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Media and USF Students' Perception of Terrorism

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Media and USF Students' Perception of Terrorism

by

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of the requirements for the degree of
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Abstract

This study examined the influence of mass media on students' perceptions of terrorism by applying the situational theory of publics (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Behavior is the consequence of perception of reality. But perception of reality is not always consistent with the reality itself. Because of the important role of the media in shaping perceptions, terrorist organizations rely on it to spread fear and advance their political goals beyond the people directly affected by their attacks. The media not only spreads the news of an attack, it contributes significantly to formulating and disseminating the message of terrorist organizations. This study explores University of South Florida (USF) students' perceptions of terrorism, and the role of mass media in shaping such perceptions. It also examines assumptions, asks pertinent questions, and seeks answers by conducting a survey of college students. The findings of this study support the basic premise of the situational theory of publics and contribute to better understanding of how media influences perceptions of terrorism. The findings of this study and future studies on the same subject might be used to better educate students, and inform communication professionals about methods to increase awareness about the U.S. position on terrorism.

Chapter One

Introduction

Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the threat of potential future

terrorist attacks was enough to cause the United States to attack and invade preemptively

in Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen, Somalia, and elsewhere. The U.S. government does not

know which groups will launch attacks, what capabilities they have, or when they may

attack, in order for the U.S. to preempt or counter such threat. Information is critical for

preparedness and for developing defense strategies. The future of global relations

depends largely on accurate knowledge and perceptions of terrorism by its youths who

may also determine future policy and course of action on this issue. The media has a

major role in this regard; thus, it is important to examine and to understand the role of the

media in shaping young people's perceptions. In the battle against terrorism, it is

essential to understand contextual influences of the media and perceptions of terrorism by

developing realistic and reliable knowledge about the functions of both.

Over the years, advancements in information technology (IT) helped to

disseminate news instantly locally, nationally, and globally. Also, public concerns and

interests in current events are growing all over the world. Mass media, whether it is

newspapers, television, radio, internet, or other means, are the primary sources of

information. Because of mass media technical capabilities and the public reliance on it

for information, terrorist organizations rely on mass media to get their message across to

their target audiences, for example, events such as September 11, 2001 in the U.S. when

two planes crashed into the World Trade Towers. Within minutes of the first tower being

struck, the devastation had been relayed around the world, and was continually on television channels for days. Repeatedly, newspapers that are printed worldwide had front page coverage of the event. In this situation, the media provided more than coverage of the news; its perpetual coverage and portrayal have aroused diverse responses and reactions among audiences worldwide. Attitudes and responses to violence by people in various societies were also influenced and shaped by the immense coverage of the media.

Among the various important functions of mass media is its influence on people's perspectives on political, economic, and socio-cultural issues (Joseph, 2009), the analysis of Joseph's study indicates that the top stories, depending on the issue area, had a powerful influence on the public's assessment of issue priorities. For example, following the 9/11 attack, media coverage followed accusations by government authorities that pointed toward Al Qaeda as the group that carried out the attack on the U.S., those news reports on the attack and aftermath shaped public opinion to support what would become the war on terrorism (Curtis, 2012). However, the role of media in shaping public perceptions and opinions about significant political and social issues has long been the subject of much speculation and debate (Maeroff, 1998; Spitzer, 1993; Wilson & Wilson, 2001; Wimmer & Dominick, 1991). Individuals' viewpoints of the world and perceptions of their lives are shaped through the interpretation of media. Therefore, it is important for communication professionals to understand public perceptions. According to Major (1993), communicators require greater knowledge and understanding of the attitudes and communication behaviors of publics in order to influence public perception and communicate effectively.

Terrorism has become a major concern following the 9/11 attacks, and it is relevant to know the perceptions of youth in this regard. Violence is increasing in the

U.S. "The rate of U.S. violent crime went up last year for the first time in nearly two decades due to a jump in assaults, the Justice Department said on Wednesday October 17, 2012. Data collected by the Bureau of Justice Statistics in telephone surveys showed a 22 percent increase in assaults, pushing up the overall rate for violent crime for the first time since 1993" (CNN, 2012). With its secure place in living rooms across the country, television has become society's storyteller, and source for news (Perse, 1994). However, television's depiction of the world differs from reality (Perse, 1994). Being exposed to large quantities of explicit violence day after day on news broadcasts and drama shows can "cultivate a social paranoia that counters notions of trustworthy people or safe surroundings" (Griffin, p. 380).

Purpose and Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study was to: (1) Examine the influence of media on youths' perception about terrorism and; (2) Explore the extent to which the different types of media are active and influential on youths' perception about terrorism. For communication professionals whose job is to communicate to the larger publics about the U.S. position on terrorism, it is essential to understand the critical role of media influence on youths' perceptions of terrorism as it evolves and adapts to meet their needs. This influence also affects society's knowledge of and cooperation with policies and strategies for facing the problem of terrorism.

Theoretical Framework

Different types of media play different roles in how society interacts and is influenced by them. McLuhan describes media as hot and cold depending on how passive and active the audience is in constructing the message, films and radio are hot media, as

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the person viewing it has to construct meaning, in contrast cold media, such as television and newspapers, do not require receivers to interpret the meaning, and we are told the message (McLuhan, 2001). The situational theory of publics posits, "communication behaviors of publics can be best understood by measuring how members of publics perceive situations in which they are affected" (Grunig & Hunt, 1984, p.148). Specifically, the theory uses problem recognition, level of involvement, and constraint recognition as independent variables to predict whether a public will become active on an issue. "The idea of audience segmentation into homogeneous groups that are likely to respond similarly to a message is widely accepted" (Werder, 2005, p. 225).

The theoretical framework provided by the situational theory of publics will be used to examine media influence in shaping college students perception about terrorism. The STP predicts when individuals are aware of the problem, and the extent to which they do something about the problem, using three independent variables: problem recognition, personal involvement, and constraint recognition. This theory determines when people communicate, and when communications aimed at people are most likely to be effective.

This study attempts to apply the situational theory of publics to better understand college students' perceptions of terrorism, and media influence in these perceptions. The study attempts to gather data to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: Do college students recognize a problem of the issue of terrorism?

RQ2: What media channel has the most influence among college students' perception of terrorism?

RQ3: How do media influence college students' perceptions of terrorism?

In addition, this study tests the assumptions of the STP by positing the following Hypothesis:

H: Problem recognition, constraint recognition, involvement recognition, goal compatibility and media influence are related to information seeking about terrorism among college students.

The next chapter reviews the literature of situational theory of publics, media influence, and the problem of terrorism.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Situational Theory of Publics

The situational theory of publics states that an individual's ability to recognize the

value of a situation and the desire and ability to remove obstacles in that situation will

lead to greater involvement in that situation. Publics differ in the extent to which they

participate in active behavior to resolve situations based on how they react when facing

similar problems, recognize the problems, and organize to resolve them (Grunig, 1983).

The situational theory of publics consists of three independent variables-problem

recognition, constraint recognition and level of involvement, and two dependent variables

- information seeking and information processing (Grunig, 1997). Problem recognition,

or awareness, refers to the mental state that exists when an individual stops thinking

about the situation at hand and starts reflecting on its importance or how to resolve the

issue. Constraint recognition is the extent to which a person views perceived barriers that

limit one's abilities to resolve the problem, and the involvement level focuses on the

importance an individual assigns to the situation. Information seeking is premeditated

actions designed to gather messages about the situation or issue at hand whereas

information processing is the continued reflection and absorption of a message after it has

been sought (Grunig, 1989a).

The situational theory has been used in numerous studies to assess the communication behavior of a variety of publics in an even greater number of situations, such as the general public's response to natural disasters (Major, 1998), Fortune 500 investors' reaction to corporate messaging (Cameron, 1992), consumers' behavior in different cultural settings (Sriramesh, Moghan, &Wei, 2007), women's understanding of health messages (Aldoory, 2001), and activist behavior by Sierra Club members (Grunig, 1989b) just to name a few.

The STP explains that publics can be identified and classified according to their level of awareness about a problem and the extent to which they can do something about it. The theory studies the formation of publics and how organizations should keep a watch and segment them accordingly so that communication is done to that specificity (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). The theory identifies the following four categories - non-publics, in which no problem is identified or exists, latent publics for whom the problem exists but the public does not see it; aware publics, the group identifies that a problem exists; and active publics, who are aware of the problem and co-ordinates to take an action.

Grunig (1997) differentiated between the communication behaviors of these publics. Latent publics are likely to process information but rarely will be motivated to move to action regarding the situation they face whereas active publics are more likely to engage in communication behavior that raises awareness levels of other public typologies to elevate their levels of action and behavior. Research demonstrates that problem recognition and involvement predict both information seeking and information processing, but involvement has a greater effect on information seeking than problem recognition (J.E.Grunig, 1997).

J. E. Grunig has spent the last three-plus decades developing the situational theory of publics that is designed to predict and explain people's communication behavior. As

the situational theory of publics has developed over the years, it has become a significant component of the strategic management of public relations (J. E. Grunig, 1997). "The situational theory improves upon the classical conceptions of publics, then, by formalizing those theories and providing means for identifying and measuring publics and their opinions" (J. E. Grunig, 1997, p. 9).

The key components of the STP are three independent variables - problem recognition, constraint recognition, and level of involvement - and two dependent variables - information seeking and information processing. The three independent variables are situational variables meaning, "they describe the perceptions that people have of specific situations, especially situations that are problematic or that produce conflicts or issues" (J. E. Grunig, 1989b, p. 54).

The STP theory provides a basis for understanding internal and external concepts of publics and variables that are important to segmenting publics, but past research suggests that there are other variables that play a role in the understanding of people's communication behaviors (Werder, 2006). Specifically, Major (2000) used a fourth perception variable called media influence to explain information seeking behavior among publics about environmental issues. Research shows support for the usefulness of the independent variables that constitute attributes of publics identified by the situational theory of publics (Werder, 2005). At its current state development, the theory provides a way to segment any general public into groups that will allow public relations practitioners to do their job more effectively.

The situational theory developed by J. E. Grunig (1989b) is designed to "predict the differential responses most important to public relations and other communication professionals: responsiveness to issues; amount of and nature of communication behavior; effects of communication on cognitions, attitudes, and behavior; and the

likelihood of participating in collective behavior to pressure organizations" (p. 52). The theory states, and previous research validates, that high problem recognition and low constraint recognition increase both active information seeking and passive information processing; whereas, high level of involvement only increases information seeking (J. E. Grunig, 1989b). This means that level of involvement has little effect on passive information processing, especially if the person also recognizes the situation as problematic (J. E. Grunig, 1997). A fourth independent variable - called media influence - will also be measured in this study. The perception variable media influence was chosen to examine the influence of mass media on college students' perceptions about terrorism. Although J. E. Grunig has not used media influence as an independent variable in his studies, Major (1998, 2000) has. Media influence has been found in past studies to be correlated with situational publics characterized by "high levels of problem recognition and low levels of constraint recognition" (Major, 2000, p. 227).

When there are violent acts, people will turn to the media sources because the research has already been done for them. Weaver (1996) believes the world of academics has awakened to the fact that the media plays a larger role in the shaping of public opinion than what was once thought. "Scholarly research and thinking about media effects in the past fifty years or so have changed from a view of rather minimal influences to a more recent view of fairly powerful, but not unlimited, media effects" (Weaver, 1996, p. 35). Social problems and movement literature identifies mass media as an important public sphere where social problems are constructed, debated, and legitimized (Blumer, 1971; Hilgartner & Bosk, 1988; Spector & Kitsuse, 1973). Mass media theories emphasize the role media play in creating our perceptions of social reality (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, & Shanahan, 2002) and setting the public's agenda (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

The extent to which students identify terrorism as a problem and relate perception of terrorism to media exposure is unclear. In a random survey of 75 graduate - level college students in Japan in 2002, the perception of a majority of students, was that domestic terrorism was of highest importance (Mohammed, 2003). News-networks are left with two options if they want to collect data on a hot issue. One option is to discuss the data in depth in a retrospective re-cap or to perform a call in or online pseudo poll. The former is what respectable journalists do because it takes time to design a meaningful opinion poll, and to analyze the data. Moreover, it takes time to see if any interesting correlations are present in the raw data. As to the latter, this is often the short cut that unscrupulous news agencies might consider.

The problem for the most part is one of poor science. Websites for almost every major news network, as well as most print publications, have internet pseudo-polls, asking an unscientific sample to give an opinion, just to attract readers, viewers, and to increase viewer curiosity. The problem is that the people who conduct these polls have no way of knowing whether the stories they report are right or wrong because the population and the sample are flawed from the beginning. The individuals who report this data have no way of knowing who the respondents were or if they were a representative sample of some unknown population. Therefore, they may present information that has entertainment value but little scientific value.

Media outlets can choose to shed a positive light on an accident or violent act by describing it as a fight for freedom when it's not, or they can jump to the conclusion describing the act as a terrorist act without waiting for the investigations or the concerned agencies to give their assessment. A review of literature found varied studies on the role and function of the media in various areas of interest to the community, but revealed no study that addresses the issues covered in the current study. However, these are studies

that address the role of the media in shaping trends, or its impact on values and culture, or its role in the political development, or its role in social change, which may be close to this study. In the current study, the main focus will be on the period after the 9/11 attacks since this is the period during which terrorist organizations started using mass media extensively, even though it has always been a major part of terrorist activity to look for publicity, and most relevant examples can be found in this period. The main media that will be examined are television, radio, newspapers, and the Internet, since these have had most influence in the period that is being researched here.

Problem of Terrorism

Ever since the terrorist attacks of 9/11 in New York or the bombings in London and Madrid, media have played an ever-present role in most people's perception of terrorism (Dorothee, 2009). According to a study about transatlantic public opinions, about 65% of European citizens and 91% of Americans consider international terrorism to be an extremely serious threat to their countries regarding the national security over the following ten years (German Marshall Fund of the United States and the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, 2002).

"Fox News has been accused of promoting a conservative, right-wing, or Republican point of view at the expense of neutrality" (Noah, 2005). Moreover, it's widely known how pundits on the left and right portray these news organizations as (CNN, NBC, ABC, and The New York Times, and Washington Post) as being supposedly more liberal mediums. According to the results of a 2006 study by The Project for Excellence in Journalism, Fox News was most frequently cited by surveyed journalists as an outlet taking an ideological stance in its coverage, and most identified as advocating conservative political positions.

Mathew Robinson in his book "Mobocracy" reveals a perfect example of selective reporting as well as biased question wording in the following example. "Here is the exact question as posed by Newsweek to a random sampling of Americans that elicited such doubt about Ashcroft: Do you think Congress should approve Bush's choice of John Ashcroft for Attorney General, or reject Ashcroft as too far on the right on issues like abortion, drugs, and gun control to be an effective Attorney General?" The wording of the question is clearly slanted toward an answer of disapproval because of the hot button issues displayed in the question itself. Robinson asserts that Newsweek went on to write up a scathing review of Ashcroft in an exposé that focused on the poll results of this question in particular to show support from the majority of Americans. Even with this slanted wording, only 41% of those that were polled opposed an Ashcroft confirmation (Robinson, 2002 p.5-6).

The perception that terrorism on such a large scale as 9/11 is new is unfounded, and in fact, false. The term "terrorism" was coined as a result of the French Revolution and can be termed as State terrorism (whereby the State uses violence and fear in order to secure political power). In Stalin's "Great Terror" and his purges millions were estimated to have been killed and many other states have exercised terrorism on their own populace. Al Qaeda, however, did display a magnitude of violence that is unprecedented among "Sub-State Terrorism," (perpetrators acting outside state control, i.e., IRA or Al Qaeda), and this sub-state terrorism is of particular relevance from WWII and the periods from 1970 to present. All of the sub-state terrorist actions from the -70s through to post 9/11, however, do share one commonality – the perpetrators do not intend to defeat armed forces but rather evade them and achieve their goals through coercion (Evans, 1979).

The term terrorism as used here denotes employing a particular type of violence to intimidate, coerce, or inflict massive damage. It is differentiated from other acts of violence and According to Wilkinson has the following five distinct characteristics:

1) Premeditated and designed to create a climate of extreme fear;
2) Directed at a wider target than the immediate victims;
3) Intended as random or symbolic attacks on targets, including civilians;
4) Considered by the attacked society as "extra-normal", that is in the literal sense that it violates the norms regulating disputes, protest and dissent; and
5) Aimed primarily, though not exclusively, at influencing the political behavior of governments, communities, or specific social groups (Wilkinson, 1997).

Following the dramatic events of September 11, 2001, the issue of terrorism has become a permanent actor in the daily amphitheater of international politics. Elevated from its formerly amateur status, this evolving phenomenon has not only captured the substantial absorption of the United States, but increasingly, the rest of the world. It seems ironic that such a captivating subject remains so elusive, as despite the attention given to terrorism, there is much consternation as to what it actually is. It becomes very clear to non - Americans who have lived in this country for a few years that most Americans build their knowledge and make decisions about how to look at people from other cultures based on what they watch on TV or at the movies.

Ever since the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center in 2001 several new words have been created by or assimilated into everyday dialect. "Jihad", "Anthrax", and "Taliban" are now words which are part of every American's dialect, however, no word has reemerged more often than the one which describes all of the events of that day; "terrorism". While not a new word, it was not used as commonly before 9/11, and as no word could better describe the actions of that day, it was the most popular word chosen by the media and the people to describe the acts of violence.

The term terrorism comes from the French word "terrorisme", which is based on the Latin verb "terrere" which means to frighten. The first use of the word dates to 1792, when the Jacobins came to power in France and initiated what we call the Reign of Terror and what the French call simply "La Terreur" (Wikipedia, Terrorism). One of the first writers to use the word "terrorist" in English was Edmund Burke, an opponent of the French Revolution, who in 1795 described the revolutionaries with "those hell-hounds called terrorists are let loose on the people." Since then the term has been far generalized (Ebenstein, 1969). Webster's Dictionary (2010) describes terrorism as "The unlawful use or threatened use of force or violence by a person or an organized group against people or property with the intention of intimidating or coercing societies or governments, often for ideological or political reasons" (Webster Dictionary, 2010).

The largest act of domestic terrorism to date is the Oklahoma City bombing. At 9:04 a.m. on April 19th, 1995, a bomb was detonated in front of the nine-story Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in downtown Oklahoma City, but the sound from the blast was heard up to 15 miles away. The bomb was a two to three ton device made of ammonium nitrate fertilizer mixed with combustible fuel oil. It was placed inside of a rented Ryder truck, which was then parked in front of the north side of the building (Briley, 2007). The blast destroyed one-third of the building from roof to ground, leaving a crater eight feet deep, and 30 feet wide. Less than 48 hours after the blast, FBI agents, with the help of state and local authorities, had apprehended and charged the first suspect in the bombing (Briley, 2007). Timothy McVeigh was already in police custody when evidence pointed to his involvement with the blast. As the story behind Timothy McVeigh's background unfolded, attention was drawn to his involvement with militant militia groups that had a great deal of animosity toward the U.S. Government (Dimitrova, Connolly-Ahern, Williams, Kaid & Reid, 2003). 168 people were reported dead, including 19 children, and

over 800 people were injured. McVeigh was executed on June 11th, 2001 and an accomplice Terry Nichols was sentenced to life in prison (Dimitrova, et al, 2003). This act of terrorism particularly surprised many Americans because it was a Caucasian war veteran who was responsible for the bombing, rather than a foreigner as the profile for such an act (Dimitrova, et al, 2003).

While all of these terrorist attacks had substantial effects on American life, society, and politics, one may go down in history as the attack that shook the country worse than any other. The September 11 Attacks, often called the 9/11 attacks, were a coordinated terrorist strike on the United States in 2001 that killed about 3,000 people, and injured more than 2,000. On the morning of September 11, 2001 19 terrorists, working in teams of four or five, hijacked four commercial jetliners and turned them toward targets chosen for destruction. Two of the planes, loaded with fuel and passengers, were flown at full speed into the twin towers of the World Trade Center in the financial district of New York City (Shane, 2009). The buildings burst into flame and then collapsed, killing thousands. A third terrorist crew smashed its plane into the Pentagon, headquarters of the U.S. military in Arlington, Virginia. The hijackers of the fourth airliner apparently intended to hit another target in the Washington, D.C., area, but passengers on the plane realized what was happening and fought back (Shane, 2009). This airplane crashed in a field in rural Pennsylvania. The 19 hijackers were from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and other Arab states. They were affiliated with al-Qaeda network (Shane, 2009). The targets they chose to destroy symbolized U.S. financial, political, and military power. More people were killed on U.S. soil on September 11 than on any day since the Civil War (Shane, 2009).

The United States of America has experienced many different forms of terrorism in its existence, and it appears that, despite all attempts, including the American "War on

Terrorism", terrorism is a form of radical behavior that will exist as long as humans exist. Terrorism, according to the FBI, is a term used to describe "the unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives. The FBI further describes terrorism as either domestic or international, depending on the origin, base, and objectives of the terrorist organization" (White, 2006).

The definition of terrorism is inherently controversial. The use of violence for the achievement of political ends is common to state and non-state groups. The difficulty is in agreeing on a basis for determining when the use of violence (directed at whom, by whom, for what ends) is legitimate. The majority of definitions in use have been written by agencies directly associated with a government, and are systematically biased to exclude governments from the definition. Some definitions are so broad, like the Terrorism Act 2000, as to include disruption of a computer system where no violence is intended or results.

The contemporary label of "terrorist" is highly pejorative; it is a badge that denotes a lack of legitimacy and morality. For terrorist groups and their government, sponsored supporters, it is crucial that they do not be labeled as terrorist group; so as not to be labeled "terrorists" and by association as "terrorist nations." Groups that have described themselves as terrorists are therefore unknown. It is equally important for a group's opponents that the label "terrorist" be applied. The appellation "terrorist" is therefore always deliberately disputed. Attempts at defining the concept invariably arouse debate because rival definitions may be employed with a view to including the actions of certain parties, and excluding others (Miller, 2006). Thus, each party might still subjectively claim a legitimate basis for employing violence in pursuit of their own political cause or aim. In addition, there is an increase in a common opinion that most

terrorists are somehow connected to Muslims in general, or of some specific sect of Islam, or of some specific interpretation of the Quran. This opinion is reinforced by the many recent newsworthy acts of terrorism, which have Muslim claimants of responsibility, which are also paralleled by the silence of the vast majority of the Muslim population concerning those acts of terrorism.

In November 2004, a United Nations Security Council report described terrorism as any act "intended to cause death or serious bodily harm to civilians or non-combatants with the purpose of intimidating a population or compelling a government or an international organisation to do or abstain from doing any act" (Juergensmeyer, 2000). Terrorism, in the modern sense, is violence against civilians to achieve political or ideological objectives by creating fear (Humphreys, 2006). Generally, terrorism includes those acts which are intended to create fear (terror) and perpetrated for an ideological goal, with deliberate target on or disregard for the safety of non-combatants. It can also be defined as the use of unlawful violence or threat of unlawful violence to inculcate fear; intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious, or ideological (Arowolo and Lawal, 2008).

Terrorism is controversial. This is because it has definitional pluralism and perceptual ambiguity. In fact, it is a nebulous concept. What is terrorism to an individual or group may connote freedom fight; struggle for survival; liberation from socio-political slavery; and, economic emancipation. The word "terrorism" is politically and emotionally charged, and this greatly compounds the difficulty of providing a precise definition (Hoffman, 1998).

Some persons and governments believe that the term "Terrorism," as defined in dictionaries, now has a negative connotation, under the theory that a person who attacks the civilian population is, instead, a militant, regardless of the status of the victims of

terrorism (Shane, 2009). Lawyers, judges, police, politicians, law makers, NGO's (global network of nongovernmental organizations), and the general public all need some basic definition of "terrorism" to proceed with fair prosecutions and court trials under the rule of law. Terrorist attacks are usually characterized as indiscriminate, the targeting of civilians or as, executed with disregard for human life (Hoffman, 2006).

The term "terrorism" often is used to assert that the enemy's political violence is immoral and unjustified. Those labeled "terrorists" rarely identify themselves as such, instead, typically use terms referring to their ideological or ethnic struggle, such as separatists, freedom fighters, liberators, revolutionaries, vigilantes, militants, paramilitary, guerrillas, rebels, jihads or mujaheddin, or fedayeen, or any similar-meaning word in other languages (Hudson, 2002).Terrorism has been used by a broad array of political organizations in furthering their objectives; both right wing and left-wing political parties, nationalistic, and religious groups, revolutionaries and ruling governments.

A study by the U.S. Army in 1988 found that more than one hundred definitions of the word "terrorism" exist and have been used. Some news sources refuse to use the term "terrorism"; others use the term in context (Record, 2003).

In November 2004, a UN panel described terrorism as any act "intended to cause death or serious bodily harm to civilians or non-combatants with the purpose of intimidating a population or compelling a government or an international organization to do or abstain from doing any act." (Annan, 2005, www.un.org) Official definitions determine counter-terrorism policy and are often developed to serve it. Most official definitions outline the following key criteria: target, objective, motive, perpetrator, and legitimacy or legality of the act. Terrorism is also often recognizable by a statement from the perpetrators following the attack.

According to Walter Laqueur of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, "the only general characteristic of terrorism generally agreed upon is that terrorism involves violence and the threat of violence" (Laqueur, 1999). However, the criterion of violence alone does not produce a useful definition, as it includes many acts not usually considered terrorism: war, riot, organized crime, or even a simple assault. Property destruction that does not endanger life is not usually considered a violent crime, but some have described property destruction by the Earth Liberation Front and Animal Liberation Front as terrorism.

In his book, "Inside Terrorism" Bruce Hoffman states, terrorism is a pejorative term. A word with intrinsically negative connotations, and is generally applied to one's enemies and opponents or to those with whom one disagrees and would otherwise prefer to ignore (Hoffman, 2006).

A worldwide acceptance of a single definition of the word terrorism, along with the adoption of international legislation against terrorism and support for terrorism based upon this definition, would conceivably allow individuals to understand what terrorism is, and make their own judgments upon it. It seems imperative that the conceptual confusion cease, and the leaders and the intellectuals of the society have a responsibility to do so at the present time. Therefore, when individuals became aware of a single definition of terrorism, they will no longer have to ask what it is, as they will know when they see it. Rather, they will ask a different question, whether they choose to justify it or not.

For the purpose of this study "Act of Terrorism" Shall mean an unlawful act, including the use of force or violence, of any person or group(s) of persons, whether acting alone or on behalf of or in connection with any organisation(s), committed for

political, religious or ideological purposes including the intention to influence any government and/or to put the public in fear for such purposes.

This literature review provides an opportunity to examine college students' perceptions of terrorism using the theoretical framework provided by the situational theory of publics. Specifically three research questions, and one hypothesis was developed based on the purpose of this study and the literature reviewed in regard to this study.

Research Questions:

RQ1: Do college students recognize a problem of the issue of terrorism?

RQ2: What media channel has the most influence among college students' perception of terrorism?

RQ3: How do media influence college students' perceptions of terrorism?

Hypothesis:

H: Problem recognition, constraint recognition, involvement recognition, goal compatibility and media influence are related to information seeking about terrorism among college students.

The next chapter describes the method used to gather data. To answer the research question and test the proposed hypothesis, a random sampled survey of USF students was conducted. The chapter has four sections: procedure, instrumentation, survey response statistics, and data analysis.

Chapter Three

Methodology

This chapter outlines the procedure used to gather the data for this study and the methods used to analyze the data that were collected. This chapter also describes the instrumentation that was used to collect the data. This study is essentially descriptive and analytical. It attempts to examine the influence of media on students' perception of terrorism and formulating societal issues, relying on knowledge, expert opinions, and literature on the subject. The analysis of survey data provides the empirical basis for answering key research questions. The main empirical data was derived from the opinion survey of USF students. In order to explore these issues, a survey study was conducted during the spring semester 2013 at USF Tampa campus. The purpose of this survey was to test the variables of the situational theory of publics, to measure the media use of respondents regarding terrorism, to measure respondent perception, and to collect demographics of respondents.

The Sample

The population of the study consisted of all students at USF Tampa campus. The sample for the study is USF Tampa campus registered students (n=47, 122). The convenient sample frame that used for this study was drawn from the INTO and Mass Communications students data basis in Tampa campus. A quantitative e-mail survey was administered to randomly selected students. The purpose of this survey was to test the variables of the situational theory of publics. In addition to the variables of the situational

theory of publics, the survey also measured students' perception about the problem of terrorism.

An e-mail survey was chosen for this study because of its many advantages and the availability of a list of addresses that existed to help reach the target audience. There are many advantages to the e-mail survey, primarily because: (a) Web surveys are much cheaper to conduct; (b) Web surveys are faster; and, (c) combined with other survey modes, Web surveys yield a higher response rate than the other survey modes by themselves. A major challenge for researchers will be to distinguish themselves and their survey from the plethora of commercial and entertainment surveys that exist and continue to multiply on the Web (Fricker and Schonlau, 2002). These are things that were considered and accounted for when deciding to do an-email survey for this study.

Instrumentation

The survey consists of questions aiming to ascertain participants' perception of terrorism, and to create a profile of the participant's media habits, that is, their most common television viewing time, how often they listen to radio, read various newspapers and surfing the internet. The final part of the questionnaire seeks to develop demographic information about the participants, while maintaining their anonymity. The 30-item survey consisted of: an open-ended question about the meaning of terrorism; 19 statements measuring the respondent's perceptions of problem recognition, constraint recognition, involvement recognition, goal compatibility, media influence, and information seeking; 6 statements measuring the respondents communication behavioral intention towards using different sources to gather information about terrorism; 7 statements measuring the respondents communication behavioral intention towards seeking information about terrorism; 8 statements measuring respondents assessment of

source trustworthy; and 7 demographic items. These items were categorized into six different sections.

In the first section, respondents were asked to write in the blank provided what does terrorism mean to them, while in the second section, respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the following statements by using the scale provided. There were 19 statements following these directions. A five-point Likert-type response scale was used where 1 represented "strongly disagree" and 5 represented "strongly agree."

Out of the 19 items in the second section, 12 of them measured variables from the situational theory of publics. To measure problem recognition three statements were replicated from previous research; however, the items were modified to fit the context of this study. Two items measured internal problem recognition and one item measured external problem recognition:

- I believe students should pay more attention to the problem of terrorism. (Internal)

- I believe that something needs to be done to improve the problem of terrorism. (Internal)

- I do not believe that terrorism is a serious problem. (External)

To measure internal and external constraint recognition three statements were replicated from previous research; however, the items were modified to fit the context of this study. Two items measured external problem recognition and one item measured internal problem recognition:

- I do not believe that I, personally, can do anything to make a difference in the way the problem of terrorism is solved. (Internal)

- I believe that my opinions about the problem of terrorism matter. (Internal)

- I do not believe that I have the ability to solve the problem of terrorism. (External)

To measure internal and external involvement recognition, three statements were replicated from previous research; however, the items were modified to fit the context of this study. One item measured internal problem recognition and two items measured external problem recognition:

- I believe the problem of terrorism affects my life. (Internal)

- I have strong opinions about the problem of terrorism. (Internal)

- I believe issues related to terrorism involve me personally. (External)

To measure internal and external goal compatibility, three statements were replicated from previous research; however, the items were modified to fit the context of this study. One item measured internal problem recognition and two items measured external problem recognition:

- I agree with government's response to terrorism. (Internal)

- My goals are compatible with the goals of my government regards the problem of terrorism. (External)

- Regarding the problem of terrorism, the government and I want the same thing. (External)

To measure internal and external media influence, three statements were replicated from previous research; however, the items were modified to fit the context of this study. One item measured internal problem recognition and two items measured external problem recognition:

- My knowledge of the problem of terrorism comes from the media. (External)

- I don't believe anything the media tells me about the problem of terrorism. (External)

- The media influences my perception of the problem of terrorism. (Internal)

To measure internal and external information seeking, four statements were replicated from previous research; however, the items were modified to fit the context of this study. Two items measured internal problem recognition and two items measured external problem recognition:

- I regularly check to see if there is any new information about the problem of terrorism in the media. (External)

- I actively seek information about the problem of terrorism. (Internal)

- I regularly visit Web sites that have information about the problem of terrorism. (External)

- I process information that I see about terrorism, but I don't seek it out. (Internal)

The third section consisted of six statements that measured the respondent's current information-seeking behavior. The instructions for the respondent were to choose the number that best describes the frequency with which you use the following sources to gather information about terrorism. The respondents were asked to be sure to answer all items and to only choose one number on a single scale. The seven-point semantic differential scale that was used measured whether a respondent would use a certain source never or very frequently. The sources that were included were: film, a newspaper, Internet, radio, a magazine, and television.

The fourth section consisted of seven statements that measured the respondent's level of active communication behavior. The instructions were to choose the number that best describes how likely you are to use the following forms of communication to seek information about the problem of terrorism. The seven-point semantic differential scale

that was used measured whether a respondent was extremely unlikely or extremely likely to use a specific source. The forms that were asked about included: film, a newspaper, Internet, radio, a magazine, social media, and television.

The fifth section consisted of eight statements that measured source credibility. Respondents were asked to choose the number that best describes how trustworthy you find the following sources on the topic of terrorism. The seven-point differential scale that was used measured whether a respondent found a specific source to be very untrustworthy or very trustworthy. The sources that were asked about included: a family member, a professor/ university researcher, a friend, a medical professional, a scientist, the media, a military leader, and an independent expert.

In addition to the primary variables of interest in this study, the sixth section examined demographic variables of the USF students that were sampled. Respondents were asked seven demographic questions measured on both nominal and ordinal level scales. The questions asked were regarding sex, age, level of education, race, political affiliation, marital status, and zip code.

Chapter Four

Results

The purpose of this study was to: (1) Examine media influence on shaping youths' perception about terrorism and; (2) Explore the extent to which the different types of media are active and influential on youths' perception about terrorism. For communication professionals whose job is to communicate to the larger publics about the U.S. position on terrorism, it is essential to understand the critical role of media in shaping the youths' perceptions of terrorism as it evolves and adapts to meet their needs. This influence also affects society's knowledge of and cooperation with policies and strategies for facing the problem of terrorism.

The survey was distributed via surveymonkey for USF students, Tampa campus. The students were assured that their responses were voluntary and will remain confidential to the extent provided by law.

The SPSS statistics 21 were used to analyze data. The sample consisted of 464 students; the majority of which were caucasian (57.2%). The sample had slightly more females (53.8%) than males. Students in this sample tended to be single (72.7%). The students were asked about how they do consider themselves; 85 answered that they consider themselves as conservatives (19.1%), 94 conservative/Independents (21.2%), 145 students were independents (32.7%), 76 were independent/liberal (17.1%), and 44 students considered themselves as liberals (9.9%). The mean age for the study sample was 25.3 years (*SD*= 8.5). The level of education among these students was assessed by asking about the current level of education. The highest number was 105 sophomores

(23.6%) followed by 87 senior students (19.6%), and 75 graduate students (16.9%). The

rest of the students were freshmen (13.0%), juniors (13.3%) and others (13.7%). (Table1)

Table 1: *Frequency and Percent of the Sample by Demographic Variables.*

Variable	Frequency	Percent	Mean	SD
Gender				
Male	206	46.2		
Female	240	53.8		
Marital Status				
Single	323	72.7		
Currently married	86	19.4		
Separated	28	6.3		
Divorced	7	1.6		
Ethnicity				
Caucasian	256	57.2		
African American	46	10.4		
Hispanic	36	8.1		
Asian	36	8.1		
American Indian	29	6.5		
Other	41	9.2		
Do You Consider Your Self				
Conservative	85	19.1		
Conservative/Inde.	94	21.2		
Independent	145	32.7		
Independent/liberal	76	17.1		
Liberal	44	9.9		
Education				
Freshman	58	13.0		
Sophomore	105	23.6		
Junior	59	13.3		
Senior	87	19.6		
Graduate	75	16.9		
Other	61	13.7		
Age			25.3	8.5

The majority of the sample distributed in Tampa Bay area Zip codes, especially

the area around USF Tampa campus. (Table 2)

Table 2: *Frequency and Percent of the Sample by Zip Code.*

Zip Code	Frequency	Percent
33601	5	1.1
33602	4	0.9
33603	8	1.7
33604	6	1.3
33605	11	2.4
33606	9	1.9
33607	12	2.6
33608	6	1.3
33609	12	2.6
33610	16	3.4
33611	47	10.1
33612	32	6.9
33613	30	6.5
33614	18	3.9
33615	14	3.0
33616	6	1.3
33617	30	6.5
33618	22	4.7
33619	20	4.3
33620	15	3.3
Other	141	30.4

Prior to hypothesis testing, Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the internal

consistency of the multiple-item indexes used to measure the variables of interest. The

results of these tests are shown in table 3. The three items measuring problem of

terrorism recognition yielded an alpha coefficient of 0.58. The next three items measuring

the constraint of terrorism recognition yielded an alpha coefficient of 0.67. The alpha

coefficient for the involvement of terrorism recognition was 0.71. The items for goal

compatibility yielded an alpha coefficient of 0.80. The media influence items analysis

showed an alpha coefficient of 0.66. The last part consisted of four items about seeking

information about terrorism yielded an alpha coefficient of 0.81. (Table 3)

Table 3: *Mean and Standard Deviation of the Sample by Survey Variables.*

Variable	N	Mean	SD	A
Problem Recognition	453	3.2	0.5	0.58
Attention to Problem	453	3.6	1.4	
Something need to be Done	453	3.9	1.1	
Terrorism is Not a Serious Problem	453	2.0	1.2	
Constraint Recognition	450	3.0	0.8	0.67
Do Anything to Solve Problem	450	3.0	1.2	
Opinion Matter	450	2.8	1.1	
Ability to Solve Problem	450	3.1	1.2	
Involvement Recognition	445	2.8	0.9	0.71
Affects my Life	445	2.4	1.1	
Strong Opinion	445	3.5	1.2	
Involve me Personally	445	2.6	1.2	
Goal Compatibility	448	3.5	1.0	0.80
Agree with Government	448	3.5	1.1	
My Goals are Compatible with	448	3.5	1.1	
Government	448	3.4	1.1	
Want the Same Thing				
	450	3.3	0.8	0.66
Media Influence	450	3.6	1.1	
Knowledge comes from Media	450	2.8	1.3	
I Don't Believe Media	450	3.5	1.2	
Media Influence my Perception				
	451	3.3	0.8	0.81
Information Seeking	451	3.5	1.1	
Check the Media Regularly	451	3.5	1.2	
Actively Seek Information	451	3.3	1.2	
Regularly Visit Websites	451	3.0	1.1	
Process Information but Don't Seek it				
Out				

Hypothesis Testing

The hypothesis stated that: problem recognition, constraint recognition, involvement recognition, goal compatibility and media influence are related to information seeking about terrorism among college students. Correlation analysis and regression analysis was conducted for the variables of interest to test this hypothesis. Strong positive correlations were found between information seeking and problem recognition, involvement, goal compatibility, and media influence P=0.01. (Table 4)

Table 4: *Correlation Coefficients for Variables Predicting Information Seeking.*

		PR	CR	INVOLV	GC	MEDINF	INFOSEEK
PR	r	1	-.012	.561¨	.508¨	.524¨	.494¨
	N	453	450	445	448	451	451
CR	r	-.012	1	.055	.015	.044	.027
	N	450	450	443	445	449	448
INVOLV	r	.561¨	.055	1	.546¨	.527¨	.681¨
	N	445	443	445	440	444	443
GC	r	.508¨	.015	.546¨	1	.645¨	.595¨
	N	448	445	440	448	446	447
MEDINF	r	.524¨	.044	.527¨	.645¨	1	.416¨
	N	451	449	444	446	451	449
INFOSEEK	r	.494¨	.027	.681¨	.595¨	.416¨	1
	N	451	448	443	447	449	451

¨. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

In addition, linear regression analysis was conducted. The intention to seek out information, the dependent variable was regressed on the measures of problem recognition, constraint recognition, goal compatibility, involvement recognition, and media influence. Findings indicated that 54% of the variance in information seeking is due to problem recognition, constraint recognition, goal compatibility, and involvement recognition which supports the hypothesis, $R^2 = 0.54$, Adj. $R^2 = 0.54$, P=0.00. (Table 5)

Table 5: *Regression Model for Variables Predicting Information Seeking.*

Model		Unstand.	Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
	(Constant)	.315	.173		1.821	.069
	INVOLV	.539	.046	.497	11.665	.000
	GC	.366	.047	.354	7.805	.000
1	MEDINF	-.129	.046	-.129	-2.838	.005
	PR	.102	.039	.108	2.591	.010
	CR	.003	.030	.004	.111	.911

a. Dependent Variable: INFOSEEK

Testing for Research Questions

RQ1: Do college students recognize a problem of the issue of terrorism?

To answer this question Also means and standard deviations were calculated for the problem of terrorism recognition part, the students were asked 3 questions, the mean for the problem recognition total was 2.9 (*SD*=0.5). The mean was 3.6 (*SD*=1.4) for the attention of the problem, for their believe that something needs to be done to improve the problem of terrorism the mean was 2.0 (*SD*=1.6), and about their believe that the terrorism is not a serious problem the mean was 3.0 (*SD*=1.1). (Table3)

For the constraint recognition the students had a mean of 2.8 (*SD*=1.1) for their believe that they cannot do anything to make a difference in the way the problem of terrorism is solved, the mean was 3.5 (*SD*=1.1) for the students belief that their opinion about the problem of terrorism matter. And they had a mean of 2.6 (*SD*=1.1) for the ability to solve the problem of terrorism. The mean for constraint recognition was 3.0 (*SD*=0.5). (Table 3)

The part of involvement recognition were asked in 3 questions as well, the overall mean was 3.5 (*SD*=0.9). The students had a mean of 3.5 (*SD*=1.2) when they were asked

if the problem of terrorism affected their life. The students had a mean of 3.6 (SD=1.1)

when they were asked if they have a strong opinion about the problem of terrorism. And

if the problem involve them personally they reported a mean of 3.5 (SD=1.2). (Table 3)

Students in this study reported a mean of 3.3 (SD=1.2) that they agree with the

government response to terrorism, the mean was 3.5 (SD=1.1) for the students goals are

compatible with the goals of their government regards the problem of terrorism, and they

reported a mean of 3.5 (SD=1.1) that they want the same thing as the government

regarding the terrorism problem. The overall mean was 3.4 (SD=0.9). (Table 3)

The students in this study reported that their knowledge comes from media

(m=3.5, SD=1.1), and somewhat agreed that they don't believe anything that the media

tells about the problem of terrorism (m=2.4, SD=1.1), however they reported that media

influences their perception about terrorism (m=3.4, SD=1.2). The overall mean was 3.1

(SD=0.5). (Table 3)

RQ2: What media channel has the most influence among college students' perception of

terrorism?

To answer this question, two tailed linear regression analyses were conducted.

Also means and standard deviations were calculated for information about

terrorism part; Students were asked 3 questions of the information about terrorism on a

scale from 1 to 7. The first one was about the frequency they use sources to gather

information about terrorism; internet was the most frequent used source for the sample

with a mean of 6.0 (SD=1.5) followed by television 5.7 (SD=1.7), the least frequent use

was films with a mean of 3.6 (SD=2.0). (Table 6)

The second question was about forms of communication to seek information

about terrorism; Internet was the most used form with a mean of 6.1 (SD=1.4), the second

used form of communication was the social system with a mean of 5.8 (*SD*=1.6), the least

used form was the film with a mean of 4.0 (*SD*=1.9). (Table 6)

The third question was about trustworthy of sources; the most trusted source was

the military leader with a mean of 5.9 (*SD*=1.6), the second trusted source was for both

the scientist and independent expert with a mean of 5.7 and (*SD*=1.9, 1.5) repetitively.

(Table 6)

Table 6: *Mean and Standard Deviation of the Sample by Information about Terrorism.*

Variable	N	Mean	SD
Source to Gather Information			
Internet	448	6.0	1.5
Television	448	5.7	1.7
Magazine	445	4.9	1.9
Newspaper	449	4.8	1.9
Radio	447	4.6	1.8
Film	447	3.6	2.0
Forms to Seek Information			
Internet	444	6.1	1.4
Social Media	444	5.8	1.6
Newspaper	444	5.3	1.7
Television	444	5.0	2.0
Magazine	443	5.0	1.9
Radio	441	4.8	1.8
Film	441	4.0	1.9
Trustworthy of Sources			
Military Leader	442	5.9	1.6
Media	446	5.7	1.7
Independent Expert	445	5.7	1.5
Professor/Researcher	445	5.0	1.9
Medical Professional	444	4.2	1.9
Scientist	439	4.2	1.9
Friend	446	3.7	1.9
Family Member	446	3.7	2.1

RQ3: How do media influence college students' perceptions of terrorism?

To answer this question means and standard deviations were calculated for the information seeking part of the survey. Students reported a mean of 3.1 (*SD*=1.2) that they regularly check to see if there is any new information about the problem of terrorism in the media, the students somewhat disagreed that they actively seek information about terrorism or that they regularly visit websites that have information about the problem of terrorism. The students agreed that they process information that they see about terrorism but they don't seek it out (*m*=4.0, *SD*=1.1). (Table 3). The students' response for the subjective question about their thinking of terrorism, and what does terrorism means to them, a summary showed the following 26 most important words and phrase:

- Act.
- Action.
- Assault.
- Attacks.
- Behavior.
- Blood.
- Crime.
- Danger.
- Dead.
- Death.
- Destruction.
- Disease.
- Fear.
- Groups.
- Human.
- Inhumanity.
- Injustice.
- Innocent.
- Lives.
- Killing.
- Problem.
- Sabotage.
- Safety.
- Terrorism.
- Threatening.
- Unfairness.
- Violence.

These responses indicate some variations in orientation towards the question what does terrorism mean to you?

The next section is the discussion chapter, which provides an overview of the findings of this study, as well its significance and limitations. The significance of this study on the situational theory of publics. Finally, the conclusion section suggests directions for future research.

Chapter Five

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to: (1) Examine media influence on shaping youths' perception about terrorism and; (2) Explore the extent to which the different types of media are active and influential on youths' perception about terrorism. For communication professionals whose job is to communicate to the larger publics about the U.S. position on terrorism, it is essential to understand the critical role of media in shaping the youths' perceptions of terrorism as it evolves and adapts to meet their needs. This influence also affects society's knowledge of and cooperation with policies and strategies for facing the problem of terrorism.

Research Questions:

RQ1: Do college students recognize a problem of the issue of terrorism?

RQ2: What media channel has the most influence among college students' perception of terrorism?

RQ3: How do media influence college students' perceptions of terrorism?

Hypothesis:

H: Problem recognition, constraint recognition, involvement recognition, goal compatibility and media influence are related to information seeking about terrorism among college students.

The students in this study agreed somewhat that they have recognized the problem of terrorism but they didn't believe that something needed to be done and they were neutral about whether the problem of terrorism is a serious problem. The students believe

that their opinion about the problem of terrorism matter which is congruent with the situational theory of publics which states that an individual's ability to recognize the value of a situation and the desire and ability to remove obstacles in that situation will lead to greater involvement in that situation. Publics differ in the extent to which they participate in active behavior to resolve situations based on how they react when facing similar problems, recognize the problems, and organize to resolve them (Grunig, 1983).

Students' information about the problem of terrorism came from the media even though they did not believe anything the media reports, but media still influence their perception about the problem of terrorism, when there are violent acts, people will turn to the media sources because the research has already been done for them. Weaver (1996) believes the world of academics has awakened to the fact that the media plays a larger role in the shaping of public opinion than what was once thought.

A review of literature found varied studies on the role and function of the media in various areas of interest to the community, but revealed no study that addresses the issues covered in the current study. However, these are studies that address the role of the media in shaping trends, or its impact on values and culture, or its role in the political development, or its role in social change, which may be close to this study. Strong relationships were found between all sources of information about terrorism in this study.

Terrorism is controversial. This is because it has definitional pluralism and perceptual ambiguity. In fact, it is a nebulous concept. What is terrorism to an individual or group may connote freedom fight; struggle for survival; liberation from socio-political slavery; and, economic emancipation. The word "terrorism" is politically and emotionally charged, and this greatly compounds the difficulty of providing a precise definition (Hoffman, 1998). The students were asked to define terrorism based on what it means to them, they used words like kill, attack and fear. The contemporary label of "terrorist" is

highly pejorative; it is a badge that denotes a lack of legitimacy and morality. For terrorist groups and their government, sponsored supporters, it is crucial that they do be labeled as terrorist groups; so as not to be labeled "terrorists" and by association as "terrorist nations." Groups that have described themselves as terrorists are therefore unknown. It is equally important for a group's opponents that the label "terrorist" be applied. The appellation "terrorist" is therefore always deliberately disputed. Attempts at defining the concept invariably arouse debate because rival definitions may be employed with a view to including the actions of certain parties, and excluding others (Miller, 2006). The hypothesis of that problem recognition, constraint recognition, involvement recognition, and goal compatibility influence information seeking about terrorism among college students were supported by the findings of this study.

Previous research indicates varying importance of constraint recognition to information seeking, depending on context of the study. The constraint recognition in this study wasn't a significant predictor and this is maybe related to the student feelings of helpless regarding their participation in solving the problem of terrorism.

Conclusion

The findings of this study support the basic premise of the situational theory of publics. Previous research states that level of involvement increases information seeking, but has less of an effect on information processing. The results of this study were in line with the previous statement. Level of involvement had the strongest effect on the intent to seek out information. J. E. Grunig (1997) stated this differently by saying that "people seldom seek out information about situations that do not involve them" (p. 11). When it came to the intent to process information, constraint recognition had the strongest effect. This could be because the public believes they have no reason to process information

about a situation they feel constrained to do anything about. Overall, J. E. Grunig's (1989a, 1997) situational theory of publics should be considered a powerful tool in predicting communication behavior and should continue to be pursued and refined by scholars for use by strategic communication practitioners. The findings indicate that while media influence does have an effect on the intention to process information, it does not have an effect on the intention to seek out information. Professional communicators can use these findings to aid in the development of effective strategies for communicating with publics about the problem of terrorism. With these results, practitioners will now know what effect communications about a situation might have. By understanding audience segmentation practitioners can improve the design and targeting of their messages. By using the situational theory of publics in research, practitioners can easily segment their audience and determine what message and medium to use to reach each audience. When practitioners are dealing with an issue such as the problem of terrorism, they would have a distinct advantage if they knew when and how they should communicate with their publics.

Limitations

The sample of this study was drawn from the Into and Mass Communication School students, this, this will limit the generalizability of the study, also some alpha scores were below 0.70 threshold for demonstrating reliability, internally consistent instrument should be administered in future studies.

Recommendations

- Community involvement: Establish workshops, and meetings inform the public aware of what is going on around and how they can be part of the solutions. This should be handled by the military stakeholders because the results showed that the military leaders were the most trusted source of information about the problem of terrorism.

- Establish a code system similar to that of Silver and Amber Alert. This system proved successful since numerous criminals have been caught and prosecuted.

- Establish coordination with other countries to fight terrorism, through providing assistance and rewards to these countries as incentives.

- Reward individuals and countries based on their contributions. The results showed that independent experts play an important role in providing important information about the problem of terrorism.

- Every criminal found guilty should be identified to the public through different media channels, so people know and feel that the government is ready and always working hard to protect its population and eliminating the problem of terrorism.

- Create assistance programs in the countries that harbor terrorists and let those countries to extend their hands to those terrorist to alter their thinking. After all most of these terrorists comes from a poor back-ground.

- Further studies should be done in this field to include a diverse population, not only the students but a wide range of professional people and try to include families because the sample in this study tended to be single.

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Appendix A

Cover Letter

February 28, 2013

Dear USF Students Tampa Campus

As a graduate student at the University of South Florida, I am currently working on a research project to learn more about the USF Students' perception of terrorism

I am writing to ask for your help with the research that investigates students' perceptions of terrorism

You have been chosen as part of a carefully selected sample of individuals who are being asked to participate in this survey. As a USF student, you can provide unique information about your perception of terrorism

The questionnaire will only take about 10 minutes to complete, and your responses will remain completely confidential. Your name will never be connected to your response in any way. Please read the informed consent statement below for information on your rights as a participant in this study. Your input is vital to my research. Please take a few minutes to contribute to this research by completing the online questionnaire

Thank you, in advance, for helping with this important study

Sincerely

Mamdoh Al-Ameri

Appendix B

Survey Instrument

Media and Perception of Terrorism Questionnaire

Thank you for taking a few minutes from your day to complete this brief questionnaire about Media and Students' Perception of Terrorism at USF.

<div style="border:1px solid black; padding:1em;">

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

This research is being conducted by Mamdoh Al-Ameri, Graduate student at School of Mass Communications, University of South Florida, 4202 E. Fowler Ave., CIS1040, Tampa, FL 33620-7800; (813) 770-3272. Your responses are voluntary and will remain confidential to the extent provided by law. You do not have to answer any questions you do not wish to answer, and you have the right to withdraw consent at any time without consequence. There are no anticipated risks associated with your participation in this research and you will receive no compensation for your participation. Neither your course status nor your grade will be affected by your decision to participate or not to participate in this study. If you have any questions concerning the procedures used in this study, you may contact the principle investigator at e-mail address mamdoh1@mail.usf.edu or by calling (813) 770-3272. Questions or concerns about your rights as a participant can be directed to the University of South Florida Institutional Review Board at

</div>

Q1: Thinking of the problem of terrorism, what does terrorism mean to you?

_____

_____

INSTRUCTIONS: Using the scale below, please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements by writing the appropriate number in the blank provided.

   (1= Strongly Disagree   2= Disagree, 3= Neutral, 4= Agree, 5= Strongly Agree)

_____ 1. I believe students should pay more attention to the problem of terrorism.

_____ 2. I do not believe that terrorism is a serious problem.

_____ 3. I process information that I see about terrorism, but I don't seek it out.

_____ 4. I believe that my opinions about the problem of terrorism matter.

_____ 5. I regularly check to see if there is any new information about the problem of terrorism in the media.

_____ 6. Regarding the problem of terrorism, the government and I want the same thing.

_____ 7. The media influences my perception of the problem of terrorism.

_____ 8. I believe the problem of terrorism affects my life.

_____ 9. I actively seek information about the problem of terrorism.

_____ 10. I regularly visit Web sites that have information about the problem of terrorism.

_____ 11. I have strong opinions about the problem of terrorism.

_____ 12. I agree with government's response to terrorism.

_____ 13. My goals are compatible with the goals of my government regards the problem of terrorism.

_____ 14. My knowledge of the problem of terrorism comes from the media.

_____ 15. I believe issues related to terrorism involve me personally.

_____ 16. I do not believe that I have the ability to solve the problem of terrorism.

____ 17. I don't believe anything the media tells me about the problem of terrorism.

____ 18. I do not believe that I, personally, can do anything to make a difference in the way the problem of terrorism is solved.

____ 19. I believe that something needs to be done to improve the problem of terrorism.

Please circle the number that best describes the frequency with which you use the following sources to gather information about terrorism.

20) Film: never :_1_:_2_:_3_:_4_:_5_:_6_:_7_: very frequently

21) Newspaper: never :_1_:_2_:_3_:_4_:_5_:_6_:_7_: very frequently

22) Internet: never :_1_:_2_:_3_:_4_:_5_:_6_:_7_: very frequently

23) Radio: never :_1_:_2_:_3_:_4_:_5_:_6_:_7_: very frequently

24) Magazine: never :_1_:_2_:_3_:_4_:_5_:_6_:_7_: very frequently

25) Television: never :_1_:_2_:_3_:_4_:_5_:_6_:_7_: very frequently

Please circle the number that best describes how likely you are to use the following forms of communication to seek information about terrorism.

26) Television: extremely unlikely :_1_:_2_:_3_:_4_:_5_:_6_:_7_: extremely likely

27) Film: extremely unlikely :_1_:_2_:_3_:_4_:_5_:_6_:_7_: extremely likely

28) Newspaper: extremely unlikely :_1_:_2_:_3_:_4_:_5_:_6_:_7_: extremely likely

29) Internet: extremely unlikely :_1_:_2_:_3_:_4_:_5_:_6_:_7_: extremely likely

30) Social Media: extremely unlikely :_1_:_2_:_3_:_4_:_5_:_6_:_7_: extremely likely

31) Radio: extremely unlikely :_1_:_2_:_3_:_4_:_5_:_6_:_7_: extremely likely

32) Magazine: extremely unlikely :_1_:_2_:_3_:_4_:_5_:_6_:_7_: extremely likely

Please circle the number that best describes how trustworthy you find the following sources on the topic of terrorism.

33) A family member: very untrustworthy:_1_:_2_:_3_:_4_:_5_:_6_:_7_: very trustworthy

34) A professor/researcher: very untrustworthy:_1_:_2_:_3_:_4_:_5_:_6_:_7_: very trustworthy

35) A friend: very untrustworthy:_1_:_2_:_3_:_4_:_5_:_6_:_7_: very trustworthy

36) A medical professional: very untrustworthy:_1_:_2_:_3_:_4_:_5_:_6_:_7_: very trustworthy

37) A scientist: very untrustworthy:_1_:_2_:_3_:_4_:_5_:_6_:_7_: very trustworthy

38) The media: very untrustworthy:_1_:_2_:_3_:_4_:_5_:_6_:_7_: very trustworthy

39) A military leader: very untrustworthy:_1_:_2_:_3_:_4_:_5_:_6_:_7_: very trustworthy

40) An independent expert: very untrustworthy:_1_:_2_:_3_:_4_:_5_:_6_:_7_: very trustworthy

DEMOGRAPHICS

Instructions: Listed below are a few demographic questions about you that will help us to understand your answers. Please write or select the appropriate response.

41) Sex:

☐ Male   ☐ Female

42) Age: _____

43. What is your current academic level?

☐ Freshman   ☐ Sophomore ☐ Junior ☐ Senior ☐ Graduate ☐ Other

44) Race:

☐ White/Caucasian   ☐ Black/African-American   ☐ Hispanic/Latino

☐ American Indian   ☐ Asian   ☐ Other

45) Do you consider yourself?

☐ Conservative ☐ Conservative/Independent

☐ Independent ☐ Independent/Liberal ☐ Liberal

46) Marital status:

☐ Single ☐ Married

☐ Separated ☐ Divorced

47) Zip Code _____

Thank you for participating in this study!