

Reporting Crisis: let's do it better

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This is my introductory speech to the seventh Polis annual journalism conference on 21/4/16: Reporting Crisis. The [conference website is here](#)

Our theme today is Reporting Crisis.

And it sometimes feels that we live in a world of permanent crises.

This year the UK news agenda has been dominated by:

- A mass forced migration sweeping across borders
- A terror movement spawned out of apparently irresolvable conflicts in distant lands – smashing its way into the heartlands of European cities
- And Europe itself, now a continent breaking apart political

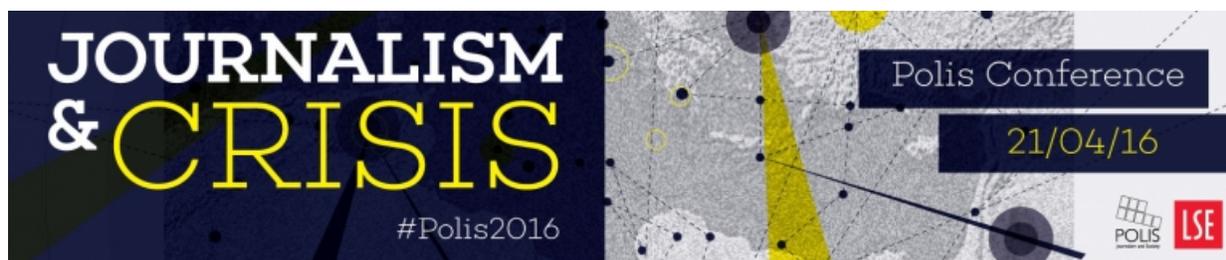
The public say they feel overwhelmed by the daily media diet of disruption and danger

Journalists tell me they too feel exhausted by the relentless agenda of agony and angst.

And of course traditional news is now being swamped by a tidal wave of images and information surging through the social networks.

At a moment when newsrooms have never been more under pressure they and their audiences must deal with a digital whirlwind of conspiracy, confusion and complexity around any crisis event or issue.

This can leave the public – the people we serve – depressed and even distant from journalism. It may also leave them feeling that in a world of crisis there is no-one to trust. No wonder that people feel a deep alienation from authority – including the authority of journalists.



Yet the appetite for information and debate has never been greater.

The evidence that people care is clear from their endless desire for communication

Some of that communication shows us that people are angry, critical and confused.

But the evidence is also there that people want media to improve their lives – to build communities and create understanding.

But how we understand the world is changing – and how journalism seeks to report and explain it must change too.

This is about how we adapt to new technology, new tools and new platforms that offer remarkable new ways to bear witness, to explain and to engage: but it's also a question of attitude.

We must put the public first – not just as consumers but as citizens – and most of all as human beings.

We should not be afraid that emotions are driving this interest in news, especially on social networks. We should be transparent about our own subjectivity. We should embrace the idea of making news relevant to the audience as people. Of course, we should always strive for facts, for data, for context and revelations and to try to present a fair and diverse range of views. But the human interest should always be at the core of our work – be it a long-form documentary or a Snapchat post.

Journalism is perhaps never more important than when things in the world go catastrophically wrong – crisis reporting can literally be a matter of life and death. Let's try, against all the odds, to make it better.

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