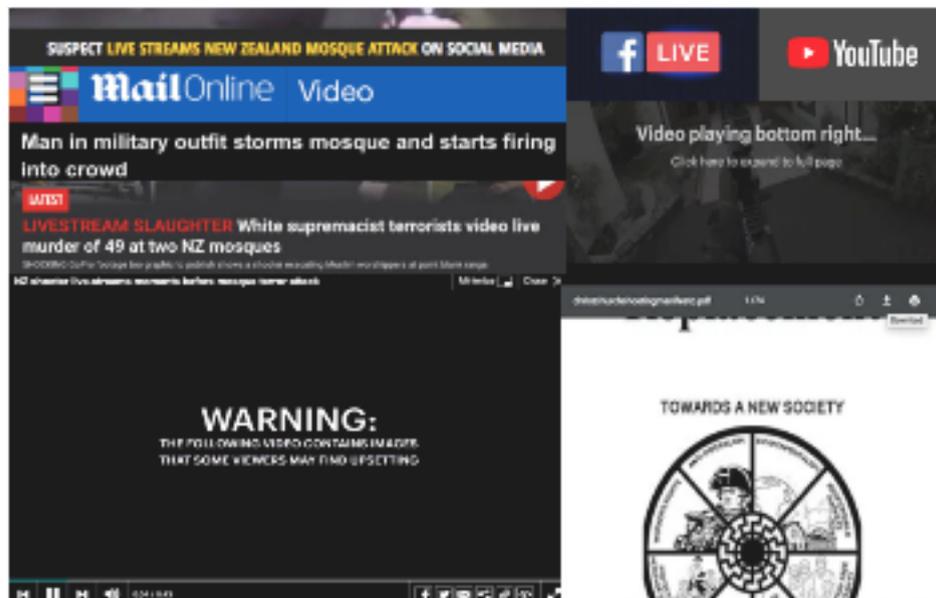


INFLECTION POINT

Christchurch

When social media platforms became **publishers of extremism** and news websites became **amplifiers of hatred**



The role of traditional media companies in the publication and amplification of violent extremist propaganda and its implications for society and security

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Summary: News sites become amplifiers for terrorist propaganda published on social media platforms

The individual responsible for the terror attacks in Christchurch New Zealand on the 15th March 2019 sought publicity for his crimes by broadcasting the attack live on the social media site Facebook. Footage from it was then edited, re-published and amplified by three UK-based newspaper websites: **The Sun, The Mirror, and The Daily Mail.**

The key facts are:

1. 4000 people watched the original video uploaded by the Christchurch terrorist;
2. The Sun, Mail and Mirror websites uploaded edited footage to their websites; some of which reach over 7 million people per day, or 3000 people per minute¹;
3. The Mail published the killer's white supremacist hate "manifesto";
4. Since the incident, Head of the UK's Counter Terrorism Policing Neil Basu has said publicly that these actions are harmful to our society and security.²

Newspapers and media websites in the UK are not independently regulated, which means they can publish material like this with no regulatory accountability.

On 15 May 2019 New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern and President Emmanuel Macron of France will host a global summit calling for a "Christchurch Call" pledge to combat hate and extremism on social media sites.

Such a pledge should include action to ensure proper accountability for any outlet that publishes, amplifies and/or promulgates the spread of hateful, extremist propaganda online.

Both social media and traditional media were major disseminators of extremist material in relation to this attack, and must all be subject to independent regulation. Harm is harm, regardless of where it originates.

¹ Figures from Newsworks: <https://www.newsworks.org.uk/>

² <https://www.counterterrorism.police.uk/acso-neil-basu-issues-open-letter-about-reporting-of-terrorism/>

Media publisher activity following the Christchurch terror attack

The Timeline: following the events of 15th March 2019

GMT	Development
12:40am	<p>The first terrorist attack takes place at the Al Noor Mosque. The second terrorist attack - committed by the same person - takes place at the Linwood Islamic Centre 15 minutes later.</p> <p>The terrorist gunman live-streams the attack to Facebook. The video is viewed fewer than 200 times during that live broadcast and 4000 times subsequently, before Facebook is able to remove it.³</p>
3:49am	<p>New Zealand Police state they are aware of the video and request that it not be shared or republished.⁴</p>
8:35am	<p>The Daily Mirror and the Daily Mail's websites are hosting edited versions of the video.⁵</p>
9:13am	<p>The Sun's website is hosting a short clip of the video on repeat, known as a "gif".⁶</p>
9:26am	<p>The Mail is hosting a copy of the terrorist's manifesto, which is made available to download.⁷</p>
12.35pm	<p>Editor of the Daily Mirror, Lloyd Embley, tweets to apologise for hosting the video, and confirms it had been removed.⁸</p>
3.36pm	<p>Di Stefano⁹ reports the Mail has confirmed the manifesto has been removed.</p>

³ See report by BuzzFeed journalist Mark Di Stefano, <https://newsroom.fb.com/news/2019/03/update-on-new-zealand/>

⁴ <https://twitter.com/nzpolice/status/1106402006183219203>

⁵ <https://twitter.com/MarkDiStef/status/1106474097637289984>

⁶ <https://twitter.com/MarkDiStef/status/1106483550143029253>

⁷ See <https://www.buzzfeed.com/markdistefano/the-daily-mail-let-readers-download-the-new-zealand-mosque> and <https://twitter.com/MarkDiStef/status/1106510389267836931>

⁸ https://twitter.com/Mirror_Editor/status/1106534340333314048

⁹ <https://twitter.com/MarkDiStef/status/1106580013409857536>

Reach of the largest media companies

1. In total, the original video was viewed approximately 4000 times through Facebook before being removed.
2. 1.5m people attempted to upload the video to Facebook over the following hours. Facebook successfully prevented 1.2m copies from being uploaded, while the remaining 300,000 were removed later, after they had been posted.
3. Newsworks, the marketing body for national newspapers, reports that:
 1. The Daily Mail's PC & mobile average reach is 5,222,000 per day¹⁰;
 2. The Sun's PC & mobile average reach is 5,152,000 per day¹¹;
 3. The Daily Mirror's PC & mobile average reach is 2,619,000 per day¹².

These figures translate to a reach of up to 3000 per minute: bringing the video to a far wider audience than had initially seen the video through Facebook.

4. We cannot be sure of when the videos were uploaded and taken down again, but we know they were on these websites from approximately 9am, as this was when their presence was reported on, and that apologies/confirmations of removal did not reportedly appear until the afternoon.
5. The question of how many individuals watched the footage as a result of their being hosted on these websites can only be answered by the newspaper websites responsible. But given the statistics on reach that are available, and the possibility that these videos were published for up to three hours which are typically a high traffic period (9am – 12pm), it is likely that the actions of these publishers brought the edited footage to over a million people. We have written to the newspapers in question about how long the videos were available for, but (as of 2 May 2019) we have not received a response.
6. In contrast to the actions of social media companies, who were *reacting* to the actions of users, newspaper websites *proactively* took the decision to publish and amplify material that may incite racial hatred and depicts the actions of a self-proclaimed white supremacist terrorist – and did so **after New Zealand police had requested the footage not be shared**.
7. Assistant Commissioner Neil Basu, Head of Counter Terrorism Policing, has written an open letter strongly criticising media coverage of the attack.
Basu writes,

“The same media companies who have lambasted social media platforms for not acting fast enough to remove extremist content are simultaneously publishing uncensored Daesh propaganda on their websites, or make the rambling ‘manifestos’ of crazed killers available for download.

“A piece of extremist propaganda might reach tens of thousands of people naturally through their own channels or networks, but the moment a national newspaper publishes it in full then it has a potential reach of tens of millions. We must recognise this as harmful to our society and security.”

¹⁰ <https://www.newsworks.org.uk/daily-mail>

¹¹ <https://www.newsworks.org.uk/the-sun>

¹² <https://www.newsworks.org.uk/daily-mirror>

Failures of regulation

1. The Mail, Mirror and Sun are not members of an independent media regulator. They are instead members of the industry complaints-handler IPSO, which does not meet the Press Recognition Panel's clear criteria for independence and effectiveness that preserves and enhances free speech.

IPSO fails those tests because it is:

1. Subject to industry interference;
 2. Ineffective, and unable to carry out basic regulatory functions like write its own code, change its own rules, or require apologies to be published when the code has been breached;
 3. Vulnerable to political interference.
2. Between them, Mail, Sun and Mirror publisher representatives occupy four positions across IPSO and the bodies which co-control it.¹³ These include chairperson of the body which sets the standards code and chairperson of the body which controls various IPSO rules and regulations. Representatives of these publishers, therefore, have significant control over the body meant to regulate them. They are marking their own homework.
 3. There is no clause in the "Editors Code" – the standards code which newspaper publishers claim to adhere to – which prohibits the republishing of terrorist propaganda. IPSO cannot change its own standards code (the code is written by newspaper editors). As such, no complaint can be made to IPSO about the Mail, Sun and Mirror having published edited terrorist footage or propaganda.
 4. Given the absence of meaningful regulatory and pro-active powers available to IPSO, and the fact it is not able to change its own standards code, even if it were inclined to act it could not do so.
 5. As of 2nd May 2019 - more than a month after the attack - IPSO does not appear to have tweeted, published any reference, or taken any action at all with regard to the attack or coverage of it.

Established media publishers are able to disseminate terrorist propaganda to a huge audience - often even wider than social media - yet there is no regulation for print & online media.

¹³ Two national representatives on the Regulatory Funding Company – a body which holds various powers over IPSO; one on the Code Committee which sets the standards Code, and one on the IPSO Complaints Committee.

What needs to happen now

1. With urgency, we must tell the UK's Digital Minister Margot James MP to demand the "Christchurch call" pledge applies to any source that publishes, promotes and/or amplifies terrorist and violent extremist content at the 15 May meeting in Paris.
2. The Government is consulting on a new regulator to protect the public from extremism and other online harms. Inexplicably, newspapers and other traditional media publishers would be exempt. Tell the Government to ensure that our safety and security is not endangered by the actions of media publishers: who must be accountable for publishing, promoting and/or amplifying terrorist and violent extremist content.