incorporation of *varied data sources*, such as news articles and social media comments, which expanded the breadth and depth of the dataset and improved the understanding of the moral panic case study. This diversity was crucial in capturing multiple viewpoints and opinions, resulting in a more comprehensive examination. Furthermore, it facilitated the application of the moral panic framework to navigate the large quantity of data, which further legitimizes this research approach by demonstrating widespread agreement among audiences. It must be acknowledged that the analysis and interpretation of data, particularly qualitative in nature, carries the potential for *researcher bias*. However, in this instance, the influence of a single scholar has limited the potential for bias to a single individual, as opposed to projects involving multiple researchers. Additionally, qualitative research can make it challenging to arrive at absolute determinations regarding the causation of phenomena and final deductions from the data. It is important to note that any inherent and habitual bias present throughout the study may consistently impact the results.<sup>490</sup>

### **Chapter Conclusion**

This chapter presents an overview of the methodology employed in a PhD study that scrutinizes the moral panic surrounding Islamist extremism during the 2010s. The study utilized a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data derived from sources such as the Lexis Library and Facebook. The data collected encompassed news headlines and Facebook comments, which were analysed using qualitative and descriptive quantitative techniques to uncover insights into the moral panic dynamics. Given the increasing significance of social media data

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<sup>490</sup> Gibbs (n449)



in research spanning multiple disciplines, it is crucial to navigate the ethical challenges that arise when collecting data from platforms like Facebook. This involves adhering to informed consent, data privacy, and purpose limitation, as well as maintaining transparency and accountability. By prioritizing these ethical considerations, researchers can engage in responsible research that respects user autonomy and upholds the integrity of academic inquiry. Such ethical research practices contribute to a knowledge base that benefits society while safeguarding the rights and privacy of individuals. One of the primary motivations for employing these methods is to gather and analyse modern data sources, such as social media comments, in conjunction with moral panic research. This type of data has the potential to provide a fresh perspective on public sentiment at specific moments and infuse outdated theoretical frameworks with contemporary relevance. Like earlier panic studies, this research examines rhetoric from the media and political figures. However, it also concentrates on public discourse, which is often overlooked.

This study aims to address several comprehensive inquiries in the following chapters, including the phenomenon of Islamist terrorism panic and the role of communication technology in the moral panic framework. The objectives of the investigation are to critically evaluate and analyse the shortcomings in the literature and frameworks pertaining to moral panic, assess the function of contemporary communication technology within the moral panic framework, analyse the interpretations of Islamist extremism during the early to mid-2010s through the lens of the moral panic framework, and examine the interpretations of Islamist extremism on social media. In subsequent chapters, it will be demonstrated that while descriptive quantitative data provides valuable insights into the trends and scope of events between 2012-2017, qualitative data offers a critical analysis of several important findings, thereby furnishing a comprehensive understanding of the aforementioned events. Despite the limitations of the methods employed, as discussed in this chapter, the methods have fulfilled the objectives of this research and introduced an underused methodological approach to examining moral panic theory. Chapter 4 will commence with an analytical examination of the genesis of the UK's terrorism panic between 2010 and 2017. Following an exploration of the framing of Islamist terrorism by elites during the War on Terror of the 2000s, subsequent chapters will delve into the evolution and expansion of these frames,

while also identifying key players and issues of concern. Chapters 4-6 will draw on quantitative data gathered from Lexis Library, Google, and 2,477 Facebook headlines collected and themed, as well as qualitative Facebook themes identified from media and Facebook comment data when evaluating frames and discourse between 2010-2017. In particular, Chapter 6 will continue to examine the qualitative data introduced in the previous chapter, focusing on the Conspiracy and Elites Distrust themes found in Facebook comment data.

# Chapter. 4

## The Cultivation of Islamist terrorism panic in the 2010s

### Introduction

A comprehensive assessment of moral panic should consider its cultivation, its unpredictable and capricious nature, the societal concerns that emerge during periods of heightened tensions, and the enduring and transient effects that ensue. A longstanding limitation of classic panic research surrounds explanations of panic growth and decline, with Critcher (2003) arguing that even Cohen's 1973 seminal work remains vague in this regard.<sup>491</sup> Conventional panic research regularly presents social concerns as rapidly and unexpectedly attaining high prominence, enduring briefly, before gradually fading from public attention, resolved or not.<sup>492</sup> Panic research should consider how prominent social actors frame the '*dangerous*' concerns rousing intense fear. The cultivation and lifespan of a panic is influenced by the choreography of social actors. For example, Cohen's analysis of the Mods & Rockers panic involved a '*signification spiral*'- a sphere of interactions amongst elite figures, claims-makers, moral entrepreneurs, and the mass media during panic formation. Throughout episodes of escalating drama, people seek instantaneous explanations from established institutions - those positioned at the precipice of the Hierarchy of Credibility.

In Chapter 2, this author considered how technology-induced social actor behavioural transformations within elite-engineered terrorism panics emerged after the 9/11 attacks. This research posits that elite framing in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 tragedy helped to create a consensus supporting a War on Terror (WoT) and justified enhanced domestic counter-terrorism measures and the invasions of Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003). The author argues in this chapter that such terrorism frames established pre-existing anticipations of terrorism that extended into the 2010s. The chapter primarily examines the modern application of moral panic in the context of Islamist terrorism between 2010 and 2016. Although Chapter 5

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<sup>491</sup> Critcher (n19) 139

<sup>492</sup> Anthony Downs, 'Up and Down with Ecology: The 'Issue-Attention' Cycle [1972] The Public Interest 28 38

discusses the peak of terrorism panic (volatility) in 2017, this chapter details panic cultivation during 2010-2016 fuelled by hegemonic sense-making and framing from prominent social actors. The discourse within media reporting evaluated in this chapter demonstrates a sense of danger in close proximity, warnings of impending danger, and promoted civic vigilance through predictions regarding the certainty of future harm. The author analyses the role of political figures and media outlets in framing terrorism during the 2010s and how they contributed to an intensification of fear and blameworthiness based on misconceptions and constructed symbols. The chapter also considers the role of social media as a modern dimension of the moral panic framework. The data used in this analysis comes from a collection of news articles and social media comments posted on Facebook between 2014 and 2016, with a focus on themes related to predictions and concerns over links between terrorism and immigration.

#### **Data applied to Chapters 4-6**

Chapter 3 outlined the original data collection and analysis procedures, which are utilised in Chapters 4-6. These chapters will incorporate descriptive quantitative data sourced from Lexis Library, Google, and Facebook news reporting. Additionally, the qualitative themes identified during the analysis of news output and social media comments posted on Facebook will be presented. The first-order, open-coded themes identified from news article data posted between 2014 and 2016 on Facebook are catalogued in *Table 4.1*.

<b>Themes</b>	<b>References made</b>
EU/Anti-EU References	108
Human Rights	201
Immigration	689
Warnings	104
Terrorism	527
Plots Foiled	87
Fake News	6
Other	15
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,737</b>

*Table 4.1: Facebook News Article Themes (2014-16)*

A total of 1,102 comments were collected from eight UK-based news providers' 2016 news articles datasets through NVivo. The comments were analysed, and ten

distinct themes emerged (see *Table. 4.2*). These themes will be contextualised in Chapters 4-6, similar to the news article data.

Themes	References made
British Values	357
Remedies	180
Media Coverage	134
Elite Distrust	129
Predictions	60
Concerns	60
Conspiracy/Misinformation	41
Immigration/Refugees	31
Police/Security	101
Brexit	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,102</b>

*Table 4.2: Themes from Facebook Comments (2016)*

In particular, this chapter analyses the themes of Predictions, Concerns, Immigration/Refugees in a critical manner. Subsequent chapters present findings regarding Remedies, Media Coverage, Elite Distrust, Conspiracy/Misinformation, and Police/Security themes.

### **Contextualising the reality of the Islamist terrorist threat**

Although disproportionality is a crucial characteristic of panic research, the centrality of a given social issue in a moral panic study can still plausibly result in at least some degree of legitimate threat. For example, Cohen's *Mods & Rockers* examination determined that deviant acts carried out by youth sub-culture groups were relatively minor. Still, such deviant behaviours were a reality, even if their destructive impact was grossly over-elaborated. An identified social fixation on 'mugging' in Hall et al.'s work was a crime to raise reasonable apprehensions for, even if the scale and novelty were misrepresented and repackaged by the media, police, and government. Many of Critcher's case studies, such as paedophilia, AIDS, and child abuse, conveyed deviant or public health issues laudable for deliberation. Similarly, terrorism poses understandable and genuine material dangers to domestic and international security. This is evidenced by 3,411 deaths in the UK between 1970-2019 from a combination of contemporary Islamist extremism and predominantly Irish dissident groups. However, since 2003 approximately 94 deaths have

occurred.<sup>493</sup> Like many sources of concern for moral panic outbreaks, Islamist terrorism was not a novel phenomenon that abruptly materialised alongside the 9/11 attacks, as Chapter 2 realised. Acknowledging this point should go some way to nullifying the novelty factor which is key to panic cultivation. Islamist terrorist upsurges were seen during the 1980s with Islamist militant groups emerging in South Lebanon (Hezbollah), Gaza and the West Bank (Hamas), and in Egypt (al-Gama' al-Islamiyya).<sup>494</sup> In 1996, Osama Bin Laden, a leader of al-Qaeda, declared war on America following US military involvement during the Gulf War.<sup>495</sup> Nevertheless, since 9/11, Western states have sustained Islamist attacks such as the Madrid bombings (2004); London bombings (2005); Little Rock (2009); Moscow (2010); Boston (2013); Paris (2015); and multiple attacks in the UK during 2017.<sup>496</sup> Worldwide deaths from all forms of terrorism declined between 2008 - 2012 (15,708 - 11,098). The Syrian war and the rise of *the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant* (ISIL) breathed new life into the European jihadi movement.<sup>497</sup> The Arab Spring of late 2010 caused eruptions of pro-democracy protest movements in nations across the Middle East and North Africa, resulting in the overthrow of dictatorships such as the Gaddafi regime in Libya. It was hoped that the movement would establish democracy in these regions, however, in multiple cases it created a power vacuum from which insurgency groups benefited;<sup>498</sup> the 2013 Egyptian *coup d'état*, for example. In Syria, the Assad regime reacted violently, carrying the country into a civil war that eventually incorporated several entities such as the Syrian government (assisted by Russia), Kurdish rebel forces (supported by Western governments), and insurgencies such as al-Qaeda. These events saw the rapid rise of the ISIL as a force in the Middle East and a stimulus for attacks on the Western states.

Although ISIS had come to the forefront of Western consciousness sometime around 2013-14, the group's precursors and forerunners were long-established Islamic militants.<sup>499</sup> After years of affiliation to established groups such as al-Qaeda,

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<sup>493</sup> Grahame Allen & Esme Kirk-Wade, 'Terrorism in Great Britain: the statistics' [2020] House of Common Briefing Paper no. CBP7613 5

<sup>494</sup> Wilkinson (n262) 31

<sup>495</sup> Lowe (n263) 5

<sup>496</sup> Kapardis (n189) 373

<sup>497</sup> Nesser (n280)

<sup>498</sup> Lowe (n263) 15

<sup>499</sup> Kris Boyle & Jordan Mower, 'Framing Terror: A Content Analysis of Media Frames used in Covering ISIS' [2018] Newspaper Research Journal 39 (2) 205

mergers with other insurgencies, and leadership changes during the early 2000s;<sup>500</sup> the *Islamic State of Iraq* (ISI) expanded into Syria by the spring of 2013. The group rebranded as the *Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant*, aided by the proclamation of a Caliphate in the region, an improving global reach via the Internet, and a campaign of notable brutality. By 2013, terrorism deaths had increased to 18,066, increasing again by 2014 to 32,763. Although remaining annually higher than any year between 2008-2013, death figures from 2015-17 showed a downward trend from 2014 with 29,424 (2015), 25,722 (2016), and 18,753 (2017), respectively. These figures increased again in 2018 to 32,836, before falling again in 2019 to 25,982.<sup>501</sup>

2006	20,487
2007	22,719
2008	15,708
2009	15,310
2010	13,186
2011	12,533
2012	11,098
2013	18,066
2014	32,763
2015	29,424
2016	25,722
2017	18,753
2018	32,836
2019	25,082

Table 4.3: Global fatalities due to terrorist attacks: 2006-2019; Statista

ISIL soon became a *bête noire* of righteous liberal, Western ideals, yet contrastingly, an international destination for aspiring jihadists.<sup>502</sup> In January 2014, ISIS gained control over the Iraqi cities of Fallujah and Ramadi. Over the next few weeks, ISIS took control of a considerable area of Iraq;<sup>503</sup> gains resulting despite increased involvement from US and UK governments in the form of airstrikes and additional troops. As Syria became a hub (central base) for global jihad, ISIL soon became notorious for their callousness, hostage-taking of foreign nationals, decapitations, and genocidal killings of *infidel* Muslims and others who opposed or did not follow their scriptural interpretations of Islam. On 11<sup>th</sup> May 2013, ISIL was heavily linked to

<sup>500</sup> Lowe (n263) 8-10

<sup>501</sup> 'Number of fatalities due to terrorist attacks worldwide between 2006 and 2019' [Statista Research Department 2021] <<https://www.statista.com/statistics/202871/number-of-fatalities-by-terrorist-attacks-worldwide/>> accessed 5<sup>th</sup> June 2021.

<sup>502</sup> Law (279) 336

<sup>503</sup> Boyle & Mower (n499) 205-219

car bombings in Turkey, killing 51 people. During the same month in Iraq, multiple bombings claimed hundreds of lives. On 22<sup>nd</sup> July of the same year, the group organised a mass breakout of 500 prisoners from prisons in Taji and Abu Ghraib. An ISIL directive issued in 2014 calling for jihadis worldwide to increase attacks from within their own countries resulted in a notable increase of 'low-grade' attacks against 'non-traditional' (civilian) targets in Europe and North America.<sup>504</sup>

One of the first European attacks affiliated with ISIL was a shooting at a Jewish Museum in Belgium on 24<sup>th</sup> May 2014 killing four people. At this time, Western news began to amplify the regularity of ISIL's brutality and its operations in the Middle East and North Africa, heavily broadcasting to Western audiences, illustrating the groups' *potential* threats. The Guardian, days after, published an article entitled '*ISIS: too extreme even for al-Qaeda*' wherein they reported that '*Having captured Mosul, second city of Iraq, the spotlight is on a terror group so hard-line that it was disavowed by al-Qaida's leader.*'<sup>505</sup> However, despite the increase in European attacks during the 2010s, Islamist terrorism was comparatively rare in Western nations compared to that in the Middle East. Following the signing of Northern Ireland's *Good Friday Agreement*, the UK enjoyed low annual terrorism incidences, although spiking in 2005 with 57 deaths from the London bombings, and again in 2017 (42 deaths).<sup>506</sup> In Britain (excluding Northern Ireland), 92 deaths occurred due to terrorism between April 2003 and March 2019,<sup>507</sup> with approximately 1,009 attacks deemed terrorist in nature.<sup>508</sup> From 1970 to 2018, the number of deaths in the UK (including Northern Ireland) totalled 3,411, with the majority (84%) occurring in Northern Ireland between 1970 and 1990, with the 1970s being the deadliest decade. This period also accounted for two separate years in which deaths surpassed 300 people: 1972 and 1988.

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<sup>504</sup> Lowe (n263)

<sup>505</sup> Mark Tran, 'Who are Isis? A terror group too extreme even for al-Qaida' [The Guardian 2014] <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/11/isis-too-extreme-al-qaida-terror-jihadi>> accessed 7<sup>th</sup> June 2021.

<sup>506</sup> Allen & Kirk-Wade (n493) 5

<sup>507</sup> Ibid 5.

<sup>508</sup> 'Number of terrorist attacks in the United Kingdom (UK) from 1970 to 2019' [Statista 2020] <<https://www.statista.com/statistics/539190/incidences-of-terrorism-united-kingdom/>> accessed 7<sup>th</sup> June 2021.



In short, Western nations have *legitimate* concerns about Islamist extremism. Europe had never recorded as many jihadi terror plots as it collectively did between 2014-18. With more people dying from terrorist-related incidents during this period (345>) than in the previous 20 years (267>), the 2016-17 attack rates reached unprecedented levels.<sup>509</sup> Nevertheless, such a legitimate concern can manifest towards a disproportionate reaction cultivated and expressed in many ways, built on inaccurate sense-making and manufactured distortion. This thesis holds that even legitimate threat can produce disproportionate response, and that it is especially vital that such boundaries be measured during times of increasing volatility and hostility.

***Distortion & Disproportionality: the frequency of news reporting, changes over time & other harmful conditions***

There are several reasons why reactions achieve disproportionate levels, measurable across a number of metrics. Media reporting of deviancy, often a central foci of panic research, has grown into a salient criminological consideration (Fear of Crime research, for e.g.), with news cycles comprising an essential illustration of moral panic. Amplified volumes, fixations, and distorted presentations of *newsworthy* events encompassing participation from other leading social actors have an excessive persuasive factor in framing specific issues as being more prevalent and dangerous than they are, *sensitising* audiences to perceptions of an ever-present, inevitable threat. Through the media, panics take the form of narratives with a beginning, middle, and an end.<sup>510</sup> Chapter. 2 assessed such manufactured and lasting narratives of Islamist terrorism, cultivating an enduring fear of terrorism during the 2000s through to the 2010s propelled by untiring coverage in the Western and British press, even before the rate of Islamist extremist attacks in Europe had increased to the levels previously detailed. Alongside, as Internet access grew and social media platforms developed, so too did the volume of news content empowering periods of intense hostility and volatility appropriate to Goode & Ben-Yehuda's analogous panic characteristics.

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<sup>509</sup> Nesser (n280)

<sup>510</sup> Critcher (n19) 140-141

This is not to say that terrorism was *always* at the top of the news agenda since 2001, although media fixation has occurred in frequent, intense waves. Explored in Chapter 2, Jewkes (2015) writes that newsworthy topics are renewable if old or common issues are afforded '*sufficiently fresh impetus*<sup>511</sup> achieving a new *threshold* of interest.<sup>512</sup> Some social subjects, such as immigration, the unemployed 'Scrounger', and terrorism are on a carousel of social discourse sporadically utilised by mass media and politicians to incite fear and guide public attention. When assessing the cultivation of terrorism panic through an elite-engineered lens, news reporting and political rhetoric embodies:

1. **Distortion** of social issues through the volume of reporting and discourse concentrated on a single issue, with exaggerated descriptions of problematic events and 'deviants'.
2. **Predictions** and prophecies of future deviance or problems based on distorted depictions.
3. The **Symbolisation** of threat assigned to cultural traits attached to the manufactured problem behaviour and folk devil.<sup>513</sup>

While the media may argue that they are fulfilling their social obligation by informing the public on social issues, obsessive and inflated volumes of media reports on a single issue are, in reality, for the purpose of revenue generation, and are resultingly problematic. For example, Stainback et al. (2020) found that heavy COVID-19 news coverage and consumption were partly linked with mass psychological distress.<sup>514</sup> Chapter. 2 also highlighted that technological innovation exacerbates news volumes. Mediums such as newspapers traditionally confined to a printed format distributed once daily have since been liberated by social media platforms, providing equality in production capabilities for print, video, and audio information, enhancing capabilities for faster and copious daily distribution of news and announcements as businesses

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<sup>511</sup> Jenny Kitzinger, & Jacquie Reilly, 'The Rise and Fall of Risk Reporting: Media Coverage of Human Genetics Research, 'False Memory Syndrome' and 'Mad Cow Disease' [1997] *European Journal of Communication* 12 (3) 319

<sup>512</sup> Jewkes (n45)

<sup>513</sup> Klocke & Muschert (n11) 302

<sup>514</sup> Kevin Stainback, Brittany N. Hearne & Monica M. Trieu, 'COVID-19 and the 24/7 News Cycle: Does COVID-19 News Exposure Affect Mental Health?' [2020] *Socius: Sociological Research for a Dynamic World* 6 1

(media included) are enticed by online advertising revenue to publish higher volumes of content. Nevertheless, excessive production of content is understandable as competition for revenue-generating audience attention and article clicks is fierce in a competitive media landscape.<sup>515</sup> More news articles published on social media translates to a higher potential for audience engagement and advertising revenue.

Nevertheless, despite there being many conditions of measurably greater morbidity than terrorism, such conditions in the post-9/11 era have often failed to produce similar sustained levels of disproportionate media and political attention, hysteria, volatile hostility, and dramatic social changes. For example, between 2017-19 knife crime had fluctuated in media and public concern. By performing combined searches for the terms '*Knife Crime*' and '*Knife Attack*' on Lexis Library for the three years between 2014-16, *Table. 4.4* illustrates n=127 news reports from 54 British print news outlets.

01/01/2014 – 31/12/2016	01/01/2017 – 31/12/2019
127	911

*Table 4.4: Combined results for 'Knife Crime' & 'Knife Attack' terms searched on Lexis Library*

The period 2017-19 exemplifies increased media fixation (n=911), correlating with steadily rising annual knife crimes between 2015-20.<sup>516</sup> However, this is in contrast to terrorism coverage, despite the higher prevalence of knife criminality. Accordingly, the media have been criticised for the theatricalisation of information escalating and overstating the prevalence of terrorist threat,<sup>517</sup> handing terrorists their sought after '*wand of murderous choreography*',<sup>518</sup> gripping public attention with the ability to spread fear.<sup>519</sup> While the Lexis Library figures for knife crime illustrate significant

<sup>515</sup> 'Competition issues concerning news media and digital platforms' [OECD 2021] Competition Committee Discussion Paper <<https://www.oecd.org/daf/competition/competition-issues-in-news-media-and-digitalplatforms.htm>> accessed 30<sup>th</sup> November 2021.

<sup>516</sup> Graham Allen, Helena Carthew & Yago Zayed, 'Knife Crime Statistics' [House of Commons Library 2020] <<https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn04304/#:~:text=In%20the%20year%20ending%20March%202019%20there%20were%20259%20homicides,the%20year%20ending%20March%202018>> accessed 30<sup>th</sup> November 2021.

<sup>517</sup> Jenkins, B, *The psychological implications of media-covered terrorism* [1981] RAND Corporation, The Rand Paper Series 6627

<sup>518</sup> Marthoz (n273) 12

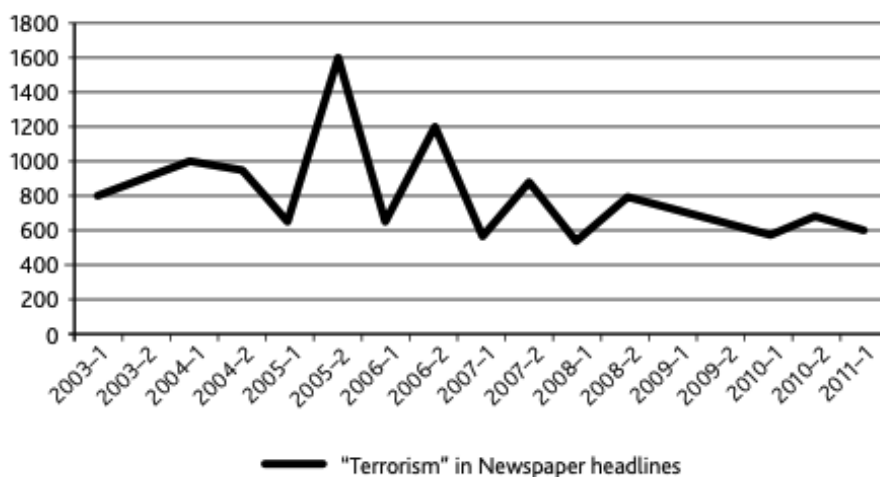
<sup>519</sup> Alexander Spencer, 'Lessons Learnt: Terrorism & the Media' [2012] AHRC Public Policy Series 4

coverage, they nevertheless fall short of matching the same media fixations illustrated with terrorism, exemplified in *Table 4.5*.

01/01/2014 – 31/12/2016	01/01/2017 – 31/12/2019
109,284	91,248

*Table 4.5: Results returned for 'Terror' term searched on Lexis Library*

Such contrasts between terrorism and other criminal activities are a starting point when assessing disproportionate reactions to terrorism. While Altheide (2006) claims that since the 9/11 attacks, terrorism has become a near-permanent fixture in news reporting,<sup>520</sup> *Table 4.5* findings show that the 'terror' term had a markedly higher return than knife crime coverage. Disproportionate news coverage amplifies the perceived prevalence of the threat, which in turn increases social fear leading to harmful social responses. Supporting, *Figure 4.1* illustrates findings collected from Lexis Nexis by Spencer (2012) relating to British print news reporting of terrorism between Jan 2003 and June 2011. Spencer's research shows volatility in media coverage during 2005 owing to the London bombings. Despite an inevitable decrease, coverage maintained a significant presence between 2003 and 2011.<sup>521</sup>



*Figure 4.1: Salience of terrorism reporting in leading British newspapers; Spencer (2012)*

Complimenting Spencer's findings, key terms were explored using Facebook's built-in search engine (see *Chapter. 3* for procedural methods). *Table. 4.6* illustrates

<sup>520</sup> Altheide (n360) 415-439

<sup>521</sup> Spencer (n519) 4

Facebook search term data published between 2014-18 from a total of n=1449 articles. The *Terrorism* datasets (n=493 or 34% of the total) indicated that terrorism captured much of the *media's attention* over the three years, returning the most articles. Following, the *Immigration* dataset (n=384), *Refugee* (n=288), *Human Rights* (n=169) also proved to be salient media topics, often interlinking with terrorism coverage. Articles which qualified for the *Other* theme shared moderate characteristics with other search terms and themes, although they did not entirely meet the necessary criteria to qualify for other themes. Examples include articles related to far-right extremism, warnings related to global population control, and the EU referendum campaign. These articles were recorded, as they were considered relevant alongside other established themes.

	<b>Total News articles</b>	<b>User article likes</b>	<b>User sharing of Articles</b>	<b>User Article views</b>	<b>Total Comments made to articles</b>	<b>Total Engagement with articles</b>
Terrorism; Terrorist; Terror	493 (34.02%)	967,761 (30.27%)	1,177,048 (42.04%)	11,195,000 (9.50%)	230,026 (25.91%)	<b>13,569,835</b> <b>(10.33%)</b>
Immigration	384 (26.50%)	1,105,055 (34.56%)	1,181,945 (42.21%)	56,158,900 (47.67%)	283,808 (31.97%)	<b>58,729,708</b> <b>(44.71%)</b>
Refugee	288 (19.88%)	606,908 (18.98%)	193,825 (6.92%)	3,177,000 (2.70%)	182,166 (20.52%)	<b>4,159,899</b> <b>3.17%</b>
Human Rights	169 (11.66%)	326,015 (10.20%)	166,433 (5.94%)	40,732,000 (34.58%)	71,322 (8.03%)	<b>41,295,770</b> <b>(31.44%)</b>
Other articles	115 (7.94%)	191,318 (5.98%)	80,709 (2.88%)	6,540,142 (5.55%)	120,325 (13.56%)	<b>13,592,961</b> <b>10.35%</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,449</b>	<b>3,197,057</b>	<b>2,799,960</b>	<b>117,803,042</b>	<b>887,647</b>	<b>131,348,173</b>

Table 4.6: Facebook search terms; all years combined (2014-18)

From *Table 4.6*, Immigration articles garnered the highest total engagements (n=58,729,708) from Facebook users, with online article engagements consisting of likes, shares, views, and comments, and are indicative of being the most salient and engaging subject capturing public attention across all areas of measurable variables, despite having fewer relevant articles.

	<b>Total News articles</b>	<b>User article likes</b>	<b>User sharing of Articles</b>	<b>User Video views</b>	<b>Total Comments made to articles</b>	<b>Total Engagement with articles</b>
Terrorism; Terrorist; Terror	125 (41.39%)	97,875 (37.43%)	35,903 (38.97%)	0	41,452 (37.49%)	<b>175,230</b> <b>(31.67%)</b>
Immigration	99 (32.78%)	86,297 (33%)	27,300 (29.63%)	89,000 (100%)	41,851 (37.85%)	<b>244,448</b> <b>(44.19%)</b>
Human Rights	20 (6.62%)	29,459 (11.27%)	8,789 (9.54%)	0	8,004 (7.24%)	<b>46,252</b> <b>(8.36%)</b>
Refugee	30 (9.93%)	33,293 (12.73%)	12,524 (13.59%)	0	7,112 (6.43%)	<b>52,929</b> <b>(9.57%)</b>
Other articles	28 (9.27%)	14,584 (5.58%)	7,619 (8.27%)	0	12,158 (11%)	<b>34,361</b> <b>(6.21%)</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>302</b>	<b>261,508</b>	<b>92,135</b>	<b>89,000</b>	<b>110,577</b>	<b>553,220</b>

Table 4.7: Facebook Search Terms (2014)

From a yearly perspective, 2014 saw Terrorism datasets return the highest number of articles (n=125 or 41.39% of the total), with *Table 4.7*, indicating that Immigration produced n=99 retrievable articles. Immigration returned more articles than did Human Rights (n=20), Refugee (n=30), and Other (n=28) combined. The Immigration theme produced the most overall engagements (n=244,448), albeit largely owing to the number of video views attached to a single article. No other articles collected or recorded in 2014 contained video footage. The total number of comments made to the Terrorism (n=41,452) and Immigration (n=41,851) datasets were almost equal, dwarfing engagement given to the other datasets.

	<b>Total News articles</b>	<b>User article likes</b>	<b>User sharing of Articles</b>	<b>User Video views</b>	<b>Total Comments made to articles</b>	<b>Total Engagement with articles</b>
Terrorism; Terrorist; Terror	107 (28.53%)	279,889 (22.71%)	91,986 (13.26%)	1,738,000 (3.35%)	52,085 (19.84%)	<b>2,161,960</b> <b>(4%)</b>
Immigration	96 (25.60%)	588,698 (47.76%)	453,127 (65.31%)	27,678,000 (53.36%)	102,840 (39.18%)	<b>28,822,665</b> <b>(53.32%)</b>
Human Rights	49 (13.07%)	51,411 (4.17%)	38,223 (5.51%)	18,000,000 (34.70%)	14,284 (5.44%)	<b>18,103,918</b> <b>(33.49%)</b>
Refugee	95 (25.33%)	244,375 (19.82%)	79,238 (11.42%)	1,328,000 (2.56%)	72,019 (27.44%)	<b>1,723,632</b> <b>(3.19%)</b>
Other articles	28 (7.47%)	68,322 (5.54%)	31,186 (4.50%)	3,126,000 (6.03%)	21,264 (8.10%)	<b>3,246,772</b> <b>(6.01%)</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>375</b>	<b>1,232,695</b>	<b>693,760</b>	<b>51,870,000</b>	<b>262,492</b>	<b>54,058,947</b>

Table 4.8: Facebook Search Terms (2015)

*Table 4.8* illustrates a substantial increase in most variables in 2015. The Terrorism theme again returned many articles (n=107), with the Immigration dataset again

(narrowly) returning the second highest (n=96). Refugee articles published on Facebook rose (n=95), albeit showing the lowest engagement with Facebook audiences. Human Rights articles rose from n=20 in 2014 to n=49 in 2015, also becoming the theme producing the second highest article engagements (n=18,103,918). However, this figure alone can be misleading as 18m of these engagements are video-view engagements. Human Rights data returns on all other metrics during 2015 were the lowest recorded. In 2015, there were more articles including video content as a source of news reporting, a trend which would continue.

	<b>Total News articles</b>	<b>User article likes</b>	<b>User sharing of Articles</b>	<b>User Video views</b>	<b>Total Comments made to articles</b>	<b>Total Engagement with articles</b>
Terrorism; Terrorist; Terror	-14.40%	185.97%	156.21%	0.00%	25.65%	<b>1,133.78%</b>
Immigration	-3.03%	582.18%	1,559.81%	30,998.88%	145.73%	<b>11,690.92%</b>
Human Rights	145.00%	74.52%	334.90%	0.00%	78.46%	<b>39,041.91%</b>
Refugee	216.67%	634.01%	532.69%	0.00%	912.64%	<b>3,156.50%</b>
Other articles	0.00%	368.47%	309.32%	0.00%	74.90%	<b>9,349.00%</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>24.17%</b>	<b>371.38%</b>	<b>652.98%</b>	<b>58,180.90%</b>	<b>137.38%</b>	<b>9,671.69%</b>

Table 4.9: Year-on-Year figures (2014-15)

Comparing 2014 to 2015, Table 4.9 shows that articles collected on both Terrorism and Immigration themes decreased. However, articles published for the remaining themes increased to ensure that the total number of articles in 2015 increased by 24%. There were significant increases across all forms of user engagement with such articles, with a total engagement rate of 9,671.69%.

	<b>Total News articles</b>	<b>User article likes</b>	<b>User sharing of Articles</b>	<b>User Video views</b>	<b>Total Comments made to articles</b>	<b>Total Engagement with articles</b>
Terrorism; Terrorist; Terror	145 (33.11%)	276,008 (29.79%)	771,644 (49.94%)	5,653,000 (9.86%)	66,094 (26.93%)	<b>6,766,746 (11.27%)</b>
Immigration	115 (26.26%)	285,284 (30.79%)	650,601 (42.11%)	26,542,000 (46.32%)	79,837 (32.53%)	<b>27,557,722 (45.91%)</b>
Human Rights	55 (12.56%)	122,530 (13.22%)	47,308 (3.06%)	21,132,000 (36.88%)	20,879 (8.51%)	<b>21,322,717 (35.52%)</b>
Refugee	93 (21.23%)	174,754 (18.86%)	54,795 (3.55%)	1,545,000 (2.70%)	58,506 (23.84%)	<b>1,833,055 (3.05%)</b>
Other articles	30 (6.85%)	68,021 (7.34%)	20,772 (1.34%)	2,434,000 (4.25%)	20,087 (8.19%)	<b>2,542,880 (4.24%)</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>438</b>	<b>926,597</b>	<b>1,545,120</b>	<b>57,306,000</b>	<b>245,403</b>	<b>60,023,120</b>

Table 4.10: Facebook Search Terms (2016)

2016 produced the most articles published overall, and most social media user engagements, as shown in *Table 4.10* confirms. Again, the Terrorism theme returned many articles published on Facebook (n=145), with Immigration second highest (n=115) and Refugee retrievals third (n=93). However, while Terrorism, Human Rights, and Refugees datasets all exhibited increases in their total engagements, Immigration saw a decline, returning fewer comments and likes than in 2015. However, the Immigration theme returned higher user article shares and video views than in 2015.

	<b>Total News articles</b>	<b>User article likes</b>	<b>User sharing of Articles</b>	<b>User Video views</b>	<b>Total Comments made to articles</b>	<b>Total Engagement with articles</b>
Terrorism; Terrorist; Terror	35.51%	-1.39%	738.87%	225.26%	26.90%	<b>212.99%</b>
Immigration	19.79%	-51.54%	43.58%	-4.10%	-22.37%	<b>-4.39%</b>
Human Rights	12.24%	138.33%	23.77%	17.40%	46.17%	<b>17.78%</b>
Refugee	-2.11%	-28.49%	-30.85%	16.34%	-18.76%	<b>6.35%</b>
Other articles	7.14%	-0.44%	-33.39%	-22.14%	-5.54%	<b>-21.68%</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>16.80%</b>	<b>-24.83%</b>	<b>122.72%</b>	<b>10.48%</b>	<b>-6.51%</b>	<b>11.03%</b>

*Table 4.11: Year-on-Year figures (2015-16)*

As *Table 4.11* illustrates that there was a 16.80% increase in overall news articles retrieved from Facebook published in 2016, with a 11.03% increase in total user engagement, despite *Table 4.11*, displaying a 6.51% decrease from 2015 in the total number of comments.

	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Terror/Terrorism/Terrorist	31,470 (54.86%)	45,200 (54.98%)	47,201 (49.36%)	<b>123,871 (52.67%)</b>
Immigration	9,926 (17.30%)	11,426 (13.90%)	18,087 (18.92%)	<b>39,439 (16.77%)</b>
Refugee	6,365 (11.10%)	13,325 (16.21%)	16,556 (17.31%)	<b>36,246 (15.41%)</b>
Human Rights	9,599 (16.73%)	12,266 (14.92%)	13,778 (14.41%)	<b>35,643 (15.15%)</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>57,360</b>	<b>82,217</b>	<b>95,622</b>	<b>235,199</b>

*Table 4.12: Lexis Library/Google Key Term Search*

To place Facebook data in a comparable context, the same terms were searched through Lexis Library and Google. *Table 4.12* illustrates the prevalence of each term,



finding the same order of salience seen in Facebook data, as Terrorism data sets (n=123,871) again saw more coverage within the media sphere than Immigration (n=39,439), Refugee (n=36,246), or Human Rights (n=35,643) coverage. When considering post 9/11 data, what data has evidenced thus far is that these key terms received elevated and prolonged media exposure, supporting Goode & Ben-Yehuda's evaluation that:

*'...moral panics may become routinised or institutionalised, that is, after the panic has run its course, the moral concern about the target behaviour results in, or remains in place in the form of, social movement organisations, legislation, enforcement practices, informal interpersonal norms or practices for punishing transgressors.'*<sup>522</sup>

As argued, contemporary terrorism garners significant political and media fixation that is disproportionate when statistically compared to other fatal or mortal threats. Goode & Ben-Yehuda propose further criterion for assessing panic disproportionality:

*'if the attention that is paid to a specific condition is vastly greater than that paid to another condition, and the concrete threat or damage caused by the first is no greater than, or less than, the second, we can say that the criterion of disproportionality has been met.'*<sup>523</sup>

Although 5,755 Americans died from terrorism between 1969-2013 resulting in a monetary outlay for homeland security exceeding \$1tr in the wake of the extraordinary events of 9/11,<sup>524</sup> 9/11 fatalities – and indeed the total US terrorism deaths between 1969-2013 - are dwarfed by the sum of people killed in America from gun-related crime in 2013 alone (33,636). Although gun crime in the US garners sporadic attention and is a divisive topic, it often fails to usher in a similar level of dramatic, sweeping actions seen in counter-terrorism legislation. In the UK, data presented in House of Commons Briefings papers,<sup>525526</sup> by the *Office of National*

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<sup>522</sup> Goode & Ben-Yehuda (n16) 41

<sup>523</sup> Ibid 45.

<sup>524</sup> Walsh (n9) 650

<sup>525</sup> Allen, Kirk-Wade & Zayed (n516)

<sup>526</sup> Allen & Kirk-Wade (n493)

Statistics (ONS),<sup>527</sup> Crown Prosecution Services (CPS)<sup>528</sup> and Statista<sup>529</sup> show many other sources of death and harm more potent than terrorism. For example, in 2019, there were 6,507 suicides in Britain,<sup>530</sup> and 1,752 deaths and 25,945 serious injuries due to road collisions.<sup>531</sup> While both issues (suicide in particular) gain sporadic media and political discourse, such attention fails to reach panic levels. Drawing comparatives from other, more comparably violent criminality, with the UK's 92 terrorist deaths since 2003 in mind, Britain saw 725 homicides between June 2019-2020, an increase from 668 during the previous 12-month period. Where Britain recorded more than 1000 examples of terrorist activity between 2003-17 with only 92 fatalities, there have been approximately 11,500 homicides.<sup>532</sup>

	<b>Terrorism</b>	<b>Homicides</b>	<b>Knife Crime</b>	<b>Firearms Offences</b>
Deaths/Occurrences	92	11,578	3,737	996
Total Instances	1,009	11,578	322,960	137,697

Table 4.13: UK Fatalities (2003-17)

Between 2003-17, there have also been over 322,960 recorded instances of knife crime in Britain; again, rising since 2017, with 259 homicides to the year ending 2019 involving a knife or sharp object.<sup>533</sup> There were also 137,697 firearm offences, which increased from 2016 to 2018.<sup>534</sup> Table 4.13 illustrates figures regarding these violent offences, with homicides, knife crime, and firearms offences resulting in more deaths

<sup>527</sup> 'Leading Causes of Death, UK: 2001 to 2018' [Office for National Statistics 2020] <<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/causesofdeath/articles/leadingcausesofdeathuk/2001to2018>> accessed 18<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

<sup>528</sup> 'Homicide: Murder and Manslaughter' [Crown Prosecution Service 2019] <<https://www.cps.gov.uk/legal-guidance/homicide-murder-and-manslaughter>> accessed 18<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

<sup>529</sup> Statista (n508)

<sup>530</sup> 'Suicide Statistics Report: Latest Figures for the UK and Republic of Ireland' [The Samaritans 2019]

<[https://media.samaritans.org/documents/SamaritansSuicideStatsReport\\_2019\\_Full\\_report.pdf](https://media.samaritans.org/documents/SamaritansSuicideStatsReport_2019_Full_report.pdf)> accessed 18<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

<sup>531</sup> 'Reported Road Casualties in Great Britain: 2019 annual report' [Department for Transport 2020] <<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/reported-road-casualties-great-britain-annual-report-2019>> accessed 18<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

<sup>532</sup> 'Homicide in England and Wales: year ending March 2019' [Office for National Statistics 2020] <<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/homicideinenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2019#what-do-trends-in-homicide-look-like>> accessed 18<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

<sup>533</sup> Allen & Kirk-Wade (n493)

<sup>534</sup> 'Crime in England and Wales: year ending June 2020' [Office for National Statistics 2020] <<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/crimeinenglandandwales/yearendingjune2020#offences-involving-firearms>> accessed 18<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

or occurring with more regularity than terrorist attacks resulting in fatalities. The media tends to give more attention to terrorism incidents compared to other issues, despite statistical evidence suggesting that the latter may be more deserving of attention. The coverage given to terrorism during the early-to-mid 2010s was disproportionate, contributing to a distorted perception of its prevalence. Additionally, the widespread use of social media has amplified the impact of such inflated coverage.

### **No Novelty in the Modus Operandi: Creating Concern**

An element aiding the consensus of growing concerns surrounding Islamist terrorism during panic cultivation was the perception that Islamist terror was an entirely novel threat. Since 2001, Islamist attacks have evidenced patterns of assailants *inspired* to strike Western countries without having been personally directed by Islamist groups located in the Middle East. When considering proposed 'old' and 'new' terrorism eras, there are similarities between both which include:

- Both old and new groups consisting of *cells*. These cells may, or may not, have direct contact with the central command but nonetheless carry out operations *in the name* of the groups or cause.
- The old and new terrorist groups are responsible for *acts of extreme violence* which result in civilian casualties.
- All terrorist entities utilise *modern technologies* and other advantageous environmental means. While Islamist extremist groups have made the most of the Internet, communication technologies, ease of travel, and benefits of globalisation, older terrorist groups seized similar opportunities available to them.
- The targeting of *iconic or symbolic landmarks* is not new; for example, the PIRA's attacks on *10 Downing Street* during The Troubles.

As Jenkins (1985) writes, '*Terrorists blow up things, kill people or seize hostages. Every terrorist incident is merely a variation of these three activities.*'<sup>535</sup> Attacks to

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<sup>535</sup> Brian Michael Jenkins, 'The Future Course of International Terrorism' [1985] RAND Corporation <<https://www.rand.org/pubs/papers/P7139.html>> accessed 7<sup>th</sup> October 2020.

Western states – irrespective of magnitude or sophistication – garnered intense media coverage; ‘*affective*’ violence.<sup>536</sup> At first glance, 9/11 coverage comprised much of the perceived elements of a ‘new’ and ‘novel’ terrorism, providing stimuli for what would become recognised as a tool for the modern terrorist - vehicles as weapons - exploited by Islamists applying guerrilla warfare tactics.<sup>537</sup> Despite the *modus operandi* and scale of 9/11, threat of violence from modern Islamist groups is not fundamentally different from that in the past. Neumann (2009) declares that modern terrorism is operationally conventional, with 95% of attacks illustrating just a handful of differing tactics such as bombing, kidnapping and hijackings.<sup>538</sup> Owing to the scale of civilian deaths and iconic infrastructural targets, the 9/11 attacks were framed to consuming audiences as a demonstration of an entirely different *modus operandi* of Islamist fundamentalist groups. However, hostage taking and the use of transportation in terror attacks had already been seen to occur. Furthermore, legislation such as *Offences & Certain Other Acts Committed on Board Aircrafts* (1963); *the Suppression for the Unlawful Seizure of Aircrafts* (1970); *Preventions & Punishments of Crimes against Internationally Protected Persons* (1973); *the Convention against the Taking of Hostages* (1979); *on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Materials* (1980); *the Suppression of Terrorist Bombings* (1997); and *the Financing of Terrorism* (1999) addressed a range of potential and persistent terrorist threats.

Nevertheless, the intensity of such attacks was to increase in frequency during the 2010s. An ISIL directive issued in 2014 calling for jihadis worldwide to increase attacks from within their own countries resulted in a notable increase of ‘low-grade’ attacks against ‘non-traditional’ (civilian) targets in Europe and North America,<sup>539</sup> often utilising vehicles in marauding-styled attacks. Many European countries have been the target of ISIL-inspired attacks since 2014, with France, Germany, and Belgium suffering the highest death tolls after Turkey, mainly owing to a series of

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<sup>536</sup> Walsh (n9) 643-662

<sup>537</sup> CNN Editorial Research, ‘11<sup>th</sup> September Terror Attacks Fast Facts’ [CNN 2020] <<https://edition.cnn.com/2013/07/27/us/september-11-anniversary-fast-facts/index.html>> accessed 7<sup>th</sup> October 2020.

<sup>538</sup> Neumann (n265) 25

<sup>539</sup> ‘Global Terrorism Index 2017: Measuring and Understanding the Impact of Terrorism; [Institute for Economics and Peace 2017] 56-57 <<https://www.economicsandpeace.org/reports/>> accessed 18<sup>th</sup> Dec 2020.

vehicular and explosive attacks in cities such as Nice, Brussels, and Berlin (all claimed by ISIL).<sup>540</sup> These were conducted with markedly increased regularity of automobiles used as weapons.<sup>541</sup> However, many of these assaults resulted in few deaths and injuries, and relative little damage to property or infrastructure. For example, an attack in Amsterdam in 2018 resulted in the deaths of two tourist by stabbing.<sup>542</sup> Though, there were also attacks resulting in much higher death totals and destruction. Bombings and explosions were used in over 55% of the attacks (the most common method used in Europe between 2002 and 2016).<sup>543</sup> The deadliest attack in 2017 was conducted against civilians in a nightclub in Istanbul, Turkey, killing 39 people. This was followed by the Manchester Arena (23 deaths/119 injured) and Barcelona (23 deaths/101 injured) attacks. ISIL, again, claimed responsibility for these attacks.<sup>544</sup> Deaths in North America rose for the fourth consecutive year, from 65 in 2016 to 85 in 2017, with Canada having its second deadliest year since 1998, with six deaths. The USA recorded increased deaths (mainly due to Las Vegas shootings, where 59 died).<sup>545</sup> Despite the fall in European terrorism deaths, the number of incidents rose from 252 in 2017 to 282 in 2016, and the majority of ISIL-inspired incidents have been a trend over the previous five years.<sup>546</sup> Despite large-scale 2017 attacks in Manchester and Barcelona, terrorism in Europe decreased during the latter years of the 2010s. The average impact of terrorism fell in 2017 as deaths in Europe decreased from 198 in 2016 to 64 in 2017,<sup>547</sup> with 21 countries recording improved GTI scores, while 11 (UK, Spain, Finland, Sweden, Austria, for example) reported deteriorations, as did North America (the USA & Canada). During 2017:

- France recorded 7 deaths, down (93%) from 162 in 2015
- Germany recorded 2 deaths, down (96%) from 26 in 2016

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<sup>540</sup> 'Global Terrorism Index 2018: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism' [Institute for Economics & Peace 2019] 40 <<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Global-Terrorism-Index-2018-1.pdf>> accessed 18<sup>th</sup> Dec 2020.

<sup>541</sup> Global Terrorism Index 2017 (n539)

<sup>542</sup> 'Amsterdam attack: Jihadist knifeman shot in nine seconds' [BBC News 2018] <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-45419445>> accessed 29<sup>th</sup> July 2020.

<sup>543</sup> Global Terrorism Index 2017 (n539)

<sup>544</sup> Global Terrorism Index 2018 (n540)

<sup>545</sup> Ibid 45.

<sup>546</sup> Ibid 46.

<sup>547</sup> Ibid 16.

- Belgium recorded 2 deaths, down (94%) from 36 in 2016.<sup>548</sup>

In 2018, Western European nations recorded their lowest terrorist incident rates in 2012, with no ISIL-related deaths. Findings from the *Global Terrorism Index* (GTI, 2018), which utilised data collected internationally during 2017 to provide a global perspective on ongoing terrorist and Islamist extremist issues, found that ISIL was the most active terrorist group globally, a position held since 2015. By 2017, ISIL-related deaths were at their lowest since 2015, as the group lost 60% of its territory in the Middle East and 80% of its Caliphate revenue. Deaths by the groups dropped from 52% (9,150 to 4,350), while the lethality of their attacks decreased from 8 to 4.9 per attack. Nevertheless, they remained active in ten countries and committed attacks in 286 cities globally. However, most occurred in the Middle East and North African (MENA) countries, with 90% of attacks and 81% of deaths occurring in Iraq alone, and four of the deadliest attacks in Mosul.<sup>549</sup> In short, while some attacks did result in higher deaths from more sophisticated techniques, these methods were not new. While safety concerns were justified, this perceived and framed novelty factor acted as fuel for moral panic, distorting the legitimacy and likelihood of attacks in Western nations. Nevertheless, frequency of dramatic reporting built a consensus built upon distortion.

Like many other aspects discussed, terrorist 'cells' are not a new element. Throughout history, terrorist groups have been able to organise themselves into small, self-contained units or (clandestine) cells. The Syrian war and the rise of ISIL breathed new life into the European jihadi movement.<sup>550</sup> While Wright-Neville (2010) discussed *administrative cells* (tasked with carrying out specific tasks such as procurement of weapons and recruitment) and *operational cells* (those which allow the hierarchy to expand operations across a wider geographic area), he does so with more traditional terrorist structures in mind. However, Wright-Neville describes 'self-starter' terrorist groups with no clear leadership or network base and who constitute primarily individuals who have been radicalised through informal relationships.<sup>551</sup>

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<sup>548</sup> Ibid.

<sup>549</sup> Ibid 15.

<sup>550</sup> Nesser (n280)

<sup>551</sup> David Wright-Neville, *Dictionary of Terrorism* [Polity Press 2010] 58

While the operations of central and networking Islamist extremist group activities in Middle Eastern and North African conflict states could be expected to have little effect on the public mood (and perhaps even interest) of Western state populations owing to proximity (seems like a faraway problem of others), covert cells, lone wolves, foreign fighters, and their modus operandi are factors of Islamist extremism which carry a relevant threat to the UK. Like common criminal activity, terrorism can be carried out by individuals or groups, and can never be expunged entirely from the social environment.<sup>552</sup> Clandestine cells are not a new addition to the terrorist approach, though they have evolved their methods, as evidenced by the al-Qaeda training manual, which outlines strategies for conducting operations and carrying out tasks, such as forging documents, securing bases for operations/hiding places, communication methods, and spying methods.<sup>553</sup> As the IRA viewed themselves as a 'legitimate' army in a 'legitimate' conflict, they incorporated an authentic military structure. The PIRA's internal structure consisted of dispersed cells (battalions) which would also, at times, amalgamate to form smaller brigades. However, these battalions were better organised and more prominent in number than the typical cells of Islamist extremists in the UK. The fact that they existed means that the UK has had underground, small bands of terrorists operating amongst society for generations; for example, the Gunpowder Plot of 1605. The threat from cells creates a 'cloak-and-dagger' threat close in proximity.<sup>554</sup>

### **Terrorism Predictions & Warnings: Creating Concerns of Terrorism**

At the top of this chapter, *Table 4.1* illustrated first-order Facebook news article themes. From the list of themes presented in *Table 4.1*, an established *Terrorism* theme (527 references) was presented. Investigating this theme further, *Table 4.14* provides second-order, *Axial* (sub) themes.

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<sup>552</sup> John Mueller, 'The threat of terrorism is overblown and more manageable than suspected' in Stuart Gottlieb (ed), *Debating Terrorism and Counterterrorism: Conflicting Perspectives on Causes, Contexts and Responses* [2<sup>nd</sup> ed, Sage Publishing 2014] 383

<sup>553</sup> 'Al-Qaeda Training Manual' [Department of Justice 2018]  
<[https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/ag/legacy/2002/10/08/manualpart1\\_1.pdf](https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/ag/legacy/2002/10/08/manualpart1_1.pdf)> accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2018.

<sup>554</sup> Randall Law, *Terrorism: A History* [2<sup>nd</sup> ed, Polity Press 2016]

Sub-Themes	2014	2015	2016
Attacks (Western states)	2	20	28
Counter-Narrative	10	19	13
CT Approaches	47	21	18
Fake News	2	1	2
FF's	15	6	3
Folk Devil	3	24	25
Hostages/Beheadings	6	1	0
Links to Immigration/Refugees	3	8	30
Plots/Foiled Plots	22	7	29
Public Opinion	2	0	0
Rationales for Terrorism	3	6	4
Terrorism in other Countries (Non-Western)	12	8	2
Warnings	27	17	60
Brexit	0	0	7
Far Right	0	0	1
Values	0	0	6

Table 4.14: Terrorism thematic subthemes: Facebook news articles (2014-16)

Second-order analysis found that some terrorism concerns were anticipated and obvious, with 'successful' attacks inciting fear of death, injury, destruction of property, or a combination of all three. However, as highlighted, successful attacks are infrequent in the UK, and when they occur, they produce much less overall detriment than many other social harms. Nevertheless, a successful terrorist attack causes mass fear and demands attention in political and media discourse. When considering *why* or *how* terroristic episodes achieve newsworthiness, deliberation should be afforded to *how* and *why* news operationally set agendas which frame concerns. Jewkes (2015) referred to the construction of crime stories in the media, highlighting 12 news values when shaping crime news.<sup>555</sup> Such values are useful for explaining media reports of terrorism and may play a role in developing an understanding of mass panic. The *Threshold* value expresses that events must achieve a level of salience to be considered newsworthy.<sup>556</sup> Numerical data provided in this chapter and the next indicates that such an interest threshold has been reached in media coverage and social media user engagement, worthy of prolonged and fixated reporting. Such reporting focused not just on attacks, but evolved to consider superfluous features of terrorism. In elevating terroristic issues to a salient threshold level, media coverage of terrorism exposed 'wickedness' and 'evil',

<sup>555</sup> The twelve news structures/values are Threshold, Predictability, Simplification, Individualism, Risk, Sex, Celebrity or high-status persons, Proximity, Violence or conflict, Visual spectacle or graphic imagery, Children, & Conservative ideology and political diversion in Yvonne Jewkes, *Media & Crime* [3<sup>rd</sup> Ed, Sage Publishing 2015] 43-80

<sup>556</sup> Ibid 49.



justifying the growing consensus of concern. As the attacks themselves brought a reality of terrorism to the public, predictions and warnings of further attacks and other terroristic harms sensitised audiences to looming danger.

From the data analysed, reports from the British press and discourse from political elites elicited persistent *Warnings* (Table 4.14) of terrorism during the 2010s. Such coverage increases civic hostilities and desires for unconstrained punitiveness<sup>557</sup> departing from baseline ethical standards under the rule of law and rational levels of tolerance, as press coverage transferred concerns and '*stereotypes into actuality and elevating the perceived actuality of deviancy.*'<sup>558</sup> Cohen (2002) argued that those exposed to such intense adversity cultivate disjointed assessments of what has transpired.<sup>559</sup> It is during such periods of heightened sensitivity, elite institutions hold *the* leading authority in sense making and framing of proceedings. Persistent media and political warnings fashioned civic expectations of imminent threat and harm to an 'evil terrorist folk devil' already inside British borders (close in proximity). Such a perception maintained a threshold level for terrorist issues, aided by research findings illustrating that terrorism warnings overlapped with other dominant sub-themes; e.g., *Immigration*. The purported proximity of this threat and the everyday, identifiable folk devil crafted a public sensitivity to imminent harm. Warning sensitised the public to a dire circumstance presented as a 'certainty to occur' (*when, not if*) through recurrent and frequently made predictions.

Moral panic research has concentrated on the stages of sociological reactions to perceived, impending threats, and has paid particular attention to defensive reactions and coping mechanisms when assessing future disasters. For Cohen, there were few warnings before the Clacton-on-Sea incident which ignited the moral panic of Mods & Rockers youth groups, although he chartered warning periods leading up to follow-up British Bank Holidays weekends anticipating anti-social behaviour between these groups.<sup>560</sup> This was not necessarily the case for Islamist terrorist attacks during the 2010s. Although terrorists operate covertly, and

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<sup>557</sup> Sarah Wright, 'Moral panics as enacted melodramas' [2015] *British Journal of Criminology* 55 (6) 1245

<sup>558</sup> Walsh (n3) 1-20

<sup>559</sup> Cohen (n1) 17

<sup>560</sup> *Ibid* 163.

successful attacks catch Western societies unaware, retaliatory attacks on Europe during the 2010s were expected (to an extent) as Middle Eastern conflicts intensified. During such time, outright threats were made by Islamist extremist groups such as ISIL against 'infidels' in Middle Eastern regions and across the globe, amplified by mainstream media, politicians, and security services. Taking such threats seriously was to be expected. Although, again, we refer to the low-scale efforts of such attacks, and consider the necessity and proportionality of reaction.

While warnings created a sense of inevitability, the extreme content gave a glimpse of what would happen next. During the early-to-mid 2010s, news reporting of attacks and brutal Islamist activity in the Middle East (beheadings and large-scale civilian bombings) alerted audiences to the potential of similar actions in Britain, presented as Warnings in news headlines, reinforced by 'near-miss' revelations of *failed or foiled terror plots*. In 2014, Prime Minister David Cameron predicted an Islamist terror attack and declared that jihadists were planning terror strikes in Britain.<sup>561</sup> The Daily Mail reported that the UK was ISIL's '*number one terror target*'<sup>562</sup> and that Britons faced a heightened and discriminated threat of attack, even when holidaying abroad.<sup>563</sup> In 2015, Sky News warned that the UK was in a '*dangerous phase of terror threat*',<sup>564</sup> as the Daily Express reported that Britain would be '*NEXT to be ATTACKED by jihadists, supporters claim*',<sup>565</sup> the Daily Mail provided a '*Map of Terror*'. During 2016, Sky News reported that a terrorist attack was a matter of

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<sup>561</sup> Jack Blanchard, 'David Cameron: 'ISIS and Syria jihadists are planning terror attacks on Britain' [Daily Mirror 2014] <<https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/david-cameron-isis-syria-jihadists-3720849>> accessed 18<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

<sup>562</sup> Ian Drury, 'Britain is Europe's number one terror target: Country ranks 27 out of 162 nations on global index after 131 terror incidents in the past year' [Daily Mail 2014] <<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2838622/Britain-Europe-s-number-one-terror-target-Country-ranks-27-162-nations-global-index-131-terror-incidents-past-year.html>> accessed 18<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

<sup>563</sup> John Hall, 'Terror warning for UK tourists: Foreign office updates travel advice for all global destinations to say Britons face 'heightened threat' of attack from ISIS supporters' [Daily Mail 2014] <<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2816595/Terror-warning-UK-tourists-Foreign-office-updates-travel-advice-global-destinations-say-Britons-face-heightened-threat-attack-ISIS-supporters.html>> accessed 18<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

<sup>564</sup> Mark White, 'UK Facing 'Dangerous Phase Of Terror Threat' [Sky News 2015] <<https://news.sky.com/story/uk-facing-dangerous-phase-of-terror-threat-10339023>> accessed 18<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

<sup>565</sup> Tom Parfitt, 'ISIS TERROR WARNING: Britain NEXT to be ATTACKED by jihadists, supporters claim' [Daily Express 2015] <<https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/619371/Islamic-State-ISIS-Britain-London-Paris-attacks-Twitter>> accessed 18<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

'when, not if';<sup>566</sup> as The Times<sup>567</sup> and The Guardian<sup>568</sup> both told that ISIS was planning a '*terrorist spectacular*' involving simultaneous attacks across Britain and Europe. The Telegraph claimed that terror alerts were '*the new normal*';<sup>569</sup> the Daily Express stating that '*another ISIS attack WILL happen*';<sup>570</sup> with The Mirror claiming, '*ISIS to attack London next*'<sup>571</sup> and London Mayor Sadiq Khan stated that terrorism was '*part of living in a big city*'.<sup>572</sup> In December 2016, the Daily Express published an article, '*TERROR WARNING: ISIS plotting brutal 2017 SLAUGHTER across Europe to spark apocalyptic battle*'.<sup>573</sup>

Supplementing Warnings, there were occasional and often vague confirmations of *Failed and Foiled terrorist plots* (Tables. 4.1 & 4.14). For example, in 2014 the press reported foiled terror attacks on Remembrance Sunday celebrations,<sup>574</sup> attacks on British passenger planes<sup>575</sup> and airports using 'human' bombs;<sup>576</sup> toothpaste tube

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<sup>566</sup> 'UK Terror Attack 'When, Not If' - Police Chief; [Sky News 2016] <<https://news.sky.com/story/uk-terror-attack-when-not-if-police-chief-10518223>> accessed 18<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

<sup>567</sup> David Brown, 'Isis fanatics planning 'spectacular' attack in UK' [The Times 2016] <<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/smuggled-jihadists-planning-spectacular-uk-attack-dnqlbn7r2>> accessed 18<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

<sup>568</sup> Vikram Dodd, 'Isis planning 'enormous and spectacular attacks', anti-terror chief warns' [The Guardian 2016] <<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/mar/07/isis-planning-enormous-and-spectacular-attacks-uk-counter-terrorism-chief-warns>> accessed 18<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

<sup>569</sup> Melanie Hall, 'Terror alerts are the 'new normal' says top German policeman' [The Telegraph 2016] <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/germany/12078221/Terror-alerts-are-the-new-normal-says-top-German-policeman.html>> accessed 18<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

<sup>570</sup> Suz Elvey, 'EUROPE TERROR WARNING: Another ISIS attack WILL happen, warns French PM' [Daily Express 2016] <<https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/643750/ISIS-terror-warning-Europe-attack-French-PM-Manuel-Vall>> accessed 18<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

<sup>571</sup> Scott Campbell, 'ISIS warn London 'next to be attacked' as UK churches put on terror alert after French priest murder' [Daily Mirror 2016] <<https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/isis-warn-london-next-attacked-8500399>> accessed 18<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

<sup>572</sup> Sun Reporter, 'WE HAVE TO BE PREPARED' London Mayor Sadiq Khan claims terror attacks are 'part and parcel of living in a big city' [The Sun 2016] <<https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/1830168/london-mayor-sadiq-khan-claims-terror-attacks-are-part-and-parcel-of-living-in-a-big-city/>> accessed 18<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

<sup>573</sup> 'TERROR WARNING: ISIS plotting brutal 2017 SLAUGHTER across Europe to spark apocalyptic battle' [Daily Express 2016] <<https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/739078/Europol-terror-threat-isis-germany-uk-belgium>> accessed 18<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

<sup>574</sup> Tom Pettifor, 'Armed cops swoop on Islamist terror plot suspects amid fears over Remembrance Sunday attacks' [Daily Mirror 2014] <<https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/armed-cops-swoop-islamist-terror-4589262>> accessed 18<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

<sup>575</sup> Donal MacIntyre, 'EXCLUSIVE: Al Qaeda plot to blow up 5 passenger planes in Christmas 'spectacular' [Daily Express 2014] <<https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/541725/REVEALED-Al-Qaeda-plot-to-blow-up-5-European-passenger-jets-in-Christmas-spectacular>> accessed 18<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

<sup>576</sup> James Lyons & Christopher Bucktin, 'British airports on alert over fears that terrorists are plotting attack using 'human bombs' [Daily Mirror 2014] <<https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/british-airports-alert-over-fears-3806303>> accessed 18<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

bombs;<sup>577</sup> plots to kill the Queen of England, target high-profile sporting events<sup>578</sup> and leading British political figures;<sup>579</sup> plots to behead police officers;<sup>580</sup> and threats encouraged by radical British Islamist preachers.<sup>581</sup> However, whilst newsworthy, such revelations often stressed the potential for harm, rather than the proficiencies of British security forces and legislative powers in successfully tackling such risks. Such reports also neglected to highlight the inabilities and limitations of terrorist assailants. Failed and foiled terror plots exemplified the inability of Islamist extremist cells and lone actors to mount sophisticated, coordinated, and large-scale attacks on a much more frequent basis, while also illustrating the preparedness of security services to deal with security threats under the current legislative powers. The capacity of most of the successful attacks on the UK post-9/11 could be considered relatively low-grade; London (2005) and Manchester (2017) bombings were excluded. Although 2018 saw more jihadi attack plots than 2014, this was half the amount seen in 2017, with several foiled attacks capable of mass casualties being successful.<sup>582</sup> Together, 2014 and 2018 had the most jihadi terrorism deaths compared to the previous 20 years, and this period also arguably saw most plots that had gone undetected, resulting in attacks.<sup>583</sup> These realisations necessitated for vigilance, yes, but also a measured realisation of how effective UK security is when addressing covert terroristic threat. The number of thwarted attacks comparative to those successful was indicative of adequate security services and legal provisions. A range of modus operandi was illustrated in the reporting of thwarted attacks, including stealth bombs, civilians, and tourists, further exemplifying the durability of security.

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<sup>577</sup> Katie Stallard, 'Toothpaste Bomb' Fears Over Russia Flights' [Sky News 2014] <<https://news.sky.com/story/toothpaste-bomb-fears-over-russia-flights-10418413>> accessed 18<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

<sup>578</sup> Mia de Graaf, 'Lone-wolf' jihadists told to target Queen at high-profile sporting events, including Wimbledon and Cheltenham, in latest chilling threats from al-Qaeda' [Daily Mail 2014] <<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2587196/Jihadists-told-target-Queen-high-profile-sporting-events-series-lone-wolf-attacks-including-Wimbledon-FA-Cup-matches.html>> accessed 18<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

<sup>579</sup> Ian Cobain, 'Terrorism trial hears of possible plot to assassinate Tony Blair' [The Guardian 2014] <<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/oct/14/terrorism-trial-possible-plot-kill-tony-blair>> accessed 18<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

<sup>580</sup> Glen Owen, 'Warning to police as terror gang 'plan to behead officer': Off-duty staff on alert amid fears of a Lee Rigby-style attack' [Daily Mail 2014] <<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2789573/warning-police-terror-gang-plan-behead-officer-duty-staff-alert-amid-fears-lee-rigby-style-attack.html>> accessed 18<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

<sup>581</sup> 'Anjem Choudary held in London terror raids' [BBC News 2014] <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-29358758>> accessed 18<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

<sup>582</sup> Nesser (n280)

<sup>583</sup> Ibid.

As cultivation created a sense of impending and brutal threat, cultivation also highlighted its source. Beyond warnings highlighting the more obvious physical threat, associations were made to migration in exacerbating economic, social, and cultural problems. As Islamist terrorism flared alongside the Arab Spring, the Syrian conflict, and continued instability in Iraq, there was a related mass movement of refugees fleeing to Europe. When exhibiting moral boundaries and dreary predictions about dangerous *Others*, threats to safety, and perils to the moral fabric of society, the melodramatic narrative of news reporting sensitises audiences. 'Dangerous' non-British people were '*coming in*' as potential security threats. For example, in 2014, The Sun ran with the headline '*Target Britain: Record wave of African war refugees behind the recent Calais riots battle to get into the UK*'<sup>584</sup> amplifying the perception of an *enemy plotting from within*. Other stories reported that '*Jihadi John's British terror ring smashed as cops uncover a network stretching across the UK*'<sup>585</sup> Boris Johnson claimed that security services were '*monitoring 'thousands' of terrorism suspects in London*'<sup>586</sup> and Theresa May declared that '*around FORTY major terror plots*' had been thwarted since the 7/7 attacks of 2005.<sup>587</sup> Press reports of Islamist terrorist plots during 2015 were similar, with former Director General of MI5, Andrew Parker, disclosing that six terror attacks had been foiled in the twelve months leading up to September 2015'<sup>588</sup> former MET police Assistant Commissioner for Specialist Operations, Mark Rowley, stated that police are watching 118 Syrian jihadis in Britain with 183 suspects held over Syria-related crimes,<sup>589</sup> arrests made in the UK

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<sup>584</sup> 'Target Britain: Record wave of African war refugees behind the recent Calais riots battle to get into the UK' [The Sun 2014] <<https://www.facebook.com/thesun/posts/988026117890494>> accessed 25<sup>th</sup> July 2021.

<sup>585</sup> Amardeep Basse, 'EXCLUSIVE: Jihadi John's British terror ring smashed as cops uncover a network stretching across the UK' [Daily Mirror 2014] <<https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/jihadi-johns-british-terror-ring-4721424>> accessed 25<sup>th</sup> July 2021.

<sup>586</sup> Gordon Rayner & Gaby Wood, 'Security services monitoring 'thousands' of terrorism suspects in London, says Boris Johnson' [The Telegraph 2014] <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/terrorism-in-the-uk/11154733/Security-services-monitoring-thousands-of-terrorism-suspects-in-London-says-Boris-Johnson.html>> accessed 25<sup>th</sup> July 2021.

<sup>587</sup> Alexandra Topping, 'Theresa May claims 40 terror plots have been foiled since 7/7 attacks' [The Guardian 2014] <<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2014/nov/24/theresa-may-london-attacks-40-terror-plots-foiled>> accessed 25<sup>th</sup> July 2021.

<sup>588</sup> Jason Beattie, 'Spy chief slams tech firms for not helping terror fight' [Daily Mirror 2015] <<https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/spy-chief-slams-tech-firms-6458836>> accessed 25<sup>th</sup> July 2021.

<sup>589</sup> Martin Beckford, 'UK counter-terror chief reveals police are watching 118 Syrian jihadis in Britain with 183 suspects held over Syria-related crime' [Daily Mail 2015]

as part of a Europe-wide investigation into suspected terrorist networks;<sup>590</sup> and even that ISIS were '*plotting a NUCLEAR HOLOCAUST*'.<sup>591</sup> By 2016, media reports consisted once more of plots against the UK and other nations,<sup>592</sup> the spreading of ISIS terror groups across Europe,<sup>593</sup> failed attacks at the European football championships,<sup>594</sup> London Underground and Gatwick airport (using sarin gas),<sup>595</sup> and terror plots in Brighton<sup>596</sup> and Birmingham.<sup>597</sup> In short, media and political discourse heavily portrayed an Islamist terrorist threat that was 'already here courtesy of immigration', and that attacks were immanent (using foiled attacks as proof).

### ***Immigration as a Trojan Horse***

With the Islamic State achieving notoriety, the media and other social actors created a highly sensitised atmosphere based on predictions of impending attacks, with the proximity of the threat inside UK borders. The Guardian reported that terrorist killings in the Middle East and North Africa had risen by 80% in 2014, increasing refugees into Europe. By 2015, a media nexus between migrants, refugees, and terrorism had been fortified.<sup>598</sup> Media discourse concentrated on Trojan Horse tactics. In this

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<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3328754/UK-counter-terror-chief-reveals-police-watching-118-Syrian-jihadis-Britain-183-suspects-held-Syria-related-crime.html>> accessed 25<sup>th</sup> July 2021.

<sup>590</sup> Awat Hamasalih, 'Arrested British terror suspect named' [ITV News 2015]

<https://www.itv.com/news/2015-11-12/arrested-british-terror-suspect-named>> accessed 25<sup>th</sup> July 2021.

<sup>591</sup> Darren Boyle, 'Isis planning 'nuclear holocaust' to wipe hundreds of millions from face of the earth', claims reporter who embedded with the extremists' [Daily Mail 2015]

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3253789/Isis-planning-nuclear-holocaust-wipe-hundreds-millions-face-earth-claims-reporter-embedded-extremists.html>> accessed 25<sup>th</sup> July 2021.

<sup>592</sup> 'Islamic State terror plots revealed in seized 10,000 documents' [Sky News 2016]

<https://news.sky.com/story/islamic-state-terror-plots-revealed-in-seized-10-000-documents-10675653>> accessed 25<sup>th</sup> July 2021.

<sup>593</sup> Tom Whitehead, 'Brussels explosions: The ISIL terror cell that spread across Europe' [The Telegraph 2016] <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/belgium/12201703/brussels-explosions-isil-terror-cell-spreads-across-Europe.html>> accessed 25<sup>th</sup> July 2021.

<sup>594</sup> Tom Wyke, 'Brussels ISIS terror cell 'had planned to carry out new massacre at Euro 2016' [Daily Mail 2016] <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3533574/Brussels-ISIS-terror-cell-planned-carry-new-massacre-Euro-2016-football-tournament-France.html>> accessed 25<sup>th</sup> July 2021.

<sup>595</sup> Danny Collins, 'Toxic Tube threat: ISIS 'plotting sarin nerve gas attack' on the London Underground' [The Sun 2016] <https://www.thesun.co.uk/archives/news/1125509/toxic-tube-threat-isis-plotting-sarin-nerve-gas-attack-on-the-london-underground/>> accessed 25<sup>th</sup> July 2021.

<sup>596</sup> Rebecca Flood, 'BRIGHTON TERROR PLOT: Teen ISIS jihadis 'planned' gun and knife attack on seaside town' [Daily Express 2016] <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/657779/Islamic-State-ISIS-terror-plot-Brighton-jihadis-Syria>> accessed 25<sup>th</sup> July 2021.

<sup>597</sup> 'Five suspects held by anti-terror police' [Sky News 2016] <https://news.sky.com/story/five-suspects-held-by-anti-terror-police-10243683>> accessed 25<sup>th</sup> July 2021.

<sup>598</sup> Mark Anderson, 'Terrorist killings up by 80% in 2014, fuelling flow of refugees, report says' [The Guardian 2015] <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2015/nov/17/terrorist-killings-up-by-80-per-cent-2014-fuelling-flow-refugees-global-terrorism-index>> accessed 25<sup>th</sup> July 2021.

context, the Trojan Horse notion holds that terrorist groups strategically dispatch operatives to Europe under the guise of vulnerable immigrants or refugees. Media stories during 2014 included coverage of violence seen during 'riots' in camps,<sup>599</sup> and a story regarding an illegal immigrant caught using cameras covertly to spy on children.<sup>600</sup> Coverage on the possibility of terrorists entering Europe and the UK in this Trojan Horse fashion was broadly reported throughout 2015, with the Daily Express writing 22<sup>nd</sup> June that ISIS terrorists '*sneak into Europe disguised as migrants*',<sup>601</sup> and again on 30th September that 'EU open door border policy is a welcome mat for ISIS terrorists targeting UK', claiming that ISIS was using the migrant crisis to '*smuggle THOUSANDS of extremists into Europe*.'<sup>602</sup> The Daily Mirror reported on 15th November that an assailant in the Paris attacks '*snuck into Europe with refugees*', with Conservative MP Richard Drax stating, "*What better way to get a terrorist into the West amidst all this chaos?*".<sup>603</sup> The Daily Mirror continued their reporting of this subject, later that same day reporting that '*Paris attacks terrorist suspect Ahmed Almuhammed 'was rescued near Greece after his refugee boat sunk*'.<sup>604</sup> Other news outlets also picked up on this story, such as The Times, stating that Paris shooters hid among Syrian refugees.<sup>605</sup> The discourse was similar in 2016. The Daily Express claims that '*mass immigration causes terror attacks across Europe*,<sup>606</sup> that Poland was blocking refugees from settling because they

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<sup>599</sup> Graeme Culliford, 'TARGET Britain: ERITREAN IMMIGRANTS WHO RISK DEATH TO ENTER UK Record wave of African war refugees behind Calais riots' [The Sun 2014] available via Lexis Library

<sup>600</sup> Matt Lloyd, 'Illegal immigrant jailed for using spy cameras to watch children in the shower' [Daily Mirror 2014] <<https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/illegal-immigrant-jailed-using-spy-3785861>> accessed 25<sup>th</sup> July 2021.

<sup>601</sup> Tom Parfitt, 'ISIS terrorists 'sneak into Europe disguised as migrants' – sparking fears of bomb attacks' [Daily Express 2015] <<https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/586045/ISIS-Islamic-State-jihadi-terror-attack-migrant-crisis-Europe-Italy-North-Africa>> accessed 25<sup>th</sup> July 2021.

<sup>602</sup> Giles Sheldrick, 'EU open door border policy is a welcome mat for ISIS terrorists targeting UK' [Daily Express 2015] <<https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/609077/ISIS-Islamic-State-EU-European-Union-terror-alert-warning>> accessed 25<sup>th</sup> July 2021.

<sup>603</sup> Sam Webb, 'Paris attacks: Greek minister says Syrian terrorist snuck into Europe with refugees' [Daily Mirror 2015] <<https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/paris-attacks-greek-minister-says-6833542>> accessed 25<sup>th</sup> July 2021.

<sup>604</sup> Ruth Halkon, 'Paris attacks terrorist suspect Ahmed Almuhammed 'was rescued near Greece after his refugee boat sunk' [Daily Mirror 2015] <<https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/paris-attacks-terrorist-suspect-ahmed-6836199>> accessed 25<sup>th</sup> July 2021.

<sup>605</sup> Tim Shipman, 'Massacre triggers hunt for Isis killers among Syrian migrants' [The Times 2015] <<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/massacre-triggers-hunt-for-isis-killers-among-syrian-migrants-pmw6fxdzmp0>> accessed 25<sup>th</sup> July 2021.

<sup>606</sup> Patrick Christys, 'Mass immigration causes terror attacks across Europe' [Daily Express 2016] <<https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/691235/Hungary-EU-migrant-crisis-immigration-open-borders-terrorism>> accessed 25<sup>th</sup> July 2021.

were being deemed as security risks,<sup>607</sup> and issued a *'TERROR THREAT: ISIS plan to radicalise migrant ALREADY in the EU to carry out attacks.'*<sup>608</sup> The Daily Mail reported on *'the alleged ISIS terrorist claiming to be a Syrian refugee,*<sup>609</sup> that jihadis were *'cutting off their beards posing as migrants,*<sup>610</sup> reported that a *'12-year-old Afghan refugee orphan' in foster care was actually 21-year-old jihadi,*<sup>611</sup> and that a terror suspect, with the aid of fake documentation, *'toured potential targets in Britain while posing as a refugee.'*<sup>612</sup> These issues led The Times to report that *'Most Europeans 'fear migrants will bring terror.'*<sup>613</sup> During 2015-16, there were multiple adverse reports regarding violence and 'chaos'<sup>614</sup> in refugee camps and areas where they had been relocated. Reports included riots breaking out in a German refugee camp after a Koran was destroyed,<sup>615</sup> refugees fighting each other in *'MASS*

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<sup>607</sup> Vickie Oliphant, 'Poland blocks refugees from settling as they 'pose security threat' [Daily Express 2016] <<https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/668492/Poland-former-PM-blocks-refugees-settling-security-threat-terror-attacks>> accessed 25<sup>th</sup> July 2021.

<sup>608</sup> Charlie Peat, 'TERROR THREAT: ISIS plan to radicalise migrant ALREADY in the EU to carry out attacks' [Daily Express 2016] <<https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/747778/Islamic-State-ISIS-plot-terror-attacks-radicalise-migrants-in-Europe-Daesh-Berlin-Paris>> accessed 25<sup>th</sup> July 2021.

<sup>609</sup> John Stevens, 'The 'ISIS terrorist claiming to be a Syrian refugee': Shocking image shows fanatic posing with cache of weapons and ammunition before being arrested at German shelter for asylum seekers' [Daily Mail 2016] <<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3434246/The-alleged-ISIS-terrorist-claiming-Syrian-refugee-Shocking-image-shows-fanatic-posing-cache-weapons-ammunition-arrested-German-shelter-asylum-seekers.html>> accessed 25<sup>th</sup> July 2021.

<sup>610</sup> Barbara Jones, 'Revealed: The jihadis who are cutting off their beards posing as migrants and slipping on to refugee boats bound for Italy' [Daily Mail 2016] <<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3637100/The-jihadis-cutting-beards-posing-migrants-slipping-refugee-boats-bound-Italy.html>> accessed 25<sup>th</sup> July 2021.

<sup>611</sup> Paddy Dinham, 'Foster mother tells of horror when she discovered '12-year-old Afghan refugee orphan' she cared for was 21-year-old jihadi' [Daily Mail 2016] <<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3863392/Foster-mother-discovers-12-year-old-Afghan-refugee-orphan-cared-21-year-old-jihadi.html>> accessed 25<sup>th</sup> July 2021.

<sup>612</sup> Sam Greenhill & Claire Duffin, 'ISIS bomb plotter's tour of Britain': Afghan 'refugee' suspected of planning terror attacks used fake IDs to visit high-profile UK sites and posed for pictures as he scouted for targets' [Daily Mail 2016] <<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3585722/Bomb-plotter-s-tour-Britain-Afghan-suspected-planning-terror-attacks-used-fake-IDs-visit-high-profile-UK-sites.html>> accessed 25<sup>th</sup> July 2021.

<sup>613</sup> David Charter, 'Most Europeans 'fear migrants will bring terror' [The Times 2016] <<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/most-europeans-fear-migrants-will-bring-terrorism-pdthrf135>> accessed 25<sup>th</sup> July 2021.

<sup>614</sup> 'Migrant 'chaos' on Greek islands – UN refugee agency' [BBC News 2015] <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-33818193>> accessed 25<sup>th</sup> Jul 2021.

<sup>615</sup> Thomas Burrows & Jay Akbar, 'Riot breaks out at overcrowded refugee camp in Germany after resident tore pages out of the Koran and threw them in the toilet' [Daily Mail 2015] <<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3204828/Riot-breaks-overcrowded-refugee-camp-Germany-resident-tore-pages-Koran.html>> accessed 10<sup>th</sup> August 2021.



*BRAWLS*,<sup>616</sup><sup>617</sup> sexual abuse in camps,<sup>618</sup> cover-up of sexual assaults blamed on migrants in Germany,<sup>619</sup> fatal violent assaults on hostel centre staff in Sweden,<sup>620</sup> child rape,<sup>621</sup> gang rape,<sup>622</sup> and the violent killing of a pregnant woman.<sup>623</sup> Concern was also raised regarding the age of refugees entering the UK and Europe. For example, the Daily Mail reported that Home Office reports indicated that two-thirds of child refugees taken in by the British government in 2015 '*turned out to be adults*'.<sup>624</sup> This followed stories such as The Telegraph reporting on an adult posing as a child refugee who had spent three years at a university.<sup>625</sup> What followed was calls for age testing of all child refugees entering the UK.<sup>626</sup>

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<sup>616</sup> 'Hundreds involved in mass brawl at Berlin refugee shelter' [The Guardian 2015] <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/29/hundreds-involved-in-mass-brawl-at-berlin-refugee-shelter>> accessed 10<sup>th</sup> August 2021.

<sup>617</sup> Sam Tonkin, 'Blood-spattered migrants batter one another with ROCKS over a loaf of bread as violence once again breaks out in Greek refugee camp' [Daily Mail 2016] <<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3481093/Blood-spattered-migrants-batter-one-ROCKS-violence-breaks-Greece-s-refugee-camp-Macedonian-borders.html>> accessed 10<sup>th</sup> August 2021.

<sup>618</sup> Tom Parfitt, 'Refugees 'sexually abuse cleaner every day for TWO WEEKS at migrant centre' [Daily Express 2015] <<https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/612679/refugee-crisis-migrant-centre-Germany-Kitzingen-Angela-Merkel-Syria>> accessed 10<sup>th</sup> August 2021.

<sup>619</sup> Justin Huggler, 'Cover-up' over Cologne sex assaults blamed on migration sensitivities' [The Telegraph 2016] <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/germany/12085182/Cover-up-over-Cologne-sex-assaults-blamed-on-migration-sensitivities.html>> accessed 10<sup>th</sup> August 2021.

<sup>620</sup> Sam Adams, 'Sweden migrant hostel worker murder: First picture of 15-year-old Somali boy accused of fatal stabbing' [Daily Mirror 2016] <<https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/sweden-migrant-hostel-worker-murder-7272863>> accessed 10<sup>th</sup> August 2021.

<sup>621</sup> Anthony Bond & Rhian Lubin, 'Iraqi refugee 'who raped' boy, 10, at swimming pool kept in solitary confinement for his own safety' [Daily Mirror 2016] <<https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/iraqi-refugee-who-raped-boy-7427309>> accessed 10<sup>th</sup> August 2021.

<sup>622</sup> Danny Collins, 'MIGRANT RAPE HELL Wheelchair-bound woman was 'gang-raped by group of migrants after asking to use the loo at asylum centre' [The Sun 2016] <<https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/1951394/wheelchair-bound-woman-was-gang-raped-by-group-of-migrants-after-asking-to-use-the-loo-at-asylum-centre/#:~:text=A%20WHEELCHAIR%2Dbound%20woman%20was,with%20one%20of%20its%20residents>> accessed 10<sup>th</sup> August 2021.

<sup>623</sup> Sophie Evans, 'Germany machete attack: Syrian refugee 'kills pregnant woman and injures others after hacking at passersby in street' [Daily Mirror 2016] <<https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/germany-machete-attack-syrian-refugee-8485456>> accessed 10<sup>th</sup> August 2021.

<sup>624</sup> Sam Greenhill, 'Give 'child migrants' age tests, says Straw: Ex-home secretary leads calls for checks...as Home Office minister says 400 may come here' [Daily Mail 2016] <<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3850564/Home-Office-admits-figures-two-three-child-refugees-lying-age-actually-adults.html>> accessed 10<sup>th</sup> August 2021.

<sup>625</sup> Martin Evans, 'Child refugee allowed into UK had spent three years at university' [The Telegraph 2016] <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/10/30/child-refugee-allowed-into-uk-spent-three-years-at-university/>> accessed 10<sup>th</sup> August 2021.

<sup>626</sup> Joe Barnes, 'Don't take us for a ride!' LBC caller DEMANDS refugee 'children' undergo age tests' [Daily Express 2016] <<https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/722963/lbc-caller-demands-refugee-children-age-tests-calais-jungle-migrant-crisis>> accessed 10<sup>th</sup> August 2021.

### **Terrorism Concerns, Predictions & Warnings: Facebook Comments**

Alongside news reporting, data collection analysed public reactions via Facebook comments posted on articles in 2016, producing prominent qualitative first-ordered themes (see *Table 4.2*). Regarding the *Concerns* Facebook comments theme, data forming this theme primarily stem from three articles:

- BBC News: *Police Review Security at UK Christmas and New Year Events*.
- BBC News: *How Islamic State group targets British teenagers*.
- Daily Mail: *ISIS threatens attacks at Heathrow, LAX, and JFK this weekend*.

Within *Concerns*, a notable *General (unspecific) Fear of Terrorism* was an evident sub-theme in many Facebook comments. Expressions included behavioural changes to avoid the potential of terrorist harm and confusion about counterterrorism and safety measures in place. Comments included:

*Female: So, what is the advice? Do we stay out of central London shopping? Mother of teenagers who go out and about in London, I feel sick with anxiety. But we have to live our normal lives, or they have achieved their goal of terror*

*Female: I honestly wouldn't go to any large gatherings, not worth the chance.*

*Male: We are due to go to London over Christmas... Making me think twice*

Such comments illustrate the fear of carrying out basic daily routines. Facebook users indicated that they would avoid certain areas (London/major cities), avoid routine activities such as shopping, school trips, and tourism, while expressing a lack of safety in crowded areas stemming from the perception that populated areas would be an appealing target for terrorists. Facebook comments stated that they feared the 'general situation' and for their children's lives, and were afraid of what was being reported in the news. As one person warned, '*...beware, they target innocents*', indicating an awareness of the indiscriminate nature of *modus operandi*. In the Daily Mail article, social media users frequently 'tagged' their friends or family members in their comment. This made those tagged aware of the information published in news articles, a novel element of communication and information dissemination to moral panic research. This is a modern moral panic dimension at play when considering the spread of information among the population. Such comments would exacerbate

concern by tell their loved ones to *'stay safe'* or declare openly, *'going from Heathrow tomorrow, this is worrying.'*

Regarding the *Immigration/Refugee* theme (Table 4.2), comments primarily stems from the following articles:

- BBC News: *Police Review Security at UK Christmas and New Year Events*
- London Evening Standard: Londoners told to 'runaway as fast as possible' if ISIS targets the capital
- Daily Express: *Islamism poses a GLOBAL THREAT'*: Marion Le Pen warns Europe is 'POWERLESS' against terror
- Daily Express: *TERROR WARNING: ISIS plotting brutal 2017 SLAUGHTER across Europe to spark apocalyptic battle*
- Sky News: Terrorists 'hiding in plain sight among migrants

As mentioned, Immigration came to be linked as being a source of the terrorist problem, and as such, purported remedies to this problem came in the form of 'addressing' immigration. It was noted from analytical findings that the terms 'immigration' and 'refugee' were being used interchangeably by Facebook commentors, often used with little distinction between the two terms or groups of people. Media reports insinuating a threat close in proximity and linking terrorism to immigration were reflected in Facebook comments, with expressions likening immigration to the UK as an 'invasion'. One female commenter stated that *'IS is now spreading like rats...they are too close now...'*, expressing a belief that Islamist terrorism had infiltrated British society and that there was an omnipresent threat close in proximity. Comments posted on an article published by the Daily Express (*Islamism poses a GLOBAL THREAT'* Marion Le Pen warns Europe is 'POWERLESS' against terror) provided several notable expressions, with lengthy comments expressing a range of concerns. Concerns included that the government prized cheap labour *'from war-torn poverty rich countries'* over British safety and values, living conditions, and welfare as migrants bring *'their deluded anti-west religion and petty squabbles with them.* Concerns were also expressed that the government was spending *'billions'* on *'inactive welfare dependant migrants...proven*

*by statistics' and which our 'societies are having to bend to accommodate.'* From another Daily Express article (*TERROR WARNING ISIS plotting brutal 2017 SLAUGHTER across Europe to spark apocalyptic battle*), it was posted that when *'we were taken into the European market, we just had the people of Europe to contend with, who the fuck asked these other people to come they are not in the EU?'* Concerns raised also regarded the influx of *'young, fit, and fighting aged men'* amongst refugees, with comments expressing that these 'types' of migrants were either coming from 'safe zones' here to *'leech off of us'* or *'harm us'*. Comments appearing to acknowledge those coming from conflict zones felt that young male refugees were *'fucking cowards'* and should go back to *'fight for their land.'*

Other comments outright referenced a perceived nexus between migration, threat (evil), and the folk devil (Muslims/Islam). Although these sentiments were heavily presented within the Concerns theme, this established a link to the Immigration/Refugee theme, as comments frequently contained criteria fitting both themes. For example, regarding comments expressing proposed routine changes for Christmas and New Year events in 2016, owing to the occurrence of attacks elsewhere in Europe, commentators stated:

*Male: European countries wouldn't have to do this if they didn't let these Islamic savages in. Easy solution.*

*Male: The Islamist terrorists are on their way now from Syria pretending to be refugees*

*Male: The killer in Berlin is a Muslim migrant. You are not going to stop this by waffling on about Islamophobia, blaming a truck or any other kind of Stockholm Syndrome ostrich behaviour. You are going to stop it by not importing a violent supremacist ideology.*

From the above comments, the perception of the *uncivilised* and the threatening immigrant is exhibited (*don't let the savages in*), the association of threat to refugees (*...on their way here from Syria as refugees...*), and the religious association and blameworthiness (*Berlin killer was a Muslim migrant; importing a supremacist extremist ideology*) whilst advocating to *'ditch concerns about Islamophobia'* so that terrorism could be adequately addressed. Views expressed to other articles reinforced the link between terrorism, immigration, and Muslims/Islam, with claims

that *'nobody asked for mass immigration'*, especially *'Muslim 'enrichment and some of us WILL NOT RUN. We'll fight back'*. While the *'liberal' left fascists, politicians, and innocent public dive for cover SOMEONE has to fight back. That's us. Head out of sand time yeah,*' and that *'...the Isis are all in UK ready they came in all the so-called refugees and our bloody gov can't see it twats.'* Comments posted on a Sky News report entitled *'Terrorists 'hiding in plain sight among migrants'* expressed a unanimous consensus regarding this calibre of threat, supported the perception that terrorists were being smuggled into Europe and the UK in high numbers posing as migrants or refugees.

The proximity of a lurking threat seemed a reality for many commentors. Comments within the Concerns of Terrorism theme linking to the Immigrants/Refugees themes consisted of *'...open borders policies of the EU...'* to Islamist extremism in the UK and Europe. Commenters believed that the UK had weak border security owing to an *'open-borders policy'* courtesy of EU membership, and that both the UK government and the EU were weak and *'migration-enabling'*. Ideological divisions were evident among social media users, as a political Left - Right divide was exhibited across multiple themes. For example, some commenters attributed terror threats to *'leftie, Remainer policies'*:

*Male: Surely if the Remainers haven't got the hint, they never will! Open borders and uncontrolled immigration have only one result, see Berlin news, as the old Chinese prophecy says, not every Muslim is a terrorist, but every terrorist seems to be a Muslim? Mrs Merkel you have blood on your hands, you should resign and stand trial for misrule and putting the population of Germany in danger just to make you feel better by opening the country to murderers, rapists, and anti-Christian gangs!*

*Male: Hang on, according to left wingers we are all safe and there is no danger from non-British, hence why they want open borders.*

*Male: If it weren't for the PC looney liberals who want freedom of movement we would have a lot less of these incidents, just what is the point in having a passport etc if the PC looney liberals want to allow anyone without a passport or any form of ID whatsoever to travel wherever they want, The PC Liberals need to wake up to the real world. NO passport and NO ID means NO entry, full stop.*

Comments expressed that those to *'the left'* of the political spectrum, *'PC rules'*, left-leaning policies and supporters were responsible for high immigration and were *soft* or reluctant to adopt stricter policies restricting stricter immigration control and enhanced punitive methods. Resentment was reserved for particular leading political figures, such as David Cameron, Theresa May, and Angela Merkel:

*Male: Any atrocities committed are down to Murky Merkel, Brussels, Dodgy Dave and Theresa May. They have continued to allow uncontrolled immigration against the will of the British people*

In short, terrorism was propelled as a threat to be on high alert about, Muslims entering the country as immigrant or refugees was the source of the threat, and mainstream political figures and institutions cultivated and amplified this problem. As a result, comments provide support for stricter and more punitive policies; a factor seen in most moral panic research. While indicating hostility for immigrants and Muslims, comments also indicated themes of support for populist political figures or entities known for their tough stance with regards to immigration and terrorism, such as Donald Trump, Nigel Farage, UKIP, Marian Le Pen, and historical figures such as Enoch Powell (*We've had Enoch Powell, who told us, decades ago, that Europe & Britain would be over run*). Such support raised observations regarding a lack of faith in mainstream institutions and the growing support for populist fringes, delved into during Chapter 6.

Comments thematically grouped from the 2016 datasets containing *Prediction* (Table. 4.2) or *Warning* elements displayed strong retrospective and prophetic discourse. Commenters stated that they felt impending attacks were 'obvious' and 'inevitable' because ISIS had continuously stated its desire to attack European and Western nations, including the UK. Commenters specifically felt the UK border security was too weak to curtail migration into the country and prevent *'the wrong type'* from entering. Some comments shared their experiences of UK travel, describing how they had travelled to and from Britain 'recently' and that they experienced relaxed port security, lacking in urgency and efficiency. These perceptions were used to justify that the UK should expect terror attacks because of high migration and weak security, and that previous attacks had occurred for similar reasons. Commenters claimed that the prospect of providing asylum to refugees

would also reinforce the inevitability of attack because if we *'take in more refugees we make the place more vulnerable!!!'* Comments expressed that right-leaning, anti-immigration, and anti-EU political actors, such as Nigel Farage, *'has been saying this for the last 2 years'* and that: *'We've had Enoch Powell, who told us, decades ago, that Europe & Britain would be overrun.'* However, numerous commenters claimed that by publicly making such anti-migration statements or declaring support for populist political figures was problematic for them and others who felt this way, because such proclamations attributing mass immigration to security threats would subsequently lead to *'those of us with common sense'* being labelled as racists:

*Male: Hasn't this been pointed out by us several times already, when Nigel Farage said this he was a terrible racist for opposing the free movement of these people, we really, really need to pull up the drawbridge this time and say no more*

*Male: They told us this 2 years ago, people who have half a brain cell have known this for years, but were branded racist, now the reality is sinking in and it's way to late to do anything, your getting concerned?*

*Female: IS themselves said they would do this, Nigel Farage is called a racist for warning against it. MSM are just picking up on what the average Joe Bloggs already knows??*

*Female: This is just what people with common sense having been saying for a long time, "but oh wait were they not called racist" !!!!!!!*

Commenters felt that, because they viewed a problem but were afraid to articulate through fear of negative social criticism, populist figures provided a representative voice for their views on such matters. Commenters articulated that it was because of this perceived *'oppressive treatment'* relating to their freedoms of speech and expression that, partly, contributed to the Leave campaign winning the 2016 Brexit Referendum with *'People who continue to call for 'open borders' will have a lot to answer for....sooner or later.'* The suppression of anti-immigration opinion again was portrayed as a Left v Right issue, as one commenter posted to a Sky News report stating that terrorists were *'hiding amongst migrants'*:

*'Try telling that to the lefties! By completely ignoring this very obvious fact they will be the catalyst for innocent deaths in Europe at the hands of the terrorists they were at fault for leaving in in the first place!!'*

Another comment posted stated:

*'No kidding dickhead, it's taken this long for you lefty morons to figure this out? The right has been screaming this from day 1!'*

After a thorough examination of the data, it became evident that the boundaries between Left-Right political viewpoints were not clearly defined. A subset of individuals perceived the ambiguous term 'Mainstream' as synonymous with a unclear left-wing ideology, while those who did not belong to the mainstream were typically viewed as more upright, conservative, and inclined towards the right. The analysis of social media data, including reports and comments, has proven to be a valuable tool for gaining insight into the raw emotions of social entities. This method has been effective in providing useful information so far. However, a drawback of this approach has emerged. Employing a semi-structured questionnaire may be necessary to gain further insight into how the participants interpret certain concepts.

### **Symbols of 'Evil' inside Britain: Creating Sensitisation**

A tactic not novel to the social media age; news and political discourse is often simplified so that it may be understood by specialist and non-specialist audiences alike, increasing the scope of viewership and understanding. This, again, was introduced in Chapter 3. This simplification tactics are particularly associated with tabloid press.<sup>627</sup> However, such oversimplified framing of worldviews and symbols of deviance result in gross misconceptions. To catch audience attention, media framing makes use of dramatic images,<sup>628</sup> often creating a *'language of symbols or the practice of representing things by symbols.'*<sup>629</sup> Deviant symbolisation crafted a regularly encountered type of 'threat' for the public (Muslims; Islam; immigration), thus creating an eternally unsafe Britain in both time and proximity. Such everyday symbols of deviance serve to heighten and maintain the consensus of concerns and sensitivity to threats. For Cohen, the terms *Mod* and *Rocker* became symbolic schemas of youth deviancy stemming from a group of social subcultural status. Each group was viewed as deviant from the perspective of mainstream British society.

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<sup>627</sup> Jewkes (n45) 51-53

<sup>628</sup> Klocke & Muschert (n11) 302

<sup>629</sup> Jonathan Matusitz, *Symbolism in Terrorism: Motivation, Communication, and Behaviour* [Rowman & Littlefield Publishers 2014] 10-11



Moreover, cultural signifiers or traits had also become negatively associated with each group and thus negatively associated with threats and harm to the mainstream.<sup>630</sup>

As a mode of communication, symbols relay information between people, conveying meaning and understanding, and can suggest *...relationship, association, convention, or accidental resemblance.*' For example, objects might attain deviant symbolic importance, such as hairstyle, clothing, and choice of motor vehicles; moped or motorbikes bikes. Cohen argued that such objects became symbols of youth deviancy during the 1960s.<sup>631</sup> The communication of stereotypes is reinforced by the symbolic authority of language and imagery.<sup>632</sup> Strengthening such authority, the concept of *Evil* - raised in a previous chapter - has a strong association with terrorism and lasting symbols linked to Islamist extremism. Historically, symbols have been used to typify people and groups and communicate information, resulting in many different formations such as flags, logos, and nonphysical forms such as terminologies or words. Within moral panic literature, *Symbolisation* denotes the emblematic embodiment of words and imageries, which can comprise neutral, nonpartisan, or unaffiliated words that negatively appropriate meanings for social problems. For example, '9/11' is a symbol of mass terrorist atrocity rather than a calendar date. Elite frames and symbols attached to 9/11 established a 'moral responsibility' in the West, justifying counter-violence. An explicit effort was made to use the tragedy of 9/11 as a moral abdication for collateral civilian deaths in Afghanistan and Iraq (*the terrorists started it*).<sup>633</sup> Such a constructed narrative also prevented alternative mainstream comprehension of the 9/11 attacks, particularly those which implicated or incriminated America's foreign policy.<sup>634</sup> As Rittossa (2010) states, concepts of evil are attached to criminal offenders who have committed depraved acts.<sup>635</sup> The 'evil' frame was utilised to help justify armed conflicts with Afghanistan and Iraq and enact intrusive domestic counterterrorism legislation in multiple Western nations. Elite presentations held that a 'new'

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<sup>630</sup> Moore (n12) 106

<sup>631</sup> Cohen (n1) 36

<sup>632</sup> Matusitz (n629) 11

<sup>633</sup> Jackson (n352)

<sup>634</sup> Ibid 31.

<sup>635</sup> Rittossa (n376)

international terrorist threat required fast and extensive security responsiveness. Media attention given to grave acts of barbarity by groups such as ISIL during the early 2010s qualified them as prominent symbols of modern terrorism.

However, as such groups carry a self-professed religious mission and motivation for their 'evil' actions, ordinary, law-abiding Muslims and the religion of Islam have come to be 'collateral folk devils' and symbols of terrorism.<sup>636</sup> A 2019 study found that 67% of the British public held negative opinions of Islam, with 48% of the respondents stating that they viewed Islam as incompatible with British values. The survey also found that 58% of the British public felt Islamophobia is '*dangerously widespread*' within the UK, with 28% stating that Islam inspired violent behaviours.<sup>637</sup> Common, observable symbols of Islam included the Niqab, Burka, or Hijab, items worn by many law-abiding and non-threatening practising Muslims. Nevertheless, these same items have also been attributed to Islamist extremism due to Western distortions of Islamic faith.<sup>638</sup> When considering post-9/11 terrorism and how Western media have characterised Muslim communities, Islam has often faced a trial by media with public opinion contributing,<sup>639</sup> exacerbated in the comments sections of social media posts. Matusitz (2014) writes that when typifying Islam or the Muslim faith, the political right utilises symbolic perceptions such as 'the West', 'Sharia', 'terrorist', 'fundamentalist', 'freedom', and 'America', or they generate pictorial symbols such as a veiled woman who is ill-treated, jihadists against a backdrop of a black Islamic standard, or imageries of falling Twin Towers.<sup>640</sup> Political comments have reinforced these negative perceptions. For example, comments made by then-Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson compared Niqab or Burka-wearing Muslim women to letterboxes and bank robbers, implying (without evidence) that Islamic garments pose security risks.<sup>641</sup> Indeed, the negative perception of Islamic religious garments

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<sup>636</sup> Walsh (n3) 1-20

<sup>637</sup> Elisa Menendez, 'Nearly half of UK adults think Islam is 'incompatible' with British values' [Metro News 2019] <<https://metro.co.uk/2019/08/02/nearly-half-of-uk-adults-think-islam-is-incompatible-with-british-values-10504459/>> accessed 6<sup>th</sup> September 2022.

<sup>638</sup> Bonnie Nguyen, *The interactive effects of accent, attire, and job status on employment-related decisions* [San José State University 2015]

<sup>639</sup> Chris Greer & Robert Reiner, 'Labelling, Deviance and Media' in Bruinsma, Gerben & Weisburd, David, (eds) *Encyclopedia of Criminology and Criminal Justice* [Springer 2014]

<sup>640</sup> Matusitz (n629) 12

<sup>641</sup> Anna Gawlewicz & Kasia Narkowicz, 'Slurs like 'letter box' are more problematic than we think: How discriminatory language travels' [2018] LSE European Politics and Policy (EUROPP)

has led to their ban in six European nations between 2010 and 2021.<sup>642</sup> In July 2010, YouGov found that more than two-thirds of British adults supported a 'burqa ban'. By 2016, support had ranged between 50-60%.<sup>643</sup>

### **Beheadings as an extreme symbol of 'New' Evil**

Of course, media projections of truly barbaric and visual acts from terrorist groups who self-proclaim to act on behalf of the Islamist religion only serves to solidify the negatively symbolic nature of the peaceful and law-abiding. Such rational distinctions from the judging mainstream are often lacking during the moral panic process. Sullivan & Bongar (2006) reason that while terror groups could never reduce or constrain powerful, established nations, terrorists instead aim to inflict psychological trauma on civilians, pressurising governments to enact policy changes favouring terrorist interests (the curtailment of human rights and the discrimination of groups, for example).<sup>644</sup> Islamist terrorists sought notoriety, purposefully inflating their capability to inflict mass harm. A method of maximising this perception, ISIL utilised video recordings and online sharing of hostage beheadings via internet webpages and social media forums.

As a punitive practice, beheadings have been a sanctioned form of execution for centuries,<sup>645</sup> with examples of decapitations documented in Islamic, Christian, and Jewish societies as a method of justice,<sup>646</sup> illustrating that this mode of reprimand is not novel. Recent examples of beheadings include sanctions by the Saudi Arabian monarch against death-sentenced prisoners,<sup>647</sup> killing 146 people in 2017.<sup>648</sup>

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<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2018/09/07/slurs-like-letter-box-are-more-problematic-than-we-think-how-discriminatory-language-travels/> accessed 6<sup>th</sup> September 2022.

<sup>642</sup> By 2021, France, Belgium, Bulgaria, Austria, Denmark, and Switzerland had banned burkas

<sup>643</sup> Georgina Lee, 'What do Brits think about banning the burqa?' [Channel 4 2018]

<https://www.channel4.com/news/factcheck/factcheck-what-do-brits-think-about-banning-the-burqa> accessed 6<sup>th</sup> September 2022.

<sup>644</sup> Glenn R. Sullivan & Bruce Bongar, 'Psychological Consequences of Actual or Threatened CBRNE Terrorism' in Bruce Bongar et al., *Psychology of Terrorism* [OUP 2006] 153

<sup>645</sup> Larissa Tracy & Jeff Massay, 'Heads will Roll: Decapitation in the medieval and early modern imagination' [2012] *Medieval and Renaissance Authors and Texts*, Volume 7

<sup>646</sup> Robert M. Bohm & Gavin Lee (Ed), *Routledge Handbook on Capital Punishment* [Routledge Publishing 2018] 236

<sup>647</sup> Associated Press, 'Outcry as Saudi Arabia executes young Shia man for 'rebellion' [The Guardian 2021] <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jun/15/outcry-as-saudi-arabia-executes-young-shia-man-for-rebellion> accessed 30<sup>th</sup> June 2021.

<sup>648</sup> Zaria Gorvett, 'The People Rethinking Methods of Execution' [BBC Future 2018]

<https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20180604-is-there-a-humane-way-to-kill-a-criminal> accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2021.

However, ISIL's beheadings were a strategic tool of intimidation broadcast to a global online audience, inspired by the tactics used during the 1990s Chechnya War. However, Friis (2015) highlights that the Chechnya example had a limited impact when compared to ISIL owing to a lack of today's communications technologies during the 90s. There was also a torrent of beheading videos produced in the early 2000s<sup>649</sup> spurring 'horror and anger' before an apparent decline in their production and subsequent dissemination. Nevertheless, beheading videos and their public dissemination are newsworthy to the media and is a practical demonstration of the evil and barbarity of Islamist extremist factions.<sup>650</sup>

Figure 4.2: One of the two Lee Rigby killers talking to a recording bystander (*Image removed for repository publication – view via citation*).

As discussed, the increased dominance of ISIS attracted sustained news coverage in 2013.<sup>651</sup> By the spring of 2014, ISIL had grown sufficiently enough for the group to advance upon Syrian and Iraqi government-controlled areas, subsequently gaining ground and prompting leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi to declare an Islamic State and announce their official separation from al-Qaeda.<sup>652</sup> By June 2014, soon after ISIL had captured Iraq's second-largest city, Mosul, the Western world began to take much more notice of the groups expanding operations. The Guardian published an

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<sup>649</sup> Ariel Koch, 'Jihadi Beheading Videos and their Non-Jihadi Echoes' [Perspectives on Terrorism, 2018] 12 (3) 24

<sup>650</sup> Simone Molin Friis, 'Beyond anything we have ever seen': beheading videos and the visibility of violence in the war against ISIS' [2015] International Affairs 91 (4) 725

<sup>651</sup> Boyle & Mower (n499) 205-219

<sup>652</sup> Lowe (n263) 9

article asking *Who are ISIS? A terror group too extreme even for al-Qaida*, explaining that:

*'The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant is even more brutal than the main jihadi group of inspiration...ISIS has shown its ruthlessness and brutality in the areas of Syria under its control, eastern Aleppo and the city of Raqqa...It ordered the crucifixion of a man accused of murder; other forms of punishment include beheadings and amputations.'*<sup>653</sup>

News stories portrayed a new terrorist group conducting 'new', novel, and more brutal tactics. Coverage in 2014 by the Daily Mirror detailed *'thousands of Yazidi refugees'* fleeing Islamic State terrorists<sup>654</sup> and fears for *'World War Three' if Kobane falls to Islamic State'*<sup>655</sup> while the Daily Mail reported of a *'British Jihadist medical student pictured holding severed head'*<sup>656</sup> while also disclosing that *ISIS is 'funding terror by harvesting human organs from living hostages'*.<sup>657</sup> However, in 2014, the element of ISIL's aggressive campaign which accentuated their ruthlessness was the dissemination of beheading videos of their Western captives, some of whom were civilian aid workers. Responding to increased military operations by Western forces in the Middle East, ISIS released a sequence of graphic videos which included hostage beheadings and demands for Western-allied military operations to cease.<sup>658</sup> Some of the most notable executions included James Foley on 19th August, David Haines on 13th September, and Alan Henning on 3rd October. Hostages were forcibly used to convey messages to the West on behalf of their captives before they were killed. For example, Henning read a statement stating:

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<sup>653</sup> Tran (n505)

<sup>654</sup> 'In The Mirror tomorrow, thousands of Yazidi refugees flee the Islamic State terrorists' posted to Facebook by the Daily Mirror <<https://www.facebook.com/dailymirror/photos/in-the-mirror-tomorrow-thousands-of-yazidi-refugees-flee-the-islamic-state-terror/10152618813869162/>> accessed 11<sup>th</sup> August 2018.

<sup>655</sup> James McCarthy, 'ISIS: Terror experts fear 'World War Three' if Kobane falls to Islamic State' [Daily Mirror 2014] <<https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/isis-terror-experts-fear-world-4424562>> accessed 7<sup>th</sup> June 2021.

<sup>656</sup> Chris Pleasance, 'British jihadist medical student, 21, is pictured holding a severed head while wearing her white doctor's jacket' [Daily Mail 2014] <<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2755210/British-jihadist-medical-student-21-pictured-holding-severed-head-wearing-white-doctor-s-jacket.html>> accessed 7<sup>th</sup> June 2021.

<sup>657</sup> Matthew Blake, 'Blood money: How ISIS is selling human organs harvested from living hostages and its dead soldiers to fund terror across the Middle East' [Daily Mail 2014] <<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2880815/Blood-money-ISIS-selling-human-organs-harvested-living-hostages-dead-soldiers-fund-terror-Middle-East.html>> accessed 7<sup>th</sup> June 2021.

<sup>658</sup> Boyle & Mower (n499) 205-219

*'I am Alan Henning. Because of our Parliament's decision to attack the Islamic State, I, as a member of the British public, will now pay the price for that decision.'*<sup>659</sup>

Following Henning's statement, his executioner delivered a message intended for David Cameron:

*'The blood of [fellow slain captive] David Haines was on your hands, [British Prime Minister David] Cameron... Alan Henning will also be slaughtered, but his blood is on the hands of the British Parliament.'*<sup>660</sup>

Figure 4.3: Image taken from the New Yorker (2014) <https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/what-is-ebola> (Image removed for repository publication – view via citation).

Many news outlets framed these acts using a similar terminology; *evil*. Western political reactions were expectedly firm and diplomatically emotive, with Barack Obama vowing to *'destroy ISIS's brand of evil'*,<sup>661</sup> insisting that *"we will not be intimidated...their horrific acts only unite us as a country and stiffen our resolve to take the fight against these terrorists."*<sup>662</sup> David Cameron branded ISIS as an *'evil*

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<sup>659</sup> Rym Momtaz & Lee Ferran, 'ISIS Appears to Behead British Captive Alan Henning' [ABC News 2014] <<https://abcnews.go.com/International/isis-appears-behead-british-captive-alan-henning/story?id=25952114>> accessed 7<sup>th</sup> June 2021.

<sup>660</sup> Ibid.

<sup>661</sup> Julian Borger & Patrick Wintour, 'Obama vows to destroy Isis's 'brand of evil' as Iraq requests help from Britain' [The Guardian 2014] <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/24/obama-isis-brand-of-evil-uk-air-strikes-iraq>> accessed 1<sup>st</sup> June 2021.

<sup>662</sup> 'Sotloff beheading: Obama warning to Islamic State' [BBC News 2014] <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-29044354>> accessed 1<sup>st</sup> June 2021.

organisation,<sup>663</sup> and 'monsters' who were the 'embodiment of evil,'<sup>664</sup> British Imams labelled the group as 'evil, corrupt cowboys,'<sup>665</sup> ex-British soldiers who had travelled to Syria to fight against ISIS stated that the situation in the Middle East was 'simply a war on evil,'<sup>666</sup> while Al Jazeera contemplated the question; *How evil is ISIL?*<sup>667</sup> The affiliation of ISIS to the term 'evil' became affixed within Western discourse, to the extent that CNN referred to Ebola as, "the ISIS of biological agents" within their news crawl<sup>668</sup> at the foot of television screens<sup>669</sup> (Figure 4.3).

Figure 4.4: The Daily Mail posting a link to Facebook for its coverage of Alan Henning's murder by ISIS militants in 2014 (*Image removed for repository publication – view via citation*).

<sup>663</sup> Nicholas Watt & Randeep Ramesh, 'UK parties, set to recall parliament to approve air strikes against Isis' [The Guardian 2014] <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/23/uk-political-parties-recall-parliament-air-strikes-isis>> accessed 1<sup>st</sup> June 2021.

<sup>664</sup> Oliver Wright & Tom Harper, 'Alan Henning: Second British hostage in Isis beheading video named as 'kind and funny' aid worker from Salford' [The Independent 2014] <<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/alan-henning-second-british-hostage-isis-beheading-video-named-kind-and-funny-aid-worker-9732162.html>> accessed 1<sup>st</sup> June 2021.

<sup>665</sup> Dominic Kenney, 'British imams condemn Isis as 'evil, corrupt cowboys' [The Times 2014] <<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/british-imams-condemn-isis-as-evil-corrupt-cowboys-g0ngldg330b>> accessed 1<sup>st</sup> June 2021.

<sup>666</sup> Damien Gayle & Ian Drury, 'We are not mercenaries say British ex-soldiers fighting IS: 'It's simply a war on evil' [Daily Mail 2014] <<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2846023/Former-British-infantryman-joins-Kurdish-fighters-Syria-defending-beleaguered-town-against-ISIS.html>> accessed 1<sup>st</sup> June 2021.

<sup>667</sup> James Denselow, 'How evil is ISIL?' [Al Jazeera 2015] <<https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2015/8/24/how-evil-is-isis>> accessed 1<sup>st</sup> June 2021.

<sup>668</sup> A line of text giving the latest news, that moves across the lower part of a television screen – [MacMillian Dictionary 2021] <<https://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/news-ticker>> accessed 1<sup>st</sup> June 2021.

<sup>669</sup> Christopher Hooton, 'The Isis of biological agents?': CNN is asking the stupid Ebola questions' [The Independent 2014] <<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/isis-biological-agents-cnn-asking-stupid-ebola-questions-9779584.html>> accessed 1<sup>st</sup> June 2021.

As Friis (2015) explained, the dissemination of beheading videos reframed the conflicts in Iraq and Syria from being a major humanitarian crisis to a threat to national security which required a military response followed by intensified military counterterrorism actions. Consequently, senior officials from the American and British administrations allegedly acknowledged that the release of beheading videos by ISIL had '*a substantial impact*' on foreign policy.<sup>670</sup> The magnified and intense attention afforded to terrorists beheading videos exemplified the importance of graphic imagery and visual media in modern armed conflicts and warfare. Despite censorship, the beheading videos were widely disseminated via social media and other online platforms, creating a '*modern guillotine execution spectacle, with YouTube as the town square*'.<sup>671</sup> Audience participation came in the form of viewing, commenting, like and sharing such content. The mainstream media provided precisely cropped and selected screenshots from beheading videos recurrently used across news broadcasting as symbolising images of kneeling, unhooded, orange-clad hostages; Western victims slain in a foreign land by evil, black-clothed, hooded ISIS operatives (*Figure 4.4*). Efforts have been made to understand the importance and impact of beheading video consumption. Redmond et al. (2019) examined n=3,294 US participants for predictors of, and motivations for, viewing graphic media such as beheading videos over a three-year longitudinal study. They found that 20% of respondents to an anonymous survey claimed to have viewed 'part' of a beheading video, while 5% claimed they had viewed 'all' of a video. Furthermore, Redmond et al. (2019) found that those likely to watch a beheading video were more likely to be male, unemployed, and Christian, while those who had partly or entirely viewed beheading videos developed a greater fear of future adverse events and global disasters. The chief motivations for viewing such video content were attributed to information seeking and curiosity.<sup>672</sup> As this research has found in earlier segments, it could be inferred that those most vocal regarding more extreme forms of dealing with terrorism and linked immigration concerns gravitate to the right of the political spectrum.

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<sup>670</sup> Friis (650) 725-746

<sup>671</sup> Hanna Kozłowska, 'Should we be seeing gruesome acts and if so where?' [New York Times 2014] <<https://op-talk.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/08/25/should-we-be-seeing-gruesome-acts-and-if-so-where/>> accessed 30<sup>th</sup> June 2021

<sup>672</sup> Sarah Redmond, Nickolas M. Jones, Alison E. Holman & Roxane Silver, 'Who Watches an ISIS beheading – and why' [2019] *American Psychologist* 74 (5) 555



### **Chapter Conclusion**

This chapter evaluated the UK political and media's coverage of terrorism between 2010 and 2016, including wider public engagement via Facebook comments. It assessed the level of attention given to terrorism and whether it was disproportionate compared to other crimes. The analysis also examined how media coverage impacted public perceptions of terrorism and the role of political elites in shaping the narrative around terrorism. As the reporting of terroristic news events increased via Facebook, research in this chapter established a correlation between media narratives, government input, and audience perceptions. While the widespread coverage of terrorism is understandable in light of its newsworthiness and the need for media outlets to attract revenue-generating audiences, data in the following chapter will demonstrate that the level of volatility resulting from direct attacks on the UK in 2017 was significantly higher compared to the cultivation period from 2012-2016.

Heightened levels of public concern during the early-to-mid 2010s were the result of not only direct attacks to the European mainland, but also the sustained impact of sensitising warnings and predictions in media and political discourse over several years prior to the 2017 attacks. This aligns with Cohen's processual framework, in which warnings serve as a form of *priming*. The usage of sensationalist media frames and elite 'danger' rhetoric, coupled with dire forecasts, led to a widespread fear of terrorism that was linked, in part, to an EU-migration-terrorism nexus. Migrants were often depicted as security risks, with the greatest safety concern being an increased likelihood of barbaric and evil Islamic terrorism. The portrayal of terrorism as already present in Britain, linked to symbols considered evil by the public, such as British Muslims, migrants, and refugees, was further reinforced by the 2013 killing of Lee Rigby. Throughout, this chapter encompassed many related panic characteristics, such as concern, consensus, hostility, and disproportionality, as outlined by Goode & Ben-Yehuda. This period of sensitisation within the panic framework distorted social perceptions of the likelihood of a large-scale terrorist attack, the prevalence and frequency of terrorism in the UK, and the threat posed by the folk devil. The following chapter will examine the Islamist extremist attacks that took place in the United Kingdom in 2017, which caused significant *volatile* concern

(another of Goode & Ben-Yehuda's characteristics). The threat of terrorism has been a prevalent issue since the early 2000s, leading to the creation of various frames, labels, stereotypes, and the perception of terrorism as an imported threat primarily associated with Muslims and the Islamic faith.

# Chapter. 5

## Panic Volatility during 2017 UK terror attacks

### Introduction

The preceding chapter highlighted an era marked by a rise in low-grade Islamist extremist attacks, which had fostered a heightened sensitivity to the danger posed by an "enemy within" that could strike at any moment. Moreover, this threat was perceived to be penetrating the UK in the form of immigrants and refugees, while domestic and European governments were weak to the problem. Media coverage of these events delved into the key actions taken by responders and commentators, documented their involvement, and narrated the ongoing developments.<sup>673</sup> Such an analysis was highly sensational; a necessity for news outlets hoping to attract revenue-generating audiences, cultivating an environmental sensitised to fear of harm from Muslims and followers of Islam. The UK experienced a surge in panic volatility in the aftermath the 2017 terror attacks, with politicians and the media quickly and intensely reacting to each event.

Referring to the overarching aims of this thesis, this chapter focus' on a period of volatility, seeking to analyse data that critiques the British media's response to the 2017 Islamist extremist attacks in the UK. Additionally, the chapter examines political and public reactions to the attacks. During each attack, political figures and media outlets attempted to moralise, magnify, and frame the broader implications of the events. They used value-laden terms, interpreted the needs and interests of both terrorists and victims, connected past and present problems and threats, and identified causes and solutions. Like the previous chapter, this chapter also uses qualitative analysis of articles posted on Facebook to observe two consistent political themes across the three most notable attacks in 2017 (Westminster, Manchester Arena, and London Bridge attacks), considering as the role of the social media. Unlike the previous chapter, which focused on the period between 2010-2016, this chapter examines social reactions during the Impact events of the 2017 Islamist terrorist attacks.

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<sup>673</sup> Klocke & Muschert (n11) 302

### **The 2017 UK Terror Attacks: Evidencing Moral Panic Volatility**

For Goode & Ben-Yehuda (2009), moral panics are '*...by their very nature...volatile; they erupt fairly suddenly (although they may lie dormant or latent for long periods, and may reappear from time to time) and, nearly as suddenly, subside.*'<sup>674</sup> For a volatile period to be identified, there must be a distinguished, short-lived spike in attention and fear, above the average volume of reporting before and after an episodic event. The duration of panic volatility varies across case studies. For example, paedophilia case studies explored by Critcher (2003) indicated that news cycles were much more protracted than those evidenced by panics regarding *Video Nasties*. In other cases (e.g. child abuse), newsworthy aspects capturing public attention declined before child abuse concerns re-emerged with different gripping elements.<sup>675</sup> Like Goode & Ben-Yehuda, Downs (1972) supposed that panics abruptly surge to notoriety, remain there for a relatively short time, and although often unresolved, gradually recede from social consciousness.<sup>676</sup> Downs' contribution illustrates a fickleness in modern audiences, who uncompromisingly expect entertainment and novelty, becoming easily unresponsive during story cycles unless new interest thresholds are met. Thus, outlets need to continuously reconsider the newsworthiness of events in their search for novelty. Sometimes this will mean - as previous chapters explored - presenting pre-existing conditions as 'new' developments to attain fresh thresholds for captivating audience attention. 'New' social harms are enthusiastically seized upon and covered until their worth has been spent or the next problem is realised.<sup>677</sup> 'New' crimes become leading headline news until their level of saturation reaches a point where they lose public revenue-generating interest unless these stories can continue to exhibit distinctive, intriguing, or unusual qualities which evolve the story over time.<sup>678</sup> Terrorism fulfils many criteria for newsworthiness, continually eliciting heightened and hostile public emotions. Academic arguments and data included in the previous chapter illustrated UK audience appetite during a timeframe which saw no major UK Islamist terrorist attacks (Lee Rigby's 2013 murder aside) on British soil. However, excessive volumes of revenue-seeking media stories had nevertheless been produced via

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<sup>674</sup> Goode & Ben-Yehuda (n16) 41

<sup>675</sup> Critcher (n19) 139

<sup>676</sup> Downs, (n492) 38-50

<sup>677</sup> Critcher (n19) 139

<sup>678</sup> Schlesinger & Tumber (n238) 146

social media. As data from the previous chapter illustrated a period of high interest and sensitisation, it was perhaps inevitable that any successful Islamist attack on mainland Britain would instantly induce exceptional mass fear and hostility.

In 2017, the three Islamist extremist-inspired attacks in the UK were the *Westminster Attack* (22<sup>nd</sup> March 2017), *Manchester Arena Bombing*, (22<sup>nd</sup> May 2017), and *London Bridge Attack* (3<sup>rd</sup> June 2017). Although botched, the Parsons Green bombing attempt in September 2017 has also been included in numerical data. Before 2017, the London bombings in July 2005 and the graphic murder of Lee Rigby in May 2013 brought Islamist terrorism to the forefront of British contentiousness. March to September 2017 proved to be the deadliest period of Islamist terror in the UK to date, accounting for the single deadliest attack (Manchester) since the London bombings of 2005.<sup>679</sup> These attacks caused 36 deaths, and over 200 injuries. There was also a failed explosion on the *Parsons Green Tube* (15<sup>th</sup> September 2017), resulting in no fatalities and minor injuries to passengers. These attacks held commonalities. The perpetrators utilised various low-grade *modus operandis*, such as vehicle ramming, knives, and explosives, while targeting police and civilians. An independent report on these four attacks revealed other notable similarities:

- All attackers were male.
- The three attackers were British.
- One (Masood) had *converted* to Islam.
- Three of them lived in London.
- Three of these were known to police.
- The same three were also known to MI5.
- At least one had direct links to a proscribed terrorist organisation (with al-Muhajiroun).<sup>680</sup>

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<sup>679</sup> David Anderson Q.C, 'Attacks in London and Manchester March-June 2017 Independent Assessment of MI5 and Police Internal Reviews' [2017] <[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/664682/Attacks in London and Manchester Open Report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/664682/Attacks_in_London_and_Manchester_Open_Report.pdf)> accessed 10<sup>th</sup> October 2018.

<sup>680</sup> Ibid.

Each 2017 attack provided periods of volatility and intense social responses which magnified those pre-existing terrorism panic concerns and frames from the previous chapter, heightened news reporting figures, and intensified political sense-making and moralisation. Each episode began by illustrating the scale and severity of the attack, progressing to frame and place each as being part of a deeper, more substantial problem in British society.<sup>681</sup>

Identifying periods of volatility is an essential measurement within panic research, suggesting disproportionate *overreporting* encompassing hostile public discourse aimed at the identified folk devil. Data collection for this chapter recorded n=2477 Islamist terrorism-related news articles from UK-based news outlets published on Facebook in 2017. Across all four terroristic episodes, *Table 5.1* shows monthly volumes of Facebook publications. June (n=792), May (n=692), March (n=640), and September (n=160) had the highest production months and were correlated with each UK Islamist extremist attack. Collectively, these four months accounted for n=2,284 (92%) of the 2,477 total.

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
20	24	640	95	692	792	8	10	160	14	10	12	<b>2477</b>

*Table 5.1: Number of Collected Facebook News Articles Per Month (2017)*

*Table. 5.2* illustrates the number of articles collected from Facebook each day during June, May, March, and September (each of the four attacks). The frequency and volume of articles published outside of the episodes (attack dates in red) were comparatively low when measured against the attacks. Owing to the late time-of-day when both the Manchester Arena bombing (22:30) and the London Bridge attack (21:58) occurred, heightened media reporting for these events transpired through the night and into the next day. Owing to this observation when collecting data, the preceding days for each of these two attacks were included as part of their Episode data. For clarity, distinctions were made for Episode data (respective days of each attack) and the days that followed.

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<sup>681</sup> Critcher (n19) 133

Date	March	May	June	September
1st	1	0	27	0
2nd	2	0	26	0
3rd	1	1	215	0
4th	0	1	31	1
5th	0	3	209	0
6th	2	0	47	3
7th	0	1	108	0
8th	0	2	41	0
9th	1	0	7	2
10th	0	0	23	0
11th	0	0	37	0
12th	0	0	1	1
13th	0	0	11	0
14th	0	0	0	0
15th	0	0	1	23
16th	1	0	1	34
17th	0	0	0	11
18th	0	1	0	19
19th	0	0	3	10
20th	0	0	1	13
21st	0	0	2	9
22nd	116	104	0	12
23rd	234	105	0	7
24th	112	133	1	3
25th	38	109	0	2
26th	31	60	0	5
27th	36	58	0	2
28th	23	57	0	1
29th	26	47	0	1
30th	7	5	0	1
31st	9	5	0	0

Table 5.2: Number of Articles per day for March, May, June & September (2017); Impact events (attacks) highlighted in red

From the Westminster Bridge attack on 22<sup>nd</sup> March, publishing figures rapidly inflated and peaked for several days, indicating the first volatile period. Subsequently, the figures gradually rescinded. By day nine following the Westminster Bridge attack, reporting figures had notably reduced, ending a period of observable volatility. Similar trends were observed for the Manchester Arena bombing and London Bridge attack when figures dropped significantly by the eighth day following each respective attack. When considering data collected across all four months where an attack took place, March 22<sup>nd</sup>-29<sup>th</sup> of the Westminster Bridge attack accounted for n=616 article titles - the most volatile episode. In March alone, 96% of the 640 articles retrieved were published during this eight-day period. Table 5.2 also details that the volatility period for the Manchester bombing dissolved between days 7 to 11. Between May 22<sup>nd</sup>-23<sup>rd</sup> and June 2<sup>nd</sup>, figures drop <10 for two

days (May 30<sup>th</sup> & 31<sup>st</sup>), although they increased again (>10) for June 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>. Taking the figures at their maximum, this 11-day range accounted for 736 articles. Between May 22<sup>nd</sup> – 31<sup>st</sup>, there were 683 articles were retrieved, accounting for 98.6% of the 692 articles retrieved in May. For the London Bridge attack on June 3<sup>rd</sup> - 4<sup>th</sup>, this volatile period ranged from to 8-10 days. Again, taking figures at the maximum, this 10-day period accounted for 730 article titles, accounting for 92% of the 792 articles retrieved. The Parsons Green Tube bombing on 15<sup>th</sup> Sept produced considerably lower numbers than the other three attacks. This was likely owing to there being zero deaths and no spectacle (full explosion). The data illustrated similarly inflated figures for an 8 days period following the failed attack until 22<sup>nd</sup> September. This eight-day period accounted for 131 articles. In September, these 131 articles accounted for 82% of 160 articles.

<b>Westminster Bridge</b>								
<b>Episode</b>	<b>Day. 2</b>	<b>Day. 3</b>	<b>Day. 4</b>	<b>Day. 5</b>	<b>Day. 6</b>	<b>Day. 7</b>	<b>Day. 8</b>	<b>Between Attacks</b>
22/03/17	23/03/17	24/03/17	25/03/17	26/03/17	27/03/17	28/03/17	29/03/17	30/03/17 - 21/05/17
7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	
116	234	112	38	31	36	23	26	120
<b>Manchester Arena Bombing</b>								
22-23/05/17	24/05/17	25/05/17	26/05/17	27/05/17	28/05/17	29/05/17	30/05/2017	31/05/17 - 02/06/17
7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	
209	133	109	60	58	57	47	5	58
<b>London Bridge Attack</b>								
03-04/06/17	05/06/17	06/06/17	07/06/17	08/06/17	09/06/17	10/06/17	11/06/17	12/06/17 - 14/09/17
7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	
246	209	47	108	41	7	23	37	46
<b>Parsons Green Tube Bombing</b>								
15/09/17	16/09/17	17/09/17	18/09/17	19/09/17	20/09/17	21/09/17	22/09/2017	23/09/17 - 31/12/17
7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	
23	34	11	19	10	13	9	12	58
<b>Total</b>								
<b>594</b>	<b>610</b>	<b>279</b>	<b>225</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>282</b>

Table 5.3: Trends in Media Output following each attack

Table. 5.3 provides figures for each episode, and figures for each of the seven succeeding days before grouping the remaining days between attacks (or until the



end of 2017 with regard to the Parsons Green bombing). The figures indicate that attack days and the following day (Day. 2) produces the highest media coverage. Combined, episodes and Day. 2 data account for 1,204 (49.6%) of the 2,425 articles collected from 22<sup>nd</sup> March onward until the end of 2017. The collective figure for all Day. 3 (279) is a <54% from the Day. 2 totals (601). Together, the episodes, Day. 2 and Day. 3 data for all Islamist attacks account for 1473 (59.4%) of all articles collected in 2017.

<b>News Outlet</b>	<b>No. of 2017 Facebook Articles</b>
Daily Express	484
Daily Mail	368
The Sun	236
Sky News	207
The Guardian	193
The Telegraph	177
BBC News	176
Daily Mirror	98
The Independent	97
LBC	96
The Times	63
London Evening Standard	59
Channel 4 News	43
Daily Star	40
Belfast Telegraph	35
ITV News	33
Manchester Evening News	18
Channel 5 News	14
Wales Online	10
The Press and Journal	6
Metro	5
Edinburgh Evening News	4
Granada Reports	4
UTV News	4
Daily Record	2
Huffington Post	2
Al Jazeera English	1
Irish Daily Mirror	1

*Table 5.4: Volume of 2017 reporting per UK outlet (2017)*

To place media outputs into a larger context, some data was collected from a range of providers. Examining media contributors within 2017 datasets, *Table 5.4* provides quantitative data for articles published to Facebook from 28 UK news outlets. The top three content producers were right-leaning, tabloid newspapers. The Daily Express (n=484), Daily Mail (n=368), and The Sun (n=236) formed the three highest producers, with Sky News (n=207), The Guardian (n=193), The Telegraph (n=177), and BBC News (n=176), following as outlets contributing more than 100 recorded

publications. Of the 28 news outlets listed, only 23 contributed to the n=1473 articles published during the first 3 days of volatile periods. During the first 3 days of each attack (collectively), these dominant news contributors remained consistent. As *Table. 5.5* illustrates, The Daily Express (n=320), the Daily Mail (n=211), and The Sun (n=112) had the most data retrieved during the first three days following attacks, while Sky News (n=136), The Guardian (n=121), The Telegraph (n=95) and BBC News (n=106) again followed.

News Outlet	Westminster	Manchester Arena	London Bridge	Parsons Green	Total
Daily Express	170	119	29	2	<b>320</b>
Daily Mail	129	41	32	9	<b>211</b>
The Sun	69	0	35	8	<b>112</b>
Sky News	17	80	37	2	<b>136</b>
The Guardian	17	70	24	10	<b>121</b>
The Telegraph	32	4	57	2	<b>95</b>
BBC News	12	54	33	7	<b>106</b>
Daily Mirror	13	4	29	7	<b>53</b>
The Independent	0	1	52	15	<b>68</b>
LBC	0	35	19	0	<b>54</b>
The Times	3	2	20	5	<b>30</b>
London Evening Standard	0	0	42	0	<b>42</b>
Channel 4 News	0	15	8	0	<b>23</b>
Daily Star	0	0	21	0	<b>21</b>
Belfast Telegraph	0	21	9	0	<b>30</b>
ITV News	0	1	24	0	<b>25</b>
Manchester Evening News	0	1	0	0	<b>1</b>
Channel 5 News	0	0	10	0	<b>10</b>
Wales Online	0	0	1	0	<b>1</b>
The Press and Journal	0	0	6	0	<b>6</b>
Metro	0	1	0	1	<b>2</b>
Edinburgh Evening News	0	0	3	0	<b>3</b>
UTV News	0	1	2	0	<b>3</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>462</b>	<b>450</b>	<b>493</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>1473</b>

*Table 5.5: Episode - Day. 3 totals per news outlet*

Social media has emerged as a lucrative platform for news content creation, and the spectacle of terrorist events offer a chance for much-needed revenue. Given that roughly half of American adults obtain their news from social media, channels like Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter wield significant influence in news consumption

patterns.<sup>682</sup> Such changes are illustrated by the substantial increase in digital advertising revenue, which amounted to \$245 billion in 2022 and is anticipated to expand further.<sup>683</sup> Social media corporations have come to play a significant role in the dissemination of news, particularly during times of heightened anxiety and uncertainty, in exchange for generating advertising income for both themselves and the news outlets involved in producing content. As highlighted in previous chapters, this issue precedes social media, raising concerns about the impact of profit-oriented business models on the trustworthiness of news. As a result, there is a growing need for regulations to ensure responsible and effective news content display. The increasing reliance on social media for news consumption highlights the importance of examining and addressing the consequences of this shift in the media landscape, especially in the context of moral panic.

This shift in the media landscape underscores the need to understand and address the implications of this shift, particularly in the context of moral panic. The numerical data included in this chapter, when considered alongside statistics from the previous chapter, satisfy Goode & Ben-Yehuda's panic characteristic of *Volatility*.

### **News Reporting on Social Media: Magnifying the Panic**

Other panic characteristic proposed by Goode & Ben-Yehuda are further exhibited during the impact events (concern, hostility, and disproportionality, in particular). Noted during analysis, in the upheaval of attempting to figure out what had happened (*the Inventory*), stories were published based on incorrect information attributed, in part, to the necessity for higher-frequency, hastier news production. A qualitative theme of 2017 news coverage on terrorism, *General Attack Updates* (n=228) (*Table. 5.6*) revealed that news framing of stories utilised quotations from various sources as a form of sense-making, exploiting pre-established labels. Quotations included information seemingly yet to be confirmed by reporters or responders when they ran their stories. News reports used quotations heavily when

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<sup>682</sup> Jacob Liedke & Luxuan Wang, 'Social Media and News Fact Sheet' [PEW Research 2023] <<https://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/fact-sheet/social-media-and-news-fact-sheet/>> accessed 10<sup>th</sup> December 2023.

<sup>683</sup> Christopher St. Aubin, 'Sarah Naseer & Elisa Shearer, News Fact Sheet' [PEW Research 2023] <<https://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/fact-sheet/digital-news/>> accessed 10<sup>th</sup> December 2023.

articles involved updates from police, politicians, eyewitnesses, and even celebrity figures (see Table. 5.6).

Codes	Total
General Attack Updates	228
Harms to British Values	23
Celebrity input	118
Terror related Concern	336
Defiance to terror threat	114
Eyewitness quote	137
Folk Devil - Blame - Villains	364
Hashtags used	105
Hero's praised	136
Hostile headline	406
Immigration-Refugees mentioned	57
Journalist accounts - editorials - opinions	51
'New Threat' referred to	99
Other Terror Attack mentioned	81
Religious Leader input	587
Remedy proposed	464
Think Tank input	158
Warning - False Alarms	409

Table 5.6: News headline data collected from 2017 – themes formed in NVivo12

Media framing is shaped and reinforced by the emblematic and emotive weight of dramatic words, powerful imageries, and reputational validity of the information presenter.<sup>684</sup> Quotations from eyewitnesses enclosed many of these variables. Moral panic research offers appreciation for how language and symbols shape our understanding of the world, and our corresponding reactions under the compulsion of fear.<sup>685</sup> However, it should be noted that not all media organisations deliberately invoke dramatic presentation tactics as freely as others. For example, *Reuters* disallowed reporters from using the word 'terrorism' or 'terrorist' unless verbatim quoted, recognising that *'some words have emotional significance and must be used with special care in the interest of objectivity.'*<sup>686</sup> Additionally, Section 11.1, of the BBCs editorial guidelines, reads that:

*'...tone and language when reporting matters involving loss of life and human suffering...We should avoid causing unnecessary offence whilst also ensuring*

<sup>684</sup> Cohen (n1) 36

<sup>685</sup> Jessica White, 'Terrorism and the Mass Media' [2020] RUSI Occasional Paper 21 <[https://rusi.org/sites/default/files/terrorism\\_and\\_the\\_mass\\_media\\_final\\_web\\_version.pdf](https://rusi.org/sites/default/files/terrorism_and_the_mass_media_final_web_version.pdf)> accessed 26<sup>th</sup> Mar 2021.

<sup>686</sup> 'Reuters General Style Guidelines' [Reuters 2021] <<https://www.trust.org/contentAsset/raw-data/652966ab-c90b-4252-b4a5-db8ed1d438ce/file>> accessed 26<sup>th</sup> Mar 2021.

*that we continue to convey the reality of events and do not unduly sanitise our reporting... There must be strong editorial justification for the use of very graphic pictures.*<sup>687</sup>

Nevertheless, the nature of emotive news reporting during extreme episodes fuels panic progression. *General Attack Update* articles or 'live-stream updates'<sup>688</sup> accounted for a significant percentage of retrievable Facebook articles, providing by-the-minute details of unfolding events. Like other aspects covered so far in this PhDs analysis, this element of reporting is not entirely novel, as 24/7 news existed before social media. Nevertheless, during the London attack in March 2017, the Daily Express provided police confirmation of '*five dead, 40 injured*',<sup>689</sup> while The Telegraph led with the headline, '*They shouted 'this is for Allah', as they stabbed indiscriminately*'.<sup>690</sup> During the Manchester attack, Sky News live streamed information updating audiences of '*Fatalities after Manchester explosion*' and that the '*Manchester Arena 'explosion' is now being treated as a "possible terrorist incident"*'.<sup>691</sup> During the Parson Green attempted bombing, the BBC provided, '*LIVE: Police search for Tube attacker*'.<sup>692</sup> While the ability and practice of providing live updates is not new to panic research, the increased frequency and intensity of reporting enabled by social media is considered along with its impact on fear generation and sense-making distortion.

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<sup>687</sup> 'Editorial Guidelines - Section 11: War, Terror and Emergencies – Introduction' [BBC News 2021] <<https://www.bbc.com/editorialguidelines/guidelines/war-terror-emergencies>> accessed 26<sup>th</sup> Mar 2021.

<sup>688</sup> On social media, news outlets will have a real-time webpage running with up-to-the-minute updates of unfolding events. Such feeds consist of reporter revelations, input from social actors, eyewitness accounts, and video/pictures.

<sup>689</sup> Jon Rogers, 'London terror attack: police confirm five dead, 40 injured' [Daily Express 2017] <<https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/782736/London-terror-attack-five-dead-Mark-Rowley-40-injured-Keith-Palmer>> accessed 26<sup>th</sup> Mar 2021.

<sup>690</sup> Robert Mendick, "They shouted 'this is for Allah', as they stabbed indiscriminately." How the London terror attack unfolded' [The Telegraph 2017] <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/06/04/shouted-allah-stabbed-indiscriminately-london-terror-attack/>> accessed 26<sup>th</sup> Mar 2021.

<sup>691</sup> 'LIVE: Fatalities after Manchester 'explosion' Manchester Arena 'explosion' now being treated as a "possible terrorist incident", police tell Sky's Mark White. Updates as they happen on our live blog' [Sky News 2017] posting on Facebook <<https://www.facebook.com/skynews/posts/1762718523742737>> accessed 26<sup>th</sup> Mar 2021.

<sup>692</sup> 'London tube bombing: PM says terror threat level raised to critical; Theresa May makes TV statement as police search for bomber who left dozens injured by blast at Parsons Green station. London tube explosion - live updates. What we know so far' [BBC News 2017] <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/live/uk-england-london-41218382>> accessed 26<sup>th</sup> Mar 2021.

While not a presentation tactic for all outlets, the use of capitalised letters, words, and phrases to increase melodrama is a fundamental part of *Tabloid Speak*,<sup>693</sup> with examples seen constantly in terrorism coverage, not limited to data collected during 2017. For example, articles across all themes presented headlines in formats such as:

- *London terror attack: Woman pulled from river Thames ALIVE by Parliament* (Daily Express)
- *London on high alert: Police urge public to keep off streets of capital as they issue list of NO-GO AREAS following Parliament terror attack* (Daily Mail),
- *BLASTED BY COPS: Parliament terror attack video reveals terrifying moment armed police open fire on terrorist in Westminster as horrified witnesses flee* (The Sun)
- *Salford university EVACUATED: Police swarm building hours after terror attack* (Daily Express)
- *Installing barriers on London Bridge was ruled out HOURS before the attack Why did they ignore it?* (The Sun)
- *THAMES TERROR PLUNGE: Chilling video shows London terror attacker's car ploughing into pedestrians on Westminster Bridge and sends woman plunging into the Thames* (The Sun)
- *Terrorist on the rampage: Chilling footage shows London terror attacker's car speeding along the pavement of Westminster Bridge as one terrified woman PLUNGES into the River Thames* (Daily Mail)
- *London terror attack victims JUMPED from Westminster Bridge in survival bid – witness* (Daily Express)
- *PICTURED: The huge KNIFE terrorist used in horror London attack* (Daily Express).

Such reporting tactics on social media - taglines, hashtags, dramatic language and images, and capitalised keywords—seek to attract audience attention. News coverage of current affairs is often negative, a product of the audience's tendency to

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<sup>693</sup> Roy Greenslade, 'Tabloid Speak' [The Guardian 2005]  
<<https://www.theguardian.com/media/2005/feb/21/pressandpublishing.mondaymediasection>>  
accessed 26<sup>th</sup> Mar 2021.

care more about content which incites negative sentiments. Soroka, Fournier & Nir (2019) find that audiences are more 'physiologically activated' by negative content<sup>694</sup> adding support to an aged media motto '*If It Bleeds, It Leads*' hypothesis, positing that events which elicit extreme negative emotions are more likely to attract greater audience engagement.<sup>695</sup> Audience *Negativity bias* is an emotional trait that has long been recognised by news providers and is now an inherent element of the construction of news frames. Such a variable increases audience distortion and sensitivities,<sup>696</sup> particularly if we consider that the vast majority of audiences are not within the immediate proximity of terrorist attacks and receive their second-hand information.<sup>697</sup>

In general, news must reduce complex situations and variables to a simplified form. However, such simplicity often sacrifices key contextual variables that better inform the audience. Jewkes' (2015) elements of newsworthiness argue that content should be reduced to the minimum sum of parts, enabling broader understanding among specialist and non-specialist audiences, linking to values of *Simplification, Individualism & Risk*.<sup>698</sup> Doing so reduces strain on the audience's attention span while also restricting alternative or counter interpretations. In traditional media (e.g. TV), news frames are often denied deliberation or alternative interpretations, thus obliging audiences to suspend critical interpretations.<sup>699</sup> Deeper terroristic connotations are complex and challenging for news to cover unless there are useful statistics, videos, or imageries. For scrolling Facebook users, once a headline has gained audience attention, other aspects of news posts are impactful, such as capitalised words, emotive statements or quotes in the title, graphic photos, and video imagery. A more contemporary feature of panic development in the social media era, supplementing article headlines, is attack-specific *taglines* added to Facebook articles, analysis found trends for news outlets inserting the geographical location of the attack followed by the word '*Attack*', '*Terror Attack*' or '*Blast*':

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<sup>694</sup> Stuart Soroka, Patrick Fournier & Lilach Nir, 'Cross-National Evidence of a Negativity Bias in Psychophysiological reactions to News' [2019] PNAS 116 (38) <<https://www.pnas.org/content/116/38/18888>> accessed 26<sup>th</sup> Mar 2021.

<sup>695</sup> Ross A. Miller & Karen Albert, 'If It Leads, It Bleeds (and If It Bleeds, It Leads): Media Coverage and Fatalities in Militarized Interstate Disputes' [2015] Political Communication 32 (1) 61

<sup>696</sup> White (n685)

<sup>697</sup> Cohen (n1) 9

<sup>698</sup> Jewkes (n45) 51-53

<sup>699</sup> Ibid 51-53.

- *'LONDON TERROR ATTACK: Bomb squad called to Parliament over more attack fears,'*<sup>700</sup>
- *'Manchester Arena blast being treated as 'appalling terrorist attack' The cause of the blast, which followed an Ariana Grande concert, is still unknown,'*<sup>701</sup>
- *'London Bridge attack: 21 of those injured are in critical condition, NHS says - live updates (and*
- *'Parsons Green terror attack: London tube station IED bomb blast leaves 22 people injured; 'Quite a few people injured' at west London station, say witnesses.'*<sup>702</sup>

The inclusion of taglines in news headings serves to instantly associate volatile events with a place (creating proximity) and adverse emotions. Hashtags are also now a common feature of online news reporting across all terror attack coverage. Like taglines, *Hashtags* (see *Table 5.5; n=105*) make it easier to attribute what occurs through a single, simplified term. Furthermore, when such terms are searched via social media input search tools, information is easily retrieved. Hashtags are utilised by distributors of information to reach target audiences, enabling audiences to access articles pertaining to trending topics. The most recorded hashtags across all 2017 attacks were: *#PrayForLondon*; *#ManchesterAttack*; *#LondonAttack*; & *#ParsonsGreenAttack*.

During analysis, attention was also drawn to the use of eyewitnesses accounts (see *Table 5.6; Eyewitness quotes n=137*). The use of quotations added to the dramatisation of attacks, reinforced the spectacle of the situation, and served as a legitimate source of 'factual' information. Not that terrorist attacks fail to provide such theatricals of their own accord, of course. Based on eyewitness accounts, news

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<sup>700</sup> Patrick Christys & Zoie O'Brien, 'LONDON TERROR ATTACK: Bomb squad called to Parliament over more attack fears' [Daily Express 2017] <<https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/782572/London-terror-attack-Westminster-Shooting-Bomb-Squad-Parliament-suspicious-package>> accessed 26<sup>th</sup> Mar 2021.

<sup>701</sup> 'Manchester Arena blast being treated as 'appalling terrorist attack' The cause of the blast which followed an Ariana Grande concert is still unknown' [BBC News 2017] published on Facebook <<https://www.facebook.com/bbcnews/posts/10154698637547217>> accessed 26<sup>th</sup> Mar 2021.

<sup>702</sup> Jon Sharman & Helen Hoddinott, 'Parsons Green terror attack: London tube station IED bomb blast leaves 22 people injured; 'Quite a few people injured' at west London station, say witnesses' [The Independent 2017] <<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/parsons-green-explosion-latest-update-london-tube-station-train-bomb-district-line-met-police-southwest-a7947781.html>> accessed 26<sup>th</sup> Mar 2021.



outlets reported with increased frequency and 'confirmed' dramatic aspects of the unfolding drama, reporting statements that some witnesses '*...saw the knifeman*' (Daily Express, Westminster Attack) and that there were "*Kids and teenagers just lying there screaming.*" (BBC News, Manchester Arena Bombing), "*I saw police jumping out, pulling on helmets, getting machine guns out.*" (Channel 4 News, London Bridge attack). However, longstanding issues of eyewitness accounts consist of inaccuracies, adding to distortion when ascertaining what has actually transpired.

Video and photography of attacks by eyewitnesses proved to be highly effective in delivering the experience of a terrorist attack to a broader audience; a modern element of panic development. During the Westminster attack, one eyewitness (a Taiwanese tourist to London) recorded a video of civilians running away from parliament, with audio picking up three shots fired at a distance (there are no visuals of who the shooter was in the video).<sup>703</sup> People in cars also took photos and videos as they drove across Westminster Bridge as people lay injured, and people sought to help those injured.<sup>704</sup> More graphically, a video recorded on a mobile phone circulated on social media showing many injured civilians on the bridge, some of whom were trapped under a stationary bus.<sup>705</sup> The BBC published a video from the Westminster attack showing the moment (from afar) that the Westminster attacker rammed his vehicle into people on the Westminster Bridge, with a woman was propelled from the bridge into the Thames River.<sup>706</sup> The Manchester Arena bombing also produced amateur pictures and video footage. Multiple news outlets amplified footage taken from inside and around the arena at the moment of detonation, such

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<sup>703</sup> 'Westminster Terror Attack: A tourist filmed the moment gunshots were fired outside the UK Parliament' [BBC News 2017] viewed on Facebook <<https://www.facebook.com/bbcnews/videos/10154508151547217/>> accessed 19<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

<sup>704</sup> Mark Hillard, 'Irish witness tells of his lucky escape in London terror attack' [The Irish Times 2017] <<https://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/uk/irish-witness-tells-of-his-lucky-escape-in-london-terror-attack-1.3020877>> accessed 19<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

<sup>705</sup> A video posted by a private Facebook account holder <<https://www.facebook.com/rafiq.rajani/videos/1400191050040512>> accessed 25<sup>th</sup> Mar 2021.

<sup>706</sup> 'Woman falls into River Thames in UK terror attack: Video shows a woman falling into River Thames in UK terror attack - she is being treated for severe injuries' [BBC News 2017] viewed on Facebook <<https://www.facebook.com/bbcnews/videos/10154508972792217>> accessed 25<sup>th</sup> March 2021.

as The Guardian,<sup>707</sup> The Independent,<sup>708</sup> The Mirror,<sup>709</sup> and the Daily Express.<sup>710</sup>

The amplification of eyewitnesses and amateur footage was a standard media tool for the first three days of each episode before its use notably receded in the days immediately following the attacks, new footage introduced concerning ongoing police operations elsewhere in connection with each respective attack. With sensational headline language used by the media during episodes, eyewitness accounts provide a vivid and highly dramatised portrayal before official facts of incidents could be released.

However, the need for rapid fire publishing created issues concerning reliability, credibility, and quality of information. During volatility, rumours gained credulity as fear and sensitisation peaked. For example, multiple news outlets reported misleading or a false terror threat to London. The Telegraph, '*Hoax London terror attack message causes panic*',<sup>711</sup> stating that British police were forced to deny rumours that a terrorist attack could occur on the London Underground.

Concurrently, the Daily Mirror quoted a Tweet posted by Chief Superintendent Martin Fry on 31<sup>st</sup> Aug 2014, stating that '*No specific threat*' to London tube network this morning after terror rumours go viral.<sup>712</sup>

### **Elite-directed Magnification & Moralisation of Terrorism: Blaming social media**

In the social media era live-update reports are supplemented with political and 'expert' analysis offering explanations for how and why attacks had happened. It was

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<sup>707</sup> 'Footage from inside Manchester Arena at the moment of explosion – video' [The Guardian 2017] <<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/video/2017/may/23/phone-footage-captures-the-chaos-inside-manchester-arena-as-bomb-explodes-video>> accessed 1<sup>st</sup> July 2021.

<sup>708</sup> Rachel Roberts, 'Manchester explosion: Video captures moment of bomb blast that killed 22' [The Independent 2017] <<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/manchester-explosion-latest-video-blast-dashcam-footage-ariana-grande-concert-a7750506.html>> accessed 1<sup>st</sup> July 2021.

<sup>709</sup> Joshua Taylor, 'Harrowing footage shows crush inside Manchester Arena as thousands of screaming children scramble to escape after suicide bombing' [The Mirror 2017] <<https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/harrowing-footage-shows-crush-inside-10480246>> accessed 1<sup>st</sup> July 2021.

<sup>710</sup> Sebastian Kettley, 'Manchester bombing video: Heartbreaking video footage of the terror attack unfolding' [Daily Express 2017] <<https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/808323/Manchester-bombing-video-explosion-attack-footage-arena-Ariana-Grande-terror>> accessed 1<sup>st</sup> July 2021.

<sup>711</sup> Josie Ensor, 'Hoax London terror attack message causes panic' [The Telegraph 2014] <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/terrorism-in-the-uk/11067185/Hoax-London-terror-attack-message-causes-panic.html>> accessed 1<sup>st</sup> July 2021.

<sup>712</sup> Jessica Best, 'No specific threat' to London tube network this morning after terror rumours go viral' [Daily Mirror 2014] <<https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/no-specific-threat-london-tube-4142454.amp>> accessed 1<sup>st</sup> July 2021.

noted by Conservatives and ideologically supporting media that modern communication technology enables individuals to inspire others towards terroristic and extremist beliefs.<sup>713</sup> Analysing the UK's 2017 Islamist attacks, news and political elites referenced the ease at which extremist content could be accessed online and the role communications technology played in terrorists communicating and coordinating attacks. This rhetoric cross many themes noted in *Table 5.6 (themes of New Threat, Remedy Proposed, and Terror related Concern, for example)*. The Westminster incident raised security concerns regarding the accessibility and dissemination of terrorist 'manuals', and how easily such material could be accessed through Internet search engines such as Google. The Daily Express reported on the ease their researchers could access such content,<sup>714</sup> while the Daily Mail highlighted that a '*Jihadi terror manual on how to use cars as a 'tool of war' for mass murder*' could '*be found in just under two minutes on Google and Twitter*' by performing '*simple searches*'. These "*vile manuals*" urged "*fanatics...to deploy large vehicles as tools of war before going on a stabbing rampage*" reported as "*the template for Wednesday's atrocity in Westminster*."<sup>715</sup> The Daily Mail also reported that then British Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson, claimed social media websites were 'inciting terrorism':

*'We are going to have to engage not just militarily, but also to stop the stuff on the Internet that is corrupting and polluting so many people. This is something that the Internet companies and social media companies need to think about. They need to do more to take that stuff off their media, the incitements, the information about how to become a terrorist, the radicalising sermons, and messages. That needs to come down.'*<sup>716</sup>

There was irony in this Daily Mail report. As the security concerns relating to the access, spread, and influence of this terrorist material are highlighted, Daily Mail extensively divulges much of the manual's content for the sake of revenue-generating audience attention. For example, the article describes how the manual's

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<sup>713</sup> Lowe (n263) 96

<sup>714</sup> Belinda Robinson, 'REVEALED: How easy it is to find a terror manual on the web after London attacks' [Daily Express 2017] <<https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/783416/London-terror-attack-parliament-westminster-shooting-extremist-material-online-for-jihadi>> accessed 24th April 2021.

<sup>715</sup> Paul Bentley, Glen Keough & Sam Greenhill, 'Jihadi terror manuals on how to use a car as a 'tool of war' for mass murder can be found in just two minutes on Google and Twitter' [Daily Mail 2017] <<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4344338/Jihadi-terror-manuals-use-car-tool-war.html>> accessed 24th April 2021.

<sup>716</sup> Ibid.

authors advocate the use of vehicles as weapons ‘as tools of war’ and knives, which are ‘*easily available from DIY stores*’. With the manual purportedly published a year before the Westminster attack and having seen over 100 deaths and over 300 injured in attacks until this point, it was insinuated by the Daily Mail that access to this online material was impactful on Masood’s choice of *modus operandi*. When describing the manual’s content, the Daily Mail used graphic and emotive outtakes to signify the extreme ramifications of such inspiring terrorist materials. For example, the Nice attack “*superbly demonstrates*” how vehicles could be used for terror, having the effect of:

*"...smashing their bodies while crushing their heads, torsos and limbs under the vehicle's wheels, leaving behind a trail of carnage. Vehicles are like knives, as they are extremely easy to acquire. But unlike knives, which if found in one's possession can be a cause for suspicion, vehicles arouse absolutely no doubts due to their widespread use throughout the world. It has been shown that smaller vehicles are incapable of granting the level of carnage that is sought. One of the main reasons for this is that smaller vehicles lack the weight and wheel span required for crushing many victims. The type of vehicle most appropriate for such an operation is a large load-bearing truck."*

The manual provided specific instructions on where to strike a person on their body with a knife.<sup>717</sup>

In a separate opinion piece again published by the Daily Mail and delivered with a headline that was both a proposed remedy and a warning - *Purge Terror Sites or Face the Consequences* - there was an initially measured narrative cautioning against ‘*going too far*’ towards ‘*making the Commons an inaccessible fortress*’ as this would ‘*hand victory to our enemies*’. There were calls to review how the Westminster attacker had ‘*been on the radar*’ of security services, yet, had ‘*slipped through their grasp*’. However, there is recognition by the Daily Mail that this can be a challenge for MI5, who have to monitor ‘*3,000 or so homegrown suspects*’ and returning foreign fighters.<sup>718</sup> In embedding the Westminster attack into a more

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<sup>717</sup> Ibid.

<sup>718</sup> ‘DAILY MAIL COMMENT: Purge terror sites or face the consequences’ [Daily Mail 2017] <<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-4344452/Purge-terror-sites-says-Daily-Mail-Comment.html>> accessed 29<sup>th</sup> April 2021.

comprehensive narrative of past and ongoing Islamist extremism, Daily Mail stated that:

*“It’s too early to say whether Masood was, like the killers of Fusilier Lee Rigby, were radicalised online. But it would hardly be a surprise if he, like many other British jihadists, was turned to hate by poisonous material which is – thanks to the likes of Google, Twitter, and Facebook – just a few clicks away. Multi-billion-dollar web behemoths...don’t care that they have become recruiting platforms for terrorists. They do nothing despite repeated pleas from politicians such as the one made yesterday by Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson. One thing is certain: this situation cannot be allowed to continue. The web giants must either clean up their acts or be made to do so by law and regulation.”<sup>719</sup>*

Such discourse links to a secondary technological concerns highlighted during the Westminster attack. Much apprehension was conveyed by Conservative government ministers, right-leaning tabloids, and broadsheets surrounding encrypted messenger apps. Having also been reported by The Sun,<sup>720</sup> the Daily Mail described appeals made by ‘ISIS fanatics’ for a ‘lone wolf’ attack on Parliament via messaging app, Telegram, ‘just weeks before the carnage in Westminster.’ The Daily Mail stressed that jihadists outlined ‘a list of possible victims and perfect targets in Britain including politicians, Jewish Schools, pubs and clubs,’ and that ‘six weeks after this disturbing call to arms on Telegram, Masood attacked.’<sup>721</sup> Although technology companies warned that decryption would allow hackers and governments to easily access users’ private messages without consent, the government insisted that national security was a higher, superseding priority.<sup>722</sup> Masood did use WhatsApp moments before his attack, raising questions regarding the possibility of him belonging to a terrorist network and raising further radicalisation concerns linked to ‘homegrown’ British terrorism. The Daily Mail ‘REVEALED’ that ‘Lone wolf terror attacker Khalid

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<sup>719</sup> Ibid.

<sup>720</sup> Brittany Vonow, ‘WHO WAS HE MESSAGING?: London attack lone wolf terrorist Khalid Masood ‘was on WhatsApp’ just TWO minutes before unleashing Westminster terror’ [The Sun 2017] <<https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/3167439/london-attack-lone-wolf-terrorist-khalid-masood-whatsapp-westminster-terror/>> accessed 29<sup>th</sup> April 2021.

<sup>721</sup> Alex Matthews, ‘ISIS fanatics called for a ‘lone wolf’ attack on Parliament via secret messaging app Telegram just weeks before Westminster carnage’ [Daily Mail 2017] <<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4350140/ISIS-ordered-attack-Parliament-app-Telegram.html>> accessed 29<sup>th</sup> April 2021.

<sup>722</sup> Vincent Wood, ‘Government ‘will force tech firms to hand over messages’ in the wake of Manchester bombing’ [Daily Express 2017] <<https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/808483/Manchester-Bombing-Westminster-terror-data-encryption-WhatsApp-Facebook>> accessed 29<sup>th</sup> April 2021.

*Masood was on WhatsApp TWO minutes before unleashing carnage in London...*' though posed an open-ended question to its audience, '*...so who was he communicating with?*'<sup>723</sup> Nevertheless, the content of this article does not provide evidence, knowledge, or understanding beyond the inciteful headline statement. The Sun, which covered the same story, provided a screenshot (*Figure. 5.1*) of Masood's WhatsApp profile with an encryption message, visually linking a terrorist attack with encrypted social media applications. Within the article, there is also a link to a Sky News interview where correspondent, Mark White, raises apprehensions concerning end-to-end encryption features in these applications. White claims that if the police had not obtained Masood's phone after the attack, there may have been substantial difficulties in obtaining information from Masood's communication accounts.<sup>724</sup> However, these articles provide little supporting detail or evidence that early access to such information would have had an impact on the commission of the attack or the investigation thereafter.

Figure 5.1: Screenshot of Khalid Masood's WhatsApp profile provided by The Sun (*Image removed for repository publication – view via citation*).

Similar conservative political and media concerns re-emerged in the wake of the Manchester Arena bombing. A key issue raised by the police, politicians, and media questioned whether the bomber, Salman Abedi, belonged to a part of an extensive network of Islamist terrorists operating covertly in Britain. Again, the covert elements were attributed to encryption aspects of social media applications such as WhatsApp

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<sup>723</sup> Alex Mathews, 'REVEALED: 'Lone wolf' terror attacker Khalid Masood was on WhatsApp TWO minutes before unleashing carnage in London... so who was he communicating with?' [Daily Mail 2017] <<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4345092/Masood-WhatsApp-TWO-minutes-Westminster-attack.html>> accessed 29<sup>th</sup> April 2021.

<sup>724</sup> Vonow (n720)

alongside the failure of social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter to detect, report, and remove harmful and influential material. As a remedy, the Daily Express asserted that the government would *'force' tech firms to hand over messages*' in the wake of the Manchester bombing, revealing that MPs had been considering ways to *'force' tech firms to provide requested data.*<sup>725</sup> There were accusations from Daily Express that the police could not access the *'barbaric killers'* final words because of privacy-maintaining encryptions. The Daily Express also claimed that government ministers sought to introduce *Technical Capability Notices* (TCNs) which would allow MI5 to force companies like Facebook to decrypt and disclose private messages. One government minister claimed, *'We will do this as soon as we can after the election.'* This undisclosed minister claimed that *'the threat level proves there is no more time to waste now. The social media companies have been laughing in our faces for too long.'* Conservative MP Tom Tugendhat, standing for re-election later that year, stated, *'Tragically, we have seen all too often that these companies are the preferred means of communication for those who seek to harm us. They must have no hiding places.'*<sup>726</sup>

By the time of the London Bridge attack, media and government discourse regarding the role of the Internet had remained consistent. Prime Minister Theresa May renewed calls and threats regarding extremist websites and Internet companies needing to *'do more.'*<sup>727</sup> The diffusion of technological concerns was continually prompted as May specified the *'hard-line'* actions that the UK government would take. Sky News reported that there were tensions between the government and Facebook regarding online extremism,<sup>728</sup> while The Telegraph ran with a headline declaring *'May: I will shut down extremist websites if internet companies don't act'* and enact legislation to make Britain *'the safest place for people online'*,<sup>729</sup> accusing

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<sup>725</sup> Wood (n722)

<sup>726</sup> Ibid.

<sup>727</sup> Gordon Rayner, 'May: I will shut down extremist websites if internet companies don't act' [The Telegraph 2017] <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/06/05/theresa-may-will-shut-extremist-websites-internet-companies/>> accessed 12<sup>th</sup> May 2021.

<sup>728</sup> Tom Cheshire, 'Tension between Theresa May and Facebook over extremism online' [Sky News 2017] <<https://news.sky.com/story/tension-between-theresa-may-and-facebook-over-extremism-online-10904140>> accessed 29<sup>th</sup> April 2021.

<sup>729</sup> Rayner (n727)

Internet companies of giving extremists a 'safe place'.<sup>730</sup> The Guardian cited May as follows:

*'We cannot allow this ideology the safe space it needs to breed. Yet that is precisely what the internet, and the big companies that provide internet-based services, provide... We need to work with allied democratic governments to reach international agreements that regulate cyberspace to prevent the spread of extremism and terrorism planning.'*<sup>731</sup>

Of course, there are legitimate concerns about the sharing of terrorist-inspiring content freely via the Internet. Undoubtedly, planning and preparation for violent attacks would be aided by acquiring materials providing inspiration and knowledge.<sup>732</sup> However, similar to other dimensions of modern Islamist extremism, the dissemination of terrorist propaganda is not a new phenomenon or issue for the UK security (*changes over time*),<sup>733</sup> and should also be talked about in the context of broader public privacy rights. Sections 57 and 58 of the *Terrorism Act (2000)* create offences for the possession of items intended to commit or perpetrate an act of terrorism. By extension, broader issues of radicalisation have been legislatively addressed in statutes and government policy. *CONTEST's Prevent Strategy* addresses the ideological challenge of terrorism and those who promote it, averting individuals from terrorism and working with sectors and institutions that expose the risks of radicalisation.<sup>734</sup>

It has been known for some time that terrorist groups understand the value of their propaganda campaigns and efforts to share information widely. Al-Qaeda's professionally produced online magazine, *Inspire*, contains articles on various topics, from the extremes of their ideology to information on bomb-making attacks.<sup>735</sup> Searching the combined terms of 'Inspire' and 'al-Qaeda' on Lexis Library retrieves n=3,955 news articles from UK publishers between 1<sup>st</sup> January 2010 and 31<sup>st</sup>

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<sup>730</sup> Henry Zeffman, 'Theresa May pledges crackdown on extremism in cyberspace' [The Times 2017] <<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/theresa-may-pledges-crackdown-on-extremism-in-cyberspace-hxvkkd3sg>> accessed 29<sup>th</sup> April 2021.

<sup>731</sup> Charles Arthur, 'Blame the internet' is just not a good enough response, Theresa May' [The Guardian 2017] <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jun/04/internet-theresa-may-cyberspace-london-bridge>> accessed 29<sup>th</sup> April 2021.

<sup>732</sup> Lowe (n263) 63

<sup>733</sup> Goode & Ben-Yehuda (n16) 46

<sup>734</sup> HM Government [2011] *Prevent Strategy* 7

<sup>735</sup> Lowe (n263) 96



December 2016, indicating that the media, too, were already aware. Other extremist groups, including the far-right, have exploited the Internet and electronic communication technology to produce professional-looking websites. The UK-based group, *National Action*, use online communication the radicalisation of young people to promote their nationalist ideology and mobilise other far-right followers to attend public events where the use of violence is glorified. However, Lowe (2018) states that ISIL is most successful in this regard, as evidenced by the UK having the youngest convicted terrorist receiving a life sentence for plotting with an Australian counterpart online to murder Australian police officers during the Anzac Day celebrations in 2015. The *Fatwa Call* (2014) also urged extremist followers to kill soldiers and civilians in Europe, the US, and Australia.<sup>736</sup>

Although the sharing of dangerous extremist materials and instructions on how to convert everyday items into weaponry should be monitored and removed, media outlets overstate the actual destructiveness of the proposed modus operandi. As Islamist groups had been promoting low-tech, remedial forms of attack, this was evidence that Islamist radicals were not skilled or resourced to organise a deadly assault. However, this argument can become mute owing to a slight (yet damaging) number of successful low-grade attacks. The Westminster and London Bridge attacks were low-grade terrorism attacks. The attempted Parsons Green tube bombing further illustrated the inability of online-inspired extremists to successfully launch a large-scale attack. Prior to 2017, Lee Rigby's murder employed knives and a car. Since the end of the Irish Troubles, the UK has seen only two attacks (the London bombings of 2005 and the Manchester Arena) which have been of higher sophistication and a significant death toll (reaching double figures). Further, as detailed earlier in this PhD, security services have been able to successfully foil multiple (18) terrorist efforts between 2013-2021;<sup>737</sup> 13 foiled attempts between 2013-2017.<sup>738</sup>

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<sup>736</sup> Ibid 96-97.

<sup>737</sup> 'MI5 and Police – Joint Review of Operational Processes in CT Investigations following recent terrorist attacks' [MI5 2021] <<https://www.mi5.gov.uk/zh-hans/node/496#sthash.ccaQWDHJ.dpuf>> accessed 5<sup>th</sup> May 2021.

<sup>738</sup> 'Security services 'prevented 13 UK terror attacks since 2013' [BBC News 2017] <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-39176110>> accessed 5<sup>th</sup> May 2021.

Political elites made efforts to establish competency in the aftermath of attacks by proposing punitive and retributive remedies (see Table 5.6); an often expressed strain of remedy by social elites seeking to managing public fear. For example, Theresa May proposed longer prison sentences for terror-related offences.<sup>739</sup> May argued that Britain has '*far too much tolerance of extremism*'.<sup>740</sup> The Times' correspondent, Richard Ford, headlines that May advocated for longer sentences for terror-related crimes, stating that Home Office figures showed that seventy-two terrorist-related offenders were released from jail in the year to September 2016.<sup>741</sup> Although these proposals were challenged by left-leaning, traditionally Labour-backing media such as The Independent and The Guardian. The Independent asserted that May's assuring speech may have comforted anxious members of the public wanting to see retribution, but the measures she proposed did not stand well against scrutiny.'

*'After the third terrorist act in Britain in 73 days, it was understandable that the Prime Minister felt the need to issue an 'enough is enough' message. Most people would agree. Nevertheless, to reassure an anxious nation, she should not rush into ill-conceived legislation or measures that could prove counterproductive.'*<sup>742</sup>

Furthermore, in the immediate aftermath of terrorist attacks, notions of dangerousness are applied to whole sections or entities within society. Moral indignation, censure, and hostility are directed at anyone who seem to transgresses the legal or moral codes of mainstream society.<sup>743</sup> The same can be true for anyone who opines for discourse dissimilar to the frames constructed by primary information sources at the top of the Hierarchy of Credibility.

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<sup>739</sup> Richard Ford, 'Theresa May calls for longer sentences for terror-related offences' [The Times 2017] <<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/theresa-may-calls-for-longer-sentences-for-terror-related-offences-z23fcxnpn>> accessed 5<sup>th</sup> May 2021.

<sup>740</sup> 'Theresa May's speech may have reassured the public, but the measures proposed don't stand up to scrutiny' [The Independent 2017] <<https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/editorials/theresa-may-speech-terrorism-london-attack-a7772406.html>> accessed 5<sup>th</sup> May 2021.

<sup>741</sup> Ford (n739)

<sup>742</sup> The Independent (n740)

<sup>743</sup> Jewkes (n45) 51-53

### **Birmingham: Symbolisation of the Trojan Horse**

Following from points raised in previous chapters, during the costing periods (Inventory) of each of the 2017 attacks, the notion of terrorist Trojan horse tactics adopted an evolved state, linking to pre-existing themes from the previous chapter regarding immigration as a source of terroristic threat to Britain (see Table 5.6;  $n=57$ ). This analysis shows that right-leaning tabloids such as the Daily Mail and the Daily Express developed broader concerns for extremist radicalisation, presenting a close *proximity* threat to their UK readerships, discussing the consequences of unchallenged radicalisation, alongside highlighting purported failings in the UK government and security services efforts in dealing with terrorism within UK borders (the attacker was 'on the radar'). Following the Westminster Bridge attack, the question was raised within media discourse; '*Why do all the Jihadis come to Birmingham?*'<sup>744</sup> A base for Islamist extremism and radicalisation in the UK was linked to Birmingham, purported as a '*breeding ground for terrorism*'.<sup>745</sup> The Daily Express equated the city to Britain's 'Molenbeek',<sup>746</sup> while Peter Bracchi of the Daily Mail declared Birmingham as the '*jihadi capital of Britain*'.<sup>747</sup> Within this Daily Mail report by Bracchi, he appears to draw upon the findings of a Henry Jackson Society (HJS) report that analyses Islamist terrorism in the UK from 1998 to 2015.<sup>748</sup> It should be stated that the HJS think tank has received much criticism from human rights lawyers and mainstream British political groups for its perceived bias towards neo-conservative right-leaning politics.<sup>749</sup> HJS has also been accused of having an

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<sup>744</sup> Katrin Bennhold & Kimiko de Freytas-Tamura, 'Why do all the Jihadis come to Birmingham?' [The New York Times 2017] <<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/26/world/europe/birmingham-britain-islam-jihadis.html>> accessed 1<sup>st</sup> May 2021.

<sup>745</sup> Kim Sengupta, 'London attack: Why has Birmingham become such a breeding ground for British-born terror?' [The Independent 2017] <<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/london-attacker-khalid-masood-birmingham-uk-terrorists-breeding-ground-a7646536.html>> accessed 1<sup>st</sup> May 2021.

<sup>746</sup> Patrick Christys & Zoie O'Brien, 'Inside Britain's Molenbeek: Is Birmingham's Sparkbrook the beating heart of British jihad?' [Daily Express 2017] <<https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/791417/Birmingham-terror-Sparkbrook-Khalid-Masood-Islamic-State-Henry-Jackson-Report>> accessed 1<sup>st</sup> May 2021.

<sup>747</sup> Paul Bracchi, 'So how DID Birmingham become the jihadi capital of Britain? 'Connection' of London terror attacker to Britain's second city is more than just a coincidence' [Daily Express 2017] <<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4344300/How-DID-Birmingham-jihadi-capital-Britain.html>> accessed 1<sup>st</sup> May 2021.

<sup>748</sup> Hannah Stuart, 'Islamist Terrorism: Analysis of Offences and Attacks in the UK (1998-2015)' [Henry Jackson Society 2017] <<https://henryjacksonsociety.org/publications/islamist-terrorism-analysis-of-offences-and-attacks-in-the-uk-1998-2015/>> accessed 1<sup>st</sup> May 2021.

<sup>749</sup> Tom Gordon, 'Scottish Labour leader urged to cut links with right-wing think tank' [The Herald 2015] <<https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/13195771.scottish-labour-leader-urged-cut-links-right-wing-think-tank/>> accessed 1<sup>st</sup> May 2021.

Islamophobic agenda,<sup>750</sup> with the Muslim Council of Britain claiming in 2017 that the narrative of HJS makes reference to unfounded, stereotypical, and slanted perceptions that Muslims do not, and cannot, integrate into mainstream society; that they are not members of a wider British society, and that Muslims are inherently prone to extremism.<sup>751</sup> Nevertheless, this argument made by Bracchi is perhaps one of the more emotive journalistic pieces analysed in this research. Bracchi began by directly connecting Islamist terrorism to the Sparkbrook district of Birmingham, which produced thirty-nine of the UK's 269 (1 in 10) known jihadi terrorists from 1998 to 2015. For Bracchi, this reinforced Birmingham's connection to Islamist terrorism:

*'The Hyundai 4x4 at the centre of the Westminster terrorist atrocity might have ended its bloody mission at the gates of Parliament, but the vehicle — and the maniac behind the wheel — began the journey more than 100 miles up the M40 . . . in Birmingham. The vehicle was hired from a firm — in Birmingham. The 'driver' was staying in a rented flat — in Birmingham. Police with machine guns carried out a series of raids in the aftermath of the attack — in Birmingham.*

*Birmingham. Birmingham. Birmingham. It's always Birmingham.*

*Under different circumstances, these revelations might be treated as no more than incidental facts in the narrative. After all, the Hyundai had to come from somewhere, the perpetrator had to live somewhere. The recent history of Britain's second city, however, tells us that the Birmingham 'connection' is more significant; more than just a coincidence. How can the shocking statistic — namely, that one in ten convicted Islamic terrorists come from a tiny area of Birmingham in and around the Sparkbrook district — be dismissed as a 'coincidence?'"<sup>752</sup>*

Further efforts were made to strengthen Birmingham's 'jihadi capital' label when stating that the 39 Islamist terrorists connected to the city 'down the years' are more than West Yorkshire, Greater Manchester, and Lancashire combined. Bracchi's discussion then evolved. Having outlined that Birmingham is a problematic area within British borders, he reasons why. Having commented earlier in his writing that

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<sup>750</sup> James Bloodworth, 'Labour should cut its ties with the illiberal Henry Jackson Society' [The Guardian 2013] <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/may/20/labour-cut-ties-henry-jackson-society>> accessed 1<sup>st</sup> May 2021.

<sup>751</sup> Alex MacDonald, 'Muslim leaders slam UK police chief ties to 'demonising' think tank' [Middle East Eye 2017] <<https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/muslim-leaders-slam-uk-police-chief-ties-demonising-think-tank>> accessed 1<sup>st</sup> May 2021.

<sup>752</sup> Bracchi (n747)

'a significant section of Sparkbrook's population does not speak English', the area of Birmingham where Masood would have resided is described:

*'The back-to-back terraces of Sparkbrook, and similar neighbourhoods around the country, have often been cited as examples of thriving multiculturalism. In truth, they have become segregated ghettos with high rates of crime and unemployment, where few British-origin households remain....Only a generation ago, residents were made up of indigenous locals and families from Ireland, attracted by cheap housing and employment.*

*In the Sixties, the first migrants from the Indian sub-continent arrived, and so began a process of irreversible change that culminated in mass, uncontrolled immigration under New Labour....Today, multiculturalism in Sparkbrook means a Muslim from Pakistan living-side-by-side with a Muslim from, say Bangladesh or Kashmir....University research recently identified Sparkbrook as one of two areas outside London with more than 30 per cent of people not born in the UK. A significant section of Sparkbrook's population do not speak English. There are 22 mosques in Sparkbrook alone.'*<sup>753</sup>

This assessment of Birmingham as the 'terror capital of the UK' and synonymous with British Islamist extremism is linked to the Kashmir dispute. Muslims living in Birmingham are identified as having family origins from Kashmir when during the 1990s, recruitment became a 'stepping-stone to join al-Qaeda.' Bracchi furthered his reasoning for Birmingham being 'the setting for the Trojan Horse scandal' when militant Muslims had attempted to infiltrate British state schools to impose 'an Islamic agenda'. This controversy resulted in a 2014 enquiry from which a Birmingham council admitted that it has 'shied away' from the problem out of a 'fear of being accused of racism'. Having been 'forced out by hardliners', a former headmaster of one of the investigated schools claimed that 'the authority turned a blind eye to the extremism out of political expediency – because most Muslims are Labour voters.' Here, Bracchi's rationalisation of events reveals political motivations. He refers to Waseem Zaffar, a cabinet minister for Transparency, Openness, and Equality, who was forced to resign after pressurising a Roman Catholic school to let a four-year-old wear an Islamic veil in class. Despite the school she attended having a uniform policy restricting headwear, Zaffar claimed that this violated the Equalities Act. Bracchi points out that Zaffar '*still plays a prominent role in local Labour politics.*'<sup>754</sup>

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<sup>753</sup> Ibid.

<sup>754</sup> Ibid.

This evaluation of Zaffar comes before a final evaluation by Bracchi of Mohammad Afzal, a candidate for Birmingham Mayor, who lost support for branding David Cameron Islamophobic and allegedly making inflammatory remarks to a Muslim woman's group when he claimed that 'domestic violence was happening mainly in the Christian community because they get drunk.' Bracchi concludes that '*Critics have argued that such political leadership – or lack of it – has created a culture where militancy has flourished*'.<sup>755</sup>

Despite The Telegraph providing a somewhat more balanced report than the tabloids,<sup>756</sup> a Daily Express' article labelling Birmingham as Britain's Molenbeek also describes the city as a 'terror hotspot' and a 'no-go zone' but fails to establish who might be forbidden from entering. The article largely echoes similar information provided by Bracchi's Daily Mail entry, listing the names of known Islamist terrorists that emerged or were linked to Birmingham, such as Moinal Abedin, Parviz Khan, Tareena Shakil and Khalid Masood. Christys & O'Brien (2017) of the Daily Express take a similar approach, as they detail the cultural and socio-economic aspects of modern Birmingham.<sup>757</sup> These concerns illustrate a consensus among the elite and media strata that Islamist radicalisation is a deep-rooted and malignant issue. Similar concerns were resurfaced during the Manchester Arena bombing, albeit concerns based on terrorist networks:

*Jihadi family's tentacles of terror: How suicide bombers Al-Qaeda-obsessed father moved his sons between the UK and Tripoli and into the clutches of ISIS;*<sup>758</sup> *Salman Abedi had links to a Manchester IS cell and knew one of its most prolific recruiters, Sky News can reveal;*<sup>759</sup> *The Manchester bomber is part of a network. We need to forget this myth that he was a lone wolf, says*

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<sup>755</sup> Ibid.

<sup>756</sup> Martin Evans, 'Terror investigation focuses on Birmingham as report reveals extent of the city's extremist links' [The Telegraph 2017] <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/03/23/terror-investigation-focuses-birmingham-report-reveals-extent/>> accessed 1<sup>st</sup> May 2021.

<sup>757</sup> Christys & O'Brien (n746)

<sup>758</sup> Thomas Burrows & Gareth Davies, 'Jihadi family's tentacles of terror: How suicide bomber's Al-Qaeda-obsessed father moved his sons between the UK and Tripoli and into clutches of ISIS' [Daily Mail 2017] <<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4539462/Jihadi-family-police-warnings-Manchester-bomber.html>> accessed 1<sup>st</sup> May 2021.

<sup>759</sup> Andy Hughes, 'Salman Abedi had links to a Manchester IS cell and knew one of its most prolific recruiters' [Sky News 2017] <<https://news.sky.com/story/manchester-suicide-bomber-salman-abedi-linked-to-key-uk-is-recruiter-10891692>> accessed 1<sup>st</sup> May 2021.

Nick Ferrari;<sup>760</sup> *REVEALED: The ISIS terror cell of recruiters and radicalisers linked to Manchester bombing.*<sup>761</sup>

Similar concerns resurfaced once again in the aftermath of the London Bridge attack; *'Not my England' Nick Ferrari FUMES at politicians allowing terror culture to 'fester' in UK;*<sup>762</sup> Killer jihadi, 27, 'radicalised by YouTube' was known to police. Another fanatic slips through the net;<sup>763</sup> Armed police are raiding houses in the hunt for a suspected jihadist cell Scotland Yard confirmed that counter-terrorism officers had arrested 12 people in Barking and several homes were being searched;<sup>764</sup> Tension between PM and Facebook over extremism.<sup>765</sup>

### **Foreign Fighters: Dangerous Traitors**

An additional element to terroristic threat that brings together immigration and the 'enemy within', globalization, and new technologies is the Foreign Fighter. The *term Foreign Fighter* denotes violent extremists who depart from their home countries with a desire to train and take up arms against non-Muslim parties within jihadi areas of conflict.<sup>766</sup> The term is typically designated for those choosing to fight for rebel insurgencies in a civil conflict, and it is not generally attributed to those who join

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<sup>760</sup> 'The Manchester bomber is part of a network. We need to forget this myth that he was a lone wolf, says Nick Ferrari' [2017] viewed via Facebook

<<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=10154331579671739>> accessed 1<sup>st</sup> May 2021.

<sup>761</sup> Vincent Wood, 'REVEALED: The ISIS terror cell of recruiters and radicalisers linked to Manchester bombing' [Daily Express 2017] <<https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/808937/Manchester-bombing-ISIS-Salman-Abedi-Moss-Side-IS-Islamic-State-terror-suicide-bomber>> accessed 1<sup>st</sup> May 2021.

<sup>762</sup> 'Not my England' Nick Ferrari FUMES at politicians allowing terror culture to 'fester' in UK' [2017] viewed via Facebook

<[https://www.facebook.com/watch/?ref=search&v=1052698991541320&external\\_log\\_id=f3c459f5-5feb-4265-91c5-15a61d1717dc&q=Not%20my%20England%27%20Nick%20Ferrari%20FUMES%20at%20politicians%20allowing%20terror%20culture%20to%20%27fester%27%20in%20UK](https://www.facebook.com/watch/?ref=search&v=1052698991541320&external_log_id=f3c459f5-5feb-4265-91c5-15a61d1717dc&q=Not%20my%20England%27%20Nick%20Ferrari%20FUMES%20at%20politicians%20allowing%20terror%20culture%20to%20%27fester%27%20in%20UK)> accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2021.

<sup>763</sup> Stephen Wright, Chris Greenwood, Inderdeep Bains, Emily Kent Smith, Sam Greenhill, Gareth Davies & Martin Robinson, 'Killer who was filmed in Regent's Park with an ISIS flag and tried to radicalise children with sweets was shopped to police TWICE as it emerges one of his fellow terrorists lived in DUBLIN' [Daily Mail 2017] <<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4571902/London-Bridge-killer-slipped-police-s-net.html>> accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2021.

<sup>764</sup> John Simpson, Francis Elliott, David Brown, Fiona Hamilton & Katie Gibbons, 'Armed police are raiding houses in the hunt for a suspected jihadist cell Scotland Yard confirmed that counter-terrorism officers had arrested 12 people in Barking and a number of homes were being searched' [The Sunday Times 2017] <<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/armed-police-hunt-for-jihadi-cell-after-london-bridge-terror-attack-89268ppts>> accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2021.

<sup>765</sup> Tom Cheshire, 'Tension between PM and Facebook over extremism' [Sky News 2017] <<https://news.sky.com/story/tension-between-theresa-may-and-facebook-over-extremism-online-10904140>> accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2021.

<sup>766</sup> Frank Cilluffo, Jeffrey Cozzens, & Magnus Ranstorp, *Foreign Fighters: Trends, Trajectories & Conflict Zones* Homeland Security Policy Institute [George Washington University 2010] 3

government forces.<sup>767</sup> Like other aspects of contemporary terrorism presented as new, foreign fighters have emerged during many conflicts. For example, the foreign fighter phenomenon was observed during the Spanish Civil War, when thousands of anarchists, communists, and socialists travelled to Spain between 1936-39.<sup>768</sup> The English poet Lord Byron was also reportedly a foreign fighter in Greece, as was Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan, prior to the formation of al Qaeda.<sup>769</sup> Foreign Fighters were an element of the conflict in the Middle East during the 2010s which combined fears surrounding domestic attacks and the mass movement of people. David Cameron warned of a '*Terror State on Europe's Doorstep*,' while also warning that an attack on the UK was 'highly likely' as returning British ISIS fighters posed a significant threat to Britain. Cameron's successor, Theresa May, resultingly raised the terrorist threat level to *Severe*.<sup>770</sup> A Guardian article published in August 2014 noted that ISIS had recruited thousands of foreign volunteers who had travelled to Syria, many from Europe, the US, and other Western regions. Numbers were estimated to have been exceeding 10,000 recruits."<sup>771</sup> The concept of individuals deciding to leave their home country and travel to take up arms in a conflict may not be entirely unheard of. However, what made Western governments, predominantly EU members, pay particular attention to this instance was increased European uptake. In the past, Europeans travelled to conflict in Afghanistan, Palestine, Bosnia, Chechnya, Iraq, Somalia, and Yemen, albeit in smaller numbers. A concern for EU members was that returnees would have training, experience, and an extremist anti-Western mentality in carrying out attacks on Europe. However, information supporting the claim that returnees carry out attacks is limited.<sup>772</sup> As Cragin (2018) writes, no attacks have been carried out by known foreign fighter returnees in the UK. Some perpetrators may have visited Middle Eastern states beforehand; however, it has not been identified that any perpetrators participated in any frontline

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<sup>767</sup> *Foreign Fighters under International Law*, Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights, Academy Briefing No. 7 [2014] 6

<sup>768</sup> Edwin Bakker, Christopher Paulussen & Eva Entenmann, 'Dealing with European Foreign Fighters in Syria: Governance Challenges and Legal Implications' [ICCT Research Paper 2003] 2

<sup>769</sup> Naureen Chowdhury Fink, Fulco van Deventer, Eva Entenmann, Bibi van Ginkel, Eelco Kessels, Alistair Millar, Christophe Paulussen & Mark Singleton, 'Addressing the Foreign Terrorist Fighters Phenomenon from a European Union Perspective' [ICCT Research Paper 2014] 1

<sup>770</sup> 'PM warns of Terror State on Europe's doorstep' [Sky News 2014] <<https://news.sky.com/story/pm-warns-of-terror-state-on-europes-doorstep-10392834>> accessed 11<sup>th</sup> June 2021.

<sup>771</sup> Tran (n505)

<sup>772</sup> Thomas Hegghammer, 'Should I stay or Should I go?: Explaining Variation in Western Jihadists' Choice between Domestic and Foreign Fighting American' [2013] *Political Science Review* 107 (1) 6



activities. In mainland Europe, however, the Paris attacks on 13<sup>th</sup> November 2015 included seven assailants who had previously travelled to Iraq and Syria to fight for the Islamic State. In the broader investigation that followed, investigators found that 16 of the 30 individuals involved in this attack were foreign fighters in the Middle East.<sup>773</sup> This attack alone illustrates the threat that returnees can potentially pose to their physical safety.

Nevertheless, following the Arab Spring, foreign fighter concerns amplified<sup>774</sup> with ISIL enticing combatants<sup>775</sup> enraged by Syrian President Assad's treatment of civilians and the rise of what seemed like a powerful Sunni state fulfilling Sharia. This became an incentive for foreign fighters,<sup>776</sup> with recruitment carried out via social media platforms.<sup>777</sup> While acknowledging that exact figures are difficult to assimilate, Europol predicted upwards of 40,000 foreign fighters had travelled to Syria from over 120 countries between 2012-16, with figures from Europe estimated between 4,000-4,500. Nesser (2019) estimated European figures to be 7,000,<sup>778</sup> with the majority coming from Germany, France, Belgium, and the UK<sup>779</sup>, with the UK accounting for 850.<sup>780</sup> Concerns surrounding foreign fighters lay in how they were inspired to leave their homes and join in dangerous conflicts and the potential threats they pose upon their return. Lowe (2018) argued that there was no doubt that those who had travelled to Syria and Iraq as combatants of ISIL and al-Qaeda posed a significant threat to their home nation. These threats can occur in two ways. First, these individuals were trained in firearms and explosives, and could either carry out attacks themselves or train others. Second, they glamourise the IS caliphate, radicalise other citizens, and promote extremism.<sup>781</sup> The Independent reported in October 2017 that

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<sup>773</sup> R. Kim Cragin, 'The November 2015 Paris Attacks: The Impact of Foreign Fighter Returnees' [2017] Foreign Policy Research Institute 212  
<<https://reader.elsevier.com/reader/sd/pii/S0030438717300091?token=DFD2654FA60642DFB8511E36C0EF248B5B1A69E56F0E750630A6390E3CD693CCF0BC83627F963BD2F626E788B9D1E29A>> accessed 10<sup>th</sup> October 2018.

<sup>774</sup> "...are non-citizens of conflict states who join insurgencies during civil war...", David Malet, 'Why Foreign Fighters? Historical Perspectives and Solutions' [2010] Orbis Journal of Foreign Affairs 54 (1) 108

<sup>775</sup> Bakker, Paulussen & Entenmann (n281) 12

<sup>776</sup> Nesser (n280)

<sup>777</sup> Laville (n297)

<sup>778</sup> Nesser (n280)

<sup>779</sup> Global Terrorism Index 2017 (n539)

<sup>780</sup> 'Who are Britain's Jihadists?' [BBC News 2017] <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-32026985>> accessed 18<sup>th</sup> July 2018

<sup>781</sup> Lowe (n263) 12

*'more than 400 British ISIS jihadis have already returned to the UK*, citing research conducted by *The Soufan Centre*.<sup>782</sup> The BBC also referred to this source, except running with a more sensationalised headline of *'IS foreign fighters: 5,600 have returned home'*. This article refers to the overall number of Western foreign fighters who left the Middle Eastern conflict zones while citing an estimated 400 hundred returnees of the eight hundred and fifty who left the UK.<sup>783</sup>

While the foreign fighter argument does illustrates, again, a legitimate aspect of threat, in the aftermath of the 2017 attacks however, it was not clear that the foreign fighter element could be attributable to any of the attackers profiles.

### **Chapter Conclusion**

The chapter evaluates the 2017 UK terror attacks and their influence on public opinion and media coverage. By employing quantitative and qualitative analysis, this chapter conducts a comprehensive examination of the media and political reactions to the Islamist terrorist attacks in the UK in 2017. The focus is on how politicians utilised social media to moralise, amplify, and frame the events for political purposes. The data collected during the analysis highlights the Impact period(s) (episodes) and reveals panic characteristics, such as hostility and disproportionate measures, as identified by Goode & Ben-Yehuda. The data shows that the attacks led to a surge in panic volatility, with politicians and media outlets reacting intensely to each event. The data indicates that Goode & Ben-Yehuda's panic characteristics, such as volatility and disproportionate reactions, were evident during this timeframe, as evidenced by the sharp uptake in attention given to each Islamist-inspired attack in 2017 and the disproportionate reactions displayed in news reporting on Facebook. The duration of volatile periods was demonstrated numerically, but cannot be used as a standard expectation in other panic case studies. The chapter considers other case studies, such as paedophilia and child abuse, and argues that the duration of panic volatility varies across case studies. This reporting included political rhetoric and exaggerated portrayals of issues as more prevalent than reality, with elite efforts

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<sup>782</sup> Lizzie Dearden, 'More than 400 British ISIS jihadis have already returned to UK' [The Independent 2017] <<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/isis-british-jihadis-return-uk-iraq-syria-report-islamic-state-fighters-europe-threat-debate-terror-a8017811.html>> accessed 18th July 2018.

<sup>783</sup> 'IS foreign fighters: 5,600 have returned homes – report' [BBC News 2017] <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-41734069>> accessed 18th July 2018.

to deflect scrutiny away from the government and instead to social media companies and immigration. Links were again made through government and media sources as to the threat posed by outsider groups; an element of disproportionate concern, though one that undoubtedly has consensus in times of mass fear.

# Chapter. 6

## Grassroots & Interest-Group Panic: Conspiracy & Social Media

### Introduction

Building on preceding chapters which analysed the cultivation and impact panic periods spanning from 2010 to 2017, this final chapter was initially intended to focus on the longer-term reactions of terrorism panic beyond 2017, focusing particularly on any curtailment of human rights and British values. However, as qualitative data analysis progressed, a crucial observation emerged leading to a shift deemed necessary in the research's purpose. This change in direction is a consideration less explored within moral panic research. Resultingly, this chapter evaluates observations in data running concurrently within that same data used to analyse elite-engineered panic of previous analytical chapters, applying a focus to sense-making, social cohesions, and structure. Classic panic research has indicated that during periods of heightened fear, a consensus of concerns emerges among media audiences who are often perceived as gullible, as their civic knowledge and perceptions (collective sense-making) are manipulated by elite hegemonic definers.<sup>784</sup> As a central focus, moral panic research makes efforts to detect and comprehend sources of distortions and misconceptions. Previous chapters have devoted significant attention to the evolution of moral panic through the elite-engineered lens. However, social media comment analysis indicates a substantial fracture in hierarchical credibility and trustworthiness, noting various expressions of dissatisfaction and distrust that have emerged within datasets across the 2010s towards mainstream social actors.

This chapter holds that disenfranchised members of society seek political leadership alternatives and fresh perspectives, indicating the some citizens have abandoned mainstream narratives from primary and secondary definers they no longer trust elite-dominated frames. In short, this chapter argues that because social media and other forms of new technologies allow the public to find and disseminate their own information, elite-engineered panic has, in fact, self-harmed mainstream elite

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<sup>784</sup> Jewkes (n45) 95-102

credibility. Consequentially, in this chapter the focus shifts from elite-engineered locus of moral panic (a causal factor in this disenchantment) to the grassroots and interest group locus of moral panic, as proposed by Goode & Ben-Yehuda. Arguing that sections of society have dismissed mainstream elite legitimacy, this chapter considers alternative leadership and 'credible' information among disenfranchised segments of society within moral panic sense-making processes, with a particular emphasis on conspiracy theory belief being the extreme end of such mainstream rejection. Resultingly, a key aim of this chapter is to delve into conspiratorial themes and expressions of elite mistrust gathered from Facebook data, and the role of conspiracy theorists in the moral panic framework, concluding with a potential trigger for contemporary conspiracy theories surrounding 9/11 and modern Islamist terrorism.

### **Data used in this chapter**

A key objective of this chapter is to critically evaluate and place the importance of phenomena such as fake news, conspiracy theories, and mis/disinformation within moral panic development. To meet this aim, *Table 6.1* illustrates key themes identified from the analysis of comments posted on 11 Facebook articles published during 2016. Themes from his table of qualitative Facebook comment themes have been included in preceding chapters. This chapter appraises, in particular, themes relating to *Media Coverage*, expressions of political *Elite Distrust*, and comments articulating *conspiracies* and *misinformation*.

<b>Themes</b>	<b>References made</b>
British Values	357
Remedies	180
<b>Media Coverage</b>	134
<b>Elite Distrust</b>	129
Predictions	60
Concerns	60
<b>Conspiracy/Misinformation</b>	41
Immigration/Refugees	31
Police/Security	101
Brexit	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,102</b>

*Table 6.1: Themes from Facebook Comments (2016 data)*

### **Definitions of Fake News & Conspiracy Theories**

Fake news is fictitious information created to pass as official mainstream news reports. Gelfert (2018) provides that *Fake News* should be reserved for “...cases of deliberate presentation of (typically) false and misleading claims as news, where these are misleading by design.” Gelfert explains that the phrase 'by design' refers to the systemic qualities of informative presentations and how fake news is circulated, thereby biasing the audience's cognitive processes.<sup>785</sup> Lazer et al. (2018) detail similar when describing fake news as “*fabricated information that mimics news media content in form but not in organisational process or intent.*”<sup>786</sup> Popularised by US President Donald Trump, the term ‘Fake News’ became the Collins Dictionary’s *Word of the Year* in 2017. Collins describes fake news as “*False, often sensational, information disseminated under the guise of news reporting.*”<sup>787</sup>

This research views conspiracy theories and theorists at the extreme end of a disinformation spectrum. By extension, conspiratorial followers are considered to be at the furthest point away from trust in mainstream institutions. Conspiracy theories are often aimed at political institutions, high ranking and popular members of society, and institutions of dominance.<sup>788</sup> Recognised as a ‘loaded term’,<sup>789</sup> conspiracy theories have been documented since the formation of civilisations<sup>790</sup> “...in the realm of myth, where imaginations run wild, fears trump facts, and evidence is ignored.”<sup>791</sup> For van Prooijen & van Vugt (2018), conspiracy theories are “*the conviction that a group of actors meets in secret agreement to attain some malevolent goal*”,<sup>792</sup> linking conspiratorial beliefs to people’s efforts to rationalise difficult-to-understand, complex situations. Conspiracy theories argue that the actions and intentions of those

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<sup>785</sup> Axel Gelfert, ‘Fake News: A Definition’ [2018] *Informal Logic* 38 (1) 84

<sup>786</sup> Lazer et al., (n318) 1094-1096

<sup>787</sup> ‘Collins 2017 Word of the Year Shortlist’ [Collins Dictionary 2017]

<<https://blog.collinsdictionary.com/language-lovers/collins-2017-word-of-the-year-shortlist/>> accessed 16<sup>th</sup> Oct 2021.

<sup>788</sup> Tandoc, et al [n 237] 137-153

<sup>789</sup> Michael J. Wood, ‘Some Dare Call It Conspiracy: Labelling Something a Conspiracy Theory does not reduce belief in it’ [2016] *Political Psychology* 37 (5) 695

<sup>790</sup> Andy Thomas, *Conspiracies: The Facts, The Theories, The Evidence* [Watkins Media Limited 2019] 1

<sup>791</sup> *Ibid* 7.

<sup>792</sup> Jan-Willem van Prooijen & Mark van Vugt, ‘Conspiracy Theories: Evolved Functions and Psychological Mechanisms’ [2018] *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 13 (6) 770

belonging to the upper-class social strata (*Insiders*) are nefarious, creating mechanisms and conditions that oppress lower-class *Outsiders*.<sup>793</sup>

Conspiracy theorists demonstrate a belief in circumstances and incidents resulting from '*the secret actions*' of authoritative elite groups who suppress or distort knowledge to benefit their aims and agendas.<sup>794</sup> Elite actors covertly abuse their positions of power to achieve independent determination.<sup>795</sup> Similarly, Hogg & Vaughan (2014) show that conspiracies create a multifaceted, intricate web of distorted sense-making rationalisations, preparing conspiracy theorists for challenges to their conspiratorial narratives, such as arguments from evidence-based academic research.<sup>796</sup> Axelsen & Emberland (2020) contribute that conspiracy theories encompass three interconnected qualities. First, the objectives of elite groups are deemed disreputable and criminal by conspiracists. Secondly, conspiracy connivers are often in positions of power, using these dominating positions on the social hierarchy to manipulate and dictate explanations of occurrences and authenticate authorised frames promoting the 'official' narrative. Lastly, connivers operate clandestinely, initiating 'cover-ups' to conceal their true purpose through the fabrication or retraction of evidence and their domination of the official narrative.<sup>797</sup> Disturbing and impactful episodes (e.g. 9/11) induce mass compulsion for rapid, instant sense-making narratives (somewhat akin to Cohen's processual *Inventory* of moral panic, for example). Such conspiratorial attempts to make sense of such events or explain the behaviours of actors often claim that clandestine actors are abusing their power to achieve their own ambitions at the expense of the less powerful.<sup>798</sup> As Zonis & Joseph (1994) detail, explanations of situations labelled as conspiracy theories share commonalities, such as unidentified actors working towards self-serving objectives, the unknown and unintended consequences of episodes aiding people in elite positions, large corporations, whole industries, or

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<sup>793</sup> Michael A. Hogg & Graham M. Vaughan, *Social Psychology* [7<sup>th</sup> Ed, Pearson Publishing 2014] 105

<sup>794</sup> Rob Brotherton, *Suspicious minds: Why we believe conspiracy theories* [Bloomsbury 2015]

<sup>795</sup> Stephanie Craft, Seth Ashley, & Adam Maksl, 'News media literacy and conspiracy theory endorsement' [2017] *Communication and the Public* 2 (4) 388

<sup>796</sup> Hogg & Vaughan (n793) 105

<sup>797</sup> Jorgen Eikvar Axelsen, & Terje Emberland, 'What is a conspiracy theory?' [2020] C-REX - Center for Research on Extremism, Faculty of Social Sciences <<https://www.sv.uio.no/c-rex/english/groups/compendium/what-is-a-conspiracy-theory.html>> accessed 26th Mar 2023.

<sup>798</sup> Craft, Ashley & Maksl (n795) 388–401

globally dominant nations.<sup>799</sup> Riveting narratives conclusively and convincingly explain the hidden triggers of momentous phenomena, largely the result of covert, mighty, and dominant groups simultaneously distorting reality.<sup>800</sup>

### **A Legacy of Conspiracy**

Those who believe that conspiratorial activities occur often highlight historical examples of events which were elite-engineered or controlled to destabilise regimes or to advance hidden agendas,<sup>801</sup> with instances of conspiratorial confirmation giving life to others. Regardless of the incongruity of Donald Trump asserting to have originated the term 'Fake News';<sup>802</sup> historical examples of false information spread by elite entities are well documented. For example, Octavian falsely accused Mark Anthony of disrespecting traditional Roman values, false press publications were used to conjure a revolt against King George II, and The New York Sun newspaper printed false claims about life on the moon to increase sales and profit margins.<sup>803</sup> Other historically evident conspiracies include witch trials, the unevidenced effects of 5G telephone masts,<sup>804</sup> with other lasting conspiracies concerning aeroplane disasters, natural disasters, wars, and armed conflicts.<sup>805</sup> Dating from the Middle Ages, the most enduring conspiracy theory is the myth of clandestine Jewish global dominance, resulting in the systematic periodic persecution of Jews.<sup>806</sup> During the 14th century, panicked Germans blamed Jews for the Black Death. Hitler used this notion to build his political rise, claiming that International Jewry was working against Germany. He blamed Jews for Germany's WWI defeat and the subsequent Treaty of Versailles, which he viewed as a 'humiliation'. The German Third Reich searched for a German utopia based on a false conspiracy. Pop-culture conspiracies include

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<sup>799</sup> Marvin Zonis, & Craig Joseph, 'Conspiracy thinking in the Middle East' [1994] *Political Psychology* 15 443

<sup>800</sup> Daniel Jolley, Karen Douglas, Ana Leite, & Tanya Schrader, 'Belief in conspiracy theories and intentions to engage in everyday crime' [2019] *British Journal of Social Psychology* 58 (3) 534

<sup>801</sup> Thomas (n790) 25

<sup>802</sup> Chris Cillizza, 'Donald Trump just claimed he invented 'fake news'' [CNN Politics 2017] <<https://edition.cnn.com/2017/10/08/politics/trump-huckabee-fake/index.html>> accessed 16<sup>th</sup> Oct 2021.

<sup>803</sup> 'A Brief History of Fake News' [CiTS 2021] <<https://cits.ucsb.edu/fake-news/brief-history>> accessed 4th Nov 2021.

<sup>804</sup> Samantha Subramanian, *A Dominant Character: The Radical Science and Restless Politics of J. B. S Haldane* [Atlantic Books 2021]

<sup>805</sup> van Prooijen & van Vugt (n792) 'Conspiracy Theories: Evolved Functions and Psychological Mechanisms' [2018] *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 13 (6) 770

<sup>806</sup> Jasper (n48) 10029-10033



staging the 1969 moon landing, the JFK assassination being a comprehensive operation, the 9/11 attacks being an inside job staged by 'the powerful',<sup>807</sup> the moon landing being staged, Area 51 housing extra-terrestrial items, the circumstances of Princess Diana's death, Holocaust denial, COVID-19, and climate change denial.

Despite conspiracy theories having existed prior to the modern era, the rise of online communications technologies has enabled the proliferation of general misinformation to increase, leading to heightened levels of scepticism for established mainstream narratives.<sup>808</sup> Modern technologies have also enabled for conspiracy theories to have fewer geographical and time boundaries, and much broader, global reach. There has been a recent resurfacing of a conspiracy theory known as QAnon, which posits the existence of a satanic cabal comprised of pedophiles and cannibals that is believed to control various world governments and news media outlets.<sup>809</sup> It is believed that the QAnon movement emerged when an anonymous individual posted on *4chan*, thereby initiating a series of messages from a supposed high-ranking official of Donald Trump (identified as Q) that incited followers to engage in a battle against an alleged network of paedophiles that was deemed to be an 'elite.' The conspiracy accuses members of the U.S. Democrat Party, Hollywood celebrities, and the media of practicing child abuse and cannibalism, calling for a 'digital army' of vigilantes to rise up and take action.<sup>810</sup> According to this theory, it is posited that Donald Trump is a virtuous outsider who seeks to abolish this malevolent system. According to Moskalenko & McCauley (2021), the conspiracy theory in question is constructed from a vast catalogue of components, which continually evolve and inventively blend fact and fiction. The researchers note that QAnon forums encourage followers to "do the research" and "connect the dots," exacerbating what has been referred to as the creation of "collective myth-making platforms." QAnon utilized such methods and platforms to orchestrate the "Capitol Storm" that occurred on January 6th, 2021, in Washington D.C., with the intention of rectifying the perceived injustice of the second-term presidential election of Donald Trump, which

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<sup>807</sup> Brian L Keeley, 'Of Conspiracy Theories' [1999] *The Journal of Philosophy* 96 (3) 109

<sup>808</sup> Jovan Byford, *Conspiracy theories: A critical introduction* [Palgrave Macmillan 2011] 151

<sup>809</sup> Kevin Roose, 'What is QAnon, the Viral Pro-Trump Conspiracy Theory?' [New York Times 2021] <<https://www.nytimes.com/article/what-is-qanon.html>> accessed 16<sup>th</sup> Nov 2021.

<sup>810</sup> Isaac Kamola, 'QAnon and the Digital Lumpenproletariat' [2021] *New Political Science* 43 (2) 231

they believe was stolen.<sup>811</sup> Evans (2020) posits that President Trump's decision to decline challenging the QAnon conspiracy and instead express empathy for QAnon's supposed crusade effectively sparked a moral panic fuelled by pre-existing historical narratives.<sup>812</sup> Further, the *Pizzagate* incident in 2016, where a man entered Comet Ping Pong pizzeria in Washington DC with the intention of "freeing children" being held in an underground basement, exemplifies the dangers of believing in such conspiracies without evidence. In this case, no basement existed, and no children were being held captive. The notion of the "*Great Replacement*," a white nationalist and far-right conspiracy theory, has been amplified by Renaud Camus, which posits that European elites are plotting to replace white European populations with non-white Europeans.<sup>813</sup> The essence of such a theory has also been linked to rhetoric from the Trump administration and other leading Western political leaders. The utilisation of elite-engineered frames portraying mass immigration to the UK as harmful, invasive, and damaging has evoked sentiments of fear and anxiety.

### **Grassroots Theory of Moral Panic: Through a conspiratorial lens**

Wood (2016) argues that past approaches to immediately label terminology associated with conspiracies as "irrational paranoia" has been naïve,<sup>814</sup> and the central argument of this chapter aligns with this view. As seen with the fake news term, politicians and news media have used the label of 'conspiracy theory' to quash resistance to hegemony, and to "*mock and dismiss allegations against them, while philosophers and political scientists warn that it could be used as a rhetorical weapon to pathologise dissent*".<sup>815</sup> Such a response marginalises and alienates sections of society to the fringes of social acceptance.

For those who subscribe to conspiracy theories, their beliefs serve as individual and collective efforts towards sense-making to attribute meaning to sensational events and the actions of those they perceived as conspirators. These theories are often

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<sup>811</sup> Sophia Moskalenko & Clark McCauley, 'QAnon: Radical Opinion versus Radical Action' [2021] *Perspectives on Terrorism* 15 (2) 142

<sup>812</sup> Jennifer Evans, 'Folk devils and fear: QAnon feeds into a culture of moral panic' [Populist Publics 2020] <<https://carleton.ca/populistpublics/2020/folk-devils-and-fear-qanon-feeds-into-a-culture-of-moral-panic/>> accessed 19<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

<sup>813</sup> Thomas (n790)

<sup>814</sup> Wood (n789) 695-705

<sup>815</sup> Ibid 695-705.

viewed as individual or collective attempts to understand and interpret social and political activity; activity they view as suspicious.<sup>816</sup> Recent research suggests that people simply have an inherent need to understand the reasons for dramatic occurrences.<sup>817</sup> Thomas (2019) gives a balanced and sympathetic evaluation of the conspiracy theorist - or *'truth-seeker'* - expressing that the conspiracy theorist term has become offensive, with such theorists depicted as people to be avoided by those who wishing to be taken seriously. Resultingly, Thomas argues that 'populist' leaders and their grassroots followings have had their credibility questioned as left-leaning commentators, often negatively cataloguing their right-wing counterparts as conspiracy theorists to lower the value of oppositional views, alienating segments of society and those who seek genuine answers in the process. Thomas also contends that academia displays a notable reluctance to consider all available evidence, preferring instead to criticize the conspiratorial perspective rather than comprehend its motivations.<sup>818</sup> However, an issue with certain stories that have initially been dismissed by the mainstream as conspiracy theories, fake news, and misinformation is that, on occasion, these narratives are later proven to be accurate, either partially or in full. For example, the *MK Ultra* program was initially dismissed as a conspiracy theory, but subsequent and prolonged investigations eventually revealed that it was indeed a genuine government program. Such examples help the conspiracist legitimise other theories (*if that was true, so could this*).<sup>819</sup>

Uscinski & Parent (2014) examined over 100,000 letters for conspiratorial content sent to the *New York Times* and the *Chicago Tribune* between 1890 and 2010. The researchers found that conspiracy theories maintained a regular presence, although they identified turbulent periods during which conspiratorial claims rose. During the early 20th century, the industrial revolution occurred, resulting in an exponential growth in the number of corporations and technological advancements. This phenomenon reflects the Marxist concept of power inequalities. A period of increased conspiratorial belief was observed during the *Red Scare* era of the Cold

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<sup>816</sup> Moore (n12)

<sup>817</sup> Michal Bilewicz, Martha Witkowska, Anna Stefaniak & Roland Imhoff, 'The lay historian explains intergroup behavior: examining the role of identification and cognitive structuring in ethnocentric historical attributions' [2017] *Memory Studies* 10 (3) 310

<sup>818</sup> Thomas (n790) 2

<sup>819</sup> Ibid.

War in the U.S.A during the late 1940s to early 1950s, characterized by heightened fears among Western democracies regarding the spread of communist ideology.<sup>820</sup> It may be inferred that conspiracy credulity tends to rise during periods of high anxiety and fear. Problematic events that trigger moral panic challenge the shared values, ideas, and principles of society.

Within the traditional hegemonic *Hierarchy of Credibility*, a significant element of the sense-making process comes through the media providing platforms to social actors who are deemed qualified to diagnose the problem.<sup>821</sup> (also see Cohens definition of moral panic). As members of a structured British society, it is anticipated that we conform to the realities defined by elite groups. In a society characterised by hierarchical groupings, the assumption is that individuals belonging to the highest echelons possess more accurate perspectives than those in lower-ranking groups, thus rendering them best suited to determine the nature of reality. Consequently, the words of high-class social groups *should* be regarded as credible. Resultingly, credibility and the right to be heard are differentially distributed across social ranks.<sup>822</sup> However, as this chapter addresses, these dynamics have changed in the social media era. Broadly speaking, sociological and criminological research has historically neglected a meaningful exploration of the influential weight of media audiences.<sup>823</sup> The conventional view of the public's part in classic panic research presupposes credulity to elite narratives, indiscriminately accepting the mainstream representation and framing of reality. Persons who would rely on mainstream sense-making were inclined to believe that they were dependably informed by politician and media. Classic panic research can be accused of overlooking the public's ability to think rationally, critically, and freely. Classic panic research also overlooks the public's ability to seek alternative information, counter to hegemonic narratives,

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<sup>820</sup> Joseph Uscinski, & Joseph Parent, *American Conspiracy Theories* [OUP 2014]

<sup>821</sup> '...the likelihood that those in powerful or high-status positions in society who offer opinions about controversial topics will have their definitions accepted because such spokesmen are understood to have access to more accurate and more specialised information on particular topics than the majority of the population.' Howard Becker's definition of the Hierarchy of Credibility as described by Stuart Hall, Chas Critcher, Tom Jefferson, John Clarke & Brian Roberts, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law & Order* [Palgrave and Macmillan 2013] 61

<sup>822</sup> Becker (n227) 239-47

<sup>823</sup> David Miller, & Jenny Kitzinger, AIDS, the policy process, and moral panics in David Miller, Jenny Kitzinger, & Peter Beharrell, (Ed) *The Circuit of mass communication: Media strategies, representation, and audience reception in the AIDS crisis* [Sage Publishing 1988] 213-222

particularly in the modern social media era. Goode & Ben-Yehuda proposed that grassroots panic derives from a consensus of concerns among society's lower rungs. It is crucial that a substantial consensus be reached regarding pressing and obvious concerns. Although panics may be engineered by elites to create concern across society, populist anxieties at the grassroots level have a tangible impact on the behaviour of elite institutions. From a grassroots perspective, the concerns expressed by elites only serve to exacerbate moral panic, rather than igniting social hysterics.<sup>824</sup> It is inevitable that a grassroots panic will ensue regardless of the elite's efforts to control the narrative, as the outward expressions of public concerns are a direct result of pre-existing problems that erupt impulsively and aggressively at opportune times.

What should be a key consideration for modern panic researchers, through the grassroots-loci lens, is that as moral panics are built upon distortions, in the social media era – with a growing lack of faith in mainstream institutions – disinformation and conspiracy theory is fuel such grassroots misconceptions outside of the control of traditional elite definers. Conspiracy theories, which originate from the grassroots and middle classes, are often directed towards those at the top of society, and is symptomatic of a deep distrust. And while elites should accept significant responsibility for such mistrust and distorted grassroots perceptions of the world, the general public, nevertheless, now play a much more active role in the generation of panic than at any previous point in history. This is due to an almost limitless array of information sources and the capacity to communicate with anyone around the globe at any time via new communications technologies. With social media having 'come of age' by 2013, over 57% of UK citizens *regularly* used platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter.<sup>825</sup> False, misleading, and exaggerated communication content thrives in digital environments, where the monitoring and scrutiny of information are lacking. *BuzzFeed* (2016) reported that 75% of American adults who encounter fake news online are deceived into believing.<sup>826</sup> Although existing before the inception of social media; mis/dis information, fake news, and

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<sup>824</sup> Goode & Ben-Yehuda (n16) 55

<sup>825</sup> Morrison (n36) 29

<sup>826</sup> Craig Silverman, 'Most Americans who see Fake News believe it, new survey says' [Buzzfeeds 2016] <<https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/craigsilverman/fake-news-survey>> accessed 26<sup>th</sup> February 2019.

conspiracy theories hold a social omnipresence,<sup>827</sup> which is concerning because world-views are vulnerable to deformation from distorted information and conspiratorial logic. The *World Economic Forum* considers the spread of misleading information through digital environments a threat to human society, stating that disinformation changes how people form world narratives.<sup>828</sup> Former US President Barack Obama,<sup>829</sup> and Pope Francis,<sup>830</sup> and a British Parliamentary committee<sup>831</sup> have highlighted the detriments of fake news and misleading information as having negatively impacting public relations, institutional trust, and mass participation in democratic processes. Deviant theories are also linked to an uptake misinformation and conspiracy credulity. Research by Jolley et al. (2019) found greater advocacy for everyday criminality in individuals who engage in conspiracy theories,<sup>832</sup> while Douglas & Sutton (2011) claim that individuals who are more 'willing to conspire' are more likely to give credulity to conspiracy theories.<sup>833</sup> According to Uscinski and Parent (2014), individuals who are inclined to accept conspiracy theories are more likely to endorse the use of violence as a means of expressing opposition to the government in certain situations.<sup>834</sup> Individuals who tend to hold conspiratorial beliefs often display a propensity for conspiring and are more inclined to possess firearms.<sup>835</sup><sup>836</sup> The correlation between crime and conspiracy theory credulity implies a profound sense of personal and collective uncertainty, eliciting a primal fear.

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<sup>827</sup> van Prooijen & van Vugt (n792) 770-788

<sup>828</sup> Tornberg (n437) 1

<sup>829</sup> Olivia Solon, 'Barack Obama on fake news: 'We have problems' if we can't tell the difference' [The Guardian 2016] <<https://www.theguardian.com/media/2016/nov/17/barack-obama-fake-news-facebook-social-media>> accessed 26<sup>th</sup> February 2019.

<sup>830</sup> Carol Kuruvilla, 'Pope Francis condemns spread of fake news as evil' [Huffington Post 2018] <[https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/pope-francis-condemns-fake-news\\_us\\_5a68b76ae4b0dc592a0eaf2e?quccounter=1&guce\\_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLmNvbS8&guce\\_referrer\\_sig=AQAAADJo9nO6pGkTbemi7GZsRMiFMB3-txbZZq-RCNKWoAqYkPlsy\\_anivpuvG5z4Zo-KkAWyDpT2sKfUScBdBvhxlzJE4LkYYidiUjlg3aCYJI4wYqgyBLjLsyveqCONDxKGaYQhj51Pzy6YmNqw-KCY6rVTxwTGhP\\_TKriSFue\\_6s->](https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/pope-francis-condemns-fake-news_us_5a68b76ae4b0dc592a0eaf2e?quccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLmNvbS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAADJo9nO6pGkTbemi7GZsRMiFMB3-txbZZq-RCNKWoAqYkPlsy_anivpuvG5z4Zo-KkAWyDpT2sKfUScBdBvhxlzJE4LkYYidiUjlg3aCYJI4wYqgyBLjLsyveqCONDxKGaYQhj51Pzy6YmNqw-KCY6rVTxwTGhP_TKriSFue_6s->)> accessed 26<sup>th</sup> February 2019.

<sup>831</sup> Jim Waterson, 'Democracy at risk due to fake news and data misuse, MPs conclude' [The Guardian 2018] <<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2018/jul/27/fake-news-inquiry-data-misuse-democracy-at-risk-mps-conclude>> accessed 26<sup>th</sup> February 2019.

<sup>832</sup> Jolley, Douglas, Leite & Schrader (n800) 534-549

<sup>833</sup> Karen Douglas, & Robbie Sutton, 'Does it take one to know one? Endorsement of conspiracy theories is influenced by personal willingness to conspire' [2014] *British Journal of Social Psychology* 50 (3) 544

<sup>834</sup> Uscinski & Parent (n820)

<sup>835</sup> Douglas & Sutton (n833) 544-555

<sup>836</sup> Uscinski & Parent (n820)

However, there is a lack of consensus regarding why people believe in false information, with Pipes (1997) finding that many Americans believe in at least one conspiracy theory.<sup>837</sup> With regards to widespread misperceptions of social issues, Rosling (2018) discovered that many people hold a distorted and negative view of various conditions such as poverty, education, crime, and child mortality. Rosling observed that, "*Every group of people I ask thinks the world is more dangerous, more violent, and more hopeless – in short, more dramatic – than it is.*" One possible reason for this negative outlook, according to Rosling, is *Ignorance*,<sup>838</sup> with trepidation arising from the distortions of reality resulting from the information we selectively ingest. Bestowing credibility upon Truth Seekers and distorting worldviews, news publications, movies, podcasts, and other media often encourage audiences to believe that mainstream narratives are not as they appear and should not be trusted.<sup>839</sup> Consequentially, the faith and confidence of the grassroots public in traditional democratic institutions has been re-evaluated in recent years as the level of trust in prominent political figures decreases.<sup>840</sup> Douglas et al. (2017) argue that conspiracy theories reverberate with specific individuals for *epistemic* reasons, as people seek to project a knowledgeable image to others. They also support the notion that conspiracy theories resonate with believers on *existential* grounds, allowing them to feel in control and reputable and to create a positive sense of self.<sup>841</sup> Individual psychological desires for stability and control often lead people to endorse false reality. Contradictory and unresolved events and practices are more easily comprehended when explained in a convincing narrative that aligns with pre-existing beliefs.<sup>842</sup> Studies also suggest that during times of crisis, such as a moral panic, individuals experience negative emotional stimuli (e.g. anxiety, fear, and a lack of control), which may encourage a genuine and sincere search for rationality in false information, ultimately leading to an increased likelihood of accepting

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<sup>837</sup> Daniel Pipes, *Conspiracy: How the Paranoid Style Flourishes and Where It Comes From* [Simon & Schuster 1997]

<sup>838</sup> Hans Rosling, *Factfulness: Ten Reasons We're Wrong About The World* [Flatiron Books 2018] 9

<sup>839</sup> Thomas (n790)

<sup>840</sup> 'Trust in politicians 'approaching rock bottom', survey finds' [Sky News 2016]

<<https://news.sky.com/story/trust-in-politicians-approaching-rock-bottom-survey-finds-10683020>> accessed 4<sup>th</sup> March 2019.

<sup>841</sup> Karen Douglas, Robbie Sutton, & Aleksandra Cichoka, 'The Psychology of Conspiracy Theories: Current Directions in Psychological Science' [2017] 26, 538

<sup>842</sup> Craft, Ashley & Maksl (n795) 388–401

conspiracy theories as truth.<sup>843</sup> Others have considered associations concerning a person's education level, intelligence, and acceptance of misinformation. Speaking to the *American Psychological Association* (APA) in 2021, Professor Karen Douglas claimed that:

*'... people with lower levels of education tend to be drawn to conspiracy theories. And we don't argue that's because people are not intelligent. It's simply that they haven't been allowed to have, or haven't been given access to the tools to allow them to differentiate between good sources and bad sources or credible sources and non-credible sources. So they're looking for that knowledge and certainty, but not necessarily looking in the right places.'*<sup>844</sup>

Although a link between intelligence and educational attainment is supported by supplementary academic research<sup>845</sup> it has nevertheless failed to gain unanimous academic agreement. For example, Galliford & Furnham (2017) fail to establish a correlation between conspiracy theory credulity and intelligence levels. Nevertheless, if we assume that conspiracy theories are accepted by individuals who are unable to fully grasp the intricate and complex aspects of social realities and phenomena, then it follows that conspiratorial narratives must be both simple enough for the layman to comprehend and far-reaching enough to accommodate a range of descriptive variables.<sup>846</sup> According to Billig (1978), the allure of a conspiracy theory lies in its ability to simplify complex and ambiguous situations by providing a clear and concise explanation that appeals to believers. Rather than considering multifaceted and nuanced situational factors, conspiracy theories offer a seductive alternative by reducing ambiguity and providing a causal explanation that is easier to grasp and remember.<sup>847</sup> Conspiracy theories will present alarming elements in a manner that suggests they are manageable if the appropriate actions are taken by the appropriate individuals. The proposed remedies are often deemed obvious and

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<sup>843</sup> van Prooijen & van Vugt (n792) 770-788

<sup>844</sup> 'Speaking of Psychology: Why people believe in conspiracy theories, with Karen Douglas, PhD' [2021] American Psychological Association <<https://www.apa.org/news/podcasts/speaking-of-psychology/conspiracy-theories>> accessed 28<sup>th</sup> February 2022.

<sup>845</sup> Viren Swami, Raj Persaud, & Adrian Furnham, 'The recognition of mental health disorders and its association with psychiatric scepticism, knowledge of psychiatry, and the Big Five personality factors: An investigation using the overclaiming technique' [2011] *Social Psychiatry & Psychiatric Epidemiology* (46) 181

<sup>846</sup> Hogg & Vaughan (n793) 105

<sup>847</sup> Michael Billig, *Fascists: A Social Psychological View of the National Front* [Harcourt Publishers Ltd 1978]



sensible, serving as a form of thought subsidy for populist figures in their respective hierarchies.

### **Decreasing Faith in the Traditional Hierarchical Structure**

The research conducted for this thesis indicates that the diminishing trust in institutional authority has contributed to the emergence of social divisions. Analysis for this thesis suggests that a decline in trust for mainstream elite social establishments and prominent individuals can be linked to their efforts to deceive the public and exhibitions of scandalous behaviour. This erosion is attributed to elite-induced panic causing self-inflicted reputational harm due to the public's ability to access alternative sources of information beyond dominant elite hegemony. The advent of new communication technologies has empowered the general public to scrutinise the narratives propagated by elites and challenge their authority, leading to a decline in faith in traditional, mainstream institutional authority. Consequently, the masses have sought what they perceive to be reliable answers and leadership from alternative sources, and this may have resulted in the proliferation of false information and unreliable leaders.

High society scandals are popular, widespread, and eagerly accepted as they demonstrate to the grassroots that society's leaders are also human.<sup>848</sup> However, in a functional democracy it is imperative that the government exhibits and upholds integrity, respect, and trustworthiness. This is in line with the principles of the *Social Contract*, which posits that communal living leads to prosperity while also preserving (to some extent) individual freedom within a political society.<sup>849</sup> Civil governments are the result of this unwritten contract<sup>850</sup> from which civilised societies fashioned social hierarchies, spurning an establishment of formalised institutions charged with specific societal functions acting in our collective best interests. However, there has been a shift in the traditional power dynamics between those at the top of social hierarchies and those at the bottom, due to the elite-engineered moral panic. The information presented as fact by those in positions of authority is now being scrutinised for its accuracy and truthfulness, leading to a loss of trust in government

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<sup>848</sup> Goode & Ben-Yehuda (n16) 58

<sup>849</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract* [Wordsworth Editions Limited 1998]

<sup>850</sup> Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy* [Routledge Publishing 1996] 573-576

and the media. Data from the *Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development* (OECD) suggests that trust in the UK government stood at 35% in 2020. Contextually, the UK ranked 32<sup>nd</sup> in the data displayed for 40 OECD nations, while the USA had 46% civic trust in 2020.<sup>851</sup> Statista polling found that trust in the UK government in 2020 was 45% and 42% in the USA.<sup>852</sup> Findings from a *British Social Attitudes Survey* stated that trust in the British government had dropped to its lowest levels for decades by 2019, with only 15% of UK citizens stating trust in the government 'always or most of the time'.<sup>853</sup> Since 2020, this trend has reached an all-time low in the UK.<sup>854</sup> It is notable that levels of trust in the US government reached a peak during the 1960s, with approval ratings of 77%, and again following the 9/11 attacks, when they spiked to 60%. However, since 2006, domestic trust in the government has persistently struggled to exceed 30%, falling to a low of 15% during 2011. From 2014 to 2020, trust in the US government failed to exceed 20%.<sup>855</sup>

As household internet access emerged, McRobbie & Thornton (1995) posited a "multi-mediated social world," in which the dissemination of information regarding public matters has become increasingly diverse and the capabilities for advancing claims have been amplified through various communication channels. A notably recent decline of public confidence in traditional institutions has led to social media platforms serving as the predominant centerground for many to access alternative information sources.<sup>856</sup> Further, the coming together of policymakers, news media, and broader society on social media platforms has served to pollute the quality of political debate dictated by the 'rule of tweets'.<sup>857</sup> Online platforms have accelerated

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<sup>851</sup> 'Trust in Government' [OECD.org 2021] <<https://data.oecd.org/gga/trust-in-government.htm>> accessed 12<sup>th</sup> Dec 2021.

<sup>852</sup> Martin Armstrong, 'Where Trust in Government Is Highest and Lowest' [Statista 2021] <<https://www.statista.com/chart/12634/where-trust-in-government-is-highest-and-lowest/>> accessed 12<sup>th</sup> Dec 2021.

<sup>853</sup> Merlin Sague, 'Survey: Trust in British government has dropped to the lowest level in decades' [Politico 2020] <<https://www.politico.eu/article/survey-trust-in-british-government-dropped-to-record-low/>> accessed 12<sup>th</sup> Dec 2021.

<sup>854</sup> Ibid.

<sup>855</sup> 'Public Trust in Government: 1958-2021' [Pew Research Centre 2021] <<https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2021/05/17/public-trust-in-government-1958-2021/>> accessed 12<sup>th</sup> Dec 2021.

<sup>856</sup> Diana Owen, 'The Past Decade and Future of Political Media: The Ascendance of Social Media' [BBVA OpenMind 2019] <<https://www.bbvaopenmind.com/en/articles/the-past-decade-and-future-of-political-media-the-ascendance-of-social-media/>> accessed 12<sup>th</sup> Dec 2021.

<sup>857</sup> Ibid.

social fragmentation, empowering alternative voices,<sup>858</sup> broadening the remit of societal expression, and has given rise to media sources reflecting the interests of marginalised groups.<sup>859</sup> Referring to the *Pizzagate* incident as an example, Mihailidis & Viotty (2017) examined the symbolic and spectacular dimensions of fake news and conspiracy stories. They maintain that Pizzagate exemplifies the emergence of a modern spectacle that operates independently of traditional news sources. Instead, audiences have become increasingly active in shaping media narratives.<sup>860</sup> While mainstream media legitimised Pizzagate through the coverage they delivered, the power of citizen-led 'niche' media in creating and disseminating misinformation was indicative of a digital ecosystem where citizens rely upon each other to transmit information, news, and entertainment.<sup>861</sup>

Concurrently, Donald Trump's use of social media bypassed traditional political information dissemination channels by sharing his thoughts and announcing government policies and strategies. His tweets often blended fact and fiction, making it difficult for followers and sceptics to distinguish between the two.<sup>862</sup> The utilisation of Twitter by Trump to engage with grassroots Americans contributed to his populist image. Through publicly expressing his disdain for mainstream news outlets, attributing to them the term 'Fake News', and using hostile rhetoric to challenge political opposition, President Trump, along with other elite figures, portrayed themselves as outsiders to mainstream problems and advocated for extreme remedies that contrasted with traditional hierarchy solutions during the 2010s. During periods of panic cultivation and volatility, politicians will make statements proposing populist remedies to appeal to the masses, and news media will produce content designed to appeal to similar-minded audiences in order to boost revenue.<sup>863</sup> It has also become expected for established institutions and state officials to issue official

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<sup>858</sup> McRobbie & Thornton (n2) 559-574

<sup>859</sup> Stephen Coleman, & Karen Ross, *The Media and the Public* [John Wiley & Sons 2010]

<sup>860</sup> Paul Mihailidis & Samantha Viotty, 'Spreadable Spectacle in Digital Culture: Civic Expression, Fake News, and the Role of Media Literacies in 'Post-Fact' Society' [2017] *American Behavioural Scientist* 61 (4) 441

<sup>861</sup> Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, & Joshua Green, *Spreadable Media: Creating value and meaning in a networked culture* [New York University Press 2013] 2

<sup>862</sup> Glenn Kessler, Salvado Rizzo, & Meg Kelly, 'President Trump has made more than 20,000 false or misleading claims' [The Washington Post 2020]

<<https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/07/13/president-trump-has-made-more-than-20000-false-or-misleading-claims/>> accessed 12<sup>th</sup> Dec 2021.

<sup>863</sup> Goode & Ben-Yehuda (n16) 56

announcements via social media platforms, resulting in exposure to political elites to an extent that may not have been possible in a pre-social media age. This trend has also led to increased visibility of political liabilities, scandals, and inadequacies through online platforms, with news stories often built entirely on a political figures' tweets and Facebook posts. The utilisation of social media by politicians can be seen in both positive and negative terms. In one sense, news outlets are often criticised for presenting biased or misleading information about politicians, leading to a negative perception of their message. Politicians now have an opportunity to 'set the record straight' and engage directly with voters. Conversely, the online environment can expose politicians to hostile feedback and repercussions as a result of controversial statements or incendiary comments. The media often portrays such instances in a sensationalised manner, in *soap opera-styled* reporting,<sup>864</sup> to such an extent that it could be asked why politicians utilise social media, considering the high potential for reputational risks and exposure to public criticism. Contrastingly, traditional media provides a level of control and protection for political figures, as they relinquish direct responsibility for their messages but avoid the direct confrontation of biased responses.<sup>865</sup>

The decreased sense-making authority of traditional news outlets have enabled politicians' social media posts and tweets to become a primary source of information that bypasses media editing.<sup>866</sup> However, this has inflated public focus on inaccuracies and false information from politicians in recent years, with fact-checking apps and webpages providing counternarratives to inaccurate political outputs. It has become commonplace for politicians and political commentators to engage in falsifications and dishonesties in the US and the UK, as evidenced by the widespread assignment of journalists and fact-checkers by news outlets such as CNN, Washington Post, BBC, Channel 4, Fox News, The Conversation, and Associated Press to authenticate political statements, speeches, and press briefings. In addition to these established news sources, organizations such as FullFact.org,

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<sup>864</sup> Bente Kalsnes, Anders Olof Larsson & Enil Gunn, 'The social media logic of political interaction: Exploring citizens' and politicians' relationship on Facebook and Twitter' [2017] *First Monday* 22 (2) <<https://www.duo.uio.no/handle/10852/61401>> accessed 24<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

<sup>865</sup> Sounman Hong, Haneul Choi & Taek Kyu Kim, *Why Do Politicians Tweet? Extremists, Underdogs, and Opposing Parties as Political Tweeters* [2019] *Policy & Internet* 11 (3) 305-323

<sup>866</sup> Owen (n856)

Snopes, and PolitiFact also dedicate resources to addressing the prevalence of political falsification and dishonesty through which political representatives cultivate panic when providing often partisan sense-making definitions and frames. Though Clayton et al. (2020) found inconsistencies in the effectiveness of fact-checking measures such as adding a warning tag to inaccurate or misleading posts on social media,<sup>867</sup> the apparent necessity to monitor the rhetoric of political leaders to such an extent should nevertheless be considered an indicator of failure within US and UK democratic processes.

Further adding to this decreasing faith for traditional hierarchal institutions, despite Pew research (2020) finding that 55% of US social media users were fatigued by political posts and discussions,<sup>868</sup> transparency, accountability, and the dissemination of accurate information is a necessity for functional democracy. In 2019, Sky News surveyed 2,800 participants and found that 75 % believed the UK was a 'divided country', 42% blamed Brexit, 23% blamed politicians, and 14% condemned immigration. The survey results indicated that the highest levels of trust were recorded in organizations such as the armed forces and the National Health Service (NHS), while the lowest levels of trust were associated with government, media, and corporations, as 87% of respondents expressed their belief that politicians were unconcerned about them.<sup>869</sup> This PEW study corresponds with research findings from Facebook comments in this thesis, which found generally negative sentiments when Facebook commenters addressed mainstream news.

Regarding analysis conducted for this PhD, Facebook comments observed within the *Media Coverage* theme (see *Table. 6.1*) were overly antagonistic, indicating a strong populist, right-leaning slant and distrust from a grassroots level towards entities in high ranking social positions. Counternarratives to these comments and

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<sup>867</sup> Katherine Clayton, Spencer Blair, Jonathan Busam, & Sam Forstner, 'Real Solutions for Fake News? Measuring the Effectiveness of General Warnings and Fact-Check Tags in Reducing Belief in False Stories on Social Media' [2020] *Polit Behaviour* 42 1073

<sup>868</sup> Monica Anderson & Brooke Auxier, '55% of US social media users say they are 'worn out' by political posts and discussions' [Pew Research Centre 2020] <<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/08/19/55-of-u-s-social-media-users-say-they-are-worn-out-by-political-posts-and-discussions/>> accessed 13<sup>th</sup> Dec 2021.

<sup>869</sup> Carmen Aguilar Garcia & David Mercer, 'State of the Nation – A Country Divided' [Sky News 2019] <<https://news.sky.com/state-of-the-nation>> accessed 4<sup>th</sup> March 2019.

themes were present within datasets, although they were comparatively minor and infrequent.

Sub-Themes	References made
General Criticism of Media Reporting	43
Terrorism Reporting Fuels Terror(ism)	34
Fearmongering	27
Fake News/Accusation of Lies	12
Media Agenda/Propaganda	6
Media-Terrorism Link	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>131</b>

Table 6.2: Media Coverage sub-themes (Facebook Comments; 2016)

Overall, the *Media Coverage* theme consisted of commenters who were displeased with how mainstream outlets presented the news. Table 6.2 displays the sub-themes used to enhance this understanding. *General Criticisms of Media Reporting* (n=43) questioned why other salient issues were not receiving media attention, such as the ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine. Some commenters felt that too much media coverage was afforded to terrorism as this ‘*was what the terrorist wanted*’, questioning the usefulness of the information reported in these articles. From this point, commenters (n=34) felt that *Terrorism Reporting Fuelled Terror(ism)*, with commenters expressing that media attention fulfilled the martyrdom desire of Islamist attackers. Some other critiques suggest that media reporting may have deliberately nefarious purposes. Commenters (n=27) felt that media coverage of terrorism was often used to *fearmonger*. It was noted in comments that media outlets utilised sensationalist headlines and rhetoric to garner audience attention and generate revenue through increased website traffic, which was deemed as a negative tactic. Commenters observed that the utilisation of such tactics was frequently associated with a perceived inclination on the part of news providers to manipulate audiences into engaging with their articles and to read more into the story, even if the story contained little in the way of quality information or substance. Such articles were commonly referred to as *Clickbait*. The utilisation of such ‘filler stories’ formed a significant part of the amplification of media reporting on terrorism-related content, thereby perpetuating the notion of danger in the minds of the audience, offering negligible levels of substance or significance, put generating revenue-generating content for publishers.

There were also outright accusations (n=12) that what the media was reporting was *Fake News* or outright *Lies*. Commenters demonstrated strong distrust of mainstream news outlets, believing them to propagate false information, and questioning the motive for covering specific stories or individual stories in certain ways (accusations of leaving out some aspects of information). Some of these comments interlinked with the theme of *Media Reporting*. One commentator advanced the argument that the aforementioned tactics employed by news organisations could be considered perverse, suggesting that the media harboured a concealed objective, perpetuating a broader strategy to mislead the general public. Other reasons were more conspiratorial: the media and the government were ‘working together’ for a mutual purpose, with news media pushing government *propaganda* (n=6) as a result. One final notable theme illustrating hostility toward British media from their coverage of terrorism was that there was an apparent link between the *Media and their support for Terrorism* (n=9). Commenters felt that some news outlets may have a vested interest in covering terrorist attacks, as such events can generate significant media coverage and attention. This may create an incentive for some news organizations to focus on these incidents, rather than other, potentially more positive, news stories. For some commenters this meant that news organisations supported terrorism owing to financial benefit that coverage yielded.

### **Growing Public Influence in Panic Production**

With the advent of digital communication technologies and social media platforms, the general public, who were once constrained in expressing their opinions and ideas, can now freely express their convictions to a vast, niche audiences. The ease of access to information and the ability to create and share content has empowered the public to participate in public discourse, challenge established authorities, conduct research, and create their own sources of information. The widespread use of smartphones and the internet has allowed people to stay informed of current events in real-time, including watching live coverage of ongoing incidents such as terrorist attacks. However, this thesis argues that increased access to information has also led to the proliferation of misinformation and conspiracy theories, which misleads people and undermines the validity of mainstream information sources. An element of moral panic research that requires supplementary academic consideration for the modern era is the public growing responsibility for the

generation of their own mass fear and distorted realities. Conflicting with the traditional panic framework, Carlson (2020) argued that audiences are blameworthy and responsible for a significant portion of distorted information and conspiracy theory propagation, viewing the public as active participants via social media rather than blameless victims. Carlson suggests a fluid concept of 'blame worthiness', attributing greater significance to social media users, describing the irresponsible and gullible consumption, and spread of fake news as a marker of 'poor citizenship' by those who partake.<sup>870</sup> In short, alongside a decreasing exhibition of faith from grassroots populaces towards traditional social institutions has been the public's ability to scrutinise, seek, gain and share alternative information, and the ability to view the flaws of those in leading social positions.

Principal to Goode & Ben-Yehuda's grassroots locus of moral panic is populist influence and how the public critically perceives mainstream, and indeed fringe, powerful, high-strata entities. Mainstream elites very standing and authority is often perceived as a desire to maintain their dominant position over the 'ordinary man'. On various matters, 'rank and file' members of society mistrust the rich and powerful, seeing them as manipulators seeking to satisfy their own self-benefit.<sup>871</sup> The grassroots theory of moral panic posits that the frame-setting activities of elites have little impact on the general public. However, the pervasive visibility of elite misconduct and the blatant attempts to manipulate public opinion erode public confidence in traditional power structures and diminish their capacity to elicit fear. This has bloated support for fringe entities among disenchanting members of British society who are searching for *sincere and relatable* leadership and guidance. Conspiracism, contrastingly, creates a sense of community for those with cynical worldviews,<sup>872</sup> establishing bonds with similarly like-minded people.<sup>873</sup> Disillusioned members feel that they are *Outsiders*, and elites at the top of the mainstream social hierarchy as *Insiders*<sup>874</sup> to a social framework disadvantaging the lower rungs.

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<sup>870</sup> Matt Carlson, 'Fake News as an Informational Moral Panic: The Symbolic Deviancy of Social Media during the 2016 US Presidential Election' [2020] *Information, Communication & Society* 374-388

<sup>871</sup> Goode & Ben-Yehuda (n16) 57

<sup>872</sup> Bradley Franks, Adrian Bangerter, Martin Bauer, Matthew Hall, & Mark Noort, 'Beyond "Monologicality"? Exploring Conspiracist Worldviews' [2017] *Front. Psychol* 8 861

<sup>873</sup> Jolley, Douglas, Leite & Schrader (n800) 534-549

<sup>874</sup> Steven Richards, *The Rise of the Outsiders: How Mainstream Politics lost its way* [Atlantic Books 2018] 9



It is an evident that globalization has brought about significant social changes which have resulted in perceptions of powerlessness among grassroots populations. This has led to the emergence of various forms of protest and resistance against elite harms, and illegal or immoral behaviours. Such a dynamic, this research argues, has contributed to a hierarchical fracture fuelled by grassroots feelings of a lost local and national identity, inducing perceptions of powerlessness. In the UK, economic turbulence via the global economic crash of 2008 and subsequent austerity measures adopted by the government have exacerbated existing economic and social inequalities.<sup>875</sup> The handling of the COVID-19 pandemic and the current cost-of-living crisis have also contributed to these inequalities.

It should be noted that data sets analysed for previous chapters of this thesis infer that many (the majority) of individuals (commenters) still follow the existing traditional social hierarchy; or at least failed to express an outright rejection to the extent seen in qualitative themes covered in this chapter. As a result, the capacity of elite rhetoric to create panic and anxiety among the general population (regarding terrorism and immigration, for example) remains significant. Nevertheless, disenchanting outsider groups are expanding rapidly online.<sup>876</sup> It is noted that the movement is largely driven by grassroots efforts, yet contributions are made from all levels of the social hierarchy. Hong, Choi, & Kim (2019) posited that the likes of back bench and fringe party politicians, and grassroots extremists, are likely to become active political tweeters. As mainstream media attention is typically focused on prominent politicians, backbenchers who receive less media attention may see the advantage of maintaining an active social media presence. This is also true for fringe politicians whose ideological positions do not align with major news organisations may encounter, and so may encounter fewer rhetorical challenges by avoiding a newscaster's live interrogations and controlling their own message from their social media accounts.<sup>877</sup>

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<sup>875</sup> Vickie Cooper, & David Whyte, 'Grenfell, Austerity and Institutional Violence' [2022] *Sociological Research Online* 27 (1) 207

<sup>876</sup> Russell Belk, Henri Weijo, & Robert Kozinets, 'Enchantment and perpetual desire: Theorizing disenchanting enchantment and technology adoption' [2021] *Marketing Theory* 21 (1) 25

<sup>877</sup> Hong, Choi & Kim (n865) 305-323

With the modern ability to produce their own media, fringe groups and folk devils can offer counternarratives and challenge elites. With information control representing a critical axis for power, social media is frequently depicted as an '*elite-challenging microphone for the masses*',<sup>878</sup> challenging traditional definitions and structures of information seeking, news production, and information dissemination. During the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, efforts were made by elites to encourage the lower classes to improve their moral character by promoting fear and panic about certain lifestyle choices, such as substance abuse, pornography consumption, and other forms of vice. This was partly achieved through the dissemination of information through mainstream media outlets.<sup>879</sup> However, the argument could be made that moral panic outbreak has become more frequent in recent years, with the 'social movement sector' of professional activists and citizen journalists attracting wider global attention, greater funding, and more volunteers.<sup>880</sup> Grassroot entities, fringe actors, and moral entrepreneurs launch crusades which can develop into moral panic.<sup>881</sup>

### **Interest-Group Theory: Modern panic from the hierarchical middle ground**

Also considered in the Interest-Group locus of moral panic. According to Goode & Ben-Yehuda's Interest-group theory, panic can arise from the middle echelons of power and status, rather than solely from grassroots or elite-engineered sources. This theory posits that professional associations, police, media, religious groups, and educational organizations, among others, have a self-determining purpose in addressing social issues, often leading to moral crusades that may conflict with the interests of the elite.<sup>882</sup> Here, moral panics are directed by experienced campaigners,<sup>883</sup> termed by Becker as *Moral Entrepreneurs*.<sup>884</sup> Action groups aim to bring about political reflection concerning problems. Pozen defines moral entrepreneurs as individuals, groups, or organizations that seek to influence others to adopt or maintain a (new) norm, which alters the boundaries of humanity,

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<sup>878</sup> Dhiraj Murthy, 'Twitter: Microphone for the Masses?' [2011] *Media, Culture & Society* 33 (5) 779

<sup>879</sup> Jasper (n48) 10029-10033

<sup>880</sup> Ibid 10029-10033.

<sup>881</sup> Becker (n58) 146-163

<sup>882</sup> Goode & Ben-Yehuda (n16) 67-68

<sup>883</sup> Walsh (n3) 1-20

<sup>884</sup> Becker (n58) 147-163

deviance, or obligation.<sup>885</sup> For example, *Human Rights Watch* globally investigates and provides accounts of humanitarian maltreatment; *Greenpeace* works principally towards protecting the environment; while *OneKind*'s mission is to defend animals from harm and abuse. Such interest-group-generated panics conjure appeals, campaigns, and action groups.<sup>886</sup> Seen as '*germinal social movements*',<sup>887</sup> middle groups view current governing provisions and policies of control as insufficient.<sup>888</sup> The utilisation of social media by concern groups and moral entrepreneurs has provided them with a platform to express their concerns and bring to light perceived injustices, much like the ability of the general public to select causes, generate and share content, and garner support through their efforts. Entrepreneurs are increasingly likely to directly challenge the established elites, as compared to previous eras. When considering the definition of a moral entrepreneur, the fringe group falls within this boundary, although their goals are not always of noble or righteous intent. Nevertheless, modern grassroots movements (through social media) have the ability to rise to the level of achieving the same qualifying criteria set out here by other authors, fulfilling the role of Interest-groups set out by Goode & Ben-Yehuda. For example, the Incel movement and online characters like Andrew Tate who have come to front such movements for change.<sup>889</sup> In this sense, it is vital to recognise media which is not 'mass', but small and able to articulate the interests of small groups,<sup>890</sup> for the potential for significant global influence is now so great, it cannot be (and should not) be ignored. For example, imageries and video recordings evidencing the violence and brutality of war appear daily on the Internet and social media, with a large proportion failing to gain ample notice or significance. Nevertheless, some do indeed 'go viral', superseding the initial diffusion sites. Among the types of visual happenings which have generated powerful elite and public consideration on several occasions are beheading videos, as discussed in an earlier chapter, created and shared by a relatively small online purposeful few – though able to incite fear in many. As *niche media* with limited or no budgets seek

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<sup>885</sup> David Pozen, 'We are all Entrepreneurs now' [2008] *Wake Forrest Law Review* 43 (1) 283

<sup>886</sup> Becker (n58) 147

<sup>887</sup> Cohen (n1)

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<sup>888</sup> Goode & Ben-Yehuda (n16) 67-69

<sup>889</sup> Paul French, 'The online 'hierarchy of credibility' that fuels influencers like Andrew Tate' [The Conversation 2023] <<https://theconversation.com/the-online-hierarchy-of-credibility-that-fuels-influencers-like-andrew-tate-197292>> accessed 16<sup>th</sup> Feb 2024.

<sup>890</sup> Critcher (n19) 132

audiences by broadcasting non-conforming perspectives, the boundaries between moral interest group crusades, grassroots panics, and folk devils has become much less distinct.<sup>891</sup> In short, focus on the hierarchical middle further illustrates credulity conflicts and fractures in modern society.

### **Political Divides & Elite Distrust: Scepticisms from the Right**

According to Jolley & Douglas (2014), the spread of disinformation has been found to increase feelings of powerlessness and disillusionment rather than fostering desirable feelings of positivity and control over one's environment.<sup>892</sup> Further probing this observation and rooted mistrust at grassroots level, this research infers that a noticeable decrease in confidence in key societal institutions is particularly observable among individuals who may be positioned to the right of the political spectrum.<sup>893</sup> As argued, this decline in trust is consistent with the advancements in online communication and information-gathering abilities, increasing the potential for lower-tier members of society to produce, disseminate, and access information which has facilitated the proliferation of conspiracy theories on social media platforms.<sup>894</sup> The news media industry, for example, is conscious of the susceptibility and prejudices of their audiences, readily concurring with worldviews that verifies biased evidence-led counter-narratives. Tabloids, in particular, also promote widespread feelings of nation-wide victimization.<sup>895</sup> It is simultaneous with the advancements in social media, as the proliferation of conspiracy theories on social platforms has coincided in a widespread dissemination of disinformation from mainstream media outlets.<sup>896</sup>

This thesis holds that the declining confidence in political leaders among Western nations may be attributed, in part, to the erosion of trust resulting from strong scepticism surrounding publicly visible examples of political scandal and media disrepute since the early 2000s. The use of manipulative rhetoric and actions by

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<sup>891</sup> Krinsky (n5) 8-9

<sup>892</sup> Daniel Jolley & Karen M Douglas, 'The social consequences of conspiracism: Exposure to conspiracy theories decreases intentions to engage in politics and to reduce one's carbon footprint' [2014] *British Journal of Psychology* 105 35

<sup>893</sup> Lazer et al., (n318) 1094-1096

<sup>894</sup> Thomas (n790) 1

<sup>895</sup> Carlson (n870) 374-388

<sup>896</sup> Thomas (n790) 1

political elites has damaged their legitimate standing among the public. Significant exhibitions of reputational self-harm may include the contentious invasion of Iraq in 2004 and the subsequent failure to find weapons of mass destruction; accusations of state crimes committed during the *War on Terror* (WoT) such as the torture of prisoners in *Abu Ghraib* prison and the restructuring of Iraqi economy; the handling of the global financial crash of 2008 and the subsequent austerity measures that have been implemented in the UK since 2010; the 2010 cash for influence scandal; MP's expenses scandal; 2012's 'cash of access' scandal; the findings of the 2016 Chilcot Inquiry into the Iraq war which found that not all avenues had been exhausted before the Iraq invasion and that the intelligence supporting accusations to the existence of WMD's was flawed. Furthermore, in 2013, a controversy emerged surrounding the surveillance measures employed by the state in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. The involvement of Edward Snowden, a government contractor for the National Security Agency (NSA), was pivotal in this issue. Snowden disclosed classified US government documents to journalists Glenn Greenwald and Ewen MacAskill, as well as documentarian Laura Poitras. These documents exposed that the NSA was collecting millions of telephone records belonging to American citizens under a presidential order, even if they were not suspected of being involved in terrorism. In the award-winning documentary *Citizenfour* - which filmed the meeting between Snowden, Greenwald, MacAskill and Poitras in a hotel room in Hong Kong - Snowden discusses how the NSA operates under *Executive Order 12333* alongside the Patriot Act and details how each surveillance system works, including the PRISM program<sup>897</sup> which gave authorities direct access to Internet servers such as *Google*, *Microsoft*, *Facebook*, and *Apple*. Soon after, *The Guardian* revealed how GCHQ also obtained Internet and telephone records and shared information with American agencies,<sup>898</sup> somewhat confirming the claim by Haggerty & Gazso (2005) that intensive surveillance infrastructure had been assembled piece by piece in the US and other Western nations.<sup>899</sup>

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<sup>897</sup> *Citizenfour* [HBO Documentary Films 2014]

<sup>898</sup> David Lowe, *Surveillance and International Terrorism Intelligence Exchange: Balancing the Interests on National Security and Individual Liberty* [Routledge 2014] 4

<sup>899</sup> Kevin Haggerty & Amber Gazso, 'Seeing Beyond the Ruins: Surveillance as a Response to Terrorist Threats' [2005] *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 30 (2) 170

With these examples in mind, the *Elite Distrust* theme listed in *Table 6.1* (see *Table 6.3* for *secondary sub-themes*), makes efforts to highlight political Left and Right divides between inferred from Facebook comments. Based on analysed data, expressions of a right-leaning nature were found to support authoritarian policies and populist figures who advocated for such strategies due to a lack of confidence in mainstream figures to address concerning problems. This type of thinking is counter to the traditional Hierarchy of Credibility, with support for populist politicians indicating that people seek alternative leadership and diverse solutions.

Themes	References made
Weak/Corrupt Government	72
(Support) Populist Politician	31
Anti-Immigration	29
Anti-EU	17
Concerns of the People not heard	8
Anti-PC	2
Blames the Left	2
<b>Total</b>	161

*Table 6.3: Elite Distrust sub-themes (2016 Facebook comments data)*

For example, comments were analysed expressing strong support for right-leaning populist political figures such as Donald Trump, Nigel Farage and UKIP, Marine Le Pen, and even historical figures such as Margaret Thatcher and Enoch Powell. These political figures have garnered a public following through their punitive, unyielding, and oversimplified rhetoric regarding complex social issues.

*Female: We've had Enoch Powell tell us decades ago that Europe & Britain would be overrun.*

Many populist entities have shared an *anti-immigration* sentiment which resonates with sections of the populace who had come to 'see the harms' of migration to Britain; frames introduced in Chapter 4. This links to comments regarding a perceived lack of attention paid to the concerns of the public on issues such as immigration. The remarks expressed that the concerns of the people had been repeatedly brought up in relation to immigration and terrorism, but were not being acknowledged by the mainstream elites. Some comments specifically stated that people at grassroots level had been 'saying this for years', but their 'voices were not

being heard by elites'. Such comments illustrated a substantial level of resentment and feelings of maltreatment. When indicating that people had been alleging for years that immigration was a detriment for Britain, they also claimed that they had been labelled as 'racist' for doing so. In turn, this produced frequent expressions of frustration and feelings that people have lost their *Freedom of Speech and Expression*.

A further prominent theme was that people felt that the *British government was weak or corrupt*, linking again to themes introduced during Chapter 4. Regarding sentiments of weakness, multiple commenters believed that the government was not able nor willing to 'do what was necessary' to curb the source of threat (immigration, for example) and that the government's weakness was to the expense of native Brits (Us) and the benefit of migrants and even terrorists (Them). For many of these commenters, terrorist threats to the UK and other social problems were partly the government's fault, owing to this perceived weakness. By extension, membership to the EU was also seen as a weakness. Commenters claimed that the free movement of people was problematic and that the UK government could not address immigration as a member. Other commenters felt that the UK government was corrupt. For example, some felt that military and diplomatic involvement in Middle Eastern countries was illegal and the cause of incited terrorist reprisal attacks in the UK. Commenters also felt that the EU was corrupt. *Table 6.4* presents a summary of the differentials discovered from Facebook comments regarding the public's perception of what constitutes the Left and the Right. *Table 6.4* exhibits a collation of variables that commenters have explicitly said they see as being either left or right leaning characteristics.

<b><i>Left</i></b>	<b><i>Right</i></b>
Weak/soft	Strong/punitive
Pro-Immigration	Anti-immigration
Pro-EU membership (Remain voter)	Anti-EU membership (Leave voter)
Jeremy Corbyn / Angela Merkel	Donald Trump / Nigel Farage & UKIP / Marion Le Pen
Political Correctness (PC; now Woke or Wokeness)	

*Table 6.4: Characteristics of Left & Right as indicated by Facebook comments (2016 data sets)*

Furthering this, Richards (2018) suggests that those on the political left prioritise economic transformation as a remedy for globalisation, while those on the right concentrate on immigration and national security.<sup>900</sup>

### **Political Divides & Elite Distrust: The Right sees Weakness in the Left**

Owing to the panic created surrounding Islamist threats, the Left had developed an image of weakness for addressing social issues, terrorism included, with *Table. 6.3* illustrates that n=72 comments expressed that the *UK government was weak or corrupt*. Some of these comments interlinked with other themes, such as *anti-EU*. For example, with comments stating:

*Male: Surely if the Remainers haven't got the hint, they never will! Open borders and uncontrolled immigration has only one result, see Berlin news, as the old Chinese prophecy says, not every Muslim is a terrorist, but every terrorist seems to be a Muslim? Mrs Merkel you have blood on your hands, you should resign and stand trial for misrule and putting the population of Germany in danger just to make you feel better by opening the country to murderers, rapists, and anti-Christian gangs!*

*Male: Hang on, according to left-wingers, we are all safe, and there is no danger from non-British, hence why they want open borders.*

*Male: If it weren't for the PC looney liberals who want freedom of movement we would have a lot less of these incidents, just what is the point in having a passport etc if the PC looney liberals want to allow anyone without a passport or any form of ID whatsoever to travel wherever they want, The PC Liberals need to wake up to the real world. NO passport and NO ID meanns NO entry, full stop.*

The UK's EU membership was viewed as a source of mass immigration to the UK, and, by extension, immigration was framed as a source of threat. From comments data, the EU attained a 'Leftist' symbol. Specific political figures, such as German Chancellor Angela Merkel, had come to signify leftist heads of state that are not trusted. This was a continuation of the sentiment that left-leaning policies or those with seemingly left-leaning policies were responsible for high immigration and were soft or reluctant to adopt stricter policies.

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<sup>900</sup> Richards (n874) 11



*Male: Any atrocities committed are down to Murky Merkel, Brussels, Dodgy Dave, and Theresa May. They have continued to allow uncontrolled immigration against the will of the British people*

Overall, left-leaning policies were seen to encourage immigration, and were soft about crime and terrorism. Regarding a Sky News article concerning 'Terrorists hiding in plain sight among migrants', comments stated:

*Male: That's strange. Left-wing tree huggers, members of parliament, local councillors, plus a few more, denied this was happening. Yet, the ordinary person on the street could see what was happening*

*Male: Well then, let's listen to our leftist politicians and bring more and more of them into our countries to help cement the communist revolution*

'Political correctness' was also linked to the left, and was seen as a barrier to incorporating 'effective' remedies.

*Male: European leaders are not powerless; they just refuse to confront it head on all because of political correctness. It's high time PC was stuffed in the bin and full consideration and action given to the safety of every country's citizens. And if that means coming down hard on Islam then so be it.*

*Male: The government are either incompetent, or complicit in this. Too politically correct. Soo much so they have put us all in danger. The only thing that will put their criminal stupidity right is martial law for a while. If there is any terrorist action soon then the decision makers on both sides of the houses of Parliament should be dragged out of their seats and drowned in the Thames*

### **Islamist & Muslim-centred Conspiracies & untruths**

Right leaning fixations on immigration and security fuelled the moral panic of Islamist extremism during the 2010s. Table 6.5 illustrates the range of professed conspiracy theories and inaccurate statements within comment datasets.

Inside Job	Government narrative/propaganda creating terrorism/fear
False Flag	Muslims instil their own (Sharia) laws
Government Control	Immigrants (Muslims) come here (UK) for the benefits system
Europe and UK overrun by 'invading army'	George Soros (other elites) rule to world
Trojan Horse	UN / EU / UK gov actively support terrorism
Government, media, and security profiting from terrorism	Pizzagate
Government foreign policy creating terrorism	Sidiq Khan is a terrorist sympathiser
United States of Europe	Paedophile ministers in government and elite positions

Table 6.5: Conspiracies & Mistrusts expressed in Facebook comments (2016 datasets)

Incorrect statements regarding the potential implications for the UK voting to remain in the EU were rife, including the erroneous assertion that Turkey would join the EU and result in an increased influx of immigrants into Britain, that the UK would be compelled to contribute to an EU Army, and that the EU was evolving into a 'super state' with the loss of veto power for member nations in EU decision-making procedures. Other conspiracies include the false circulation of information related to provisions within the Lisbon Treaty.<sup>901</sup>

Accompanying, many conspiratorial and distorted stories emerged during the 2010s involving Islam and Muslims specifically. Stories disproven by fact-checkers such as *Snopes* and *Full Fact* include: Muslims demanding that the cross be removed from the Swiss flag (2019);<sup>902</sup> 84% of child grooming gangs are Asian (2018);<sup>903</sup> Ofsted inspectors downgrade English schools for being too white and British (2014);<sup>904</sup> Trojan Horse conspiracy in Birmingham schools (2014);<sup>905</sup> Halal meat funds

<sup>901</sup> 'There's a lot wrong with this viral list about the Lisbon Treaty' [Full Fact 2019] <<https://fullfact.org/europe/viral-list-about-lisbon-treaty-wrong/>> accessed 19<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

<sup>902</sup> Bethania Palma, 'Did Muslims Demand the Cross Be Removed From the Swiss Flag?' [Snopes 2019] <<https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/muslims-cross-swiss-flag/>> accessed 19<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

<sup>903</sup> Kenan Malik, 'We're told 84% of grooming gangs are Asian. But where's the evidence?' [The Guardian 2018] <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/nov/11/84-per-cent-of-grooming-gangs-are-asians-we-dont-know-if-that-figure-is-right>> accessed 19<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

<sup>904</sup> Sean Coughlan, 'Ofsted rejects claims schools downgraded as 'too white' [BBC News 2014] <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-30177054>> accessed 19<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

<sup>905</sup> Samira Shackleton, 'Trojan Horse: The real story behind the fake 'Islamic plot' to take over schools' [The Guardian 2014] <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/sep/01/trojan-horse-the-real-story-behind-the-fake-islamic-plot-to-take-over-schools>> accessed 19<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

terrorism (2015);<sup>906</sup> *'The War on Christmas - can't call it Christmas anymore'*;<sup>907</sup> Islamic Sharia law has become enshrined in the UK legal system (2020);<sup>908</sup> Muslims marched in favour of Sharia law in Britain (2017);<sup>909</sup> a gang of Muslim women beat up a French lady for wearing a bikini (2015);<sup>910</sup> Immigrants out breeding white people (white genocide);<sup>911</sup> *'Islam will overwhelm Christendom unless Christians recognise the demographic realities and begin reproducing again'* (2009);<sup>912</sup> Britain has Sharia law 'No-go' areas (2015);<sup>913</sup> Paris under a Muslim siege (2016);<sup>914</sup> Muslim children are offended by the US national anthem (2015);<sup>915</sup> a couple were removed from a bus because they sang a nursery rhyme that offended Muslim passengers (2014);<sup>916</sup> the city of London saw 500 churches close and 423 new Mosques open (2018);<sup>917</sup> Muslim immigrants committed the most knife crime in Britain in 2017;<sup>918</sup> a Muslim refugee shot 15 people in an Ohio nightclub (2017);<sup>919</sup> 5,000 jihadis entered the EU

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<sup>906</sup> Randa Abdel-Fattah, 'Australia: Is halal food funding terrorism?' [al Jazeera 2015] <<https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2015/5/2/australia-is-halal-food-funding-terrorism>> accessed 19<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

<sup>907</sup> David Emery, 'A History of the 'War on Christmas' [Snopes 2017]

<<https://www.snopes.com/news/2017/11/29/the-war-on-christmas/>> accessed 19<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

<sup>908</sup> Charlotte Mason, 'Sharia has not been adopted into UK law' [AFP Fact Check 2020]

<<https://factcheck.afp.com/sharia-has-not-been-adopted-uk-law>> accessed 19<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

<sup>909</sup> Dan Evon, 'Did Muslims March in Favor of Sharia Law in England?' [Snopes 2017]

<<https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/video-muslims-sharia-ashoura/>> accessed 19<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

<sup>910</sup> Dan Evon, 'Gang of Muslim Women Beat a Lady for Wearing Bikini' [Snopes 2015]

<<https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/muslim-bikini/>> accessed 19<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

<sup>911</sup> Luiz Romero, 'No, there is no 'Kalergi plan' to replace Europeans with migrants' [PolitiFact 2022]

<<https://www.politifact.com/factchecks/2022/jan/24/tiktok-posts/no-there-no-kalergi-plan-replace-europeans-migrant/>> accessed 19<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

<sup>912</sup> David Mikkelson, 'Muslim Demographics' [Snopes 2009] <<https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/muslim-demographics/>> accessed 19<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

<sup>913</sup> David Mikkelson, 'Sharia Law Muslim 'No-Go' Zones' [Snopes 2015]

<<https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/sharia-law-muslim-no-go-zones/>> accessed 19<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

<sup>914</sup> Dan Evon, 'Paris Under Muslim Siege' [Snopes 2016] <<https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/paris-muslim-siege-false/>> accessed 19<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

<sup>915</sup> Kim LaCapria, 'National Ban-Them' [Snopes 2015]

<<https://www.snopes.com/news/2015/11/03/muslim-national-anthem/>> accessed 19<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

<sup>916</sup> David Mikkelson, 'Couple Kicked Off Bus After Nursery Rhyme Offends Muslims' [Snopes 2014]

<<https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/peppa-pig/>> accessed 19<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

<sup>917</sup> Dan Evon, 'Did London Close 500 Churches and Open 423 New Mosques?' [Snopes 2018]

<<https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/london-closes-500-churches-opens-423-new-mosques/>> accessed 19<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

<sup>918</sup> Dan MacGuill, 'Did 'Muslim Immigrants' Commit the Most Knife Crimes in London in 2017?'

[Snopes 2018] <<https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/london-knife-crime-muslims/>> accessed 19<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

<sup>919</sup> Arturo Garcia, 'Muslim Refugee' Shoots 15 People In Ohio Nightclub?' [Snopes 2017]

<<https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/muslim-refugee-ohio-nightclub/>> accessed 19<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

(2016);<sup>920</sup> a Muslim woman ignored a dying man at the scene of the London Bridge terror attack (2017).<sup>921</sup>

Figure 6.1: False perception of a Muslim woman ignoring a dying man at the scene of the London Bridge terror attack (*Image removed for repository publication – view via citation*).

Tandoc et al. (2018) proposed six forms of fake news: Satire, Parody, Fabrication of News, Photo Manipulation, Propaganda, and Advertising.<sup>922</sup> On the impact of *photo manipulation*, this was exemplified by social media rumours in datasets immediately following the Westminster Bridge attack. A photograph of a young Muslim woman (*Figure 6.1*) was shared widely on Twitter, portraying her as walking past an injured person without stopping to help. This was framed under the tweet, "*Muslim woman pays no mind to the terror attack, casually walks by a dying man while checking phone #PrayForLondon #Westminster #BanIslam.*" The reality is that the woman had stayed to help and was *'as distraught as other onlookers.*<sup>923</sup>

Fabricated stories have been conjured by civic-run niche media and spread not just within conspiratorial circles, as mainstream media outlets have also helped their dissemination (*Figure 6.1* as an example). Also, in 2011 the Daily Mail reported that

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<sup>920</sup> Conor James McKinney & Sinead Boulton, 'Have 5,000 jihadis come into the EU?' [Full Fact 2016] <<https://fullfact.org/europe/have-5000-jihadis-come-eu/>> accessed 19<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

<sup>921</sup> Dan Evon & David Mikkelsen, 'Muslim Woman Ignores Dying Victim of London Terror Attack?' [Snopes 2017] <<https://www.snopes.com/news/2017/03/24/muslim-woman-london-attack/>> accessed 19<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

<sup>922</sup> Edson et al., (n209) 137-153

<sup>923</sup> Ella Wills, 'Muslim woman pictured 'ignoring victims of London terror attack' was fake news Tweet created by Russians' [The Evening Standard 2017] <<https://www.standard.co.uk/news/world/russian-bot-account-claimed-muslim-woman-ignored-westminster-attack-victims-a3689751.html>> accessed 26<sup>th</sup> Feb 2019.

Islamist extremists had declared '*Britain's first Sharia law zone*', despite this being little more than the desires of a convicted hate preacher with a small radical following.<sup>924</sup> The Daily Express reported in 2016 that a nursery school's Ofsted rating was downgraded for being '*too white and British*'. In its article, the Daily Express claim that *Middle Rasen* primary school '*was penalised by Ofsted for effectively being too English*'.<sup>925</sup> However, this report did not state that the school was either 'too English' or 'too white', instead recommending that because of its rural location, more could be done to educate students about other British cultures.<sup>926</sup>

### **9/11 Remembered: Endurance of the 'Inside Job' theory**

The US is often cast as a villain in conspiratorial scenarios,<sup>927</sup> as state harm and ill-handling of certain situations have diminished the façade of competence, trustworthiness, and higher morality ownership.<sup>928</sup> In the UK, the government's handling of *The Troubles* in Northern Ireland led to the *Civil Authorities (Special Powers) Act (Northern Ireland) (1922)*, *Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act (1973)*, *Yellow Card/Rule of Engagement*, and *Bloody Sunday* all creating a legacy of criminal and harmful approaches to counterterrorism. Since 9/11, various political campaigns, such as the War on Terror, have contributed to a decline in public trust in politicians, giving rise to the perception that 9/11 was an "inside job" perpetrated by government officials. This belief continues to persist and has taken many forms through the efforts of those seeking the truth.<sup>929</sup> It has been postulated that the occurrence of the September 11th attacks was either deliberately orchestrated or deliberately allowed on the part of the United States government, with the ultimate aim of providing a potent justification for the deployment of coalition forces in Afghanistan and Iraq, with the ultimate objective of securing valuable resources,

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<sup>924</sup> Sue Reid, 'As Islamic extremists declare Britain's first Sharia law zone, the worrying social and moral implications' [Daily Mail 2011] <<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2020382/You-entering-Sharia-law-Britain-As-Islamic-extremists-declare-Sharia-law-zone-London-suburb-worrying-social-moral-implications.html>> accessed 26<sup>th</sup> Feb 2019.

<sup>925</sup> Mark Reynolds, 'Too white and British' Nursery DOWNGRADED by Ofsted for failing to teach ethnic diversity' [Daily Express 2016] <<https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/665009/Ofsted-downgrade-nursery-teach-kids-ETHNIC-DIVERSITY>> accessed 26<sup>th</sup> Feb 2019.

<sup>926</sup> 'The Middle Rasen Primary School' [Ofsted Report 2014] <<https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/2432799>> accessed 26<sup>th</sup> Feb 2019.

<sup>927</sup> Thomas (n790) 7

<sup>928</sup> Ibid 72-73.

<sup>929</sup> Evan E Laine & Raju Parakkal, 'National Security, Personal Insecurity, and Political Conspiracies: The Persistence of Americans' Beliefs in 9/11 Conspiracy Theories' [2017] *Journal of International Relations* 11 (3) 16

particularly oil. Arguments and conspiratorial 'facts' supporting this conspiracy include:

- The collapse of 7 World Trade Centre hours after planes hit the Twin Towers
- Reuters mistakenly reported that 7 World Trade Centre collapsed before it had.
- US missiles hit the Pentagon, not a hijacked Boeing 757
- United Airlines Flight 92 was shot down by US forces.
- The Twin Towers collapse was the result of deliberate and controlled explosions.
- There was a deliberate failure on the part of US security services to intercept the hijackers of these four planes, as government elites knew that the attack was imminent.
- The 9/11 '*Tourist Guy*'

It is widely believed that the 9/11 conspiracy theories are intertwined with the idea of a "New World Order" being orchestrated by an international Jewish elite. While this notion has been the subject of numerous investigations and studies, evidence supporting these claims is not academically persuasive. As such, it is not the intention of this discussion to debunk these theories further. Nevertheless, the justification for invading and occupying Iraq adds credence to these false conspiratorial notions.

Further surveying the widely stated 9/11 conspiracy theories, a sample of Facebook comments (see *Table. 6.6*) were sourced from a BBC News article entitled *9/11*. Published on the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the attacks on 11<sup>th</sup> September 2011 the article live-covered the national service in New York as the memorial was unveiled at the World Trade Centre site. The most dominant theme consisted of comments from Facebook users, evidencing the support of beliefs in some form of the 9/11 conspiracy theory. Some comments broadly or *vaguely* believed in the conspiracy they felt was occurring. For example, some commenters merely stated that '*IT WAS A CONSPIRACY*', whilst others provided that they felt the 9/11 attacks were the '*...biggest fucking conspiracy the world has ever seen!*' And whilst some tried to

convey sympathetic sentiments for 9/11 victims in their comments, they still expressed sinister causations; *'Yes, my sympathies go out to those who lost loved ones in this incident BUT I still got doubts over it.'* Some conspiracists also displayed hostility towards those who did not believe in their theories. One user claimed that people who believed the official mainstream account of 9/11 were *brainwashed by the media and did not have their own minds*. Similar to those claiming fears of being labelled as racist for expressing anti-immigration views, comments on this theme claimed that *'If you disagree with an opinion you're not patriotic or you're a terrorist. The other 'insult' is a tin hat.'*

Themes (Mother)	No. of References made
Conspiracy Belief	35
Support for Victims	33
Style of Media Reporting	32
Other Comments	31
Anti-Conspiracy	23
Folk Devil	15
Western Aggression	15

Table 6.6: Facebook comments; BBC News article; 9/11 Remembered; (2011)

The 15 comments qualifying for the Folk Devil theme provide negative links between terrorism and the Islamic religion or Muslim people. On the morning of 11<sup>th</sup> September 2011 approximately 100 members of a radical (now proscribed) Islamist group called *Muslims Against Crusades* (MAC) gathered outside the US embassy in London. The core ethos of MAC is that they believe Muslims do not fall under the restrictions and limitations of the rule of law, but instead advocate for the implementation of Sharia law. This was reflected in some of the expressions in this theme, as references were made stating that the government and the media were *'too afraid of extremist Muslims...whilst our human rights laws and political correctness allows MAC to get away with this.'* Other comments expressed opinions that 'the West' was a free, liberal, and democratic place, whilst 'the East' was ruled strictly by religion, with religious values used to justify violence. This view was reinforced by one commenter declaring that *'all you muslims who live in this country do because of our standard of living?we want cheap oil,so if you dont like it ,fuck of back to your caves!you tossers know where your better off???'* One comment sweepingly stated that *'not all muslims are terrorists,but most terrorists ARE muslims FACT.'* Another commenter gave thanks that 'our small island' wasn't surrounded by

Muslim countries, as they *'would try to wipe us of the face of the earth like they want to do to Israel.'*

Oppositional and positive sentiments were also evident, in opposition to these negative themes. For example, this sample had an *Anti-Conspiracy* element, either simply outright denouncing conspiratorial notions or directly attacking or challenging those sharing conspiracy notions. Multiple commenters argued that spreading such false notions was disrespectful to victims. Under the Western Aggressors theme, comments deflected from 9/11 atrocity and its victims by highlighting civilian deaths in countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq, the use of torture, and the blaming of Muslims. As one comment read, *'9/11 was horrific, BUT, ....Let us remember and never forget .... the ruthless revenge for 9/11 .....AFGHANISTAN ! - ABU GHRAIB ! - IRAQ ! - GUANTANOMO ! - RENDITION ! - WMD !'* The *Support for Victims* theme evidenced sympathetic sentiments towards those killed and injured during the 9/11 attacks. By somewhat of an extension, the *Style of Media Reporting* theme was somewhat negative in sentimental expression, but this was due to the broadcasting style of memorial proceedings. As the names of the deceased were recited, the BBC commentary narrated proceedings and included interview contributions. The 'interruptions' produced comments labelling BBC coverage as 'disgraceful' and 'lacking respect'. Two comments were somewhat reflective: recanting, *Where I was 9/11.*

*Table. 6.7* illustrates second and third order sub-themes regarding the specific 9/11 conspiracy theories expressed by commenters. As can be seen, there were  $n=11$  broad or vague references regarding the occurrence of conspiracies. However,  $n=24$  comments declared a specific conspiratorial activity that they believed was occurring. These third-order-themed conspiracies included: *9/11: Inside Job; Other; Bin Laden; WTC Building 7; Media Cover-Up; Twin Towers; and Pentagon.*



<u>Themes (Mother)</u>	<u>Second-Order Themes</u>	<u>Third-Order Themes</u>
Conspiracy Belief		
	<b>Vague Declaration (11)</b>	
	<b>Specific Belief Declared (24)</b>	9/11: Inside Job (12) Other (5) Bin Laden (2) WTC Building 7 (2) Media Cover-Up (1) Twin Towers (1) Pentagon (1)

Table 6.7: Second & third order sub-themes regarding 9/11 conspiracy theories

In essence, the minor third-order themes, Bin Laden, WTC Building 7, Media Cover-Up, Twin Towers, and Pentagon, can all be said to provide different elements of 9/11: Inside Job theme. Of the 12 comments referring directly to the US government having a direct influence on the 9/11 attacks, the following comments were made:

- *9/11 was a coverup for the USA government to enter war with Afghanistan.*
- *Bush Did it for money and oil to take over the middle east!;*
- *All those who think that 9/11 was not a false flag operation are injecting stuff from the fields of Afghanistan, the very same stuff that has seen production goes up by over 90 percent since NATO occupation!;*

Minor themes relating to the 7 World Trade Centre, the Pentagon, and the Twin Tower collapse displayed similar thoughts to those detailed earlier. Other minor themes included comments accusing the mass media of partaking in government cover-ups, while others doubted the blameworthiness of Osama Bin Laden in 9/11. The Other theme consisted of comments questioning the events of 9/11, with one comment questioning ‘*how could 3 planes be hijacked, all going off-course and could not be detected and alerted at the airport towers minutes before the impact????*’

### **Chapter Conclusion**

A greater understanding of the implications of widespread conspiratorial beliefs is lacking within moral panic theory.<sup>930</sup> The origins of conspiracy theories are complex and warrant further investigation, particularly within the context of moral panic research. Despite the long history of conspiracy theories, classical moral panic

<sup>930</sup> Jolley, Douglas, Leite & Schrader (n800) 534-549

authors tend to overlook them, possibly because they were primarily associated with marginalised groups on the fringes of society and panic researchers often focus their criticisms on societies elite players and institutions. However, fractures in the established social hierarchy post-9/11 have led to a loss of trust and credibility in social institutions, which is a point of great concern. Consequently, members of the public are increasingly likely to seek information and leadership from alternative, niche sources, rather than accepting official narratives from social elites.

The findings of this chapter show that grassroots and interest-group sources contribute to the emergence of moral panics through alternative sources. The analysis of Facebook comments has revealed themes in public discourse negatively related to media coverage, elite distrust, and the expression of conspiracy theories or general disinformation. These themes suggest a scope of scepticisms existing at the grassroots level of society. Comments that are conspiratorial in nature indicate deep-rooted mistrust among certain segments of the population regarding government and media credibility, immigration, safety, power dynamics, and security. However, it should be noted that many of these comments provide little or no supporting evidence for their claims. Nonetheless, these concerns appear to be predominantly held by individuals in the lower and middle socioeconomic strata and are often fronted by interest groups and grassroots organizations. Additional research into grassroots and interest-group sources of moral panics in contemporary society is warranted. Such research would offer valuable insights into the left-right political dynamic, tensions, and differentials identified through the analysis. The right appears more inclined to criticize the government's immigration policies, express anti-EU sentiment, and espouse other populist concerns. These sentiments were prevalent among pro-populist political figures who frequently portrayed themselves as "voices of the people." The findings reveal that dissatisfaction with the media was pervasive, with a prevalent lack of faith in news sources and suspicions of hidden agendas that favour the privileged classes at the cost of the masses. Although the majority of the comments analysed for this PhD did not exhibit conspiratorial inclinations, a substantial portion still harboured such convictions. These outcomes suggest that a considerable degree of scepticism towards mainstream media and political elites was present in 2016, with this potentially having increased in the years since; a potential for future research.

# Chapter. 7

## Final Deductions & Concluding Remarks

### **Introduction**

This thesis began by assessing the moral panic framework, identifying its advantages, limitations, and potential applicability to current social issues. It was suggested that the framework was adaptable, allowing it to address present-day issues, helping researchers comprehend and explain mass reactions to sensational phenomena. The instigation of this project was inspired by the outcomes of prior MSc research, which observed that people would be willing to give up their human rights for increased security, based on distorted perceptions of reality and mass-generated fear. As previously discussed in earlier chapters, an unforeseen relationship was noted between elite-generated moral panics of Islamist terrorism and conspiracy theories during the analysis. This observation led to a change in some of the thesis's objectives mid-project. Although it is still important to investigate the influence of moral panics of (Islamist) terrorism on human rights (in future publications), due to word restrictions, it was decided to instead focus on the connection between moral panics of Islamist terrorism and conspiracy theory credulity. To reiterate, the thesis's aims, as stated in the introduction, were:

1. To critically evaluate and analyse the shortcomings of the literature and frameworks pertaining to moral panic.
2. To critically assess the function of contemporary communication technology within the moral panic framework and the part played by social actors.
3. To analyse the interpretations of Islamist extremism during the early to mid-2010s through the lens of the moral panic framework.
4. To examine the interpretations of Islamist extremism during the 2017 Islamist terrorist attacks through the lens of moral panic framework.
5. To critically evaluate the importance of phenomena such as fake news, conspiracy theories, and mis/disinformation.

### **Identifying a gap in moral panic framework**

While acknowledging its limitations and criticisms, this study engaged with key arguments and gaps in existing literature. The researcher's reconsideration of moral

panic theory to fit modern social issues (Islamist terrorism) was deemed to be a novel contribution to academia. This thesis aimed to assess the potentials and constraints of moral panic theory in the contemporary era and as it pertains to advancing academic understanding of current social phenomena, such as reactions to terrorism. In the early stages of this project, selecting a central case study was of utmost importance. The research highlighted a shortage of attention given to examining the volatile fear of (Islamist) terrorism throughout academic research. Despite the gravity of the terrorism threat, scrutinising society's tendency for disproportionate reactions towards this issue was lacking, despite contributions from authors detailed in previous chapters. Having explored the literature, this researcher argues that the moral panic framework retains value as a theoretical tool for comprehending modern social issues, emphasising its continued relevance and usefulness. This study acknowledged the significant contributions of scholars such as Cohen, Hall et al., Goode & Ben-Yehuda, Critcher, and Klocke & Muschert to moral panic framework, with the latter theorists presenting a hybrid model that combined Cohen and Goode & Ben-Yehuda's respective contributions to the field. Despite the usefulness of this hybrid approach, it failed to be directly applicable to this project, and there remained a need to adequately incorporate social media in a meaningful and relevant manner; a further aspect novelty for this thesis. The hybrid framework gave inspiration to the research approach and structure of this thesis, though, was not directly applied. Future research may making more meaningful efforts.

### **Social Media: the cause of & solution to modernising moral panic framework**

Furthering the identification of research gaps, a principal goal of this doctoral research was to assess the impact of social media on the moral panic framework as part of its modern rejuvenation. Social media faces accusations of inducing changes in the way traditional panic actors operate and respond to crises,<sup>931</sup> heralding new considerations and challenges in relation to the loci of moral panic and the actors within. Social media has become a significant aspect of global communication, and played both a critical role in reassessing moral panic theory and served as a wealthy source of data. The impact of modern communication technologies on the behaviour

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<sup>931</sup> Cohen (n1)

of different actors, such as news media, the public, social control agents, lawmakers, and moral entrepreneurs, cannot be overstated. The interactions and relationships between these actors play a crucial role in shaping the emergence, evolution, and decline of panics, and any changes in social actor behaviour must be reflected in corresponding changes to the panic framework. It is fundamental to recognise that the behaviours of panic actors is essential for understanding the nature of panic, though it should be noted that panics do not affect all members of society equally, at the same time, or in the same way. As such, the three theories of panic loci proposed by Good & Ben-Yehuda, namely the Elite-Engineered Theory, the Grassroots Theory, and – to a lesser extent - the Interest-Group Theory, were considered in light of the impact of modern communications technologies.

The decision to employ data from sources such as Lexis Library, Google, and Facebook, was motivated by observations of social media's impact on behaviour. By fusing both qualitative and quantitative data, including news headlines and Facebook comments, this strategy offered a contemporary and triangulated perspective on the dynamics of collective panic. And as a primary objective of this study was to investigate moral panic using contemporary data sources, this offered a fresh perspective on public opinion, updating on older theoretical frameworks. This study, like prior research, analysed media and political discourse, with a specific focus on often-neglected public discussions. Although quantitative data helped understand the trends and extent of events from the early 2000s onward, qualitative data provided crucial insights into the public mindset.

The researcher faced challenges and limitations when collecting and analysing data using social media. But, despite these obstacles, the methods used in the research proved beneficial and enabled the achievement of the desired outcomes. With users able to produce and disseminate information at a rapid pace, social media has played a significant role in revolutionising the way people share and communicate, with an estimated 4.2 billion individuals actively using social media platforms by 2021.<sup>932</sup> As moral panic results from complex information exchanges between key

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<sup>932</sup> Stacy Jo Dixon, 'Social Media – Statistics & Facts' [Statista 2021] <<https://www.statista.com/topics/1164/social-networks/>> accessed 10<sup>th</sup> Oct 2021.

actors,<sup>933</sup> platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and (more recently) TikTok have changed communication landscape.<sup>934</sup> Such platforms provide two-way interactions between panic actors. This technologically-facilitated dynamic was not prevalent when classic panic frameworks had been formulated. With Bartlett (2018) contemplating the detrimental impact of the Internet on functional democracy,<sup>935</sup> thoughts have been given to the central role of the Internet and social media in changing who and what influences panics actors and their intertwining relationship. As such, research methods for this thesis used data from Facebook which, at the time, was not being extensively applied for examining moral panic theory. Findings from Facebook comments revealed similarities to Cohen's observations of rumour spreading amongst crowds and provided a modern way for judging panic variables such as public concerns and measuring consensus. High volumes of media reporting observable of social media gives insight to cultivation of public sensitisation to threat.

This researcher calls for additional investigations to account for further changes in the theoretical landscape, such as researching specific areas of social media influence - communication and social interaction, for example. Investigators should consider the impact of social changes to panic framework, making necessary and evolutionary adjustments to maintain relevancy and applicability. As social media has been in existence for some time and continues to grow in prevalence, it should be considered as a permanent fixture moving forward. As such, it should be a key consideration for most panic research herein. Continual evaluation of moral panic framework is necessary in light of the obvious and significant influence exerted by social media on the ability of political leaders and the media to stir up moral panics and their ramifications on public discourse. When compared to early panic contributions, social media has considerably altered the extent to which political leaders and mainstream media can incite moral panics. With the aid of social media platforms, news outlets can now disseminate content around the clock, granting them a global reach. While the development of broadcasting via social media has opened up new revenue opportunities, the pressure on news organisations to generate more income may have led to a decline in the quality and accuracy of

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<sup>933</sup> Rothe & Muzzatti (n13) 327-350

<sup>934</sup> Hodkinson (n208) 26-27

<sup>935</sup> Bartlett (n175) 2

reporting, as outlets compete for audience clicks to generate revenue. This phenomenon is not entirely novel, as traditional printed media outlets have long employed tactics to capture audience attention. Political leaders and enforcers of social control frequently utilise online platforms to disseminate updates and announcements. Social media has brought political leaders under increased scrutiny, which has weakened their legitimacy and capabilities. Additionally, it has exposed their relationships with media outlets, which were already established but have become more apparent with the widespread availability of the Internet. This has raised questions about the impact of these relationships on public trust in democratic institutions. Additionally, social media has enabled the public to create and perpetuate distorted panics. Researchers have used the moral panic framework to study Islamist extremism on social media and its effects on key actors and stakeholders, as well as the role of globalisation and technological progress in shaping the sources of terrorism panic.

### **Hegemonic elite-engineered framing & its consequences**

The devastation witnessed on September 11th was undoubtedly significant and had a profound impact, providing justification for Western leaders to take action and for a widespread sense of panic to ensue. It is expected that leaders and the media will respond forcefully to acts of terrorism, but it is crucial that their responses are proportional and measured. Despite popular belief, calculations and limitations should be placed on acceptable hostile reactions, even in the aftermath of great atrocities such as terrorist attacks. This thesis warns that influential figures in society should exercise caution when addressing and framing terrorism, particularly when attributing it solely to Islamist extremism – inadvertently impacting Western Muslim communities. It is crucial to avoid fuelling fear and hostility in these situations, as doing so can exacerbate the problem and give such terror groups what they desire; division and an abandonment of civilised values.

Resultingly, this PhD centred a great deal of attention on terrorism panics engineered between political elites and the news media, the elevated positions these actors occupy within the social hierarchy, and the interconnected relationship that exists between them. In analysing the interpretations of Islamist extremism during the early 2000s and up to 2017 through the lens of the moral panic framework,

Chomsky & Herman's propaganda model brings an additional understanding of this relationship. Politicians, as primary providers and definers of information, pronounce problems, identify the 'enemy', and frame the situation.<sup>936</sup> The media, as businesses seeking operating profits, amplify these frames to mass audiences in return for generated revenues. In the modern sense, Internet access and social media has exacerbated these functions in the elite-engineered loci of moral panic of terrorism. Elite generated concerns and fears often divert (deliberately or not) attention away from real problems that would otherwise threaten to undermine the interests of elite groups.<sup>937</sup> Through research conducted for this PhD, the power of elites to dictate the public narrative was seen in the high publication rates from media and the dominant political rhetoric within such media coverage, inflating the prevalence of the problem, maximising hostile rhetoric, and distorting perceptions. For example, even though incidents like 9/11 were then, and remain to be, a rarity, particularly when compared to other sources of social harm and criminality, the terror threat is amplified. The scale of deaths seen on 9/11 would be challenging to achieve even through an orchestrated state military assault. Terrorist threats to Western nations have been ongoing for a long time prior to 9/11, they are not solely from Islamist extremist sources, and they are a rarity in prevalence and high impact. It is through such a realisation that the novelty factor fuelling such panics should be significantly nullified. However, Chapter 2 detailed elite efforts to construct a novelty factor.

The analysis indicated that the Western perspective on terrorism changed significantly in the aftermath of 9/11, with the concept of terrorism being redefined as a new threat associated with a particular social group, namely Muslims and Islam. This has led to a moral panic and lasting negative perception of Muslim communities, contributing to the marginalisation, stigmatisation and criminalisation of Western Muslim communities. Adding to the aspects of originality in the research, the experiences of the Folk Devil should be recognised; again, an avenue for future research in this area. The perception of an ever-present terror threat has resulted in increased support for coercive counterterrorism measures and foreign military interventions. The use of the label "Evil" to describe terrorists and their actions has

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<sup>936</sup> Becker (n58) 15

<sup>937</sup> Goode & Ben-Yehuda (n16) 62



also contributed to the othering and stigmatisation of Muslim communities, perpetuating the idea that they are uncivilised and dangerous. Rohloff & Wright (2010) examined Elias' *Civilising Process* in conjunction with moral panic theory to better comprehend the academic implications of this experience.<sup>938</sup> The Civilising Process advocates for behavioural standards that promote mutual prosperity and enhanced security. As societies established norms for peaceful coexistence, violent crimes and behaviour came to be considered as uncivilised, leading to the exclusion and penalization of offenders. Following the 9/11 attacks, Western Muslims suffered from negative labelling consequences, significantly contributing to their marginalisation and rejection from mainstream society due to the perception that they were inherently violent and threatening. Further theoretical understanding might be gained from Cacho's (2012) theory of *Social Death*. From this we might consider, generally, Folk Devils to be *entities within the community, but not of the community*,<sup>939</sup> with Western Muslims qualifying as modern terrorist folk devils. People who live in a shared society often receive benefits and protections that a civilised society provides. Resulting from elite discourse about Islamist extremist groups, Western Muslim communities were frequently perceived as "*guilty by association*" based on religious similarities to that of extremists, as a result, stigmatised and viewed as part of a dangerous group. The original aim of this thesis to investigate human rights and values impacted by panic would have focused on this very aspect. Future research should consider this, alongside other connected social issues.

For example, by the 2010s in Britain, migrants from the Middle East were frequently portrayed as suspect groups, with discourse focused on "Muslim migration" and its supposed impact on the "fragile" British economy. Additionally, there was a focus on "uncivilized" behaviours associated with these communities that were deemed to be at odds with the standards of the British mainstream.<sup>940</sup> Incorporating vivid perceptions of *uncivilised*, *evil*, and *barbaric* rhetoric and frames when developing *Us vs Them* narratives empowered social division. The actions of the Islamic State may

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<sup>938</sup> Rohloff & Wright (n149) 403-419

<sup>939</sup> Lisa Marie Cacho, *Social Death: Radicalised Rightlessness and the Criminalization of the Unprotected* [New York University Press, 2012]

<sup>940</sup> Rohloff & Wright (n149) 403-419

very well be 'evil' by that term's definition;<sup>941</sup> this thesis is not to debate or rank the severity of their actions against this definition. The steps taken by these organisations, including hostage-taking, beheadings, bombings, and targeting civilians, would be exceedingly difficult to downgrade if one wanted to. However, it is important to recognise that terror groups intentionally sought out this notorious reputation in order to create panic among their target populations and portray themselves as a formidable force. Since these groups are smaller and fighting against larger nation states and opposing ideologies, they need to create the illusion that they can match the military might of established governments. The mass panic and disproportionate reactions to terrorism in Western countries, which often marginalized and discriminated against minority groups, were counterproductive and helped further the Islamist terrorist cause. These fear-based responses led to social divisions and damaged the democratic values that Britain holds dear. Media coverage and political rhetoric have been criticised for exacerbating this fear and perpetuating misunderstandings about Islam (Islamophobia).<sup>942</sup>

Historically, Western politics and media have demonstrated limited understanding of Islamic cultures and customs, often projecting offensive mischaracterisations.<sup>943</sup> As a result, Western public perceptions of Islam came to mirror these limitations.<sup>944</sup> Since, these folk devils are conjured as physical, amoral threats in close vicinity to *Us*,<sup>945</sup> they are, consequentially, victimised and discriminated against in their role as the Folk Devil. Western Muslims are individuals who, if living in the central sphere of ISIL's influence in the Middle East, would be labelled as *Infidels* by Islamist extremists and consequently become targets for attacks. Regrettably, we have let down a substantial portion of our citizens by succumbing to hegemonic elite perspectives and our own partisan anxieties. This failure is particularly evident in our inability to uphold the British values of tolerance, inclusion, diversity, and human rights, which are meant to be universal and inviolable. We have consistently fallen short in embodying these values. We have inadvertently sustained and perpetuated

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<sup>941</sup> *Very immoral and wicked; Very unpleasant; Extreme wickedness; Something harmful or undesirable: unpleasant social evils* [2012] Oxford English Dictionary (7<sup>th</sup> Ed) 245

<sup>942</sup> Boyle & Mower (n499) 205-219

<sup>943</sup> Ibid 205-219.

<sup>944</sup> Ibid 205-219.

<sup>945</sup> Walsh (n3) 1-20

discriminatory and exclusionary practices under the mistaken belief that this was actually safeguarding and preserving the very same British values; a paradoxical situation.

### **Fractured Society: Conspiracy Theories, & the Alternative Hierarchy of Credibility**

A further significant deduction arises from the perceived informational and ideological fracture in society. The relevance of Howard Becker's Hierarchy of Credibility persists in contemporary society alongside the emergence of the Internet and social media helping to place actors Goode & Ben-Yehuda's three locus of moral panic. With widespread access to online platforms has enabled the public to question the legitimacy of political and media figures on a global scale, consequently, every instance of political scandal or allegation of elite wrongdoing is amplified to a mass audience worldwide. This has led to the erosion of trust and credibility among those in positions of power, resulting in more individuals seeking alternative sources of leadership and guidance.

This thesis illustrated that contemporary society is characterised by fragmentation resulting from elite creation of deep-seated fears that come to engender a mistrust among various communities. Moreover, this research argued that the manufacturing of elite fear and other public scandals have significantly eroded the public's faith in mainstream leadership, a situation that has been facilitated by modern communication technologies. The importance of faith in social systems cannot be overstated when it comes to functional civilisations and democracies. It is essential that individuals perceive those in charge as progressive and trustworthy, as this belief reinforces their faith in the system and its benefits. This notion has been a longstanding concept, as evidenced by Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Social Contract theory, which holds that individuals inherently agree to membership of collective societies to enjoy greater security, safety, and sustenance while still maintaining a degree of individual freedom.<sup>946</sup> The process of creating civilised societies led to the emergence of social hierarchies and the establishment of formal institutions to carry out specific functions within society. We expect these institutions to perform their

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<sup>946</sup> Rousseau (n849)

duties reliably, such as the media providing accurate information and political leaders ensuring the progressive welfare of citizens. Despite the criticisms of contemporary conspiracy theorists and social dissenters who label those who follow social norms and hierarchy as "sheeple" (a modern term),<sup>947</sup> the trust and belief that people place in mainstream institutions to conduct themselves in a way that is for the betterment of society is simply a fundamental ethos of the social contract and an expectation of the citizen. However, the increasing ability of the general public to scrutinise elite frames through the Internet has led to, this researcher argues, a decline in the quality of public discourse, policymaking, and trust in established democratic institutions; contributing to the fracturing of Becker's conventional social *Hierarchy of Credibility*.<sup>948</sup> The credibility hierarchy establishes who is authorised to interpret and define reality and phenomena, with the principle that those from the highest-ranking social groups are credible sources.<sup>949</sup> At the apex of the hierarchy are individuals, groups, and institutions viewed as the most reliable and authoritative sources of information. As Becker notes, in any hierarchical structure, members generally assume that those from the highest social strata are best equipped to "define the way things are."<sup>950</sup> The opinions of important individuals, such as policymakers and experts, on major events like the 9/11 tragedy, economic fluctuations, immigration trends, technological security threats, and human rights provisions are widely considered to be the most trustworthy and authoritative perspectives on these issues. However, conspiracy theorists are sceptical of such a hierarchy and mainstream rhetoric, in an *Age of Conspiracism* fuelled by social media and poor elite decision-making.<sup>951</sup>

Social media has provided numerous alternative sources of information for the public, particularly those who are sceptical of elites. These fringe sources have risen to the top of an alternative hierarchy of credibility. However, research in this thesis infers that the majority of the population still adhere to the mainstream hierarchy, albeit with low levels of trust in media and politicians, with only a small minority of

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<sup>947</sup> *Sheeple; People who are docile, compliant, or easily influenced: people likened to sheep*, Merriam-Webster <<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sheeple>> accessed 19<sup>th</sup> October 2021.

<sup>948</sup> Becker (n58)

<sup>949</sup> Schulenberg & Chenier (n216) 261-294

<sup>950</sup> Becker (n227) 239-247

<sup>951</sup> 'Why platforms must act on twelve leading online anti-vaxxers' [CCDH 2021] Centre for Countering Digital Hate.

individuals accept the alternative hierarchy. The majority of people remain within the traditional hierarchy, led towards panic and fear during the 2000s and 2010s, as elites used hostile frames for issues such as the War on Terror, immigration, and Islamist terrorism. However, those who have accepted the alternative hierarchy are less likely to be affected by these elite-engineered frames, as they are highly sceptical of elites who amplify them. They are also less likely to be influenced by mainstream interest groups and moral entrepreneurs, as they either do not care about their causes or are also sceptical of hidden agendas. In this new reality-defining landscape, conspiratorial figures have emerged and taken on the role of primary and secondary sources of information. With high society scandals being popular, widespread, and readily accepted as they show those at the grassroots level that society's elites are not so 'high' nor 'mighty',<sup>952</sup> social media creates online environments where groups lower in the social hierarchy of credibility can express themselves, be heard, scrutinise, and conflict with those at the top.

Such notions are again subject to modernity, and are considerations for future academic consideration. Criminological philosophy has been addressing social conflicts since Durkheim proposed the concepts of mechanical and organic changes.<sup>953</sup> Merton's Anomie & Strain theories of crime explain how individuals may resort to criminal behaviour in their pursuit of materialistic success, with some individuals choosing to reject society's norms and values entirely, becoming social outcasts.<sup>954</sup> Marxist theories suggest that elites use law and social barriers to suppress lower-class individuals in a struggle for power and wealth.<sup>955</sup> This study further highlights evolving critical perspectives directed at those in power, which are deeply ingrained in systemic frameworks and fuelled by years of detrimental actions carried out by the government, as well as media manipulating public opinion. Extreme fringe groups outside the realm of mainstream institutions nurture a profound distrust of aspect of the mainstream, treating any mainstream discourse with suspicion, scepticism, and rejection. Further research should concentrate on this area. When public knowledge gaps are occupied by fake news, conspiracy theories,

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<sup>952</sup> Goode & Ben-Yehuda (n16) 58

<sup>953</sup> Emile Durkheim, *Durkheim: The Division of Labour in Society* [2<sup>nd</sup> ed Bloomsbury Publishing 2013]

<sup>954</sup> Robert Merton, *Social Structure and Anomie* [1938] *American Sociological Review* 3 672-82

<sup>955</sup> Raju Das, Identity Politics: A Marxist View [2020] 8 Class, Race, Corporate Power 8 (1)

and other items of mis/disinformation, serious social issues have the potential to emerge. These sources generally distort or contain inaccurate information, thus jeopardizing the effective functioning of a democratic society. For example, during the recent global outbreak of the COVID pandemic, social media platforms were accused of failing to curb disinformation and conspiracy theories regarding the virus's origins, severity, and false information related to vaccines.<sup>956</sup>

A catalyst of longstanding scepticism from fringe groups stems from the 9/11 attacks, as argued throughout this thesis. In this sense, the importance of 9/11 as a significant turning point should not be overlooked. The events of September 11th 2001 and the subsequent terrorist attacks on Western countries portrayed such nations as victims without any level of culpability, contributing to a global War on Terror marked by strong nationalistic sentiments. These sentiments were used to justify invading two sovereign nations in the name of self-defence, as well as the implementation of counterterrorism measures aimed at preventing harm within Western countries. However, prolonged hysteria was fuelled by hostile political and media hegemony, drowning out counter-narratives in favour of amplifying elite sense-making; Agnotology. While the invasion of Afghanistan received global support, the invasion of Iraq was met with public hostility and resistance. Western media played a role in amplifying government rhetoric about the need to rebuild Iraq by promoting democratic values.<sup>957</sup>

The aftermath of the Iraq War saw accusations of state crimes committed by Coalition forces, including the use of torture and an illegal economic restructure that benefited Western nations and corporations. As the Internet grew for information sharing, scrutiny of elites and report findings questioning the legitimacy of military actions increased. Social media emerged during the early 2000s, allowing both true and false information to spread, creating a challenge for governments in controlling opposing narratives. From this point in history, central governments no longer had full control over public discourse, and their influence has only waned since then. The

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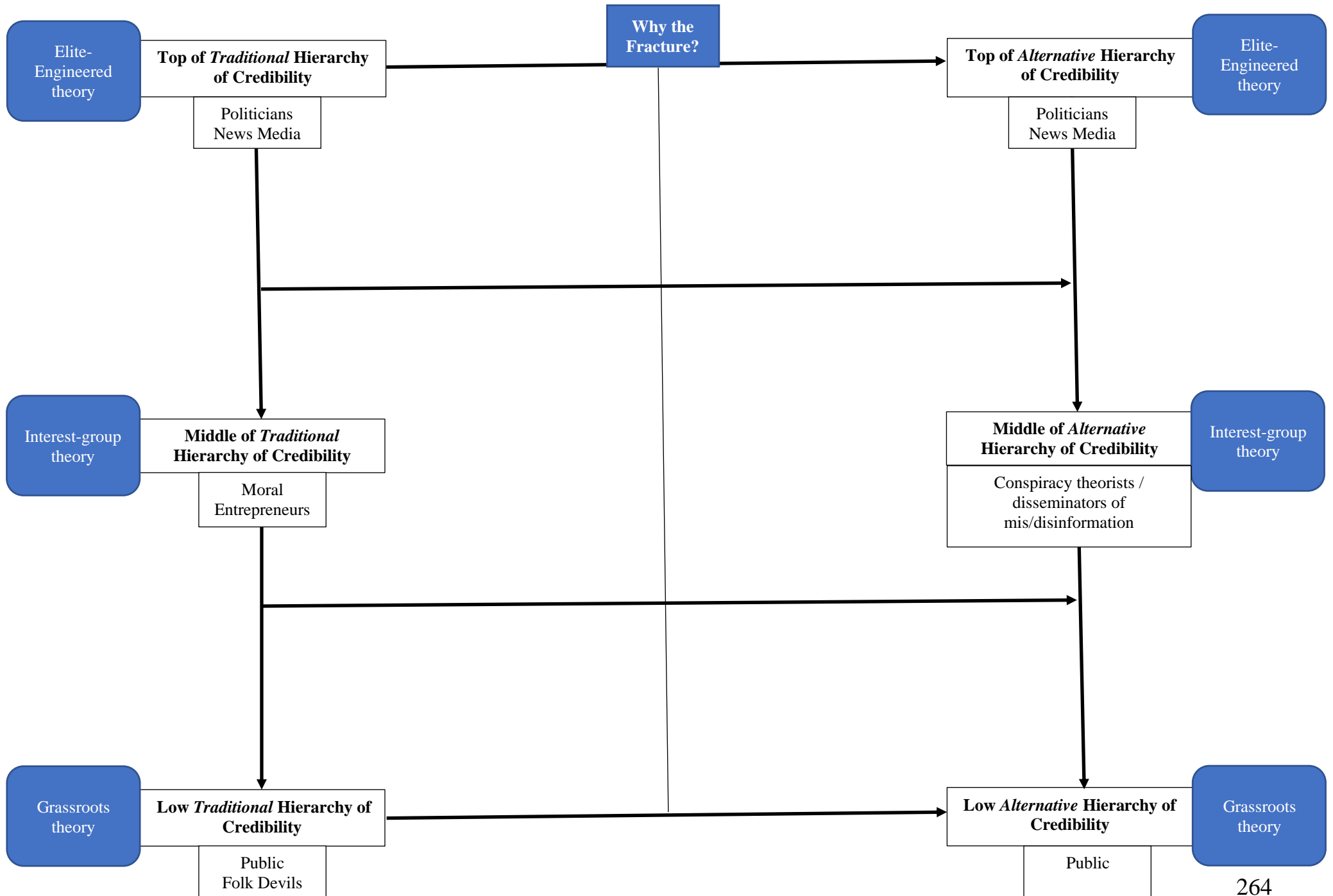
<sup>956</sup> Andreas Goreis & Oswald D. Kothgassner, 'Social Media as a Vehicle for Conspiracy Beliefs about COVID-19' [2020] *Digital Psychology* 1 (2) 36

<sup>957</sup> Daniela V. Dimitrova & Colleen Connolly-Ahern, 'A Tale of Two Wars: Framing Analysis of Online News Sites in Coalition Countries and the Arab World During the Iraq War' [2007] *Howard Journal of Communications* 18 (2) 153

accusations of state crimes committed during the Iraq War are just one example of where Western governments' legitimacy has been questioned. There are many other examples, too numerous to include in this final chapter, but they have been included in previous chapters and have all contributed cumulatively to a fractured society. Conspiracy theories have since emerged, fuelled by rogue, unregulated, and unverified information dissemination online, including theories about hidden sects controlling the world. A core theory promoted by Western government mishandlings in Iraq is that the 9/11 attacks were an 'Inside Job' by Western governments to justify accessing Iraqi oil and resources. These notions are still prevalent today, especially at the grassroots level. Through new communications technology, dubious information is presented as credible to gullible audiences, appealing to inherent scepticism, biases, and voids of trust created by unreputable elite behaviours. Social media facilitates showcasing political and media reputational self-harms, eroding faith in traditional hierarchy. Exposure of elite malpractices and erroneous behaviours has diminished their standing as authorities and leaders of nations. Historical examples of conspiratorial activities show engineered elite endeavours to destabilize regimes for political or religious ends. Some conspiracy theories, fake news, and misinformation can turn out to be accurate. It is suggested that individuals occupying prominent positions in society should reflect on their own conduct and the manner in which they present themselves in order to rectify and re-establish their credibility. This is particularly applicable to entrepreneurs who have propagated false information.<sup>958</sup>

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<sup>958</sup> Thomas (n790) 25





### **A Modern Form of Rumour on Social Media**

One final deduction of this thesis related to the form and influence of rumour.

Conspiracy theories aimed at the upper classes encompass some of the most hostile and fearful displays of *rumour*. In its most simplistic view, rumours are hearsay. They are untruths, with scholars assessing rumours not by the substance of the content but rather by their acceptability, despite rumours being told without reliable, factual corroboration.<sup>959</sup> Rumours are communicated, believed, and then circulated not because of the weight of the evidence but because of the belief and expectation by tellers that they are true.<sup>960</sup> The acknowledgement and consideration of the pace of rumour spreading in moral panics has been recognised by both Cohen and Goode & Ben-Yehuda. According to Cohen, following a disaster episode, there is a period of disorganised responses, during which rumours and unclear perceptions serve as a basis for interpreting the situation. In the Inventory phase of the moral panic process, those affected by the disaster episode take stock of the events and their circumstances. Rumours provide an alternative source of information for mainstream news when official and recognised channels fail to provide accurate information. Cohen examines rumours as a component of the crowd dynamic and as a form of collective behaviour, addressing this topic from various perspectives, including the gathering crowds, the audience, the influence of the media, and the impact of social control agents such as the police during his analysis of the Mods & Rockers phenomenon. There are key points to consider regarding how Cohen interprets each perspective. For example, from the crowd perspective, the spread of *Apocryphal* rumour-as-fact contributes to forming a collective 'understanding' used to justify deviant behaviour as a form of circular reinforcement within a *Milling Process* between people who have become sensitised to each other and the volatile situation. From the perspective of the disorganised crowd, the spread of rumour is viewed not as misleading or compulsive communication, but rather as a form of sociological sense-making to reach a meaningful, communal explanation utilising accessible and existing resources.<sup>961</sup>

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<sup>959</sup> Goode & Ben-Yehuda (n16) 131

<sup>960</sup> Ralph L Rosnow & Gary A Fine, *Rumor and Gossip: The Social Psychology of Hearsay* [1976] Elsevier

<sup>961</sup> Cohen (n1) 175

The role of rumour can act as a filler in knowledge gaps about social phenomena. Goode & Ben-Yehuda recount Richardson, Best, & Bromley's *The Satanist Scare* (1991):

*'When the tradition has broken down or is no longer possible, and the sources of information that are customarily sought (the government, the media, big business) are seen as the very forces causing the problem, alternative sources will be sought out and legitimised.'*<sup>962</sup>

The movement of a fictitious tales through a rumour mill is far more unpredictable as rumours are unverified by those who believe them.<sup>963</sup> Goode & Ben-Yehuda provide four stages of the rumour process:

1. Topical importance or "outcome-relevant involvement."
2. Uncertainty of ambiguity
3. Personal anxiety
4. Credulity.<sup>964</sup>

Under optimal conditions, rumours often proliferate rapidly. Such circumstances typically arise during periods of heightened public interest, such as times of war, natural disasters, or other significant events. Furthermore, the advent of the internet and social media has transformed the way people communicate and share information, including through the spread of rumours.<sup>965</sup> The comments sections, such as those used to collect data for this PhD research, form new arenas for the spread of rumour among people. Future research should do more to focus on the modern dynamic.

Further, ,oral entrepreneurs, in the traditional sense of moral panic research, can leverage an online presence to spark, mobilise, and sustain movements for social change. However, in the proposed alternative hierarchy, conspiracy theorists and other purveyors of disinformation may assume the role of moral entrepreneurs. Disillusioned community members may seek alternative political guidance and

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<sup>962</sup> Goode & Ben-Yehuda (n16) 133

<sup>963</sup> Ibid 130-132.

<sup>964</sup> Ibid 131.

<sup>965</sup> Uscinski & Parent (n820)

leadership from prominent outsiders, whether political or otherwise. For disenfranchised individuals, these actors are seen as legitimate sources. This researcher argues that the alternative hierarchy's equivalent of classic moral entrepreneurs are those who spread disinformation, promoting rumours and conspiracy theories. They wield the same level of influence as their mainstream counterparts. Alternative moral entrepreneurs push, promote, and legitimise false and distorted content to further their own interests, such as financial gain, utilising the same revenue-generating social media platforms as mainstream news.

Ultimately, the public will play a significant role. Those who maintain faith in the traditional, mainstream way of society need to do more to ensure that values are upheld. Though, repairs are needed in this regard. Considering known and suspected state malpractices since 2000, government reputation has suffered greatly. In the UK, OECD data suggests that trust in the UK government stood at just 35% in 2020. Contextually, the UK ranked 32<sup>nd</sup> in data displayed for forty OECD nations, while the USA had 46% civic trust in 2020.<sup>966</sup> Statista polling finds that trust in the UK government in 2020 was 45%, 42% in the USA.<sup>967</sup> Findings from a *British Social Attitudes Survey* illustrates that trust in the British government had dropped to its lowest levels for decades by 2019, with only 15% of UK citizens stating trust in the government 'always or most of the time'.<sup>968</sup> Faith in government has further suffered by state handling of covid and resulting accusations of scandal, and the recent cost of living crisis placing great financial strains on the populace. The declining lack of faith in major societal establishments has been particularly evident amongst people situated to the right of the political spectrum,<sup>969</sup> once more linking to findings in previous chapters. Nevertheless, those disenfranchised with the mainstream should seek out reliable alternatives based in reality. As responsible citizens, such people need to bear responsibility for the quality of information they digest affecting their worldview, and the subsequent decisions they make thereafter which impact functional democracy.

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<sup>966</sup> OECD (n851)

<sup>967</sup> Statista (n852)

<sup>968</sup> Sague (n853)

<sup>969</sup> Lazer et al., (n318) 1094-1096

### **Research Limitations & Future Research Recommendations**

The prominence of social media data in research has grown significantly in recent years, which highlights the importance of addressing the ethical considerations that arise when acquiring such data. In line with Chapter 3, it is essential for researchers to abide by the principles of informed consent, data privacy, and purpose limitation to carry out ethical research that values user autonomy and upholds the highest standards of academic integrity. By prioritising these ethical considerations, researchers can utilise social media as a data source, while remaining transparent and accountable. This not only contributes to the advancement of knowledge but also benefits society by safeguarding individual rights and protecting privacy. Such a data source also worked towards meeting this projects aims, and added novelty when combined with applying moral panic framework to (Islamist) terrorism. However, the limitations of the methods employed in this study are thoroughly discussed in Chapter 3. These limitations include potential researcher bias, the time-consuming nature of the research methods, restricted access to certain data due to changes in Facebook's terms and conditions, and concerns regarding the reliability of the data. It is recommended that future research incorporate a greater number of advanced, inferential quantitative research methods to enhance the applied methods used in this study. The researcher acknowledges that this thesis has adopted a comprehensive approach and scope, which was necessary due to the exploratory nature of the study.

This PhD utilises various theoretical frameworks to examine phenomena that extend over an extended period. Although the thesis has identified critical factors such as the modernising moral panic framework and the applicability of Becker's credibility hierarchy, other theoretical aspects require further investigation to enhance the study's findings. Future research should apply and scrutinise theoretical concepts, such as the Propaganda Model, Agnotology, and the Civilizing Process, as well as a more in-depth analysis of the state's role in the denial of harms and atrocities and the impact of such denial on public confidence. Unlike early panic researchers (Cohen, say), this study did not place a strong emphasis on law enforcement agencies, which also warrants a more comprehensive evaluation in the modern sense. Future research may seek to further investigate the impact of political leaders' use of social media on political dynamics and public opinion, as well as the

consequences of excessive exposure to news alerts on mobile devices. Moreover, the study may assess how following a larger or smaller number of news outlets on social media affects the perception of panic surrounding social trends. The idea is put forward that exploring the financial incentives of those who disseminate false information and conspiracy theories through mainstream media may offer insight into their behaviour. It is believed that these individuals and organisations may utilise comparable online revenue models to attract viewers.

In general, more research is needed to better understand and more strongly establish the proposed alternative hierarchy. The available data makes it difficult to determine whether individuals who lack faith in mainstream entities in the traditional Hierarchy of Credibility are influenced by unidentified external factors. For example, it is unclear whether partisan media consumption is a contributing factor to mistrust in elite entities. However, other sources may also be the catalyst for mistrust among a portion of the population. Furthermore, there is a need to investigate the relationship between a lack of faith in elite entities and a rise in credulity for fringe groups, which can be achieved through the use of quantitative data and in-depth interviews. However, the current research may lack population validity due to the precise assembly of data and theory. Facebook comments sample data would need to be collected for 2017 until current day to utilise the advantages of this methodology, and further explore the prevalence of conspiracy theory further. Additionally, it is challenging to determine whether the themes identified are unique to the United Kingdom based on the datasets used in this research, which were derived from Facebook comments posted to UK-based news outlets. While the comments were posted by individuals located in the UK, anyone in the world with a Facebook account can follow and post comments to these pages. To improve future research, it may be beneficial to gather information on individual user account location. Furthermore, it is challenging to determine from the data collected whether individuals advocating for extreme, human rights-violating remedies are doing so due to external variables not identified during analysis. Overall, a broader range of variables needs to be considered in future research to gain a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics at play.

The research's limitations in terms of time may restrict its scope. This thesis investigates the evolution of Islamist terrorism and related issues since the early 2000s. However, due to word limitations, it does not delve into the same extent the evolution of public trust in social elites and the emergence of fringe movements. This poses a significant challenge to the research. The study concludes that individuals' tendencies to believe in conspiracy theories are shaped by those in their social circle who share similar views, resulting in a form of social exclusion.<sup>970</sup> It seems credible to suggest that individuals who are enticed by conspiracy beliefs may convert others.<sup>971</sup> As conspiracy theory credulity hinders an individual from engaging in democratic process,<sup>972</sup> illustrating a withdrawal or retraction from social normalities resulting in a higher chance of engagement in antisocial behaviour;<sup>973</sup> this area alone demands much more academic understanding. Since 2017, political scandals have consistently emerged in both the United Kingdom and the United States. The handling of the COVID-19 pandemic has further fueled grassroots tensions towards elites. The rhetoric and frames identified in this PhD thesis, as well as those from the 2017 and 2019 general elections, and the government's economic management of the pandemic, have significantly damaged the reputations of elites and undermined their ability to govern effectively. Additionally, international diplomatic breakdowns, such as Russia's invasion of Ukraine, have contributed to the cost of living crisis in the United Kingdom and have been accompanied by a lack of political and media attention towards the financial impact of Brexit. At the time of writing, there has been a renewed rise in the Incel movement. This research has documented a growing divide between elites and the wider society. This thesis recognizes that the issue of political agendas and their impact on media discourse has become increasingly complex and multifaceted since 2017. However, it also acknowledges that other factors and agendas, particularly those that have emerged post-2017, may also play a role in shaping media coverage. The political and economic climate has shifted significantly since 2017, and it is crucial to reevaluate the influence of these factors on media discourse. It should be noted that this thesis primarily focuses on the

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<sup>970</sup> Jose Marques, Dominic Abrams, & Rui Serjido, 'Being better by being right: Subjective group dynamics and derogation of ingroup deviants when generic norms are undermined' [2001] *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 436

<sup>971</sup> Jolley, Douglas, Leite & Schrader (n800) 534-549

<sup>972</sup> Jolley & Douglas (n892) 35-36

<sup>973</sup> Jolley, Douglas, Leite & Schrader (n800) 534-549

events and media coverage that took place before 2017 and can only provide a partial explanation of the complex and multifaceted issue of political agendas and media discourse. Further research is recommended to fully understand the ways in which political agendas shape media coverage and the impact this has on public perception and understanding.

The notion of moral panic frequently leads to the suspension of societal rules, standards, and principles in favour of extreme, temporary, or permanent solutions. Such measures often result in the immediate loss of truth, human rights, and democratic British values. Human rights grant equal rights to all individuals, including marginalized groups like migrants, refugees, outcasts, and criminals. It is advised that future research concentrate on examining the denial of rights to these groups by employing the moral panic framework in the context of Islamist terrorism.

### **Thesis Conclusion**

This PhD thesis aimed to investigate the moral panic surrounding Islamist extremism and its implications on the Hierarchy of Credibility. By conducting theoretical analyses and scrutinizing existing frameworks, the research sought to understand contemporary society's methods of making sense of the world. The study delved into the role of digital technologies, such as the internet and social media, in shaping the moral panic narrative, as well as the influence of key figures in framing social issues. The research identified a gap in the literature on moral panic, which it addressed by applying the moral panic framework to the issue of Islamist terrorism, and by examining the effects of new communication technologies and the spread of misinformation on the social hierarchy. The study utilized a nonexperimental, interpretative case study design and gathered news headlines and Facebook comments from selected news articles. The research findings suggest that there have been substantial changes in the moral panic framework since the 1970s, and further investigation of these components is required. The study indicates that Western elites need to be cognizant of the distorted framing of sensitive issues and its negative impact on their reputational legitimacy and trustworthiness. While elites employ frames to promote their agendas, distortions in framing from those at the top of Becker's Hierarchy of Credibility have eroded their legitimacy and authority. As people's ability to scrutinize government actions has increased due to advancements

in communication technology, manipulations during elite-engineered panics have been exposed, leading to grievances with elites and a search for alternative sources of leadership and credible information. The study emphasizes the importance of considering conspiracy theories and the role of disinformation in shaping public perception. The internet and social media have created new opportunities, resulting in a new Alternative Hierarchy of Credibility. The research highlights the significance of disinformation and conspiracy theories in panic contemplations and must address these issues. This PhD research has unveiled that the current era is marked by intense disputes and conflicts. The scrutiny of the elite has reached an unprecedented level, resulting in a growing distrust and fear of harm. This has given rise to alternative frameworks and the side-lining of subcultures, while the broader population is advocating for self-destructive measures. Both the upper and lower strata of society are grappling with the need to rebuild public trust. However, it is equally crucial for those at the grassroots to actively preserve the values of human rights and shared beliefs, which are increasingly threatened by the erosion of community foundations.



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# Appendix. 1

## *Klocke & Muschert's Hybrid Model/Framework for Moral Panics*

### **Elements of Cohen's Model of Moral Panic**

- C1. Behaviour by folk devils is defined as a threat to societal values and interests.
- C2. The threat is depicted in a recognizable dramatic form by the media.
- C3. A rapid build-up of public concern arises.
- C4. Authorities, politicians, and moral entrepreneurs call for a strong solution to the problem.
- C5. The panic recedes and/or results in social and institutional changes.

### **Elements of Goode and Ben-Yehuda's Model of Moral Panics**

- G1. *Concern*: There is heightened level of *concern* over the behaviour and social consequences of a certain group.
- G2. *Consensus*: There is a general *consensus* that the threat is real, serious and caused by the wrongdoing of group members and their behaviour.
- G3. *Hostility*: An increased level of *hostility* develops towards the deviants whose behaviour is seen as threatening to society.
- G4. *Disproportionality*: The public concern is in excess of what is appropriate if concern were directly proportional to objective harm.
- G5. *Volatility*: Panics are by their nature fleeting, often subsiding as quickly as they erupt

### **Klocke & Muschert's Hybrid Model**

#### **1. Cultivation**

The emergence of conditions, actors and discourses that make the growth of a MP more likely, such as:

- Conflict among competing moral universes and/or rapid social change
- Economic or political crisis
- Media attention/public concern about related social problems

#### **2. Operation: processes that function during a MP**

**A. Episode** (C1, C2, G1) – coverage of the shocking event or series of events that identify the problem/threat

- i. Distortion* – descriptions of the event and the deviants are exaggerated
- ii. Prediction* – there is a prediction of future deviance
- iii. Symbolization* – dramatic images and symbols are attached to the problem behaviour.

**B. Magnification** (C3, G2, G3) – the period of intense attention and prolonged media coverage to the causes and consequences of the threat, represented by a shift from media inventorying the episode to value-laden sense-making activities.

- i. Moralization* – identification of the folk devils and why they are a threat to the social order, and a typification of their behaviour as representative of the danger they pose/problem they embody
- ii. Officiation* – increasing involvement of police, experts & officials, moral entrepreneurs, and community leaders through media interviews, press releases, public statements, etc.
- iii. Amplification* – Coverage of the panic becomes themed and a re-occurring feature. Media focuses on heightened public concern evidenced by opinion polls, letters to editor, protests, web pages, blogs, etc.

**C. Regulation** (C4, G4) – the advocacy of strong measures of social control through the media, to deter, manage or eradicate the threat, often met with varying levels of resistance.

- i. Surveillance* – calls for law enforcement, other officials and the public to be vigilant and to report suspicious behaviour.
- ii. Mobilization* – gathering of personnel and resources for civic, legislative, and law enforcement action to manage the problem, as well as the mobilization of resistance groups countering the demonization of the folk devils.

*iii. Institutionalization* – implementation of new structures of governance or enforcement, creation of social movement organizations and counter-organizations, passage of new laws or tougher penalties. If resistant groups are successful in critiquing the MP, institutionalization will not occur.

**3. Dissipation: the receding of a MP from the public limelight. (C5, G5)**

- *Normalization* – a new hegemony is established (e.g., the new normal – living with the threat)
- *Transformation* – the panic results in social, ideological and/or institutional change either in support of moral regulation or in opposition to it.
- *Dissolution* – the moral panic is challenged or debunked, offending behaviour drops off, or another pressing social problem takes its place).
- *Re-circulation* – aspects of the MP are reproduced into the discourse or social dynamics of a new MP or become a more permanent feature of prominent discourses of social risks and moral regulation.

*Notes: 1) Parts G1-5 really are descriptive elements of all stages of the operation of a MP, and G4 & G5 are more likely to be determined after the dissipation of the MP. 2) Parts a, b & c in the operation stage are not meant to be discrete or linear steps.*

# Appendix. 2

## *Klocke & Muschert's suggestions for researching moral panics.*

### **1. Cultivation Stage**

- Describe existing value conflicts.
- Describe pre-existing problem frames.
- Identify and describe pre-existing folk devils from earlier panics.
- Identify and describe key interest groups and moral entrepreneurs.
- Measure perceptions of relevant social problems/threats and identify social-historical conditions cultivating them.
- Examine mass media reportage of the problem/threat prior to the panic.

### **2. Operation Stage**

#### *A. Episode Sub-Stage*

- Describe the precipitating event(s), identifying key responders and their actions (e.g., agents of social control).
- Identify key commentators (e.g., agents of social control, experts, or community leaders) and analyse their characterizations of the event(s).
- Interpret and analyse dramatic images and symbols attached to the deviants.
- Identify predictions about the future recurrence of the problem/threat.

#### *B. Magnification Sub-Stage*

- Describe efforts to characterize the broader meaning of the precipitating event in value-laden terms and interpret the needs and interests of various stakeholders.
- Identify efforts to connect the current problem/threat with other past problems/threats or to create a new folk devil.
- Analyse official statements and media discourse about the extent of the problem/threat, as well as its causes and solutions. Identify any discursive patterns typifying the behaviour of the folk devils. Analyse any statements from the folk devils and reactions to them.
- Analyse media coverage of the social problem and compare it to past coverage. Identify recurring themes/frames and elements of the coverage.

#### *C. Regulation Sub-Stage*

- Identify the social group(s) targeted for surveillance and the methods and means of social regulation attempted.
- Identify sources of mobilization and justifications for civic, legislative and enforcement action, as well as any groups mobilized, and campaigns created to counter the MP.
- Analyse the processes and outcomes of key social control responses undertaken to mitigate the problem/threat.

### **3. Dissipation Stage**

- Analyse the factors and conditions leading to the decline of the MP.
- Identify institutional legacies of the panic (e.g., new organizations, policies, or laws).
- Identify symbolic legacies (e.g., new or continuing problem frames and symbols/images) that may cultivate future MPs or dissuade them.

## Appendix. 3

Starting criteria for Lexis Library and Google searches, prior to Facebook data collection.

<b>Years covered for original data collection</b>	<b>Media Outlets</b>	<b>Key Search Terms</b>
2014	The Times (London)	Terrorism
2015	The Guardian (London)	Counterterrorism
2016	The Daily Telegraph	Counterterror
2017	The Daily Mail and the Mail on Sunday	Terror
2018	The Express	Terrorist
2019	The Mirror (The Daily Mirror and The Sunday Mirror)	Extremist
	The Sun (England)	Extremism
	BBC News	Islamist
	Sky News	Radical
		Radicalisation
		Human Rights
		Islamic State
		ISIL
		ISIS
		al-Qaeda
		Immigration
		Refugee
		IRA
		Right-Wing

## Appendix. 4

A sample of figures per news distributor per year (Key Term searcher: 'Terrorism')

<b><u>01/01/2014 - 31/12/2014</u></b>	<b><u>Distributor</u></b>	<b><u>Number of Publications</u></b>
	The Times (London)	1053
	The Guardian (London)	1737
	The Daily Telegraph	866
	The Daily Mail and the Mail on Sunday	447
	The Express	164
	The Mirror (The Daily Mirror and The Sunday Mirror)	518
	The Sun (England)	531
	BBC News	2830
	Sky News	150
	<b><u>Total publications (all print media)</u></b>	<b>8296</b>

<b><u>01/01/2015 - 31/12/2015</u></b>	<b><u>Distributor</u></b>	<b><u>Number of Publications</u></b>
	The Times (London)	1468
	The Guardian (London)	3975
	The Daily Telegraph	1026
	The Daily Mail and the Mail on Sunday	421
	The Express	381
	The Mirror (The Daily Mirror and The Sunday Mirror)	536
	The Sun (England)	636
	BBC News	2970
	Sky News	186
	<b><u>Total publications (all print media)</u></b>	<b>11599</b>

<b><u>01/01/2016 - 31/12/2016</u></b>	<b><u>Distributor</u></b>	<b><u>Number of Publications</u></b>
	The Times (London)	1582
	The Guardian (London)	4626
	The Daily Telegraph	951
	The Daily Mail and the Mail on Sunday	630
	The Express	240
	The Mirror (The Daily Mirror and The Sunday Mirror)	528
	The Sun (England)	735
	BBC News	2980
	Sky News	309
	<b><u>Total publications (all print media)</u></b>	<b>12581</b>

<b><u>01/01/2017 - 31/12/2017</u></b>	<b><u>Distributor</u></b>	<b><u>Number of Publications</u></b>
	The Times (London)	2205
	The Guardian (London)	1514
	The Daily Telegraph	1108
	The Daily Mail and the Mail on Sunday	702
	The Express	340
	The Mirror (The Daily Mirror and The Sunday Mirror)	679
	The Sun (England)	904
	BBC News	4200
	Sky News	821
	<b><u>Total publications (all print media)</u></b>	<b>12473</b>

<b><u>01/01/2018 - 31/12/2018</u></b>	<b><u>Distributor</u></b>	<b><u>Number of Publications</u></b>
	The Times (London)	2137
	The Guardian (London)	1326
	The Daily Telegraph	935
	The Daily Mail and the Mail on Sunday	421
	The Express	381
	The Mirror (The Daily Mirror and The Sunday Mirror)	536
	The Sun (England)	636
	BBC News	5300
	Sky News	1050
	<b><u>Total publications (all print media)</u></b>	<b>12722</b>

<b><u>01/01/2019 - 31/06/2019</u></b>	<b><u>Distributor</u></b>	<b><u>Number of Publications</u></b>
	The Times (London)	856
	The Guardian (London)	656
	The Daily Telegraph	353
	The Daily Mail and the Mail on Sunday	158

	The Express	102
	The Mirror (The Daily Mirror and The Sunday Mirror)	277
	The Sun (England)	253
	BBC News	3090
	Sky News	564
	<b>Total publications (all print media)</b>	<b>6309</b>

### **TOTAL PUBLISHERMENTS**

<b><u>Distributor</u></b>	<b><u>Total per Distributor</u></b>
The Times (London)	9301
The Guardian (London)	13834
The Daily Telegraph	5239
The Daily Mail and the Mail on Sunday	2779
The Express	1608
The Mirror (The Daily Mirror and The Sunday Mirror)	3074
The Sun (England)	3695
BBC News	21370
Sky News	3080
<b>Total publications (all print media for Terrorism term)</b>	<b>63980</b>

<b><u>Year</u></b>	<b><u>Total per Year</u></b>
<b>2014</b>	8296
<b>2015</b>	11599
<b>2016</b>	12581
<b>2017</b>	12473
<b>2018</b>	12722
<b>2019 (Until June 31st)</b>	6309
<b>Total publications (all print media for Terrorism term)</b>	<b>63980</b>

### **PER NEWS OUTLET**

<b><u>01/01/2014 - 31/12/2014</u></b>	<b><u>Distributor</u></b>	<b><u>Terrorism</u></b>
	The Times (London)	1053
	The Guardian (London)	1737
	The Daily Telegraph	866
	The Daily Mail and the Mail on Sunday	447
	The Express	164
	The Mirror (The Daily Mirror and The Sunday Mirror)	518
	The Sun (England)	531
	BBC News	2830
	Sky News	150
	<b>Total publications (all print media)</b>	<b>8296</b>
<b><u>01/01/2015 - 31/12/2015</u></b>	<b><u>Distributor</u></b>	<b><u>Terrorism</u></b>
	The Times (London)	1468
	The Guardian (London)	3975
	The Daily Telegraph	1026
	The Daily Mail and the Mail on Sunday	421
	The Express	381
	The Mirror (The Daily Mirror and The Sunday Mirror)	536
	The Sun (England)	636
	BBC News	2970
	Sky News	186
	<b>Total publications (all print media)</b>	<b>11599</b>
<b><u>01/01/2016 - 31/12/2016</u></b>	<b><u>Distributor</u></b>	<b><u>Terrorism</u></b>
	The Times (London)	1582
	The Guardian (London)	4626
	The Daily Telegraph	951
	The Daily Mail and the Mail on Sunday	630
	The Express	240
	The Mirror (The Daily Mirror and The Sunday Mirror)	528
	The Sun (England)	735
	BBC News	2980
	Sky News	309
	<b>Total publications (all print media)</b>	<b>12581</b>
<b><u>01/01/2017 - 31/12/2017</u></b>	<b><u>Distributor</u></b>	<b><u>Terrorism</u></b>
	The Times (London)	2205

	The Guardian (London)	1514
	The Daily Telegraph	1108
	The Daily Mail and the Mail on Sunday	702
	The Express	340
	The Mirror (The Daily Mirror and The Sunday Mirror)	679
	The Sun (England)	904
	BBC News	4200
	Sky News	821
	<b><i>Total publications (all print media)</i></b>	<b>12473</b>
<b><i>01/01/2018 - 31/12/2018</i></b>	<b><i>Distributor</i></b>	<b><i>Terrorism</i></b>
	The Times (London)	2137
	The Guardian (London)	1326
	The Daily Telegraph	935
	The Daily Mail and the Mail on Sunday	421
	The Express	381
	The Mirror (The Daily Mirror and The Sunday Mirror)	536
	The Sun (England)	636
	BBC News	5300
	Sky News	1050
	<b><i>Total publications (all print media)</i></b>	<b>12722</b>
<b><i>01/01/2019 - 31/06/2019</i></b>	<b><i>Distributor</i></b>	<b><i>Terrorism</i></b>
	The Times (London)	856
	The Guardian (London)	656
	The Daily Telegraph	353
	The Daily Mail and the Mail on Sunday	158
	The Express	102
	The Mirror (The Daily Mirror and The Sunday Mirror)	277
	The Sun (England)	253
	BBC News	3090
	Sky News	564
	<b><i>Total publications (all print media)</i></b>	<b>6309</b>

## Appendix. 5

*An illustration of the year-by-year prevalence of key terms search via Lexis Library and Google.*

	2014		2015		2016		2017		2018		2019 (until June 30th)	
1	Terrorist	11763	Terrorist	17774	Immigration	18087	Terror	18894	Terror	19155	Terrorist	11203
2	Terror	11411	Terror	15827	Terrorist	17727	Terrorist	16998	Immigration	17087	Terror	10694
3	Immigration	9966	Refugee	13325	Terror	16893	Terrorism	12473	Human Rights	16570	Human Rights	9269
4	Human Rights	9599	Human Rights	12266	Refugee	16556	Immigration	11623	Terrorist	16418	Immigration	15608
5	Terrorism	8296	Islamic State	11850	Human Rights	13778	Refugee	10481	Refugee	12945	Refugee	13193
6	Radical	8283	Terrorism	11599	Terrorism	12581	Human Rights	10153	Terrorism	12722	Terrorism	6309
7	Islamic State	6411	Immigration	11426	Islamic State	10759	Radical	7868	Radical	9395	Radical	5021
8	Refugee	6365	Radical	10052	Radical	9414	Islamic State	7223	Extremist	6875	Right-Wing	4077
9	Extremist	5425	ISIS	7987	ISIS	7741	Extremist	6669	Right-Wing	6761	Extremist	3942
10	ISIS	4324	Extremist	6821	Extremist	6697	Right-Wing	4550	Islamic State	5971	Islamic State	3744
11	Islamist	3974	Islamist	4713	Right-Wing	5998	Extremism	4218	Extremism	4595	IRA	2796
12	Right-Wing	3262	Right-Wing	4680	Extremism	4337	ISIS	3917	IRA	3571	Extremism	2722
13	al-Qaeda	2800	Extremism	4282	Islamist	3972	Islamist	3274	Counterterrorism	3471	ISIS	2536
14	IRA	2796	IRA	3013	Counterterrorism	2781	Counterterrorism	3125	ISIS	3269	Islamist	1612
15	Extremism	2578	Counterterrorism	2949	IRA	2451	IRA	3053	Islamist	2925	Counterterrorism	1400
16	Counterterrorism	2026	al-Qaeda	2402	ISIL	1592	al-Qaeda	1480	al-Qaeda	1291	al-Qaeda	748
17	ISIL	1012	ISIL	2393	Radicalisation	1553	Radicalisation	1088	Radicalisation	952	Radicalisation	693
18	Radicalisation	998	Radicalisation	1935	al-Qaeda	1508	ISIL	976	Counter-Terror	694	ISIL	398
19	Counter-Terror	226	Counter-Terror	418	Counter-Terror	350	Counter-Terror	642	ISIL	125	Counter-Terror	244
	<b>Total</b>	<b>101515</b>		<b>145712</b>		<b>154775</b>		<b>128705</b>		<b>144792</b>		<b>96209</b>



## Appendix. 6

*List of Facebook new articles which comments have been collected from for analysis; published during 2016*

### **BBC News - How Islamic State group targets British teenagers**

25/01/2016  
Likes 3200  
Shares 600  
Comments – 415

### **BBC News - Police review security at UK Christmas & New Year events**

20/12/2016  
3.8k Likes  
201 shares  
Comments – 120

### **Sky News - Terrorists 'hiding in plain sight among migrants'**

Caption - The head of the armed forces has warned that Islamic State terrorists are "moving in migrant flows, hiding in plain sight"

15/12/2016  
Likes – 1100  
Shares – 580  
Comments – 473

### **Daily Mail - Police uncover ISIS plot to set off phone bomb on UK streets in the run up to Christmas after two people appear in court charged with terror offences**

26/12/2016  
2000 likes  
690 shares  
Comments – 235

### **London Evening Standard - Londoners told to 'run away as fast as possible' if ISIS targets the capital**

01/08/2016  
Likes – 1100  
Shares – 1315  
Comments – 179

### **Daily Mail - ISIS threatens attacks at Heathrow, LAX and JFK this weekend**

CAPTION: 'There will be a device placed in either Heathrow, LAX or JFK airports'

01/07/2016  
Article likes – 1600  
Article shares: 1885  
Comments – 153

### **The Telegraph - Germany's dangerous open borders show why Britain is right to take back control on immigration**

Facebook Caption - "The first duty of a state is its people's security; that means proper immigration control. Thankfully, Britain will soon have that again."

Do you agree?  
21/12/2016  
3300 likes  
491 shares  
Comments – 278

### **Daily Express - Islamism poses a GLOBAL THREAT' Marion Le Pen warns Europe is 'POWERLESS' against terror**

CAPTION: "We need to make a coalition alliance against all Islamist ramifications."

21/12/2016

883 likes  
350 shares  
Comments – 66

**Channel 4 News - The "most extreme surveillance in the history of Western democracy." The Investigatory Powers Bill will give the British government the power to access a year of your browsing data. (video)**

18/11/2016  
1300 likes  
2638 shares  
Comments – 170

**BBC News - Security risk on in-flight entertainment systems**

CAPTION: Flaws could allow attackers to switch off → cabin lights, change altitude readings and display bogus maps.

21/12/2016  
3.2k Likes  
267 shares  
Comments – 111

**The Guardian - EU's highest court delivers blow to UK snooper's charter**

CAPTION: "General and indiscriminate retention" of emails and electronic communications by governments is illegal.'

21/12/2016  
6700 Likes  
1790 shares  
Comments – 234

**Daily Express – TERROR WARNING: ISIS plotting brutal 2017 SLAUGHTER across Europe to spark apocalyptic battle**

CAPTION: Chilling warning from the security agency

02/12/2016  
132 Likes  
111 Shares  
Comments – 53

## Appendix. 7

*A sample of edited comments extracted from Facebook and uploaded to NVivo 12 software.*

**Daily Mail article:** *Almost 400 ISIS jihadis trained in Iraq and Syria are now at large on Britain's streets... as it's revealed just 14 fighters who have returned to the UK have been jailed –*

*Published to Facebook 08/10/2016*

*1000 Article Likes*

*362 Article Shares*

*95 comments posted to article: 73 male/22 female*

**Male:** This is exactly why we should not be involved in military overseas adventures, our real enemies are right here in the UK, looking to kill and maim innocent people going about their lives. The time has just about arrived for internment now, we need our own GITMO.

Likes 167

15 Replies

**Male:** This is why i VOTED OUT, not for any other reason but to close our borders. Britain is in a mess, we have to become tougher or else all hell will be let loose.

Likes 226

1 Reply

**Male:** You cannot fool God, so don't make a fool of yourself! You will harvest what you plant. 8 If you follow your selfish desires, you will harvest destruction, but if you follow the Spirit, you will harvest eternal life. 9 Don't get tired of helping others. You will be rewarded when the time is right, if you don't give up.

Galatians 6:7-9 Contemporary English Version (CEV)

Likes: 287

13 Replies

**Female:** Drinking Alcohol is Haram in Islam.

If anyone drinks alcohol saying "Bismillah" it will not make the alcohol Halal.

In the same way if someone kills innocent people saying "Allahu Akbar" it doesn't make him Muslim.

Likes 350

8 Replies

**Male:** UK needs to do something about these returning ISIS fighters who are walking bombs.. anytime the fuse will go up and damage will be unjlimited..

**Female:** The men and women who left to join Daesh and those who stayed here to plan murderous attacks on the residents of UK are the enemy. Those who are UK citizens should be hung for TREASON and the rest SHOT AS SPIES.

Likes: 426

Replies: 2

# Appendix. 8

## Facebook Terms & Conditions: Facebook & Public Information (2018)

Creating an Account  
Friending  
Your Home Page  
Messaging  
Photos  
Videos  
Pages  
Groups  
Events  
Payments  
Apps  
Facebook Mobile and Desktop  
Apps  
Accessibility

### What is public information?

[Computer help](#) [Mobile help](#) ▾

[Share article](#)

Something that's public can be seen by anyone. That includes people who aren't your friends, people off of Facebook and people who use different media such as print, broadcast (ex: television) and other sites on the Internet. For example, if you use our services to provide a real-time public comment to a television show, that may appear on the show or elsewhere on Facebook.

#### What information is public?

**Information you share that is always public:** Some of the information you give us when you fill out your profile is public, such as your age range, language and country. We also use a part of your profile, called your Public Profile, to help connect you with friends and family. Your Public Profile includes your name, gender, username and user ID (account number), profile picture, cover photo and networks. This info is also public. Some of the ways this helps us connect you are:

- Your name, profile picture and cover photo help people recognize you
- Gender helps us describe you (ex: "Add her as a friend")
- Listing your networks (ex: school, workplace) allows others to find you more easily
- Username and user ID (ex: your account number) are in the URL of your profile
- Age range helps provide you with age-appropriate content
- Language and country help us provide appropriate content and experiences

**Information you share publicly:** When you choose to share something with **Public** (ex: when you select **Public** from the audience selector), it's considered public information. If you share something and you don't see an audience selector or another privacy setting, that information is also public. Learn more about using the audience selector to control who you share with when you post to Facebook.

**Stuff other people share:** If other people share info about you, even if it's something you shared with them but did not make public, they can choose to make it public. Also when you comment on other people's public posts, your comment is public as well.

**Posts on Facebook Pages or public groups:** Facebook Pages and public groups are public spaces. Anyone who can see the Page or group can see your post or comment. Generally, when you post or comment on a Page or to a public group, a story can be published in News Feed as well as other places on or off Facebook.

#### Remember that public information can:

- Be associated with you, even off Facebook
- Show up when someone does a search on Facebook or on another search engine
- Be accessible to Facebook-integrated games, applications and websites you and your friends use
- Be accessible to anyone who uses our APIs, such as our [Graph API](#)

# Appendix. 9

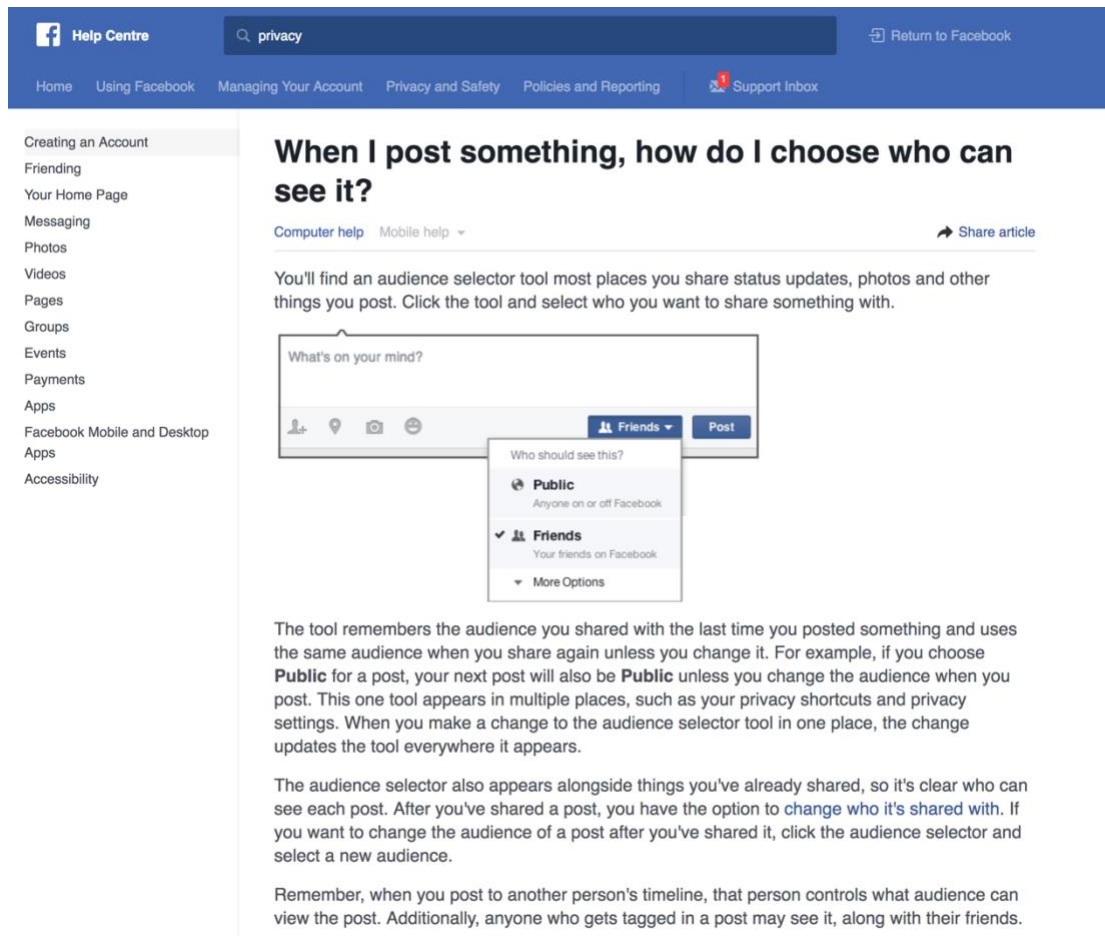
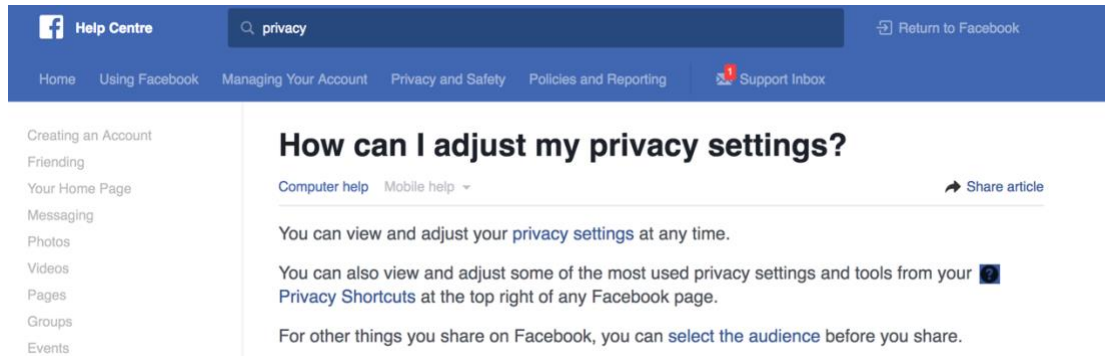
## Facebook Terms & Conditions: Posting Comments to Facebook (2018)

The screenshot shows the Facebook Help Centre interface. At the top, there is a blue navigation bar with the Facebook logo and 'Help Centre' on the left, a search bar containing 'public posts', and a 'Return to Facebook' link on the right. Below the navigation bar, there are several menu items: Home, Using Facebook, Managing Your Account, Privacy and Safety, Policies and Reporting, and Support Inbox. On the left side of the page, there is a vertical list of help topics including: Creating an Account, Friending, Your Home Page, Messaging, Photos, Videos, Pages, Groups, Events, Payments, Apps, Facebook Mobile and Desktop Apps, and Accessibility. The main content area features the article title 'How do I post on a Page and who can see it?' in bold. Below the title, there are links for 'Computer help' and 'Mobile help', and a 'Share article' button. The article text explains that Facebook Pages are public spaces and that posts or comments can be seen by anyone who can see the Page. It also notes that visitor posts are only visible on Pages that allow them. A section titled 'To post on a Page that you visit:' is followed by a three-step numbered list: 1. Type your post into the box at the top of the Page's timeline; 2. Click your profile picture in the top right and select to post as yourself or as a Page you manage; 3. Click **Post**.

# Appendix. 10

## Facebook Terms & Conditions: Ability to choose/filter who views posts (2018)

The below screen shots of Facebook illustrate the ability to choose who views content posted to public forums.



# Appendix. 11

## Consent Form



**Title of Project:** Moral Panic of Islamist Extremism: Elite-Engineered fear harming the Hierarchy of Credibility

**Paul French: School of Law; John Moores University**

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information provided for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and that this will not affect my legal rights.
3. I understand that any personal information collected during the study will be anonymised/removed and remain confidential.
4. I agree to take part in the above study by allowing for my Facebook comment(s) to be used as a direct quotation in the dissemination of this research.

*For studies involving the use of audio / video recording of interviews, focus groups etc or where there is a possibility that verbatim quotes from participants may be used in future publications or presentations please include the following:*

5. I confirm that although my personal information will be removed and not used in research dissemination, that the verbatim quotation still has the possibility of being traced to its source, and that I am happy to proceed.

Name of Participant	Date	Signature
Name of Researcher	Date	Signature
Name of Person taking consent <i>(if different from researcher)</i>	Date	Signature

*Note: When completed 1 copy for participant and 1 copy for researcher*

Liverpool John Moores University, Redmonds Building,  
 Brownlow Hill, Liverpool L3 5UG  
 Tel: 0151 231 5090;  
 Email: APSadmissions@ljmu.ac.uk Web: www.ljmu.ac.uk

# Appendix. 12

Participant Information Sheet (To be attached with Appendix. 11)



## LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

**Title of Project:** Moral Panic of Islamist Extremism: Elite-Engineered fear harming the Hierarchy of Credibility

**Name of Researcher and School/Faculty:** Paul French, School of Law, Liverpool John Moores University

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it involves. Please take time to read the following information. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide if you want to take part or not.

*What is the purpose of the study?*

This is an investigation into the UK public's collective response towards terror events, and their thoughts and perceptions of human rights provisions during this time. As part of this research, comments have been collected from Facebook social media articles covering terrorism incidents and/or topics to be used for qualitative analysis; to better understand the public mind set at this particular time towards the particular topic the article addresses. You have been contacted as you have made the comment(s):

\*Insert comment here

on a (*insert news provider*) article published on (00/00/00) titled (*insert article title*). For my research, I believe that this/these comment(s) would provide weight to the topic discussed within my thesis, and I would like to use your comment(s) as a verbatim (direct quotation) in my published thesis and possibly in other mediums such as presentations and conference talks.

*Do I have to take part?*

No. Participation in this research is voluntary. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do you will be given this information sheet and asked to sign a consent form. You are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. A decision to withdraw will not affect your rights/any future treatment/service you receive. Before deciding, I must make you aware that no personal information will ever be made accessible to the public via this research. This includes names, profile



pictures etc which will be fully removed and deleted. However, direct quotations do have the possibility of be searched and traced back to the individuals who post them.

*What will happen to me if I take part?*

You are being asking for permission to use a comment(s) that you posted to Facebook as a direct quotation in the dissemination of research (publications, presentation etc). As this quotation will be part or printed/online publications, it will be accessible to the public for a long time.

You will not be asked to be actively involved in this research. Your comment(s) alone will be displayed in these disseminations without any other personal information attached (name, profile picture etc) as to reduce the likelihood of this quotation being made traceable to you. Your personal information will never be made publically available; this research is only interested it the quotation(s) under request. Your personal information will be removed and deleted from the quotation(s). Every step possible will be taken to ensure your confidentiality is maintained.

*Are there any risks / benefits involved?*

Nevertheless, direct quotations do have the possibility of being traced back to the individuals who post them. Because this quote holds content of a sensitive nature, this is something that you may like to consider. By taking part in this study, you are helping to better our understanding of public reaction to terrorist issues in the UK.

If you are happy to proceed, please complete the participant consent form attached. If you are not happy to provide consent and would not like your comment(s) to be used as verbatim, please reply stating as such and your comment will not be used as a result. If you would like you comment(s) to be removed for the research entirely, please reply stating as such and your comment(s) will be fully removed from this research.

*This study has received ethical approval from LJMU's Research Ethics Committee  
(insert REC reference number and date of approval)*

**Contact Details of Researcher**

**Paul French:**

E: (LJMU): [p.t.french@2014.ljmu.ac.uk](mailto:p.t.french@2014.ljmu.ac.uk)

**Contact Details of Academic Supervisor**

**Dr Carlo Panara:**

T: 01512313649 E: [C.Panara@ljmu.ac.uk](mailto:C.Panara@ljmu.ac.uk)

If you any concerns regarding your involvement in this research, please discuss these with the researcher in the first instance. If you wish to make a complaint, please contact [researchethics@ljmu.ac.uk](mailto:researchethics@ljmu.ac.uk) and your communication will be re-directed to an independent person as appropriate.

In the interests of safety for the researcher LJMU ethics committee would advise researchers not to include home addresses or personal telephone numbers (mobile or home) as contact details for participants.

Where questionnaires are to be returned by members of the public as part of the study the ethics committee would advise researchers to consider the use of collection boxes at third party locations.

Note: A copy of the participant information sheet should be retained by the participant with a copy of the signed consent form.

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