

EFFECTS OF TERRORISM NEWS ON READERS OF NEWSPAPERS: A CASE STUDY OF *TAIFALEO* NEWSPAPER OF KENYA

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ABSTRACT

The media plays an important role in giving the masses information about terrorism. Many developing countries have not in the past had many acts of terrorism that originated directly from those countries and for a long time have had the media in those countries reporting news on terrorist acts in other countries. However in the recent past there has been an increase of terrorist activities in some countries in the developing world. Some of these countries are Nigeria and Kenya. In Kenya the war with Somalia's militia group Al Shabaab has increased the frequency of terrorist activities. The media in Kenya therefore has been on the spotlight recently concerning its role in providing news related to these incidents. This paper looks at the manner in which TaifaLeo a Kiswahili language daily newspaper presents news on terrorism from both inside and outside Kenya. The main objective was to seek the opinion of readers about the news on terrorism in the daily and find out how the presentation of those news items affected the readers. The study was carried out in four towns in Kenya where circulation of the paper is highest- Nairobi, Mombasa, Nakuru and Mumias. The study revealed that the news had mostly social and psychological effects on the readers that led to readers developing attitudes mostly negative towards their neighbours.

Keywords: Terrorism news, Readers, Effect, Newspapers

INTRODUCTION

International and national terrorism is one of the issues that are often highlighted by newspapers in Kenya and other parts of the world. In Kenya the, worst incident of terrorism was the August 7th 1998 bombing of the American embassy in Nairobi. Later there was another which had a tourist hotel at Kikambala at the coast bombed in the year 2002. Both incidents were reported in all Kenyan dailies including *Taifaleo*. In the recent past there have been several incidents of terrorism in Kenya which are reported by the newspapers. Most of them have been grenade and improvised explosive devises (IEDs) attacks. This means that the media has to re -asses its role in reporting of news about terrorism in Kenya. A bias in the reports can lead to serious effects on the recipients of the news in television, radio and readers of newspapers. Some of the effects this can have on the readers is creating suspicion, enmity and generally polarizing communities by creating *in-group out-group* relationships. In the reports the language used is chosen by either the news reporters or the people they quoted. The choice of language has an effect on the readers of the newspaper. As a result of language use, attitudes towards certain communities, enmity, suspicion and other problems often arise. This is because language used often creates bias that is responsible for developing such attitudes.

There is a relationship between this bias and ideologies of leaders of nations where newspapers are published. This is because in theory, many countries have laws that protect

freedom of the press. However the ideologies of leaders and security agencies of many nations tend to undermine this freedom. As a result there is pressure that often influences choice of language that satisfies the desires of the government agencies and the political class. This pressure often manifests itself in the texts that appear in news articles.

Williams (2002) affirms that the most important thing to note when reading a newspaper is that news is often lopsided and that many times the views expressed in the news reflect the political ideologies subscribed to by the owners of the media house.

Taifaleo newspaper is a Kiswahili daily paper published in Nairobi Kenya by Nation Media Group. The paper publishes in moderate Kiswahili language which is both the national and official language of Kenya. The paper is a moderate and does not have a history of open inclination towards known political wings both in this country and elsewhere. Despite this non inclination there is still bias in the way the paper reports news about terrorism. According to (Fiske 1994), our words are never neutral. This means that the bias that appears in the texts of newspapers may sometimes not be intended but it is still bias.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A number of scholars have researched on the effect of terrorism news on various groups in the society. It is generally agreed that there is some effect both positive and negative.

Hamblen (2001) on a national survey of U.S adults 3-5 days after the September 11th, 2001 attacks, reported that people watching an average of 8 hours of television related attacks. Those who watched the most coverage had more substantial stress reactions than those who watch less television coverage. In another research carried out in Israel on a sample of adults, it was reported that those who had an intimate friend or relative killed in the Mount St. Hellens tragedy reported that the media was a hindrance to their recovery. Although the media plays a critical mitigative role in the aftermath of a disaster, too much trauma related television viewing may have a negative impact.

Although these surveys were done on television viewers, they have a relevance to this study. In the west most people have access to television unlike in Kenya where people spend less time viewing television. Some people do not have access to television at all. However a number read newspapers. This is not because many people can afford them but rather because a number of people have a glimpse of the papers on the streets as they go about their daily activities.

Grossman the president of of NBC news once said, “The job of the press is not to worry about the consequences of its coverage but to tell the truth. As much as those of us in the press would like to be popular, and loved, it is more important that we are accurate and fair... and let the chips fall where they may” According to this quote, the NBC president seems to suggest that it is not the responsibility of the media to decide what the recipients get from them and how it affects them. This assertion is not shared by many people because if the reports lead to people getting hurt, then the media house has an obligation to get concerned.

Das, Bushman, Bezemer, Kerhorf and Vermeulen (2008) say that terrorism news reports may increase the accessibility of thoughts of one’s own morality, which, in turn may become an important evaluation standard for judging out-group members, public policies, and politicians. The studies they carried out showed that terrorism news is most likely to increase prejudiced attitudes when the news is psychologically or physically close. They found out that terrorism news increased prejudice against Arabs from non Muslims and increased prejudice against Europeans from Muslims.

Almagor (2005) Describes reports by a Tel Aviv newspaper where coloured photos of injured people coloured in blood were shown. He complains too about headlines like “horror at the heart of Tel Aviv” and how television dedicated long hours to bring to citizens homes pictures from killing scenes. According to him, the issue is whether these photos are considerate to the victims of families.

Nacos (2002) says immediately after September 11th 2001 tragedy, the broadcast media played and replayed the recorded exchanges between victims in the World Trade Centre and emergency police dispatches. They exploited the suffering of the people trapped inside the struck towers playing again and again the emotional mayhem of people who were trying to cope amidst overwhelming horror, disbelief fear and terror. Those sensational broadcasts showed very little sensitivity to the victims in pursuit of better ratings.

Walsh (2010) confirms that a number of studies found that exposure to media coverage of terrorism increases fear and anxiety. In a survey of Israelis conducted shortly after a series of deadly terrorist attacks, it was found that exposure to coverage of attacks was associated with the development of symptoms of traumatic disorder.

Stone (2000) found that subjects exposed to media coverage of terrorist attacks experienced greater increases in anxiety than did a control group exposed to media coverage unrelated to terrorism.

METHODOLOGY

Survey was used to collect data from newspaper readers from four towns in Kenya. The readers were asked through a questionnaire to give their opinion on news about terrorism. The opinion sought included how they were affected by the news on terrorism which they read in *Taifa Leo* newspaper. The towns where the study was done are found in four regions in Kenya i.e. the coastal region, central, Rift valley and the Western region.

To select the sample, a confidence level of 95% was used together with a confidence interval of 4.5 against the approximated 15,000 readers of the paper to get a sample of 460 readers. Questionnaires were administered to the readers in four different towns in the selected regions of the country where circulation of the paper is highest. The towns were Nakuru, Nairobi, Mombasa and Mumias. This choice was based on the number of readers in the towns and also the position of the towns in Kenya. They are representative of the regions mentioned above.

Procedure for Administering Questionnaires

In each of the towns three newspaper vendors were chosen from different parts of the towns. They were given twelve questionnaires each day for the first three days and 7 questionnaires on the fourth day. They were asked to request their customers/readers to complete the questionnaire. The decision to use the vendors to administer the questionnaires was arrived at to reduce suspicion due to the emotive nature of issues of terrorism. The completed questionnaires were later collected and analysed.

DATA PRESENTATION ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Out of the 460 questionnaires issued, 419 were returned. This was 91.09% of the total number of questionnaires. The results of the questionnaires administered to the readers have been presented in percentages and tables for quantitative data.

The first question sought to establish how many days in a week the readers interacted with the newspaper. This was meant to establish if the reader's interaction with the newspaper was frequent enough to give a reliable opinion of what they read in the paper.

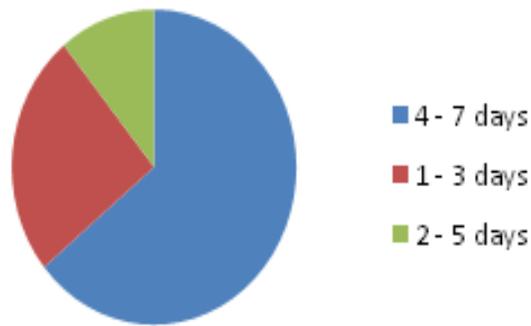


Figure 1. Frequency weekly readership

Many of them read the paper at least between 4 – 7 days in a week.

Out of all the readers who answered the questions, all had read news about terrorism in the news paper. Out of these 240 have only read national news on terrorism, 168 had read a mixture of both national and international news on terrorism.

Adequacy of Terrorism News

The readers were asked to say if in their opinion the news they have read about terrorism was adequate. Their responses are summarized in the table below

Table 1. Adequacy of terrorism news

<i>Responses</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Adequate	264	63.01%
Inadequate	144	34.37%
No response	11	2.62%
Total	419	100%

Most respondents (63%) thought the information they got about terrorism was adequate. However 34% of the population thought the information given was not adequate. The researchers sought to find out from them what extra information they would have liked the newspaper to give. There were varied responses that fall mainly into the following general categories.

- i. Cause and meaning of terrorism
- ii. Why terrorists are never easily arrested
- iii. Measures taken to eradicate terrorism
- iv. What usually happens after a terrorist attack?
- v. What is the solution to this problem
- vi. The history of terrorism
- vii. Sponsors of terrorism
- viii. How are people recruited in terrorist groups?

Apart from the above queries, many readers felt that the writers of terrorism news know a lot more than what they write. The meaning of terrorism is important because in this part of the world the word terrorist is used to refer to many activities wrongly so of course. It is not uncommon to hear people refer to armed robbers criminal gangs or even pirates as terrorists. The newspaper stories then have concentrated on giving information about events but gave less educative information. The readers also felt that they should be given more information about the methods used by terrorists to carry out their activities. Another concern of the readers was the fact that they are not given information on the efforts of the security agencies to control the vice. This has adverse effect on the readers in the sense that they feel unsafe when they are not given information about the security agencies efforts to fight terrorism. The idea here is that if they are not told about these efforts then they are nonexistent.

Readers complained that usually when there is an occurrence of a terrorist attack, there is a lot of sensationalism. The paper does not however follow up to say what happened after the occurrence. The readers also want the paper to write what the terrorists want. They were curious to find out if the perpetrators would stop the terrorist activities if they got what they wanted. Some of the readers argued that the people who get caught are poor people who cannot finance their own activities. They thought the paper knew the financiers of the terrorist activities but chose to give scanty information. It is noteworthy that this paper has a policy that giving some kind of information about terrorism is glorifying the vice.

Bias in Terrorism News

This study also posed a question to the readers to find out if they thought this paper showed some bias in its reporting of terrorism news.

The following table represents their responses

Table 2. Bias in terrorism news

<i>Response</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
There is bias	126	30.07%
No bias	276	65.87%
No response	17	4.06%
Total	419	100%

Over 65.87% of the respondents said there is no bias in the way the paper reports news on terrorism. It was important to find out what the 30.07% who said the paper showed some bias meant. In response to who they thought this news was biased against, some of the responses included:

- i. Bias against Muslims
- ii. Bias against the poor
- iii. White men are favoured
- iv. The real terrorists are not exposed
- v. The so called terrorists are not allowed to give their opinion
- vi. Jews and Americans are favoured
- vii. The police are biased against some religions

The most common response was that terrorism texts were biased against Muslims. There are others who wanted to know whether terrorism and Islam is the same thing because most of the news they read seemed to mention Muslims and not people from any other religion. Some of the readers expressed concern that the people mentioned in the text were poor people while the sponsors of the terrorist activities in question were not mentioned. They also felt that there is need to give the point of view of the so called terrorists to enable them know what the terrorists want. Their contention was that if the views of the terrorists were not written, then it is difficult to know whether they were fighting for a worthy cause. Some said there seemed to be disproportionate views of America and Israel and that too much attention was given to the two countries. The effect of this generally is that a number of readers were of the opinion that there is bias in terrorism news reported in this newspaper.

Effect of Bias

Readers were asked to state in what ways they felt the bias affected people in their society. The following responses were obtained:

- i. It creates enmity and restlessness
- ii. Causes suspicion
- iii. It creates hatred against Muslims
- iv. It causes religious prejudice
- v. Non Muslims think Muslims are terrorists

From these responses, it is clear that readers felt the stories that appeared to associate Muslims with terrorism made people to be suspicious of one another. This is because many people easily associated Muslims with terrorism. Among many readers who were interviewed, religious prejudice was as a result of news that appeared suggestive of the relationship between specific religions with terrorism. They created an attitude that was easily ignited each time a terrorist activity was reported.

The readers of this paper also complained that the stories about terrorism were lacking in detail. Their contention was that the reporters dwelt more on the event rather than the perpetrators, history of the groups involved, their intentions, results of investigation and any other details that would enable them understand why these activities occur. According to them these details are deliberately omitted and that the publishers of the paper are part of this conspiracy.

One of the effects of news about terrorism is how it shapes person to person relationship within society. People often discuss various events that affect their community. In this study, we wanted to find out if after reading news about terrorism, readers had any arguments over the issues that come from those stories. We asked the readers if they have had such arguments.

The responses are summarized in the table below:

Table 3. Oral reaction to terrorism news

<i>Response</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
We have had arguments	167	39.86%
Never had arguments	247	58.95%
No response	05	1.19%
Total	419	100%

This table shows that there is a percentage 39% of readers who after reading the news on terrorism often engage in discussions. Some of these discussions end in heated arguments. We wanted to find out the issues in the news that led to such arguments. Some of the issues they mentioned were:

- i. Origin of terrorists
- ii. The news targeted some races Arabs and Somalis
- iii. My colleague was defending Fazul claiming he was fighting for the Islamic faith (Fazul an Al-Qaeda operative was killed in Somalia)
- iv. The killing of terrorists
- v. Blaming police for arresting the Kampala bombing suspects

The responses given indicated that even among readers, out-groups and in-groups had been formed. This led to each group defending their side irrespective of whether they were right or not. If Fazul was a terrorist why would someone defend him? But again how would the other group that felt his killing was justified be sure that his accusers were right yet he was not given the opportunity to defend himself in an objective forum like a court of law. The arguments that arise out of these terrorism stories can at times be irrational. There were arguments of origin of people who committed terrorist acts but most assertions depended on the attitude. The arguments also took a religious angle where in this case Christians thought Muslims are involved while Muslims for their part think their faith is deliberately targeted. After the Kampala bombing for example an argument arose between two readers on the legitimacy of the police arresting the suspects and taking them to Uganda.

Perhaps the most important effect of terrorism news this study found out is the lack of trust that people develop for the people they interact with. We put a question to the readers to find out if the news they have read about terrorism has made them feel there are people they do not trust. The table below is a summary of what their responses were.

Table 4. Attitude resulting from terrorism news

<i>Response</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
There are people I do not trust	287	68.50%
I trust everybody	127	30.31%
No response	05	1.19%
Total	419	100%

It is worth noting that 68.50% of the readers live with lack of trust for some of their neighbours. They were further requested to say which people they do not trust. The following responses were obtained.

- a. Muslims
- b. Somalis
- c. Many
- d. Ethiopians and other foreigners
- e. Al-Shaabab
- f. News reporters

- g. Arabs
- h. Politicians
- i. Mungiki
- j. Al Qaeda
- k. People from Mombasa
- l. Some members of Parliament
- m. Afghanistans, Comoros and Pakistans
- n. Kikuyu's – they are terrorists
- o. Al-Amin Kimathi
- p. Investigative agencies

These responses indicate that the news they have read have had some effect on their relationship with people or groups of people who they have mentioned specifically. From the responses it is also apparent that some of the readers do not understand what terrorism means. Mungiki that was mentioned by some of the readers is actually a criminal gang that engages in extortion.

Kikuyu is an entire ethnic group in Kenya and there is no known association between that ethnic group and terrorism. In Kiswahili language the word 'gaidi' which means terrorist is sometimes loosely used by some people who are non regular speakers of Kiswahili to refer to criminals. This partially led to some responses we got from the readers. The readers who said they are suspicious of Somalis living in Eastleigh may have said so because many news reports tended to associate Somalis with Al-Shabaab. This is an example of racial bias where a whole race is associated with crimes some of them know nothing about. It is interesting to note that those Al-Shabaab members who had been arrested in Nairobi were not of Somali origin. Members of parliament and news reporters were not trusted by the readers because they thought they withheld crucial information about terrorism from the public. People from Mombasa were not trusted because a number of terrorists have in the past been associated with the town. Generally these responses indicate that readers can show lack of trust in others due to race, religion and regions of origin. They can also show distrust to reporters and even government without any tangible evidence against them. This situation has arisen as a result of how news about terrorism has been reported and also those who have discourse access to the media to speak about terrorism.

CONCLUSION

Readers of *TaifaLeo* newspaper were affected in various ways as a result of the news they read about terrorism. The first effect was that news about terrorism left them with many unanswered questions. There simply wasn't enough information for them. Some of the things they needed to know included the meaning of terrorism, methods used by terrorists, steps taken to counter the vice, the history of terrorism, how cases of terrorism are concluded and the sponsors of terrorist activities. The proof that readers do not know even the meaning of terrorism is found in the responses of some of the readers who thought even rapists are terrorists. Some readers also felt the news they read about terrorism are lopsided and effectively biased against some people. Muslims specifically observed that terrorism news they read in this paper were biased against them because insinuations about involvement of Islam appeared each time terrorism is mentioned.

Readers were categorical that the manner in which the news on terrorism was reported created enmity and suspicion among people. Non Muslims expressed distrust for Muslims and thought that they could be connected to terrorists or terrorism. This led to prejudice

against Muslims, Somalis and Arabs. This prejudice was in the form of stigmatisation of people originating from those communities. In addition there are people who have had arguments over terrorism news they have read in this paper. It was clear that the main reason why these arguments arose was because there was not enough information about the terrorism incidents reported. It is our submission that enough educative information would mitigate the society against the effect of terrorism news.

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