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Effects of Media Reportage on Terrorist Activities in Mandera County, Kenya

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Abstract:

Presently terrorists are having a 'good-day' in the media because of the unnecessary publicity given to them. Most terrorists often play on the psychology of media practitioners by carefully planning attacks that would compel the press to cover and disseminate them globally. The media has on a number of occasions been seen to act as an accomplice to the successes of these acts of terror. This has been witnessed more so during the processes of reporting and covering these acts of terror whenever they take place. Their reportage intentionally or unintentionally gives so much publicity to the terrorist groups, a mileage they really crave to achieve. The objective of this study was to examine the effects of media reportage on terrorism in Mandera County. It was established that most of the media broadcasts relating to terrorism journalism were war or violence oriented and to a greater extent, media content opposed efforts aimed at fighting terrorism. The resultant effects included radicalization and youth recruitment into Al-Shabaab, poor infrastructural development, and increased hatred for Security Agencies. The study was motivated by the need to inform the drafting of new policies and guidelines and the re-drafting of existing policies regarding to the broadcast of terrorism activities.

Keywords: Terrorism, radicalization, sympathizers, media effects, Mandera County

1. Introduction

Mass media around the world is seen as the most significant and strategic agent of socialization. Biernatzk(2002) observed that grown- ups perspectives towards life matters are as a result of print media, television and radio broadcast news. The idea here is that if the media have a certain point of view about some matter, the public will naturally adopt the same perspective. For the media to have any effect on the public, they will seek to influence on how to think along issues and what to think about.

McQuail (1987) further argues that there is evidence which postulates that the population or citizens have a tendency to think about issues they listen or watch in the media. The challenges and dilemmas that come out as a result of this are usually clear to everyone. Audiences expect the press to inform them as accurately and consistently as possible without sensationalizing the news.

Past research studies indicate that the media is a vital component for the terrorists to perpetuate and spread fear onto large audiences than the small group of victims of a terrorist act. It is a special means of attracting and maintaining the audience's attention and consequently passing over the messages of the terrorists group. Therefore the most important goal of terrorists is not just to kill and maim the target but rather to disseminate the terse messages of terror, anxiety and uncertainty among the audience as well as the spread of the group's messages through the newsworthiness of the violent terrorists' actions. In this case, a scholar or researcher may conclude that the media play accomplices to the terrorists groups' acts of terror (Schmid 1989) or even their best companion or friend (Hoffman 2006) as it does provide the oxygen of publicity which the terrorists crave for according to remarks made by Margaret Thatcher the former Prime Minister of Britain (Wilkinson, 2000).

The media has on a number of occasions been seen to play an accomplice to the success of these acts of terror. This has been witnessed more so during the processes of reporting and covering these acts of terror whenever and wherever they take place. Their coverage intentionally or unintentionally gives so much publicity to the terrorist groups; a mileage they really crave to achieve. So in one way or the other, the media aids them achieve this.

The fact that popular perception on terrorist violence is shaped, to a large extent, by mass media's ideology and the underlying moral point of view is not necessarily negative. Presenting terrorism in a manner that clearly rejects violence, demystifies assassins and emphasizes victims' personal tragedies is an essential resource in any type of multi-faceted strategy that combats terror. The problem arises when media controlled by certain ideological, cultural or religious conniving begins to look for a fictitious balance between murderers and victims; when the 'causes' of certain terrorist groups are justified against others; or when a story is treated in such a way that it gives the viewer the impression that terrorist groups are political participants that deserve certain legitimacy in the competition for power.

2. Literature Review

One of the main objectives of a terrorist act is to maximize publicity in order to create a psychological effect on the public. Caruthers (2011) posits that the aim of terrorism is to shape an audience whom they can manipulate to give them bargaining power such that they are able to put a lot of pressure on governments hence forcing them to give in to the terrorists' demands because of fear. In the event that the media fall for the terrorists trap, the relationship between terrorism and the media develop hence aiding the terrorists achieve the effects they want to have on the audience which is usually a stark contrast to conventional warfare where the immediate physical targets of violence are less consequential than the message being transmitted as a result of the attack Caruthers (2011). This ensures that the effects caused by the terrorist attack are loud and clear as well as the messages have a long lasting effect on the population.

According to Barnhurst (1991), there exist two models which are dedicated to describing the relationship between the mass media and terrorism. The culpable-media model is the first among these models and it postulates that, the media complete a vicious cycle. While broadcasting the messages on terrorist attack as news, they play a part in the process of enhancing terrorism. They indirectly assist the terrorists achieve their objectives thus carry out more attacks so as to sustain their continued presence in the headlines. In short, the media is thought to be the cause of terrorism.

The second model discussed is called the vulnerable media model which projects the media as a victim of terrorism activities rather than a cause. In this model, Barnhurst postulates that, though the media could theoretically stop covering terrorism this may not be enough to stop or bring to its end terrorism. It is logical to think that terrorists must not rely only on one media to pass over their political messages. This is because of the emergence of new media and terrorists can exploit any – online media, social media and tabloids (Barnhurst, 1991).

Professor of Law Michelle Ghetti, did take note that the modern terrorist is a creation of the media. Ideally what the media does is to enlarge and broaden the terrorists' dimension beyond what it really is. Television brings everyone in the audience into the scene of terrorism rendering them helpless hence unable to chart their independent path out of the scene hence engendering the feelings of anxiousness and fearfulness which are tools of the terrorists' instruments of repression to coerce the public to conform to their narrative which they drive. The public anxiety augments the perceived influence of the terrorist in his own eyes as well as the eyes of the peer groups and the rest of the audience. This enhanced authority often replicates itself and the cycle repeats itself (Ghetti, 2008).

In 2007, the retired Chief of the Kenya defense Forces – General Karangi attended a round table meeting which sought to review the role of media in the efforts of reportage of terrorism. He recommended that the media should not magnify the threat as this will offer advantage to the terrorist groups to cause more fear and anxiety in the general population. The media instead should work towards propping the security agencies' efforts and strategies to counter terrorism. Once media does this, the fear and anxiety will be allayed, eventually the terrorist activities will be managed (Coastweek.com, 2018).

Terrorism, according to Hoffman (2003) can be said to be a violent act meant to attract or draw attention of the public and thereafter through the publicity it generates a message is passed as intended. As one of the United Army leaders once explained, violent actions are shocking and scary. The leader further reiterates that terrorists want to shock people everywhere because it is a means of communicating their messages to their audience. Mass media, as the principal conduit of information about such acts, thus play a vital part in the terrorists' calculus. By terrorists reigning terror and widely spreading their heinous acts of terror to a large audience terrorists gain the maximum potential which they always seek for to spread their intentions and actions to effect fundamental political change.

Giving great publicity to terrorist actions, kidnappings in the first place greatly increases the public pressure on government representatives to give in to terrorists' requests. The response American TV networks had on the crises related to kidnapping of American hostages who were taken to Beirut in 1985, is without a shadow of a doubt one of the best examples of terrorism capability to draw attention, and to exploit and manipulate media. Schmid & De Graaf (1982) in distinguishing these assertions observed differently make contrary remarks as to how the terrorists and common criminals perceive their subjects of terror. With regard to criminals reigning terror on their victims, they are actually their target and so they do not have any ulterior motives such as the one terrorists harbor when they conduct terrorist activities.

Terrorists' activities are not meant for their victims but rather the government. They commit these heinous acts so as to gain the attention of the government so that they pass their intended message. In other words; it could be true to conclude that the acts of violence committed by terrorists are a means which enable them transmit their political messages to the government. Their victims are not the primary target but rather the wider audience. Therefore, Schmid and De Graaf (1982) conclude that for the terrorists, the message matters so much to them and not the victim of the act of terror.

Schmid (1982) further argues that the news value criteria applied by media in coverage of news enables the perpetuation of terrorist actions beyond the actual victims since unlike in assassinations, the victims of terrorist attacks

only 'but serve as message generators, more or less unwittingly helped by the news values of the mass media, to reach various audiences and conflict parties that identify either with the victims 'plight or the terrorists' professed cause'

In addition, in a study of the coverage of two 'investigative' documentaries by two local television stations, KTN and NTV, Abraham Kisang noted that the two stations continued to replicate and project the Al-Shabaab messages to the audiences, and often quoted verbatim, or replayed terrorists' video messages, which were in the first instance subject of investigations, or in some cases (had) resulted in targeted attacks against Christians in Kenya (Kisang, 2014).

This 'conveyor-belt' journalism, where media publishes every piece of information notwithstanding its source, objective and impact, is a cause of (domestic) concern in the war against international terrorism Kenyan media may, therefore, have been used by Al Shabaab to promote the feeling that Somalis are being victimized for their ethnicity and religion. This has the unintended effect of increasing dissatisfaction among the Somali community and their families, the Muslim community and those who were affected by 'Operation Usalama Watch'. This may have been used by Al-Shabaab recruiters to recruit from among members of this community who felt victimized, especially the young.

'*Inside Story: Wolves at Westgate*', another documentary by a Kenyan journalist, that was aired on the KTN after the Westgate terror attack is another of those works of journalism that aid the Al-Shabaab cause. By suggesting that the terrorists may have escaped as the operation proceeded - without offering any evidence other than the suggestion, that coordination between the security forces was poor leading to the death of an army officer from police fire, and that the military looted from the mall, the documentary painted a grim picture of counter-terrorism operations, especially Westgate and questioned ability of the Kenyan state to protect her citizens and residents; it equally 'elevates' the *operational success* of Al-Shabaab beyond that of a state actor, Kenya, and her allies in the war against international terrorism.

An International Crisis Group policy report observes that *Radio Rehema* and *Radio Iqra* are two such radio stations that have been used to radicalize youths and in the process make them soft targets for Al-Shabaab recruiters. The report adds that *Radio Iqra* gave too much airtime to radical preachers from Tanzania- *the Tabligh*, who ended up inciting and indoctrinating the listeners through anti-state rhetoric. The clip played by media outlets encourages the notion that a religious war between Muslims and non-Muslims is already on, creating fear and despondency among Muslims and energizing impressionable Muslim youth into a non-existent jihad. Muslim radios that have used imported radical preachers in the past have served to help radicalization of youth as a January 2010 incident where radical youths protested violently in Nairobi over the deportation of a radical Jamaican Muslim preacher shows (Crisis Group, 2011).

The Sunday Nation, one of Kenya's and East Africa's largest circulating Sunday newspaper, carried a splash on what it described as Al-Shabaab's intended attack on Kenyan parliament on March 1, 2015. The published story went into details on how the terrorists intended to carry the attacks, their number and how previous attempts had been foiled. Scholars argue that this kind of reporting, especially when such attacks have been foiled, and repetition of previous attacks, or attempts inevitably works to amplify and actualize some of the objectives of the terrorists organizations and organizers. Thus, such reporting, oblivious of terrorists' values and norms only aims at enabling actualization of their agenda which is either physical or psychological attack (Richardson, 2006).

3. Methodology

This paper adopted a descriptive research design. Descriptive research is directed at making careful observations and detailed documentation of a phenomenon of interest. These observations must be based on the scientific method and therefore, are more reliable (Anol, 2012). The study was carried out in Mandera County. Mandera County is found in the former North Eastern Province of Kenya. Its capital and largest town is Mandera town. The county has a population of about 867,457 (2019 census) and an area of 25,797.7 km².

The study population included both residents and non-residents in Mandera County. The target population constituted Mandera County Officials, the NPS personnel, KDF personnel, media personnel (both local and international media representatives in Mandera County), NIS personnel as well as officials from NGOs, FBOs and CBOs. Simple random sampling was used to obtain respondents from within the general population of Mandera County. Purposive sampling was used to obtain key informants from the population of officials from Mandera County Government, the NPS personnel in Mandera County, KDF personnel, local and international media representatives in Mandera County, NIS personnel and officials from NGOs, FBOs as well as CBOs within Mandera County. A sample size of 384 was calculated using a formula proposed by Fisher (1996) which is:

$$n = \frac{z^2 pq}{d^2}$$

The study used mix method technique in data collection where both primary and secondary data were collected. The research instruments for primary data collection were questionnaires while secondary data was obtained by use of key informant interviews and FGDs. The interview schedule, FGDs and questionnaires were developed with special focus on achieving the research objective. Questionnaires with both closed and open ended questions were used in this study. The interviews conducted in this study were key informant interviews where the respondents were selected purposively. Information from key informants was obtained through inquiry and recorded by researchers. Structured interviews were performed by use of open interviews; the researcher taking notes while talking with respondents.

To ensure validity and reliability of the research instruments, the researcher conducted a pilot study in the following places: Elwak, Lafey, Fino and Omar Jillo prior to the actual data collection. All resulting discrepancies were corrected to ensure that the results remain the same as if the research was to be repeated under similar circumstances. The study also made use of the supervisors and MMUST Research Experts who ensured that the research instruments were

valid and reliable.

The researcher used mixed (qualitative and quantitative) approaches of data analysis to provide the researcher with an ideal method needed for descriptive explanation. Quantitative data underwent the process of data management. Thereafter, the data was coded and entered into a computer software program- Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) for analysis. Qualitative data was analyzed using summary sheet by compiling specific phrases and key words used by respondents in description of scenarios to represent themes. The researcher used short abbreviations as descriptive codes to label data, usually a comment from key informants, under an appropriate category such as numeric codes are organized around relevant ideas, concepts, questions, or themes. Similarities and differences were sorted out then merged into larger categories then further into sub-themes. The results were presented in form of tables, charts and graphs.

4. Study Findings

Mandera County has in one way or another been at the center of terrorist attacks in Kenya. This is so because virtually every successful terror assault in the country, particularly the most severe ones have had a link to Mandera as an access point through which terrorists have entered Kenya. It was realized that the people of Mandera County in the past, have been subjected to repeat radical preaching from these Islamists by use of radios that are the most preferred medium of informing the public. These radios used by radical Islamist group are operating from inside Somalia (Mandera County official magazine, 2018).

The study first began by ranking the portrayal of media broadcasts related to terrorism. The study established that most of the media broadcasts relating to terrorism journalism were war or violence oriented. This was noted among 68% (193) who cited that war or violence was most appearing in broadcasts, 12.3% (35) noted that war or violence was moderately appearing in broadcasts, 10.6% (30) noted that war or violence appeared sometimes in broadcasts while 9.1% (26) noted that war or violence was the least appearing in terrorism journalism.

With regard to media broadcasts being propaganda oriented, the study established that 5.3% (15) of media broadcasts which were propaganda oriented were most appearing, 60.6% (172) noted that propaganda oriented broadcasts were moderately appearing, 17.2% (49) noted that propaganda oriented broadcasts appeared sometimes while 16.9% (48) noted that propaganda oriented broadcasts were least appearing. Media broadcasts that were truth oriented were cited as most appearing by 8.1% (23), 31.7% (90) noted that media broadcasts were truth oriented, 35.6% (101) noted that media broadcasts that were truth oriented appeared sometimes while 24.6% (70) noted that media broadcasts that were truth oriented in terrorism journalism.

Victory oriented broadcasts were cited as most appearing by 49.6% (141) with 22.2% (63) noting that victory oriented broadcasts were moderately appearing, 17.3% (49) noting that victory oriented broadcasts appeared sometimes while 10.9% (31) noted that victory oriented broadcasts were the least appearing in terrorism journalism. It was thus noted that war and violence dominated the broadcasts made by the media in relation to terrorists' activities. Journalists who were part of the focus group discussion noted that terrorism journalism was concerned with presenting news and information as it is and not to mis-inform the audiences.

The study also established that terrorism journalism appeared most in local radio stations. This was noted in 162 respondents (57%). A total of 84 respondents (29.6%) noted that terrorism journalism appeared most in local television stations, 20 respondents (7%) noted that terrorism journalism appeared most in local newspapers while a total of 18 respondents (6.4%) noted that terrorism journalism appeared most in local online tabloids.

The study established that media content opposed efforts aimed at fighting terrorism. From the data collected, it was observed that 57.4% (163) of the respondents were of the opinion that media content opposes efforts aimed at fighting terrorism. On the other hand only 13% (37) were in agreement that media content supports all efforts aimed at fighting terrorism with 29.2% (83) noting that media content was neutral on the efforts aimed at fighting terrorism. Key informants in the study however noted that media content was prominent on informing audiences of terrorism acts rather than supporting efforts aimed at fighting terrorism.

The study established that most of the respondents were of the opinion that the media was propelling the terrorists' agenda through their content and delivery. It was observed that 59% of the respondents were in agreement that the media was propelling the terrorists' agenda with 41% noting that the media was not propelling the terrorists' agenda. A subsequent analysis on information provided by the key informants painted a picture of a media fraternity that indirectly breathes fresh air into terrorism.

The following effects were established by the study:

4.1. Radicalization and Youth Recruitment into Al-Shabaab

Youths and the elderly adopt radical/hard stances or positions on matters political, economic, spiritual and social. This has led to an increase in the number of Al-Shabaab sympathizers. Therefore, there is also an increase in the number of youths joining Al-Shabaab.

4.2. Poor Infrastructural Development

Education standards are low – teachers refusing to work in Mandera County. Livelihoods have been affected and this has evoked a sense of hopelessness in the population who feel neglected by Government

4.3. Increased Hatred for Security Agencies

The general public has developed fear of the security agencies. This has led to psychological disturbances to locals and non-locals working in the County. This is as a result of the kind of news they consume from the media.

5. Discussion

An analysis of the responses given in by the participants clearly depicts that most of the terrorism reports and news they consume are broadcasted on radio. The study noted that radio; being the most preferred media category as earlier noted in the study, had the most terrorism journalism. Other media such as television and newspapers were also cited, having broadcasted terrorism news stories. The study also noted that while the media might be exercising their roles of informing the public, the airing and publication of terrorists' acts in the eye of the terrorists is simply publicity of their success.

The study observed that it would not be helpful in any way for media content to be neutral on the fight against terrorism. The study noted that to a large extent, media content does not directly oppose efforts aimed at fighting terrorism but does that indirectly through giving terrorist energy by giving them a larger audience to spread fear into and to justify their acts. The modern news media, as the principal conduit of information about such acts, thus play a vital part in the terrorists' calculus. Indeed, without the media's coverage the act's impact is arguably wasted, remaining narrowly confined to the immediate victim(s) of the attack rather than reaching the wider 'target audience' at whom the terrorists' violence is actually aimed. Only by spreading the terror and outrage to a much larger audience can the terrorists gain the maximum potential leverage that they need to effect fundamental political change (Hoffman 2006).

The findings of this study are in tandem with the findings of Hamid and Baba (2014) where they singled out the case of Nigeria and observed that the Nigerian media are yet to effectively play the surveillance function of the media in their reportage of insurgency. He asserts that this has led to the unabated insurgent activities in Nigeria. The Nigerian media have not done well in discharging their surveillance role, particularly in the Boko-Haram crisis and as such, as Popoola (2012) affirmed the fact that the government sees the media as unpatriotic and uncommitted to the national interest, peace and stability of the country. Just like the Kenyan media and the International media have failed to remain firm on censored or limited reportage of terrorist activities is an example of how media has propelled the Al-Shabaab agenda in carrying out sustained attacks on Kenya and other countries in the region.

The study noted that media content and the way it is delivered propels the wheel of terrorism fast forward. As noted from the responses collected, 'screaming' newspaper headlines, live coverage of terrorists' acts and the sensational delivery of content by the media acted as a catalyst to the terrorists, making them yearn to commit more acts in order to justify themselves, their acts and gain popularity among other things. Furthermore, the study established that the manner in which stories were written, the connotations used and the way the terrorists were compared to the security and defense forces, sparked a sense of same comparison that would otherwise be easily used by the terrorists to gauge their strength and capabilities against the security forces. Such insinuations by the media about the Kenyan government for example not being able to bring back persons kidnapped by Al-Shabaab made the terrorists feel strong and thus, able to carry out more kidnappings without being caught.

The way terrorist activities are reported can have far-reaching implications on the future actions of terrorist groups, the reactions and responses of governmental organizations and public opinion. The way journalists report consists of the description of the violent activities, how prominent these activities are, how they are framed and how they are emphasized. From this it is evident that the media forms the vital link between terrorists, the government, and the public (Paletz and Tawney 1992).

6. Conclusion

The study concluded that most of the media broadcasts relating to terrorism journalism were war or violence oriented and to a greater extent, media content opposed efforts aimed at fighting terrorism. The resultant effects included the media propelling the terrorists' agenda through their content and delivery. The following were the major effects which were established by the study which include: Radicalization and youth recruitment into Al-Shabaab, poor infrastructural development, increased hatred for Security Agencies among others.

7. Recommendation

The study recommends that the media should shift focus towards ensuring their broadcasts and publications support fully, all efforts aimed at fighting terrorism in their reportage of terrorism. This will eliminate instances whereby media reportage encourages and aids continued terrorists' attacks. Media should limit, censor and not sensationalize terror related news stories.

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