

The narrative rhythm of terror: a study of the Stockholm terrorist attack and the “Last Night in Sweden” event

Cecilia Cassinger, Jorgen Eksell, Maria Mansson and Ola Thufvesson

Cecilia Cassinger is Senior Lecturer, Jorgen Eksell is Assistant professor and Maria Mansson is Lecturer, all at the Department of Strategic Communication, Lund University, Helsingborg, Sweden.
Ola Thufvesson is Senior Lecturer at the Department of Service Management, Lund University, Helsingborg, Sweden.

Abstract

Purpose – *The purpose of this paper is to examine how the mediatisation of terror attacks affects the brand image of tourism cities.*

Design/methodology/approach – *Informed by theories of mediatisation and space, the study analyses two different types of terror attacks in Sweden during 2017 as media events. The focus of analysis is on identifying spatial and temporal patterns that underpin the narrative rhythm of the discussions of the events on Twitter and online news platforms.*

Findings – *The findings demonstrate that the unfolding of the events can be divided into three phases of varying intensity in rhythm and implications for city brand image. The manifestation of an imaginary terror attack in a digital environment had a greater impact on the narratives of the city than an actual one.*

Research limitations/implications – *Rythmanalysis is introduced as a useful device to examine how urban space is mediated through social media and online news flows.*

Originality/value – *The study contributes with novel knowledge on the mediatisation of city space on digital media platforms in a post-truth world. It shows that city administrations need to deal with both real and imaginary terror attacks, especially when there is an already established negative image of the city.*

Keywords *Brand image, Narrative, Terrorism, Rhythm, Space, Mediatization*

Paper type *Research paper*

1. Introduction

The 9/11 terror attacks made it apparent that terror can appear anywhere and at any time. Contemporary terrorism targets places in which civilians from many different countries gather, such as airports, shopping malls, city centres and tourist attractions, in order to attract highest international media attention (Liu and Pratt, 2017). Such acts are often spectacular and aim at destabilising the public experience of safety and security and install fear in the civilian population (Howie, 2015; Cavarero, 2009). In recent years, there has been an increased interest in how to embed safety and security in the branding of places (Coaffee and Rogers, 2008). Security branding has emerged as a new paradigm through which to understand and configure brand images of cities (Coaffee and Van Ham, 2008; Avraham, 2009). The development of a secure image is now a fundamental strategic place-brand asset that requires marketing and management (Coaffee and Rogers, 2008). Tourists are an important stakeholder group, which is particularly vulnerable to terrorism. Yet, previous research on place branding show that infrequent terrorist attacks, despite attracting high global media attention, do not have a long-term impact on the brand image of the city (Anholt, 2006) and tourists' perceptions of the city (Liu and Pratt, 2017). The tourism literature has devoted considerable attention to the link between tourism demand and terrorism (Walters *et al.*, 2018). Walters *et al.*'s (2018) study on tourist behaviour in relation to perceived high-risk destinations demonstrate that tourists make changes to their travels plans as regards accommodation and travel company when the perceived risk of terrorist threat is increased due to governmental and other warnings.

Received 28 April 2018
Revised 4 June 2018
Accepted 5 June 2018
© International Tourism Studies Association

Similarly, Larsen *et al.* (2009) concluded that tourists worry about various risks before travelling; however, the worries have less impact when travel decisions are made. Moreover, the tourism literature has been concerned with the resilience and response strategies to deal with negative images of destinations resulting from terrorist attacks (e.g. Avraham, 2004, 2009).

Both news media and social media play a significant role for tourists' perceptions of security and safety in cities (Avraham and Ketter, 2017). While it is well established that news media's way of framing violent attacks and incidents promote civic narratives of fear (Altheide, 1997), less is known about the logic of social media narratives and how this logic impacts the brand image of the city. Narratives of fear and unsafety may be amplified on digital platforms, which are characterised by the speed of information and fast circulation of text and images (cf. Doosti *et al.*, 2016). The circulation of fake news, and so-called post-truth statements, also make the media landscape more complex. Post-truth is defined by the *Oxford Dictionaries* (2016) as "relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief". In a post-truth world, there is a greater insecurity around information and a lack of trust in information. Despite the rapid dissemination of fake news and false rumours about destinations across social media platforms, there is a scarce knowledge of the logics of such imaginary narratives and what they may mean for city image.

The research aim in this paper is, therefore, to advance knowledge of the mechanisms of how terror in the tourism city is shaped in and through media events. The focus here is on actual, rumoured and imaginary events (Couldry and Hepp, 2018). To this end, a study is undertaken of the flow of media narratives of terror attacks in tourism cities on the so-called open internet that anyone can access. Lefebvre's (2004) rhythmanalysis is used as a means to investigate the rhythms of media narratives and counter-narratives of terrorism and their implications for city brand image.

The paper is structured in the following way. First, it gives an account of the concept of media events and mediatisation as means of theorising how the public image of tourism cities is affected by fast-circulating information in the digital landscape. Second, narrative rhythm and spatio-temporality are introduced as theoretical tools for analysing terror acts in cities as media events. Third, in the methodology section, analyses of the mediatisation of an imaginary event and a real event are discussed. Two events, in the Swedish cities of Stockholm and Malmö, are used as cases in point. Fourth, in the analysis of the data, the rhythms of the imaginary and real media events are analysed. Finally, in the last section, it is argued that the events follow different narrative rhythms that have different consequences for the brand image of the cities.

2. Terror attacks as media events

Terror attacks are here conceptualised as media events to underscore the role of digital narratives in shaping the city's brand image (cf. Nossek, 2008). According to Couldry and Hepp (2018), media events may be understood as a particular type of spatio-temporal symbolic power in a global world where boundaries between nations are shifting and complex. They define a media event as a form of mediated ritual; a situated, thickened and centred performance of mediated communication on a specific theme (Hepp and Couldry, 2010). Media events leave digital traces, which in take part in constructing the event (Couldry and Hepp, 2018). Moreover, these events work through a wide range of representations that are characterised by heterogeneity and contradictions. Couldry and Hepp (2018) further argue that media events are the emblem of contemporary globalisation and deep mediatisation. Mediatisation has a long history. Hjarvard (2009, p. 160) defines mediatisation as "the process whereby society to an increasing degree is submitted to, or becomes dependent on, the media and their logic". The concept underscores the institutionalisation of the media and the dialectical relationship between the media and social institutions (e.g. family, work, politics, war, etc.). War and terror are particular susceptible to being turned into global tabloidised spectacles in news media's quest for audience attention (Howie, 2015; Kellner, 2009; Altheide, 1997). The Vietnam War is sometimes proclaimed as the first televised war (Horten, 2011) and Baudrillard (1995) argued that the 1991 Persian Gulf War was a simulacrum of war due to its aestheticisation and visual orchestration in the media. The media, however, is ambiguous and difficult to control. Depending on closeness to the events, media can

serve both as an ally and as an enemy in times of war (Avraham, 2009). While media's presence may be wanted in technically distanced warfare, where attacker and victim are anonymous to each other, its presence becomes more problematic in violent encounters on the battlefield. Digital media introduces another media logic. For example, terrorist attacks are commonly portrayed through the eyes of terrorism's target audience – witnesses – who use mobile technology to document and disseminate accounts of terror (Howie, 2015; Mortensen, 2015). Today, social media – especially Twitter – and online news media platforms play an important role in the mediatisation process of terror and war. In this paper, the focus will be on these two digital media outlets for understanding narratives of terror on digital media platforms and their implication for city brand image.

2.1 Narrative rhythm and space

In order to be able to operationalise terror events as media narratives that unfold in time and space, the concept of rhythm is employed as a theoretical lens. Rhythm is a useful concept here, since digital media events are composed of spatio-temporal flows (Gotved, 2006). In addition, rhythm helps us to better understand the mediatisation of space (Edensor, 2009; Lefebvre, 2004). This paper proposes that images of cities are formed on the basis of spatio-temporal regimes of narrative rhythms. The French Philosopher and Activist Henri Lefebvre (2004) developed rhythmanalysis as an approach to study the rhythms of urban spaces in order to understand parallel, overlapping and non-synchronous times, moments and situations under the conditions of capitalism. He demonstrated that rhythms play a major role in acts and practices of civil resistance and struggles of appropriation. Rhythms transform the urban space into a place for encounters, intrigues, diplomacy, deals and negotiations (Lefebvre, 2004). Rhythms reveal the appropriation of, and struggle over, public space. Rhythms shape human experience and pervade everyday life and place; they give a temporal understanding of place and space (Edensor, 2010a, b).

The focus of rhythmanalysis, then, is on “particular formations of tempo, timing, duration, sequence, and rhythm as the mutually implicating structures of time” (Edensor, 2010a, p. 202). In particular, rhythmanalysis is useful when examining the patterning of temporalities, for example, calendric, lunar lifecycle, somatic and mechanical, whose changes are crucial to experiences and organisation of social time (Edensor, 2010a). It is important to note that a rhythm can only crystallise in relation to other rhythms and may be fast, slow and so on. A rhythm can be understood as a form of repetition bound in time and space (Lefebvre, 2004). There are two primary forms of repetition: linear and cyclical (Lefebvre, 2004). Cyclical rhythms refer to alternations and short intervals with determined frequency and new beginnings (e.g. solar rhythms, lunar rhythms, day and night). Linear rhythms refer to successions, routines and planning. Linear time is repetitious and possible to measure, and calculate. Another type of rhythm is arrhythmia, which refers to a disruption of already existing rhythms (Lefebvre, 2004; Edensor, 2009). Disruption in rhythms may be caused by interventions such as an accident or a post that changes the direction of the discussion on a digital forum. In the analysis of the data, these three rhythms are used to understand the mechanisms of media narrative events of terrorist acts in cities.

3. Methodology

Mediatised narratives shape the brand image of the city. Here, online and social media narratives are the focus of study. What differentiates online narratives from those in traditional news media is that they are disseminated faster, have a greater reach, and that it is sometimes difficult to separate the sender from the receiver. The study relies on two media events, which occurred in Sweden during 2017. The events are treated as critical incidents situated in time and space and as constituent of experiences of and actions in the city (cf. Ochberg, 2012).

The first incident concerns an alleged terror attack caused by a statement made by Donald Trump (hereafter Trump) on 19 February 2017, just before the American presidential election. Trump misleadingly implied that there had been a major terror attack in the Swedish city of Malmo. This city is a typical example of a post-industrial city, which during the past few decades

has invested in cultural events and developing a destination profile. Being a place with a history of gang crimes and violence, the city is in need of a positive image. Malmo also served as the major transit city during the refugee crisis in 2015. The rebuttal to Trump's claims is commonly referred to as "Last night in Sweden". The second incident concerns a deadly terrorist attack in the Swedish capital city Stockholm that occurred on 7 April 2017 when a truck entered the main tourist and pedestrian street, Drottninggatan, at full speed with the intention to massacre as many people as possible. In the attack, 5 people were killed and 15 were injured. In this paper, this incident is referred to as the "Stockholm Terrorist Attack". The city centre of Stockholm has a strong positive image and is the heart of Swedish foreign tourism. In 2006, the capital was ranked the second with the safest city image in the Anholt-GMI City Brands Index (Anholt, 2006).

3.1 Research design and methods

The research design had the character of a mixed-methods approach (Johnson *et al.*, 2007). Qualitative and quantitative data were collected on the open internet consisting of tweets and online news media articles covering the two aforementioned media events. Twitter is a social networking and microblogging service. Registered users can read and post short messages, so-called tweets, which are limited to 140 characters. Users are also able to upload photos, short videos or share posts. In 2017, Twitter had 330m active monthly users (Twitter, 2018). The selection of tweets was based on hashtags (#) used on Twitter for the respective event. Hashtags can be short-lived and disappear rapidly, but they can also create ongoing conversations and event movements. Using hashtags as a selection strategy is useful, since a community of followers is usually formed around the hashtag (Small, 2011). As an event evolves, one or two hashtags are typically established as the most prominent to use when commenting on the event on Twitter. The main or the most commonly used hashtags within a set of associated hashtags are sometimes called meta-hashtags (Rocheleau and Millette, 2015). These hashtags become significant markers of the event itself, and make relevant data relatively easy to access (Brun and Burgess, 2013). The tweets that followed the events after the terror attack in Stockholm were collected under #stockholmattacks, #drottninggatan and #openstockholm. It was deemed useful to track and collect tweets for an extended period of time in order to follow the development and rhythm of the events. Tweets were collected from 7 April to 31 December 2017, and also during the Remembrance Day on 7 April 2018. The tweets that were published on the events that emerged in the aftermath of Trump's claim of terror in Malmo were collected under #lastnightinsweden from 19 February to 31 December 2017.

News articles published in online media covering the events were also collected. To get a wide selection of articles providing broad coverage and ample perspectives, online news media providing news in English from different parts of the world were selected. More specifically, some of the biggest news media platforms were selected: Yahoo News, RT, *The Guardian* and Al Jazeera. News articles that covered the "Last Night In Sweden" incident were collected from 19 February to 28 February 2017. News articles covering the events after the terrorist attack in Stockholm were collected from 7 April to 14 April 2017.

3.2 Analysis

The focus in the analysis was on the intensity and mechanisms of the mediatisation of city space through online news platforms and Twitter. The analysis of the media events involved identifying conflicting narratives, how they were negotiated and their implications for city image. The focus of the analysis was on examining the image of Malmo and Stockholm, respectively as a process of becoming in spatio-temporal rhythms. Rhythms were understood as regularised patterns of speech and analysed in terms of duration, intervals, sequencing, pace and so on.

An interpretive analytical approach was used in the analysis (Spiggle, 1994). Tweets and new articles were coded to develop patterns in the data that could be aggregated and synthesised into more general categories. In this process, both *a priori* and *in vivo* codes (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) were used. To arrive at a higher level of deep structure in the analysis, the researchers employed an abductive research strategy (Alvesson and Sköldböck, 2000), alternating between the empirical data and the theoretically informed schema. *A priori* codes were formed on the basis

of the theoretical lens of rhythmanalysis. The *a priori* codes were based on Lefebvre's (2004) conception of rhythmanalysis and its applications by Adam (1998). First, the narrative patterns were identified and linked to time in terms of tempo, duration, sequence and rhythm (Edensor, 2009). In this stage, counter-rhythms, arrhythmia, linear and cyclical rhythms were noted. In addition, movements, actions and repetition were noted. Thereafter, *in vivo* codes were identified that guided the analysis that aimed to identify different mechanisms that underpinned the different rhythms of the media events. Since rhythms are relationally constituted, attention was paid to the interplay of rhythms and how they were connected and disconnected. In the later stages of the analytical process, Adam's (1995, p. 66) work was used to highlight how the understanding of "when, how often, how long, in what order and at what speed" are guided by "norms, habits and conventions about temporality". In addition, the two media events were compared in order to highlight similarities and differences as well as analysing the deep structure of the data. The analytical processes resulted in the three general empirically derived phases in the processual unfolding of the events: initiation, appropriation and assimilation. Next, these phases are developed further.

4. Findings

In this section, the unfolding of the actual and imaginary events of terror are identified and analysed. Lefebvre's (2004) rhythmanalysis is used as a tool to investigate the rhythms of the media events under scrutiny. The analysis traces the emergence of the events along a timeline consisting of three phases. The findings of the study are summarised in Tables I and II, which show the typical rhythms of the unfolding of the events in the main hashtags, #lastnightinsweden and #stockholmattacks.

Table I The narrative rhythm in #lastnightinsweden

Date	Approx. number of tweets	Phase	Dominant expressions, themes, and hashtags
19 February 2017	3,446	Initiation	What has happened? What did Trump say? International actors, jokes about Trump, praise of Trump, fake news, Swedish chef #fakenews
20 February 2017	5,220	Appropriation	Polarisation. Different international actors, jokes about Trump, Sweden's problems, #alternativefacts
21 February 2017	3,228	Appropriation	Polarisation, jokes, Sweden's problems with migration, incidents in Swedish deprived areas, #factcheck #swedenattacks
22 February 2017	677	Appropriation	No go zones, building of a mosque
23 February 2017	349	Appropriation	Alt-right movement, racist posts, counter-arguments, social multiculturalist fake utopia
24 February 2017	200	Assimilation	Alt-right movement expressions, racists posts, #swedenhasfallen

Table II The narrative rhythm in #stockholmattacks

Date	Number of tweets	Phase(s)	Dominant expressions, themes, and hashtags
7 April 2017	171	Initiation	What has happened?, witness testimonials, #prayforstockholm, #prayfrosweden
8 April 2017	189	Initiation	Victims, perpetrator, #openstockholm
9 April 2017	387	Appropriation	Polarisation, #we standunited, open city empowerment, #islam, #Trump
10 April 2017	266	Appropriation Assimilation	Polarisation, honour the victims, word of wisdom, flowers at the attack site, empowerment, #Sweden
11 April 2017	162	Assimilation	Detailed reflections about the perpetrator, earlier mistakes made by the police and the secret service, scapegoating, #police, #migpol
12 April 2017	21	Assimilation	Occasional reflections, questions, attempts to start discussion #sweden

Responses to the alleged terror attack in Malmö that Trump referred to in a speech on 19 February 2017 were posed under #lastnightinsweden the following day. Even though the hashtag was filled with all kinds of posts, the discussion quickly became polemic. The hashtag was active during six months, but in January 2018, the rhythm of the account was slow with a low frequency of posts; most of the posts were expressions of alt-right populist views. In the tables, the intensity of postings during the first six days is included to demonstrate how it may have affected visitors' image of the cities.

In contrast to the imaginary event, the Stockholm terrorist attack had a clear beginning and end. Whereas the imaginary event was quickly hijacked and appropriated by different agendas, the actual event was more resistant to appropriation and followed a circular rhythm.

4.1 Initiation phase

The initiation phase in the case of the imaginary media event is characterised by an intense flow of voices and fast exchange of views. The initiation phase has no distinct end, since the Twitter community never agree on what actually happened. The phase seamlessly merges into the second phase of appropriation.

#lastnightinsweden took off after a speech held by Trump at a campaign-style rally in Florida, USA. At the meeting Trump stated:

We've got to keep our country safe. You look at what's happening in Germany, you look at what's happening last night in Sweden – Sweden, who would believe this? Sweden. They took in large numbers. They're having problems like they never thought possible (Topping, 2017).

The statement created confusion with regard to what had happened in Sweden. In response, thousands of tweets were immediately posted under #lastnightinsweden about different events that allegedly had taken place in Sweden. Questions were put to Sweden's official Twitter account, which is controlled by a different Swede each week. The answer was widely circulated and read:

No. Nothing has happened here in Sweden. There have not been any terrorist attacks here. At all. The main news right now is about Melfest [TV-music event] (@sweden, 19 February 2017).

In addition, a Swedish former Prime Minister and Foreign Minister wrote: "Sweden? Terror attack? What has he been smoking? Questions abound" (@CarlBildt 19 February 2017). Even Trump posted a clarification: "My statement as to what's happening in Sweden was in reference to a story that was broadcast on @FoxNews concerning immigrants & Sweden" (@realDonaldTrump, 19 February 2017). Few in the Twitter community, however, noticed Trump's clarification, and continued to incessantly post comments, which formed a number of media narratives (see further under the section of appropriations). In contrast to the discussion on Twitter, within hours of the statement, the consensus in online news media was that nothing had happened in Sweden and that the statement originated in a Fox News documentary on immigration and crime in Malmö aired on 17 February 2017 (e.g. Al Jazeera, 2017; Fox News, 2017; *The Guardian*, 2017).

The initiation phase of the Stockholm terror attack is also marked by an intense flow of posts and fast dissemination of information and rumours. At the outset, for a very short period of time, the posts reveal confusion and limited knowledge about what has happened. Thereafter, it is revealed that the driver is a 39-year-old asylum seeker from Uzbekistan who sympathises with the extremist organisation ISIS. The police quickly labelled the act as terrorism (*The Guardian*, 2017) and captured the perpetrator on day of the attack. In the week following the attack, there were news reports worldwide. On Twitter, comments were predominately posted under #stockholmtattack. In time, however, other hashtags came to dominate the Twitter flow.

The rhythm of the initiation phase is marked by an exchange of information and facts to discover what has happened. Articles from online news media are shared and there is a strong reliance on news to solve the mystery. Intensity is also created by a large number of individuals, organisations, and probably a number of bots (mainly re-tweeting messages), contributing to the Twitter flow. The narratives in this phase follow a linear rhythm in terms of being synchronous in the shared experience of the events, and following habits and norms of how to respond and

report on them (cf. Edensor, 2009). The instantaneous and rapid flow of tweets and news also created a synchronised choreography of the events, which contributed to a collective experience of what happened. Shortly afterwards, however, the rhythm changed as other narratives entered into the discussion in the second phase of the events.

4.2 Appropriation phase

The rhythm of the second phase is characterised by a high-level of activity and struggle over meaning. In this phase, various actors appropriate the media events and make them part of different agendas. The events are merged with other narratives, hashtags and places in order to mobilise them for diverse purposes. The linearity of rhythm in the initiation phase is disrupted and counter-rhythms are introduced. Conflicts and struggles predominately occur in relation to the imaginary event where a polarisation of views is noticeable. A few hours after Trump's statement, the first narratives critiquing his precedency emerged. These narratives revolve around different kinds "fake news" and his suspected connections to Russia. Many of the posts portray the president as a villain and joker who has been mistaken previously, for example by referring to his false claims of a massacre in Green Bowling. For example, in response to Trump, Chelsea Clinton tweeted: "What happened in Sweden last night? Did they catch the Bowling Green Massacre perpetrators?" (@chelseaclinton, 19 February 2017). The post has since then been retweeted 39,527 times. Using the Swedish incident to advance critique towards Trump is underscored by the common use of hashtags, such as #notmypresident and #alternativefacts.

The critical narratives are countered by a set of tweets and news reports in support of Trump. Over time #lastnightinsweden is appropriated as an ongoing support for Trump's presidency and is followed by hashtags such as #trumprally and #presidentsday. The narratives depict him as competent, heroic and that "he is right once again". In support of Trump, it is common to share information about Sweden's assumed problems with gang rapes, no go zones, sharia laws and mass migration. Other prominent narratives that enact the imaginary media event are connected to anti-Islamic and extreme right wing groups, which use Sweden as a horror example of a multi-cultural society. There are different narratives within this group. One set of narratives discusses the specific problems in Malmo and Stockholm, such as violence, riots and migration. News articles on these problems are predominately in Swedish, but there are also examples from American and British news agencies. In particular, an incident taking place in a deprived area with a large migrant community in Stockholm is used to provide evidence of Sweden's problems. In the incident, youths threw stones and burned cars, while the police responded with firearms. There are actors that appropriate the conversation under #lastnightinsweden in order to strengthen a pre-existing narrative that there are major problems in Sweden spiralling out of the control of the government. Another set of narratives involves ideas that Sweden and Europe are swamped with ISIS supporters who pose a threat to everyone in Europe. Tweets under hashtags such as #whitegenocide #raperefugees are deeply racist and convey negative stereotypes of Islam. Hence, #lastnightinsweden becomes a site for mobilising a far right agenda by means of Malmo and Sweden.

4.2.1 Counter-rhythms. In the case of the real terror attack in Stockholm, a different type of appropriation is used. The narratives enacting this media event are more fact-based than those performing the imagined event. For example, those in #stockholmattack seek to provide neutral and fact-based accounts of what happened. The posts focus on disseminating information about the attack, people's stories and experiences and follow-ups on the victims of the attack. There are also tweets expressing respect and condolences to those affected by the attack. A second notable narrative created in the #stockholmattack was to connect the terrorist attack to other attacks in Europe. Apparently, the commentators were trying to appropriate the hashtag to create an ongoing and evolving narrative on attacks on European cities. In this appropriation, the use of hashtags such as #LondonAttacks, #NiceAttacks and #BarcelonaAttacks were important to create a sense of community and solidarity, but also to underscore that Stockholm is not the only city that has been affected. Terror attacks happen in every metropolitan city.

A third narrative that can be discerned in relation to the Stockholm attack is a distinct counter-narrative to the alt-right one by positioning Stockholm as an open city using #openstockholm. It introduces a counter rhythm in the flow of tweets by shifting attention from

the attack to the openness and solidarity of citizens in Stockholm. This is an attempt to create a more positive image of the city under attack and to deal with an image in crisis by defending Stockholm against the far right narrative. Terror should not dominate the image of the city, but is countered with love. Solidarity, resilience and love were a major counter narrative created by a large number of tweets published in #stockholmattack. The tweets use statements such as “stronger together”, and “never surrender to terrorism”:

Solidarity followed the attack in Stockholm yesterday. People used the hashtag #openstockholm to offer a ride, a meal or a place to sleep (@swedense, 8 April 2017).

#openstockholm was established shortly after the attack, to help those affected. The hashtag connects to the initiatives taken in other cities affected by terrorist attacks, such as #openberlin, and #PorteOuverte used after the attacks in Paris. Initially, the #openstockholm was used together with #stockholmattack, but later it formed a community on its own. On the first day, many tweets focussed on solidarity and hospitality. People offered free meals and a place to stay for the night if you could not return to your home. Two days after the attack, the hashtag was used to gather people for a public demonstration on not surrendering to terror. The strategic use of the hashtag is similar to Avraham and Ketter's (2008) response strategy of recovering images of cities that are perceived as unsafe by delivering a counter message on how to tackle perceptions of unsafety.

In contrast to the imaginary event, in the actual event counter narrative dominates the conversation. There are several explanations for why this happens. Stockholm has an already established positive image based on safety (Anholt, 2006), which is stronger than images of no go zones and crime. Therefore, the negative narrative does not seem to stick to the image of Stockholm. Narratives of openness, safety, love, and resilience are more aligned with its established image, and therefore more authentic and credible.

4.3 Assimilation phase

The initiation and appropriation phases are relatively short. They are followed by the third phase, assimilation, which is characterised by low-key rhythmic activity. The rhythm and development are slow in comparison to the earlier phases. In the assimilation phase, the disparate narratives converge into a dominant one, establishing a consensus in the discussion. The phase is characterised by a linear rhythm in which the narrative is chronologically unfolded to comments on events occurring in real time.

In #lastnightinsweden, there are only eight to ten tweets per month posted between May and December 2017. The majority of tweets in the hashtag focus on messages related to crimes committed by immigrants, and recirculate or develop anti-Islamic and alt-right posts in the earlier phases. Hence, the tweets form a general narrative of discontent with Swedish politics and government. Similarly, in #stockholmattack there are only three to five tweets per month between May and December 2017. Hence, the narrative rhythm is slow. The majority of the tweets focus on information on and remembering similar attacks in London, Manchester, Nice, Berlin, Paris, Brussels, and St Petersburg. In this way, the narrative flow naturalises the terror attack in Stockholm by stating that it was inevitable. The #openstockholm tweets follow a similar rhythm. There are approximately 20 tweets between May and June 2017, and thereafter only one to two tweets per month. Most of the tweets concern remembrance of the victims of the terror attack. The intensity of the rhythm of the hashtag increased as the annual Remembrance Day to honour the victims of the attack approached (Nordlund, 2018). However, in comparison to the intensity of the two previous phases, the increase in the pace of the rhythm is marginal. The real event is marked by a cyclical rhythm through the ritualisation of the performance of the annual memorial.

To conclude, the assimilation phase is marked by low-key rhythmic activity. The narratives created in this phase consist of generic narratives with clear ties to the narratives established in the appropriation phase. The media event Last Night in Sweden with the hashtag #lastnightinsweden is characterised by linear time, but the media event Stockholm terror attack with the hashtags #stockholmattack and #openstockholm show signs of cyclical time.

5. Discussion and conclusion

This study contributes with novel knowledge on the role played by the fast circulation of digital narratives in the mediatisation of tourism cities. It demonstrates that city administrations need to deal with both imaginary and deadly terror attacks. Indeed, the narratives of the imaginary terror attack in a digital environment had a greater impact on the image of Malmö than the ones of the actual terror attack. Previous research on place branding shows that it is difficult to change positive images of cities and nations that have been established in the public mindset over time (Anholt, 2006). Sweden and Stockholm have traditionally had a strong brand story, even if this story nowadays is challenged by the regularity of mutated and even fake news about Sweden's problems with migrations. By contrast, at the time of the event, Malmö city is relatively unknown internationally and already suffered from a negative image, which made the city vulnerable to extremist and populist narratives. The media attention was relatively quickly shifted from the city of Malmö to the country of Sweden. The Last Night in Sweden incident was treated as a problem on the national level and not handled by the city administration in Malmö. In the beginning, the focus is on the location where the attack is assumed to have taken place, but with time, the place is extended. Eventually, the narrative concerns Sweden. Given that it is not possible to locate the imaginary event to a specific place, the place becomes ephemeral and dynamic. The fact that no one knew what had happened and the vague image of Malmö opened up a space in which speculation and conspiracy fantasies can grow. Real and imaginary elements are woven together into different stories of what took place. By contrast, in the Stockholm attack there was no ambiguity with regards to the event. Stockholm also had a positive image onto which the populist narratives did not stick. This finding underscores the importance of developing distinct images of cities that can make them resilient to attacks and negative media narratives. This is especially important in a post-truth era in which facts are relativised and the boundaries between what is true and false are fluent. The media narratives appropriate certain places and use them as symbols for certain types of agenda. References to places seem to be necessary in order to make claims legitimate and authentic. In the actual event, however, the place is fixed. The event took place. The discussion is more focused on micro-localities exploring the truck's path on the main tourist and shopping street Drottninggatan. Nevertheless, attempts are made to connect the attack in Stockholm to socially deprived areas in the city's outskirts.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that the unfolding of the media events follows the three chronological phases: initiation, appropriation and assimilations. The phases are interrelated and overlapping, but the duration, configuration and rhythm are different in the imaginary event and the real event, which has consequences for city image. In the actual case, the initiation phase is very short and there is joint recognition in the community of the hashtag that an attack has taken place. However, in the imaginary case, no agreement on what has actually happened is achieved in the Twitter community. Over time, the actual event was ritualised and integrated into cyclical time, while the imaginary event, characterised by counter-rhythms and arrhythmia, took on a life of its own. To conclude, this paper shows that tourism in cities is affected differently by terror attacks depending on the mediatisation of the city space and the image of the city as a tourism destination. Tourists will probably still travel, despite violent attacks, if the overall image of the tourism city is positively perceived.

References

- Adam, B. (1995), *Timewatch: The Social Analysis of Time*, Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Adam, B. (1998), *Timescapes of Modernity*, Routledge, London.
- Al Jazeera (2017), "Social media mocks Trump for making up Sweden attack", 19 February.
- Altheide, D.L. (1997), "The news media, the problem frame, and the production of fear", *The Sociological Quarterly*, Vol. 38 No. 4, pp. 647-68.
- Alvesson, M. and Sköldböck, K. (2000), *Reflexive Methodology: New Vistas for Qualitative Research*, Sage, London.
- Anholt, S. (2006), "The Anholt-GMI City Brands Index: how the world sees the world's cities", *Place Branding*, Vol. 2 No. 1, pp. 18-31.

- Avraham, E. (2004), "Media strategies for improving an unfavorable city image", *Cities*, Vol. 21 No. 6, pp. 471-9.
- Avraham, E. (2009), "Marketing and managing nation branding during prolonged crisis: the case of Israel", *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, Vol. 5 No. 3, pp. 202-12.
- Avraham, E. and Ketter, E. (2008), "Will we be safe there? Analysing strategies for altering unsafe place images", *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, Vol. 4 No. 3, pp. 196-204.
- Avraham, E. and Ketter, E. (2017), "Destination image repair while combatting crises: tourism marketing in Africa", *Tourism Geographies*, Vol. 19 No. 5, pp. 780-800.
- Baudrillard, J. (1995), *The Gulf War did not take Place*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington.
- Brun, A. and Burgess, J. (2013), "Crisis communication in natural disasters: the Queensland floods and Christchurch earthquakes", in Weller, K., Bruns, A., Burgess, J. *et al.* (Eds), *Twitter and Society*, Peter Lang, New York, NY, pp. 373-84.
- Cavarero, A. (2009), *Horrorism: Naming Contemporary Violence*, Columbia University Press, New York, NY.
- Coaffee, J. and Rogers, P. (2008), "Reputational risk and resiliency: the branding of security in place-making", *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, Vol. 4 No. 3, pp. 205-17.
- Coaffee, J. and Van Ham, P. (2008), "'Security branding': the role of security in marketing the city, region or state", *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, Vol. 4 No. 3, pp. 191-5.
- Couldry, N. and Hepp, A. (2018), "The continuing lure of the mediated centre in times of deep mediatization: media events and its enduring legacy", *Media, Culture & Society*, Vol. 40 No. 1, pp. 114-17.
- Doosti, S., Jalilvand, M.R., Asadi, A., Pool, J.K. and Adl, P.M. (2016), "Analyzing the influence of electronic word of mouth on visit intention: the mediating role of tourists' attitude and city image", *International Journal of Tourism Cities*, Vol. 2 No. 2, pp. 137-48.
- Edensor, T. (2009), "Commuter: mobility, rhythm and commuting", in Cresswell, T. and Merriman, P. (Eds), *Geographies of Mobilities: Practices, Spaces, Subjects*, Ashgate, Farnham, pp. 189-204.
- Edensor, T. (Ed.) (2010a), *Geographies of Rhythm: Nature, Place, Mobilities and Bodies*, Ashgate, Farnham.
- Edensor, T. (2010b), "Walking in rhythms: place, regulation, style and the flow of experience", *Visual Studies*, Vol. 25 No. 1, pp. 69-79.
- Fox News (2017), "Trump clarifies 'Sweden' remark, says he was referring to Fox News report", 19 February.
- Gotved, S. (2006), "Time and space in cyber social reality", *New Media & Society*, Vol. 8 No. 3, pp. 467-86.
- The Guardian* (2017), "Stockholm attack suspect Rakhmat Akilov admits terrorist crime", 4 November, available at: www.theguardian.com/world/2017/apr/11/stockholm-attack-suspect-rakhmat-akilov-admits-terrorist (accessed 28 January 2018).
- Hepp, A. and Couldry, N. (2010), "Introduction: media events in globalized media cultures", in Couldry, N., Hepp, A. and Krotz, F. (Eds), *Media Events in a Global Age*, Routledge, London, pp. 1-19.
- Hjarvard, S. (2009), "Soft individualism: media and the changing social character", in Lundby, K. (Ed.), *Mediatization: Concept, Changes, Consequences*, Peter Lang Publishing, New York, NY, pp. 159-77.
- Horten, G. (2011), "The mediatization of war: a comparison of the American and German media coverage of the Vietnam and Iraq wars", *American Journalism*, Vol. 28 No. 4, pp. 29-53.
- Howie, L. (2015), "Witnessing terrorism", *Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 51 No. 3, pp. 507-21.
- Johnson, R.B., Onwuegbuzie, A.J. and Turner, L.A. (2007), "Toward a definition mixed methods research", *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, Vol. 1 No. 2, pp. 112-33.
- Kellner, D. (2009), "Media spectacle and media events: some critical reflections", in Couldry, N., Hepp, A. and Krotz, F. (Eds), *Media Events in a Global Age*, Routledge, London, pp. 87-102.
- Larsen, S., Brun, W. and Øgaard, T. (2009), "What tourists worry about – construction of a scale measuring tourist worries", *Tourism Management*, Vol. 30 No. 2, pp. 260-65.
- Lefebvre, H. (2004), *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life*, Continuum, New York, NY.
- Liu, A. and Pratt, S. (2017), "Tourism's vulnerability and resilience to terrorism", *Tourism Management*, Vol. 60, June, pp. 404-17.
- Mortensen, M. (2015), "Conflictual media events, eyewitness images, and the Boston Marathon bombing (2013)", *Journalism Practice*, Vol. 9 No. 4, pp. 536-51.

- Nordlund, F. (2018), "Det här händer under terrorattackens minnesdag i Stockholm", *Dagens Nyheter*, 6 April, available at: www.dn.se/sthlm/det-har-hander-under-terrorattackens-minnesdag-i-stockholm/ (accessed 1 June 2018).
- Nossek, H. (2008), "'News media' – media events: terrorist acts as media events", *Communications*, Vol. 33 No. 3, pp. 313-30.
- Ochberg, F. (2012), "The emergence of critical incident analysis as a field of study", in Schwester, R.W. (Ed.), *Handbook of Critical Incident Analysis*, M.E. Sharpe, Armonk, NY, pp. 3-19.
- Oxford Dictionaries* (2016), available at: <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/word-of-the-year> (accessed 19 February 2018).
- Rocheleau, S. and Millette, M. (2015), "Meta-hashtags and tag co-occurrence: from organisation to politics in the French Canadian Twitter sphere", in Rambikkana, N. (Ed.), *Hashtag Publics. The Power and Politics of Discursive Networks*, Vol. 103, Digital Formations, Bern, pp. 243-54.
- Small, T.A. (2011), "What the hashtag?", *Information, Communication and Society*, Vol. 14 No. 6, pp. 872-95.
- Spiggle, S. (1994), "Analysis and interpretation of qualitative data in consumer research", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 21 No. 3, pp. 491-503.
- Strauss, A.L. and Corbin, J.M. (1998), *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*, 2nd ed., Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Topping, A. (2017), "Sweden, who would believe this? Trump cites non-existent terror attack", *The Guardian*, 19 February, available at: www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/feb/19/sweden-trump-cites-non-existent-terror-attack (accessed 28 January 2018).
- Twitter (2018), "Number of monthly active Twitter users worldwide from 1st quarter 2010 to 4th quarter 2017 (in millions)", available at: www.statista.com/statistics/282087/number-of-monthly-active-twitter-users/ (accessed 21 April 2018).
- Walters, G., Wallin, A. and Hartley, N. (2018), "The threat of terrorism and tourist choice behavior", *Journal of Travel Research* (forthcoming), available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/00472875187555>

Further reading

- Avraham, E. (2015), "Destination image repair during crisis: attracting tourism during the Arab Spring uprisings", *Tourism Management*, Vol. 47, April, pp. 224-32.
- Couldry, N. and McCarthy, A. (2004), "Orientations: mapping mediaspace", in Couldry, N. and McCarthy, A. (Eds), *Mediaspace. Place, Scale and Culture in a Media Age*, Routledge, London, pp. 1-18.
- Harvey, D. (1992), *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, Wiley, London.
- Hepp, A. (2009), "Differentiation: mediatization and cultural change", in Lundby, K. (Ed.), *Mediatization. Concepts, Changes, Consequences*, Peter Lang Publishing, New York, NY, pp. 139-58.
- Jansson, A. (2018), "Rethinking post-tourism in the age of social media", *Annals of Tourism*, Vol. 69, March, pp. 101-10.
- Korstanje, M. (2009), "Re-visiting risk perception theory in the context of travel", *e-Review of Tourism Research*, Vol. 7 No. 4, pp. 68-81.
- Månsson, M. (2011), "Mediatized tourism", *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 38 No. 4, pp. 1634-52.

Corresponding author

Cecilia Cassinger can be contacted at: cecilia.cassinger@isk.lu.se

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website:

www.emeraldgroupublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm

Or contact us for further details: permissions@emeraldinsight.com