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# Counter-Terrorism Strategic Communication Campaigns and the Generative Nature of Trust

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## ABSTRACT

This article examines how public-facing counterterrorism campaigns are strategically constructed and communicated, to try to signal trust, as part of their wider agenda to deter terrorist risks and threats. The empirical evidence includes frame analysis of the main messaging assets across three UK campaigns, in-depth practitioner interviews, and public focus groups across different parts of the UK. Building on sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995) we present insights into sensemaking, sensegiving and sensebreaking around trust in this form of messaging, and introduce the concept of ‘sensebridging’ as a theoretical extension useful in understanding how trust deficits are negotiated by publics and tackled by practitioners through particular public relations strategies and mediums. We demonstrate how specific trust elements are ‘designed in’ to campaign assets, and how these are (re-)interpreted by publics through the lens of distant and recent histories, as well as hyperlocal presents. Viewed in this way, the article moves beyond the idea of bifurcated trust that either is or is not present, instead arguing that trust is ‘generative,’ and as such more complex, situated, and mobile. In doing so, it makes several interdisciplinary contributions together with practical recommendations that centre on appreciating the generative nature of trust in strategic communication.

## Introduction

*Terrorism is quite unique as a crime type in the sense that it's one of the only ones I can think of that comes with a distinct communications and PR objective . . . To achieve the necessary support to try and instil societal change that they are seeking, they need to effectively communicate their goals, their objectives, their beliefs to an audience (P3).*

Taken from an interview with a counterterrorism practitioner, this quotation demonstrates the understanding that terrorism is a strategic communicative act (Somerville et al., 2011). The concern among state authorities is that such acts may have persuasive effects and influence over publics, either in the form of fear or through generating public support or sympathy for the cause. Counterterrorism (CT) strategic communication campaigns have therefore been designed, as one strand of a range of countermeasures. Strategic communication campaigns have been defined as: “a set of deliberate and purposive communication activities enacted by a communication agent in the public sphere on behalf of

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a communication entity to reach established goals” (Werder, 2015, p. 81). They comprise a main means of public communication on an often contentious policy domain, in an era when citizens expect to be informed on government actions and intentions (Werder, 2020). Public-facing CT strategic communication campaigns tend to comprise a series of messages, often with a common theme, communicated via media or increasingly social media, with the intent that they should reduce the risk, threat or impact of terrorist violence in some way (Rice et al., 2024). Either by informing the public on terrorism risks and threats, promoting public vigilance, calls to action to help mitigate threats, and also deterring potential perpetrators (Rice et al., 2022). There is, however, an inherent ambivalence in CT messaging that practitioners and policymakers continue to grapple with in operational practice. These campaigns seek to simultaneously reassure publics of the state’s protective capabilities, while alerting them to the possibility of remaining risks and threats in their environment. This ambivalence is then confounded by the array of perspectives and life experiences that publics as ‘readers’ bring to their interpretation of the messaging.

Trust applies in multiple ways to how strategic communication campaigns are designed, delivered, and “read” by audiences. Broadly speaking this relates to trust in the messenger and medium, as well as the message itself (Hocevar et al., 2017; VanderMolen et al., 2015). Presently, such factors are framed by a broader context of a seeming decline in trust in key public institutions across many western liberal democracies, such as government, policing, and traditional media (Edelman Trust Institute, 2022; Flew, 2021). This is in tandem with a rise in extremist and state-sponsored disinformation that helps to destabilise societies and sow seeds of distrust among citizens and their government (Innes, 2020; OECD, 2020). The implications of this are important from a social order perspective, because trust directly affects public engagement with government directives and policies, and information sources on these play an important role in whether trust is built (Devine et al., 2023; VanderMolen et al., 2015). More widely, there are indirect effects in terms of trust shaping who should or can be believed in public rhetoric about risks, security, and political information more widely (Braddock & Morrison, 2018; Dubois et al., 2020; Yorke, 2020).

Although it is difficult to decisively disentangle the predictive, moderating, and consequential effects of trust (Fulmer & Gelfand, 2012), trust to some extent mediates the effectiveness of strategic communication interventions. However, we still have little empirical evidence on how trust is actually communicated through these types of public-facing campaigns. Existing research has tended to focus on whether public trust is or is not present, largely through quantitative or single methods that defines trust *for* audiences (Valentini, 2021). This ignores the more nuanced and meaningful insights that can be gained by close attention to the “language of trust” (Wubs-Mrozewicz, 2020).

This article defines and analyses constructions of trust across different CT strategic communications campaign. The logic being that there are different modalities of trust that can be and are mobilised to prevent terrorism, manage the social effects of terror attacks and create better trust atmospherics, through strategic communication campaigns – an understanding of which helps explain their public reception. Practically speaking, understanding the role of trust in the transmission and reception of CT strategic communication campaigns is an important research gap, since this appears to be important in whether publics engage with this specific type of risk messaging designed to help keep societies safe (Parker et al., 2019). From a scholarly perspective, trust is relevant to almost every aspect of human experience and a communication studies perspective offers

“considerable conceptual resources to questions of trust” that make an interdisciplinary contribution (Flew, 2021, p.173).

The empirical data analysed here derives from three UK CT campaigns: *See it, Say it, Sorted (SiSiS)*, *Action Counters Terrorism (ACT)*, and *Security On Your Side (SOYS)*. We bring an original conceptual and analytical framework to bear, that utilises and combines work on framing (Entman, 1993) and sensemaking (Weick, 1995). This synthesis has usefully been applied in sociology (Fiss & Hirsch, 2005), but is novel for the communication sphere. Linked by complementary aims, this dual approach allows us to better explore and understand the higher order transmission work of campaigns as they seek to mobilise a particular meaning (via framing), as well as the sociopsychological logics and reception perspectives of the campaign communication process (via sensemaking). In terms of the former, for each campaign, we analyzed the visuals and text associated with the main messaging assets, to establish the particular trust “frames” (Entman, 1993) used. With regards to the latter, we have then incorporated qualitative insights from 20 practitioner interviews and seven focus groups including 52 members of the public across different parts of the UK.

Collectively, the data suggests the importance of understanding how CT campaign messaging is situated within publics’ everyday experience, and importantly, attempts to make sense of these experiences. Demonstrated through how CT campaign assets are viewed via the lens of distant and recent histories, as well as hyperlocal presents, we discuss the *generative* nature of trust. This builds on work that prioritises communication as the vehicle of trust (Rice et al., 2021), and extends insight into how contemporary public relations communication, and its influence, is always generated and made sense of by and through history (Somerville et al., 2020). Specifically, building on sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995) we present insights into sensemaking, “sensegiving” and “sensebreaking”(Pratt, 2000; Scarduzio & Tracy, 2015) around trust in this form of messaging, and introduce the concept of “sensebridging” as a theoretical extension useful in understanding how trust deficits are negotiated among practice and public communities. Viewed in this way, the article moves beyond the idea of bifurcated trust that either is or is not present, and into the realm of arguing that trust is more complex, situated, and mobile.

## **Trust, communication, and sensemaking**

Trust is linked to social order through its role in providing predictability and security to everyday interactions (Misztal, 2001). It is now well established that trust is foundational to peaceful societies (Butzlaff & Messinger-Zimmer, 2020; Rice et al., 2021) and its role in the effectiveness of government communication about risks and threats (Enria et al., 2021; Gauntlett et al., 2019; Heath et al., 2017; Ruggiero & Vos, 2015). Research crossing different disciplines defines trust as the willingness to be vulnerable to another party, based on positive expectations of their intentions or actions (Mayer et al., 1995; PytlikZillig & Kimbrough, 2016; Rousseau et al., 1998), enabling cooperation and collaboration (Fulmer & Gelfand, 2012; Lewicki et al., 1998). Distrust, on the other hand, is now largely considered a separate construct comprising (often pervasive) negative expectations, associated with wariness, scepticism, and even fear (Sitkin & Bijlsma-Frankema, 2018).

Communication is constitutive of relationships specifically, and social reality more widely. From this perspective, communication is not a process of transmitting information,

but of creating and relating (Condit, 2006). As a relational characteristic, trust can be created, maintained or indeed broken through communication (Rice et al., 2021). Normatively speaking, strategic communication, from a public relations perspective, is a way to: “build, enhance and maintain trust among social systems, that is, publics, institutions and organisations” (Valentini, 2021, p. 87). This understanding of strategic communication demonstrates an awareness that a sole focus on the “sender’s” goals, is not only potentially unethical, but is likely to be ineffective in its dismissal of the multiple individual and contextual factors that affect how messaging is received by audiences in real life (Macnamara & Gregory, 2018).

Theories of strategic communication and public relations have been developed to account for such situational factors. The longstanding situational theory of publics (Grunig, 1997) accents how publics are active or passive in their processing and seeking of information, linking this to people’s personal connection or level of involvement with the “problem at hand,” whether they recognise the problem, and if they felt capable or constrained to solve it. More recently, mirroring a growing engagement agenda in public relations scholarship, there is increasing focus on how past experiences frame publics’ situational motivation (Kim & Grunig, 2011; Kim et al., 2021).

### **Campaigns, counterterrorism, and trust**

Situational motivation and the impact of past experience on this is a theme reflected in existing work on public receptivity to strategic communication. Although conceptual rather than empirical, Goldberg and Gustafson (2023) devised a framework for understanding the impact of strategic communication campaigns. They conceptualise *driving and restraining forces*, such as, “contextual factors, audience characteristics, and social or physical systems,” explaining their cumulative consequences as a product of their individual and interacting *reach, effect, and durability* among exposed audiences (p. 6). Although not specifically highlighted, trust could seemingly be located within this framework of driving and restraining forces. Though the focus or critical variable is not always explicitly defined in existing studies, as a driving or restraining force in strategic communication trust can manifest in terms of the source or messenger (‘trustee’), the associated medium or channel, and/or their words, actions, or messaging (Rice et al., 2021). Trust is an antecedent of successful relationship building with publics, and in managing institutional image and reputation (Valentini, 2021). Further, trust may be cultivated through strategic communication campaigns; crisis communications strategies, for example, have been found to positively influence consumer trust and corporate brand (Falkheimer & Heide, 2015). In terms of the impact of existing levels of trust on campaign uptake and success – varyingly considered as awareness, attitudinal or behavioural change – trust has been found to be significant across a range of contexts, including public health, natural disaster, and (counter-)terrorism (Heath et al., 2019; MacKay et al., 2021; Ruggiero & Vos, 2015).

Given the article’s focus, counterterrorism deserves particular attention. Terrorism “problems” are situated within wider sociopolitical dynamics and the lived experience of individuals in relation to these (Jarvis & Lister, 2016; Rice et al., 2022, 2024). Histories of fraught relationships between authorities and publics has led to distrust towards CT initiatives and associated messaging; for example, being viewed as surveillance of minority communities, or as disconnected from local community concerns and contexts (Coaffee &

Fussey, 2015; Parker et al., 2019; Thomas et al., 2020). A related overarching dilemma pertaining to trust and CT strategic communication campaigns is that campaigns try both to advocate for community responsibility for identifying terrorism risks and threats, and to build these trust bonds in others and authorities, while at the same time communicating that fellow citizens may be a risk, thus breaking trust bonds (Salerno, 2016). For example, the UK “ACT” campaign highlights risks within one’s community or within relationships of trust with friends, family, students, as part of the wider “Prevent” policy. Such approaches can induce trust-based conflicts for would-be reporters (Thomas et al., 2020).

Trust does not operate in isolation. It interacts with existing knowledge of threats and their accompanying risk levels in explaining the efficacy and acceptance of risk messaging (Perko et al., 2014). Practitioners’ and publics’ notions of threat, risk and responsibility may thus diverge, and together with perceptions of authorities’ trustworthiness, this can affect whether publics are willing to follow campaign guidance to report concerns (Pearce et al., 2020).

Trust can also be shaped by the level of transparency around a campaign’s underpinning policy, where decision rationale, as opposed to blanket transparency, can have a positive impact on audience trust in counterterrorism authorities (Clubb et al., 2024). On a more practical note, different and creative communication strategies are required for tangible versus intangible threats, with the latter enhanced by visual appeals and specific linguistic devices such as metaphor and references to popular culture (Landau et al., 2018; Rice et al., 2022). Actionable guidance has been derived as good campaign practice (Pearce et al., 2019; Wood et al., 2011), so too a combination of informational and engagement messaging that dually informs and reassures of authorities’ protective capabilities, while calling the public to take personal responsibility for some kind of preparatory or responsive action (Johnston et al., 2020).

The evidence recounted thus far emphasises the fact that strategic communication campaigns can provoke varied reaction at local levels, despite following fundamental “good practice” principles. Reactions to CT campaigns depend to a notable extent upon the prevalence, distribution, and “normalisation” of risks and threats, both in past and present contexts, ranging from being seen as highly salient, through to irrelevant or stigmatizing (Innes, 2014; Keenan, 2018; Rice et al., 2022, 2024). At the same time, terrorism has proven a “hot issue” that can mobilise previously inactive or latent publics (Aldoory & Grunig, 2012).

### ***Trust – components and contexts***

Trust thus both informs individuals’ identification and perception of threats and risks, and whether once identified, individuals feel confident and motivated to report these to the designated authorities. In public relations theory, this mirrors two major research strands. One, the symbolic role of communication in managing how an entity is viewed by publics, and two, how communication can bring about a desired public behaviour (Valentini, 2021). Of course, either of these goals are complex given the range of variables that inform and mediate trust perceptions. A wide body of literature demonstrates trust is multifaceted, dynamic, and targeted to different foci, depending on the context, relationship, and situation at a given time (c.f. Fulmer, 2018).

Broadly speaking, trust is built through cognitive, rational judgements, as well as affective, emotional perceptions (McAllister, 1995). Decisions to trust are preceded by perceptions of trustworthiness – whether one is considered competent, to be benevolent or good-willed, and to operate with integrity and adhere to moral and fair standards (Mayer et al., 1995). Depending on the particular relationship or context, one or all of these trustworthiness components may be more or less important (Baer & Colquitt, 2018; Moore et al., 2023). Particular experiences or situational norms bring various trustworthiness elements and associated expectations to the fore (Kang & Park, 2017; Lewicki et al., 1998). For example, it has been shown that for UK publics, in times of crisis, people look particularly to their government to communicate transparently with competence, clarity, and consistency (Enria et al., 2021). Other factors have proved important in other circumstances and in other cultural and situational contexts. This includes whether governments are perceived as caring and responsive to public needs in the aftermath of conflict-related crisis (Wong, 2016) and to listen to, accommodate, and fairly represent diverse community values and priorities on a longer term basis once a new postcrisis phase has stabilised (Rice & Taylor, 2020).

The “target” of trust matters too. Trust may be directed at institutions or organisations, a particular group within a system or organisation, or a specific individual (Herian & Neal, 2016). This is especially pertinent to the CT environment, which involves a variety of institutions and agencies across government, policing, and the third sector. But trust also develops within an interdependent social network, meaning that trust boundaries are porous (Nienaber et al., 2023). Trust may “trickle” across different targets, relationships, and levels through “boundary spanning” intermediaries or via direct or indirect social influence (Wo et al., 2019).

### ***A generative nature – trust and sensemaking***

Trust perceptions cannot be viewed in isolation from the wider social context in which a relationship is embedded (Lumineau & Schilke, 2018). Somerville et al’s (2020) discussion of the “generative power of history,” proposes that analysis of public relations communication and practice helps reveal social, cultural and political conditions. In so doing, they propose, it becomes evident, “how histories are used to explore how the past is constructed from the present, how the present is always historical, and how both past and present can power imagined futures” (p. 1–12).

This temporal theme resonates with sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995) and may help illuminate what is going on in this type of trust communication. Sensemaking posits that individuals look to their past to understand current experience and envisage the future. Weick explained this in terms of *frames* and *cues* that come into play iteratively and dynamically as people continually attempt to make sense of the world around them: “Frames tend to be past moments of socialization and cues tend to be present moments of experience. If a person can construct a relation between these two moments, meaning is created” (Weick, 1995, p. 111). Entman (1993) also discussed frames in relation to the power of a communicating text to make certain aspects of a perceived reality more salient to an audience. For instance, through strategic selection and placement of certain text or images. Entman argues that frame analysis can reveal how a text strategically communicates and defines a problem, its causes and appropriate moral evaluation, and through this

incentivises a particular “treatment” or response from the audience. Further application of sensemaking theory, clarifies how such communicative content is made sense of “in context.” As Fiss and Hirsch explain:

While framing focuses on how different meanings compete for support, sensemaking stresses how the identification of patterns of meaning depends on salient cues from the environment . . . Sensemaking stresses the internal, self-conscious process of developing a coherent account of what is going on, while framing emphasizes the external, strategic process of creating specific meaning in line with political interest. (pp. 30–31)

In terms of this research, while the core focus is on the microlevel perceptions of professionals (as “transmitters”) and publics (as “receivers”) of CT communication, Entman’s framing paradigm is useful in both conceptualising the broad strategic intention of CT communications, and in practically unpicking the latent and semantic content of campaign materials (see results section that follows).

Although sensemaking is a constant process that helps people to quickly filter relevant information in everyday experiences, it is often prompted and made more observable by novel or disruptive events functioning as sensemaking “shocks” (Ballinger & Rockmann, 2010; Colville et al., 2013). Innes (2014) has applied this logic to social perceptions of disorder. His “signal crimes” perspective suggests that sensemaking is heavily influenced by lived experience and learned local norms of threat and safety, so that much information that is situationally irrelevant or implausible is “screened out.” While certain high-profile terror events prompt and frame collective sensemaking on a macroscale, other local incidents (together with cultural and personal experiences) provide different kinds of socialisation and sensemaking. This understanding helps to explain why CT strategic communication may be received variously across audiences and why trust signals might “land” or not.

Applying a sensemaking approach to trust specifically, Adobor (2005) asserts: “trust creation may be viewed as a process of [our emphasis] sensemaking in which small cues are enlarged through the incremental accumulation of evidence” (p. 330). Research across a variety of contexts and scenarios, demonstrates trust is dynamic and can change over time and in response to particularly salient events or experiences that maintain or strengthen trust, or trigger trust breakdown (Korsgaard, 2018). Individuals’ trust in others is often re-evaluated and adjusted, as people reflect upon and make sense of past experience and current interactions (Ballinger & Rockmann, 2010; Bijlsma-Frankema et al., 2015; Gillespie & Siebert, 2018). The relevance to CT communication is that individuals lean on much more than the explicit strategic communication assets in front of them when making trust judgements, “reading” and interpreting these iteratively through particular trust relevant experiences that colour their views of the future.

Although significant attention has been paid to *sensemaking* (largely in organizational contexts), an important, but lesser examined strand of research pertains to the related processes of *sensegiving* and *sensebreaking* (Pratt, 2000; Scarduzio & Tracy, 2015). *Sensegiving* refers to attempts to influence an actor’s meaning making towards a preferred reality, essentially a core element of strategic communication efforts. *Sensebreaking* relates to the destruction or break down of meaning, which may come about deliberately (via an agent), or accidentally (via an agent or contextual factor). Scarduzio and Tracy (2015), for example, analyse how bailiffs in a courtroom setting provide *sensegiving* and *sensebreaking* cues to significant others; through positive or

negative emotional interpretations and communicative displays, they help to regulate and align the courtroom mood and maintain social order. Herein we develop the idea that sensemaking, sensegiving, and sensebreaking, help explain how trust is signalled and received in CT communication campaigns. Specifically, our article asks, *how are public-facing CT communication campaigns strategically constructed and communicated, to try to signal trust, as part of their wider agenda to deter terrorist risks and threats?* In addressing this question, we introduce the concept of “sensebridging” as a way of understanding how mismatches – or sensebreaks – in trust communication are negotiated, tolerated, and tackled in everyday life by publics and practitioners. The remainder of the article presents the methodology, results, and ensuing discussion and conclusion.

## Methods and materials

This study used three qualitative methods – frame analysis, in-depth interviewing of practitioners, and public focus groups. The research underwent ethical review at the lead author’s University Ethics Committee and with the research funder.<sup>1</sup> Across these methods, three campaigns were used as stimuli for analysis or discussion; their inclusion was based on the fact that they are the most widely used across the UK, or that they appeared to present a novel and interesting contrast to existing campaigns in terms of aesthetics and/or messaging (see below for further details).

### Campaigns

“See it, Say it, Sorted” (SiSiS) is a commuter-focused campaign led by British Transport Police and the Department of Transport. First deployed in 2016, it is still in regular and widespread use across transport settings, mainly in England, and is probably the most publicly familiar campaign through its recurrent visual and audio-based messages that seek to prime commuter vigilance towards specific risks and threats. “Action Counters Terrorism” (ACT) was launched in 2017 by Counter-Terrorism Policing and comprises both video and print media assets. These materials constitute a toolkit that can be customised for various locations and regional policing teams. ACT focuses on a “call to action” for community effort to “defeat” terrorism that presents in a less overt manner in one’s local area. At the time of data collection, “Security On Your Side” (SOYS) was a brand new campaign led by the Centre for Protection of National Infrastructure (CPNI, now the National Protective Security Authority (NPSA), that had not yet been publicly released. It is notably different in terms of aesthetics to the other campaigns and in the way it focuses on protective security measures that have been “built into” the urban environment, potentially read as hostile deterrence, or as public reassurance.

### Methods

For the first step of our methodology, a comprehensive frame analysis utilising Entman’s (1993) six-component technique was deployed. This enabled the deconstruction of the visual and textual elements of assets across the three campaigns, deciphering how they are

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<sup>1</sup>Approval reference number P125871; all human participants provided written informed consent.

designed to send their intended message (Rice et al., 2022b). Materials for this frame analysis included: 12 SiSiS campaign posters; two extended videos and an accompanying set of shorter videos, and three posters for ACT; and five posters and 10 GIFS for SOYS. All three campaigns convey that there are security risks and threats in ordinary surroundings that publics should be alert to. In various ways, they each communicate a message that publics should report concerns to authorities, who are prepared and duly competent to respond to these concerns. For the purposes of this article, the frame analysis component focuses solely on trust framing (detailed further next).

Twenty in-depth interviews with experienced CT professionals, lasting around one hour each, were conducted between February and July 2022 (14 from England, 5 based in Northern Ireland, and 1 based in Wales). This method allowed us to verify and enhance understanding of the driving logics and the intended and perceived impacts of the campaigns. A snowball sampling strategy was employed whereby interviewees referred the lead author to colleagues considered relevant and useful to the study. Interviewees spanned a variety of professional roles, including: government security policy; policing/CT policing; CT advisory, intelligence, media, and communications. The semistructured interview schedule, as part of the wider project, covered current role and working relationships; the design, logic, and intended messages of particular campaigns; barriers and facilitators of effective public communication; contextual/regional impacts on the production, communication and interpretation of messaging/campaigns; areas of success or promise, and those in need of change (Rice et al., 2024).

Third, we conducted seven online focus groups across the same timeframe and locations, involving 52 members of the public. Sampled locations crossed urban and rural/suburban areas: two in London, one in Yorkshire, two in Cardiff, one in Belfast, one in rural/suburban Northern Ireland. This range of locations was devised to try and capture diversity of public perception, recognising the potential for different public perceptions of campaigns, shaped by location, together with other salient demographic and sociopolitical contextual factors in different parts of the UK (Jarvis & Lister, 2016). Participants were recruited through a fieldwork agency, using a sampling criteria based on the above distinctions. Age range was 18–74, with an average of 40 years old. The gender ratio was fairly even, and we obtained views crossing a range of socioeconomic groups, occupations, and family status. Young adults and ethnic minority participants engaged across multiple focus groups. However, in recognition of existing research indicating particular issues regarding the engagement of these groups with CT communication and interventions (e.g., Coaffee & Fussey, 2015; Johnston & Uberoi, 2022), one London focus group comprised specifically only ethnic minority community members and another group only involved young adults (18–25, Cardiff).

Focus groups were piloted with colleagues external to the research team and then facilitated by the Principal Investigator or Co-Investigator, lasting around 90 minutes. They covered two main areas: (1) discussion of reactions to posters shown from the three aforementioned campaigns (see Figures 2–4); (2) general discussion on security risks and threats, terrorism and counterterrorism interventions and their communication. Whereas the interviews focused more on the intentions behind campaigns, the focus group data speaks to how campaigns were interpreted and received. Focus groups allowed us to obtain detailed audience insights on the campaigns and the sensemaking around these, within the wider prism of “everyday” experiences of security – an approach successfully applied elsewhere (Jarvis & Lister, 2016).

## Analysis

Data analysis was inspired by an abductive “phroentic iterative approach” that integrates inductive and deductive techniques, to both contribute to existing theory and address a practical problem (Tracy, 2018) – in this case, around trust. We first analysed our secondary data of campaign materials. In line with the theoretical framework outlined, frame analysis was employed in this specific research as a broad analytical lens, operationalised through application of thematic analysis procedures (thematic analysis having proven a useful technique for uncovering frame elements c.f. Wibeck & Linnér, 2021). Primary data from both interviews and focus groups were professionally transcribed in full, coded by the team using the software package Nvivo, and also processed thematically, as follows. Themes were derived primarily inductively, by two team members following thematic analysis procedures of familiarisation, code generation, theme generation, and review (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2020), and in regular discussion and negotiation around choices and interpretation. Codes and themes followed an “open” and inductive logic aided by the team’s existing knowledge of trust theory, essentially involving a degree of deductive practice. We moved from “first-order codes” assigned to salient elements in understanding the transmission or reception of CT campaigns to “second-order themes” (Brown & Coupland, 2015) that captured recurring perceptions and/or linked codes together (see Figure 1).

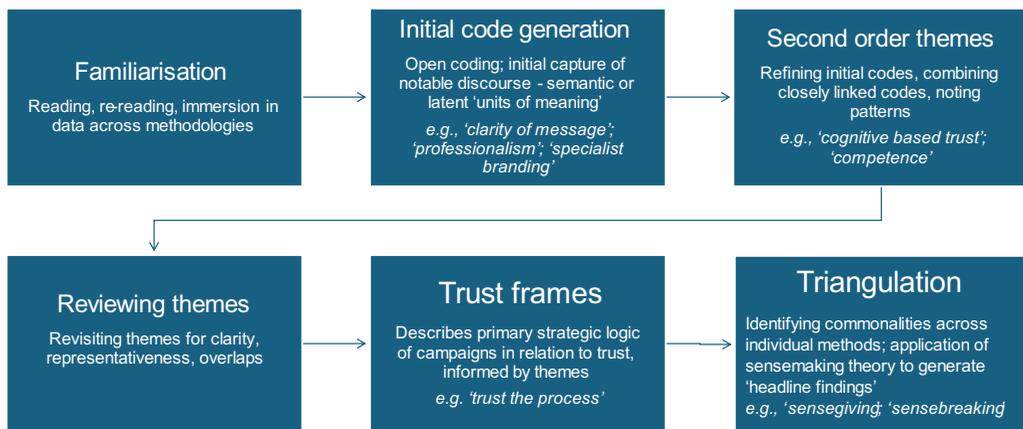


Figure 1. Analytical procedure.

Analysed datasets were then triangulated. Through team reflection and discussion, we identified patterns, interactions, distinctions and points of disjunction across our individual method analyses that informed our cross-cutting “headline findings” and theoretical contribution. Practically speaking this involved team members revisiting key themes from each dataset, noting, with examples, core recurring or distinctive themes, narratives, and issues across datasets (Wibeck & Linnér, 2021) in one comprehensive working document. This document was continually revisited and revised to distill cross-cutting links, and then edited and restructured as we moved to document our collective findings as a readable narrative that addressed our research aim and questions. In progressing through this “horizontal”

between-method analytical process (Wibeck & Linnér, 2021), we found sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995) helped to explain, in a more conceptual register, “what was going on” in our overall dataset. Further reading around the topic led us to lean on specific sensemaking concepts to ‘tell the story’ of our findings.<sup>2</sup>

## Results: Operationalising and problematising trust

Following the thematic procedures outlined above, we analysed the three CT campaigns for trust messaging; additionally we layered on the “primary frames” element of Entman’s framework (see Table 1). This clarifies how each campaign, while dealing with shared, multiple trust themes, tries to convey different trustworthiness messages, foregrounding specific elements and qualities of trust in their messaging to varying extents. The campaign material analysis is augmented by insights from 20 interviews with practitioners who, in various capacities, operationalise the campaigns in their everyday work, and with the findings of seven public focus groups comprising 52 people in total. Collectively, this provides a picture of the sensegiving, sensemaking, and sensebreaking of trust.

During focus group discussions of the three specific campaigns, there were unsurprisingly varied opinions and perspectives about trust. This variation was linked to multiple factors, including different experiences associated with individuals’ personal and social identities; geographic location and “close to home” histories and types of crime and terrorism; direct interaction with authorities; and high profile national and local events that propel and shape trust perceptions. Despite the range of responses, common themes of trust were evident in the analysis, identified both directly in participants’ discussions of the meaning of campaign assets, and indirectly through discussions of how these messages sit within everyday experiences of security. Likewise, practitioner insights reveal how trust informs their practice, and their problematising of trust. The following findings sections present trust elements singularly for conceptual clarity when in practice these are multi-layered. Similarly, we varyingly use specific campaigns as a touchpoint for analytical illustration, but note themes cross other campaigns to different degrees.

**Table 1.** Campaigns and their trust frames.

| Campaigns  | SiSiS  | ACT  | SOYS   |
|--|--|--|--|
| Primary frames<br>Underpinning second<br>order descriptive<br>themes | <p><i>Trust the process</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● A focus on <i>cognitive based trust</i></li> <li>● Foregrounds the <i>competence</i> of authorities to “sort it”</li> </ul> | <p><i>Trust your instincts</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Focuses on <i>“feelings”-based trust</i></li> <li>● Foregrounds <i>integrity</i> in CTP delivering on a promise, maintaining confidentiality and fairness of response</li> </ul> | <p><i>Transfer your trust</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Trust the physical, technological and people <i>capabilities of security services</i> – competence and preparedness</li> <li>● Foregrounds <i>benevolence</i> or “goodwill” based trust – protection of public interests</li> </ul> |

<sup>2</sup>Due to the sensitive nature of the research, supporting raw primary data is not available.

## Trust the process

### Sensegiving

SiSiS (see Figure 2) targets risks in transport settings and the need for partnership working between publics and authorities in order that these risks are mitigated. The primary trust framing concerns *trust in the process* of reporting concerns to authorities. It seeks to prime cognitive-based trust by communicating, through the direct and assured “we’ll sort it,” that the authorities are competent to address the situation when contacted.

Supporting the campaign material analysis, the theme of competence was evident in sensegiving attempts as discussed by practitioners. The strategic foregrounding of the professionalism and expertise of specific policing branches as seen in the ACT and SiSiS campaigns (CTP and BTP), was discussed by practitioners:

We’ve continued to do research on the general public perspective - what do you see as the trusted source of information about CT? For the most part it’s security services and the police, certainly counter-terrorism policing. So I think we push, as much as we can, that as much communication is delivered by them as possible. (P9)



Figure 2. Selected SiSiS campaign assets shown in focus groups.

### Sensemaking

This sensegiving was mirrored in how focus group participants discerned the specific branding of campaigns, deriving from this a sense of specialist expertise:

It's good that it differentiates . . . it's not just saying police. It's highlighting a specific group within the police who you'd presume would be specialist. So, it's not, like, just phoning up 999 and it goes in the whole bag of problems. (London – Suburban, Female, 50, White)

Such examples of sensemaking demonstrate rational, cognitive processing of information. This was further evident in the way participants discussed the “clarity” of the SiSiS message and the instructional nature of the campaign that included specific examples of suspicious behaviours: “It's the sort of thing you could glance at quickly and it would, sort of, file away in the back of your head” (Northern Ireland – Urban, Female, 56, White).

### **Sensebreaking**

However, perceptions of authorities' past incompetence with regards high profile terrorism events weighed heavily on how publics engaged with campaign messaging. Publicity of these past “failures” diminished trust in both policing and government, and their processes for mitigating threat, and characterised the nature of sensebreaks of trust in this respect. For example, individuals commented on their own “role” in CT being ironic given those with expertise and official authority for CT had missed opportunities for mitigating attacks:

People are going to be a bit more, ‘Well it's not my problem if the government can't even keep an eye on people who are on the watch list, what am I supposed to do.’ I think people felt a bit, sort of, let down by that. (London – Urban, Male, 50, White)

In contrast to the largely rational and cognitive framing of trust in relation to competence, participants often leaned on the SiSiS campaign to discuss, in a much more affective register, how perceptions of competence had been broken. One important element of this was through a perceived lack of responsiveness. Responding to citizens' needs helps to cultivate and strengthen citizen trust in government (Wong, 2016). There was, however, for many focus group participants, a perceived disconnect between the SiSiS campaign's messaging of competence and “trusting the process” and a lack of responsiveness to terrorist threat in real life. Participants highlighted both high profile terrorism incidents and everyday policing let-downs in this respect. In relation to the former, every focus group discussed the Manchester bombing at length, crossing all sampled geographical locations and participant demographics:

I think there are quite a number of people across all communities, probably across all these islands, who don't have faith in the police . . . my initial reaction, when I saw that, ‘See it, say it, sorted,’ strap-line, was to think of Manchester Arena, and how it was said, and not sorted, so there's that lack of trust. (Northern Ireland – Urban, Female, 54, White)

Direct or vicarious experience of a lack of responsiveness to more ordinary crimes or personal safety concerns were also often recounted:

[my neighbour] had footage of people trying to burgle and steal, and they handed it to the police . . . She saw it, she said it and they did nothing . . . that then goes back to the question if you see it, why bother saying it then? (London – Urban, Female, 31, Black)

## Trust your instincts

### Sensegiving

ACT (see Figure 3), while also centring on the need to raise concerns to authorities, focuses more specifically on threats within one's community and the corresponding need for community action in addressing these. In terms of trust, the overriding framing of the message is to *trust your instincts*. The assets prime affective, feelings-based trust by explicitly asking people to think about when something “doesn't feel right,” reinforcing this by not specifically identifying concerning behaviours in the poster assets (though some are highlighted in the longer form video assets). ACT highlights the integrity of CTP in showcasing statistics documenting how they have delivered on their “promise” to keep communities safe through acting on community reports. The assertion that reports “won't waste their time” and will be confidential seeks to reassure of their integrity and fairness.



Figure 3. Selected ACT campaign assets shown in focus groups.

Integrity sensegiving was evident in practitioners' discussion of the campaign. One practitioner explained: "I just fundamentally think it's quite a good construction . . . there is a promise there which can be fulfilled. Action *does* counter terrorism" (P11). Practitioners pointed to the fact that ACT has various offshoots targeted to specific cohorts, such as businesses, enabling them to demonstrate the delivery of these promises. For example, one stated: "the important piece, is being able to tell people through that 'ACT Corporate' . . . things have happened in your area, what's actually happened is a successful disruption" (P19).

### **Sensemaking**

Public participants commented that the meaning of the assets indeed demonstrated: "The public have really helped, don't be afraid to help more" (Yorkshire – Rural, Male, 29, White). Similarly, various comments were made on both the welcome assurance of confidentiality and on the reassuring nature of there being no repercussions for reporting: "it's reassuring that there's no comebacks that you're not wasting their time" (Yorkshire – Rural, Male, 68, White).

### **Sensebreaking**

However, with a distinctly emotional tone, high-profile incidents of police misconduct, racism, and injustice towards minorities, feature as strong sensebreaks of both integrity and benevolence-based trustworthiness. The rape and murder of Sarah Everard by a serving police officer was one repeatedly highlighted incident by practitioners and focus group participants as evoking a sense of injustice, a lack of moral principles and care for vulnerable or minority groups:

If they're not carrying it out themselves, the way they're investigating the murder of women . . . women of colour and just, basically, it's undermined the trust I have, or had . . . over the past few years there have been reason upon reason to doubt whether they're doing what they're [supposed to be] doing. (London – Suburban, Female, 54, Asian)

Legacy issues of race-relations were raised particularly by London publics and practitioners, that were then inflamed by current events such as the mishandling of Black Lives Matter protests. High profile incidents can serve to increase feelings of vulnerability towards the police (Hamm et al., 2021), and this was widely recognised by practitioners. For different reasons, similar issues of trust exist in Northern Ireland related to the legacies of conflict and ongoing sectarian divides that colour perceptions of state authorities. For several Northern Ireland focus group participants, the emphasis in the ACT materials on confidentiality was interrogated and challenged through reflection on previous instances of state collusion and the potential repercussions for reporting:

Because we hear so much about collusion here in Northern Ireland from both sides . . . Can you trust the handler that's taking your call to not be connected to whoever planted the bag or the pipe-bomb or the drugs or whatever. You have to be so careful. (Northern Ireland – Rural, Female, 52, White)

## Transfer your trust

### Sensegiving

SOYS (see Figure 4), takes a different approach in its public-facing message around protective security measures designed into the environment. The headline trust frame in this respect is to *transfer your trust*. The campaign assets convey a message that publics should trust the capabilities of the security services, presenting specific tangible evidence in these capacities to verify the message. Whilst there is clearly a competence and preparedness message to this campaign, it also highlights benevolence or “goodwill”-based trust in the conveyed dedication to the protection of public interests that has a reassurance undertone.



Figure 4. Selected SOYS campaign assets shown in focus groups.

### **Sensemaking**

SOYS provoked substantial and polarised discussion with regards its meaning generally and in relation to trust specifically. This is seemingly due to both its unusual and jarring aesthetics for a CT campaign, and that it could be plausibly “read” as either a hostile deterrence or public reassurance campaign. In terms of the latter, this was a theme that emerged quite strongly supporting the theme of benevolence. Participants made statements like: “My first thought, I just liked the security on your side. I guess it does make me feel quite safe” (Cardiff – Suburban, Male, 19, White). Individuals commented that it illustrated the protection of public interests and a sense of positive, collective agency: “It feels more powerful rather than [in the other campaigns], you know, dis-empowered we have to report these people because that’s the only thing we can do. It feels like no we’ve got all this on our side.” (London – Urban, Female, 29, White).

### **Sensebreaking**

However, the CCTV and the “vigilant security officer” depicted in SOYS particularly sparked discussion across focus groups regarding trust. For example:

CCTV footage that’s been reported on the news, everything just looks so blurry and unclear. . . They say there’s an officer on this poster but I can’t see any around me, and then you just think, ‘Alright, this poster’s just there as, like, a kind of propaganda piece to say, ‘Oh, it is safe’, but you don’t really trust it. (London – Suburban, Male, 25, Asian)

Several individuals commented the “real” message was of public surveillance: “I feel like it’s the sort of nicer way of saying, ‘we’re always watching,’ sort of thing . . . like the wording, ‘we’re on your side’ but realistically it is just sort of Big Brother.” (Cardiff – Urban, Male, 19, White). There are thus two important implications for trust. One, it demonstrates a sensebreak in terms of the recounted perceived incompetence of the state security apparatus. Two, it suggests a sensebreak between the notion of security services protecting public interests in a benevolent fashion that honours their stated intentions, and perceptions of vested malevolent interests that monitor communities.

### **Public sensebridging: Dismiss and displace**

In light of the trust sensebreaks discussed thus far, analysis of the “now what?” led to the uncovering of what we are labelling “sensebridging.” Essentially, this relates to what people do when sensebreaking has occurred – the psychological and behavioural “strategies” people put in place to maintain a sense of security. Several focus group respondents discussed minimal trust sensebreaks, instead indicating through their discourse that they were generally trusting in government and (CT) policing as the main authorities in charge of terrorism threat management. In such cases, individuals viewed themselves as part of the CT “solution” and were generally aligned with the sensegiving of the campaigns. This notwithstanding, many others, particularly those who presented examples of sensebreaking, provided accounts of how they “bridged” the trust gap in their everyday life. It is this cohort that provides the most revealing insights into this next step of sensebridging, and thus is the main focus of this section.

“Dismiss” relates to how people defaulted to cognitive and rational sensemaking, assessing the risk of being involved in a terrorism incident through relative statistics that restore

a sense of security and trust that all is well (Herovic et al., 2019). Common statements to this effect were for example: “I think we are all aware it’s really quite unusual and even though we see it happen in London, the chances of you being involved in it are quite slim” (London – Suburban, Male, 43, White). Individuals discussed the futility of concern, given they have so little control over terrorism occurrences. Similar rationalisations were also linked to how some individuals discussed actively disengaging from the problem of terrorism and its management. Leaning again on cognitive processing, it reframes the problem in a way that lessens its intrusion into everyday life:

I don’t think it’s my responsibility . . . we’ve all got a lot going on in our lives . . . this is a bit beyond my pay grade and there’s other people that are supposed to do it, to make us feel safe. (London – Urban, Female, 36, Black)

“Displace” relates to how, following trust sensebreaks, individuals developed a more discerning approach, both towards the targets of trust, and towards their risk assessments. For the latter, it was common for people to talk of being vigilant towards risk in certain scenarios – namely those that were “new,” infrequently experienced, or particularly associated with terrorism incidents. For example, individuals discussed being alert while travelling in airports, or while attending major high footfall events: “when I’m in an airport, that’s usually, I do think about that sometimes and sometimes when I’m in London as well, I’ll think about it and get worried” (Cardiff – Suburban, Male, 18, White). This shows that sensebridging only really becomes necessary for some people via “abnormal” feelings of vulnerability – a critical affective component of trust (Nienaber et al., 2015). Second, displacement became apparent in how individuals directed their trust at certain figures within the authority apparatus, or indeed withdrew their trust altogether. For example, as discussed in relation to the theme of competence, some people distinguished between CTP and policing more generally in terms of trustworthiness on the particular issue of terrorism: “I think I trust the reputable ‘counterterrorism policing’, they’ve got to be government recommended or government endorsed at some point. So, yes it’s not like, random” (London – Urban, 50, White). This was corroborated by more negative sentiments about the more mainstream policing “system” across focus groups:

I would say I don’t distrust the police at all. 90% of interactions I’ve had with police officers have been fine, it’s just the fact that the whole police force and the whole system, it just doesn’t feel like it actually works. (Cardiff – Suburban, 19, White)

Publics clearly operationalise different kinds of bridging techniques following trust sensebreaking in CT strategic communication. Practitioners also carry out sensebridging of their own. This manifests in their professional work via compensatory trust-building public relations strategies.

### **Practitioner Sensebridging: Relationship management**

For practitioners, the principal sensebridging strategy was that of relationship focused work to build trust in public communications. In contrast to much strategic communication that is authoritative, mass-focused, and appeals to logic and rationality, this is founded instead on principles of emotion and empathy. It is characterised by a dedication to active listening

to feelings and of being led by, and responsive to, local, community need. For example, one practitioner explained that in the wake of trust breakdown within a particular community:

They were very direct about how they felt about the institution that we were part of and why. And we listened and were very open to everything they said and, you know, agreed, mostly. But I think having a face and making these institutions human and trying to, sort of, recognise that there is legacy ... it's people-to-people relationships ... that really shift and build trust, ultimately. (P15)

There was a clear recognition for the need to move beyond the public-facing campaign material to the long and arduous process of relationship building that does not seek to convince or persuade, but to “co-orient,” much more akin to the type of engagement one would find in the work of peacebuilders rather than government or policing professionals (Rice et al., 2021). Further, an important element of sustained engagement and the eventual building of trust, was giving agency to communities to regularly inform the delivery of long-term CT interventions in a manner that recognises their competence: “I think from a comms perspective, that relationship management piece has been key... It's helped us to receive honest feedback and to adapt our approaches based on what we're hearing” (P5).

Related to this was use of *community messengers*. Community messengers are trusted intermediaries of “official” information, a vehicle that practitioners were increasingly aware as critical to “cut through” of their message in a busy information environment: “we now operate in an extremely fragmented communication space ... highly fragmented communities, all with a completely different set of trusted messengers and ecosystems that they engage with and with completely different context and ultimately ... everything comes down to trust” (P15). Such messengers are authentic in their lived experience and modes of communicating that better engages audiences:

I think trust is a big one, actually ... I think there's making sure that it [the campaign] really connects, that you're whole, sort of, creative concept is based on something that's authentic ... so far less about big billboards and TV advertising and far more about getting discussion going ... we would then have part of the campaign that takes it through theatre or film or community groups and allows people to, kind of, really start to explore those in their own context and their own community. (P20)

In applying the work of sensemaking to understanding the transmission and reception of CT strategic communication, community messengers can, in some ways, be viewed as “emotional buffers” (Scarduzio & Tracy, 2015). The application is apt in the sense that certain individuals can be particularly influential in interpreting, “buffering,” and aligning the emotions – and through this the sensemaking – of others, so that social order is sustained.

## Discussion and conclusion

Trust is a significant element signalled across the three different CT campaigns studied. Uncovering how and in what form this occurs, helps identify the multifaceted nature of how trust messages are “built into” CT communications as a form of influence, evidencing a more discerning approach to trust than might be “read” at a surface level. Practitioner interviews, analysed via a sensemaking framework, proposes a picture of the ‘sender’s’ intended trust messaging as “sensegiving.” By then integrating public perspectives, we have

also been able to present a snapshot of how this messaging is made sense of by publics with regards to trust. Overall, there appears to be some alignment in how both campaign assets and professionals' strategic practice conveys and "gives sense" to different elements of trust, and how members of the public accordingly understand and make sense of these messages. However, we have also identified how and why sense might be "broken" with trust messaging.

"Sensebreaks" broadly related to perceived competence, integrity and benevolence. They confirm how signals of trust do not sit in isolation, nor solely in the present, but are situated within the prism of past and contemporary local contexts and challenges. These sensebreaks of course feature within a wider "low trust" climate with regards to government and policing, confirming research and polling on the "elite trust problem" (Flew, 2021) that figured high on the agenda around the Covid pandemic, the time of data collection, and presenting particularly fertile ground for sensebreaking to occur. Further, we have shown what is done by publics and practitioners in light of such sensebreaking – a process labelled "sensebridging." In lieu of a sense of strong trust, individuals use a variety of cognitive and emotional "strategies" to build and protect a sense of security, and "good enough" trust required for everyday life.

This study is of course limited in that the results represent a snapshot in time, involving a modest range of perspectives. As such, we do not make causal claims about trust. Instead, recognising trust as enmeshed in the wider sociopolitical experience of daily life and the array of complex interacting factors that brings to its study. Nonetheless, the richness of our mixed-methods data suggests that the concept of generative trust may lend itself to the exploration of different contexts of trust, beyond that of CT strategic communication, but further research is required. A first step would be to monitor perspectives from the same cohort on a longitudinal basis to test our concept and its underpinning sensemaking inspired elements. Further, a natural extension would be to explore the topic in different geographical regions, among different audiences, and through different types of public communication campaigns to both validate the findings and capture additional important variables.

### ***Emotions, sensemaking, and trust***

This study has shown that in the sensegiving and sensemaking around CT communication campaigns, both cognitive and emotional sensemaking come into play. It thus goes towards addressing the assertion that most research on sensemaking: "has centered on the cognitive aspects . . . rather than on the emotional aspect" (Scarduzio & Tracy, 2015, p. 334). Accordingly, our findings support recent research that asserts that trust judgements are motivated by interacting cognitive and emotional triggers and regulation processes (van der Werff et al., 2019). Further, with regards to sensebreaking, it is clear that emotions are especially salient. Trust sensebreaks, particularly around a sense of fairness and morality (integrity), goodwill and public interest serving (benevolence), are *felt* acutely and appear harder to (re-)align – indicating these elements of trust may be an important future focus for campaign development.

Indeed, recent longitudinal work on trust perceptions of a U.S. government agency found that perceptions of ability appeared to be most malleable, and integrity perceptions were associated with a more resilient sense of trust (Van Fossen et al., 2024). Our findings,

on the whole, support recent research that nuances the impact of different qualities of trustworthiness on trust perceptions (Devine et al., 2024; Moore et al., 2023; Sondern & Hertel, 2024), underscoring the possibility that certain qualities may matter more at different times, in different kinds of scenarios and relationships, and in different local and national trust “climates.” Our data also suggests, however, that “splitting” trustworthiness into individual components is not always reflective of how trust is conceived of in everyday life, and that the conflation of certain elements in public perceptions around a topic is revealing in itself – such as in the case of integrity and benevolence here. This paper thus adds to this emerging literature by utilising sensemaking theory to specifically illuminate the role of strategic communication in this process, which we propose may be a mechanism of the “trustworthiness-trust link” worth exploring further (see Sondern & Hertel, 2024). On a more practical note, while specific elements of trustworthiness are tactically communicated in individual UK CT campaigns, via cognitive and affective sensegiving triggers, the *strategic* element of trust communication, requires further between campaign analysis and attention to the cumulative impacts on CT “grand strategy” (Botan, 2006).

Accordingly, the concept of sensebridging foregrounds the role of emotional buffering via trusted community networks and leaders, encapsulating practice strategies of trust mediation and repair. Getting emotional buffers right matters, since: “the role involves emotional interpretation – depending on what the buffer observes about the receiving actor, they do not just absorb, but rather, complement or compensate” (Scarduzio & Tracy, 2015., p. 352). Relatedly, this research’s practitioner cohort suggested that the real work of trust communication remains rooted in face-to-face, co-creational relationship building, indicating that localised, traditional strategic communication methods remain paramount in strategic communication of this type (Lilleker & Negrine, 2003). Although relationship management is a long-established public relations approach (Ledingham, 2021), its out-working here is informed by the evolving information ecosystem containing microcommunities with specific trusted messengers, and a low trust climate towards authorities following salient sensebreaking experiences.

### **Generative trust**

It is clear that certain high profile, far reaching incidents act as “signal events” (Innes, 2014) of trustworthiness around terrorism management. Thus, when such incidents reveal authorities’ lack of competence, integrity, or benevolence, they act as sensemaking “shocks” and become heuristics or “anchor events” (Ballinger & Rockmann, 2010) of trust that people lean on in their future sensemaking around the topic. Although these agenda-setting events are widely influential of public trust “atmospherics”, everyday experiences, local incidents, and legacies are simultaneously important triggers of sensemaking and sensebreaking. Likewise, the targets of trust are dynamic, ranging from views on specific individual security actors to the problems of the “whole system” of security. It is through an understanding of the continually evolving past-present, national-local, and individual-institutional tensions that the study underpins the need to appreciate the “generative” nature of trust.

Such an understanding supports the fundamentals of sensemaking as a constantly evolving process involving history, expectations and ongoing experience. In terms of practical implications, this suggests policymakers and practitioners need to be continually horizon

scanning and correspondingly agile in terms of trust communications. They should acknowledge trust as a public sentiment that is dynamic both in terms of time, and its agility to inform and mould the ‘reading’ of international, national, and local events of relevance to CT. Such operational intelligence requires methods to capture wide ranging cognitive and affective perspectives to identify (sub-) population trends, but also the granular qualitative investigations that provide the type of data presented in this article.

“Generative trust” conceptualises the evolving nature of campaign communication as it pertains to trust – how its design and delivery, and its reception and reading, is continually generated through past histories, contemporary contexts and events, and from these, ideas of the future. Trust, like history, is always generative (Somerville et al., 2020) and strategic communication acts a mobiliser (Rice et al., 2021).

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