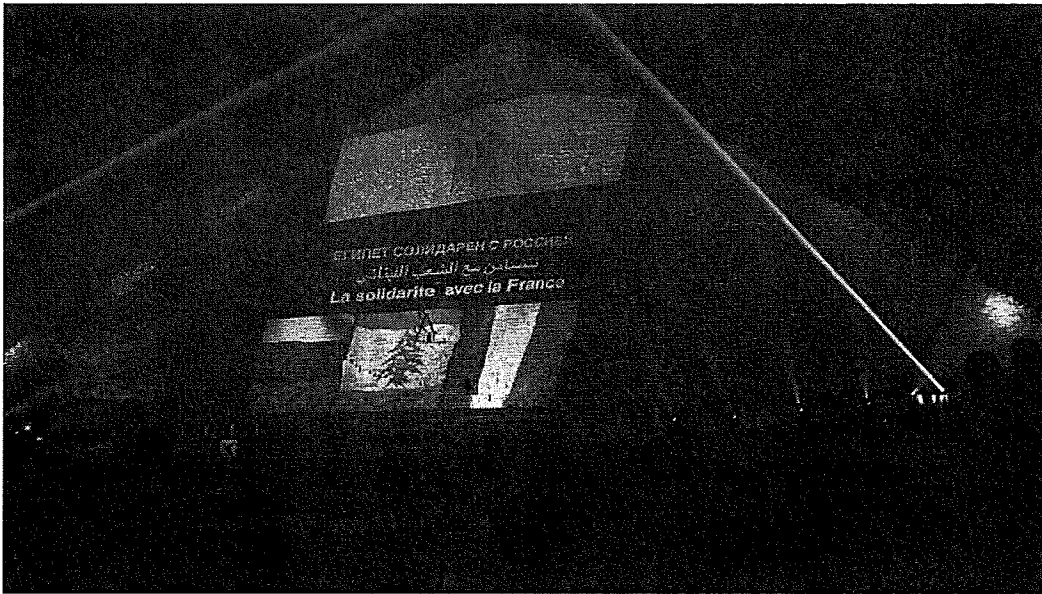


NEWSELA

Opinion: Kenya attack was off our radar — until beloved Paris was hit

By Washington Post, adapted by Newsela staff on 11.18.15

Word Count **778**



The Great Pyramid of Giza is illuminated with the Egyptian, French, Lebanese and Russian Flags in solidarity with the victims of attacks in Paris and Beirut and the Russian plane crash in northern Sinai, on the outskirts of Cairo, Egypt, Nov. 15, 2015. Photo: AP/Thomas Hartwell

In the hours after the deadly terror attack in Paris, France, Facebook and Twitter were filled with signs of support for France. People posted old photos of themselves in front of the Eiffel Tower. Others said they were praying for Paris. Profile picture after profile picture was overlaid with the red, white and blue of the French flag.

Then suddenly a story about another terror attack popped up. This time the attack was in Kenya.

"Man, what's happening with the world right now?" one Facebook user wrote.

"147 dead in terrorist attack on Kenya college," actress Bex Taylor-Klaus tweeted. "Hate consumes and destroys."

Older Tragedy Plays Out As New Attack

One British Broadcasting Corp. article on the attack was linked to over and over again. The date on the story? April 3, 2015.

It is impossible to tell how this article started making the rounds of the Internet seven months after it was published. The story within is as horrifying as the ghastly events in Paris: 148 people were killed by al-Shabab militants who stormed the dormitories of Garissa University College in a siege that lasted 15 hours. For those who skimmed past the date, it seemed like another unfolding story of horror and death.

It was posted so many times that "Kenya" began to trend on popularity-tracking websites like Alexa.com.

Why Didn't We Tweet About Kenya?

The eventual awareness that the story was published in April triggered a more somber realization: There had been no grand social media response to the earlier terror attack.

In fact, this old article was clearly the first time many people were hearing about it.

Comparing levels of outrage in response to tragic news is nothing new. It is happening right now in reference to the bloody attack in Beirut, Lebanon, that happened the day before the attack in Paris. The same extremist group, Islamic State, or ISIS, was responsible for both attacks, though few people noticed the Beirut attack. Islamic State is trying to set up its own country governed by Islamic law and has already captured parts of Syria and Iraq.

The Black Lives Matter movement has brought attention to the media's uneven and unequal coverage, which gives much more attention to some deaths than it does to others. The same has been said for years in reference to missing persons cases. Cases involving missing young white women always seem to receive the most attention, media critics say.

How Do We Explain What Goes Viral?

What gets covered and why is an issue complicated enough to take up entire college courses, but here is what seems clear: People are more likely to care about tragedies that hit people and places to which they feel close. They are also more likely to show their concern if everyone else is doing the same.

Just think about what happens when a Facebook friend passes away, said Boston College's Kelly Rossetto, who studies the way grief is expressed on social media. Mourners write on the person's wall and change their profile

pictures to old photos of them together. They fill their statuses with "RIP" and "praying for you." The more posts we see, the more pressure there is to post our own.

"Watching the waves of everyone else grieving can make you feel guilty," Rossetto said. "If you're not changing your profile picture, if you're not posting a message — you start to question your own grief response."

Americans And Their Affection For Paris

Many Americans have personal connections to Paris. They may have vacationed there or know people who live there. Thus, they are more affected when Paris is hit by tragedy, just as they would be when a friend dies. Even those who have never set foot in France have traveled there through books, TV shows and movies.

After the attacks on Paris, a chain of events unfolded on social media that resembled what happens when a friend dies: Profile pictures changed to those Eiffel Tower selfies, statuses were posted and a "peace for Paris" symbol went viral. Others saw those pictures and statuses, then were asked by Facebook to "Change your profile picture to support France and the people of Paris." Soon, a widespread and heartfelt response to a horrible event became visible for all to see.

Many fewer Americans have traveled to Kenya or Beirut than to Paris. However, just because we do not have vacation photos taken in those places we do not get to ignore the horrible killings they have endured.

Deep down, everyone knows that.

So what can a person do in an instant to show they care? Share a link, even if it is 7 months old.

Quiz

- 1 Read the sentence from the section "Why Didn't We Tweet About Kenya?"

The eventual awareness that the story was published in April triggered a more somber realization: There had been no grand social media response to the earlier terror attack.

Which of the following words would BEST replace the word "somber" in the sentence without changing the meaning of the sentence?

- (A) trivial
 - (B) flippant
 - (C) earnest
 - (D) mournful
- 2 Read the following sentence from the section "How Do We Explain What Goes Viral?"

"Watching the waves of everyone else grieving can make you feel guilty," Rossetto said.

Which phrase BEST matches the meaning of the word "waves" as used in the sentence?

- (A) slow trickle
 - (B) intense rising
 - (C) receding flow
 - (D) rhythmic crashing
- 3 Which section's MAIN purpose is to provide details about the attack in Kenya?
- (A) Introduction [paragraphs 1-4]
 - (B) "Older Tragedy Plays Out As New Attack"
 - (C) "How Do We Explain What Goes Viral?"
 - (D) "Why Didn't We Tweet About Kenya?"

- 4 Which of the following statements MOST accurately represents the author's opinion in the article?
- (A) Paris is the most beloved of all cities.
 - (B) The events in Paris and Beirut were very similar.
 - (C) Everyone should care when terrible things happen anywhere.
 - (D) People believe the things they are familiar with are most important.