



Tweeting situational awareness during the Sydney siege

Benjamin Archie

To cite this article: Benjamin Archie (2016) Tweeting situational awareness during the Sydney siege, *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism*, 11:1, 14-29, DOI: [10.1080/18335330.2016.1161223](https://doi.org/10.1080/18335330.2016.1161223)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/18335330.2016.1161223>



Published online: 25 Apr 2016.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 221



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Tweeting situational awareness during the Sydney siege

Benjamin Archie

Politics and International Relations, Newcastle Business School, University of Newcastle, Callaghan, Australia

ABSTRACT

This article seeks to investigate the way in which social media can affect terrorist events. Using the 2014 Sydney siege as its primary focus, it will argue that the public's social media activity, particularly the capacity to engage in 'reporting' of live events as they occur, can shift the tactical advantage from counterterrorism officials to the perpetrator. Situational awareness theory will be used to analyse how the public's Twitter activity during the event had the capacity to enhance the perpetrator's decision-making and therefore his overall capacity to execute the attack. The article will analyse the *Martin Place Siege Joint Commonwealth—New South Wales Review*, particularly, Chapter 10, Public Communication. The Review had shortcomings in terms of its failure to fully analyse the role of social media during the Sydney siege and the way in which it impacted upon events. The article therefore seeks to highlight the need for law enforcement and government agencies to take into account developments within social media, which have added a new dimension to terrorist activity. Failure to take account of these developments will diminish the capacity of law enforcement and government to respond effectively to similar events in the future.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 22 July 2015
Accepted 3 January 2016

KEYWORDS

Sydney siege; terrorism;
twitter

Introduction

The Sydney Lindt Café siege played out across the nation's television screens on 15 December 2014. The event captured the attention of the nation as a lone gunman, Man Haron Monis, held 18 café customers and staff hostage for 17 hours as police sought to negotiate from the outside. Hostages being forced to press an Islamic *Shahada* flag to the window of the café, in full news of television cameras in the Channel Seven headquarters on the other side of Martin Place, immediately linked the event, in the public mind, to ongoing issues of Islamic terrorism in the wider world.

This article seeks to investigate the way in which social media can affect terrorist events. Using the Sydney siege as its primary focus, this article will argue that the use of social media by the public, in particular the public's capacity to engage in 'reporting' of live events as they occur, can shift the tactical advantage from counterterrorism officials to the perpetrators. The article will discuss how the situational information the public provided via Twitter during the 2014 Sydney siege could have aided Monis' decision-making process, and thereby added to his capacity to carry out this attack. Notably, there is no evidence that Monis accessed situational information via Twitter during the

event. However, the article will analyse how the public's real-time Twitter reporting of a terrorist event has the potential to endanger the public, victims and police and prolong the event, enhancing the publicity of the perpetrators' political messages.

The article therefore focuses on how the development of social media, and its widespread use by the public, has altered the context and the dynamics of terrorist activity. This change has, in turn, created a need for law and order forces to take into account, within their operations, this use of social media, if they are to respond effectively to terrorist activity.

The article uses situational awareness (SA) theory to analyse how the public's Twitter activity during the Sydney siege had the capacity to enhance the perpetrator's decision-making and therefore their overall capacity to carry out the attack.

As part of its focus, the article considers the *Martin Place Siege Joint Commonwealth—New South Wales Review*, conducted by Michael Thawley and Blair Comley, which sought to investigate how Monis was able to move within society unrestricted. How the relevant agencies collaborated, both prior to and during the event. Finally, whether the communication provided to the public, via government authorities and the media, during the siege was effective. The article considers the adequacy of this review in terms of its response to the social media issue referred to above. It will be shown that the Review had serious shortcomings in terms of its failure to fully analyse the role of social media during the Sydney siege and the way in which it impacted upon events. Notably, this article will not discuss Monis' use of hostages to communicate via social media during the siege as the Review proclaimed that the issue would not be included in its investigation (Thawley & Comley, 2015, p. 65).

The article will also analyse the police activities in response to the Sydney siege. It will argue that the effectiveness of their response was undermined by the failure of police to take into account the social media activity of the public that was occurring as the event unfolded.

The article therefore seeks to highlight the need for law enforcement and government agencies to take into account developments within social media, which have added a new dimension to terrorist activity. Failure to take account of these developments will diminish the capacity of law enforcement and government to respond effectively to similar events in the future. Finally, the article will provide two recommendations for government authorities to help minimise the adverse impacts through social media during future terrorist events.

The Sydney siege

At 8:33 am on the morning of 15 December 2014, Man Haron Monis, an Iranian-born Australian citizen from Bexley North, in Sydney's south, produced a gun inside the Lindt Café in Sydney's Martin Place. He subsequently locked himself inside the café holding customers and staff hostage for approximately 17 hours (Thawley & Comley, 2015, p. iv). Police surrounded the building and sectioned off the area. Simultaneously, the media arrived and there was permanent coverage.

The siege culminated at 2:07 am the following morning when gunshots sounded from within the café, followed by flash grenades thrown inside by police. At 2:11 am, a cacophony of gunfire was reported as police stormed the building ('Sydney Siege', 2014). As a

result of these events, two hostages along with the gunman were killed and several hostages sustained injuries (Thawley & Comley, 2015, p. 2). An inquest into the event determined that one hostage was murdered by Monis in an execution style. The second hostage was killed after being hit by fragments of police bullets which targeted Monis. Finally, Monis was shot by police as they stormed the building (Box, 2015).

Terrorism and the media

Modern terrorism is a carefully choreographed theatrical performance aiming to secure maximum media attention (Tsftati & Weimann, 2002, p. 318). It is widely recognised in the scholarly literature that terrorists perform their acts to maximise publicity for their cause—with the result that terrorist activities are chosen primarily because their impact will elicit the attention of the media (Ganor, 2015; Hoffman, 2006; Laqueur, 1987; Weimann, 2006).

The manipulation of traditional media by terrorist groups to achieve this end is well researched (Ganor, 2015; Hoffman, 2006; Laqueur, 1987; Weimann, 2006). Traditional media refers to newspapers, television and radio, which were the primary means of production, dissemination and consumption of information in the twentieth century. The ubiquity of real-time broadcasting technologies means large global audiences witness every detail of many terrorist events, sharing in the emotional states relating to the experience of being a victim of terrorism (Weimann, 1987, p. 25).

Media manipulation is particularly evident during hostage situations (Picard, 1993, p. 115). This is because during hostage situations, the drama is increased, as the act lasts longer than other terrorist acts. They attract maximum attention from the public and the media, as innocent lives are at stake (Lee, 2013, p. 235). From the moment, the terrorists takeover the hostage event, through the negotiation process, rescue attempts and the eventual conclusion, the media broadcasts live into Western homes (Weimann, 1987, p. 25). Therefore, it is more common for a hostage situation to occur in a country with a free media, where the media is able to pursue its interests, and therefore publicise terrorist events, with less chance of control by government or law enforcement (Lee, 2013, p. 245). The 2014 Sydney Siege was no exception. Network television broadcast was constant, with continuous live coverage of the situation.

Free media is able to provide situational information surrounding a terrorist event to the terrorists themselves, providing them with a greater understanding of what is occurring in a wider setting in response to their actions. This greater access to information increases the capacity of terrorists to respond to events as they unfold. It may also increase danger to hostages. There have been instances where live media reporting has interfered with government operations through revealing to terrorists, during a terrorist act, the personnel deployment, weaponry, strategies and positions of law enforcement (Picard, 1993, p. 66).

To take one example, during the 1972 Munich Olympics Massacre, the numerous television cameras covering the event broadcast the attempted rescue mission staged by the German authorities. The terrorists were able to watch their movements and positions live on television, and subsequently foil the rescue operation (Cohen-Almagor, 2005, p. 399).

In response to the increasing use and manipulation of the media by terrorists, governments and media organisations have implemented policies and practices to respond to

this, in an attempt to reduce the effectiveness of terrorists' use of the media. The practices included; limiting media access to terrorists and reducing live coverage of the event (Hoffman, 2006; Tsfati & Weimann, 2002).

SA theory

SA literature discusses the processes and strategies required in emergency situations when awareness is required (Vieweg, Hughes, Starbird, & Palen, 2010, p. 1079). Mica Endsley defines SA as 'the perception of the elements in the environment within a volume of time and space, the comprehension of their meaning and a projection of their status in the near future' (Endsley, 1995, p. 36). SA is the individuals' conscious dynamic orientation to the environment. It provides the individual with the opportunity to reflect on the past and present in order to anticipate future events. The acquired SA, accompanied with an individual's prior knowledge and skills can aid in the decision-making process (Stanton, Chambers, & Piggott, 2001, p. 191). This is because SA refers to an understanding of the environment in which an event is taking place, thereby providing a foundation for decision-making during a task or complex situation (Oh, Agrawal, & Rao, 2011, p. 36).

The concept was first identified during World War I, regarding the importance of formulating methods of obtaining an awareness of the enemy prior to their obtainment of a similar awareness (Stanton et al., 2001, pp. 189–190). Due to the complexities and uncertainties of warfare, adversaries constantly compete for information. Any informational superiority provides a tactical and situational advantage over the enemy (Oh et al., 2011, p. 35). Although SA originally served as a concept within the military milieu, subsequently SA has been researched and applied across various disciplines and is an essential element in emergency response (Oh et al., 2011; Stanton et al., 2001; Vieweg et al., 2010; Yin, Lampert, Cameron, Robinson, & Power, 2012). This is because SA involves an understanding of the situation during an event with multiple actors and moving parts, primarily in regard to any command and control operations. It includes the attainable knowledge combined to assess and manage the situation (Vieweg et al., 2010, p. 1079).

Endsley articulated three hierarchical phases and components of a cognitive SA process. An individual perceiving an event at 'Level 1' receives various, relevant information from a dynamic environment, though a comprehensive understanding of the situation is not yet established. At 'Level 2', the knowledge gained on Level 1 is used to form patterns providing the individual with a comprehensive picture of the dynamic environment. An individual comprehends the situation in relation to their goals and objectives. At 'Level 3', the individual is able to engage in complex and counter-factual analysis of the environment, based on their knowledge at 'Level 2'. This includes the ability to anticipate future actions of the elements within the environment, not least those involving the enemy's strategy, planning and movements (Endsley, 1995, pp. 36–37). Across the three SA levels, information relevance is dependent on the actors' operational goals.

In regard to terrorism, SA is an important and fundamental element in conflict success, as when individuals are engaging with a terrorist event at 'Level 3', they have the ability to operate within the context of an enemies' decision-making process (Oh et al., 2011, p. 36). SA is therefore relevant to both terrorists and counterterrorism officials. Each seeks, in the context of terrorist activity, to obtain an understanding of the critical elements of the

situation in the dynamic environment in which they are operating, in order to determine the appropriate course of action. Within complex and dynamic environments, current and relevant information is difficult to obtain. Therefore, any SA provides those who possess it with a tactical advantage (Endsley, 1995, p. 33).

Social media

What has fundamentally altered the context and dynamic of SA in recent years is social media technology. Due to the ubiquity of social media and mobile technologies within society, a new medium for SA to be obtained during a terrorist event has been established. During an event, all individuals within the environment have the ability to produce, publish and disseminate information for SA purposes. Further, given the easiness of access to such information, that social media technology makes possible, all individuals involved in a terrorist event now have the ability to access and analyse the published content. Needless to say, this provides a new dimension to terrorist events—a dimension that arises solely due to the emergence and widespread use of social media technology.

Social media allows easier and freer distribution of messages and imagery than through traditional media. This is due to the nature of social media technology, where the production, dissemination and reception of the information are 'decentralised' (Weimann, 2015, p. 30). This is because both the production and the reception of the information occur through multiple independent points—specifically, anywhere where individuals have either a mobile phone or computer and Internet access. Reporting also becomes a lot more immediate. It is subject to multiple and pluralistic viewpoints, given that the reporting is coming from multiple individuals rather than being filtered through a news organisation. Wider agendas possessed by news organisations, which might influence their reporting, are not able to impinge on social media reporting by individuals.

This 'decentralisation' means that control or restriction by governments or media organisations on social media information is limited. The result is that censorship is minimal, and the multifarious media platform that social media make possible provides access to information to anyone capable of accessing and operating the technology (Weimann, 2015, p. 30).

Twitter

Microblogging services, such as Twitter, have emerged as popular communication platforms. Twitter is a free, easy-to-use service which allows users to publish short messages, called 'tweets', to a maximum 140 characters, from web and mobile-based systems (Vieweg et al., 2010, p. 180). The information flow on Twitter cascades and is easily amplified through 'retweeting', or reposting the content, while referencing either the source of the content or the last person who shared it (Lotan et al., 2011, p. 1380). Hashtags are added to tweets to enable users to search for relating content. For example, in response to a crisis, users will use hashtags, such as '#SydneySiege', to create traceable content (Mills, Chen, Lee, & Rao, 2009, p. 7). Twitter's 'trending topic' feature highlights content which is collectively related and statistically distinguishable across the network. For example, if multiple users start tweeting about Sydney, 'Sydney' becomes visible to all users through Twitter's trending topic feature (Lotan et al., 2011, p. 1380).

The use of Twitter and other social networking tools such as Facebook is common practices in both every day and emergency situations (Vieweg et al., 2010, p. 180). What distinguishes Twitter from other social media sites is its facilitation of real-time situational information. Differing from other social media platforms, Twitter is especially suitable for content relating to what the user is doing or witnessing in the current moment (Weimann, 2015, p. 242). As a result, Twitter has become a ubiquitous platform in the provision of information and instant communication (Yin et al., 2012, p. 52).

Tweeting SA

Twitter has drastically altered the way individuals create, consume and share information during a large scale crisis. It has become normal practice for incidents such as natural disasters and terrorist attacks, to be initially reported via mobile communication devices by eyewitnesses and continued to be reported 'live' for the entirety of the situation (Allan, 2014, p. 134). These reports are distributed instantly through Twitter and subsequently followed by mainstream media (Oh, Agrawal, & Rao, 2013, p. 408). The phenomenon is defined as 'citizen journalism' and involves information gathering, reporting and image sharing, by ordinary members of the public (Carr, Barnidge, Lee, & Tsang, 2014, p. 454).

The active participation of the public in the news production processes is a result of cheap, easy to use digital camera phones accompanied with the ease of publishing and sharing text and visual information across social media networks (Allan, 2014, p. 134). No longer is news only created and disseminated by media companies for the public to passively consume. The public have become active participants in information consumption, creation and distribution.

The use of Twitter during a crisis provides a new information source which can enhance the SA for authorities. Individuals, as outside observers of events, and at times participants in the events themselves, can report real-time observational information regarding an event. Additionally, the population can receive real-time information, imagery and cautions via the authorities or the public (Yin et al., 2012, p. 52). When a crisis is announced on Twitter users retweet the information, distributing the news instantly. As a result, Twitter use spikes exponentially during a crisis, increasing SA for all individuals in the area (Mills et al., 2009, p. 12).

Research has highlighted how Twitter has provided SA during natural disasters, including the 2007 California Wildfires, the 2008 Sichuan earthquake in China and the 2009 Victorian Bushfires (Oh et al., 2011; Vieweg et al., 2010; Yin et al., 2012). Moreover, during the 2009 Red River Floods and Oklahoma Grass fires in the United States, Twitter provided accurate and relevant SA to authorities and the public (Vieweg et al., 2010).

Audience gatekeeping

Media companies perceive the role of providing information to the public and determining what information and events are worthy of viewership as paramount to their responsibilities. The sociological construct of 'gatekeeper' was first used to define the role of the media in this respect in 1950 (Hamdy, 2015, p. 8). Gatekeeping is the publisher's ability to 'shape' the news and ultimately decide what is considered 'news' and therefore what news should be disseminated to the public (Hamdy, 2015, p. 8). Gatekeeping, in order to be

effective, presumes the existence of a hierarchal organisational control over the production and dissemination of news information, and therefore a similar control over which content is considered permissible to enter the public domain through traditional media (Singer, 2013, p. 56).

The emergence of Twitter as a source of breaking news and its openness and instantaneity has had a fundamental effect on traditional news media's role as gatekeeper (Hermida, 2013, p. 302). 'This is significant because traditionally the dominant mainstream news organisations have performed a de facto censorship role, deciding when to refuse to deliver to the public material that was, in their judgment, too graphic, too speculative, or too inflammatory' (Seib & Janbek, 2011, pp. 17–18). Given the capacity of Twitter to circumvent the institutional structures that underpinned the traditional power of the media, as discussed above, it makes the production and dissemination of news information outside the media's scope and control possible. Therefore, the traditional gatekeeper role of the traditional media, in relation to news production, is no longer possible. Rather, it is private individuals which now act in this capacity, constituting 'audience gatekeeping' (Kwon, Oh, Agrawal, & Rao, 2012, p. 214).

Audience gatekeeping refers to the public providing a significant amount of information on a particular news event. Audience gatekeeping is possible on social media because users are able to share information throughout the world at a more voluminous rate than traditional media (Kwon et al., 2012, p. 214). This, in turn, impacts on determining the importance of news agendas. This means that that information is much more plural and multifarious, given that the reporting is coming from much wider variety of sources rather than being filtered through a news organisation. The result is that social media has blurred the lines between producer and consumers of information—news becomes a 'participatory process' between multiple sources.

Twitter provides SA for terrorists

In regard to terrorism, information disseminated through Twitter has been used for SA purposes to assist police in providing investigational leads and in tracking suspects (Schechner, 2015). For example, eyewitnesses to the 2013 Boston Bombing and the murder of a British soldier in London were the first to report the events via social networking sites, instantly distributing images and videos of the incidents. This information provided SA to police assisting in their responses (Allan, 2014, p. 134).

However, while social media can be beneficial during certain crises, as discussed above, it can be counterproductive during a potential lethal situation. Information broadcast in real-time through Twitter can be accessed by terrorists, increasing their SA and enhancing their decision-making process. For instance, imagery and information during a police operation published on Twitter can be accessed by perpetrators on 'Level 1' of the SA hierarchy. This information has the potential to be then used at Levels 2 and 3, shifting the tactical advantage to the terrorists. For instance, this information can enhance the effectiveness of the perpetrators' weaponry and positioning, helping them accomplish their goals (Oh et al., 2011, p. 34). Consequently, the terrorists can gain the information superiority, even if for a few moments, which can endanger the police and the public. Furthermore, Twitter can be used by terrorists to coordinate their attack and share and receive real-time dynamic situational information, thereby enhancing terrorists' attack

management and coordination (Amble, 2012, p. 346; Oh et al., 2011, p. 35). An example of this concern is the 2008 Mumbai terrorist attack.

During the 2008 Mumbai terrorist attack, the perpetrators relied on Twitter to increase their SA. This information assisted with their decision-making processes (Amble, 2012, p. 344). The terrorists were in regular contact with their handlers in Pakistan, who were analysing live media broadcasts and Twitter feeds. The handlers were relaying information through satellite phones to the terrorists in Mumbai (Oh et al., 2011, p. 37). The information received helped the terrorists reach 'Level 2' of the SA hierarchy and establish a comprehensive picture of the environment within which they were operating.

Governments have acknowledged the threat posed by public tweeting during a crisis and have requested for civilians to be cautious when using social media (Espeseth, Gibson, Jones, & Goodman, 2013, p. 100). The government of Washington State, in the United States, has sought to pre-empt the problem through a 'Tweet Smart' campaign. The campaign informs the public of the dangers associated with tweeting situational and observational information during a crisis (Washington State Patrol, 2014). Throughout the Mumbai siege the Indian authorities asked the public to cease tweeting, due to the information increasing the terrorists' SA (Espeseth et al., 2013, p. 100). During the 2015 hostage situation in a Paris kosher supermarket, police advised the population that any live Twitter reporting could increase the terrorist's SA, endangering the police, hostages and bystanders (Schechner, 2015). Moreover, Islamic State (also known as ISIS, ISIL or IS) launched a Twitter campaign using the hashtag '#Media_Blackout_Campaign' to prevent their supporters from tweeting situational information which could be used to locate their leadership (Stalinsky & Sosnow, 2014).

Public communication during the Sydney siege

During the Sydney siege, the NSW Police worked closely with traditional media to limit the live broadcasting of situational information. Yet they did not make the same coordinated effort when it came to social media, merely requesting the public to cease sharing information and imagery on social media of what was occurring inside the Lindt Café (Graham, 2014). Moreover, NSW Police did not advise the public of any adverse implications that citizen reporting and audience gatekeeping could have on their operations.

In addition to making use of the traditional media, the police made extensive use of social media during the siege. NSW Police

held six press briefings and issued eight media releases over the two day period of the siege. They also published a steady stream of tweets during the siege—often only minutes apart—providing live updates which were picked up by the media (Thawley & Comley, 2015, p. 65)

Furthermore, on 14 December the police used Twitter to urge the traditional media to report responsibly and for the public to vacate the area (NSW Police, 2014a, 2014b).

Such actions by the police indicate their awareness of the potential live broadcasting by the traditional media has on increasing a perpetrator's SA. Yet, this did not extend to social media. During the siege, the public was not directly advised by the police to tweet responsibly. Members of the public exercised their civil liberties and personal freedoms when tweeting images of themselves outside the siege or of the police surrounding the café

(Byrnes, 2014), but due to the absence of police advice, they generally had no awareness of the wider implications of such actions upon the siege itself.

Professor Greg Barton articulated that responsible reporting of a terrorist event by traditional media can be undermined by the public's dissemination of information and imagery via social media (Duffy, 2014). However, members of the public who engage in citizen journalism and audience gatekeeping during lethal situations are often not aware of these implications. Social media analyst Nancy Korb proclaimed that the public does not understand the implications of tweeting information, images or videos of police activity during crisis situations, and that the uncensored and unfiltered information can easily be accessed by terrorists via mobile technologies (Blankinship, 2014).

During the Sydney siege, NSW Deputy Police Commissioner, Catherine Burn, acknowledged 'that social media was hampering [the police's] ability to control information' (Duffy, 2014). Therefore, the police could have advised the public, via their Twitter account and through traditional media, of the risks associated with tweeting information which can be used for SA purposes. Korb argues that generally citizen journalists and audience gatekeepers respond positively when the danger of sharing information is explained (Blankinship, 2014). Others, such as Australian political scientists Greg Barton and Rory Medcalf, advised the public not to broadcast police operations during the event (Duffy, 2014; Medcalf, 2014). Yet the police warning never came.

One other factor that impacted on the events was the fact that during the siege, the police did not officially define it as a terrorist attack. Special powers given to NSW Police under anti-terrorism legislation allows them to prevent members of the public from photographing, recording and publishing imagery of police operations and crime scenes (NSW Police Force, 2013, p. 34). However, it was a month after the Sydney Siege, on 15 January 2015, when the Australian Government officially declared the event a terrorist attack (Terlato, 2015). Therefore, throughout the event, the NSW Police were not authorised to announce to the public this summary offence, or confiscate recording devices, delete media footage or either prevent or arrest those publishing live situational information (NSW Police Force, 2013, p. 33).

Citizen journalism during the Sydney siege

As discussed, individuals on the scene of a crisis often feel an obligation to report the situation they are witnessing. There is a compulsion to record and share the traumatic experience with others (Allan, 2014, p. 145). Barton proclaimed it to be a natural response for an individual to post on social media any police operations they have witnessed, such as, an armoured police officer climbing a ladder. He added though the public ought to be cautious as there is the potential for adverse consequences (Duffy, 2014).

Further, a fundamental component of liberal democratic societies is freedom of speech and open communication. The Internet and social media are interrelated with the values of freedom of speech and the free flow of information and have enhanced citizens' capacity for freedom of speech and communication (Weimann, 2006, p. 203).

Consequently, we perceive a basic conflict of values and imperatives. On the one hand, we have seen above that there is an inherent tendency on the part of individuals to wish to broadcast unusual or compelling information as it occurs. The basic free-speech values of liberal democracies are in accord with this. And yet it is precisely such activity that can endanger

the capacity of law enforcement agencies to keep liberal democratic citizens relatively safe during a terrorist attack. Chia-yi Lee points to these conflicting imperatives as follows:

Liberal democracies face a dilemma between the pursuit of democratic values and counterterrorism. On the one hand, democratic governments are expected to secure the lives and property of their citizens without severely encroaching on civil liberties and personal freedom. On the other hand, political and civil freedoms and the protection of human life in liberal democracies provide a vulnerable environment for terrorists to engage in terror activities. (Lee, 2013, p. 237)

Despite the free and open communicative advantages the Internet poses, it is not a completely free medium. Western governments limit the freedoms of the Internet, often for principled reasons, including preventing child pornography and sex trafficking (Weimann, 2006, p. 204). In Australia, under limited circumstances, such as during a terrorist situation, freedoms are restricted. The anti-terrorism legislative special powers referred to above is an example of this. Yet despite such government legal powers, Barton has noted that the decentralised nature of web communication, as well as its massive volume, means that during a crisis event, the flow of information can no longer be completely shut down (Duffy, 2014). This means that, even with police warnings to the public, during terrorist or criminal events, the sort of problems discussed above concerning social media, and its implications for SA, are unlikely to be completely avoided.

Sydney siege review

On 17 December 2014, the Prime Minister of Australia and the Premier of NSW established a review into the events on 15 and 16 December 2014. The purpose of the Review was to determine what lessons could be learnt concerning the successes and failures of operations by Commonwealth and NSW governments from the events preceding and surrounding the siege, as well as the operations of the relevant government agencies and the communications between them (Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2014). Ultimately, the Review was to provide recommendations in these areas for any future situation involving a similar set of circumstances. Furthermore, the Review was to investigate how the perpetrator arrived in Australia and gained permanent residency, as well as securing bail release following a violent crime and considering his long record of violence and mental instability (Abbott, 2014).

Nine terms of references were announced by the Prime Minister and the Premier. (1) The arrival of Monis in Australia and the steps leading to his acquisition of citizenship. (2) The support and interactions Monis had with government social support agencies. (3) Information obtained and shared by Commonwealth and NSW agencies relevant to public safety surrounding Monis. (4) Monis' interactions with the NSW justice system. (5) His access to firearms. (6) If any national security legislative powers either were or could have been used relating to Monis. (7) Operational lessons to be learned by NSW and Federal police. (8) Public communication, including inter-agency communication. (9) The operational coordination between the relevant agencies (Thawley & Comley, 2015, p. 2).

Analysis of the Sydney siege review

This analysis will address Chapter 10 of the *Martin Place Siege Joint Commonwealth—New South Wales Review*, the 'effectiveness of public communication including coordination of messaging between the Commonwealth, NSW and jurisdictions' (Thawley & Comley, 2015,

p. 65). This is the chapter most relevant to the social media issue. Chapter 10 addressed the Prime Minister's and Premier's term of reference surrounding public communication. The chapter sought to determine if public communications protocols were adhered to throughout the siege. Additionally, it analysed whether Commonwealth and NSW government agencies communicated effectively with the public, media and other relevant agencies (Thawley & Comley, 2015, p. 65).

The Review discussed the effectiveness of; managing public safety, informing the public, engaging the media, providing reassurance, risk management and supporting recovery (Thawley & Comley, 2015, p. 65). The Review stated that the police adequately followed the public communication protocols, including communications with the media and the public. These elements were satisfied by the NSW Police through the issuing of media reports, the frequent press conferences, live interviews and the ubiquity of published information via social media (Thawley & Comley, 2015, p. 69).

The Review posited that throughout the event the quality of communication between the police and the media led to the limitation of sensitive or situational information from being broadcast in real-time. The hostage taker was denied access to live media, the broadcasting in real-time of police activities was limited and hostage identities were not reported. Ultimately, the Review argued that the communication between the police and the media during the siege was 'very good' (Thawley & Comley, 2015, p. 69). Despite the media exaggerating the event's political situation and providing the event maximum exposure, through the constant real-time coverage and commentary the perpetrators awareness of the activities within the dynamic environment was not aided as a result of the broadcasting decisions and actions taken by media companies.

According to the Review, the role traditional media played in reporting the situation was 'measured and responsible' (Thawley & Comley, 2015, p. 69). The Review credited this to the training sessions conducted by NSW Police for media companies prior to the siege which provided information regarding the dangers associated with reporting police operations (Thawley & Comley, 2015, p. 69). These training programs supported the development of a constructive relationship between the police and the media. Additionally, the police were in constant contact with the media providing information in order to prevent the spread of any inaccurate or incomplete information (Thawley & Comley, 2015, p. 69). Despite Monis' attempts to secure media coverage, outlets ensured he was unsuccessful and his and the hostages social media messages were not re-broadcast (Thawley & Comley, 2015, p. 69). Some tactical information was broadcast by the media during the siege's infancy, although, due to police and media cooperation it ceased (Thawley & Comley, 2015, p. 69). This included Channel Seven's, *The Morning Show*, whose studio is opposite the Lindt Café, broadcasting live as police arrived on the scene and surrounded the café (The Morning Show, 2014).

The Review's authors proposed two recommendations relating to public communication. The first was that further government led training ought to be offered to media representatives in order to improve cooperation during any future terrorism incidents. Secondly, the National Security Guidelines ought to be updated to ensure relevant agencies are able to access information and effectively communicate with the public during a crisis (Thawley & Comley, 2015, p. 71).

However, the above recommendations refer exclusively to traditional media organisations and government agencies. The Review's recommendations do not acknowledge

the change in information creation and dissemination generated by social media and mobile technologies. To this extent, the key limitation of Chapter 10 was the exclusion of any reference to the public's real-time social media 'reporting' and 'audience gatekeeping' on the operations, movements and positions of the NSW Police during the siege. The Review primarily addresses the traditional hierarchies of the media, where media companies produce information for the public to passively consume. In contrast, as discussed above, the Internet and social media are decentralised, with limited control, censorship and restriction, and they provide access to any interested individual (Weimann, 2015, p. 30). As discussed, social media has enabled individuals to be active participants in the production and dissemination of information (Singer, 2013 p. 57).

Notably, the Review briefly discusses the power of social media and its ability to instantaneously disseminate information to the public. This was only in reference to public galvanisation during and following the event. Such as the '#illridewithyou' Twitter hashtag. This campaign was launched during the event and was aimed at encouraging solidarity and support for Australian Muslims. Additionally, the government recognised the power of social media in the dissemination of anti-Muslim rhetoric and promotion of violence. Both during and after the siege, the government strongly condemned these messages (Thawley & Comley, 2015, p. 70).

Consequently, the Review failed to focus on the entirely new situation in which police found themselves, in the context of the siege, of having to deal with, and respond to, the public's broadcasting of the event, in real-time, via social media. Insofar as the Review credited the relationship between the police and the media for preventing information being broadcast in real-time which could be used for SA purposes, the same relationship does not exist with the general public. NSW Police proclaimed due to their relationship with media companies, it was unnecessary to request for them not report unconfirmed information (Graham, 2014). However, the police issued a statement requesting social media users to refrain from posting or sharing unconfirmed imagery being distributed from inside the Lindt Café. As the public's 'reporting' and sharing of unconfirmed information and videos could inhibit police operations, through providing SA to the perpetrator or increasing public anxiety (Graham, 2014). Nevertheless, this warning and its implications were missing from the Review.

Notably, during the siege there were no direct requests for the public to cease acting in the role of 'audience gatekeeper' and to stop publishing information and imagery from outside the siege via social media which could be used for SA purposes. NSW Police did not advise the public of any adverse implications citizen reporting could have on their operations. Furthermore, the Review did not discuss citizen journalism, audience gatekeeping, nor offer any recommendation for information to be supplied to the public regarding responsible use of social media during a terrorist event.

Recommendations and conclusion

The author of this study presents the following two recommendations to Australian law enforcement agencies in order to limit the dissemination of SA through social media during a terrorist event. As discussed, the Review highlighted the work continually conducted informing traditional media of the dangers associated with live reporting during a terrorist event. However, this author could not find any evidence of similar informational

campaigns conducted towards the general public. Therefore, it is recommended that the Australian Government conduct a similar awareness campaign to the 'Tweet Smart' campaign in Washington State, as discussed above.

Secondly, in future operations, this author suggests that government authorities make formal requests to the public to cease real-time reporting and audience gatekeeping of situational and observational information through social media—similarly to the French authorities in January 2015. During the Sydney siege, the NSW police did not seek the public's support—in either their press conferences or their Twitter posts—to refrain from disseminating information which could be used for SA purposes.

This author recommends that future requests and campaigns from government authorities ought to articulate the justifications regarding the dangers associated with the dissemination of real-time situational information. As discussed above, the public generally respond positively when the dangers of sharing information is explained.

This can be achieved through providing the public with an understanding of the adverse effects associated with citizen journalism and audience gatekeeping during a potential lethal event. These adverse effects include disseminating information—such as imagery and commentary of counterterrorism officials' operations, locations and weaponry—which can be accessed by the perpetrator and used for SA purposes. This information can be accessed by the perpetrators or their handlers and analysed on 'Level 1' of the SA hierarchy. Once the information is analysed, it can be used to ascend the terrorists to 'Level 2', where they can acquire a comprehensive picture of the dynamic environment. This comprehensive picture can be used on 'Level 3', helping them anticipate future events and ultimately assisting in their decision-making process. This ascendancy up the SA hierarchy can be used to gain information superiority and make effective tactical decisions. This tactical advantage acquired through SA makes it easier for terrorists to achieve their operational goals.

These two recommendations are based on the discussion above, which highlights that social media is a new factor in the terrorist environment that can both enhance and hinder the law enforcement response to terrorist activity. The above discussion has shown that the Sydney siege was one situation where the social media platform Twitter was pervasively present. The discussion has pointed to the shortcomings of police operations in relation to social media and also the shortcomings of the government report into police operations. Although this author could not find any evidence whether Monis managed to use social media to enhance his terrorist activity, nevertheless the above discussion has shown that both police and government have yet to fully appreciate the full significance of social media in relation to SA issues in the context of terrorist events.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank John Tate for his advice, guidance, feedback and suggestions during the drafting and formulating of this article. Additionally, to the anonymous reviewers, thank you for your feedback, comments and suggestions.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

References

- Abbott, T. (2014, December 17). *Martin place siege – joint Commonwealth-New South Wales review. Press conference at parliament house*. Canberra: Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. Retrieved from <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/2014-12-17/press-conference-canberra>
- Allan, S. (2014). Witnessing in Crisis: Photo-reportage of terror attacks in Boston and London. *Media, War & Conflict*, 7, 133–151. doi:10.1177/1750635214531110
- Amble, J. C. (2012). Combating terrorism in the new media environment. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 35, 339–353. doi:10.1080/1057610X.2012.666819
- Blankinship, D. G. (2014, August 13). Police to citizens: Be careful what you tweet. *Los Angeles Daily News*. Retrieved from <http://www.dailynews.com/general-news/20140813/police-to-citizens-be-careful-what-you-tweet>
- Box, D. (2015, January 29). Sydney siege inquest: Lindt cafe deaths investigated. *The Australian*. Retrieved from <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/in-depth/sydney-siege/sydney-siege-inquest-lindt-cafe-deaths-investigated/story-fnqxbywy-1227200443586?nk=aeaff2cdcff6a27bdf9ce843a01c393b>
- Byrnes, H. (2014, December 15). Take a long hard look at your selfies, rubberneckerers. *Herald Sun*. Retrieved from http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/national/opinion-take-a-long-hard-look-at-your-selfies-rubberneckerers/story-fni0xqrb-1227157193635?utm_content=SocialFlow&utm_campaign=EditorialSF&utm_source=HeraldSun&utm_medium=Twitter
- Carr, D. J., Barnidge, M., Lee, B. G., & Tsang, S. J. (2014). Cynics and skeptics: Evaluating the credibility of mainstream and citizen journalism. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 91, 452–470. doi:10.1177/1077699014538828
- Cohen-Almagor, R. (2005). Media coverage of acts of terrorism: Troubling episodes and suggested guidelines. *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 30, 383–409.
- Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet of Australia. (2014, December 17). *Martin place siege - joint commonwealth - New South Wales Review* [Press Release]. Retrieved from <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/2014-12-17/martin-place-siege-joint-commonwealth-new-south-wales-review>
- Duffy, C. (2014, December 16). Sydney siege: Social media could hamper police operations, being exploited by modern terrorists, expert says. *ABC News*. Retrieved from <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-12-16/sydney-siegesocial-media-a-liability-says-expert/5971622>
- Endsley, M. R. (1995). Toward a theory of situation awareness in dynamic systems. *Human Factors: The Journal of the Human Factors and Ergonomics Society*, 37, 32–64. doi:10.1518/001872095779049543
- Espeseth, C., Gibson, J., Jones, A., & Goodman, S. (2013). Terrorists use of communication technology and social networks. In U.F. Aydoğdu (Ed.) *Technological dimensions of defence against terrorism* (pp. 91–105). Amsterdam: IOS Press. doi:10.3233/978-1-61499-317-9-91
- Ganor, B. (2015). *Global alert: The rationality of modern Islamist terrorism and the challenge to the liberal democratic world*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Graham, C. (2014, December, 16). Police ask public to not share unconfirmed videos and footage from lindt cafe siege. *New Matilda*. Retrieved from <https://newmatilda.com/2014/12/16/police-ask-public-not-share-unconfirmed-videos-and-footage-lindt-cafe-siege>
- Hamdy, N. N. (2015). Egypt shifts towards a networked journalism Paradigm. *Journal of Arab & Muslim Media Research*, 8, 3–20. doi:10.1386/jammr.8.1.3_1
- Hermida, A. (2013). #Journalism. *Digital Journalism*, 1, 295–313. doi:10.1080/21670811.2013.808456
- Hoffman, B. (2006). *Inside terrorism*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Kwon, K. H., Oh, O., Agrawal, M., & Rao, H. R. (2012). Audience gatekeeping in the twitter service: An investigation of tweets about the 2009 gaza conflict. *AIS Transactions on Human-Computer Interaction*, 4, 212–229.
- Laqueur, W. (1987). *The age of terrorism*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company.
- Lee, C. (2013). Democracy, civil liberties, and hostage-taking terrorism. *Journal of Peace Research*, 50, 235–248. doi:10.1177/0022343312465424

- Lotan, G., Graeff, E., Ananny, M., Gaffney, D., Pearce, I., & Boyd, D. (2011). The revolutions were tweeted: Information flows during the 2011 tunisian and Egyptian revolutions. *International Journal of Communication*, 5, 1375–1405. doi:1932–8036/2011FEA1375
- Medcalf, R. (2014, December 17). *Sydney gunman's use of iPad in siege a reminder for media, social media users never to broadcast details of police positions* [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/Rory_Medcalf/status/545444211600801792
- Mills, A., Chen, R., Lee, J., & Rao, H. R. (2009). Web 2.0 emergency applications: How useful can twitter be for emergency response? *Journal of Information Privacy and Security*, 5(3), 3–26. doi:10.1080/15536548.2009.10855867
- The Morning Show. (2014, December 14). *Martin place siege*. YouTube. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FAxqPrtbZME>
- NSW Police. (2014a, December 14). *Latest update re: @nswpolice operation at #MartinPlace* [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/nswpolice/status/544374461135196160>
- NSW Police. (2014b, December 14). *Our site is currently experiencing a lot of traffic. Here's our latest update (11.50am) re: #MartinPlace police op* [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/nswpolice/status/544303006460551168>
- NSW Police Force. (2013, May). *Media policy*. Retrieved from https://www.police.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/175269/Media_Policy_030913.pdf
- Oh, O., Agrawal, M., & Rao, H. R. (2011). Information control and terrorism: Tracking the Mumbai terrorist attack through twitter. *Information Systems Frontiers*, 13, 33–43. doi:10.1007/s10796-010-9275-8
- Oh, O., Agrawal, M., & Rao, H. R. (2013). Community intelligence and social media services: A rumor theoretic analysis of tweets during social crises. *MIS Quarterly*, 37, 407–426. doi:10.1007/s10796-010-9275-8
- Picard, R. (1993). *Media portrayals of terrorism: Functions and meaning of news coverage*. Ames: Iowa State University Press.
- Schechner, S. (2015, January 10). Social media complicates police efforts amid attacks; New mobile technologies, social media both help and hinder authorities' pursuit of terror suspects. *Wall Street Journal (Online)*. Retrieved from <http://www.wsj.com/articles/gag-order-during-french-raids-highlights-technology-dilemma-1420923128>
- Seib, P. and Janbek, D. M. (2011). *Global terrorism and new media: The Post-Al Qaeda generation*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Singer, J. B. (2013). User-generated visibility: Secondary gatekeeping in a shared media space. *New Media & Society*, 16, 55–73. doi:10.1177/1461444813477833
- Stalinsky, S., & Sosnow, R. (2014, December 5). The future of online Jihad – The coming battle with the cyber army of Al-Qaeda and its offshoots. *The Middle East Media Research Institute*. Retrieved from <http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/8311.htm%207/3/15>
- Stanton, N. A., Chambers, P. R. G., & Piggott, J. (2001). Situational awareness and safety. *Safety Science*, 39, 189–204. doi:10.1016/S0925-7535(01)00010-8
- Sydney Siege: A timeline of how it happened. (2014, December 16). *The daily telegraph*. Retrieved from <http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/nsw/sydney-siege-a-timeline-of-how-it-happened/story-fni0cx12-1227157482502?nk=aeaff2cdcff6a27bdf9ce843a01c393b>
- Terlato, P. (2015, January 15). Joe hockey declares Sydney siege a terrorist incident for insurance purposes. *Business Insider Australia*. Retrieved from <http://www.businessinsider.com.au/the-sydney-siege-has-been-declared-a-terrorist-incident-2015-1>
- Thawley, M., & Comley, B. (2015). *Martin place siege joint commonwealth - New South Wales review*. Canberra: Australian Government Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, NSW Government Premier and Cabinet.
- Tsfati, Y., & Weimann, G. (2002). www.terrorism.com: Terror on the Internet. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 25, 317–332. doi:10.1080/10576100290101214
- Vieweg, S., Hughes, A. L., Starbird, K., & Palen, L. (2010). Microblogging during two natural hazards events: What twitter may contribute to situational awareness. *SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, CHI'10 (pp. 1079–1088). doi:10.1145/1753326.1753486

- Washington State Patrol. (2014, July 29). Local police ask you to “tweet smart” during emergencies. *Seattle-Area Law Enforcement Agencies*. Retrieved from http://www.wsp.wa.gov/information/releases/2014_archive/mr072914c.htm
- Weimann, G. (1987). Media events: The case of international terrorism. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 31, 21–39.
- Weimann, G. (2006). *Terror on the internet: The new arena, the new challenge*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press.
- Weimann, G. (2015). *Terrorism in cyberspace: The next generation*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Yin, J., Lampert, A., Cameron, M., Robinson, B., & Power, R. (2012). Using social media to enhance emergency situation awareness. *IEEE Intelligent Systems*, 27(6), 52–59. doi:10.1109/MIS.2012.6