

CONSIDERATIONS FOR REPORTING ON TERRORISM, VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND CRISIS EVENTS

This guidance note has been prepared by the BSA in consultation with broadcasters to highlight the key considerations for broadcasters when reporting on terrorism, violent extremism and crisis events.

When reporting on such events consider the following:

Extremist Messaging

- » Images are at the core of terrorist acts. Strike a balance between duty to inform and the need to avoid being used as a vehicle for hateful, ultraviolent propaganda.
- » Extremist groups are strategic in communication and messaging – are there visual or sound cues, cultural or extremist references or instructional messages that need to be edited (a particular risk with footage sourced from the terrorist)?
- » Will the content promote and glorify the attacker/terrorist and their method, message and actions?
- » Are there first person clips, putting viewers in shoes of the attacker, which may glamorise violence and dehumanise victims?
- » Have the original messages and images been amplified (eg by the inclusion of subtitles making clear the attacker's words)?
- » Minimise focus on individual motivations and personal psychology of the terrorist.
- » Does the content inappropriately defer to the extremist's chosen language, explanations or justifications?
- » Could the content incite or encourage violence, or promote serious anti-social and illegal behaviour, in the form of terrorist activity?
- » Would susceptible viewers be encouraged in extremist views by what they see and hear?
- » Content that may not be justified in the public interest, regardless of steps taken to protect audiences may include:
 - footage that includes the attacker's first person view – resulting in viewers watching the attack through the attacker's perspective
 - references to popular extremist memes which may be presented as intentional cues or flags
 - instructional elements of the attacker's words or messages – including any self-assessment of the attacker's own performance and his weaponry.

*"[I]mages are at the core of terrorist acts, with social media networks in particular providing new ways for terrorist groups to disseminate their messages or stage their violent actions. **The critical issue for broadcast media is knowing how to '...strike a balance between [the] duty to inform the public... and the need to avoid being used as a vehicle for hateful, ultraviolent propaganda'.***

[NT and Television New Zealand Ltd, Decision No. 2019-028 at \[70\]](#)

Public Interest – Harm to Viewers

- » Exercise care and discretion in carefully balancing the obligation to report accurate and timely information to the public.
- » What is necessary to give the public a sufficiently comprehensive (and not unduly sanitised or overly sensationalised) account of what happened to enable them to understand the scale and significance of what has taken place?
- » Will repetition, intensity and disturbing nature of the clips go beyond what is necessary to keep viewers informed?
- » Is the degree of potential harm greater than the public interest in the content itself?
- » Are the images of attempted killing, or disturbing and alarming images of injury appropriate?
- » Are the violent images gratuitous or sensationalised?
- » Will the content cause significant distress to the audience, family and friends of victims?
- » Will the content impact viewers who may be harmed by disturbing content and viewers who may be susceptible to being encouraged by the promotional nature of the alleged attacker’s actions, personal footage, signs, words, methods and message.
- » Has any violence or distressing content been appropriately signposted?
- » Be mindful of explicit graphic or violent content
- » Keep a sense of proportion – too much information can cause as much anxiety as too little.

- » Can potential harm be mitigated by warnings (repeated) or sign-posting (enabling viewers to choose not to watch), editing, blurring?
- » If pass through content, should it be removed from air (should it be shown at all)?
- » What is the impact on the local audience, what is the impact if the content is shifted to online platforms?

Timing

- » Balance first footage advantage with not being caught in terrorist propaganda.
- » Before re-using content in ongoing or follow up coverage, take advantage of the additional time available to review it against the above guidelines.

Further guidance regarding reporting on terrorism (including post event analysis and trial reporting) can be found in the BSA’s [Resource for Broadcasters after 15 March Attacks](#).

Relevant BSA Decisions

- » [UJ and SKY Network Television Ltd](#), Decision No. 2019-030
- » [Grant & Phillips and Television New Zealand Ltd](#), Decision No. 2019-013
- » [NT and Television New Zealand Ltd](#), Decision No. 2019-028

“... showing the clips from the alleged attacker’s livestream footage had the **potential to further the alleged attacker’s propaganda purposes of glorifying** his own actions and **inciting or encouraging violence**. In our view the broadcaster should have been more cognisant of this risk and taken appropriate action to take this content off air, or to ... remove disturbing content from the feed.

“... be mindful of the potential impact [the] broadcast could have, not only on **viewers who might be harmed** by the disturbing content, but also the impact on **susceptible viewers who might be encouraged** by the **promotional nature** of the alleged attacker’s livestream video.”

[UJ and SKY Network Television Ltd](#), Decision No. 2019-030 at [86]