

<b>Institution:</b> Royal Holloway, University of London
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 21, Politics and International Studies
<b>Title of case study:</b> Political Communication in the New Media Ecology
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Ben O'Loughlin led and participated in a series of grant-funded collaborative projects that explored the nexus between media and security, provided a foundation for innovations in political communication theory and practice, and impacted upon government, business and media organisations. The iteration of projects and outputs integrated qualitative and quantitative, behavioural and interpretive methodologies, which in turn revealed emergent relationships between policy, media and publics in global, multilingual media ecologies. O'Loughlin's collaborations with Linguamatics Ltd, the BBC World Service and the House of Lords have led the application of these new methodologies and created policy debate on the ethics of their use.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>The impact generated is underpinned by three intersecting strands of research:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. After joining the UoA in 2006, O'Loughlin published a body of work exploring the interaction of <b>security and media, policy and publics</b> (i-v). This research showed how discrepancies between the views of policy and media elites on the one side and those of publics on the other side about a range of security threats led to public dissatisfaction with the substance, procedural process and pace of 'war on terror' policies and to a government legitimacy deficit. Through grant-funded projects for the ESRC (2007-10), Centre for the Protection of National Infrastructure (2008-09) and Technology Strategy Board (2009-10), O'Loughlin generated analysis of the role of broadcast and post-broadcast media in radicalisation processes. Research demonstrated how journalists, policymakers and citizens were uncertain about the nature of radicalisation, yet also dependent on mainstream news reporting that uncritically reflected those uncertainties. This amplified anxiety and reduced trust in news. Research also demonstrated how new networked gate-keeping functions in the digital media ecology enabled jihadist groups to reach differentiated audiences (v).</li> <li>2. <b>Semantic polling.</b> O'Loughlin created the concept 'semantic polling' to refer to Big Data mining and analysis used to generate 'intelligence' about the meaning of texts available in publicly-available social media (vi). In 2009-10 he collaborated with the Cambridge data firm Linguamatics Ltd to develop (patented) methodologies for monitoring Twitter for security risks in a TSB-funded project. This allowed him to develop concepts and methods for monitoring public opinion more generally. This work has extremely broad application beyond war and terrorism because responses to pandemics, financial crises and natural disasters have all been diffused through new media ecologies, triggering new information dynamics through which publics have come to understand events. O'Loughlin's analysis revealed the repertoires of communication used by citizens in new media spaces and the ways elites seek to manage their reputations, information flows and the 'movement' of public conversation. O'Loughlin conducted semantic polling during the 2010 UK General Election and for the BBC during the 2012 London Olympics, co-leading a project, 'Tweeting the Olympics', to explore how multilingual overseas audiences responded to London, the Olympics and the BBC's representation of each.</li> <li>3. <b>Strategic narratives.</b> Strand 1's explanation of the circulation of jihadist narratives and Western government counter-narratives and Strand 2's development of digital methodologies to trace narrative circulations combined to enable O'Loughlin to pursue research into how strategic narratives are formed, projected and interpreted in international relations generally. This new research developed through a series of strategic narrative workshops (International Studies Association catalytic workshop, 2009; American Political Science Association Political Communication section workshop, 2010; and European Consortium for Political Research standing group section, 2010) and produced a strategic narratives monograph in 2013 (vii). O'Loughlin's BBC 'Tweeting the Olympics' and strategic narratives research led to his appointment on 8 July 2013 as Specialist Advisor to the House of Lords Select Committee on Soft Power and the UK's Influence, bringing him into direct dialogue with those tasked with forming and projecting UK narratives and those in government and publicly-funded cultural institutions tasked with measuring their impact.</li> </ol> <p>Each strand of underpinning research has an interdisciplinary remit, involving collaborations with computer scientists, sociologists, psychologists and political scientists. The ISA, APSA and ECPR</p>

## Impact case study (REF3b)

workshops each included scholars from history, journalism, sociology and diplomacy studies. Such an approach is necessary to address the difficulties of researching political communication today.

**3. References to the research** (indicative maximum of six references)**Publications:**

- i. (with A. Hoskins) (2007) *Television and Terror*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.
- ii. (with A. Hoskins) (2010) *War and Media: The Emergence of Diffused War*. Cambridge: Polity.
- iii. (with A. N. Awan and A. Hoskins) (2011) *Radicalisation and Media: Terrorism and Connectivity in the New Media Ecology*. London: Routledge.
- iv. (2011) 'Images as weapons of war? Representation, mediation and interpretation', *Review of International Studies*, 37:71-91.
- v. (with A. Hoskins) (2010) 'Security Journalism and 'the mainstream' in Britain since 7/7: translating terror but inciting violence?' *International Affairs*, 86.4:903-924.
- vi. (with N. Anstead) (2011) 'The Emerging Viewertariat and BBC Question Time: Television Debate and Real Time Commenting Online', *International Journal of Press/Politics*, 16.4:440-462.
- vii. (with A. Miskimmon and L. Roselle) (2013) *Strategic Narratives: Communication Power and the New World Order*. New York: Routledge.

**Key research grants:**

1. (with A. N. Awan and A. Hoskins), 'Legitimising the discourses of radicalisation: Political violence in the new media ecology', ESRC October 2007 – January 2010 £239,184.22 + FEC then £25,000.00 additional grant to extend existing project.
2. (with A. Hoskins, P. Rayson and P. Taylor) 'Developing our Understanding of the Language of Extremism and its Potential for Predicting Risk'. Centre for the Protection of National Infrastructure (CPNI) October 2008 – March 2009 £179,000.
3. (with Linguamatics Ltd) 'Monitoring of complex information infrastructure by mining external signals', Technology Strategy Board (TSB) September 2009 – September 2010 £120,000.

**Evidence of quality:**

O'Loughlin has published this case study research in the house journals of the Political Studies Association (*Political Studies*), the British International Studies Association (*Review of International Studies*) and the Royal Institute for International Affairs (*International Affairs*). *Ethnopolitics* (9:2, 2010) devoted a special section to this research, with responses by leading scholars in the US, UK and Australia. *War and Media* has been cited 56 times, and it is testament to its theoretical grounding that its first review was published in *Radical Philosophy*, where University of Amsterdam's Joyce Goggin called it 'a thoroughgoing and meticulous study'. Katherina Niemeyer of Université Paris II wrote, '*War and Media* put a scientific bomb in our reflection on contemporary warfare thinking' in her review in the *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*. Columbia University's Brigitte Nacos called *Radicalisation and Media* 'a first rate book' in her review for *Critical Studies on Terrorism*. The ESRC awarded 'Legitimising the Discourses of Radicalisation' an 'Outstanding' grade and provided additional funding to extend the project. It led to an invitation to bid to the CPNI (successful). Other researchers secured project grants building on the trajectory of O'Loughlin multi-methodology studies, applying the framework of integrated study of media, publics and policymakers to different cases, e.g. Jarvis & Lister's 'Anti-Terrorism, Citizenship and Security in the UK', Economic and Social Research Council, Award ref: RES-000-22-3765; and Hoskins's 'Conflicts of Memory: Mediating and Commemorating the 2005 London Bombings', Arts and Humanities Research Council, Award ref: AH/E002579/1.

**4. Details of the impact** (indicative maximum 750 words)

Research on **Security and Media, Policy and Publics** informed a series of engagements that contributed to reflections on and reformulations of counter-terrorism policy and its media coverage by UK and overseas governments and by the public. It also created new spaces for reflection.

- Contributions to ongoing UK security policy thinking: (i) Home Office, Countering Online Radicalisation Working Group, October 2008. Private meeting to establish the 'evidence base' the Home Office was seeking; (ii) Presentation of interim findings of radicalisation project at FCO, 17 September 2008; (iii) House of Commons, presentation on the theme 'The "War on Terror" By Any Other Name: Ethical Dimensions of Foreign Policy', 25 February 2009; (iv) Centre for the Protection of National Infrastructure, presentation of CPNI project findings to security agencies, 22 April 2009 and 2 March 2010. Dorset Police claimed that O'Loughlin's work (presented at the 'Responding to Extremisms: media roles and responsibilities' conference at Bournemouth University, 15 July 2011) put the issues

## Impact case study (REF3b)

around extremisms and media portrayal into a wider spotlight, ensuring that the Police Force's policy review processes were based on as wide as spectrum as possible.

- Contributions to ongoing overseas policy and media conceptualisations of terrorism and radicalisation: European Security Research and Innovation Forum (ESRIF), European Commission, 'Mediatization and Communication', Brussels, 4 September 2008; National Security Coordination Secretariat (NSCS), Singapore, 1-4 November 2009; Al-Jazeera, 'Perspectives on Terrorism, Violence and Resistance', Doha, 26-27 September 2010.
- Spaces of reflection for policymakers, journalists and NGOs: (i) Media and Radicalisation Symposium, Royal Holloway, 15 September 2009 and end of project conference, Warwick University. (ii) Presentation to Finsbury Park/North London Mosque, 8 June 2010.

**Semantic Polling Research** created debate on an entirely new and unexplored methodology being deployed in public opinion research. O'Loughlin's analysis with Linguamatics was used in the BBC's 2010 General Election coverage and mentioned in the *New York Times* (31 October 2010). Linguamatics was able to move from data mining medical journal texts to mining public social media data and thereby enter public opinion research. It won a patent on its text analysis software I2E. On 14 September 2009 O'Loughlin convened a semantic polling event featuring presentations by the FCO, the private company, Information Options, and the activist/marketing group, We Are Social, and attended by Oxfam, DSTL, YouGov, the BBC and the European Commission.

O'Loughlin's research both stimulated debate and changed the practice of organisations. His work with Linguamatics in 2008 and from 2009 with Nick Anstead (a former PhD student in O'Loughlin's New Political Communication Unit and now a Lecturer at LSE) engaged practitioners during the research process and led to a Hansard launch event of Anstead/O'Loughlin's policy brief on 5 July 2012, with attendees from the BBC, Department of Culture, Media and Sport, pollsters Ipsos-Mori, Angus Reid, YouGov, ComRes, Tweetminster and the British Polling Council, and semantic polling companies Linguamatics and Semiocast. O'Loughlin and Anstead later presented on the implications of semantic polling for citizens' social media use and its regulation at a 17 May 2013 OFCOM event, 'Adult Media Use and Literacy'. The Council of Europe invited O'Loughlin to give evidence on developments on the internet and politics in March 2013. Based on that presentation, the Council decided to instigate a debate about semantic polling at the November 2013 World Forum for Democracy and it will feature in the Council's December 2013 final report.

O'Loughlin's expertise in semantic polling led to an invitation from BBC World Service (BBCWS) to conduct social media analysis of audience responses to the 2012 London Olympics, in collaboration with Marie Gillespie (Open University). This work has impacted upon editorial policy and the BBC's audience research practice. The BBC had already conducted sentiment analysis and basic network analysis, but the BBC Trust's remit requires it to find ways to measure 'buzz', 'reach' and 'the global conversation'. This required greater conceptual clarity and methodological innovation, and O'Loughlin and Gillespie's research of English, Persian, Russian and Arabic audiences contributed to this by delineating the role of identity and community in generating various affective and cognitive responses. O'Loughlin and Gillespie were invited to present their report for the BBCWS at the main international industry gathering, CIBAR (Conference of International Audience Researchers), in November 2012 in Salford.

Tweeting the Olympics helped BBCWS reshape its editorial and social media strategies for future global events. The BBCWS Head of Audiences said, 'It was useful to pinpoint what exactly was good and what was less so and work on improvements for similar events in the future', and that the research would 'help inform further social media activity across the language services'.

The impact of O'Loughlin's earlier research on how online conversation moves during events was evident in a statement by the BBCWS Digital Insight manager, who said, 'For me the most important take out was about how the conversation morphed throughout an event – from the emotional, to the informational and finally to the contextual. The fact that the former types of conversation were the most dominant in the twittersphere was really important to us – as it's not something we really engage with at the moment (focussing more on the contextual) and raises the very important question as to whether we need to engage with these types of conversations more in order to take social users with us into the journey towards more analytical content'. The manager also confirmed that these findings were fed into editorial policy: 'This has been something we've discussed with senior management and is now being used by us to help us in our ongoing social listening activity and is acting as a loose framework to help us better analyse social conversation'. The impact of the semantic polling methodology was evidenced by feedback from the BBC Global

News Online Journalism & Innovation Editor, who said: 'The research methodology in combining scientific computational calculations with human coding is unique and offered useful insights [into] qualitative and quantitative analysis. The research and the findings highlighted the need to have proper social media staffing when covering big events. It was also useful in comparing two different approaches to using twitter in covering big events: Automated module VS. Live tweeting combined with live pages'. He further confirmed that, 'I have included the lessons learnt from this research in my social media strategy for BBC Arabic'.

O'Loughlin's work on **strategic narratives** and public diplomacy was recognised as early as 2008 when he was asked to contribute to an 18 May 2008 *New York Times* article on Russia's development of the English-language news channel Russia Today to promote its image abroad. However, the most direct impact of O'Loughlin's work is demonstrated in his role as Specialist Advisor to the House of Lords Select Committee on Soft Power and the UK's Influence from July 2013. O'Loughlin advises on the selection of witnesses from politics, business and culture who are invited to give evidence, on the questions they are asked, and on how written evidence is interpreted. The Committee Clerk has written that O'Loughlin's 'knowledge of academic debates around strategic narratives and changing global media environments has directly influenced the drafting of possible questions for the assistance of Committee members in evidence sessions with high-profile witnesses from organisations such as the British Council, the Ministry of Defence, and UK Trade and Industry', and has further testified to the influence of O'Loughlin's research on measuring the 'impact' of narratives, saying that O'Loughlin 'successfully assisted the Committee with understanding how some of the more nebulous concepts that are used in the relevant literature – and by witnesses – might best be pinned down, such as by recognising the distinction drawn between outputs (for instance, the number of website "hits" that the British Museum receives) and outcomes (for instance, the change in attitudes about the UK that witnesses might have seen as a result of their actions)'. The Committee's final report is due in March 2014.

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact** (indicative maximum of 10 references)

1. Numerous invitations to open and closed discussions with the FCO, Home Office and security services during the period corroborate the contributions of O'Loughlin's research to the UK government's reflections and reformulation of counter-terrorism policy.
2. Documentation of O'Loughlin's participation in open policy debates in Parliament, Finsbury Park Mosque, Al-Jazeera in Doha and the Council of Europe, and of the participation of numerous policy, media and NGO stakeholders in O'Loughlin's events at Royal Holloway, corroborate his contributions to public and expert awareness of media and security.
3. Coverage by the *New York Times* (<http://nyti.ms/16C684o>) and the BBC (<http://bbc.in/dtzsBB>) corroborates the impact of semantic polling with Linguamatics.
4. The take-up of semantic polling by a private sector company is evidenced by Linguamatics winning patents for its I2E software. The most relevant is U.S. Patent Application No. 12/899,478: Providing users with a preview of text mining results from queries over unstructured or semi-structured text (<http://bit.ly/177URru>).
5. Evidence that semantic polling research stimulated debate and agendas is found in the Council of Europe's March 2013 draft report (private but available on request) and the inclusion as a topic for the Council's World Forum on Democracy (<http://bit.ly/187Abiq>).
6. Evidence that semantic polling is now used by the BBC: Powerpoint report for the BBC, 'The 2012 London Olympic Games, the BBC World Service and Twitter', January 2013: <http://bit.ly/14Ky0jH> (login on request, access to members and conference attendees).
7. Letters from the Head of Audiences at BBCWS, the BBCWS Digital Insight Manager, and the BBC Global News' Online Journalism & Innovation Editor corroborate the impact of semantic polling research through Tweeting the Olympics.
8. A letter from the Clerk of the House of Lords Soft Power Committee corroborates the impact of O'Loughlin's strategic narratives research and expertise on the Committee's work. The Committee's transcripts are located on its website at: <http://bit.ly/12roqVr>
9. A testimonial from a Dorset Police Inspector corroborates the impact of O'Loughlin's research on the police force's understanding of the effects of media coverage on radicalisation and on its subsequent review processes.
10. The 18 May 2008 *NYT* article on Russia Today, which quotes O'Loughlin and corroborates the early impact of his strategic narratives research, is located at: <http://nyti.ms/18oy65x>.