

A REVIEW OF THE PSYCHOLOGY AND COMMUNICATION BEHIND FLIGHT ANXIETY: AFRAID OF FLY

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This article aimed to review the book “*The Psychology and Communication Behind Flight Anxiety: Afraid to fly*” written by Lindsey A. Harvell- Bowman and foreword by Eric M. Wilson meant to present various theories of flight anxiety among the flying public. The book will introduce you to know about fear and anxiety including aviophobia and leading to know what is the flight anxiety and the relevant research related to death anxiety and flight anxiety in regard to this theory. Specifically, the TMT theory which is at the heart of understanding why flight anxiety is so troubling and a potentially hazardous characteristic of the flying public also features on plane crash case studies MH370. Additionally, examines what the media’s role is in the flight anxiety discussed and, how can airlines and airports manage discomfort among passengers merging with the areas of psychology, communication, and public relations to form recommendations for practitioners in the aviation industry as well as offers suggestions to journalists and aviation professionals on how to help curb this anxiety to create a healthier flying public.

Introduction

“Anxiety is the reaction to danger” This statement was written decades ago by psychologist Sigmund Freud and still stands true today. Therefore, if we do not put ourselves in a dangerous situation, and the anxiety should be alleviated. However, what happens when danger is not imminent, and it is simply the fear of danger that leads to anxiety? Fear that is not immediate can often lead to the type of anxiety that is present when individuals exhibit a fear of flying, with the worst cases being psychologically diagnosed as aviophobia. Since flying has become more mainstream in the 1960s to 1980s, crowded airports, airplanes, and skies allow for more anxiety among passengers. While the fear is very real for those that experience flight anxiety, the probability of actually becoming a participant in a plane crash is slim. Additionally, flight anxiety can skew the perceptions of how

safe (or unsafe) air travel really is. This perception is mediated through self-esteem and pre and post-flight anxiety.

What is flight anxiety?

There are many different perspectives on flight anxiety and consequently many different definitions.

From the conclusion of this book, flight anxiety is a situational phobia, meaning the anxiety is produced by a particular object or situation causing intense anxiety. This anxiety often manifests in physiological, psychological, and behavioral reactions. Fear of loss of control and a need to be in control are key determinants of this anxiety. As with other phobias, fear of flying can range from an uncomfortable feeling all the way to an incapacitating phobia where it affects everyday life. Fear of flying is extremely complex psychologically with multiple dimensions.

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Whereas, Aviophobia is a debilitating disorder that requires people that have the disorder to either be heavily medicated while flying or simply avoid flying altogether. This extreme form of flight anxiety is defined by the American Psychiatric Association, where certain characteristics must be present for a diagnosis of aviophobia.

The author mentioned that aviophobia often results from other phobias such as claustrophobia (fear of enclosed spaces), ochlophobia (fear of crowds), acrophobia (fear of heights), and fear of hijacking or terrorism. While psychology does provide a basis for these fears, a look into the history of this anxiety among aviators as well as sampling some recent plane crashes (and the media that covered them) can provide some insight into why flight anxiety has always been problematic.

Flight anxiety is death anxiety

From many theories, the author studied the relationship between flight anxiety and death anxiety as the following:

At the heart of this anxiety is something that is rarely, if ever, mentioned when discussing aviophobia: fear of death. While there is a lot of discussion of what contributes to this anxiety, the one linkage is what can happen during a crash—you could die. Because of this, flight anxiety takes on a more personal effect; this type of anxiety is existential. Flight anxiety and death anxiety are woven together to result in an existential nightmare for passengers who are unable to handle both. There has only been one study to date that investigates this relationship.

Flight anxiety and death anxiety do appear to work the same, producing the same kind of existential defense that is typically seen in research investigating death anxiety. Having this type of anxiety among the flying public has

the potential to produce grave consequences. For instance, engaging in risky behavior, such as violent acts in airports, or worse, in flight. TMT can help provide some insight into the psychological constructs that might cause these types of behaviors in response to anxiety.

Terror Management Theory (TMT)

TMT, Terror Management Theory, a theory originating in psychology, examines the psychological effects of pondering one's death. The author reviewed that when one begins to ponder death, the anxiety of impending doom creeps in. And, as humans, we will do whatever we can to defend against the uncomfortable feelings of death and attempt to alleviate the anxiety. In the past year, much of TMT research is focused on mindfulness and meditation practices. The first study showed there were less proximal (i.e., immediate) responses with mindfulness and mind-wandering when compared to a worried group, but no effects were found for distal (i.e., delayed response) outcomes.

The book showed about TMT model that when something in the environment causes existential reminders, people tend to engage in what terror management scholars call proximal defenses (see figure 1). A proximal defense is an immediate denial of death. People will immediately seek to logically deny their impending doom (e.g. I'm probably not going to die today). In an airport setting, passengers rely on the statistics that you are much more likely to be in a car accident on the way to the airport instead of being involved in a plane crash.

However, once denial has taken place, crash thoughts begin to exit the conscious mind and recede into the unconscious.

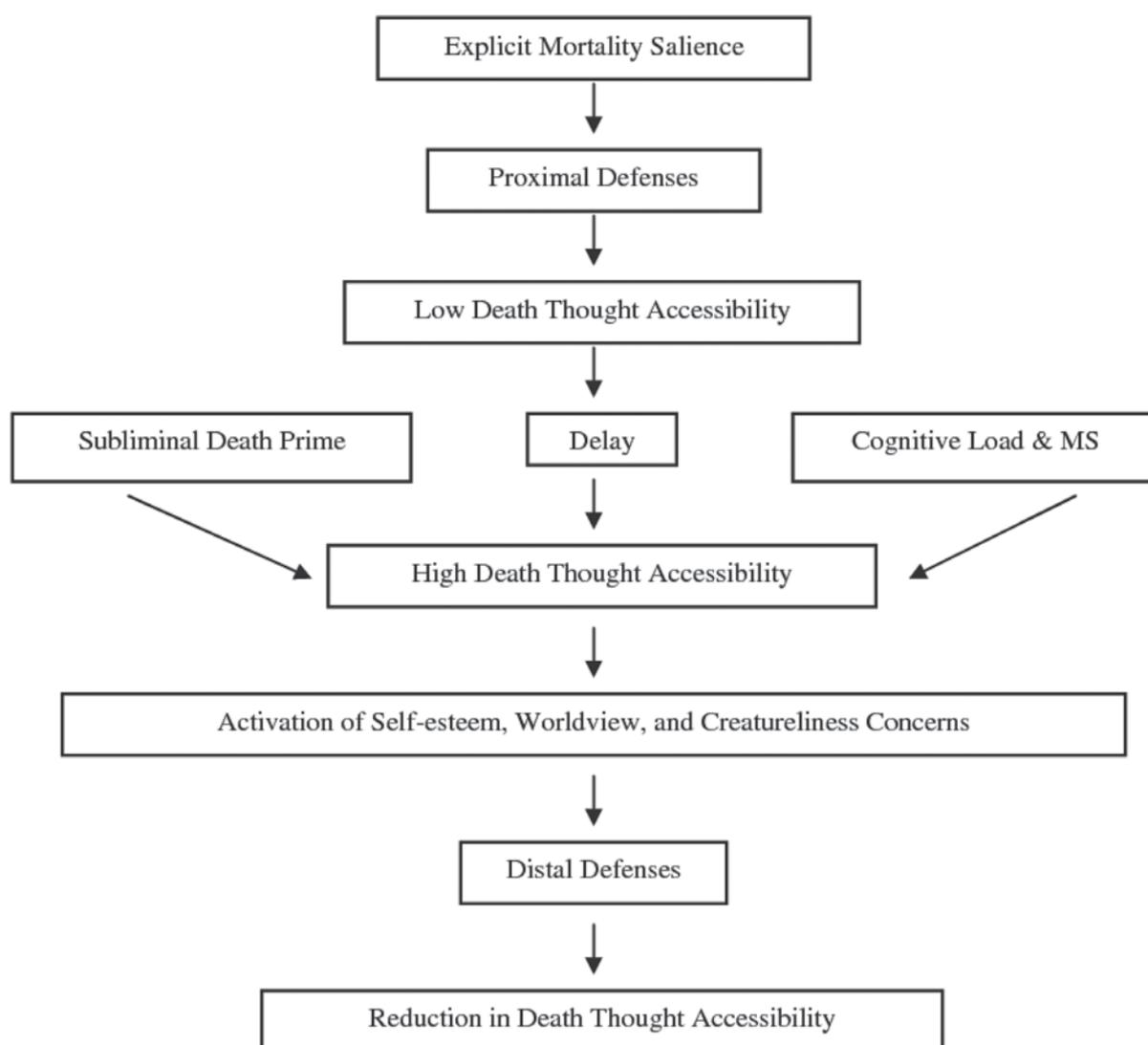


Figure 1 Terror Management Model

Moreover, the author reviewed of IATA air travel information related to flight anxiety. As air travel has continued to increase over the decades, so has general anxiety. In 2018, 6.8 million American adults suffered from Generalized Anxiety Disorder, 6 million American adults suffered from a panic disorder, and a staggering 15 million American adults suffered from a social anxiety disorder. Additionally, 19 million American adults suffered from specific phobias, such as aviophobia, a fear of flying. In fact, aviophobia can often be linked to other primary causes of anxiety such as the fear of enclosed spaces (claustrophobia), a fear of crowds (agoraphobia), a fear of heights (acrophobia), and even the anxiety of not being in control. With all of these possibilities for anxiety,

when passengers get stressed, certain unsavory behaviors can manifest as a result of this anxiety.

What can airports and airlines do to help?

This is one of interesting section of this book is how airlines and airports have any role in mitigating the flight anxiety of passengers. We can review that before passengers even arrive at the airport, they are stressed with worries like getting stuck on the way to the airport, missing the boarding time, delays, and needing to pay extra for baggage. And then once arriving at the airport, passengers are plagued with anxiety related to checking in and security. While moving walkways can help passengers get from place to place quick and efficiently,

these walkways are often narrow and do not promote enough room for varying speeds of movement with bags. Many airports are old and outdated. Oftentimes, these airports would require a major overhaul to put in passenger comforts like moving walkways. However, Airport design may not be the only way airports can help curb anxiety. Airport management may also play a role. For instance, while many airlines now offer online check-in services, passengers are often still required to drop bags off in lines that can be quite long in addition security lines have the potential to be long and cumbersome, making passengers anxious and uncomfortable before they even enter the departure hall.

The author reviewed and suggested that risk communication often relies on a fear appeal in order to motivate behavior change. As flight anxiety already has the flying public in fear, the Extended Parallel Process Model (EPPM) provides a useful framework to utilize in order to construct a useful risk message. The goal then, in message creation, is to provide a strong efficacy message that will lead to fear control, rather than danger control, and thereby ultimately to the desired reduction in anxiety and increased healthy behavior. Using this theoretical rationale, a risk message was created that included a risk comparison and a strong efficacy component. The risk comparison (showcasing that fewer deaths occur from flying than from other forms of transportation) should reduce the perceived severity and susceptibility, and the efficacy message (that there is a means to look up the maintenance information about the airplane) should reduce the flight anxiety. This study utilized a three-condition experimental design. The control condition featured a message about airlines' commitment to achieving passenger satisfaction and was meant to serve as a baseline of flight anxiety in a message that had nothing to do with safety. The message read as follows: Airlines dedicate themselves to serving their customers to the highest quality and satisfaction while also maintaining the optimal level of safety.

Experience that no one expects to happen with their life; a plane crash. The experience of the plane crash may stick in every passenger's mind and may change those people's perspective on flying the plane. Anxiety and previous scenarios could pop up in their mind, as it can be called a "Near Death Experience".

During the situation that happens, many people may think about religion and expect positive outcomes like surviving. While others may try to find a way to manage their close relationship after they have passed away.

Religion somehow makes passengers get less fear of death and calm on whatever will happen to them. Passengers with the same belief in the same situation, tend to take over the scenarios and convert the environment into their faith. For example, many Christian passengers were on board, while a plane crash was about to happen. Praying to Jesus Christ may takeover or even lead by a flight attendant. Of course, praying is not only done for safety purposes, but it makes all passengers who do so, change their focus to keep themselves calm.

Bad Situation can make people who do not know each other feel united, as getting through a life-death situation together tend to make people being kind to their friends. During the situation of life-death, mainly people will try to call their close relationship to express goodbye or telling how much they love those people.

However, some passengers tend to not accept their death faith, instead of telling goodbye or how much love they have. They may only tell those persons that they will be late. This is called "Denial Death". While we carefully investigate on specific reason, not only they do not want to be negative toward themselves. It could be that they do not want those love one to worry about their death

There are two types of people who in seconds of death; either accept it or totally deny it. Those people who deny will try to imagine a different thing, even though they were in a dream. Everything that happening right now is

just surreal. Yet, those surreal feelings cannot be that long, they finally have to accept it. On the other hand, those who accept their destiny. May try to be creative and identify themselves in case of plane explode. Many of those passengers will put driver's licenses on their shirts to easily identify the body. Some of the passengers who accept death may try to change the tension within the situation like mention the enjoyable experience of using the emergency slide.

No matter whether life or death after a plane crash, it may change that individual perspective as well as relatives that will look at planes differently. Those who experience life-death situations will definitely look at life from another perspective. While many people did not expect any accidents will happen on the plane since very few of them happened. Results of those plane crash survivors vary, some might get rid of the anxiety that they have before, or some might deny flying in the plane or even let a relative fly in the plane as well. Even though, that person will not anymore take the plane, they have grown stronger in inner strength, discover new possibilities or perspectives in life, appreciate that they still spend time with their relatives, or get deeper relationships with their close families.

Commuting by plane is not always something that everyone looking for especially those who have a negative experience with flying. Aviophobia is one simple word that can describe those who fear flying, the symptom not only affects an individual during their commute in a plane only, but it can further result on a daily basis. Moreover, news on the television or newspaper that published relate to plane crash or accidents will definitely trigger those symptoms to get even worse.

Terror Management Error (TMT)

is mainly focus on behavior of deny death, by taking certain actions or behave in a certain way. Within this book has reviewed three experiments. As following.

Experiment 1

This one is focusing on the anxiety that happens with an individual while a plane crash or unexpected situations that are hard to predict. The individual will mentally prepare for the damage until death, so they will finally realize how important and meaningful their life is eventually.

People cannot deny that Air Traveling is the safest path, compare to any other type of transportation. As a result, most people have not prepared themselves for any losses or accidents that could occur with Air Transport. Yet, when realize each time that plane accidents occur, the amount of fatal loss seems to be high. This makes people with low self-esteem choose not to fly in the plane, while high self-esteem make them look over and keep traveling with planes.

The test process of Experiment 1 makes participants read information from different sources, on a different level of negative. From the higher cost of traveling to possibly fatal accidents that could happen. Those who have not anticipated very negative sources still strongly in mind air traveling, while those who consume air crash resources will hesitate to air travel in the future.

Experiment 2

Comparison between the different of seeing plane crash visually either from news or video online, compared to reading from news text storytelling. The result showed that neither viewing a video from the news nor reading through text does trigger more anxiety within an individual. Anyone who already has flight anxiety will remain the same, no matter whether they consume more news about a plane crash or not.

Experiment 3

This experiment expands the sample of videos that could possibly be a reason of flight anxiety, participants got one of six conditions, which is different kinds of videos related to

death. The result still be the same no matter whether participants consume a video related to death, even within the plane. Flight anxiety still results in the same.

MH370

One of the most popular cases of a plane went missing; MH370. Malaysian Airlines with call sign MH370, the Boeing 777, carried 227 passengers and 12 flight crews. The flight from Kuala Lumpur International Airport to Beijing Capital International Airport had lost communication during the cruising phase. This news had been published by CNN on March 8, 2014, by Anderson Cooper.

The chapter begins with the story of Richard Quest, a Malaysian Airline pilot who was familiar with the Boeing 777 very well as well as knowing the co-pilot who went missing name “Fariq Abdul Hamid” because he has flown with him a week before the accident happened. He described that Hamid has not shown any sign of endangerment or red flags. The time passed by, news about MH370 has been faded because there was no evidence of a plane crash or track of an accident at all. It just somehow disappears on the Air Traffic Control radar screen. Until 2015, the debris was founded in the area of search, where the missing plane was found later on.

At the beginning of the crisis, people have thrown several theories about the missing plane; for example, fire occur in the cockpit making the pilot lose consciousness, a Russian spy took the plane, and the plane has been shot down by the United States of America, or even the plane taken by Aliens. When realizing all those reasons that news broadcasters publish through television, it might call many people interested to find the solution or reasons why it happened. Also, the human brain generally contains those feelings of consideration and empathy for those disasters.

It can become an obsession to feed ourselves with more information and update, as well as consumes news not only from one source but several sources. Since MH370 is the first major crash even since Asiana Flight

214 crashed in San Francisco. This action of an individual can create Post-Traumatic Stress, which mainly creates stress for anyone. The emotion will swing following the tone of the news especially the more it tones down negatively. The more distress it could be.

While News Broadcasters are carrying indications and attitudes of people toward the world. The worse news that has been broadcast, is the negativity of people thinking toward the world. TV broadcaster has to realize the amount of negativity or information that they will publish. They carry believe, personalities, and trust of people in society. It is normally that hit news can be updated 24/7, as those TV stations looking for better ratings in their channel. Yet, ethical behavior must come along with the gain high amount of view.

Fixing the Current Journalistic Model
Nowadays, journalists tend to work more difficult than before, since it is not only to do storytelling about news, but it needs an understanding of the news and be able to make it easier to digest. With the twenty-four-hour cable news cycle and the internet, journalists today have constant deadlines. They are often expected to be immediately tweeting or live streaming the news, something that their journalistic ancestors never were faced with. There is no time for that today in the competing market of networks-you must report immediately so that your network owns the story. There is rarely time to digest the information. In this kind of environment, journalists often make errors in their reporting and have to backtrack in later stories.

Changing the current journalistic model is not anything new. As society has changed, so has journalism. But, even journalists are starting to take note of the problem and calling for a change in the cable news model.

This model of journalism has the potential to make any anxiety induced by traumatic news stories much worse. Watching anything for twenty-four hours can be problematic for the psyche. While the panel format provides viewers with a wide range of perspectives, disagreements on these panels

can often end in shouting matches, something that can be seen on all of the major cable networks. The confusion that viewers may have also can play a role in this anxiety.

A New Model of Journalism

The key to finding a new way to think about cable news journalism is two fold: (1) networks need to produce enough ratings to generate high revenue, but (2) they also need to be ethical in what they are reporting. And, while we need to report the facts, we need to do so in a way that always has the consumer's psychological health in mind. With the ever-present death salience with not only aviation disaster news but all news, here are some recommendations on what journalists can do to report the news in a better way, from a psychological standpoint,

The first step to a better journalistic model is to eliminate the speculation, knowing that in the beginning hours of a plane crash or traumatic event, doing this will be extremely difficult. However, the end game is worth it. When journalists focus on facts, and the analysis of those facts, viewers will feel less uncertainty. And, when there is a desire to speculate, draw parallels to past events. Drawing parallels will provide new content and provide viewers with the comfort that whatever is being reported has occurred before.

Second, journalists need to treat breaking news as breaking news, but not weeks of nonstop 24/7 coverage of the same material. Once a few days have passed, and you get past the initial event, devote fifteen minutes an hour to the story, but a report on other things in the world. This change in coverage will help viewers realize that, while this new event is scary and uncertain, the world is still turning.

The new journalistic approach could also help with ratings. Because viewers are not inundated with constant coverage, viewers will crave news about the new event, potentially causing them to tune in more frequently. Third, networks would benefit from employing psychologists and having them on air to discuss the impact these events have on the public.

Networks need to continue this model for plane crash news. Last, networks really should rely on their online outlets for more complementary, in-depth analysis while referencing television content.

How Aviation Professionals Handle Crashes

In the initial hours of a crash, the airline, involved airports, and the NTSB are scrambling to manage the crisis that has just been thrust upon them. While the NTSB is getting a team ready and on-site to investigate, the airlines and airports often have to work together to manage the public crisis. The good news is most major airlines that have had disasters in the past have plans in place. These plans typically include the following: (1) family assistance centers, (2) a telephone hotline for families, (3) the designation of specific employees for individual families, (4) onsite grief counseling, and (5) a JIC (joint information center) for airline personnel and investigators with a nearby media room for reporters.

The way MH370 was handled led to an overall increase in anxiety all over the world. And, a lot of what was being communicated to the media was wrong, causing journalists to backtrack, contradict, and generally confuse viewers.

In the beginning, withholding information was necessary. The NTSB typically withholds all information until after their investigation is complete (a process that normally takes over a year). But when airlines lie about information and continue to change their story, the public will get anxious. Consequently, when airlines do not communicate, the lack of communication also breeds anxiety. It makes the journalist's job next to impossible. So, now not only are the airline's public relations mistakes, following a disaster, affecting the families of crash victims but also affecting the greater flying public.

The first step is to over-communicate relevant details.

The second step is to hold daily press briefings. Even if there are not any new findings in the crash investigation,

The third step is to be completely upfront with the families of the passengers. Keep updating with public and launched new procedures that concern safety.

What Can the Flying Public Do?

Today, air travel caters to the cheap passenger with options for “basic economy” on major airlines and dirt cheap fares (e.g. \$25 one-way) on airlines like Spirit, home of the “base fare”. On these airlines, nothing is free. Want to pick your seat? Want a glass of water? It will cost you. Some of these low-cost airlines even charge to use their overhead bin space. Currently, they aren’t placing passengers in that space,

The crowding, lack of respect, and unhappy passengers about being nickel and dimed are already set up for anxiety in flight. And, with all of these obstacles, it makes sense that the flying public is walking balls of anxiety.

A Loss of Control

When we board an airplane, we give up a certain amount of control. In the same line of thinking, we also do not have control over when we will die.

Whenever there is a loss of control (or perception of that loss) in any situation, anxiety increases. So, getting on a plane should be no different; a plane is a natural situation for anxiety to breed.

This loss of control seems to be acknowledged by the flying public. Will, Self, a frequent anxious flyer, notes, “The only flights on which I’ve ever felt at complete ease are the ones where I’ve been in the cockpit with the pilot” (Self, 2014, p.70). This makes sense. By being in the cockpit, you gain a sense of calmness because you are watching the plane being flown. You can see it. You know everything is okay.

If we have experience or are knowledgeable relating to safety like which seat is considered the safest area within the plane,

get consulting with the pilot or experienced traveler within the plane. This cause of action can reduce the amount of anxiety that could happen within the individual. For those who cannot control their anxiety, but need to travel by plane. The prescription drug from the doctor is also one of the options that they can do. Even though the prescription drug is making crisis go away, it does make an individual control over their body and mind.

All-Natural Ways of Curbing Flight Anxiety

We already partake in many pre-flight activities that both lower our anxiety and serve death-denying functions. First, those who worry about flight anxiety need to make sure to have control over their safety. One of the great parts is studying safety demonstrations and reading safety instructions from the backseat pocket.

Second, reducing psychomotor sense, earbuds, eye cover, or music (Audio Device) will reduce the amount of stress or worry in an individual.

Third, pre-flight seat selection. Talk to any aviation expert and they will all agree: seat selection matters in a crash. When a plane crashes, the front of the plane experiences the largest amount of g-forces while the back of the plane experiences the least.

While we already engage in pre-flight anxiety-reducing behaviors, there remains a fair amount of uncertainty. Therefore, there is more we can do to feel safe and to help curb some of that pesky anxiety.

First, limit aviation disaster-related media. Second, fill your carry-on with things that give you comfort, and keep those things easy to access in an organized travel bag. Third, rely on applications like “Am I Going Down?” to help you realize crashes are extremely rare. Fourth, avoid alcohol and prescription drugs if you can. We need a healthier flying public. By eliminating stressors and keeping our anxieties in check, we can avoid a multitude of potential unsavory situations.

Conclusion

Flight Anxiety or Aviophobia can happen to everyone whether passengers with a health problems or general passengers who are fit to fly. Mainly, passengers worry about the accident that could happen to them. Moreover, it is quite difficult to control or resolve if there is an accident occurs. Generally, passengers who have not usually traveled by plane will scare of flying by nature. Since they have no idea what will happen next and they totally lose control (cannot expect an outcome) when compare to another kind of transportation. Also, statistic showed that plane disaster is usually

worse than other kinds of transportation. The rate of survival is quite low. One main factor that does affect not only who will fly, but close families of passengers as well as, journalists or media. As they usually are the only source that people can easily access. The foundation of being media is “Fast and giving clear details”, but those clear details can hurt several people who watch it. Anxiety can also trigger more often based on the result of consuming the amount of news. So, a good journalist should consider the health of viewers specifically mental problems rather than the rating of the channel only.