

Chapter Three

A critical discourse analysis of online YouTube news coverage of Garissa University terrorist Attack in Kenya

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Abstract

Terrorism remains a global threat. The architects of terror attacks aim for maximum media coverage in order to attain multiplied shock effect on the citizens including those who might be far removed from the direct impact of a given attack. In covering terror attacks, the media should be aware of this desired goal of terrorists. News reports of attacks form mental models in readers and viewers. These become their reference point of understanding who is a terrorist and an evaluation of success of terrorists vis-à-vis counter terrorism efforts. This study sought to establish how the terrorists and the counterterrorist efforts are constructed on YouTube news reporting on the Garissa University terrorist attack. The study therefore draws data from online YouTube news headlines of the 2nd of April 2015 terror attack at Garissa University in Kenya in which 147 lives was lost. The study examined the presupposed knowledge of a terrorist and the counter terrorists' efforts brought out through the use of presuppositions as a language strategy. This was done through highlighting the emerging construction of terrorism, terrorists, and counter terrorist efforts on YouTube news videos in line with van Dijk's Socio cognitive framework of Critical Discourse Analysis theory (CDA). The use of presuppositions in the headlines brought out terrorists as very sophisticated. The security agencies on the other hand are constructed as impotent, poorly organized and always playing catch-up to the terrorists. The YouTube news on the Garissa University terrorist attack served to propagate the terrorist agenda instead of countering it.

Keywords: Discursive, Garissa, Linguistic, Mental model, Strategies, Terrorist

Introduction

The news media and violent extremism have a complex relationship. This is attributed to the fact that terrorism as a notion takes different interpretations and definitions based on differing forms of conceptualizations and perceptions. Terrorism is frequently applied to describe highly varied attitudes and behaviour ranging from anarchist, or revolutionary ones to criminal acts. It is also possible that terrorist's acts be interpreted either as fights for freedom or terrorism based on one's religious or political stand. Language use forms the basis for what should count as knowledge on terrorism and define what should be produced, communicated, legitimated and resisted (Stump, 2013). Journalists are therefore faced with the dilemma of deciding how to frame the news on terror without promoting the terrorist's agenda. This study aimed to

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critically analyse the social media discourse on terrorism to recognize and recommend elimination of biases.

The media is a source of information on terror attacks. The public relies on both the traditional and the social media coverage to get to know of the attacks in terms of the number of those injured and the death rates, the perpetrators and how the government security forces are responding to the attacks. The media therefore provides information that their consumers use to form or update their mental model of the event. It could be said that terrorists' acts aim at causing heavy casualties but also at raising fear with the public which thanks to the media, participates collaterally in every terrorist attack (Peresin, 2000). Without the media's coverage, the acts and the impacts are limited to the immediate victims of the attack.

Terrorists' attacks have frequently been witnessed in Kenya. A major attack in 1998 that involved the bombing of the American Embassy was followed by a bombing of the Paradise Hotel at Kikambala in Mombasa in the year 2012 (Mutua, 2013). According to Eboi (2015), there have been fifty terrorist attacks since late 2011 to 2015 when terrorists attacked students at Garissa University situated in the northern part of Kenya. Garissa University terrorist attack was the deadliest attack ever witnessed in Kenya with one hundred and forty-seven lives lost and several students' injured. The magnitude of the attack, therefore, attracted a lot of attention from both local and international media. The attack has happened in one of Kenya's institutions of higher learning symbolized an attack on Kenyan education and its future. It is against this background that the study was seen relevant.

The media constructs our understanding of the world we live in, when they use a given language. In effect, this language is not authentic since it is determined and administered by dominant world views or ideologies Fowler (1991) asserted that the world of the press is not the real world, but a world skewed and judged. This study limited itself to media houses' YouTube video reportage of terrorism news. Kenyans, as social media consumers, would make meaning of such attacks based on how the journalists frame their reporting. van Dijk and Kintsch (1983) explain that news makers have a model of each news event, and they will generally write their reports to suit their audiences' model of the event. In Kenyan social media, various terms such as *attackers*, *gunmen*, *Muslim extremists* and *terrorists* have been used by different reporters to refer to the perpetrators of the terror attacks. Such terms play a great role in determining the mental model readers make of who terrorists are and the measure of the counter-terrorists' efforts.

Terrorists' acts of violence on civilians are intended to create publicity. As earlier said, the media cannot be separated from what is happening in society. Internet tools such as Facebook, blogs, YouTube, and Flickr as well as traditional media occupy a major business and personal sphere of communication. They facilitate awareness, and news to audiences hence acting as a great communication resource to humankind with a wide reach. On the contrary, the media can provide platforms for global terrorists to convey their agenda to as many people as possible. It

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is argued that the media and terrorists have a symbiotic relationship (Bilgen, 2012). This is because while the terrorists seek attention and publicity, the media has a story to sell. Striking a balance between informing the public of the attacks and spreading the terrorists' agenda becomes a complex task for the creators of terror news content in social media. It is however possible to report in such a way that the newsmakers divert the attention from the core. This study sought to establish the role that YouTube news videos on the Garissa university terror attack in Kenya played in promoting the terrorists' agenda. The study was interested in bringing out the role of Kenyan social media in the fight against terrorism in Kenya.

An analysis of YouTube news channels found that the most popular ones are affiliated with news organizations (Pew Research Centre, 2020). The biggest chunks of these news organizations of all the popular YouTube news channels belong to television stations (TV). The survey further indicated that the YouTube channels that belong to news organisations tend to be neutral in their reportage. This is because news is expected to be objective. It is against this background that this study sought to analyse the reporting of the Garissa University terror attack in selected YouTube news channels associated with local and international TV stations.

Literature review

Olasya (2018) assessed the impact of social media on national security in Kenya. The study sought to establish the threats of social media usage on security and how social media can be utilized in preventing, limiting or eliminating the threats on Kenyan National Security. The study found that terrorist organizations use social media for radicalization and popularization of their action and also spread propaganda. This study informed the current study which sought to establish the role of Mainstream Kenyan media YouTube channels in promoting the terrorists agenda. Suvojit (2019) in his study of the terrorists' use of social media found that social media has been weaponized. That is to say the internet has become a weapon for terrorists to exploit in selling their agenda. Suvoit (2019) terms this *Social Media Terrorism*. He goes ahead to say that terrorists play psychological warfare using social media. The current study came in to find out the situation as far as YouTube news channels is concerned in Kenya. The big question being whether the terrorists are benefitting too from how terror reports are handled by journalists.

Oluwakemi (2020) critically analyzed news coverage of South African discourses on Xenophobia. The findings of the study indicated that there were narratives that termed the South Africans as 'we' against the migrant 'them'. The 'them' description of the migrants fuelled Xenophobia. This is a clear indication of the role of social media in promoting war. The terrorists attacks frequently witnessed in Kenya could also be as a result of the framing of the perpetrators and the counter terrorists in the news channels. The current study aimed to establish the role of Kenyan YouTube news channels in fighting terrorism in Kenya. Rewai (2014) in his study on the representation of HIV AIDS healthcare care policy in Zimbabwe examined the linguistic and discursive strategies used by the media regarding the implementation of the policy. The study revealed that linguistic strategies such as

nominalization, positive politeness, thematization, and action verbs play a major role in the setting of the agenda in newspapers. The study showed how the linguistic features could either highlight or downplay certain aspects regarding the implementation to influence perception. This in turn would inform the knowledge of the readers of the news articles on the government's role in the implementation of the policy. The current study borrowed some of the linguistic strategies used in this study to set the agenda that guides the YouTube channels hearers' understanding of who a terrorist is using the tools of van Dijk's cognitive model of CDA as opposed to van Dijk's Ideological Square adopted in the study.

Owala (2013) studied language use in the reportage of terrorism news in a Kenyan newspaper called *Taifa Leo*. Employing the tools of CDA, the study revealed a lot of bias in the reportage of Terrorism news. The bias originated either from discourse access or the discourse structures. The researcher concluded that the news affected the readers since they were not able to get all the information they needed to know about terrorism in Kenya. The knowledge the readers had was therefore distorted. This is because the information provided forms the basis through which readers make meaning of the situation so as to build and update their model of the situation. If the reporting is biased as seen in this study, then the model of situation will also be biased. The present study sought to find out how this was handled in the Kenyan Mainstream YouTube channels.

Mutua (2013) examined the media's role in influencing the fight against terrorism in Kenya. Using CDA, the study analysed the reportage of terrorism news in Kenya. According to the findings of this study, the mass media and terrorism is that the media have come to constitute such a major portion of modern culture that most of today's terrorists and counter terrorists have factored into their tactics. The media can serve both the terrorists and the counter terrorists. He recommends that in order to minimize the reliance of terrorists on traditional media, it is important for the media to report objectively minding language use when covering news and stories on terrorism. The data analysed was from the reportage of the 1998 bomb-blast in Kenya. There are several attacks that have happened since then. The findings of the current study would tell whether like the traditional media, the social media is serving the terrorists' agenda.

Theoretical framework

The Socio-cognitive Model of Critical Analysis Theory (CDA)

The present study adopted the Socio-cognitive Model of CDA as proposed by van Dijk (2001). Whereas all approaches to CDA study the relations between discourse and society, a Socio-cognitive approach claims that such relations are cognitively mediated (van Dijk, 2001). According to Sanders (2005), cognition can be taken to mean unconscious mental processes involved in discourse processing. This is to say social structures and discourse structures being different can only be related through the mental representations of language users as individuals and social members.

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The mental representations of events, situations, acts spoken or thought about, observed or participated in by human actors are termed as models (Johnson-Laird, 1983; van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983). A model is an individual's or social members' construct of a situation or event they have read or heard of. Journalistic activities and interactions as well as the actual writing of news texts are inherently social (van Dijk, 1988). It therefore follows that for the news texts to make sense, it must be explained bearing in mind the social cognitions within social contexts. This is to also say there has to be a shared knowledge (model) of the news reports between the news makers and their audience. Since journalists write news as social members it follows that this can affect their knowledge, beliefs, attitudes or ideologies (van Dijk, 1989). Hence as they write the news they have to ensure that they remain faithful to the mental representations of particular situations and events of their audience. The production and processing of news texts is therefore subjective.

In the case of news in social media, such shared knowledge of a situation or event between the news makers and the consumers can be expressed through the use of presuppositions. Presuppositions give a common knowledge ground. They serve to present information or knowledge of an entity as self-evident unproblematic and unquestionable. Presuppositions in text could easily go unquestioned or unchallenged as most of the presupposed knowledge remains implicit. According to van Dijk (2008), one of the most important properties of discourse is what is not said but remains implicit as in the case of presuppositions (Richardson, 2007). Van Dijk (1995,1988) has it that media's power is persuasive because it has the potential to control the minds of the readers or viewers by developing truth beliefs that become part of their cultural knowledge. To achieve this, CDA focuses on those propositions that suggest that certain information is (accepted to be) true but in fact is not true at all or at least controversial van Dijk (2001). Our task therefore involved reconstructing the underlying models and especially opinions from subtle discursive properties (van Dijk, 1989).

It is expected that most Kenyans watch YouTube videos on daily happenings. This is true of the many terrorists' attacks that have been witnessed in Kenya. Social media consumers are able to understand the attacks based on the information relayed and how it is relayed in the social media platforms. Every time they watch an attack the information forms and also adds to what they already know. The knowledge acquired forms the basis through which they can make meaning of possible future attacks. The Social media can serve as a tool terrorists use through the use of sensational language in reporting the attacks. However, the content creators can choose to report critically by avoiding the use of sensational language. It is therefore important to find out the knowledge Kenyan social media users have on terrorism as this knowledge also codes for the readers' opinions, attitudes and emotions towards terrorism which in turn has an influence on the fight against terrorism in Kenya. Garissa University terrorist attack is the focus of this study based on the fact that it was the deadliest attack that followed several other attacks. The social media users' prior knowledge of terrorism from there that was applied in understanding the attack under study and their new knowledge on terrorism added in the selected YouTube videos formed the central focus of this study.

Data Analysis, Presentation and Discussion

Data for this study was drawn from YouTube news video headlines on the Garissa University terrorist attack. The news videos reporting from the 2nd of April 2015 (day of the attack) to the 30th of April 2015 were selected for the study. The selection was guided by such words as Garissa, terrorist, Kenya attack, Campus attack, and Alshabaab. YouTube news headlines with more than 100,000 views were purposively sampled. Eleven headlines were then analysed using van Dijk's Socio-cognitive model of Critical Discourse Analysis Theory. This analysis focused on the taken-for-granted information in the reportage concerning the perpetrators of the attack and the Kenyan Security Force. This is done critically with an aim of uncovering biases in the reportage.

The analysis and interpretation of the news headlines sought to bring out the common ground knowledge, taken for granted knowledge that the newsmakers and the news consumers had or formed concerning the terrorists and the Kenyan Security Force. This knowledge facilitated their understanding of the headlines without the need for more information. It is expected that the media audience's interpretation of possible future attacks will be based on the presupposed information in the news reports.

The followings are the findings and discussions on the study:

The headlines are identified with the TV channel associated with and are numbered systematically. The date, month, and year of the video production is also provided. For example, **K24 4.4.15** means that the YouTube Video News belongs to a TV station called K24 and the news was aired on the 4th of April in the year 2015. The analysis of data in this study found the following to have been presupposed in the headlines of the news videos.

1. Nation 6.4.15 Terror on Campus: Garissa attack response blunders as part of elite squad traveled by road

Presuppositions are all pieces of knowledge that language users must assume in order for what they say to make a literal meaning (Bekalu, 2016). The use of the verb *blunders* in the headline implies the response mission was not successful. This is attributed to the fact that the special unit of the Kenya Defence Force (RECCE) traveled by road. The unsuccessful mission is therefore framed as the cause of the many deaths witnessed.

2. EURO News 5.4.15 Too much time taken to deploy elite RECCE squad in Garissa

What is intended to be believed without questioning in headline 2 is that the RECCE squad was deployed late. What the headline presupposes is that had they been on the attack scene early, more lives could have been saved. The institution responsible for the deployment of the elite group is the government. It, therefore, goes without saying that the government of Kenya failed its people.

3. KTN News 4.4.15 The government transport RECCE squad by road to Garissa University

The referential meaning of headline 3 is that apart from road, there are other means of transport that the RECCE squad could have used to Garissa University. They arrived late meaning that it was possible to use a faster means like taking a flight. The take home message here is that the coordination of the transport means was poor hence the cause for the many deaths.

4. K24 TV News 18 RECCE squad members took 12 minutes to overpower terrorists

Quantifying nouns trigger presuppositions (Richardson 2017). The headline quantified the RECCE squad as well as the amount of time they took to overpower the terrorists. By so doing, the RECCE squad are construed as very sophisticated, winning the battle in 12 minutes. Other headlines prior to this one had however indicated that they arrived late at the attack scene. The glorification of their prowess at handling terrorists will not go down well with the news consumers having negative prior knowledge of them.

5. KTN NEWS 21.4.15 Top security bosses in Garissa University sent home over the Garissa University terror attack

The action expressed in headline 5 through the verb *sent* communicates common knowledge that the security bosses did a shoddy job in the attack. What is constructed in the minds of the news viewers is a picture of a disorganized K Kenyan security Force. This is a plus on the terrorists who on the contrary are seen as organized. Such knowledge according to van Dijk (2000) forms a referential basis for the Kenyan public interpretation of possible future terrorist attacks.

6. KTN News 30.4.15 Joseph Nkaisery reveals major security lapses during Garissa college attack

The headline in excerpt 6 discloses that there were security lapses in the response to the attack through the use of the verb *reveals*. The Headline quotes Joseph Nkaisery, the then minister for internal security as the source of the information. This downplays the role played by the government in the attack. This in turn negatively informs the public attitudes towards their government.

7. CNN News 3.4.15 Four gunmen took over the university in Kenya attack

The headline in excerpt 7 glorifies the attackers; they are constructed as being highly organized and sophisticated. The implicative verb *took over* construed the terrorists as powerful despite them being few in number. Quantifying the noun *gunmen* satirizes The Kenyan soldiers. The headline served to downplay the role of the government in the attack.

8. Aljazeera News 6.6.2015 Garissa attack: Could it have been prevented?

Headline in excerpt 8 presupposes that the attack may not have happened after all. Giving their audience a lee way to think of a possibility that the attack could have been averted creates in them a doubt on the government's efforts to protect its citizens. The headline questions the

efficiency of security intelligence in Kenya. This again is a message that brings out the terrorists as an organized group that is able to operate without the Kenyan government's awareness.

9. Nation News 10.4.15 State admits mistakes in response to Garissa Massacre

The verb *admits* in the headline brings to full light the reason behind the deadly attack. It is common knowledge that the state made mistakes in its response to the Garissa University attack. The government, therefore, takes responsibility for the many lives lost. The Kenyan government's effort was inadequate.

10. Citizen News 5.4.15 Lawyer, Manderu chief's son among Garissa Alshabaab terrorists

The referential expression *Manderu's chief son among Garissa Alshabbab terrorists* points to the common knowledge that terror in Kenya is homegrown. It is also associated with the cream in the society that is a lawyer and son of a government official. This is another instance of glorification of terrorism which can encourage radicalization.

11. KTN News 30.4.15 Kenya ignored intelligence

Presuppositions give a common knowledge ground. They serve to present information or knowledge of an entity as self-evident unproblematic and unquestionable. Presuppositions in a text could easily go unquestioned or unchallenged as most of the presupposed knowledge remains implicit. According to van Dijk (2008), one of the most important properties of discourse is what is not said but remains implicit as in the case of presuppositions.

Headline 10 presupposes that there was intelligence that was ignored in Kenya. This is a high level of government security negligence. Again, the media served to downplay the role of the government in securing its citizens. How can a caring government ignore intelligence on such a deadly matter? The Kenyan government is portrayed to have failed its citizens in its response to the attack.

12. CGTN Africa 2.4.15 Kenyan security fighters kill two terrorists in Garissa attack

The verb *kill* in refers to Kenyan security fighters. What is presupposed is that they killed the terrorists. Quantifying the terrorists killed questions their ability to handle terror situations. They were able to kill two terrorists while the terrorists killed 147. The terrorists are therefore said without saying that they were more sophisticated than the Kenyan soldiers.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the YouTube news headlines on the Garissa University attack highlighted the sophistication of the attackers while downplaying the role of the government in its response to the attack. YouTube as a social site forbids any content that would be regarded as an incitement to violence. This study points to the language strategies used by reporters during times of crisis. The presupposed meaning of every utterance cannot be taken for granted. YouTube responds to calls from governments to remove the videos of radical groups. The Findings of

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this study reveals that even the mainstream news channels propagate the terrorist agenda. It is advisable then that the creators of news contents on terrorism pay attention to the language strategies they employ bearing in mind that the subtle meaning of utterances informs their consumers attitudes and opinions about the government's and its agencies efforts in countering terrorists attacks. Downplaying the role of the government makes the situation worse. This is because the terrorists aim at using the media to pass such information.

The researcher recommend this study to journalists with the aim of helping them understand that the language they use in their reporting influences their readers' understanding and emotions toward what they are reporting. Based on the fact that terrorism is a psychological war makes their word choice a key feature in their reporting. It is therefore important for them to use words, phrases, and sentences that do not terrorize the readers who then would become secondary victims of the terrorists' attacks.

The researcher also recommend this study to print media consumers. This study will help them know that news is subjective. They should therefore be critical in reading to decipher the writer's intentions and be able to make their own meaning instead of consuming news as gospel truth.

This chapter connects the fight against terrorism to social media use. It implies that YouTube news can serve both the terrorists and the counter-terrorists. Language use is key and attention should be given to the meaning that every headline implies. Journalists' model of attacks can promote the agenda of the terrorists as seen in the findings of the study. The social media news can however be an avenue to downplay the terrorists by highlighting the role of the counter-terrorists.

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