
MANHATTAN ATTACK: ARE NEWS MEDIA BIASED?

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Abstract

The study on different attitudes of news media in news report is worth attention because the perception and conception of society toward social event reported in news media depend on the way the news outlets present it. As reliable information providers, news media are obliged to report any events objectively. However, there has been a claim saying they do not fully execute the responsibility as they seem to report some events differently one another particularly in the event related to religion which is often linked to “the act of terrorism”. Four news reports from two American news media (NBC and New York Daily News) and two others from non-American news media (BBC and Al Jazeera) were analyzed using critical discourse analysis to seek whether they truly do such claim. The theory of Association Category by Van Leeuwen (2008) was also used to analyze the data. Based on the result, it was found that the two kinds of media reported the event, *Manhattan Attack*, the deadliest terrorist attack in New York City since the September 11 attacks of 2001, taking place on October 31, 2017 in a different way especially in representing the perpetrator. Thus, they were biased and not neutral in the coverage of the event.

Keywords: *News Media, ISIS Terrorism, bias, Manhattan Attack*

1. INTRODUCTION

The world today has been sparked by the increasing number of terrorist attacks. It has consequently become a huge concern for many countries across the world. The attacks took place in numerous countries including the Western countries like The United States, France and The United Kingdom. The deadliest attack recorded in history until now is the 9/11 attack which left almost 3.000 people died. There are many more other attacks before and since then that take away hundred lives of innocent people. The renowned group ISIS (Islamic state of Iraq and Syria) claimed to be responsible for some of the terror acts. A number of deadly attacks were reported to be done by perpetrators who pledged allegiance to ISIS. ISIS has carried out at least 140 terrorist attacks in 29 countries excluding Iraq and Syria which have taken lives of 2,043 people and injured thousands [1]. For example, on November 13, 2015 a series of attacks taking place in some public sites in Paris killed at least 130 people and wounded more than 350 others. The attackers were believed to be inspired by ISIS [2]. Four months afterwards, four people were killed and 36 were hurt by a suicide bomber at a busy tourist area in Istanbul Turkey. In the United States alone, according to research from the New America Foundation, there have been 7 attacks since ISIS declared a caliphate and captured the globe's attention in 2014. One of the attacks is *Manhattan Attack*. On October 31, 2017, a man plowed a rented picked truck into cyclists and runners for about one mile in Lower Manhattan, New York City, leaving 8 people died and 11 injured. It was the fifteenth vehicular attack in North America and Europe and was then known as *Manhattan Attack*. It was also the deadliest terrorist attack in New York City since the September 11 attacks of 2001. The perpetrator was identified as Sayfullo Habibullaevich Saipov, a Muslim immigrant coming from Uzbekistan and became a US permanent resident since 2010. The incident exceedingly grabbed public attention as the perpetrator was reported to indicate allegiance to ISIS.

The news reported by various media then came up with their own ways of reporting after the event. The news media are highly demanded to stay objective to report the event in their news articles. However, they seem not to fully carry out the responsibility as they have been regarded to put their own perspective in reporting events, and hence are biased [3]. Similarly, a study about two news media in reporting crime news found that the media set a particular viewpoint in the news coverage and thus were not neutral [4]. Over the last decade, discourse analysts have studied the representation of Muslim and Islam in media and it was found that Muslims are negatively represented in mainstream news reports [4]. This paper highlights the different viewpoints of four news media, two of which are American news media (NBC and New York Daily News) and the others are Non-American news media (BBC and

Aljazeera) especially with regard to the perpetrator. A critical approach to language structures ranging from words to sentences were employed to find out the perspectives of the media in relation to the issue of terrorism.

2. METHOD

The data were taken from four online news articles of two American news media; The National Broadcasting Company (NBC) and New York Daily News and two other from non-American News Media; The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and Al-Jazeera [5] [6] [7] [8]. The two types of media were chosen in order to compare whether the American news media cover the events differently from the non-American news media as there has been a claim that the former media commit bias in the coverage of their daily social, political and economic news to the American people [9]. Two media of each type (instead of one) were used to strengthen the results of the analysis.

Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth CDA) approach was employed to divulge the media bias in news reports about *Manhattan Attack*. The news reports were analyzed to compare the different viewpoints of the media toward the perpetrator's personal background as a Muslim and his allegiance to ISIS. In addition to specifically revealing the attacker's representation with regard to terrorism, the category of Association, which is part of Van Leeuwen's (2008) theory of Social Actor Representation, was applied. The news articles were broken down into clauses and only the relevant of which were coded and presented here to be discussed.

3. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Contrasting Highlights on the News Headlines

The headlines of the news reports as shown in table 1 were analyzed to discover the highlights of each media in their news coverage since a headline plays a substantial role in news communication. A headline serves to summarize the main idea of an article, it allows readers to scan a large amount of news items to get an abbreviated news update or to choose which article to read and it serves to grab attention as well as maximize interests [10]. A headline will therefore not only be the first (and sometimes only) element of an article that is encoded, but it will also have an effect on what information a reader focuses on or ignores when reading an article [11]. In a simple way, headline is the most essential part of an article that can shape the readers' perception toward the information given as a whole.

Table 1. Headlines of the Analyzed News Reports

Code	News Media	Headlines
A1	New York Daily News	ISIS-pledging terrorist kills 8 in lower Manhattan truck attack
A2	NBC	New York Terrorist Attack: Truck Driver Kills Eight in Lower Manhattan
NA1	BBC	New York attack: Eight killed by man driving truck
NA2	Aljazeera	Eight dead as truck rams into New York crowd

From the headlines of the four news reports, it is visible that the American news Media (Coded A) and Non-American news media (Coded NA) highlighted contrasting point of view. The news report A1 and A2 stress the incident committed by a terrorist. It can be perceived through the inclusion of the word 'terrorist' as the representation of the attacker in their headlines. The news reports NA1 and NA2 conversely did not place the inclusion of the word "terrorist" in their headlines. Instead, they put the phrase "man driving truck" and "truck rams into New York crowd" by which there was no indication at all signaling the committer was a terrorist.

What is interesting to see from the analysis above is that in terms of Headline, while both media originating from America suggested that the incident was conducted by a terrorist, both media from outside of America did not signal any indication that the act was committed by a terrorist. It can be seen from the presence of the word "terrorist" in the headlines. To conclude, American news media attempted

to highlight the committer as a terrorist in their headline news while the non-American news did not seem to perform it.

3.2. Association between the Perpetrator and ISIS

The news articles shown in table 2 and 3 provide a unique finding that correlates with the finding from the first and this analysis. Association can be simply defined when a social actor is associated with other social actors in a text either generically or specifically [12]. For instance, “they played “higher and higher” with the other children”, the actor ‘they’ is associated with ‘the children’. After analyzing the news articles, it was found that A1 and A2 wrote more clauses of Association to ISIS than NA1 and NA2 did. Table 2 illustrates the Association clauses in the non-American news articles while table 3 shows the Association clauses in the American news articles.

Table 2. Association Clauses in the Non-American News Articles

Code	Aljazeera (NA1)	Code	BBC (NA2)
B1	A spokesperson for the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) described the incident “an apparent act of terrorism”.	C1	A note was found in the truck that referred to so-called Islamic State , a law enforcement source told CBS News.

Table 3. Association Clauses in the American News Articles

Code	New York Daily News (A1)	Code	NBC (A2)
D1	what authorities described as the deadliest New York City terrorist attack since 9/11	F1	The man hopped out of the truck and shouted "Allahu Akbar ," or "God is great,"
D2	“God is Great!” The Uzbekistan native shouted in Arabic	F2	Manhattan Officials said it was a terrorist attack — the deadliest in New York City since Sept. 11, 2001.
D3	ISIS-pledging terrorist kills 8 in lower Manhattan truck attack	F3	New York Terrorist Attack: Truck Driver Kills Eight in Lower
D4	A note written by Saipov in Arabic and discovered outside the rental vehicle declared he was loyal to the ISIS cause , sources told the Daily News.	F4	Law enforcement sources said the man left a note in the truck claiming that he committed the attack for the Islamic State terrorist group
D5	The deadly incident was reminiscent of similar terrorist car attacks in London, Barcelona and Berlin, all committed in the last two years.		

It is obvious from the two tables above that the NA and A exhibited a great difference in the number of Association clauses. The NA only presented 2 Association clauses while the A wrote 9 Association clauses in total number. In table 2, both non-American news media wrote the similar amount of Association clause while in table 3, the American news media shared a slightly different number of Association clauses. A1 is found to write the highest number of the Association clauses among others.

B1 signifies the association between the perpetrator and ISIS through the phrase “an apparent act of terrorism” as it is popularly known, the term ‘terrorism’ is being referred to ISIS and the act, of course, is referred to be done by the attacker. C1 suggests the association through the clause ‘that referred to so-called Islamic State’ which is more direct than the former.

D1 indicates the association through the phrase ‘ISIS-pledging terrorist’. The association between the perpetrator and ISIS is similarly supported by D3 (through the clause ‘he was loyal to the

ISIS cause'), datum D4 (through the phrase 'the deadliest New York City terrorist attack') and D5 (through the phrase 'similar terrorist car attacks'). D2 is also Association because the term 'God is Great' Arabic for 'Allahu Akbar' is frequently used by terrorists when they are carrying out the terror actions. Therefore, the inclusion of such term in the report strengthened the other Association clauses to ISIS. The data from A2 shared close similarities with the data from A1. However, datum F4 and D3, the emphasis on the clause seems to be different. D3 through the clause 'he was loyal to the ISIS cause' appears to only describe the relation between the perpetrator with ISIS while F4 through the clause 'he committed the attack for the Islamic State terrorist group', emphasizes that ISIS is the leading cause of the perpetrator's action.

What appears to be remarkable from the analysis above is that in terms of Association, while all media indicated there might be association between the perpetrator and ISIS, the perpetrator was more actively associated with ISIS in the two American news media than in the two non-American news media. It is noticeable from the presence of 9 Association clauses to ISIS in the American news media as opposed to 2 Association clauses in the non-American news media. In addition, the American news media associated the perpetrator more directly to ISIS than the non-American news media did through the choice of words in their news articles. To conclude, the American news media endeavor to associate the perpetrator, in particular, and the event, in general, to ISIS more actively than the non-American news media did.

3.3. Trump's statements over the attack

To support the previous finding regarding the ISIS association with the attacker, there is another discourse that can be utilized. It is the statements from the U.S. President, Donald Trump, toward the attack that can propagate the view. Interestingly, the news media presented different statements from the president. Based on the statements, the American news media still associate the perpetrator to ISIS through the inclusion of the word 'terrorist' as can be seen from the table below.

Table 4. Trump's statements in American news media

Code	News Media	Statements
G	New York Daily News	"My thoughts, condolences and prayers to the victims and families of the New York City terrorist attack," he tweeted.
H	NBC	"Our thoughts and prayers are with the victims of today's terrorist attack in New York City and their families," Trump said in a statement.

The two statements above clearly show that the attack is done by a terrorist. Hence, it means that the two media still attempt to associate the perpetrator with ISIS. On the other hand, the ISIS association did not appear in the non-American news media as illustrated in the following table.

Table 4. ISIS Association from Trump's statements in non-American news media

Code	News Media	Statements
I	BBC	In separate tweets, he said: "In NYC, looks like another attack by a very sick and deranged person. Law enforcement is following this closely. NOT IN THE U.S.A.!"
J	Al-Jazeera	-

4. CONCLUSION

To conclude, the two kinds of media hold different stance in presenting their news report in the case of Manhattan Attack. The American news media inclined to associate the event, particularly the perpetrator, to ISIS Terrorism. It can be seen from the news headlines and the ISIS association with the perpetrator throughout the news articles. On the other hand, the non-American news media appeared to report the event more naturally. They did not seem to attempt to link both the event and the perpetrator to ISIS Terrorism. Therefore, the news discourses from the non-American news media were found to

negate the ones from the American news media regarding the alleged connection between the event and ISIS terrorism. Further studies related to the issue with larger data are highly recommended to be done to know the reasons why the news media did it in the first place. Lastly, it is hoped that news media should be objective as much as possible in reporting a particular social event so that the unexpected misunderstanding among society will not occur and news readers also should be more critical in perceiving the news.

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