Mediating Trust in Terrorism Coverage

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Abstract

Mass mediated risk communication can contribute to perceptions of threats and fear of "others" and/or to

perceptions of trust in fellow citizens and society to overcome problems. This paper outlines a cross-

disciplinary holistic framework for research in mediated trust building during an acute crisis. While the

framework is presented in the context of television coverage of a terror-related crisis situation, it can equally

be used in connection with all other forms of mediated trust.

Key words: National crisis, risk communication, crisis management, television coverage, mediated trust, 911,

rescue operation, audience, journalism, trust.

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By Kirsten Mogensen[i]

Global terrorism as a topic has been on the top of the news agenda since the turn of the century, and

unfortunately we might expect global terrorism to continue to randomly threaten civilians in the next decade.

The World Economic Forum in its 2012 report examines 50 global risks. In a scale from 1-5, 469 experts and

industrial leaders worldwide rated both the likelihood and impact of terror attacks at +3.5 over the next

decade (World Economic Forum 2012: 13, 40). With regard to the risk-situation in general, the World Economic

Forum in its conclusion writes:

> Three common, crosscutting observations emerged from the varied groups of experts consulted
>
> to construct the three cases:
>
> - Decision-makers need to improve understanding of incentives that will improve
>
>   *collaboration* in response to global risks
>
> - *Trust, or lack of trust*, is perceived to be a crucial factor in how risks may manifest
>
>   themselves. In particular, this refers to confidence, or lack thereof, in leaders, in the
>
>   systems which ensure *public safety* and in the tools of communication that are
>
>   revolutionizing how we share and digest information
>
> - Communication and information sharing on risks must be improved by introducing
>
>   greater *transparency* about uncertainty and conveying it to the public in a meaningful
>
>   way (World Economic Forum 2012: 49, *my emphasis*)

Collaboration, trust and transparency are seen as fundamental factors in the effort to handle risks and ensure

public safety, while communication and other forms of information sharing are among the tools. In notes from

a plenary session in the World Economic Forum on January 27, 2012, Evans writes:

> Trust in elected politicians has declined sharply and government has become the least-trusted

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institution in a range of key countries, followed by company chief executives, according to an

authoritative opinion survey. In the Eurozone, 65% of the population does not trust their

governments to tell the truth, the survey showed. At the same time, trust in the media has risen

after a long period in which it was held in low esteem; non-governmental organizations (NGOs)

are collectively the world's most trusted institutions (Evans 2012).

Again we see the emphasis on trust. When people do not trust their government to tell the truth, it might be

based partly on past personal experiences with these leaders, including the experienced consequences of their

policies, and partly on the form and content of mediated information. The topic of this paper is the mediated

information that contributes to a perception of other people – including societal leaders and fellow citizens - as

being trustworthy or not trustworthy. The general trust in other people and public institutions that we refer to

as *social trust* is important for a society to function. In a review of literature, Bakir and Barlow summarize some

of the benefits of social trust, including its ability to hold a society together; facilitate business and other forms

of exchange between citizens; motivate people to engage in political life as well as to contribute to civil society;

and make it possible for democracies to function (2007: 13).

This paper is explorative. It is an attempt to outline a holistic framework for research in *mediated trust building*

in connection with a terror-related crisis situation. Without ignoring the complexity of communication during a

crisis (Greenberg 2002), a simplified mass communication model is used as a point of departure, and when

appropriate, it draws on examples from the 911 coverage on the major television networks in the United

States. While there have unfortunately been numerous terrorist attacks since, the 911 is especially useful for a

case study of this type for a number of reasons that distinguish it from later attacks, incl. it is very well

documented and most of the American citizens were focused on a few news channels (Greenberg 2002), which

create a sense of shared memory. The author has published several studies of the 911 coverage (Mogensen

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2011A, 2011B, 2011C; Mogensen 2010; Mogensen 2008; Mogensen 2007; Mogensen, Lindsay, Li, Perkins & Beardsley 2002), but this paper introduces a new perspective and a framework for further studies of trust in connection with crisis communication in general.

The World Economic Forum writes about social trust in connection with risks, and in scholarly literature social trust is also seen as contrary to uncertainty and fear of others. In understanding social trust, it might be helpful to look at some of the characteristics of a society in a crisis situation and of a society in fear.

National crisis, fear and threats

Terror by its very nature creates fear felt by the people directly affected and by society in general. While hostile soldiers in accordance with the Geneva Conventions must be identifiable, citizens normally do not know who the terrorists are before they act. Following the terror attacks, citizens usually learn about their personal history, and according to media reports, the terrorists' friends and relatives have been equally surprised because the terrorists were known to them as ambitions students (New York 9.11.01), family men(London 7.7.05) or an innocent looking youngster (Oslo 22.7.11). Since the terrorists blend in with the rest of the population before their atrocities and do not show signs of irrational behavior citizens do not know what to look for and therefore do not know whom to trust. Because citizens cannot spot the terrorists before they act, terrorism creates a fear of other people in general. Altheide blames the mass media for contributing to this uncertainty, distrust and fear of fellow citizens:

> When few attacks come from foreigners, we are instructed to be wary of our own citizens who might turn against us (2010 p. 151).

In accordance with terrorism logic, creating fear and social distrust is a main purpose (Spiegel 2002:X; Conboy 2006) because lack of social trust is assumed to lead to a breakdown of the form of society that the terrorists oppose. To avoid a breakdown of societal institutions, the leadership is challenged with the task of conveying a

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feeling of social trust to the public. In short then, what terrorists and societal leadership are fighting over is the cohesiveness of society. Trust can be seen as social glue (see Bakir & Barlow 2007: 13 for references). Remove the glue, and society disintegrates. Referring to Rosenthal et al., 1989, Ansell et al writes:

> We speak of crisis when a threat is perceived against the core values or life-sustaining functions of a social system, which requires urgent remedial action under conditions of deep uncertainty (2010: 196).

Neal in his book "National Trauma & Collective Memory" (1998) writes that national trauma has "disruptive effects" on the "institutional underpinnings of the social order" (1998: xi); feed into "overriding forms of collective fear and anxiety" (1998: x), and "shared values are threatened." Because of the related anger, a "volatile situation frequently develops" and the "discourse throughout the nation is directed towards repair work" (1998: 5). Neal:

> Perceptions of evil reflect the frustrations of human effort and an awareness that one's own sense of morality and decency is not shared by others ….The major task, individually and collectively, is that of integrating the traumatic event into the fabric of social life in order to make it less threatening (1998: 6, 12)

To survive, we as humans will always make assumptions about cause and effect, including assumptions about the behavior of other people. What is lost and needs to be repaired in connection with a terror-related crisis is *trust* on several levels (Neal 1998: 4-5):

- *Trust* in one's ability to foresee the behavior of other people, because such a crisis makes people "uncertain about what they should or ought to believe";

- *Trust* in other people as moral beings, because without such trust people feel vulnerable and personally insecure; they see themselves as "moving into uncharted territory."

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At least since September 11, 2001, words like risk, fear and threat are constantly used by scholars to describe the lack of general trust in society. With reference to well-known intellectuals like Ulrich Beck (2006), Anthony Giddens (1999), Jürgen Habermas (1997) and Niklas Luhman (2008), Nohrstedt writes about decision-making "in situations when decisions have to be made based on uncertain knowledge and when security matters are involved":

> Several leading theorists regard the fundamental problems of decision-making in present day society to be the unforeseen consequences and accompanying challenges of legitimacy and trust …. Particularly with reference to media construction of dangers and risks, the central focus of politics, public debates, cultural concerns, et cetera, seems to have shifted from risk distribution to dissemination and promotion of fear messages and speculative threat scenarios (2010: 10-11).

In the literature, risk communication is usually associated with fear and lack of trust. Altheide:

> The prevailing context of risk communication is fear, or something to be dreaded, avoided or even intervened against in order to keep us safe …. A risk discourse grounded in fear of the future has become more prevalent; particularly fear of uncertain interactions and involvements with 'others' either as foreigners, criminals or terrorists (2010: 147, 155).

For decade media scholars have examined how the media cover risks and threats. Nohrstedt argues that mass media not only report about risks, but that they actively contribute to a sense of uncertainty and distrust in the global society for example because they report about risks as threats, which mean that the media transmit the message that there is someone who deliberately exposes us to a danger (Nohrstedt 2010: 26).

We do not want to accept such threats. We require action from politicians and others, but do not know whom to trust. The mass media question authorities, resulting in skepticism regarding traditional authorities. As

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traditional authorities have lost their truth-monopoly, mass media have filled the gap and have gained increased influence over the public debate, according to Nohrstedt.

Ulrich Beck wrote about the *risk society* and Nohrstedt writes about the *threat society,* which he considers to be a later stage of the risk society. In the threat society, we are not only focused on the risk of natural disasters or scientific and technological development, but in addition we also fear people who are different from us. Mass media create or at least increase this fear of others (Nohrstedt 2010: 11). Five points characterize the political discourse in the threat society according to him:

- Threats and dangers dominate the political rhetoric.

- Political conflicts are increasingly about different priorities between various threats.

- Political changes are driven by worst-case scenarios.

- The dominating threat perceptions replace each other at an increasingly higher pace in the public discourse.

- Political and social identity increasingly takes the shape of a vulnerable and exposed individual who does not dare to trust his/her fellow-citizens (Nohrstedt 2010: 35).

Depending on the coverage, the mass media can impact us so that we become either more fearful or more trusting. Referring to Boin et al (2005), Altheide (2002) and Eide et al (2008), Nohrstedt writes:

> Among both decisions-makers and researchers, it is believed that the media can play it both ways – either escalate fear, animosity and conflict or contribute to trust, de-escalation of fear and conflict resolution (2010: 10)
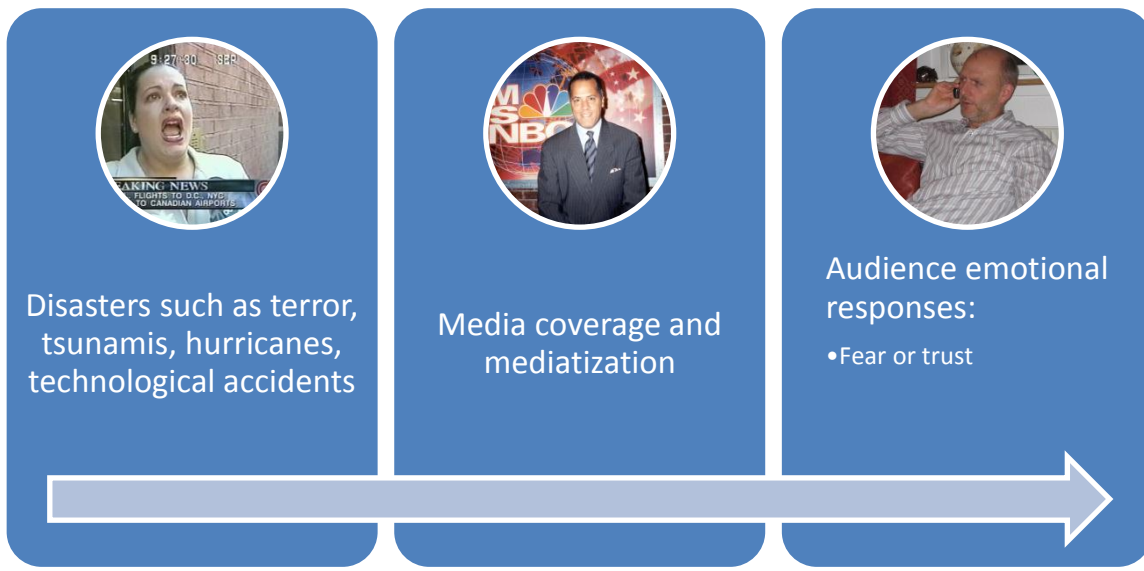
I will illustrate it this way:

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Figure 1 : Most disasters in our time are *unpredictable,* and they cause death, suffering, pain and fear around the world. Media cover the disasters and while doing so they also send coded messages to the audiences as to who are threatening and who can be trusted. The media audiences interpret the media messages and construct their own perceptions of reality. The emotional response might be fear of or trust in the various actors.[ii]

Risk communication moves hand in hand with what Altheide terms "the discourse and the politics of fear" and "the face of fear is expanded surveillance." "All have become more prevalent since the 9/11 attacks on the United States" (Altheide 2010: 152). He also writes that:

> Fear limits our intellectual and moral capacities, it turns us against others, and it changes our behavior and perspective, and makes us vulnerable to those who would control us in order to promote their own agendas ….We monitor and we discipline and punish; but above all, we tell mass mediated stories framed by symbolic manipulators of a society in control and out of control, infused with the discourse of fear (2010: 150, 155).

The public expects government to protect it against criminals, including terrorists, and citizens insist on knowing to what degree the government truly understands the causes of the threats and are able to provide the security. Richards:

> If, as seems likely, anxieties about terrorist threats intensify, we are likely to see an awareness of

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the protective responsibilities of government coming increasingly into the public mind, and

expectations and demands for protection to be stepped up….In order to trust a government to

protect its people against attack, we must trust its capacity to perceive and understand the

source of the attack. This is often a matter of trust in the competence of the government, rather

than trust in its moral integrity, although the two cannot always be cleanly separated, and there

is always a moral dimension (2007: 65, 67).

Richards adds that people do not want to trust leaders who seem to have limited understanding, and that they

will also trust their own responses more, if they are guided by a government they trust (2007: 67). In order to

demonstrate their competency to the public, governments need to communicate through mass media, and

citizens are depending on mass media for the information and explanations that can guide them in their

decisions. In the following, *mass media* is used as a short term for *editorial content* in *news media and other*

media within the field of professional journalism.

Trust

Based on the literature review, it is clear that the disadvantage of the risk-threat-fear reaction to terrorism is

damage to the public's feeling of security, the cohesiveness of society and the collective intelligence. Society as

a whole would probably be better able to respond appropriately if it is possible to convey a sense of social

trust, including a general trust in fellow citizens, government and social institutions. It is assumed that mass

media influence the level of trust and fear among citizens. Richards:

While we will be unable to demonstrate direct causal links between the content of media

discourse and the ambivalence towards government … we know that the media content plays a

crucial role in the dynamics of public opinion, giving shape, focus and confirmatory expression to

powerful forces of public feeling (2007: 68)

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If mass media have a role to play in binding the country together (Carey 2002: 78; Bakir & Barlow 2007: 12) during a crisis, then media professionals need to know the recipe for the glue. While many communication scholars have been engaged in studies of how mass media contribute to the experience of threats and fear in society, fewer have studied how mass media-might contribute to the experience of trust (Bakir & Barlow 2007: 17). However, a growing community of scholars from different disciplines is interested in trust research. The following literature review is cross disciplinary and elements have previously been presented in a working paper (Mogensen 2011D).

Basic trust can be developed in the relationship between a newborn baby and its caretaker (Erikson 1993). However, in connection with a terror-related crisis, risk is the point of departure and therefore also a foundation for trust. When a person (A) does not know for sure how another person (B) will reach, A can chose to trust B or not to trust B. If A choses to trust B, then A faces a risk. As a constructed example, remember one of the men whom television showed running away from the towers on September 11, 2001. He is hurt and can hardly breathe because the cloud of dust seems to be right behind him all the time. As he runs, he sees a fast-food shop and tries to get in, but the woman inside fears that if she opens the door, the dust cloud will enter her shop and maybe suffocate her. He might trust that she will help because he himself would have felt a moral obligation to help in that situation and he expects fellow citizens to share his norms for moral behavior. The woman might indeed open the door and help him, but she might-conversely leave him to die, let him in just to steal his belongings or accuse him of crimes. She is also taking a risk if she opens the door because the dust cloud might enter, or the man might turn out to be a criminal.

People are facing similar risks when they listen to advice from public institutions and mass media. As a documented example, some people were trapped on the 86th floor in the North Tower. Sports anchor Janib Abreu, WABC-TV, New York, called one of them, Jim Gartenberg, and asked him if he would talk to ABC News

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anchors live on the air. He accepted and "sounded brave and composed" on the air, while 15 minutes later he

was suffocating (Spiegel 2002: 89, 94). Later Abreu wrote:

> He asked me what he needed to do. I couldn't fathom what he was going through. I couldn't
>
> relate to it. He sounded scared to me. He said he was on the eighty-sixth floor. I told him he
>
> would be okay, that help was coming. I was scared....I should have just told Jim to run like hell
>
> (Gilbert et al 2002: 27).

Correct information can be lifesaving while wrong information may cause death, especially in a disaster

situation. When people choose to trust another person, it is a future-oriented judgment in which the judge has

a stake, according to Vanacker & Belmas:

> Trust, then, is linked to risk. The higher the stakes are, the harder it is to earn trust (2009:113).

From a phenomenological point of view, there are at least two moral agents involved in a trust exchange:

trustor and the trustee. The trustor is the one who is faced with the problem of whether or not to trust. The
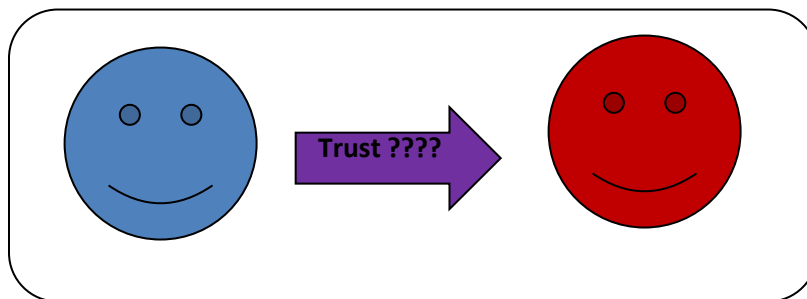
trustee is the person being evaluated.

Figure 2. The blue face is a symbol of the trustor. He evaluates the red face and decides whether or not to trust him. The red face is termed trustee.

Trust is expressed toward another moral agent as an indented action as when a man on the 86th floor chose to

trust a journalist. Trust is always relational (Clayman 2010: 255; referring to Gilson, 2003), and it cannot apply

to the information provided but only to the messenger. It is the trustee's morality and competency that the

trustor evaluates. Even the most competent person with high moral standards can convey wrong information,

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as was the case with information given to the people on 86th floor. While the consequences were awful, they do not discredit the messenger's morality because he had good reasons to believe that the information was correct, but, as it turned out, he did not have full understanding of the situation and should not have been trusted. Vanacker & Belmas:

> Trust is always put in another moral agent, a person or institution that can validate or invalidate that trust (2009: 117).

Trust then is the result of trustor's judgment of whether or not to believe that the trustee will "fulfill certain expectations in the future" Vanacker & Belmas (2009:112). Trustors can never be certain, because if they knew for sure, there would be no need for trust. For that same reason, trust "cannot be said to be true or false"(Vanacker & Belmas 2009:111), and we cannot use the term trust to describe impartial evaluations. Trustors shows their intent to trust, for example when they buy a newspaper or watch television news to get relevant, correct information about public affairs. Vanacker & Belmas write:

> Intent in the sense of purposefully engaging in a relationship is crucial to a conception of trust between media and audience (2009:115)

Using methodology known from grounded theory, Meredith et al. (2007: 221) identified six components of trust mentioned by 75 African-Americans in Los Angeles during focus group discussions:

- fiduciary responsibility, defined as a relationship in which someone (the fiduciary) acts in the capacity of another's rights, assets, or well-being;

- honesty, defined as perceived truthfulness and sincerity;

- competency, defined as being perceived as well-qualified to perform an act;

- consistency, defined as uniformity and agreement among messages;

- faith, defined as any mention of faith or similar words; and

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- other: for trust-related passages that did not fit into the other categories.

Vanacker & Belmas (2009:114) distinguish between four different types of paradigms with different sources of trust:

- Caring relationships (norms and values)

- Solidarity (norms and values)

- Economic calculation (self-interest)

- Repeated exposure (tested)

In caring relationships, we regard trust as a value and will feel betrayed if we cannot trust, for example, a family member. Similarly, communities can have a sense of solidarity, where shared norms and values are the source of trust. Referring to American sociologist Talcott Parsons, Vanacker & Belmas write:

> Trust … refers to the state of having one's own interest vested in someone else's interest. It assumes that the trusted, especially when this trusted is in a position of power, will meet his obligation and exercise responsibility (2009: 116)

We see this exercised in many situations in real-life, such as when emergency workers enter a burning tower knowing that they may be in personal danger and when journalists run toward the disaster area while others are running away. (For an introduction to the concept of social norms, see ,for example, Alf Ross 1968. For a description of Ross' concept of norms applied to 911coverage see Mogensen 2011 A, C; 2010). Within the economic paradigm, trust usually only emerges when the relationship or exchange is of mutual benefit. In the literature, there is some discussion as to whether or not it is correct to call it *trust* when a calculative, rational element is involved, and during a disaster, we certainly expect emergency workers and fellow citizens to help even if it is not in their own interests.

Trust may be *narrow-scope*, as when a citizen trusts a specific reporter or anchor but does not trust television

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news in general, or it might be *broad-scope* in the sense that the citizen in general trusts news media as institutions with certain moral standards and tasks to fulfill (Grayson et al 2008: 242-43; Vanacker & Belmas 2009: 120). Trust in systems is seen as a value from an economic perspective because it saves energy; e.g., if a man trapped in the North Tower is called by a journalist from his favorite television station and asked to share information, he might choose to do so even if he does not know the calling journalist. Repeated interaction with another individual or institution makes it easier to make a judgment and might instill trust (Adler 2001, Vanacker & Belmas 2009: 116); however, experience might as well create distrust that can be difficult to overcome (Meredith et al. 2007: 218 and 224), and such distrust might be harmful in a disaster situation where people need to cooperate.

Mehta writes about mass media as guardians of trust in a time of crisis (2007: 155ff). The idea is that public leaders and institutions are agents that society have chosen to fulfill certain roles, and citizens trust that they do what they are supposed to do; e.g., society has chosen airport security to check luggage in order to prevent terrorism attacks. In a crisis situation media will let the public know what the roles imply and comment on them if they do not fulfill their obligations; e.g., media questioned the security system at Boston's Logan International Airport from which the high jacked flights departed on 911. By doing so, the media serve as guardians of the trust that the public places in the agents. Mehta studied a policy crisis in Australia and wrote:

> [T]he framing of mass mediated exchanges is the basis of mass media's role as a guardian of trust …Focusing on the need to overcome vulnerability and risk in principal-agent relationships, the findings showed that through reporting and questioning of an agent's roles and subsequent changes to these roles, the mass media acted as guardian of trust to meet the needs of the principals … In principal-agency relationships, this study has shown how the mass media indirectly guards trust in times of crisis (2007: 159, 163, 165).

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Trust-based processes in crisis coverage

Considering the high stakes for trust during a disaster, it is difficult for media to build social trust, and in the overall process of creating the media content there are several places where it can go wrong. We know about some of these hotspots from the different professions involved. Rescue workers discuss how media should be treated at the disaster area where they might be in the way while at the same time they acknowledge the need for informing the public. Emergency mangers discuss how much information the public should have and at what speed. Journalists discuss how to get access and how to treat victims. Editors discuss ethical questions related to the broadcast, and producers discuss the format. These discussions are reflected in the scholarly literature, but the discussions take place in different journals and trade magazines. They are too seldom integrated, but are linked as shown in the following figure 3:

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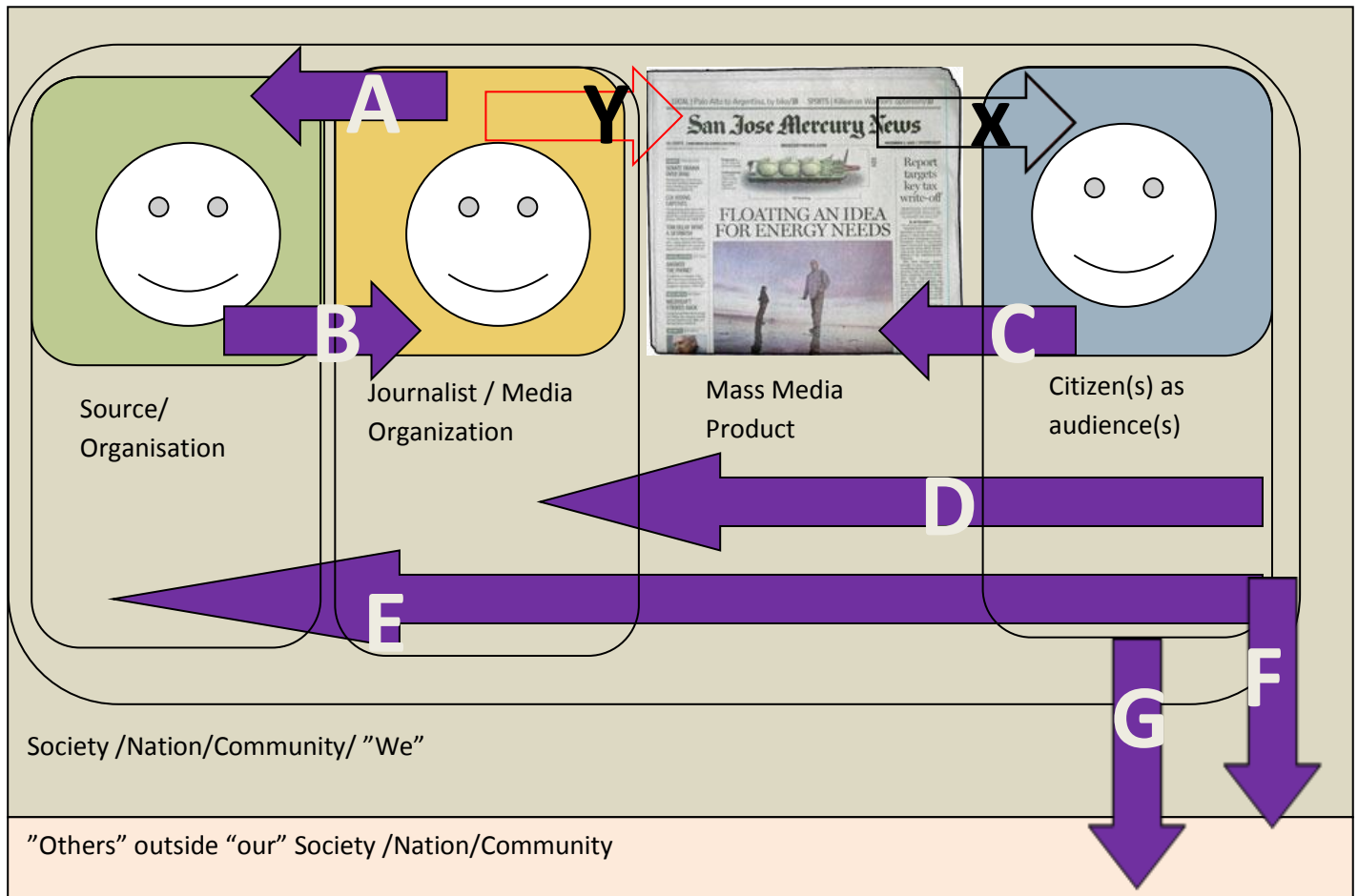
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Figure 3: Some trust-based relationships that media professionals are involved in. The purple arrows (A-F) indicate the trust. The transparent arrows (Y and X) indicate the process of encoding the trust-based information into a medium like a newspaper and the readers decoding it.

A: Journalist trusting individual source and organization

While ordinarily professional journalists in the United States and other liberal democracies might cover a wide variety of opinions, "even views they find repugnant" (SPJ Code 2012), at least during the first 24 hours following a major terror attack, they may limit themselves to sources that they trust will convey a message of trust in fellow citizens and community leadership (Mogensen 2007; Mogensen 2011). In live coverage and interviews this implies at least three signs of trust:

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- The process: The journalist faces a risk when handing the microphone to a source, because even if the source is carefully chosen and established as reliable, the journalist cannot be sure that in this critical moment the source will not use the opportunity to send a message of distrust.

- The expressed message: This contains the message of social trust created through a combination of words/sounds and visuals.

- The implied message: By handing the microphone to the source, the journalist signals to the public that the source is trustworthy unless otherwise indicated.

B: Source trusting individual journalist and media organization

It is obvious from crisis-management literature that emergency-response teams have ambivalent feelings about the presence of media professionals on sites of disasters. On one hand, they are usually aware that the public needs information and that mass media are essential in conveying a sense of social trust to the public. On the other hand, they find that media professionals are in their way that interviews take time away from rescue work and that reporting tends to focus on the sensational or on misconduct in the rescue operation, which create distrust in the crisis management and that may contribute to social distrust and unrest. Again, this implies at least three signs of trust:

- The process: The source faces a risk when letting a journalist into an emergency ground. Even if the journalist is known to be serious and trustworthy, the source cannot be sure that in this critical moment the journalist will not use the opportunity to send a message of distrust.

- The expressed message: The source might say something meant to convey trust in social institutions and fellow citizens, but he is faced with a risk because he does not know how the journalist will cut it and in what context it will be published or broadcast.

- The implied message: When a source decides to trust a journalist with access and interview, he also sends a signal of social trust to the public. The implied messages are 1) that the source can be trusted

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because he is transparent, he is not hiding anything except in cases where it is clearly stated and explained; 2) that the source trusts the journalist and recognizes the importance of mass media in distributing information during a terror-related crisis; 3) that he understands the need of the public for a full, timely, trustworthy account of what is happening and trusts that the public receiving that information will react rationally.

C. Citizens trusting media product

During a terror-related crisis or any disaster, the citizens, for very good reasons , feel that their lives are in danger, which makes it more risky to trust, but because of the situation they are forced to either trust or fear. Neal writes that a national crisis commands the attention of all members of society:

> The social fabric is under attack, and people pay attention because the consequences appear to be so great that they cannot be ignored. Holding an attitude of benign neglect or cynical indifference is not a reasonable option (1999: 10)

When a citizen choses to seek information about a disaster from a specific media product, he is showing intent to trust that news outlet. By doing so the citizen is taking a risk. Even if he chooses the media outlet that he usually finds trustworthy, it may not meet his expectations at a time when he is in a crisis mode. Audience behavior is monitored on a routine basis for commercial reasons, but special studies are done in connection with coverage of disasters such as the one created by the terror attacks on September 11, 2001 (Greenberg 2002; Izard and Perkins 2011). In short, American citizens turned to the live coverage on the largest television networks, ABC, NBC, CBS, CNN and Fox News. They watched for many hours, found the coverage very disturbing but believed that it was accurate and relatively few had complains. IN this case the expectations of the citizens were met to a degree that many journalists and intellectuals later considered as one of journalism's finest hours. "It was to meet the needs of those in their audience," wrote Izard & Perkins

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(2011: 12).

Individual members of the audience have different relationships to the circumstances surrounding the disaster plus different life experiences, interests, opinions, networks, and psychological characteristics that influence how they perceive and react to the mediated communication. Jackob:

> It is likely, for instance, that political interest or political participation as well as trust in political or societal institutions is associated with trust in the media and/or with the use of alternative information sources. Individuals with high levels of political efficacy or engagement may be somewhat skeptical (…) Furthermore, trust in the media, media dependency, and the use of non-media sources may differ according to psychological characteristics, such as individual persuasiveness, need for cognition, and the willingness to trust (2010: 601)

An audience member obviously expects accurate information, but during a crisis citizens do not only expect media to provide correct information. We know from the audience studies after September 11, 2001, that American television viewers also trusted that journalists would provide, for example, timely information brought to them in a comprehensible form and with not too shocking visuals. Vanacker & Belmas writes that the two terms *credibility* and *trust* are not interchangeable:

> Credibility refers to one of the expectations we have of news media, to be accurate in their reporting; or, if one wishes to broaden the scope of the concept, to report truthfully (2009:116).

Trust in media implies an assumption that they understand the audience's needs and try to meet them even if that requires that the media professionals adapt their normal routines and professional standards (Mogensen 2008). In doing so, they might contribute to a sense of social trust because citizens experience that their own moral standards are reflected in the media.

Although the American public generally was satisfied with the coverage on September 11, 2001, the Japanese

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public seems to have been disappointed with the coverage of the off-shore earthquake in March 2011 and the following meltdown of the Fukushima power plant because the public lost trust in media as well as government (Edelman 2012).

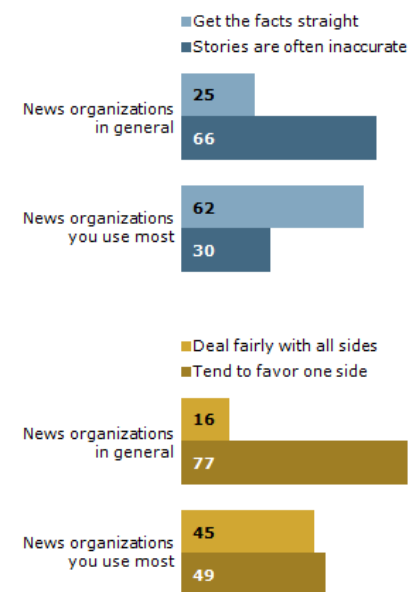## D: Citizens trusting individual journalist and media organization

Several studies show that in general journalists and media organizations score low in trust (Edelman 2012; Pew 2011). This is a fundamental problem for the profession. Vanacker & Belmas:

> Media professionals often argue that without audience's trust they have no reason for being. If this is the case, trust for news media is not merely a lubricant to make its interactions with audiences go smoother, but it is also constitutive to the relationship with readers (2009: 115).

Unfortunately, people have not only lost trust in new organizations. They have lost trust in business and government representatives as well (Edelman 2012). Faced with a number of seemingly unreliable sources, most people still chose news media as main source of information. Pew Research Center in a 2011 report writes:

Public Offers Better Evaluations of the News Sources They Use Most

■ Get the facts straight
■ Stories are often inaccurate

News organizations in general: 25 / 66
News organizations you use most: 62 / 30

■ Deal fairly with all sides
■ Tend to favor one side

News organizations in general: 16 / 77
News organizations you use most: 45 / 49

PEW RESEARCH CENTER July 20-24, 2011. Q38, Q39 and July 21-24, 2011. PEW4, PEW5.

> Negative opinions about the performance of news organizations now equal or surpass all-time highs on nine of 12 core measures the Pew Research Center has been tracking since 1985. However, these bleak findings are put into some perspective by the fact that news organizations are more trusted sources of information than are many other institutions, including government and business.

People also evaluate some media institutions as more trustworthy than others. As an example, BBC, public

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broadcasting companies and elite newspapers are usually seen as more trustworthy than tabloid newspapers and local talk radio (Kellner 2010; Burson Marsteller 2011), but it varies across the globe (Bakir & Barlow: 6). People tend to give higher marks to media they use (Pew 2011), so the individual citizen has his or her own preferences and often uses a combination of media sources rather than trusting one medium to provide the full picture.

Citizens might evaluate some individual journalists as more trustworthy than others. As an example, anchors may over time gain the trust of their audience. For that reason, in a crisis stituation like September 11, 2001, American television managers chose anchors that they throught were trusted by the public and were able to meet the special needs of an audience in a crisis mode(Mogensen 2011A).

E: Citizen trusting individual source and organization

The messenger is important for the evaluation process. Referring to Covello, Meredith et al. writes:

> The literature on trust and credibility suggests that effective communication depends on whether the message recipient perceives the message source as trustworthy and believable (2007: 221).

Many studies of trust in media also measure trust in different types of spokespersons, such as the ones representing government, NGO and business (Edelman 2012; Pew 2011; Kellner 2012). Media users evaluate sources. If they chose to trust a source, they are taking a risk, especially in a crisis situation where they are on alert. So they look for cues (Jakob 2010: 593). One cue is that the source is credible, but the audience will also look for other cues, such as expertise and shared norms (Edelman 2012).

F: Citizens trusting own community

As already mentioned, during a terror-related crisis many people are scared because they have lost trust in their own abilities to foresee the behavior of other people and see other people as moral beings. It is difficult

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to function in a society where there is no trust, so trust has to be restored. Citizens turn to mass media for

information that might serve as guidance. People make their own judgment of the content of mass media, so

media cannot force people to trust fellow citizens and society leaders. But studies have shown that media can

influence the public agenda, and that is especially true in a crisis situation where a nation of fearful people rely

on a few national media, as in the United States on September 11, 2001 (Greenberg 2002).

According to agenda-setting theory, media can put issues - such as the issue "rescue workers" on the agenda,

which means that people – if they accept the agenda – will discuss the behavior of rescue workers. Through

their reporting, media can also emphasize certain attributes, such as bravery and helpfulness or incompetence,

and they can impact the public evaluation of these attributes as positive, negative, or neutral. In an

introduction to an international agenda-setting study of companies, Carroll suggests that there may be an:

> […] impact of firm's media favorability on the public's images of or esteem for such firms. A
>
> firm's public esteem is the degree to which the public likes, trusts, admires, and respects it.
>
> Without a base level of trust, admiration, and respect, individuals lack sufficient incentives to
>
> consider having a relationship with an organization … (Carroll 2011: 4).

In the above-mentioned study the results were mixed, but support was found in the United States (Carroll

2011: 429), and obviously general trust in media around the globe reflects the results. What is of interest here

is that trusted mass media during a crisis where people are vulnerable and fearful (Greenberg 2002) and core

values or life-sustaining functions of a social system are perceived as threatened (Neal 1998) have a unique

opportunity to redefine the public image of fellow citizens and societal leadership. In a trust perspective it

makes a lot of difference whether, for example, television shows footage of people helping fellow citizens or

they show footage of people looting and fighting. Both frames were available to the television producers in

New York on September 11, 2001, but the five top networks chose to show the first type and avoided the

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second (Mogensen 2011), thereby helping to create social trust.

G: Citizens trusting "others"

Just as media help create an image of fellow citizens and societal leadership, they also help create an image of other people. While, for example, CNN chose American sources with mainstream opinions, they showed a much wider variation of voices from abroad – from Palestinians who celebrated the terror attacks to political friends and allies of the United States around the globe (Mogensen 2007). Since the public has limited direct experience with people in faraway countries, they have to rely more heavily on the image provided by the media. A concern here is that there may be created stereotypes of people from other countries. Stereotypes can be understood as:

> […] a form of shorthand, reducing the complexity of an individual, group or situation to a familiar
>
> and quickly understood and defining set of attributes (Long & Wall 2009: 83)

In a terror-related crisis situation where everything seems a chaos and the enemy difficult to identify, it may be especially tempting to use shorthand in an effort to cope, but the danger is that it can result in violence and, if so, threaten democracy. For that reason, professional journalists try to avoid stereotypes (SPJ 2012; Mogensen 2011C).

Y: Journalists encoding "trust" in the text

As is the case with all other forms of text, mass media content is created by the writers, editors and producers through a combination of signs and symbols. In the case of television, this includes a selection of visuals and verbal statements. Richards writes about *micromessages,* which are statements taken from political speeches and interviews and edited so that they last ONLY a few seconds. Journalists call them *soundbites, and* they are used in most pre-edited news stories, while less so in live coverage. Richards:

> They may sometimes seem simplistic or uninformative, but individually and cumulatively they

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can have major impact … they are targeted to colonize key locations in our mental maps of the

world … trust is continually maintained, or eroded, through the communication and reception of

such micromessages. While there may be particularly momentous public events which have

substantial impact on levels of trust, these occur in the context of a continuous flow of small,

compressed messages (2007: 70)

To combine the different elements into a coherent message is the art and craft of professional communicators

and their toolbox is too large to unpack in this paper, but as examples trust can be signaled these ways:

- Since *moral consensus* seems to be an important element of trust, media can reflect norms expected to

  be shared by the audience and frame issues in the light of shared ethical values; e.g., in the 911 coverage

  the main television networks reminded people that backlash against American Muslims was not

  accepted, and they also focused on the way Americans helped one another.

- Since vulnerability is always present when we trust, media professionals can signal that they respect the

  audience *by choosing a tone that matches* the emotional state and mental competences of the target

  group; e.g., in the 911 coverage producers chose not to show people ~~in~~ on fire or hitting the ground after

  jumping from the top of the towers (emotional) while they did broadcast analyses and discussions about

  the possible reasons for the attacks (mental competence).

- A *narrative that defines roles*; e.g., the 911 coverage generally portrayed fellow citizens, societal leaders

  and rescue workers as trustworthy, caring, and united.

- As guardians of trust, media *frame* content so that it reminds the public what can be expected of officials

  and make it clear if these expectations have not been met in terms of competence, ethical standards and

  transparency; e.g., journalists questioned the competences of FBI, CIA and airport security in Boston.

- *Transparency* regarding the work conditions for media people and the credibility of the information

  provided by the mass media; e.g., on 911 anchors and reporters constantly reminded the audience that it

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was difficult to obtain information and that they were not sure about the facts.

- *Trust markers* such as small words indicating to what degree the communicator trusts the source or the information.
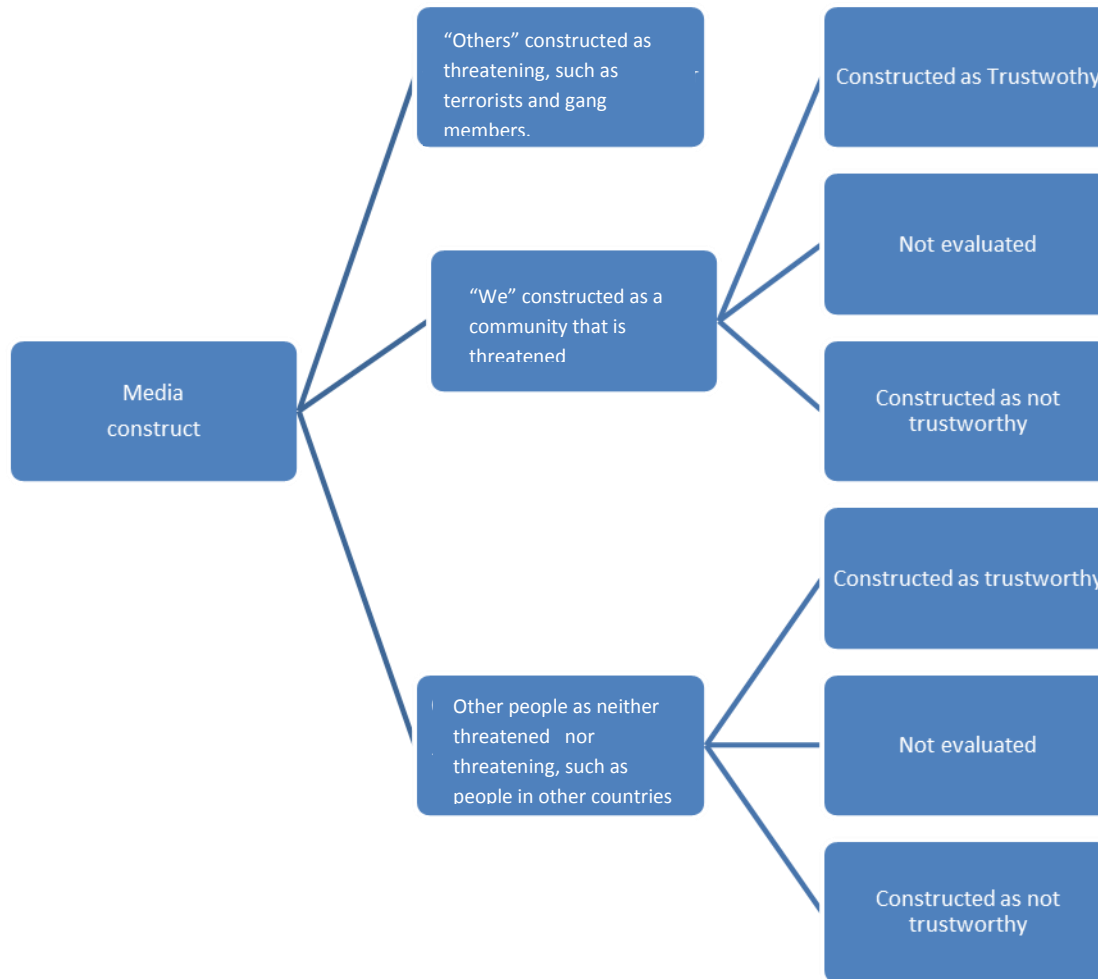

Figure 4: When covering a disaster, media can tell a story that places the different actors in the classic roles known from storytelling around the world: "we" live in an imagined community and somebody is threatening us. Within the community, some people can be trusted, while others might for many reasons such as love, money and fear chose to collaborate with the aggressor. Around us are other people who are not part of the conflict, such as people in other places of the world. Some of them support us, and others support the aggressor.

X: Audience decoding "trust" from the text

As others have pointed out, there is a need for a better understanding of how the less informed interpret

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"communication of terrorist risk, especially from mediated information" (Harrison et al. 2008: 381).

The most common way to talk about mass communication in our culture is as a process in which a source sends a message to a receiver though a medium. As an example, a message is passed from an anchor at a news program (encoder) to the viewers (decoder) through television. In line with this thinking, there are different models known as "Code model" or "transmission," and linguists talk about the "conduit metaphor" (Harrison et al. 2008). The simple models have been criticized for not taking into consideration a number of factors, but they are still useful for many purposes. Harrison et al. interviewed television viewers in order to understand how laypeople receive messages related to terror. The researchers noticed that their informants referred to the coverage as if it were an interpersonal relationship where a message was sent from a source to the public but might get distorted or somehow manipulated resulting in distrust.

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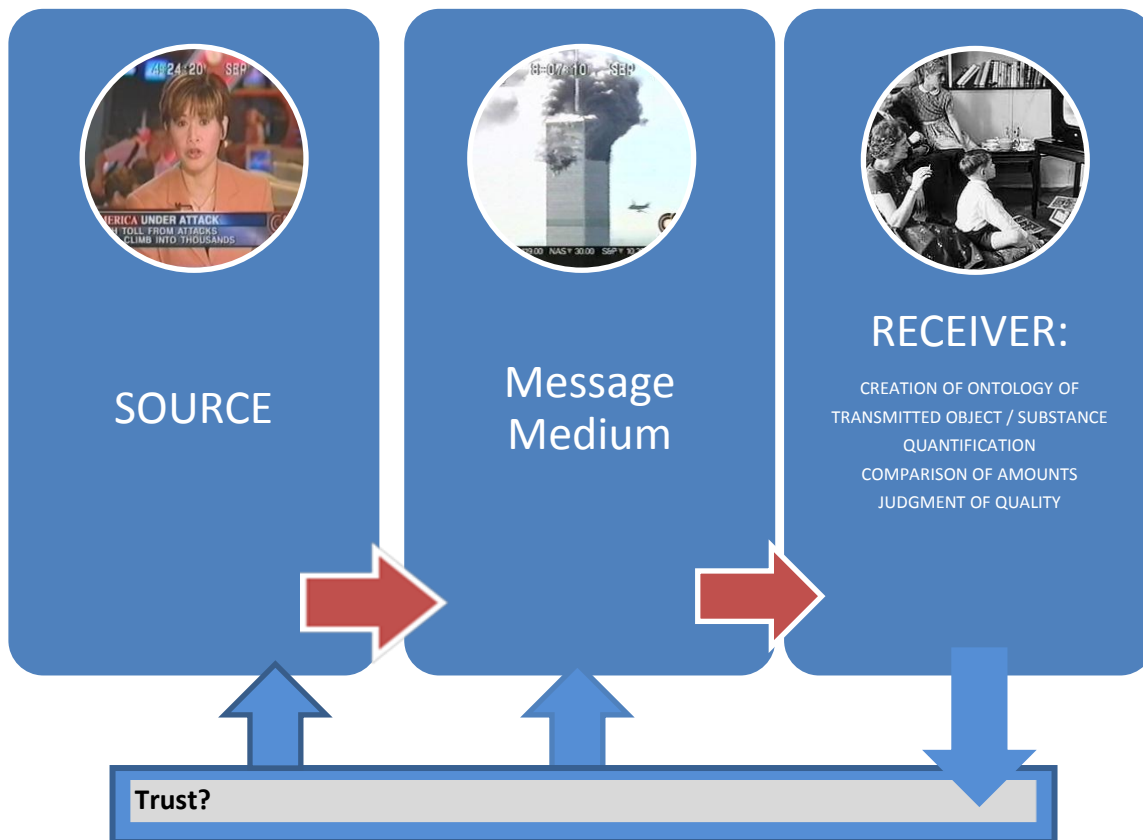
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Figure 5: This is how audience in a study by Harrison et al. (2008) talked about the transfer of information. The figure is my visualization of the main idea: According to the conduit metaphor, information is seen as objects travel from one "container" to another. That is from the source to the receiver. The receiver evaluates the information, and lack of trust may relate to the source and / or to the information. In the figure, this feedback from the receiver is illustrated with the grey line in AT the bottom. "[I]ntent and trust are inferred too, passed back along the conduit, suggesting an interactive relationship of objects. This response is speaker's representation and does not mean a personal interaction with the media source itself." (Harrison et al. 2008 p. 383. See Harrison et al. (p. 383) for the original figure.[iii]

Harrison et al:

> Frewer (2003) suggests that ''the extent to which people trust or distrust risk managers may
>
> determine how people process risk information'' (p. 124). We would suggest that, from this
>
> analysis, the opposite could also be the case, namely that the extent to which people
>
> understand or express communication as ''information transfer'' may determine how people
>
> trust the perceived source of risk information. (2008 p. 391)

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Audience is made up of many individuals with different information needs, and, especially during a crisis, each audience member will focus on that specific information. The following three testimonies are illustrative of the different roles that mediated information can play and also of the importance of trustworthy information:

1. Richard Clarke, National Coordinator for Security, Infrastructure Protection, and Counterterrorism and the U.S. "crisis manager" on 911, describes how the government set up a video conference in the Situation Room of the White House and then:

   > The television screen in the upper left was running CNN on mute. Noticing the President coming on, Lisa turned on the volume and the crisis conference halted to listen (Clark 2004:6).

2. Retired firefighter Dennis Smith volunteered to help with the rescue operation and later wrote a book about it:

   > At 9:03 I arrived home to find my wife, Katrina, staring in shock at the television. Another plane had just gone into the South Tower. The second crash leaves no doubt that we have been attacked, so many thoughts begin to flow through my mind. This is no accident. As every American must be doing at this moment, I wonder: *Who would do this? Who could pull off something this horrendous?* ... I can see now on television just how much fire is coming out of the buildings … I am attached to the television as if every friend I ever had is about to cross the screen (Smith 2002: 4, 6).

3. On the 86th floor of the tower, Jim Gartenberg had company of a co-worker Patricia Puma. She talked on the phone with her husband, and he had the television turned on. He later told Spiegel:

   > He saw the fireball burst out of the second tower. Over and over again, the TV reran footage of the impact…He told her again that she should get out. She said that Gartenberg had checked the emergency exits, and they were blocked. He begged her to try anyway. He didn't think it was a

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good idea simply to wait. What he saw on the screen looked very dangerous (Spiegel 2002: 88)

She did not make it out.

Final remarks

In this paper I argue that research in mediated trust will benefit from a holistic approach to the communication process and sense making involved. This does not imply that there cannot be specialized fields in the trust communication research, but when studying the parts, it is important to keep the whole trust communication process in mind.

We can reference medical research. The health of a human depends on the working of many different parts, but also in the interaction among those parts. A medical researcher might study brain cells, but he needs to take into consideration that the brain cells are parts of a living organism called a body and that the life of the brain cells depends on the work of other organs such as heart and lungs. A brain cannot fully be understood outside the context of a whole body. Similarly, research might focus on audience reception, information campaigns or media texts, but such specialized fields cannot be fully understood if they are studied as isolated phenomena because mediated trust building is a living network of many interlinked situations in which a trustee expresses him- or herself with the intent to be trusted, and a trustor evaluate the cues provided by the trustee, makes a judgment and shows an intent to trust. It happens all the time.

Some of the research specialties within this holistic approach to mediated trust are more developed, have received more resources and have published more than other fields. As examples, we have a large body of research in audiences' use and gratification and in textual analyses, while we have relatively little insight in "how mass mediated trust differs from other forms of trust relationships" (Bakir & Barlow 2007: 213) and in the actual coding of mediated trust. These are fields that we need to develop if we will truly understand how mass media can contribute to social trust. While the framework in this paper has been presented in the context

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of television coverage of a terror-related crisis situation, it can equally be used in connection with all other

forms of mediated trust.

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[i] I sincerely would like to express my gratitude to the three anonymous reviewers for their most encouraging reviews and to journalist Ronald L. Snipes for editing my paper. Further, I want to express my thanks to my colleagues in two research networks relevant for this paper: the September 11 research group at Manship School of Mass Communication, LSU, and the Nordic Research Network on Trust within and between Organizations. Finally, I owe journalists who covered the event on September 11, 2001, for ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN; MSNBC and FOX News and later shared their insight from that coverage with the September 11 research group at LSU all my thanks.

[ii] The first picture is a screen shot. The other two pictures are private photos both of them taken by me. In the middle is seen MSNBC Anchor Lester Holt. This picture was taken during a research interview in New Jersey, March 7, 2002.

[iii] The first two illustrations of the television broadcast are screenshots. The illustration used for audience is photo by Paul Townsend licensed through Creative Commons: http://www.wylio.com/credits/Flickr/4934882110

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