Do we really need to know everything?

Crisis Communication Ethics among Swedish Journalists and Citizens

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ICRCC, Bridging the Gaps
12-14 March 2018
Orlando, Florida
Aim of study:

To compare assessments of ethical issues regarding news reporting from the Stockholm terror attack among Swedish journalists and citizens.

To address tensions between reporting as much as possible, and ethical considerations.
Time line

14:53 Call to SOS Alarm about truck on Drottninggatan in Stockholm

14:57 Police arrives at the scene
14:57 Twitter: *What the f… is happening??*
14:58 Breaking news in aftonbladet.se
15:02 Breaking news in expressen.se
15:11 Breaking news in national news agency TT
15:16 Breaking news in public service radio
15:28 Twitter: “Shootings at Fridhemsplan now …”

15:37 Breaking news about shootings at Fridhemsplan

15:40 Police urging to avoid city centre

16:53 stockholmdirekt.se: Police denies shootings at Fridhemsplan
Police press conference publishing photo of wanted person

Police arrests Rakhmat Akilov in Stockholm suburb

Publication of name, age, nationality and photo of victims that died
Research questions:

1. How did Swedish journalists and citizens assess media ethics regarding news about the Stockholm terrorist attack 2017?

2. How did journalists that reported on the Stockholm terrorist attack, 2017, assess media ethics compared to journalists that did not report.

3. What impact did professional and demographic factors have on the assessment of media ethics regarding the news about the Stockholm terrorist attack, 2017.
Method:
Web surveys to journalists and citizens with identical questions

Material:
Journalist panel – 2,555 respondents, 1,092 answers (43 %), June 2017
Citizen panel – 4,300 respondents, 3,881 answers (90%), October 2017
Previous Swedish studies

Börjesson 2007:
Very small differences in ethical assessments concerning news content between journalists and citizens in general.

No differences at all between journalists and citizens with higher education.

Edström 2011:
80 percent of Swedish journalist have university education.
Ethical assessments issues:

- Delayed publishing of the victims’ names
- Live reporting with eye witnesses directly after the attack
- Publishing of name and nationality of suspected perpetrator same day as attack
- Publishing of suspected shootings at Friedhemsplan in Stockholm
RQ1: Assessments of ethical issues among journalists and citizens.

Both journalists and citizens:

• Most support for delayed publishing of victims’ names

• Least support for publishing of suspected shootings

Citizens more in favour of publishing names of both victims and perpetrator than journalists
RQ2: Assessments of ethical issues among journalists who reported themselves, who’s media organization reported, or did not report at all.

- No striking differences between three groups
- However, greater acceptance if the own media reported, and especially if journalist directly involved in reporting
- Most difference regarding publication of suspected shootings
RQ3: Implications of professional and demographic factors on assessment of ethical issues

• Journalists in three cases out of four make different assessments than citizens

• Proximity effect confirmed – journalists reporting themselves are less critical than those who did not

• Elderly people, women and highly educated are more sceptical of publishing than others
Conclusions

• Professional identity influenced journalists’ ethical considerations.

• Journalists less critical of ethical considerations when involved in reporting.

• Citizens generally more in favour of name publishing than journalists.

• The results reveal a turnaround compared to the similar studies from the early 2000s.

• Possible effect of social media content on journalistic news? More research is needed.
Thank you for your attention