

Opinion: 'Speech should be free regardless of how many people want to support it'

By L.V. Anderson, Slate

It's hard to know how to respond to the horrific murders of much of the staff of Charlie Hebdo earlier this week. For the past few days, social media has seen an outpouring of grief and condolences, of cartoon tributes to the controversial magazine, of the #JeSuisCharlie hashtag.

But if you felt like you wanted to do something to take a stand against terrorism instead of just emoting on Twitter, some commentators had a suggestion: Subscribe to Charlie Hebdo.

These reactions echoed a sentiment widely shared last month, after theaters began backing out of plans to screen "The Interview" in light of threats from the group that hacked Sony.

"I probably wasn't even going to see 'The Interview' until theaters started pulling it, but now I will drive as far as necessary to watch it," tweeted one typical would-be moviegoer, expressing a view that grew in popularity after Sony (temporarily) suspended plans to release the film.

The impulse to support a piece of media that has provoked violence (or threats of violence) is understandable. If you want to stand up for free speech, buying a movie ticket or newspaper that you normally wouldn't buy seems like a simple, concrete way to take a stand against censorship. Subscribing to Charlie Hebdo might also feel like a satisfying way of thwarting the terrorists and those who share their goal of suppressing the magazine's influence.

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